

## FIRST AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH: REDUCING HEALTH DISPARITIES THROUGH EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

First African Methodist Episcopal (FAME) Church, the oldest church founded by African Americans in Los Angeles, California, with a congregation of more than 19,000 members, is working to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities for the communities it serves. Through FAME Assistance Corporation, its community and economic development arm, FAME is inspiring Californians to make healthier choices every day.

FAME has created several programs and initiatives to increase awareness of the crisis of preventable diseases that disproportionately affects low-income and ethnic minority communities, as well as educate and empower individuals to make healthy choices where they live, work, learn, play and worship.

To connect widely and impact the greatest number of people throughout Los Angeles and California, FAME's outreach extends beyond its immediate congregation and neighborhood. Through a broad coalition of community partners, including a multi-denominational network of churches, energized leaders and complimentary agencies, FAME reaches the underserved and is committed to creating healthy individuals, families and neighborhoods. FAME's approach is to work both with individuals and within existing institutions to create new environments that will lead to a lifetime of better health.

### Where We Live

Partnering with the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, FAME offers a series of training programs and community events at local public housing projects to create appreciation for and commitment to the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity.

Offered free-of-charge, residents complete a 6-week Champion Empowerment Program in order to serve as healthy lifestyle ambassadors and change agents in their community. Ambassadors help plan and execute complimentary community health fairs and healthy living classes. The curriculum encompasses nutrition, healthy

cooking, physical activity/exercise, presentation skills, entrepreneurship, community advocacy, and the link between diet and disease. With funding provided by the Network for a Healthy California, Kaiser Permanente and the UCLA Center for Health Equity, FAME impacts thousands of individuals.

### Where We Shop

Every Saturday and Sunday, FAME transforms its parking lot into a produce market where congregants and community members can purchase fresh and affordable produce. The market helps people gain access to healthy foods, promotes fruit and vegetable consumption, and showcases FAME's health programs.

In March 2012, in association with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's Good Food Day LA, FAME delivered "Healthy Heritage," a cooking demonstration and food sampling featuring chefs preparing ethnic foods in a healthier way. Chefs demonstrated how to make healthy tweaks to traditional African American, Latino and Korean favorites to show families how to improve nutrition without compromising flavor. Food samples were provided for all to enjoy.

### Where We Learn

When First Lady Michelle Obama started *Let's Move!* to reverse the epidemic of childhood obesity in one generation, FAME responded to the call to action by launching *Let's Move L.A.!* Over the last two years, FAME has facilitated the dissemination of nutrition education materials and led physical activities at schools and community events focused on creating healthier environments for children and instilling healthy habits that last a lifetime.

In May 2012, FAME further engaged young people with the *Let's Move Youth Summit*. The Youth Summit encouraged young people to take charge of their health, set and achieve fitness goals, and become leaders in their community that advocate for better health.

### Where We Play

An outgrowth of *Let's Move L.A.!*, FAME launched *Let's Move California!* in June 2012 with a series of events aimed at uniting and invigorating Californians to eat healthier and be more active. *Let's Move California!* will create a statewide framework to educate citizens, streamline access to healthy lifestyle resources, and provide training to incorporate *Let's Move California!* programming into existing infrastructure.

Central to the *Let's Move California!* launch is Fitness Feria, a one-day intensive program to introduce children and parents to the "movement ABCs," a fundamental step in early childhood development that enables participation and success in athletics. Families participated in more than 40 sports and fitness-related activities, and learned how to engage more fully in the U.S. athletic system. During the program, parents and children receive instruction on many Olympic Sports and information on where to obtain non-profit resources and support. In addition, thousands of parents learn how to enroll their children in community athletic programs and how to help their families practice a healthy lifestyle.

### Where We Worship

A core audience for FAME's programs and message is its broad-based network of churches. Begun at home and now expanded throughout Southern California, FAME is dedicated to making church a place of physical as well as spiritual well-being.

The Body&Soul collaborative brings a series of initiatives and programs to local churches that include health messaging from the pulpit; monthly newsletters; food policies; healthy cooking and exercise classes; community health fairs; and an exercise break during worship services.

In partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, FAME created an Instant Recess<sup>®</sup> video — designed to get people to take 10-minute physical activity breaks. Instant Recess has been adopted by congregations all over the city with plans for national distribution through Let's Move! Faith and Communities. The video, which has a spiritual and gospel flair, provides churches with fun and active ways to spend 10 minutes exercising while worshipping, specifically during children's Sunday School, Sunday worship service, choir rehearsal, special events and celebrations, and Bible study meetings.