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**The Delaware Historical Society's
Jane & Littleton Mitchell Center for African American Heritage & Culture
in collaboration with the Mother African Union Church**



**Request for Proposal (RFP)
Exhibit Design and Interpretive Plan for the Mother African Union Church
Heritage Project**

November 3, 2025

Issued by:

The Delaware Historical Society's Mitchell Center for African American Heritage

Representative

Hannah Grantham, Director of the Mitchell Center for African American Heritage

505 N. Market Street Wilmington, DE 19801

hgrantham@dehistory.org

1.0 Introduction

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In collaboration together, the Delaware Historical Society's Mitchell Center for African American Heritage and the historic Mother African Union Church ("the Church"), have spent the last three years pursuing a large-scale project to raise awareness of the Church's two centuries of activities shaping religious discourse and practices in the Mid-Atlantic region. Through public-facing outlets, including engagements at the Church's longstanding August Quarterly Festival, newly developed exhibitions and displays of the Church's history, and a documentary bringing the threads of this work together, this multi-year project seeks to create more information and access points for people to appreciate the living legacy of the Reverend Peter Spencer and the impact the church he founded has had on American history and broader diasporic Black faith practices.

The Mother African Union Church ("the Church") on Franklin Street in Wilmington, Delaware, currently pastored by the Reverend Dr. Ronald Whitaker, II, is the longtime home base for the African Union Methodist Protestant (A.U.M.P.) Churches—a network of over thirty churches spanning from New York to Virginia that were active participants in modeling religious freedom and supporting freedom seekers traveling along the Underground Railroad. The Church's early origins lie in the journey of Peter Spencer, a man of many talents born enslaved in Kent County, Maryland, in 1782. After being manumitted, Spencer migrated north to Wilmington, Delaware, in the 1790s, where he was exposed to Quaker practices and joined the city's vibrant Methodist movement that offered enslaved and free Black people a space to worship. Little is known of Spencer's day-to-day life during this period, but it is believed that he interacted with other religious thinkers and began carving out a space for himself as a lay preacher worshipping at Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, which had had a sizeable Black membership since its formation in 1789.

The establishment of the Union Church of African Members, which later became the Mother African Union Church, was the result of years of organizing and advocacy efforts led by lay Spencer and William Anderson, another lay preacher active in Wilmington's Methodist movement. In the summer of 1805, the pair led forty Black parishioners in separating from the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in response to the continued discrimination they faced while worshipping. They established their own church, Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church, in June of 1805, which operated under the pastoral supervision of the Asbury Church and the broader Methodist Episcopal Conference. After ongoing struggles with the presiding Methodist Episcopal bishopry that parishioners perceived as limiting their religious freedoms, Spencer and Anderson again led members in separating. This time, however, they worked to found their own space—the Union Church of Africans, which was legally incorporated on September 18, 1813.

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Members of the Church hosted the inaugural Big August Quarterly Festival in 1814 to celebrate the founding of their new church. This event and its camp meeting-style worshipping attracted thousands of Black people who made their way to Wilmington by foot, horse, and steamboat to hear moving sermons, gather with friends and family, and organize themselves for generations. For the last 211 years, members of the Mother African Union Church have continued to host the August Quarterly to acknowledge the historical significance of the Church's founding and to gather people together for community healing, discussion, and organizing. To quote then-Senator Joseph R. Biden from an address he gave before President Ronald Reagan on August 9, 1984, the Big August Quarterly is a "fundamentally American celebration" that makes space for Black people to discuss their challenges within a Nation still working to become a place "dedicated to the proposition that all [men] are created equal."

The Delaware Historical Society is honored to be partnering with the Mother African Union Church to elevate the living legacies and histories of this Church and its diverse membership over the last 212 years. As part of this endeavor, we are installing a small-scale exhibition at the Mother African Union Church on Franklin Street. The objective for this Request for Proposal is to locate a partnering firm that will provide the best value and support to the Delaware Historical Society and our friends at the Mother African Union Church. While price is an important factor taken into consideration, other criteria will also inform our award decision—more details can be found in Section 5.0.

2.0 Project Explanation

The Delaware Historical Society's partnership with the Mother African Union Church is multitiered and comprised of four primary components:

1. Rejuvenating the Big August Quarterly's activities by working together to create programming and public dialogue engagements that generate new awareness of the Quarterly and its contributions to the Wilmington community.
2. Develop an exhibition in the Mother African Union Church's Heritage Hallway illuminating the life and work of Peter Spencer and the living legacy of the Union Church of Africans (now, known as the Mother African Union Church) showcasing extant artifacts including objects such as photographs, choir robes, business records, recordings of past sermons, and other ephemera from the DHS and MAUC collections that represent the church's vibrant contributions to American history.
3. Preservation of historic documents and artifacts associated with the Mother African Union Church's history is a key factor for this project.

