

“Getting Back to Basics as We Envision Our Way Forward In Taking Care of God’s Business”

Introduction

Giving honor and praise to our awesome, electrifying and gracious God, who has allowed us to be in our Master’s service for another quadrennial and has afforded me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the College of Bishops of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, to our gifted, analytical and pastoral Senior Bishop Lawrence L. Reddick, III, chief executive officer of the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church and Mrs. Wynde Reddick, the first lady of the CME Church, Bishop C. James King, Jr., my classmate and Chair of the College of Bishops, Host Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton and Rev. Lawrence Jefferson-Snorton, to Bishop Henry M. Williamson, Sr., my energetic, encouraging and articulate father in Episcopal Ministry and Dr. Doris Yvonne Williamson, to the College of Bishops and their spouses, especially the love of my life who has supported me for the last 38 years, Mrs. Jacqueline Best, to our visiting ecumenical bishops and their spouses, to the widows of bishops, to the General Officers, Judicial Council, Connectional Officers, College Presidents, and all of the spouses engaged in connectional service, delegates, alternates, CME’s here to observe, registered guests, members of the 9th Episcopal District, to my children Brandon and Bridgette and grand-children Brandon, Jr. and Cameron and all assembled at this 38th Quadrennial Session and 39th General Conference of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. I greet you in the matchless name of Jesus our Lord and Liberator, on behalf of the Episcopal leaders of the CME Church. We humbly submit this Episcopal Address to you for your prayerful consideration and deliberation, as a progressive path that leads us forward in the new quadrennial (2018-2022), with hopes that you will accept our recommendations.

Over the last several years, your Episcopal Supervisors of the CME Church have engaged in serious contemplation regarding the present state of the CME Church. Our goal this afternoon is to clearly express our concerns and issues and to articulate a clear vision that will move the CME Church toward a brighter future. The lot has fallen upon me and I am humbled, honored, appreciative and blessed to be the writer, the messenger, who delivers to you the collective thoughts of the College of Bishops, as we endeavor to be led by God’s Spirit.

In Memoriam

“And are we yet alive, to see each other’s face? Glory and praise to Jesus give for His redeeming grace!”

We are pleased to report that the ranks of the Episcopacy have not been broken over the last four years. In God’s wise providence, all the lives of our Chief Pastors have been spared so that we can continue to be a witness for our Lord and Savior for a while longer, and for that we are grateful.

However, since we have gathered at the last General Conference, we have mourned the loss of Sis. Willie Ann Helton, the widow of Bishop Charles L. Helton.

“O rapture scenes that wait the day, When Thou shall call me home, When I shall here no longer stay, No longer weep and moan.”

Mrs. Helton was one the nicest and friendliest people that one could ever meet. She was small in her physical frame, but she was a giant in her love for her family, friends and all she encountered. Mrs. Helton was a retired educator and was very supportive of her beloved “Charles,” as she affectionately called Bishop Helton. We praise God for how she allowed her life to be a witness in God’s kingdom. She and Bishop Helton left a legacy through their children: Carol, Charlene and Donald.

“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”(Revelation 14:13 NKJV)

Additionally, there have been countless other CME soldiers, clergy and laity who have transitioned from this life to life eternal since we last met in 2014. We acknowledge that they have blessed both God and us through their labor and love. So we praise God for their lives and their service. “Hallelujah! the race is run! Eternal life is gained, my happiness has just begun, the crown of life obtained!”

State of the CME Church

The state of the CME Church is GOOD. Just because our state is good does not mean that we do not have challenges or that we do not need to be and do better, for there is always room for improvement. First of all, the CME Church is good because of God’s grace that constantly sneaks up upon us, surprising us with God’s unconditional love. There is one thing that we know for sure: God’s grace, goodness and favor have been upon the CME Church. We serve an awesome God. Our state is also good because we are improving services to humanity in both our U.S. and non-U.S. work, through our churches, colleges and schools, hospital, seminary and Bible colleges and all programs put into place for the well-being of our world.

Additionally, the church is good because of the pioneering spirit of determination bequeathed to us from our 41 founders, who had been enslaved. This spirit transcends time and generations and is at home in those who are presently carrying forth God's Church in the CME Church, through the ministries and the service given over the years. It is because of these persons who are presently in our local churches, and the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before them that we are grateful and give God praise for their loyal commitment. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," (Philippians 4:13 NKJV) seems to best capture their determined spirit.

In Colored Methodism's early days, our founders faced insurmountable odds, struggling to survive opposition coming from inside of the black race that resulted from their conscious decision to form a separate denomination instead of joining already existing Methodist bodies. Our church, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America (name changed in 1954 to Christian Methodist Episcopal but the change did not take effect until 1956), was called the "slave owner's church" by African Methodism, because we were sanctioned by the Methodist Episcopal Church-South and the property that slaves used before the Civil War was given to us.

Our founders not only had to deal with opposition from within, they also had to triumph over the powers of racism and oppression from outside of the race. The beginning of the CME Church was in 1870 – five years after the Civil War and the freedom of Negroes from slavery. Negroes in the South were living in terrible, unsettling conditions, which caused them to constantly be on the move seeking employment and satisfactory places to live. Organizations as the Ku Klux Klan, which came into existence Dec. 24, 1865, came into being to keep the races separate and to eliminate or minimized competition between white and Negro labor. The Ku Klux Klan was responsible for many of our churches being burned. However, neither opposition from without, nor erosive forces from within were able to stop God's CME Church that our founders brought into existence. The attitude that one could accomplish anything because of Christ's strength was a force of liberation, and the essence of the gospel that formed, sustained and assisted our founders in triumphing over the powers of oppression and racism. It is the same attitude that is responsible for our nearly 148 years of existence. For if the Lord hadn't been on our side, where would we be?

The CME Church recognizes the great need for our Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), for no other colleges or universities give the attention, assistance and tools necessary for all their students to be successful like our HBCUs. Our committed and generous members from the CME Church's early beginnings have both recognized and stressed the importance of a good education. The long existence of our four colleges and seminary validates our present membership's continued value of education. Our affiliate schools, which we are so proud of, are Miles College in Fairfield, Ala., (whose 2018 graduating class was the largest in its history), Paine College in Augusta, Ga., Lane College in Jackson Tenn., Texas College in Tyler Texas, and Phillips School of Theology at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Ga. CME affiliate schools are doing all they can to compensate for the failures in this country's

public educational system and are doing their share in helping students get a quality and affordable education. Our emphasis on education, which consumes about 24 percent of the CME Church's Connectional Budget, contributes to our good state and is consistently paid by our local church membership even amid great struggle. Thank you, CME congregations, for paying your apportionments, making sure that the Connectional Budget of our church is met.

Finally the state of the CME Church is good because of our most valuable resource God has put in our care, our human resource. It has been a joy serving with the wonderful clergy and laypersons in our Zion. The College of Bishops affirms that God has given the CME Church some of the most loyal, committed and generous clergy and lay members in Christendom. For that we are grateful. In a recent effort to save Paine College, our fine pastors and hardworking lay members sacrificed by giving liberally, which resulted in our church giving Paine College a million dollars. We are not a rich church, but we make the necessary sacrifices for what is important to us. Does the gallant effort of the College of Bishops need to be mentioned? Led by Bishop Gilmore and Bishop Grave, when we borrowed several millions to save Texas College, and our loyal members paid it off during 2010-2014 quadrennial. Retiring that indebtedness was a big deal to the cherished members of the CME Church, especially when one considers that other denominations much larger than ours have not been fortunate enough, or chose not, to save their affiliate schools. Now Texas College is alive and well.

These same CME congregations are often the first to respond to crisis and other requests. Whether the asking is for disaster relief, our annual appeal for our seminary, Phillip School of Theology, assistance for our affiliate institutions (colleges and the present renovation of the historical Collins Chapel Hospital into a much-needed rehabilitation facility in Memphis, TN), Interdenominational Theological Center, St. Jude Children's Hospital, outreach projects to the community or other worthy causes, CMEs respond willingly, quickly and generously. Please know that you are a great people and these are the types of things you have done over and over again and you do it well. We are grateful to God that we have such wonderful people with whom we work. Please know that the College of Bishops both celebrates and appreciates your love for the Lord and your neighbor, and your devotion to your church that you exemplify every day. We are thankful for the honor and respect that you bestow upon us and your commitment to service in our communities. Today, please know that we see your diligence and commitment and we celebrate each of you in every local church. Praise God for the faithful leaders and members of all the local churches of the CME Church.

Because of your outstanding contributions, we have been able to meet the needs of God's people, for whom we have been called. We may be one of the smaller Methodist bodies, but because of your love and devotion to God and God's Church, and because our great God is on our side, we stand tall as giants. We stand as giants only because of God and because we stand on the shoulders of our local churches and those whom have gone before us. We decree that the CME Church is a miracle church, recognizing that little becomes much when it is placed in the Master's hands.

Moreover, the dedication of our members is also seen in the commitment and sacrifice of our golden age citizens, who have carried this church on their backs for years. Their support is seen in the finances they contribute and how they consistently press their way to Sunday school; Bible study and prayer meetings; worship services; church, quarterly, district and annual conferences and connectional meetings. The late Naomi Ledbetter, a senior citizen and a lifelong member of St. John CME Church in Winston Salem, where I used to pastor, once told me that she was so committed to God and her church that she would crawl to get to worship service if she had to. That is commitment. The College of Bishops is appreciative of the support, service and many sacrifices of our seniors, and we do not take any of their many contributions, or the contributions of any of our loyal members or local churches, for granted. Our state is good because of the wonderful committed people that we have the privilege of serving.

Thank you God for your grace! Our loving CMEs are a blessing sent from heaven above. Thank you, CME

We must honestly and boldly confront the challenges that are before us, praying and asking God's guidance and assistance and for the power of the Holy Ghost to give us wisdom and strength as we attempt to tackle our challenges.

Challenges We Must Confront

The world, the country and the cultural landscape of our churches are rapidly changing. We cannot operate as we did 50 years ago. Our responsibility is to serve this present age and we must be willing to do things differently, to remain both relevant and appeal to the people we are trying to draw. If we are to not only survive the future but thrive both in our local ministries and as a denomination, we must find a way of becoming more appealing to our youth and young adults. They are the bridge and gateway to our future. They are critical to the continuity and well-being of our church. We must find a way to mentor them and bring them along with us. We acknowledge that changes can be both alarming and hard for the local church to keep up with and understand. We must both pray for God's guidance and study these changes, to ascertain whether they are fads that will soon pass or whether they are permanent and require our flexibility and adaptability. The call of God and our future well-being require us to seek some understanding of these changes, so we can adopt plans and strategies that will help us continue to operate with relevance and effectiveness.

