African Methodist Episcopal Church, black Methodist church in the United States, formally organized in 1816. It developed from a congregation formed by a group of blacks who withdrew in 1787 from St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia because of discrimination. They built Bethel African Methodist Church in Philadelphia, and in 1799 Richard Allen (q.v.) was ordained its minister by Bishop Francis Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1816 Asbury consecrated Allen bishop of the newly organized African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Confined to the Northern states before the American Civil War, the church spread rapidly in the South after the war. It supports an active home-missions program and has sent missionaries to Africa and the West Indies.

The church is Methodist in doctrine and church government, and it holds a general conference every four years. It has about 3,500,000 members.