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ST. THOMAS GOSPEL CHOIR CROWNED “THE BEST!”

AECST Gospel Choir Wins Verizon HSTS New York Regional Competition

Philadelphia, PA, October 4, 2013–The St. Thomas Gospel Choir (STGC) of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas (AECST), the first Black Episcopal Church in the United States, was selected as ‘the best church gospel choir’ during the New York Regional Finals in the Verizon Wireless “How Sweet the Sound” (HSTS) competition. The event, held at Radio City Music Hall in New York City, brought STGC together with five talented choirs from Harlem, NY, Newark, NJ, Rochester, NY, New Haven, CT, and Brooklyn, NY. To learn more about Verizon HSTS, please visit <http://www.howsweetthesound.com/>

“To God be the glory,” said Waltier Blocker, STGC Director through a strained and emotion filled voice. “This is an honor and distinction that our choir members richly deserve. For weeks, they gave all they had to prepare for this event. We are humbled and grateful to use our voices in praise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and represent the African Episcopal Church of St.

Thomas in the Verizon HSTS New York regional and Los Angeles national competitions.”

As reward for being crowned victor, the STGC was awarded a \$10,000 check and will get an all-expenses paid trip to compete in the Verizon HSTS National Finals held on Saturday, November 2, 2013 in Los Angeles, CA. The winner of the finals receives \$25,000 and a music recording contract. The STGC was also selected as the HOPE Award winner for the choir that collected the largest number of cell phones to be refurbished for women and families that were victims of domestic abuse. Phones are then refurbished and given to them to help them get a fresh new start on life.

The STGC is celebrating 22 years of music ministry. This is the next blessing in a long line of appearances, awards and recognition for this talented group of musicians that includes being featured at the Induction and Seating Services of the Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts Shori, the first female Presiding Bishop for the Episcopal Church of the U.S., being invited every year for the past 8 years to perform with the Philly Pops, having music included by Philadelphia’s and AECST’s own Oscar nominated producer and director, Lee Daniels in his movie, “The Woodsman,” recording 3 CDs (a 4th is being planned), and ministering every second and fourth Sunday during service at the AECST.

In support of STGC, over 200 AECST parishioners boarded buses to make the 2 hour journey from Philadelphia to New York on a weeknight to witness the miracle at Radio City Music Hall. When the decision was announced, AECST members were making a joyful noise and dancing in the aisles. All social media lit up to announce that the STGC won well-deserved recognition.

Father Martini Shaw, AECST’s 17th Rector shared, “I am overwhelmed at how much of a blessing the St. Thomas Gospel Choir has been to the music ministry of the AECST. We are truly blessed to have such a diverse and rich musical heritage.” In an uncharacteristically relaxed moment, when STGC was chosen as one of 2 finalists to in the Verizon New York Regional HSTS competition, Father Shaw was overheard to say in a whisper, “I think we might win this!”

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The St. Thomas Gospel Choir (STGC) is a one bodied, one spirit, Christ centered music ministry that spreads the gospel and edifies Jesus Christ through music. STGC's members currently consist of 50, spirit filled, energetic, and anointed musical ambassadors of song. With evangelism being a very important factor in the choir's ministry, they share their music ministry at over 100 services, programs, concerts and celebrations every year. For more information about the STGC, please contact Daryn Stewart, Choir Business Manager at (215) 688-3735, via email at daryn215@aol.com, or stthomasgc@aol.com or visit <http://www.stthomasgc.org/>

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Founded in 1792, the African Episcopal Church of Saint Thomas (AECST) is the first Black Episcopal Church in the United States. We are a Christ-centered community that welcomes all people. This community embraces and executes the core values of our founder, the Reverend Absalom Jones, the first Black Episcopal priest in the United States: leadership, morality, spirituality, equal rights, education, liberty, charity, justice, humanitarianism, self-determination, self-respect, and freedom. AECST is located at 6361 Lancaster Avenue, between Overbrook Avenue and Sherwood Road, one block west of City Line Avenue. To learn more about AECST, please contact Father Martini Shaw, Rector at (215) 473-3065, via email at frmartinshaw@aol.com or visit www.aecst.org

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