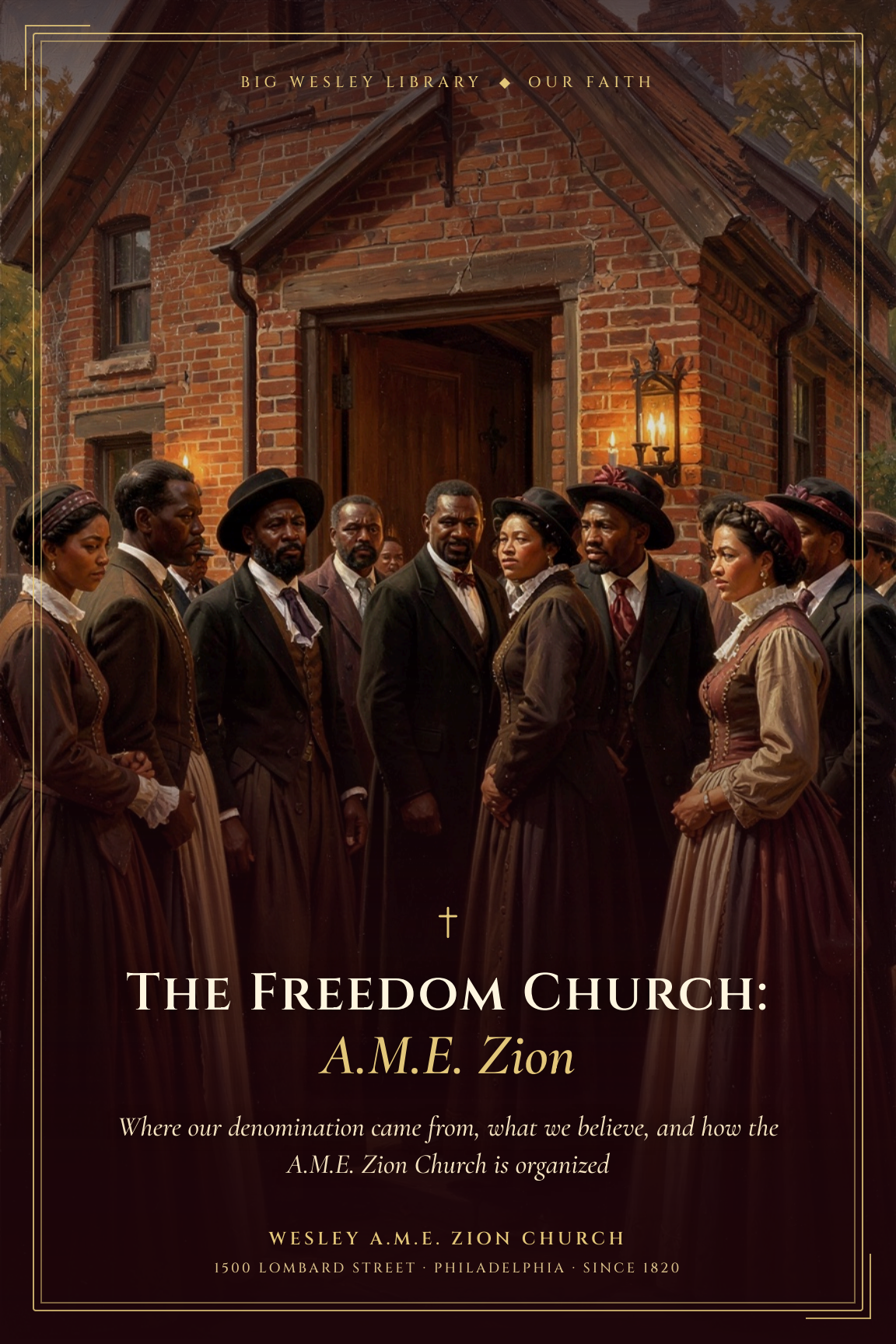


A group of African American men and women in 19th-century attire standing in front of a brick church building. The men are wearing suits and hats, while the women are wearing long dresses and headscarves. The church is made of red brick with a wooden door and a small window above it. A lantern is visible on the wall to the right.

BIG WESLEY LIBRARY ♦ OUR FAITH



THE FREEDOM CHURCH: *A.M.E. Zion*

*Where our denomination came from, what we believe, and how the
A.M.E. Zion Church is organized*

WESLEY A.M.E. ZION CHURCH
1500 LOMBARD STREET · PHILADELPHIA · SINCE 1820

THE FREEDOM CHURCH: *A.M.E. Zion*

Where our denomination came from, what we believe, and how the A.M.E. Zion Church is organized

EVERY FAMILY HAS AN ORIGIN STORY, AND SO DOES EVERY CHURCH. Ours begins with a simple, holy refusal: Black Methodists who would not accept second-class seats in the house of God. Out of that refusal came a church that has been called, for more than two centuries, **the Freedom Church**.

This booklet explains where the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church came from, what we believe as Methodists, and how our church is organized. It is good for new members, for young people being confirmed, and for anyone who has ever asked, "*What does A.M.E. Zion mean?*"

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

GALATIANS 5:1 · KJV

A.M.E. ZION

WHAT THE NAME MEANS

WORD

MEANING

African

Founded by people of African descent, proud of that heritage.