In the Episcopal Address of the CME Church delivered at the 1926 General Conference, the College of Bishops stated: "The growth and expansion of Colored Methodism and to meet the demands of the times, requires that there should be some changes in some of our laws to meet present conditions and others clarified and simplified and all ambiguous expressions eliminated." This may be worthy of our consideration as we go through our legislature process at this 2018 General Conference. Your Episcopal leaders are also sensitive to the fact that our churches are experiencing challenging times that impact our ability to serve more efficiently. It is these important challenges that we feel that this Episcopal Address must confront if we are

to not only survive but thrive in the years ahead. With this being said, let me acknowledge that the College of Bishops in their forward thinking has solicited and secured a \$50 thousand matching grant from the Lilly Foundation, written by Bishop C. James King, to develop a strategic plan as we seriously engage in long-term planning for the future of our church.

The first challenge that must be addressed in the CME Church: is declining membership over the last few years in many of our local churches in the United States (Episcopal Districts 1-9). This is not surprising because most if not all major denominational churches are in decline in the U.S., whether it is acknowledged or not. The decline is especially seen in the small number and/or absence of young adults, children, youth and men in many of our churches in the United States. The CME churches on the continent of Africa (10th and 11th Episcopal Districts) are growing tremendously with an abundance of people in all of the groups missing from many U.S. churches. As the U.S. bishops have visited our churches over the past quadrennial, many of us, especially the new bishops, were surprised as to the number of our small membership churches, and that several of which are in decline. There are myriad variables that may affect the declines and changing demographics around our congregations: different cultures who do not value church attendance as many of us do, the death and graying of many our members, and some churches' ineffectiveness in transmitting their value to the younger generation. These are just a few of the varied factors that affect declining membership. Whatever may be the cause, the fact remains that many of our already small membership churches are getting smaller.

It must be said loudly and clearly: not all of our churches in the U.S. are in decline; some are rapidly growing and are full of all age groups, including young adults, while others are holding constant. Some of our rapidly growing and thriving churches in the U.S. noted by your Episcopal Supervisors are: Williams Memorial in High Point, N.C. (Pastor Robert Williams); Beebe Memorial Cathedral in Oakland, Calif. (Pastor Charley Hames); Phillips Temple, Trotwood, Ohio (Pastor Jimmy Washington); Allen Metropolitan CME Church, Chicago, Ill. (Pastor David Bryant); St. Paul CME Church, Savannah, Ga. (Pastor Da Henri Thurmond); Kirkwood CME Church, Dallas, Texas (Pastor Jerry Christian); St. James CME Church, Tyler, Texas (Pastor Orenthia Mason); and Emmanuel Temple CME Church, Victorville, California (Pastor James Markham); to name a few. These churches are growing and have an abundance of members in most, if not all, of the categories that are usually lacking in many of our declining churches. These churches are being lifted up as models for us to study and make inquiry in our quest for growing churches. Their growth cannot be reduced to magical formulas that can be emulated because all churches' circumstances are uniquely their own; however, talking to the pastors of these churches and inviting them to do workshops on the principles of church growth, especially the principles that have benefited them, may be helpful and give us insights and ideas as to how we might grow the church where we are.

In an all-young-adult 9th Episcopal District webcast, held April 9, 2017, with representation from all five regions, our young adults gave us some insights that were helpful to us in

understanding their perspective. Young adults shared openly how they felt in reference to their involvement in the CME Church. The purpose of the webcast was simply to give the young adults an opportunity to speak without opposition or interruption, and to give the adults an opportunity to listen to what our active young adults had to say to us. One of the young adults stated that they just want to be given an opportunity to serve. They challenged the CME Church not to allow persons to stay in office too long, because they began to think that they own their position for life. One young adult likens the transition of power from adults to young adults to a runner in a relay race who continues to hold on to the baton, refusing to hand it off to the next runner. These young adults, who were intelligent, spiritual and professional, said that they acknowledge with grateful appreciation the help and advice that the church gives them. They shared that they were open to mentoring and shadowing. The College of Bishops highlights a few churches that we believe are doing outstanding jobs in recruiting and incorporating young adults into the ministry of the Church. They are: Hudsonville CME Church, Slayden, Miss. (Pastor Bobby Wilson); Westside CME Church, Atlanta, Ga. (Pastor Andre Loyd); and Martin Chapel, Redwater, Texas (Pastor Michael Rush).

Churches that we highlight for their tremendous work with children and youth are: Trinity CME Church in Lafayette, La. (Pastor Rev. Maggie Banks) and Promised Land CME Church, Canton, Texas (Pastor Ruby Skief). We must concentrate on our recruitment of children, youth and young adults and utilizing their gifts, talent and ideas. They are technologically savvy, and they can help us to reach other technologically-savvy millennials in our congregations and expand the ministry in creative ways.

Finally, another major group missing in our churches is men. We love the women who are the backbone of many of our churches and we celebrate the important role they've played in bringing the church to the good state that we are presently in. However, we must employ an aggressive marketing campaign to recruit our men and bring them back to our churches—particularly our black men who have traditionally been a part of the Church. It is a fact that usually when men come to church, they bring their whole family with them, which will significantly impact the membership of our local churches. The College of Bishops highlights just a few churches and pastors and commends them for the fine job they are doing in recruiting and maintaining ministries that develop and support the men in their churches. These churches are: Williams Memorial CME Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (Pastor Rev. Calvin Hopkins); Mt. Pisgah CME Church, Memphis, Tenn., which has a fifty-voice boys' to men's choir (Pastor Willie Ward); and Douglas Memorial CME Church, Beaumont, Texas, (Pastor David Robinson).

We have identified the groups who are missing from our churches in the United States, but the groups that are present could benefit us more if we all were more actively engaged in sharing our faith with those we encounter daily, and especially in recruiting those groups that are missing. When we are excited about God and share that excitement with others, people will come to see what all the excitement is all about. For some strange reason, many believe that it is the sole responsibility of the pastors to win souls to Christ, and if our church is not growing, it

is the pastor's fault. In all of our congregations, there are more lay persons than there are clergy. Think about the collective impact we could make for the kingdom of God if all of us, clergy and lay, were adequately trained and actively engaged in sharing our faith with others and inviting them to become a part of our local churches. When is the last time that each of us shared our faith with others, outside of the church's "Invitation to Christian Discipleship"?

The second serious challenge that we must address is the many aged and decaying church facilities that are in much need of costly repairs. Some of these structures are quite old. Many of our churches that we presently have were not built by us or purchased as new structures, but were bought from other denominations. Even churches that we have built new over time also get old and need repairs. Many of our churches need to be updated with repairs to meet the present building codes, especially accessibility codes.

Decaying structures combined with declining membership usually means that there are not enough funds available for maintenance, repairs and upkeep. As a result, some of our churches deal with leaking roofs, inefficient or inoperable heating and air-conditioning systems or units, flooding basements, faltering foundations, infestations of various kinds of pests, decaying wood on flooring and/or on the interior and exterior of the structure, soiled or worn carpet, chipping paint, energy inefficient windows, etc. These repairs require monies that some of our churches do not have. A well-cared-for church structure is more appealing to potential worshipper than a structure that is in disrepair.

A third challenge that we must address is high apportionments among our smaller shrinking local churches' membership. Many of our smaller local churches are assessed beyond what they are able to pay. As your Episcopal Supervisors, we are not insensitive to this situation and pledge that we will work on this concern. Let's face it: not everyone who feels that their apportionments are too much can get a decrease. Our primary concern is for the very small struggling church. As your Episcopal leaders, we are not that far removed from paying apportionments that we don't remember our own struggles as pastors to pay them every year. But we made them a priority, as they should be. When we were pastors, most of us complained among our peers, like many of you do, that our apportionments were too high and should be reduced. But they never were reduced, and we paid them every year without a short report. We never complained in the company of our parishioners about our apportionments, because complaining was not helpful to us in collecting them. We had a full year to raise our apportionments and we paid them every year throughout our careers because we had a plan that we monitored and adjusted it whenever it was needed. We did what we had to do for our well-being. We are CMEs, paying apportionments is what we do.

That being said, our very small churches deserve for us to take a second look and make our best attempt to match their present reality to what they are being asked to pay. We recognize that technically these apportionments should be readjusted at the beginning of each quadrennial. But often, setting the apportionments for the quadrennial has become a ditto or rubber stamp of what the region has always done in the past, without serious contemplation or consideration

for local churches' present reality, especially as it relates to the very small membership churches. It should be understood that each Joint Board of Finance in consultation with the presiding bishop and presiding elders, assess the funds it needs to pay the general church its share of the Connectional Budget, as well as the funds necessary to operate the annual conferences and districts' offices each year.

The fourth and final challenge that we must confront is the need to enhance our discipleship and leadership development training for our preachers and lay persons in our local churches. We are living in a day in which we have educated congregants in the pews, which requires us to have educated pastors in the pulpits. Presently, we require that all pastors going into full connection to have two years of college, but all that we require of those being admitted on trial is a high school education or a GED.

Many of our pastors are ill prepared for the tasks of ministry. Some of them have no theological education or training, which sometimes becomes obvious and shows up in their preaching, teaching, evangelism, pastoral care and church administration. The College of Bishops acknowledges that this is not always the case, for some of our pastors do quite well without formal seminary education because they have had great mentors, and/or they constantly work on improving their skill set. However, other pastors do not seem to be motivated to improve or upgrade their skills by attending trainings, getting a four-year degree or otherwise taking responsibility for their theological education. Theological education is critical because it has the potential to correct the skewing of one's understanding of the faith and, by extension, the faith of the people they serve and lead.

Theological and Biblical Undergirding

"Getting back to basics" is simply our way of saying that we must return to doing what God commands and expects from us. The theme implies that we have strayed away from that which is foundational, that which should have been our main focus. We would submit that we have stayed away; however this straying was not intentional and it occurred gradually over a period of time. Our straying happened amid doing what we thought was important. The truth of the matter is that we lost focus on what the most important matters were. Getting back to basics entails obeying God's will, fulfilling God's design for our lives, winning souls and making and nurturing Christian disciples. So we acknowledge the error of our ways and repent, asking God's forgiveness as we make another stab at trying to get things right, by getting back to our basic foundational mission as we envision our way forward in taking care of God business.

It also includes the church challenging all structures of power that prevent people from enjoying the full benefit of what God did for humanity in Jesus Christ. If Jesus is the light of the world, it follows that He is the light for people all over the world regardless of where they live. The Church is challenged to bring salvation and liberation to humans suffering under various yokes of oppression, whether here in the United States or globally. Whether the issues are sexual abuse, human trafficking, genocide or suffering in any other form, we, the people of

God, must be concerned about the humanity of all and denounce any exploitation of humanity and/or resources. We must especially be concerned about the suffering of women all around the globe.