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Throughout the project, items will be rehoused, conserved, and digitized as appropriate. As the project progresses, staff at the Delaware Historical Society will teach and empower community members to preserve and care for materials through educational workshops.

4. Produce a high-quality documentary that highlights and emphasizes the role of the Black faith community in Delaware and its contexts within broader American histories. Specifically, the documentary will explore the origins of the Mother African Union Church in 1813 and how the community has continued and celebrated the work of Peter Spencer more than two hundred years later.

2.1 Project Purpose

The scope for this project entails developing and installing two small exhibitions at the Mother African Union Church and the Delaware Historical Society. These two exhibitions should complement one another and expansively tell the story of Peter Spencer and the many succeeding generations of people who have been part of maintaining the traditions he and his fellow worshippers began in 1813. The stories presented in these exhibitions are meant to introduce and contextualize this story in a way that has yet to be done.

Goals for Exhibitions:

- Create a permanent exhibition at the Mother African Union Church that drives interest in the Church as a research and tourism space in Wilmington, Delaware.
- Present an inspirational and engaging visitor experience that immerses people in the history of the Mother African Union Church.
- Inform people about the significance of the past history of the Mother African Union Church, its vibrant activities today, and the potential the Church sees for its future.

2.2 Project Scope

Executive Director

Ivan Henderson

2.2.1 Mother African Union Church Exhibition

The Mother African Union Church Heritage Hallway exhibition is a longstanding tradition that members of the church have maintained for decades. The hallway sits inside the church, adjacent to their

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sanctuary. Through this collaborative partnership, the Mitchell Center for African American Heritage is working with representatives from the church to establish an exhibition that is informative, immersive, and inspirational. The intent is to incorporate physical objects that are stable enough for display, sounds from recorded sermons over the last twenty-five years, video clips from Church events and Quarterly activities, and facsimiles of important paper materials too fragile to be displayed. The exhibition at the Church will primarily be accessed by audiences comprised of existing and new members of the church, as well as local community members interested in learning more about this historic space. The spirit of the exhibition is meant to bring together the past, the present, and the future through an exploration of the Church's foundations, its ongoing practices of community building, and its continued significant influence on life, culture, and politics on the Delmarva peninsula.

Heritage Hallway Space:

- Exhibition Space: 408 ft²
- Room Capacity: 10-15 people
- Visitor Predictions: The Heritage Hallway space sees most of its traffic on Sundays and during the August Quarterly period. Current visitor predictions are estimated to range between 885 and 1,000 people annually.

Key Narrative Themes Identified: Church members have identified themes for this exhibition:

- Peter Spencer – emphasizing his biography, philosophies, and political activities.
- The Establishment of the Union Church of Africans – tracing the church's history from its establishment to the present and potential futures. Careful attention to community life at the Church and experiences of members within the contexts of broader histories (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement).
- The August Quarterly – spotlighting 212 years of Quarterly histories and positioning it as an important socio-political event occurring on the Delmarva peninsula.

3.0 RFP & Project Timelines

The exhibitions are scheduled to open in August of 2026 in time for the 212th August Quarterly celebrations. Bidders will be able to conduct on-site visits to the Mother African Union Church Heritage Hallway space between November 17, 2025, and December 17, 2025.

Executive Director

Ivan Henderson

Request for Proposal Announced	10/17/2025
Window for On-Site Visits	11/17/2025-12/17/2025
Proposal Due	01/05/2026
Contract Award / Notification to Unsuccessful Bidders	1/16/2026

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The exhibition installation is planned for the summer of 2026, with a deadline for project completion on August 22nd, 2026. This permits a premiere in time for the 2026 August Quarterly activities.

4.0 Budget Explanation

The Mitchell Center for African American Heritage's anticipated budget for the entirety of the exhibition design and installation process at the Mother African Union Church is \$150,000. This amount includes any necessary refurbishment preceding the exhibition installation, display furniture, and exhibit design and implementation.

5.0 Submission Guidelines & Requirements

- Summary of your firm's background, resources, and relevant experience.
- Examples from past projects of a similar size and scope.
- Statement of firm's design philosophy and capabilities. Please explain your approach to working with clients and local histories.
- References from past projects of a similar size and scope.
- Proposed schedule for completing the master plan, including project stages, milestones and payments.
- Proposed budget for completing the master plan by major categories.
- Names and resumes of key personnel that will be *directly involved* in the project.
- Any other relevant supporting materials of the firm's choosing.

6.0 Evaluation Factors

1. Responsiveness to the requirements set forth in this Request for Proposal
2. Relevant past performance/experience
3. Samples of work
4. Cost, including an assessment of total cost of ownership and maintenance
5. Technical expertise/experience of bidder and bidder's staff

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Appendix Items:

Reference Images of Exhibition Spaces

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Mother African Union Church Heritage Hallway

