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## Panel Discussion on May 2 to focus on Faith Congregational Church, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

**(HARTFORD, CT: April 24, 2018)** Hartford's Faith Congregational Church was born in protest two centuries ago and has continued that tradition to the present day. The church's past, present and future will be the subject of a panel discussion entitled "Faith Congregational: 200 Years and a Future of Social Justice in Hartford" on Thursday, May 2, from 5:30-7:30 pm in the Hartford History Center at Hartford Public Library, 500 Main Street, Hartford.

Panelists will include Dr. Sherwood Lewis, PhD; Patricia Camp, Board Member, Pardons and Paroles, State of Connecticut; Dorothy Mosby, Professor and Associate Dean of Faculty at Mount Holyoke College; local historian Stephen Thornton; Rev. Stephen Camp, Pastor of Faith Congregational; and motivational speaker and author Joelle Murchison. Former Hartford Fire Chief Charles Teale will serve as moderator.

There will also be live gospel music by Wayne Dixon, Minister of Music at Faith and a dramatic re-enactment of a conversation between Rev. Dr. James W.C. Pennington, former Pastor of Faith Congregational, and pioneer photographer Augustus Washington. Earl Gardner will portray Pennington and Terry will take the role of Washington.

Faith Congregational's roots stretch back to 1819, when several African American members of First Church Congregational (now Center Church) grew tired of being assigned seats in the rear and upper galleries of the church. This small group began worshiping on their own in a conference room of the church, but soon moved into their own space on State Street. They called their new church the African American Religious Society of Hartford. It was the first African-American Congregational Church in Connecticut and the third in the nation.

In 1826, the church moved to the corner of Talcott and Market Streets, where it would remain for 128 years. Early lectures by prominent abolitionists such as Arnold Buffman and Rev. Henry Highland Garner quickly established the church as a key center in the fight against slavery. The church also opened its own school, which provided the only formal education for African-American children in Hartford for decades.

The church was renamed First Hartford Colored Congregationalist Church in 1839 and the distinguished Dr. Pennington arrived from New York City to become its pastor the following year. Pennington was the first African-American student at Yale University and wrote the first history of African Americans, *The Origin and History of the Colored People*, during his time in Hartford. Pennington continued and expanded the church's role as a prominent advocate for the abolition of slavery. He was chosen as a delegate to the Second World Conference on Slavery in London and played a key role in freeing the Africans who had seized the slave ship *Amistad* in 1839.

Following the Civil War and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the church grew and cemented its position as one of the main pillars of Hartford's African American community. In 1953, the church merged with Mother Bethel Methodist Church and adopted its present name, Faith Congregational Church. A year later, it moved to its present building at 2030 Main Street. Since then, it has continued the battle for social justice on many fronts and has also served as an incubator for numerous political and community leaders.

Light refreshments will be served at the discussion on May 2, and images of prominent figures from Faith Congregational's history will be on display.

## **ABOUT HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Now celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. Please visit [www.hplct.org](http://www.hplct.org).

## **About the Hartford History Center**

The Hartford History Center at Hartford Public Library is the museum and archive for the library. It holds a growing multi-media compilation of more than 500,000 books, maps, photographs, works of art, digital assets and municipal records that uniquely convey the 300-plus years of community life in Connecticut's capital city. Officially named in 1945, the archives and special collections of Hartford Public Library date back to the 17th century.

**Source:** "Faith Congregational Church: 185 Years – Same People, Same Purpose," by Tamara Verrett, *Connecticut Explored*, Summer 2005