When we with intentionality get back to the basics, we will once again be on the course that God has designed for us and only prayerfully we will stay on that course. We can only envision our way forward by the power of the Holy Spirit as we stay in communion with God through prayer and spending time in fellowship with God and God's Word. Taking care of God's business only occurs when we stay faithful to what God calls us to do.

The theme of this Episcopal Address is grounded theologically and Biblically in Matthew: 28:18-20, the Great Commission, our foundation for both evangelism and discipleship and Luke 2:39-51, Jesus was accidentally left in Jerusalem as a twelve year old, by his parents. When they found him three days later in the Temple, Jesus responds, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (NKJV)

Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission opens with Jesus declaring in verse 18 of Matthew 28 that all authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth. Then He charges His disciples in verses 19 and 20 to go into all the world and make disciples. This is as basic as it gets. Making disciples is the primary responsibility of the Church of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is sharing the good news of what God has done for humanity, through the sacrificial act of Christ dying on the cross for the sins of the world and extending an invitation to humanity to accept Jesus, the Christ, as personal Lord and Savior. Christian education and discipleship training is the methodology that is used in instructing, nurturing and teaching persons how to become followers, pupils or disciples of Jesus Christ, using Jesus' teachings, lifestyle and behavior as a model to follow. The Bible is clear that Jesus did not live for Himself, but to fulfill the purpose that God had for His life and we are challenged to do so as well. Philippians 2:5-8 says, "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of a man. And being found in the appearance of a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross." (NKJV)

The setting of verse 16 and 17 in Matthew 28 is a post-resurrection scene that opens with Jesus appearing to his 11 disciples at the mountain where they were first appointed. Verse 17 reveals that some believed and worshipped him while others doubted. Verses 18-20 record Jesus' last word in Matthew to those whom he had mentored the duration of his ministry. Jesus reveals to them that all authority had been given to him in heaven in verse 18. The Great Commission is given in verse 18. Here Jesus commands his disciples to go to all nations and make disciples. "All nations" is often a part of the Great Commission that we often minimize. We are to make disciples of all nations and not just here in the U.S. This command relates to our foreign work and challenges us to be more serious about making disciple in Haiti, Jamaica, and the 14

countries in Africa. Adding verses 19 and 20 to verse 18 make Jesus' commands fourfold: 1. Go to all nations; 2. Make disciples; 3. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and 4. Teach them to observe God's commands. It is not enough to spread into other nations if we are not making disciples. Perhaps we might want to engage our foreign work more by making sure that we are making disciples, baptizing and teaching God's commandments. After we shore up the disciple-making process in the nations where we are already present, then and only then should we consider going to other nations. The mandate says all nations and we are a long way from "all," so we ought not be content with where we presently are. If Jesus commands us to go into all nations, God will supply the provisions needed to get everything done for what has been commanded. Jesus assures his disciples in verse 20 that He, the one who has all power in heaven and earth, will be with them always even until the end of the age. Making disciples, teaching God's commands, going into all nations, and baptizing are our commands. In this new quadrennial let's make sure that we do better in following our biblical mandate. Are we up for the challenge?

Luke 2:41-50

Luke is the most comprehensive of the four gospels, is one of the treasures of biblical literature and is heralded as a theological foundation for the Church.¹ It is addressed to Theophilus, a Greek name meaning: "a friend of God" or "one who loves God." Theophilus could also mean "God Fearers, who are interested in Christianity".² Luke is a Gentile physician from Antioch who seeks to write a truer gospel with a more robust account of Jesus than his contemporaries, addressing the basic needs of Gentile inquirers.³ According to Bishop Thomas Lanier Hoyt, Luke wants his readers to know much more about Jesus than historical facts but also the work and plan of God in His life.⁴ Luke was much more than a physician. He was primarily an evangelist, who utilized his training as a physician. Luke uses his outstanding education, his giftedness as a skilled writer, his amazing story telling ability and his meticulous concern for historical accuracy to become the inspired theologian who pens one-fourth of the New Testament, writing the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

Luke takes the original message of Jesus from Mark, using an additional Q source and a special Lukan tradition.⁵ He recasts it in the language and thought patterns familiar to more Hellenized Jews, God fearers and gentile readers.⁶ Luke's gospel presents Jesus in a more elegantly crafted and engaging way. In today's jargon we would say that Luke rebranded the old gospel message, providing it with a new universal flavor in order to make it more relevant to a different audience – a different culture – thus making it more understandable with a broader appeal. Bishop Hoyt says that Luke is the first gospel written against the background of world history; moreover, Luke is the first gospel that takes Jesus beyond His death, to the formation of the Church in Acts.⁷ Rebranding the gospel message, making it relevant for new generations, is what the Church is called to do. Luke made sure that there was nothing in his gospel that Gentiles could not understand.⁸ In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is a friend to those considered to be unacceptable to "proper" society.⁹

Luke presents Jesus as the Universal Compassionate Savior, submitted to the will of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to minister to the poor and oppressed. Luke stresses the power of the Holy Spirit, and one can see that Jesus' whole public ministry is guided by the Spirit.¹⁰ Bishop Hoyt says, "What happened to Jesus, being filled by the Spirit, must continue in the Church until Parousia."¹¹ Jesus serves as an example of discipleship as He who heals, forgives and dies a martyr's death, for a disciple is called to take up his/her cross daily and follow God's instructions and will. We must recognize that Jesus' ministry is characterized by a life of prayer from beginning to end, even praying for His crucifiers while dying in Luke 23:31.

Volume IX of The New Interpreter Bible Commentary by Leander Keck of Yale University says that Gospel of Luke is known for its richness in themes, one of which is God's Redemptive Purpose.¹² Keck says all that happens in Luke is ultimately a part of God's redemptive purpose and Jesus is very much aware of it. He cites Luke 2:49, a verse in our text, to illustrate this point. Here, Jesus says he must be about his father business, noting that even at twelve years old, Jesus is keenly aware of God's redemptive purpose and how he fits into it. Moreover, scattered through-out the Gospel of Luke, are other statements that Jesus makes that indicate Jesus awareness of his purpose and his fate: In Luke 4:49 Jesus says he must preach the Gospel in other towns, for that is why he was sent. In Luke 9:23, 17:25, 24:7 Jesus reveals: that he must suffer and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, teacher of the law and his generation; and be killed and raised on the third day

Clearly, Luke effectively engages a new audience and utilizes fresh insights and techniques, but equally apparent is Luke's faithful adherence to the basics of the faith. Luke reinforces the basics of orthodoxy: Jesus is "the Lord," God's divine Son; compassionate universal Savior of the World. Luke understands the basics of Golden Rule Theology, thus Jesus lives and works among the marginalized and He reaches out to the disenfranchised members of society: women, children, the less than pious, tax collectors, the poor, the sick, the lowly, the oppressed, social outcasts and the downtrodden. In Luke, loving one's neighbor is not the exception, but it is the basic rule. As the church, we must learn to rebrand ourselves for a broader appeal and to gain additional cultures, generations and/or different audiences by blending tradition with post-modernity.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus reaches out to the Pharisees in loving ways, more prominent than in any other gospels. Jesus' dining with the spiteful Pharisees in Luke does not erase their disdain for Him, but it allows us to see the basic virtue of love that Jesus personifies and models for all Christians.

The second chapter of Luke begins with the birth of Jesus, but our text in Luke 2:41- 50 is the only episode recorded of Jesus' childhood beyond infancy. The verses surrounding our text focus upon Jesus' growth. Verse 40 says: "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him." (NKJV). Verse 52 says: "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." Verse 39 points out that Jesus' growth took place in his local setting in Nazareth of Galilee. Local churches have the basic opportunity

and responsibility of shaping little minds and spirits, setting them on a course for life. If we are to do our job well in helping to form the faith of our children, we must be intentional about this basic responsibility and train our children as babies, using the Bible and the best age appropriate Christian education techniques and discipleship training literature available.

In our text, Mary and Joseph, being devout Jews, went to Jerusalem every year to observe Passover as the law required. On this particular trip, 12-year-old Jesus goes with them to the Temple. Jesus' parents were only required to stay two days, but Mary and Joseph stay for the entire festival: seven days. After the festival was over, Jesus' parents head back home on their four- to five-day journey, but Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem without his parents' knowledge. *The International Bible Commentary* says that the custom of that day was for the women to leave earlier than the men, giving them a head start since they walked slower and at the end of the day, the men would catch up with the women.¹³ As the caravan heads back to Nazareth preparing to rest for the evening, Mary discovers that Jesus was not with Joseph as she thought, and Joseph discovers that Jesus was not with Mary as he thought. They accidentally left Jesus in Jerusalem... or did Jesus intentionally linger behind?

Mary and Joseph check among their relatives and acquaintances but to no avail. Jesus was not in the crowd. They did not mean to lose Jesus – it just happened. Have we been traveling without Jesus, not realizing he was missing?

When Mary and Joseph find Jesus, He is calmly sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions as if He does not have a care in this world. Is Jesus sitting with the teachers as a catechumen, mentee or one with knowledge as a teacher? The answer to this question is debatable. Though Jesus had tremendous knowledge of the Jewish scripture, He balanced that knowledge with a teachable spirit. According to *The International Bible Commentary*, Jesus was eager to learn about the Jewish religion, where he had recently believed to have celebrated his bar mitzvah and now he was a son of the commandment.¹⁴ This was the time when Jewish boys began formal education in the Torah and the reading of the Hebrew Scripture to fulfill their ritual duty as an adult male.

Verse 47 records that all the people that heard Jesus were astonished at his understanding and his answers. Also Jesus' parents observed and were amazed according to verse 48. Afterward, His mother asks in verse 48, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have sought you anxiously." In the last part of verse 49, there is division on whether the accurate translation should be "about my Father's business" or "in my Father's house". The problem is that the Greek lacks the noun for "house", "affair", or "interest". The *Interpreter's Bible Commentary* says that both translations fit the narrative, though "my Father's house" is preferred, "about my Father's business" also gives an accurate description of Jesus' involvement with teachers and the function of the story as a transition to Jesus' public ministry.¹⁵ Whether one accepts the translation "my Father's house" or "my Father's business", the urgency of Jesus' redemptive purpose is still reflected from both translations. Being about God's business does not always mean being employed for service in God's house, sometimes it may mean making the necessary

preparation of study of God's Word in God's house and in one's private devotion for later employment of service.

