

Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study



Religion and Houses of Worship: *Honoring faith traditions*



Photos (clockwise from top left):
former location of St. James AME Church,
photo by A.F. Raymond, courtesy of Minnesota
Historical Society (MNHS); Zion Baptist
Church Women's Guild, courtesy of Hennepin
County Library (HCL); Masjid An-Nur, courtesy
of Mississippi Watershed Management
Organization; Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church,
courtesy of HCL; St. Peter's AME Church senior
usher board, courtesy of MNHS

The City of Minneapolis has been working since 2019 to document the history of African Americans in Minneapolis. We have published a report about this work. It's called the Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study. One section focuses on African American faith traditions. This is a summary of that content.

Houses of worship connected people. They uplifted their members and provided social services. Churches often hosted political discussions. Some religious practices have African roots. White slaveholders also had a Christian influence on enslaved people. These traditions passed to later generations.

Black churches and temples often had to relocate. Sometimes they moved to better serve their members. Other times, they were forced to move due to development pressures. Because they often did not own their worship spaces, landlords could make other plans for the buildings. Some Black churches were also lost to fire.

The city's oldest Black congregations formed in the 1860s. Some are African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches. The AME church began in Pennsylvania in the late 1700s. Others are Baptist churches. Enslaved African Americans brought the Baptist faith to Minnesota from Missouri.



Current location of St. James AME Church, courtesy of MNHS

African Americans also practice other Christian faiths. Sometimes churches branched off. Other groups formed around shared values. In North Minneapolis, the Jewish community moved to the suburbs around the 1950s. They left vacant synagogues. Some Black churches moved into them.



First Church of God in Christ is located in a former synagogue. Photo courtesy of HCL

In the early 1900s, some African Americans began to convert to the Islamic faith. Many recent African immigrants are Muslim. There are mosques and churches across the city.

African Americans faced discrimination with funeral services and burial places. These practices are often tied to faith. It was helpful to work with Black funeral directors. They better understood a family's traditions. The Black-owned Woodard Funeral Home opened in the late 1920s and closed in the late 1970s. Estes Funeral Chapel is the only Black-owned funeral home in the city today. Minneapolis' earliest Black residents were buried at Pioneer and Soldiers Memorial Cemetery. Lakewood Cemetery is the final resting place for several notable community members.



**Scan to learn more in the
Minneapolis African American
Historic and Cultural Context Study**

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