WORD	MEANING
Methodist	Part of the Methodist movement begun by John and Charles Wesley in England in the 1700s, known for its <i>method</i> of disciplined holy living.
Episcopal	Led by bishops (from the Greek word for <i>overseer</i>).
Zion	The holy hill of God in the Bible. The word was added to the name in 1848, partly to distinguish the church from the A.M.E. Church founded by Richard Allen in Philadelphia.

A.M.E. OR A.M.E. ZION?

They are two different denominations, both born from the same struggle. Mother Bethel, here in Philadelphia, is the founding church of the **A.M.E.** Church. Big Wesley is part of the **A.M.E. Zion** Church, which began in New York. Big Wesley's founders actually came out of Mother Bethel in 1820 and joined the Zion movement.

NEW YORK, 1796

HOW IT BEGAN



In **August 1796**, Black members of the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, tired of discrimination, began meeting separately for worship. That group became *Zion*. The church was chartered in **1801**, published its first Book of Discipline in **1820**, and in **1822** saw James Varick consecrated as its first bishop. Today the denomination is headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, and describes itself as having more than two million members on five continents.



The first A.M.E. Zion Book of Discipline was published in 1820.

A HERITAGE OF LIBERATION

WHY *the Freedom Church*?



The A.M.E. Zion Church earned its nickname through its long work for abolition and civil and human rights, and its role in the Underground Railroad. Its members and preachers have included some of the great freedom fighters of American history:

- ◆ **Harriet Tubman**, who led enslaved people to freedom, remained a member of the church until her death.
- ◆ **Frederick Douglass** began his public speaking as a Zion preacher.
- ◆ **Sojourner Truth** is remembered among its members.
- ◆ **Paul Robeson**, the singer, actor and activist, was a son of the church.
- ◆ **Coretta Scott King** was born into an A.M.E. Zion church.

WHAT WE *believe*



The A.M.E. Zion Church shares the historic Christian faith summarized in the **Apostles' Creed**, and the Methodist emphases of John Wesley. In plain words:

- 1 ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS**
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2 JESUS CHRIST IS LORD**
Fully God and fully human; He died for our sins and rose again.
- 3 THE BIBLE**
The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation.
- 4 GRACE FOR ALL**
God's grace goes before us, reaches every person, and invites everyone to salvation. No one is shut out.
- 5 SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH**
We cannot earn salvation; we receive it as a gift.
- 6 ASSURANCE**
The Holy Spirit lets believers know they are God's children (Romans 8:16).
- 7 HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE**
God's grace not only forgives us but changes us, growing us in love for God and neighbor.
- 8 FAITH THAT ACTS**
True faith shows itself in works of mercy and justice.

GRACE, IN THREE STEPS

John Wesley described God's grace in three movements. **Prevenient grace** goes before us, drawing us to God before we even know Him. **Justifying grace** forgives and saves us when we trust Christ. **Sanctifying grace** keeps working in us for the rest of our lives, making us more like Jesus.

HOW WE *worship*

A.M.E. Zion worship joins Methodist order with the fire and freedom of the Black church: hymns and gospel music, scripture and prayer, preaching that calls for a response, and the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (see *The Lord's Supper & Baptism* in this library). We observe the Christian year, and special days such as Connectional Lay Sunday and Children's Day.

THE CONNECTION

HOW WE ARE *organized*

Methodist churches are *connectional*: no congregation stands alone. Each local church belongs to a larger family that shares ministers, mission and resources.

LEVEL	WHAT IT IS	BIG WESLEY
Local church	The congregation, led by a pastor appointed by the bishop.	Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church
District	A group of churches overseen by a Presiding Elder.	Philadelphia District
Annual Conference	Churches of a region that meet yearly.	Philadelphia-Baltimore Annual Conference

THE FREEDOM CHURCH

LEVEL	WHAT IT IS	BIG WESLEY
Episcopal District	Conferences overseen by a bishop.	Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District
General Conference	The church's lawmaking body. It meets every four years, with equal numbers of clergy and lay delegates, and elects the bishops.	The whole A.M.E. Zion Church

IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

BOARD	WHAT THEY DO
Stewards	Care for the spiritual life of the congregation and the pastor; prepare the Lord's table.
Trustees	Hold and care for the church property.
Class Leaders	The Methodist tradition of small-group shepherds, each watching over a class of members.
Stewardess Board	Prepare the elements for Communion and baptism and serve the altar.
Lay Council	The organized laity; leads Connectional Lay Sunday.
Missionary Society	The Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society supports missions at home and abroad.

LEARN MORE

The A.M.E. Zion Church's official site is amezion.org. Its schools include Livingstone College and Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina. To learn more about membership at Big Wesley, speak with the pastor or call (215) 735-8961.

SIT WITH IT

What does it mean to me to belong to the Freedom Church?

How can I carry that heritage forward today?



“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

GALATIANS 5:1

WESLEY A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

“Big Wesley” · The Freedom Church · Founded June 6, 1820

SUNDAY SCHOOL	9:30 AM
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SUNDAY WORSHIP	11:00 AM
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