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## Bethel AME Church Boston hosts regional conference through Sunday

Posted by Matt Rocheleau April 5, 2011 01:22 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

For the first time in its 160-year history, the African Methodist Episcopal Church is hosting its regional annual conference in Jamaica Plain.

Representatives from 25 churches in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut began convening Monday for a conference that runs through Sunday at the Bethel AME Church Boston founded in 1988, church officials said. Around 600 people are expected to attend during the week-long gathering.

The first New England Annual Conference was in held in 1852 at Bethel AME Church in New Bedford. The last time the conference was held in Boston was four years ago in Roxbury at the Charles Street AME Church, said a conference spokeswoman.

"This is a historic event. Upholding a tradition that dates back to 1852 is a real honor for which we are very grateful," said the Boston church's Co-Pastor Rev. Ray Hammond who co-founded Bethel-Boston with his wife and fellow Pastor Rev. Gloria White-Hammond.

The conference kicks into full swing Thursday and includes a look back on the past year as well as planning ahead by church leaders and members, said Candice Alexander, co-chair of the meeting's Communications Committee.

On Sunday morning, Rev. Ray Hammond, who is chair of the conference's committee on social action, will announce the event's special resolution that serves as "a powerful, timely and important resolution on several matters of public concern," the church said.

Last year's resolution included official stances on topics including: wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan; the economy, jobs, foreclosures and financial reform; health care reform; education; energy and the environment; Sudan and Dafur; and Haiti.

"We believe that the theme of this year's conference, 'Reach, Reclaim, Engage, Empower: We Lift As We Climb (Luke 10:1)' is particularly apropos during these troubled times in our nation," Rev. Ray Hammond added in a release. "Now more than ever we must work to ensure that the mission of the

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Connectional Church —housing the homeless, providing jobs for the jobless, and encouraging thrift and economic advancement — is the preferred choice for a country in desperate need of spiritual and ethical direction.”

The free, public conference is held at the church’s five-acre St. Andrew’s Campus on Walk Hill Street, officials said. Two years ago, the congregation moved its worship services to that property after purchasing the complex the Catholic Archdiocese had built in 1918.

Bethel-Boston’s former home base, its Parkside Campus on Forest Hills Street, is home to over 40 ministries and nonprofits

The conference will include ecumenical services, youth programs, a historic tour of Roxbury by Discover Roxbury (not free, tickets required), and the participation of local vendors.

Bethel-Boston’s members hail from within the city -- including Jamaica Plain, Dorchester, Hyde Park, Mattapan, Roslindale, Roxbury, West Roxbury -- and outside of metro Boston, officials said.

The church is a member of the 1st District of the AME Church which is the oldest Episcopal Districts in African Methodism. The district’s Bishop, Right Reverend Richard Franklin Norris, will lead this week’s conference.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church has 20 worldwide districts.

It has roots in Methodism, is governed by bishops and grew out of the Free African Society established in Philadelphia in 1787. The word African means the church was organized by people of African descent and heritage, church officials said. It does not mean the church was founded in Africa, or that it is for people of African descent only.

For an overview of the conference, [click here](#). For detailed conference events, including times, [click here](#). For more information about Bethel AME Church Boston, visit [www.bethelame.org](http://www.bethelame.org), or email [annualconference@bethelame.org](mailto:annualconference@bethelame.org).

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