So from this text, how do we get back to basics as we take care of God's business? First, we must make sure that we stay connected to God through Jesus. We cannot be about God's business if we have lost our connection with God. Jesus, the Son, who is the second mode of expression of God, says to His disciples in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing." (NKJV) In verse seven, Jesus says, "if you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you." (NKJV) We must stay connected to God by following the instructions Jesus gives us through the Word of God. When Mary and Joseph discovered that they had lost their connection with Jesus, the Word of God, they retraced their steps until they reconnected. Reconnection is so critical that Mary and Joseph could not go forward until they retraced their steps, going back and reconnect to Jesus.

The second way that we get back to basics and take care of God's business is by making up our minds that we are going to do all that is in our power to commit to God's redemptive purpose for our lives. Our lives are not our own. God has a purpose and plan for all of us. This means that we must first accept God's redemptive plan for our own lives by acknowledging the sacrificial act of Jesus Christ and accept Him as our personal Lord and Savior. After we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we must commit to actively seeking the salvation of our lost brothers and sisters in a loving way. God loves all of humanity and God wants to see them saved. If we are willing, God is willing to work through us for their salvation. We must commit to God's redemptive purpose for our lives and for the lives of others.

The third way that we get back to basics and take care of God's business is by preparing ourselves for a lifelong journey of learning, growth and development in our faith, as we mentor with intentionality and take seriously our responsibility of making disciples, or followers of Jesus. Jesus' preparation for ministry started as a child and continued throughout His entire life. There were 30 years of preparation before Jesus even started His ministry. Yet, we seem to have a problem in preparing ourselves for ministry for our Master. We go to school and prepare ourselves for our careers, being willing to go as long as it takes. But we seem to want to give God the short end of the stick by not doing what it takes to be best at what we are called to be and do. God wants us to grow and become better.

State of Our Global Existence

Presently, the CME Church is located in nine Episcopal districts (1st—9th) throughout the United States, in 15 countries in two Episcopal District (10th and 11th) on the continent of Africa, in Haiti (part of the 6th District), and in Jamaica (part of the 8th District). The 10th Episcopal, presided over by indigenous Bishop Godwin Umoette, is under the umbrella of the CME Church in America and consists of four countries in West Africa, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana and Togo. This Episcopal district's churches are flourishing in all four countries, and are full of children, youth,

young adults and men. Young adults are stepping up and taking upon themselves the leadership mantle in both the 10th and 11th Districts. The 10th District has an awesome young adult conference that has been witnessed by a delegation from the U.S., which came back with rave reviews. The 10th District has embarked upon several programs designed to improve the spiritual, social and economic conditions of its members. In Nigeria, we have the Breeding/Montgomery Bible College that trains young minds, as well as the Elnora Hamb Library Center. Other programs of the 10th Episcopal District include: a prison ministry, a mentoring ministry and a Motherless Baby Home.

The 11th Episcopal is presided over by Bishop C. James King, Jr., with 11 countries in South, Central and East Africa including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Egypt and Johannesburg. The work is growing in all of the countries according to Bishop King. Bishop King and the writer had the privilege of being the first CME bishops to ever visit the CME people of Egypt when we visited Cairo, Egypt, in May 2017. There was also a very large delegation that came to Cairo from Sudan to be a part of the annual conference. We had wonderful and celebrative annual conferences and we ordained a multitude of preachers throughout the 11th Episcopal District.

Also, on a visit to Nairobi, Kenya, we met some very intelligent and articulate students from the Nellie B. King and Princess R. Pegues schools. They welcomed Bishop King and me with open hearts and arms and presented themselves to us in a formal and a very polished fashion. Because of the widespread outbreak of AIDS in Africa, the CME Church has an HIV/AIDS Clinic in Nairobi Kenya. The clinic opens at night because many that are infected do not want others to know that they have the virus, nor do they want to be seen going into the clinic.

The two countries that are a part of our non-U.S. work, under the jurisdiction of U.S. bishops and U.S. Episcopal districts, are Haiti and Jamaica. Jamaica is a part of the Eighth Episcopal, presided over by Bishop Lawrence L. Reddick, III. Our presence in Jamaica is relatively small but we have seen a significant increase in growth in the 14 churches of Jamaica this past quadrennial, which is encouraging. This quadrennial, a new church was planted in Jamaica. Our flagship church in Jamaica is Good News CME Church in Elizabeth and it is doing well.

Haiti is a part of the 6th Episcopal District, presided over by Bishop Kenneth W. Carter. In Haiti, this quadrennial the focus has been on rebuilding our thirty-acre, eleven-building compound, which was devastated by a hurricane two and a half years ago. Haiti has 28 churches, 24 of which have schools at the site of their churches. The compound has an orphanage for one hundred and 50 children, an educational building with a computer lab, an administrative building, a guest house and eight classrooms housed in four buildings with space for a medical clinic. The compound has just recently been restored. The membership of the CME Church in Haiti is basically maintaining itself and has had little time to concentrate on growth this quadrennial, for they have been in a survival mode. However, Haiti is planning to concentrate on church growth 2018-2022 quadrennial. It is also important that you are aware that the unemployment rate Haiti is 75 percent.

The United States of America is in a period of uncertainty with the election of President Donald J. Trump. We struggle over the vibrancy of our democracy and the strength of our commitment that defines America. Voter suppression stands as a grave threat to democracy. The U.S. Justice Department, under Attorney General Eric Holder, filed lawsuits against Texas and North Carolina because of their attempts to suppress votes before the 2016 presidential elections. Congresswoman Terri Sewell of the 7th Congressional District of Alabama says in an article entitled, "Old Battles Become New Again," that our democracy is weaker than it was a decade ago because of barriers at the poll, an antagonistic Supreme Court and a Congress that refuses to protect our right to vote.¹⁶ The Russian Probe investigation looms over us and causes us all to wonder what in the world is going on. The widespread protests we are experiencing against the U.S. government has not been encountered since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Both Americans in general and black Americans specifically are in jeopardy of losing strides that this country has made, which would be a drastic move in the wrong direction. Incendiary language about immigrants, Muslims, women and people of color has translated into discriminatory public policy including an immigration ban that gives preference to one religion over another and baseless accusations of voter fraud that have provided flesh fuel to racial discriminatory voter suppression in state legislatures.¹⁷ According to the 2017 National Urban League's, "The President's Desk Report," 10 days after the 2016 election, the Southern Poverty Law Center recorded "a national outbreak of hate" that was worse than the outbreak the day after Nine Eleven (9-11).¹⁸ Mark Morial noted that "this social cancer of hate continues to metastasize in a climate conducive to hostility toward religious and racial minorities."¹⁹ Morial says that "discrimination against anyone is discrimination against everyone." We must dismantle racism, discrimination, fake news and alternative facts of any kind in our country.

On the education front, we also face challenges. Too many of our children are still dropping out of school. This is why the "One Church One School Partnerships" were developed by Bishop Henry Williamson. Although the 2017 "Report on the State of Black America" reveals a notable decline in high school dropouts, the dropout rate is still too high.²⁰ The disparity of the graduation rate is 72.3 percent for black Americans and 78.7 percent for Hispanics in comparison to white America. This same report also shows that a higher number of African-Americans are receiving their associate degree; however, there is a decline in college enrollment for African-Americans.²¹

In the article "Road Map: Disparities, Progress and Equity," Congresswoman Robin L. Kelly says that when one talks about health care in the black community, one word comes up: "disparity." Disparities in communities of color plague us deeply and persistently, from the cradle to the grave.²² African-Americans are sicker, have less access to health care and die younger than our white counterparts.²³ However, presently in health care the number of uninsured is down significantly as a result of the Affordable Care Act. When President Trump was not able to secure enough votes to repeal and replace the Affordable Health Care Act as promised, he suspended the funding for marketing the plan for the next year in an effort to kill

it, risking the health care coverage of millions of people. Efforts to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, in part or whole, would have the inevitable outcome of disproportionately burdening communities of color.²⁴

The president's Tax Reform Bill that passed was designed, according to experts, to benefit all Americans initially, but in the long run, it will only benefit the very rich. The average black unemployment rate is two to three times higher than the white unemployment rate in most urban cities. The impact of unemployment is both physical and psychological, according to an article entitled, "Bad for Your Health: The Link Between Unemployment and Wellbeing," by Gwendolyn Grant, President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City. Unemployment has both physical and psychological effects upon African-Americans.²⁶ The physical impact plays itself out through stress, which if not managed or coped with, can impact one's physical well-being through various forms of diseases and health challenges.²⁷ The psychological impact manifests itself as emotional distress, feelings of helplessness, lack of control, diminished self-esteem, depression, frustration and anxiety.²⁸ These conditions negatively impact one's ability to obtain and retain work. This same article indicated that in a web-based survey of 622 career marketplace clients, 70 percent of the respondents were struggling with symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.²⁹ This data validates the need of mental health intervention in assisting those seeking employment in addition to job training programs.³⁰ On a positive note, 80 percent of that 70 percent said they were managing their stress and anxiety by attending church.³¹ This is a good time for the church to be a witness for God and play a vital role in the lives of people by giving them a message of hope.

The joblessness of our youth reflects a lack of private and public intervention, which causes racial inequalities to be further entrenched. In the article, "Young, Jobless and Black: How Opportunity Works to Ensure Progress," Shari E. Runner, President and CEO of the Chicago Urban League, says that many of the issues we are facing in our communities – the violence, the poverty, the low graduation rate, the disproportionately-high incarceration rates – are structural inequity that causes our black and brown youth to bury themselves in an underground economy.³² She further points out that there is a tremendous wealth gap in our nation's cities, which causes African Americans, especially our youths to live quite differently from their white counterparts.³³ She says whereas all men are created equal, the denial and erosion of the unalienable rights of African-Americans produce undeniable suffering in our communities, and that too many are prevented from pursuing life, liberty and happiness simply because of the color of their skin.³⁴ The College of Bishops takes their hats off to Bishop C. James King for the wonderful work he is doing with Project One that provides thousands of jobs for our youth.

Many of our people are still living in poverty and are struggling to survive. Yet, there does not seem to be much conversation or concern for the plight of the poor, many of whom are working, but are struggling to make a decent wage and living. Payday lenders are heavily saturating and preying upon black, brown and poor communities. Some people are spending as

much as 10% of their income to payoff these loans, and are being charged excessively high interest rates.³⁵ Persons in our communities are living from paycheck to paycheck.

