

New Mt. Zion AME Church
“Christ Centered, People Oriented, World Teaching Church”

Mission Statement

New Mt. Zion AME Church strives to be embody the teachings of Jesus Christ by being globally conscience and locally engaged in the lives of the members of our community and the communities where we feel called to serve.

Vision Statement

At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the AME Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and to serve the needy.

(Note: This vision statement is taken from *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2012.*)

A Word from the Pastor

Dear Family & Friends,

The New Mt. Zion AME Church Burial Policy is designed to serve as a guide to all members of our congregation, family, and friends for the purposes of providing quality pastoral care in times of bereavement. With these goals in mind, our hope is to clarify how funerals are conducted at New Mt. Zion AME Church, specify the recommended procedures for planning one’s funeral, and outlining the criteria that determine eligibility for burial in the church cemetery/churchyard.

If you are reading this for the first time during a time of loss, please accept our sympathy. On behalf of the entire church family, we at New Mt. Zion AME Church promise to do all that we can to help you in the love and spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christian Service,

Rev. Dominique I. Grate
Pastor of New Mt. Zion AME Church

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**General Property Utilization Guidelines for Cemeteries and/or other
Properties in the AME Church**

New Mt. Zion AME Church does not unilaterally have the authority to sale its local church property or any property belonging to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The selling of any church property held within the trust of New Mt. Zion AME Church is reserved for the trustees of the Columbia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, pursuant to the guidelines as stipulated by the guidelines of the latest edition of *The Doctrine and Disciple of the African Methodist Episcopal*. A copy of the latest edition of *The Doctrine and Disciple of the African Methodist Episcopal* is available for viewing in the pastor’s office.

Additionally, no person or persons own any property of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. All contents contained either below or above ground that is the property of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is owned by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Therefore, New Mt. Zion AME Church as a custodian of the African Methodist Episcopal Church has full legal authority over these properties pursuant to the latest edition of *The Doctrine and Disciple of the African Methodist Episcopal*. The implications of these legal designations with specific regard to this policy will govern the use of grounds designated as cemeteries of New Mt. Zion AME Church and will be governed by the elected representatives of New Mt. Zion AME Church.

Further, New Mt. Zion AME Church does not sale cemetery plots or family plots. No person owns any plot in a cemetery owned by New Mt. Zion AME Church. Instead, individuals are allowed to utilize designated spaces referred to as plots pursuant to qualifications established by New Mt. Zion AME Church.

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Checklist for Those Requesting a Funeral

- Whether to be cremated;
- In the case of cremation, whether to have the funeral before or after the cremation;
- Where the funeral is to take place;
- Where the burial is to take place;
- Which cemetery is to be used for the burial;
- What kind of plot should be bought;
- The day and time of the funeral;
- The day and time of the burial;
- Whether to have prayers in the home;
- Whether to have a visitation in a funeral home;
- What hymns and music should be chosen;
- Whether to have flowers in the Church;
- What liturgical color should be used at the service;
- Whether any other group is to be present or partake before or after the service;
- Whether to give a memorial gift to the Church;
- Which tombstone is to be chosen;
- What inscription is to be used.
- Whether to have memorial flowers on the anniversary of death.

Cost

The Pastor does not charge anything for conducting funerals of members of the congregation. In addition, there is no facility rental fee for members of the congregation. However, an honorarium is expected for those who are not members of the church. A list of members of the church is maintained by the board of stewards.

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Commitment to Pastoral Care

The Ministry of the Pastor and Congregation

The Pastor’s ministry is to lead the bereaved into and through the rites of the Church where the voice of the Gospel can be heard with healing power and clarity. As a people of faith, we know that the pain and loss of death must not be minimized or ignored. We understand, the bereaved need to confront and accept the loss of the deceased as well as be given hope. Our Church promises to do our best to support the bereaved – not only at the time of the funeral, but also as the family and loved ones who sorrow, return to the duties of your lives.

Pastoral Services to Members of Other Congregations

Sometimes our clergy are asked to be involved at the funerals of people from other Churches. We affirm that the responsibility and authority for pastoral acts or services rests with the pastor of the congregation where the deceased held membership. If our Pastor is asked to provide pastoral services for members of other congregations, the Pastor will contact the clergy of the Church in which the person held membership before providing the service. Our goal is to aid other Churches in their ministry without interfering. It is hoped that this sign of respect would be returned to us from other clergy and Churches. If the request for pastoral service involves an individual who has had conflicts with his/her Pastor or congregation, the immediate family will be urged to resolve the difficulty prior to receiving pastoral service.

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Funeral Arrangements

How Mourners Worship in Our Tradition

A Christian Funeral is a time when we pause before the mystery of death and life. Funerals are an expression of faith in our salvation, resurrection and eternal life. As such, we come to worship God and rejoice in the new life he has given us beyond death. We also gather to thank God for the gift given to us in the person of the deceased. Funerals also express the community support that is shown at a time of death as we pray, sing, laugh and cry together.

