



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

RESOLUTION NO. 260655

Introduced June 11, 2026

Councilmember Squilla

RESOLUTION

Also naming Lombard Street between 6th and 7th Streets as "Bishop Richard Allen Way" to honor the life and legacy of Bishop Richard Allen, founder of (Mother) Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church denomination.

WHEREAS, Richard Allen was born on February 14, 1760, as a slave. His family was owned by Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and owner of the Cliveden Estate, Benjamin Chew. In 1767, "Negro Richard" Chew sold him to Stokley Sturgis in Delaware; and

WHEREAS, Richard and his brother were left on the farm to be raised by Stokley Sturgis to never be reunited with his family. Richard attended a Methodist Society Camp Meeting where he was converted and felt a yearning to devote to life to God after hearing the fire and brimstone preaching of abolitionist Methodist preacher, Freeborn Garretson; and

WHEREAS, Richard purchased his freedom from Stokley Sturgis for \$2,000 continental dollars and received his manumission papers and took the name of Richard Allen; and

WHEREAS, Richard became a Methodist Exhorter, preaching the 5:30 AM service at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. His sermons attracted a sizeable Black congregation necessitating church expansion; and

WHEREAS, On the third Sunday in November 1787, Richard Allen recalls in his autobiography *"The Life and Gospel Labors of the Right Reverend Richard Allen (1833)"* the incident noted as "The Great Walkout" that led to the founding and establishing of (Mother) Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church:

"We had not been long seated in our new seats, before we met with great opposition... A trustee of the Methodist church came and took him [Absalom Jones] by the hand and said, 'You must get up, and you must not kneel here.' Mr. Jones said, 'Wait until the

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prayer is over.' He said, 'No, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and force you away.' Mr. Jones said, 'Wait until the prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.' ... By the time the prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued by us in the church;" and

WHEREAS, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and others founded the Free African Society in 1787, a mutual aid organization, which fostered identity, leadership, service, benevolence and unity. It should be noted that the 48th Philadelphia Mayor, Matthew Clarkson personally requested the services of the Free African Society during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793. Jones and Allen led the black community in the care, comfort and proper handling of the dead during this time period; and

WHEREAS, Richard Allen married Flora in 1790. Flora died in 1801, however is revered for her steadfastness and support of Allen during the fundamental stages of the development of the Free African Society and later establishment of Bethel Church; and

WHEREAS, The Free African Society asked Allen to purchase land for the first independent black church. On October 10, 1791, Allen purchased a plot of land located at 6th Street near Lombard from Mark Wilcox; and

WHEREAS, After the property was purchased, Absalom Jones founded the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Allen remained on the site at 6th Street near Lombard to start a Methodist Church for people of African descent; and

WHEREAS, Allen hauled a former blacksmith shop to the site to serve as a place of worship and gathering, and it was dedicated on July 29, 1794, by Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury. The name of the church, Bethel, was given by Rev. John Dickens, pastor of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, for it was to be a "gathering place of souls;" and

WHEREAS, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was legally incorporated in 1796 by the name African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Philadelphia in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Although legal; and

WHEREAS, Allen was ordained the first black deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1799; and

WHEREAS, (Mother) Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church not only served as an important spiritual haven, it also established a legacy of educational outreach for the community, for example adult night school, the birth of the African School in 1804, apprenticeship programs and job training for new arrivals; and

WHEREAS, In 1802, Allen married Sarah Bass, a participant in the "Great Walkout" and a stellar nurse during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793. From this marriage six children were born: Richard, Jr., , James, John, Peter, Sarah and Ann; and

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WHEREAS, As more free people of African descent migrated to Philadelphia, the congregation grew rapidly, necessitating a larger church building by 1805. A larger brick church was built in 1841 and the current Romanesque edifice was built in 1889 by Hazelhurst and Huckel; and

WHEREAS, From April 8-11, 1816, Allen gathered leaders of other independent Black Methodist churches from across the Eastern seaboard at Bethel Church to establish the African Methodist Episcopal Church denomination of which is the first independent denomination founded by people of color in the Western Hemisphere; and

WHEREAS, (Mother) Bethel AME Church is not only the birthplace of the AME denomination, but also of AME Book Concern, the first publishing house founded by people of color and publisher of the Christian Recorder, the oldest continuously published African American periodical. Launching point of the Colored Conventions Movement (1830), which was a critical assembly of people of African descent forging national and regional leadership, which laid the groundwork for future civil right movements. In addition, (Mother) Bethel was an anchor of the Underground Railroad and the Black Metropolis (Historic 7th Ward); and

WHEREAS, Bishop Allen is praised not only for his being a stellar clergyman but also for having purchased countless plots for housing, benevolence and small businesses. Of note, is his purchase of a burial ground on April 28, 1810, which allowed for people of African descent to receive dignified burials; and

WHEREAS, Bishop Allen died at the age of 71, at his home in Philadelphia on March 26, 1831. His remains lie in the crypt of his beloved (Mother) Bethel AME Church, which is a National Historic Landmark, Shrine and Museum, which is visited by thousands annually; and

WHEREAS, Bishop Allen was one of the few people of African descent honored at the 1876 US Centennial World's Fair, with a monument and courtyard; and

WHEREAS, Countless references of Bishop Allen's contributions and impact include, Philadelphia Housing Authority's Richard Allen Homes; Richard Allen Preparatory Charter School; Richard Allen Lane Septa Station; Richard Allen Lane in Mt. Airy; Mural Arts Mural - "Richard Allen" at 38th and Market Streets; "Colored Conventions" Mural located at 3rd and Washington; and prominently featured at the President's House/Slave Memorial along with Father Absalom Jones; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby renames Lombard Street between 6th and 7th Streets as "Bishop Richard Allen Way" to honor the life and legacy of Bishop Richard Allen, esteemed citizen of Philadelphia, Black founding father, founder of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, establishmentarian of the African Methodist Episcopal Church denomination, purchaser of the oldest continuously owned and occupied parcel of land in the United States, prophet of freedom and justice.

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FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed Copy of this Resolution be presented to Rev. Carolyn Clarene Cavaness, 53rd Pastor of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, further evidencing the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.