However, breaking the cycle of poverty requires more than a job, according to an article by Stephanie Hightower, entitled, “Earn It, Keep It, Grow It’: Smart Consumers Scores, Greater Economic Mobility.” It requires building financial stability, sustaining wealth creation and passing on a legacy.³⁶ Representative Cedric Richmond from the 3rd Congressional District of Louisiana and the Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, in an article entitled, “Resisting the Rollback: CBC Congressional Priorities in the Trump Era,” says to advance black America to the 21st century, we must address the historical economic disparities and create opportunity to lift all Americans out of poverty into the middle class and beyond.³⁷ We must recognize that education is the best cure for poverty and we are to fight for major investments in public schools in order to ensure a good quality education for all Americans.

We also live in a society that needs a reform in its criminal justice system. The United States criminal justice system is broken. It is costing minorities dearly and widening the racial and economic divides.³⁸ The 2017 National Urban League’s State of Black America Address shows that black men are given sentence about 20 percent longer than white men for similar crimes.³⁹ It also reveals that black women are at least twice as likely to be incarcerated than their white peers.⁴⁰ As black Americans, we know that people of color are over policed and under protected. We also know that convictions for both violent and nonviolent offenses make it nearly impossible to get a job, a loan, housing or go to school.⁴¹ The address discloses that one out of 13 black Americans are prevented by the law from voting and black citizens are four times more likely to have their voting rights revoked than their white counterparts.⁴²

It is fascinating that the U.S. only makes up about 5 percent of the world’s population, but 25 percent of the world’s prison population.⁴³ This seems like modern day slavery, where profit is prioritized over humanity. According to Cory Booker, a U.S. senator from New Jersey, in an article entitled, “Turning Back the Clock: Advancing Criminal Reform in the Face of Retreat,” a majority of those incarcerated in a federal prison have been convicted of nonviolent crimes.⁴⁴ Also, the State of Black America Address indicates that whites are more likely to sell drugs than blacks, but blacks are 3.6 times more likely to get arrested for selling drugs.⁴⁵ Our criminal justice system is broken and is in much need of reform.

In addition to all of these problems in the United States, allegations and revelations of long term sexual abuse, assault, harassment or misconduct is an issue that we cannot afford to overlook or sweep under the carpet. These issues are front and center in our society. This was ignited by the “#MeToo” revolution, when many women and some men came forth after the Harvey Weinstein allegations. Allegations of unwanted sexual indiscretions are widespread in scope: In Hollywood; In the business world; In the news media; And in politics. This list grows every day and only represents a few of the people whose careers have been ended, derailed or smeared with allegations of sexual abuse, harassment or assault, often resulting in many of their firing or resignation. Silence seems to have been broken by alleged victims coming out of

the woodwork in groves. Sexual abuse, harassment, assault or misconduct is never okay for it violates one's humanity and minimizes a person's existence. It is not okay wherever it is encountered, in Hollywood, in business, news media, or politics and especially not in the church.

In this period of uncertainty in our country, characterized by the Trump administration's refusal to acknowledge and/or deal with racial and religious tension and discrimination, foreign interference, the lack of gun control, police brutality, the turning back of the clock on past advancements and the complete disregard for the poor and struggling working class, the Church is presented with an opportunity to step up to the plate and be both a prophetic witness for Jesus Christ and be a balm in Gilead, bringing healing to our wounded and broken nation. It is a good time to get back to basics as we envision our way forward in taking care of God's business.

How Do We Get Back To Basics As We Envision Our Way Forward In Taking Care Of God's Business?

Up to this point, this address has given: a historical perspective of formative struggles of the CME Church and the undefeated spirit that prevailed; our present state with devoted and loyal members as a major human resource asset; challenges that must be confronted; a theological and biblical undergirding of the Episcopal Theme; and the state of our global existence. However, now the time has come for us to offer some solutions to our challenges. What do we do about our situation of declining membership, our old and decaying structures that are in need of repair with little or no money available, high apportionment among shrinking membership of our smaller churches and the need of discipleship training and leadership development for our laity and clergy? Our theme: "Getting Back to Basics as We Envision Our Way forward In Taking Care of God's Business," leads us to consider six major areas of concentration for the next four years of the upcoming quadrennial. They are: 1. evangelism/church planting and prayer; 2. Project Restoration; 3. adjusting apportionments to reflect present realities of our smallest churches; 4. discipleship training (which includes stewardship) and leadership development; 5. need-meeting outreach ministries; and 6. energizing and revitalizing worship.

It is not our aim to dictate how each congregation, presiding elder or Episcopal district addresses these six areas. We are simply suggesting that they be addressed. In the 2018-2022 quadrennial, with the church on every level working together toward a common goal, it will assist us in getting back to the basics as we envision our way forward in taking care of God's business. This assures our staying true to our roots and remaining relevant in meeting the needs of this present age, as we work in line with our God-given mission. We envision a future where we not only survive but thrive.

Prayer/Evangelism/Church Planting/Outreach

The formative years of our Church saw tremendous growth and other times of significant growth resulted from an aggressive evangelism efforts. These efforts, however, were preceded by a time of prayer. Every great evangelistic movement in God's Church is preceded by prayer. The founders of the CME Church saw the need of seeking God's assistance, favor, intervention and anointing in forming our church, so they designated Dec. 15, 1870, as a day of prayer before they started organizing its structure the following day. One of the reasons for the success of the late Billy Graham's ministry is due to his strong prayer ministry. Graham sent prayer teams to places that he planned to visit weeks before he was scheduled to be there to pray for a great move of God in the saving of souls.

The College of Bishops accepts the challenge before us and urges all local churches, all pastors, all presiding elders, all general officers and all CMEs to join us as we observe the month of August as a time of prayer. Through prayer, we will seek God's face for wisdom and guidance and for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to assist us in our efforts of getting backs to basics as we envision our way forward in being about God's business. We are also praying for persons who are lost and our efforts of winning them, making disciples, growing and planting churches. In addition, we will be praying for: a mighty move of God in turning the trend of declining membership around as we ask God's help in attracting more young adults, men, youth and children; monies and insights necessary in repairing and renovating our aged edifices; assistance in adjusting apportionment for our very small churches; discipleship training and leadership development for both clergy and lay; our continual engagement in need meeting outreach ministries; and for assistance in revitalizing and energizing our corporate worship.

C. H. Spurgeon, in his book, *"The Soul Winner,"* says that soul winning is the chief business of Christian ministry⁴⁶ and truly a blessed service for the Savior.⁴⁷ In case we have not figured it out yet, salvation is the chief business of the Church. It is the most royal service in which a professing Christian can be engaged.⁴⁸ As Christians, our primary concern should be bringing people to Christ and not to a particular brand of Christianity.⁴⁹ Our one business in Christian life is to lead people to believe in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit and every other thing is subservient to that.⁵⁰ Our definition of salvation entails being born again, regenerated, pardoned from sin and made a new creature by the power of the Holy Spirit through the merits of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God.⁵¹ When one is regenerated, a spark from the everlasting fire of God's love and life falls into one's heart, making this person, who is the receiver of God' divine Spirit, new.⁵² It must be made clear that souls are won to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in sharing the Word of God, through witnessing, preaching, teaching or giving one's testimony.⁵³ Apart from the Holy Spirit, no one can win souls. Our job is simply to be a conduit in the hand of the Holy Spirit and participate in the process of winning souls. A conduit is a person or an organization that acts a as a channel for the transmission of something. Both we as individuals and the Church as a whole are vehicles for the Lord to

accomplish God's purpose and mission in the world through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Our responsibility of engaging in evangelism comes out of our love for God and neighbor. When we love God; we will seek our neighbor's salvation because we love our neighbor.⁵⁴ Our expression of this love goes hand in hand with prayer, which is vital to the ministry of evangelism and keeping us in tune with God. Prayer is critical in encouraging people to engage in soul winning and assisting the Church's endeavor to be successful.⁵⁵ "Those who win souls must be a master in the art of prayer, for one cannot win souls if he does not go to God in prayer."⁵⁶ Prayer also keeps us in tune with God, reminding us that we are not self sufficient but depended on God.

We are encouraging all our local churches to develop outreach ministries to children and youth in the communities surrounding our churches. This action has the potential of benefiting us and the children and youth in at least three ways. First, it may save their lives, give them purpose, introduce them to Christ and the Church and get them off the street. Secondly, it will help get more children and youth in our churches. And thirdly, it has the potential of also drawing their adult parents. Therefore, we are urging our local churches to concentrate on outreach ministries to children, using age appropriate literature in instructing them. In attracting youth, we must do ministry with our youth and not for our youth or we might find ourselves alone without our youth. To keep youth interested in church, we must get input from them and engage in activities that appeal to them.

To draw young adults to our churches, we must start where we are and utilize the few that we do have. We must motivate them to participate and we must keep in mind that young adults are drawn to churches by other young adults. Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer III in their book *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* say that young people drop out of church because they do not see that the Church is essential to their lives.⁵⁷ Unless we are intentional in involving young adults in meaningful ministry designed to reach and engage them, we will continue to see a decline in attendance and participation in church. The bright side is that 50 percent will return with encouraging words from family and friends.⁵⁸ Young adults must be thoroughly and consistently involved in conversation, planning, leadership and execution of ministry if we expect to retain them. Often young people drift away because their church is not leading them to go deeper; therefore, they are not anchored in the Word.⁵⁹

During the Ninth Episcopal webcast with all young adult participants, we asked in a panel discussion, "What draws young adults to a church?" The answers they gave may help us to draw more young adults. They suggested that, to draw more young adults, we need: 1. other young adults; 2. to give them a sense of connection to church members; 3. A focus on personal relationship with God; 4. to show them the unconditional love of God through people; 5. to provide knowledge of how the Bible is relevant to their lives (for they look for solid biblical teachings) 6. to foster a sense of warmth and acceptance without judgment; 7. authenticity; 8.

opportunity for missions and outreach projects; 9. to take them seriously; and 10. impactful, lively and dynamic worship.

A young adult teacher also revealed during the Webcast that young adults need the church to embrace positive changes, give them direction and trusting mentorship relationships. In addition, we were told that young adults love spice (excitement). They do not like anything boring. They are excited about what they do for God and they want others to be excited as well. Also, they want transparency; and for Adult church members to be approachable and Christian in their conversation and actions. Finally, they want the church to be a safe zone for them, where they can share their failures without being judged or given what they called the “stank face”.

In response, we task our General Secretary of Christian Education with the responsibility of developing a planned strategy and a curriculum to assist local churches in recruiting children, youth and young adults to our churches. We further task the General Secretary of Christian Education and the Connectional Young Adult Ministry to work together to establish an Episcopal District Young Adult Advisory Committee: one person from each annual conference to help the CME in developing a plan that will assist us in drawing and retaining young adult – a critical group missing from our churches.

To draw men to our churches we task our General Secretary of Ministry to Men to develop a comprehensive plan to be issued to local churches on ways to draw men to our congregations. One of the ways that we can draw men back to our churches is by speaking to and addressing issues that are relevant to men. We can also attract men by having special events that are specifically designed with them in mind, such as a monthly male emphasis Sunday, where men are leading worship, singing and ushering. It may help us to honor a man from the church and a man from the community on that Sunday. These are the types of things that Bishop Henry Williamson initiated when he was pastor of Carter Temple CME Church-Chicago, where he had a thriving men’s ministry. Other activities can include monthly men’s prayer breakfasts, attending sports outings together, and a Super Bowl party at the church.

A major contributor to the early growth and subsequent growth of the CME came as a result of an aggressive campaign in church planting, especially on the West Coast. Many of our major churches started off as church plants. If we want to grow again, we must get back to planting new congregations throughout our Episcopal districts. One of our many planted churches is Faith CME Church in Charlotte, N.C., planted under the leadership of Bishop Henry C. Bunton, with Rev. Phillip Nelson as its first pastor. This church was seeded with 10 members from Parkwood CME Church, which is also in Charlotte. As some of our churches are closing in abandoned communities, we need to be planting new churches in new and upcoming communities—otherwise we will continue to dwindle. Moreover, we must not fear the possibility of merging small churches together and relocating others in order to form stronger congregations. We can create something new out of old situations.

We urge our General Secretary of Evangelism to develop an aggressive curriculum for evangelism that teaches every member how to share his or her faith and give opportunity for the same through workshops and evangelistic training. Moreover, we are also asking for the General Secretary of Evangelism to formulate a Commission on Church Growth and Church Planting with two representatives from each Episcopal district, one representative with experience in church growth and the other with experience in church planting. This commission will serve as a resource for those assigned to plant churches and assist pastors and membership in growing churches.

Each bishop has accepted the challenge of planting two new churches in each presiding elder's district for the 2018-2022 quadrennial. We are encouraging persons who plant churches not to rush to secure a building, but instead start the plant as a weekly Bible study for six months to a year. Once attendance and commitment from persons have been secured for a period of time, then the church should begin a worship service and begin to look for affordable space. Seeding each of the plants with a few good members from surrounding strong and healthy CME churches would be ideal in this critical transition period of starting the worship service. For Bible study, we suggest that a space be secured for a small group that doesn't require any funds. Bishops are committed to work along with presiding elders to do feasibility study for the selection of both the right person to plant a church and the right place to plant. The church plant will require training from persons who have planted a successful church in the past and persons that are certified to train and teach others in planting churches. We must remember that many of our churches were originally church plants. Where would we be today if our fore-parents had not had the foresight to plant new churches? We have gotten away from planting churches, but we must go back to what got us this far.

We cannot simply overlook persons in the communities surrounding our churches, including Hispanics and black immigrants. As we canvass the community door to door around our churches, we may need to get some tracts in whatever languages are needed for people in our communities. Our traditional landscape has changed and we must not be afraid to befriend and invite persons of different ethnic groups to our fellowship. If they come, we must be hospitable as we open our door for all that are in the community. God loves and reaches out to all people and wants them saved. We must love and reach out to all people as well, so they might be saved.

Project Restoration

Project Restoration has its biblical foundation in the Bible's greatest reformation, during the reign of Josiah, Judah's 16th king in 2 Kings 22:1-23:30. King Josiah is on a mission for the Lord as he gets back to basics after Judah has strayed away from God. King Josiah devotes Himself to pleasing God, destroying anything that has an association with idolatry, getting rid of Judah's idolatrous priests and reinstating Israel's observance of the Mosaic Law, which had not been observed since the period of the judges. Money was collected for much needed repairs in the

Temple from the people by the doorkeepers of the Temple (22:4). The high priest, Hilkiah, delivered the money to those appointed to supervise the work, and they were to pay purchase all materials and pay the carpenters, builders and masons making the repairs (22:5-6). It is from the efforts to repair the Temple that Josiah's reform was born. The book of the law, thought to be either the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) or Deuteronomy, was found in the Temple and read to Josiah, and Josiah initiated a thorough reform that lasted until his death.

In dealing with our problem of aged and decaying church facilities, we are proposing two actions. The first action agreed upon by the College of Bishops is that one church in each Episcopal district per year for the next four years will be selected to receive a one-time gift, between \$25,000.00 and \$50,000.00 to assist in much need repairs and renovations. These funds will be raised by the Episcopal district to assist a struggling church that is in dire need of repairs but does not have the resources to get them done. The presiding bishop in consultation with the presiding elders will select the church. The church selected will be announced in advance of receiving the contributions, giving everyone in the Episcopal district, as well as persons in the community, family members and friends, an opportunity to give. It is suggested that when these repairs are completed that a celebration of praise to God be held. The second action that we are suggesting is that each local church that does not have funds set aside for much needed repairs or potential future repairs will start a project restoration fund, giving congregants an opportunity to contribute to this fund weekly or monthly – whatever time frame is more feasible to your church.

Stewardship Training

We also propose that each local church pastor leads its members into stewardship training. Stewardship denotes being under the lordship of Jesus Christ as an obedient servant. It entails one submitting every aspect of his/her life under the management of God's will. It is God's will that we express concern for those less fortunate than ourselves by engaging in outreach ministries that move us beyond the walls of our churches. This is also a part of our stewardship responsibility. Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 25:31-46 that He expects His disciples to reach out to those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked (those in need of clothing), sick and imprisoned. Therefore, we are encouraging our local church to continue to reach out, servicing the needs of the communities surrounding their churches.

Furthermore, we also urge our members, as churches and individuals, to partner with organizations that work diligently to counter human rights violations and address human needs, such as Church World Service, Bread for the World and Amnesty International. It is also a part of our stewardship responsibility to exercise our right to vote. We are encouraging our local churches and members to get involved in our midterm elections by registering to vote and voting, motivating others to register and vote, allowing their churches to be used as registration

sites, voting early and use the church's vehicles and personal vehicles to transport people to the voting polls on the day of voting or Election Day.

Stewardship is about more than just giving monetary contributions, but the giving of one's whole life in service to God. The stewardship question asks, "What shall I render to God for all of God's blessings to me?" When one's life is in total surrender to God, God can get anything he or she has, including money, but also obedience. Giving monetary contributions, including tithing, is a major category under stewardship, but stewardship is so much more.

Most of our churches report that most of our members do not tithe. Though many of us do not want to admit it, our members not tithing may be a contributing factor in the financial hardship that our churches are experiencing. Is it interesting how the church used to thrive financially in yesteryears, with persons making less than minimum wage; yet, today we struggle when we make so much more than our ancestors could even dream of making.

We make no apologies for encouraging tithing and generous giving in our congregations. Pastors must learn to deal with sour faces and cold spirit that they receive when the subject of money comes up. Tithing and giving offering is one of the basics that we must get back to and stay with until our people get it. Tithing finds its foundation in Genesis 15:18-19, 28:22 and Proverbs 3:9-10. Those who don't want to tithe often argue that it is on Old Testament principle and because we are not under the law, we don't have to do it. Tithes did not come into fruition as a result of the Old Testament and it is not legalism. Those who tithe do it because we love God, and this is one of the ways we express our gratitude to God for all God has done for us, especially the central act of Jesus Christ at Calvary. Tithing predates the giving of the law as noted in the two Genesis passages mentioned earlier in this paragraph. If we are to accomplish what God desires for us to accomplish in our churches, we have to stop making excuses and begin to use our faith to tithe. God's Church will then have all that it needs financially. The premier tithing scripture is Malachi 3:10: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and thus put Me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." (NRSV) The premier general giving scripture is Luke 6:38: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, shall men give unto your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to again." (KJV)

More of our people must be taught how to tithe and be generous in their giving because there is a blessing in giving. Our forefathers had the good sense to sing about this when they sung, "You can't beat God's giving, no matter how hard you try. The more you give, the more He gives to you, Just keep on giving because it's really true. You can't beat God giving, no matter how hard you try." We don't ascribe to a prosperity gospel, but we have noticed that every time we see a request to give in the scripture, it is followed by a promised blessing as noted by the scriptures we quoted from Malachi 3:10 and Luke 6:38. We urge our presiding elders and pastors and officers who are tithing to encourage other members to tithe and work to generate a spirit of generosity in congregations by teaching the principle of stewardship, including tithing

in our local churches, as God's system of financial management for His people. This must be done in a loving and nonthreatening and non intimidating manner. It is time for us to tithe and stop tipping God.

Adjusting Apportionment to Reflect our Present Reality for Smaller Churches

Many of our churches, especially our very small churches, need the Annual Conference Joint Boards of Finance to do some serious consulting with the presiding elders and the presiding bishop to make sure, as much as possible, that they match the smaller local churches' present reality of membership with its ability to pay. The College of Bishops commits to working with presiding elders and Joint Board members to bring as much equity to the apportionments as possible. Let's be frank and say this upfront: not everybody can get a decrease. We understand that most of our churches are not what they used to be. Some churches may get an increase to compensate for the decrease of a smaller church. We are asking each Annual Conference Joint Board of Finance to be conscientious as to how it performs the difficult and delicate task of assessing each local church as fairly as possible, as it consults with the presiding bishop and the presiding elder. Smaller churches who are struggling, especially those whose membership has dwindled down to single digits, deserve some special consideration in assessing its apportionments.

Soon after the 2018 annual conferences, we are also asking every presiding elder to get with each local pastor and church in their district to make sure that they have an annual budget that includes a plan accurately forecasting their annual expenses (including the church's repairs and apportionments) and a realistic income projection with plans as to how the money is to be raised for the ensuing conference year. One cannot just hope and pray that their annual budget or apportionment is going to be paid at or before the end of the year without formulating a plan and monitoring that plan to assure that it comes into fruition.

Discipleship Training and Leadership Development

Christian education is a lifelong process of training and faith development. Its goal is to nurture and to form one into a disciple of Jesus Christ, which we refer to as faith formation or discipleship. It is critical that churches take their faith formation/Christian education/discipleship responsibility seriously. This means that pastors, Sunday school superintendants, Sunday school staff, Bible study teachers, Christian Youth Fellowship, Rossie T. Hollis and Mattie E. Coleman advisors and Boards of Christian Education: including children, youth, young adults and adult directors and workers, must all synchronize their efforts and cooperate with the same shared goal of forming and nurturing disciples of Jesus Christ in all age groups in the church. It is critical that the local church be intentional in forming and nurturing its congregation into faith formation and in the call to discipleship. Dr. Carmichael Crutchfield, our General Secretary of Christian Education and author of the recently published book, *"It's All About Discipleship,"* says that if we are not conscious of the what we are trying to accomplish in Christian education, we miss the focus and goal of discipleship, which should play itself out in

intentional preaching and teaching in our local church setting.⁶⁰ Discipleship is learning about the One we follow, Jesus, which inspires and leads one to live out a life of the love of God and neighbor, for this is the heart of what real Christian education is all about.⁶¹ As God's people, we love God and evidence our love through worship in response to God's love for us.⁶² Worship is our stewardship response to God's love.

As prayer is critical to evangelism, so is it to Christian education and the discipleship process. Prayer is one of the spiritual disciplines that all Christians should practice regularly. Spiritual disciplines are defined as simple behaviors that Christians should practice regularly as part of their Christian faith, as God's disciple. They include prayer, study, fasting, service, stewardship, worship and rest.⁶³ It is no secret that many of us, who call ourselves good CMEs, do not attend Sunday school, Bible study or prayer services. If we are to get back to basics and be about God's business, we've got to get serious about both our preparation for being made into good disciples by attending these important functions and recruiting and motivating others to do the same. Have we become so spiritual that we've outgrown our need for private and corporate prayer, Sunday school and Bible study? Pastors and churches must be creative in making the functions more appealing and more meaningful. God's people must be willing to make the necessary sacrifices for what is important as we ask ourselves, *How serious are we in being and making good disciples?* The church may want or need to consider changing these spirit-enhancing services to a time that the majority of the congregation is available and will come. Perhaps a meal may be considered before Bible study – either potluck, financed by the church, charging a small contribution to cover the cost, church auxiliaries sponsor the meal, etc. The study of scriptures and opportunities for prayer are of the utmost importance in submitting to God's will and mission for our lives.⁶⁴

Our focus in discipleship training and leadership development will assist our lay persons and clergy in becoming better disciples and leaders. We are encouraging the use of five books as part of our curriculum for discipleship training and leadership development. They are:

1. Crutchfield, Carmichael, *It's All About Discipleship* CME Publishing House, Memphis, Tenn., 2017
2. Crutchfield, Carmichael and Ross, Willa, *21st Century Discipleship: Reclaiming the Vision*, CME Publishing House, Memphis, Tenn., 2009
3. Maxwell, John C., *Leadership Gold*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tenn., 2008
4. Munroe, Myles, *Becoming a Leader*, Pneuma Life Publishing, Bakersfield, Calif., 1993
5. Maxwell, John C., *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tenn., 1998

Bishops are committed to discipleship training and leadership development. We are asking presiding elders, pastors and lay leadership to join us in modeling discipleship training and leadership development by identifying skilled leaders who model discipleship and leadership to teach in local churches' workshops and training opportunities, district conferences, annual conference meetings and leadership training schools. The College of Bishops is in the process of

enhancing our Bishop's Course of Study for the training of our ministers. In addition, a seminary education is critical in steering both our clergy lay members away from false doctrine and erroneous theology, therefore we are encouraging our ministers to consider enrolling first in Phillip School of Theology on campus or online program. If for some reason that is not feasible, we are encouraging the enrollment in an accredited seminary. We are asking our Annual Conferences Committees of Ministerial Examination to impress upon ministers that come before them the seriousness of adhering to the Bishop's Course of Study and strongly urge our ministers to complete their bachelor's degree and then enroll in seminary.

It is important that we become more intentional in transmitting our values to our children by developing mentoring programs and seeing to it that they attend worship, Bible study, Sunday school and various youth meetings. It is critical that the people we have working with our young people are interested in their faith and spiritual development. Make sure you know the person very well who is with our children and youth and by all means make sure that we do background checks on them. We can also stand to be more gracious and loving when it comes to our young adults in making them feel like we want them around and that we value their opinions. We encourage the CME Church on all levels make more of a conscious effort to mentor teenagers and young adults, creating programs to assist in the transmission of spiritual values and that guide them into maturing young adult and adults.

In the CME Church's effort to reverse the decline spiral of church membership and attendance, it is critical for us to focus on leadership of both clergy and laity. In *Leadership Gold* by John Maxwell, he says that good leadership always makes a difference.⁶⁵ Leadership is about enhancing skills and continuing to learn, for if you want to lead, you must keep yourself in a position to learn and keep learning if you intend to keep leading.⁶⁶ John F. Kennedy said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable of each other."⁶⁷ We must make every possible effort to train our leaders on what God called us to be and the Word God called us to.

The late Myles Munroe said that our world and nations, church and homes are suffering from an astounding leadership vacuum and are in desperate need of leaders.⁶⁸ Thus, leaving our communities in need of positive role models, our children need fathers and our world in need of direction. He asks, "Where are the leaders?" Greed, timidity and lack of vision are running rampant among the current crop of pseudoleaders.⁶⁹ He says leadership is like beauty: it is hard to define, but you know it when you see it.⁷⁰ As stewards of the present age, we must face the challenge of identifying, developing training, releasing and reproducing a generation of leaders who would serve the future for their children.⁷¹ The Great Commission is a direct mandate for the church to provide leadership to nations.⁷³ Today the responsibility of producing quality leaders is a serious task for this generation to undertake.⁷³

Leadership is the ability to lead others by influence – not manipulation or domination. Leadership also includes the ability to inspire, rally, direct, encourage, motivate, induce, move, mobilize and activate often to pursue a common goal.⁷⁴ Munroe says that leadership can also be seen as simply responding to one's responsibility.⁷⁵ *God's Little Devotional Book for Leaders*

says, “You do not lead by hitting people over the head – that’s assault, not leadership.”⁷⁶ “The difference between ordinary and extra ordinary leadership is that little word extra.”⁷⁷ Good leadership requires hard work and sacrifices and it is not for the lazy person. One’s leadership ability always determines one’s effectiveness and the potential impact of an organization.⁷⁸ The higher you want to climb, the more you need effective leadership.⁷⁹ Maxwell states clearly that if you want to change the direction of your organization, you change the leaders – for personal and organizational effectiveness is proportional to the strength of the leader.⁸⁰ Without strong clergy and lay leadership, the church is limited. Talent is rarely the issue, for there are a lot of talented people in our church, but leadership is the key to harnessing all the gifts and talents together to work toward a desired end. Smart, talented and successful people only go so far because of the limitations of their leadership. One of the keys in leadership is the ability to train people to improve their level of service to God and God’s Church. Therefore we must recruit the best pastors to give leadership our churches. So focusing on training and mentoring is crucial to our success going forward. Eighty-five percent of leaders attending Maxwell’s leadership conference said they were influenced by another leader.⁸¹

Energize and Revitalize Worship

In getting back to basics as we envision our way forward in doing God’s business, we must adjust our understanding of worship, which is a part of our being disciples. Worship is honoring, reverencing and paying homage to a superior being or power. For Christians that power and superior being is God in the three modes of expression, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship is a response of total surrender, in which we encounter God in adoration, praise, intercession, confession, petition, thanksgiving, etc., for God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The proper attitudes in worship include gratitude, humility, thanksgiving, prayerfulness, sensitivity, obedience and submission to God’s will, as one goes with the flow of God’s Spirit. Worship is not just meditative; it also requires our vocal and physical response, for it is more experiential than a rationalistic response, especially in the black Church, where worship is joyful and celebrative.⁸² True worship is not limited to corporate worship and it cannot be reduced to merely the hour or two we spend in worship services. Worship includes our daily lifestyles, covering every aspect of our involvement in this world. Christian education, stewardship and evangelism are all a part of worship. God must be in the center and the focal point of worship. When worship ceases to be God centered, it ceases to be worship.

Leander E. Keck says that the proper response of a disciple, one who has experienced and seen God’s power at work and heard the good news of the kingdom, is joy and praise as one glorifies God.⁸³ He cites Luke as being filled with examples of this with angels, shepherds and disciples glorifying and praising God.⁸⁴

In getting back to basics as we envision our way forward in taking care of God’s business, we must revitalize and energize our worship, both corporately and individually. Worship requires both thought and passion. It involves the intellect and the heart. John Killinger, a former pastor

and distinguished professor of Religion and Culture at Sanford University, says that worship without passion is like “stacked wood without fire: orderly but cold and lifeless.”⁸⁵ All of us as disciples of Christ and the Church of God must be reminded that worshipping God is one of the basics that we must get back to. We were placed on this earth to worship to bring glory and praise to God— for worship is what the Church does. The challenge of corporate worship is constantly bringing freshness and newness without necessarily making major changes. Adding poetry, devotional and worship aid literature to one’s library can have significant impact on revitalizing worship.

Our corporate worship can be so much more, if only we get away from our cookie cutter mentality. In our technological society, we must find different ways of using technology in worship. Using video clips can be a powerful tool as well as the dramatization or singing of scripture. So many things can be used to enhance our delivery of the message. We can use social media to enable people to respond to the message in real time. We are too afraid to push beyond the norm because we are comfortable with the way we have always done worship. We are strongly urging all pastors and church leaders to prayerfully consider adopting a plan to energize and revitalize our churches’ worship experience, giving it mass appeal to all the generations and cultures in and around our churches during this quadrennial, as we explore new ideas and new approaches to ministry through worship. The CME Church has trained people in both worship and music who could help us explore options. Let’s get out the box and discover worship anew.

Worship is vital to young adults. They want a worship experience that is energized by the spirit, and not dry and bulletin-driven. They like spontaneity. A young pastor in the 9th Episcopal District young adult webcast stated that worship gives him life-changing directions and instructions and a life-changing encounter with God. He further stated that worship gets him through the day and the week, keeping him focused and laying the foundation for the Word. Another young adult panelist stated in that same webcast that young adults are constantly under attack and that being in worship is their safe place. She said worship was healing for her, like a spiritual Neosporin. While another young adult said worship is like faith, it must be taken very seriously. A final panelist stated that worship takes him to a place where he gives all his problems all over to God. Our young adults want to feel the presence of God in their corporate worship experience. We know that worship is designed to please God, but it does not hurt us when others enjoy the overflow. These young adults shared that they get freed and are delivered in worship. Worship is powerful, and its importance cannot be devalued, for chains of bondage are broken for them in impactful, lively and dynamic worship. It follows that one of the ways to draw young adults to our churches is through impactful, dynamic and lively worship.

We urge pastors, ministers of music, worship committees, choirs and worship leaders to all work together to energize and revitalize worship, as they lead congregants in keeping the praise and the love of God the center of the worship experience. The goal in worship should be

glorifying God in a way that is appealing to all age groups and worship should lead us to outreach.

Conclusion

We must be diligent and be about God's business and not our individual agendas, remembering that this is God's Church and God has employed both clergy and laypersons into this ministry to continue the mission of Jesus as expressed in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20: "Go and make disciples." As the Church of Jesus Christ, if we are to be effective. We must learn how to blend tradition with post-modernity in order to meet the need of this present age. Being about God's business means that we too, like Jesus, should be preaching good news to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, recovering sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (NKJV) as expressed in Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus declares that God's Spirit was upon him.

The basics we need to get back to not only include the Great Commission but also the Great Commandment, loving God with our total being and our neighbor as ourselves. The basics include evangelism and making disciples, staying connected to God and God's Word, getting back to our spiritual fundamentals that have advanced us to where we are. These fundamentals are prayer, Christian education, winning souls, Christian nurture and training, stewardship, authentic worship of God, outreach and surrendering our lives in service of the Lord.

(Please excuse this personal reference in this Episcopal Address.) Part of my preparation for my election as a Bishop in the CME Church was visualizing myself as a bishop. Once you can see something, it is easier to have faith to believe and work toward that end. We need to visualize ourselves getting to the places we are trying to go and God doing a new thing in our lives.

The College of Bishops sees us making it. We see a bright future for the CME Church. We rebuke prophets of doom and gloom, in the name of Jesus, who have forecast our demise. We are a part of God's Church that is built upon a rock, with the promise that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against us. We are not scared, though we have faults and many challenges to address. We are going to make it. We are going to be alright because our future has been entrusted into the hands of the faithful God that we serve and in Whom we have confidence. The same God who was with our founders is with us and will lead us into our marvelous future.

The College of Bishops does not believe that God brought us this far to abandon us, and we certainly are not going to abandon God. God will give us the wisdom, the strength, the energy and the motivation that we need to become that vibrant church in the future we were designed to be. We can see it. Envision it with us. Can you see it? Right now, many of our memberships may be declining but God can and will turn it around. Many of our facilities may be in need of repair, but God can and will turn it around. We have seen God turn too many things around too many times in the past to give up on God now. With the assurance of Paul in his letter to the

Philippians, we declare that our God shall supply all our needs according to God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19), and with God all things are possible.

Some of our churches are feeling overwhelmed with apportionments that they have been assessed. The College of Bishops needs you to dream with us. We see a day when we will have multiple streams of income for the Connectional Budget and not just income from the local churches, thus lightening the load on the local churches. We see it! Can you envision it with us, for God can turn things around? Envision with us, for ultimately we also see the day coming when the interest from investments and endowments will be sufficient in taking care of the total Connectional Budget. We see it! Can you see it with us, as we envision our future?

We envision the day when all our ministers, presiding elders and bishops alike serve their calling with more diligence and seriousness, by preparing for Christian ministry and making the necessary sacrifices, as God so leads. We see the day when ministers and lay people no longer fight with each other but become more supportive as they work cooperatively, hand in hand, being about God's business. We see the day when lay people will grasp and embrace the fact that God calls us all – not just preachers – and begin to come out more abundantly to Bible study, church school, prayer meetings and training workshops, making them a priority. We see our churches full again not only on Sunday mornings, but during weekdays and on Saturdays. Can you see? We see church conferences less contentious and less confrontational, where people show up not to fight or to vote something up or down, but because they love God and God's Church and they want the best for it. We see the day when we outgrow having to hear our name called or be in charge of something before we support it. We see it! Can you see it?

We see the day when our local worship services are full of children, youth, young adults, men and women and the worship experience is inclusive and appealing to all these groups. We see ourselves and our churches being good stewards over our God entrusted resources, where we no longer tip God but bring the full tithe into the storehouse. We see it. Can you see it?

Our future is bright. We see God turning things around simply because we trusted God enough to ask and believe that God would do it. Today, we commit ourselves afresh and anew to the service of the Lord. Let's continually keep the main thing *the main thing*. Let us be proactive in seeking the salvation of our lost world. We have much work to do. Are you up for the task? The harvest is plenteous but the labors are few. Let's increase the laborers in God's vineyard and do what God called us to do. As we enter a new quadrennial, let us renew our commitment to God, and be both motivated and inspired by this theme: "Getting back to basics as we envision our way forward in taking care of God's business."

Recommendations

1. Given the need for a greater emphasis on church growth, the College of Bishops recommends that Chapter 49, paragraph 1102 be expanded to include:

Article 3. Church Planting. The aim of church planting is to remain faithful to the aggressive church growth efforts of our founders and expanders in starting new congregations. The objective of the church planting ministry is to continue to fulfill our evangelism mission by reaching out and forming new Christian congregations, thus expanding the kingdom of God.

2. The College of Bishops supports the recommendations of the Commission on Life and Witness that during the ensuing quadrennial that we commit to a process that will lead to the: 1. Re-districting of the Episcopal districts and 2. Restructuring of our General Departments for achieving greater effectiveness and efficiency.
3. In order to facilitate the ministry in the 11th Episcopal District, and to re-align its regions to reflect the current realities of the ministry and resources of the Episcopal district, we recommend that the number of regions be reduced from 12 to seven and be named as follows:
 1. Kenya/Uganda Region
 2. Egypt/Sudan Region
 3. Tanzania/Zambia Region
 4. DR Congo Region
 5. Rwanda Region
 6. Burundi Region
 7. South Africa/Zimbabwe Region
4. The College of Bishops recommends that in Chapter 16, entitled, "Admitting Preacher on Trial," paragraph 413, article 4, that the following be added as section f: "have submitted to and successfully passed a comprehensive background check," and that the present section f becomes section g.

Your Episcopal Leaders:

Bishop Lawrence L. Reddick III, 51st Bishop
Bishop Henry M. Williamson Sr., 52nd Bishop
Bishop Thomas L. Brown Sr., 54th Bishop
Bishop Kenneth W. Carter, 55th Bishop
Bishop James B. Walker, 56th Bishop
Bishop Sylvester Williams, Sr., 58th Bishop
Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton, 59th Bishop
Bishop Godwin Umoette, 60th Bishop
Bishop Bobby R. Best, 61st Bishop
Bishop Marvin F. Thomas, Sr., 62nd Bishop
Bishop C. James King, Jr. 63rd Bishop

Bishop Paul A. G. Stewart, Sr. 50th Bishop-Retired
Bishop E. Lynn Brown, 46th Bishop-Retired
Bishop Ronald M. Cunningham, 53rd Bishop-Retired
Bishop Othal H. Lakey, 44th Bishop-Retired
Bishop William H, Graves, 42nd Bishop-Retired
Bishop Marshall Gilmore, 41st Bishop-Retired

FOOTNOTES

1. Keck, Leander E., *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995, page 3
2. Spivey, Robert and Smith D. Moody, *Anatomy of the New Testament Fourth Edition*, McMillan Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1982, page 130
3. IBID, page 130
4. Hoyt, Jr., Thomas, *Introduction to New Testament*, Self published, 1992, page 49
5. Spivey, Robert and Smith D. Moody, *Anatomy of the New Testament Fourth Edition*, McMillan Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1982, page 130
6. Farmer, William R., *The International Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1994, page 1368
7. Hoyt, Jr., Thomas, *Introduction to New Testament*, Self published, 1992, page 44
8. Farmer, William R., *The International Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1994, page 1368
9. Hoyt, Jr., Thomas, *Introduction to New Testament*, Self published, 1992, page 48
10. IBID, page 49
11. IBID
12. Keck, Leander E., *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995, pages 20-21
13. Farmer, William R., *The International Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1994, page 1377
14. IBID, page 1377
15. IBID, page 77
16. National Urban League, "Protect Our Progress: State of Black America", 2017, 41st Edition, www.stateofblackamerica.org, 12/03/2017, page 16
17. IBID, page 6
18. IBID
19. IBID
20. IBID, page 10
21. IBID
22. IBID, page 16
23. IBID
24. IBID, page 6
25. IBID, page 18
26. IBID
27. Grant, Gwendolyn, "Bad for your Health: The Link Between Unemployment and Willingness", National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/235, 12/03/2017, page 1
28. IBID
29. IBID
30. IBID, page 2
31. IBID

32. Runner, Shari, "Young, Jobless and Black: How Opportunity Works to Ensure Progress," National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/218, 12/03/2017, page 1
33. IBID
34. IBID, page 2
35. National Urban League, "Protect Our Progress: State of Black America 2017, 41st Edition, pp. 1-20, www.stateofblackamerica.org, 12/03/2017, page 18
36. IBID
37. Richmond, Cedric, "Resisting the Rollback, CBC Congressional Priorities in the Trump Era," National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/267, 12/03/2017, page 1
38. Booker, Corey, "We Refuse to Turn Back the Clock: Advancing Criminal Justice Reforms in the Face of Retreat", National Urban League: State of Black America, 2017, page 2
39. IBID
40. IBID
41. IBID
42. IBID
43. National Urban League, "Protect Our Progress: State of Black America", 2017, 41st Edition, www.stateofblackamerica.org, 12/03/2017, page 17
44. IBID, page 17
45. Booker, Corey, "We Refuse to Turn Back the Clock: Advancing Criminal Justice Reforms in the Face of Retreat", National Urban League: State of Black America, 2017, page 2
46. Spurgeon, C.H., *The Soul Winner*, Gideon House Books, Dallas, TX, 2016, page 9.
47. IBID, page 9
48. IBID, page 159
49. IBID, page 12
50. IBID, page 169
51. IBID, page 165
52. IBID, page 20
53. IBID, page 12
54. IBID, page 18
55. IBID, page 83
56. IBID, page 155
57. Rainer, Thom S. and Rainer, III, Sam S., *Essential Church*, B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN, 2008, page 4
58. IBID, page 224
59. IBID pages 183 and 186
60. Crutchfield, Carmichael, *It's All About Discipleship* CME Publishing House, Memphis, TN, 2017, page 5
61. IBID, page 5
62. IBID, page 6
63. Rowland, Beth, ed, *Learn It, Live It Bible Studies: Spiritual Disciplines*, Group Publishing, Loveland, CO, 2003, page 2

64. Crutchfield, Carmichael, *It's All About Discipleship* CME Publishing House, Memphis, TN, 2017, page 12
65. ¹Maxwell, John C., *Leadership Gold*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2008, page 46
66. IBID, page 126
67. IBID, page 129
68. Munroe, Myles, *Becoming a Leader*, Pneuma Life Publishing, Bakersfield, CA, 1993, pages 10 and 11
69. IBID, page 10
70. IBID page 7
71. IBID page 9
72. IBID page 12
73. IBID
74. IBID, pages 28 and 30
75. IBID, page 12
76. Freeman, W. B. Concept Inc., *God's Little Devotional Book for Leaders*, David C. Cook Publisher, