

Roles and Functions of African American Churches

The primary role of the church is to assure the spiritual well-being of its membership following a prescribed set of beliefs.

African American churches generally employ multiple practices to engage members.

	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
CARING PRACTICES	Demonstrate concern for the wellbeing, self-worth, and self-esteem of members and the wider community.	Religious practices offering comfort and healing, ministries to reach people in crisis.
EDUCATING PRACTICES	Provide instruction in linking values and beliefs to everyday life.	Sunday school, bible study, sermons, workshops.
MEDIATING PRACTICES	Enhance spiritual resources and connect people to resources in their communities.	Church sponsorship of social service programs, referrals to community agencies.
SUSTAINING PRACTICES	Ongoing encouragement of members' engagement in the range of activities provided by the church.	Church bulletins, outreach and communications activities, activities that engage members in the life of the church.
ADVOCATING PRACTICES	Help members understand their rights and responsibilities, and mobilize the church community for action.	Voter education, community mobilization, action on behalf of members or the community with agencies, companies or politicians.

Many of these practices overlap and fulfill multiple functions in instructing members in moral beliefs, providing an opportunity to demonstrate those beliefs through action, and engaging members in the wider community.