

TOWSON

Black church in Cockeysville works to preserve history despite difficulties presented by pandemic

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By Allana Haynes Baltimore Sun Media • Jan 18, 2021 at 5:00 am



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Angela Bullock is the Pastor at Bazil AME Church. Bazil African Methodist Episcopal Church is located at 320 Sherwood Road, Cockeysville. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Baltimore Sun Media)

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The small, nondescript church on Sherwood Road in Cockeysville looks more like a house and has fewer than a dozen members.

But Bazil African Methodist Episcopal Church, a historically Black house of worship, has a history reflective of its times and deep roots in the community. Named after Bazil Foote, a white farmer from Pennsylvania who was banished by his family for marrying Elizabeth Smith, a Black and Native American, the church was established 145 years ago as a place of worship for the burgeoning rural community.

Already tiny, the historic church is struggling with a dwindling, aging membership and stretched finances amid the coronavirus pandemic that has ended in-person worship.

The Rev. Angela Bullock, 58, of Cockeysville, ministers to the intimate and what is now a multicultural congregation. She said she tries to maintain the history and tradition of the church, while remaining relevant.

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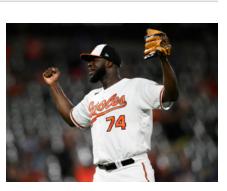
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"I try to merge it so that people are aware of the history, but also are receiving what they need in this present age," Bullock said. "In the age of racial injustice and in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, it's a challenge to do that because the church building in and of itself is closed to parishioners."



Angela Bullock is the pastor at Bazil African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was established in 1876 and is located at 320 Sherwood Road in Cockeysville. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Baltimore Sun Media)

Before establishing the church, the Footes and their seven children would gather in the family's parlor to worship. Others in the community would join them at what was known as Foote's Hill.

Tired of hosting so many people, according to family legend noted in a 1998 Baltimore Sun article, Foote donated 4 acres of land to build the church, which opened its doors in 1876. Alas, he died two years later.

Fast forward a century to more than two decades ago, and the small church, located at 320 Sherwood Road high atop Foote's Hill, underwent a renovation, adding a pastor's study and updating the kitchen, restrooms, a gravel parking lot, and a heating and cooling system. The latter eliminated the need for the potbellied stove.

Cynthia Wilkins, 67, a great-great-granddaughter of Foote, recalled visiting the church as a child.

During the summer, she and her family would travel south from New York City to Cockeysville to spend time with their extended family in the community.



"Edna Foote, who is my great aunt, [used] to take us to the country to experience country life," she said.

Living in New York City, Wilkins said she

A stained glass window in memory of John L. Foote Sr. and his wife, Emma Alberta. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Baltimore Sun Media)

has not been to the church in quite a while but would like to go back someday.

Generations of her family are interred in the tiny cemetery next to the church, including her great-great-grandfather.

"My parents, grandparents and great-greatgrandparents are buried there, and I'm hoping to be buried there as well," Wilkins said.

Bullock has served as the pastor for more than four years after serving on the staff at the Empowerment Temple AME Church in

Baltimore City for nearly two decades.

Since the pandemic began, the church has been holding services online and engaging members by posting quotes, videos and Scripture on social media.

[<u>Black church that helped ease racial strife in 1972 among several in Carroll County still</u> providing community]

Bullock said the level of giving to the church has decreased tremendously due to the closing of the church building and the passing of two longtime members, Maurice Longnecker Bailey and Cittie Riddick Bailey, who are descendants of Foote.

"In all of this, God remains faithful and has used a neighbor in the community to support the church in providing quarterly offerings," Bullock said. "Without this support, bills will have gone unpaid. For this we are grateful to God and our generous neighbor."

Rupert LaRose, 72, has been a member of the church for a decade and a half.

Since he began attending, he said, there has been a noticeable decline in membership.

"Most churches are going through the same thing, it's a generational change," he said.

He recalled a time when the church held an outdoor retreat where members went camping in West Virginia.

"That was very memorable to me because it brought together different generations," LaRose said.

He said the church is looking to engage young people by partnering with the Black Church Food Security Network, an organization that works to bring fresh produce to Black churches and Black farmers in Black communities on the East



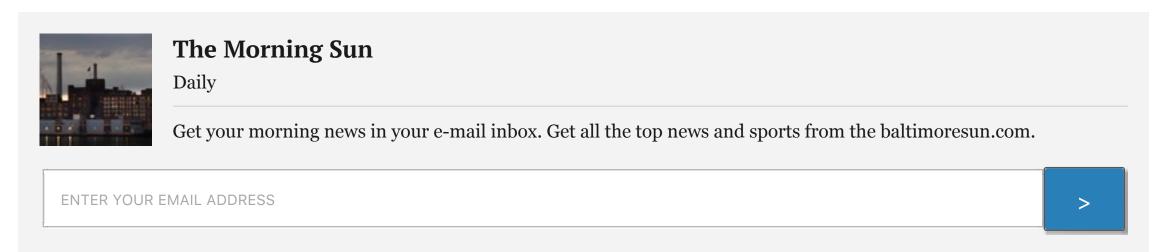
Coast, Midwest and Southeast, according to its website.

A portrait of Bazil Foote (1811-1876) hangs in the meeting room at Bazil AME Church. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Baltimore Sun Media)

"If we can get younger members interested in it, like high school kids, they can get

involved in the community and get [community service] credit," LaRose said. "The program can be used for that purpose and get young people involved and attending the church."

Don Callihan, 73, and his wife, Sally, have been attending the church for the past four years.



He said he became interested in the church after participating in a service project to remove vegetation in the cemetery.

Although he and his wife are white, Callihan said the church has welcomed the couple with open arms.

"We see [attending] both as an act of faith, but also to support the community that lives here," he said.

Because of its history, he said he would like for the church to be preserved for years to come.

"My hope would be that we figure out a way to at least memorialize the church and its place in Baltimore County," Callihan said.

Bullock said she hopes Bazil AME will grow economically, physically and spiritually in this new year.

"[I hope] when our doors open [post-pandemic], people who know God and people who want to know God will come in and learn of God and be blessed in the spirit and give their lives over to the service of the Lord," she said.

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