

One pastor's experience with the African American Lectionary

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

November 8, 2013

Christopher Michael Jones is pastor of First Baptist Church of Hillside, New Jersey. He's used the African American Lectionary—which I [wrote about for the Century](#)—in worship, though he doesn't use it every week. Jones has also contributed to the AAL's resources. I asked him a few questions about his experience.

How long have you been using the AAL in worship?

For five years.

How has it challenged you as a preacher?

It has challenged me to think more critically from a theological perspective on the claims I attempt to make through the texts I preach. In addition, it offers cultural historical perspectives from a distinctly African American perspective. This is helpful for contextualizing the texts being preached, to enrich the experience of the gospel listener.

Has the AAL changed your church's worship life in areas other than preaching?

The greatest impact upon FBC's worship life would be in the area of its litanies. The African American Lectionary offers some of the most creative litanies/calls to worship, and they speak specifically to the needs and concerns of the African American worship community.

How have people responded to these litanies?

They have responded with energetic expressions of worship through song, prayers, dance and fellowship. In some instances the response has included the birthing of new ministries to live out the words of faith experienced in the litany read during public worship.

Has the AAL had an effect on your congregation's general knowledge and understanding of the Bible?

To some degree, yes.

Say a little more about how this has worked.

In certain instances the congregation has learned of a subtle nuance in a particular scripture being read in during public worship. For instance, addressing God as "God," as opposed to "Him"—which is more customary and traditional in the black church experience.

You're also an AAL contributor. How has this work enriched your work as a pastor and worship leader?

As a contributor I've had the unique opportunity to both dig deep into academic biblical scholarship and express God's eternal truth in layman's terms. Being a contributor to the African American Lectionary has also helped me to rediscover the interconnections of worship: from the crafting of the sermon to the creation of relevant litanies, video and audio aids, scholarly resources, information on various administrative and philosophical styles that shape the theological framework of a planned worship service, and an assortment of other materials. These all add to an authentic African American worship experience.

What do you find most useful about the AAL?

The creative blend of sermon material, cultural-historical perspectives, and creative liturgical ideas. These all make the African American Lectionary one of the best resources pastors can use when seeking to speak from, create, or understand the African American worship experience.