The Christian funeral is a service of worship and should involve all those present. The funeral serves a support function such that the religious, social, and emotional needs of the mourners are met. In order to achieve these goals, as a general practice any viewings of the remains of the deceased must precede the start of celebration of life services. Once the casket is closed it will not be reopened.

Worship Service Format

At New Mt. Zion, we offer families the choice of a funeral service from *The Book of Worship of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* or special program planned in conjunction with the Office of the Pastor.

Sample Funeral Worship Service:

- The Prelude
- The Processional
- The Hymn
- The Prayer
- The Scripture
- The Choral Selection
- The Eulogy
- The Closing Prayer

Note: In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, prayer always proceeds the reading of scripture. Further, the order of worship service for any funeral services must be approved by the pastor. Failure to receive pastoral approval may result in a delaying of the funeral or the termination of the deceased individual's rights to be buried in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery or utilize church facilities for the celebration of life services.

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Other Party Participation in Funeral Services

To Fraternal Groups:

Such groups, upon the consent of the Pastor and following the guidelines outlined by the church are welcome to take their place in the celebration of the life of the deceased person.

Regarding Music:

Music selected for use at a funeral should embody high standards of quality, and in general reflect the spirit of Christian confidence, trust, and hope in the Resurrection. The hymns should reflect such themes as the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, hope in the Resurrection. All music selected for use at a funeral must be approved by the Pastor.

To Visiting Clergy:

The Pastor or his or her designee is in charge of the service. If the family wishes to invite other clergy or have them participate in the worship service, they must obtain the permission of the Pastor. The role of all invited clergy at the service is assigned by the Pastor.

On Cremation:

Cremation is becoming more common today. The ashes are the body of the deceased in a changed form. Therefore, we honor them as we honor the body. A funeral can be held with the body present before cremation or with the cremated remains in an urn on a table near the chancel.

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Optional Services

Prayers at the Home

It is recommended that the family of the deceased have prayers at the home of the deceased sometime before the funeral. For those who die with the rites of the Church these prayers will be performed at the time of death.

The Committal

When the body of the deceased is to be transported to a distant interment site, has been donated for medical use, or has been lost at sea, the commendation alone will suffice. The coffin is lowered into the grave. Urns are placed in their resting place. It is important that the mourners see the coffin lowered into the grave and not simply remember it resting on top of the device by which it will later be lowered after the mourners have left, for it gives the mourners a clearer memory of what happened to the body. (The lowering of the casket in the presence of the family is optional and must be coordinated in conjunction with both the church and funeral home.) Earth is cast on the coffin by the Pastor or his or her designee as the body is committed to its resting place. The final blessing and dismissal, is said by the Pastor. Bodies are not interred after sunset or before sunrise.

If an interment service is being held in conjunction with the funeral worship service, either a member of Calvary’s ministerial team or other clergy designated by the Columbia Annual Conference’s representative must preside at the interment of any body in our cemetery.

Bequest

Although the Church will not pressure an individual or a family to make a bequest to the Church, it is encouraged. In our society memorials are often made to secular groups, such as the Cancer Society, and we condone this practice. However, sometimes we as Christians often overlook our duty to leave bequests to the local church for its future upkeep and ministry. The Church will welcome any memorials that you choose to give in honor of your loved one with gratitude, and our Pastor will be glad to meet with you at any time to discuss your needs.

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Anniversaries

The church marks the anniversary of all our ancestors who have transitioned on All Saints Day, which is normally celebrated on the last Sunday in October or on a date designated by the congregation. During this time, a representative from each family of the deceased will be given an opportunity to deliver brief remarks and light a candle in honor of their loved one. Also, flowers may be dedicated to the memory of a loved one on any Sunday.

An additional service that the church offers is a service of prayer and communion with the family of the deceased. Our experiences as a church family have taught us that sometimes the comfort of sharing in the Lord's Supper can be an act of grace connecting the community and family of the deceased with God especially on the anniversaries of deaths when memories of the deceased are sometimes most difficult to cope. Please, see the pastor in order to make arrangements and for more details.

Memorial Book

All names of the deceased buried in the Churchyard are kept in a memorial book and are remembered annually at the time of death in congregational prayers.

Preparing Your Funeral in Advance

You are encouraged to think about your own funeral. With respect for the Church's teaching, outlined in this policy and in dialogue with your family, you may want to leave directions as to how you wish your funeral to be celebrated. The Pastor in conjunction with local funeral homes have the resources and are prepared to offer help in this area. The Pastor is always willing to help you prepare your own funeral.

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Guidelines for Use of Cemetery Grounds

Cemetery Properties

New Mt. Zion AME Church owns two properties that it has consecrated for use by both members of the congregation and community for the purposes of burial. These properties are:

1. The cemetery grounds adjacent to the 103 Cromer Road Lexington, SC 29073 worship facility sometimes referred to as “the cemetery at the church.”
2. The cemetery grounds owned by New Mt. Zion AME Church on the campus of River Bluff High School located at 320 Corley Mill Road Lexington, SC 29072 sometimes referred to as “the cemetery at the old site.”

Tombstones and other Memorials

New Mt. Zion AME Church cemeteries are consecrated ground. It is a common misunderstanding that burial in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery gives rights to the relatives to erect memorials, plants or other things on the grave. Our cemeteries are different than other municipal cemetery, and the rights of congregants and community members are limited:

1. The strict right of a congregant or community in a cemetery owned by New Mt. Zion AME Church is simply the right to be buried. The erection of a tombstone or monument over a grave, though now customary, remains a privilege. It is an erection on consecrated ground and therefore in strictness requires the permission of the Pastor and official board of the church.
2. Inscriptions on monuments or tombstones must be approved by the Pastor and official board of the church.
3. If the right of a monument, tombstone, or the particular wording of an inscription is not granted, then the Pastor will provide a written explanation to the family of the deceased outlining why. Additionally, a copy of this letter should be placed in the historical records of the church.

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Right of Burial

To ensure for posterity that the members of New Mt. Zion AME Church will have burial plots, plots will only be made available under the following circumstances:

1. Members of New Mt. Zion AME Church in good standing are eligible to be buried in the cemetery at no cost.
2. Members of New Mt. Zion AME Church not in good standing are eligible to be buried at the cost of \$1000.
3. Non-members of New Mt. Zion AME Church and members of the larger community are eligible to be buried at the cost of \$1300.

Note: The church will not allow individuals to be buried on top of each other or urns to be placed in the same grave as another individual.

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Burial Petition Agreement Form

All persons seeking burial in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery will be required to complete and submit the following form for approval. Failure to submit a form or the inability of the deceased family/representatives to produce this form in the event of death may result in a delay in New Mt. Zion AME Church’s ability to optimally adjudicate cemetery utilization in the event of an individual’s death.

Note: New Mt. Zion AME Church is only guaranteeing to the best of our ability we will honor the unique terms of the petition as they are agreed to in this petition. If there are any unique circumstances or pre-arrangements, you would like to make please notify the pastoral team and trustees so that information may be included in the petition agreement prior to the ratification of the Burial Petition Agreement Form.

Petition Approval Process

The approval of petitions will occur at duly called official board meetings, where the confirmed stewards and elected trustees will be eligible to vote. In cases of a tie, the said petition or petitions will go to the full official board for a vote and either approve or reject the petitioner’s eligibility.

The following principles will be used for determining the petitioners’ eligibility to be buried in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery:

1. The petitioner is a member of New Mt. Zion AME Church. No non-members will be permitted burial in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery.

New Mt. Zion AME Church defines membership utilizing the definition provided in the...Further the definition of membership in any local church where the African Methodist Episcopal Church is adjudicatory is the reserved right of the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Therefore, because New Mt. Zion Mt. Zion AME Church does not have the right to define membership, all members of the church’s membership roster maintained by the steward board are eligible for burial.

2. Full members, affiliate members, new members (formerly referred to as “probationary members”), and preparatory members will be eligible for burial.
3. For all “Special Clause A” petitioners please see *Appendix*

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Amendments Procedure & Special Circumstances

Any amendment to the Funeral and Burial Policy must be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the church conference. If special provision for burial must be made that are in contrary to this policy, the Pastor should be notified immediately. Please note, that a notification of the pastor is not a guarantee that a request can be granted. However, the Pastor will work diligently to accommodate any possible special request.

*****SPECIAL NOTE*****

New Mt. Zion AME Church is not accepting petitions from individuals to be bury at our cemetery grounds on the campus of River Bluff High School located at 320 Corley Mill Road Lexington, SC 29073

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Appendix

Special Clause A Discernment Guidelines & Rationale

The purpose of “Special Clause A” membership designations in the New Mt. Zion AME Church Burial Policy is to address the situation of persons who under previous burial policies entered into agreement with New Mt. Zion AME Church or its antecedent Mt. Zion AME Church for utilization rights of cemetery grounds but do not have records that attest to those agreements due to a complex matrix of diverse factors.

Seeking to provide transparent and accountable business practices our hope is that moving forward New Mt. Zion AME Church will do a better job of maintaining cemetery ledger records and our constituencies in times of their bereavement will have greater assurance regarding the wishes of their loved ones to be buried in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery respected.

To achieve these objectives, between May 1 – August 1, 2018, authorized representatives of New Mt. Zion AME Church will be making contact to the best of their abilities with persons and families who claim to currently hold pre-existing rights to cemetery plots. The goal of making these contacts is to initiate a process that will ensure that both the church and the said persons have proper documentation of the utilization rights of these same said individuals for burial purposes.

Once contact has been established between the official representative of New Mt. Zion AME Church tasked with jurisdiction over the cemeteries, these parties will be asked to complete a petition for cemetery usage under the what the New Mt. Zion AME Church Burial Petition Form calls, “Special Clause A.”

“Special Clause A” permits individuals to be buried in a New Mt. Zion AME Church cemetery under the terms listed on the burial petition form for the designated number of plots.

Petitions received citing “Special Clause A,” will be presented to the trustees will decide in conjunction with the pastor as whether to adjudicate the petition through the official board or church conference.

Note: Cemetery plot utilization is not deeded property.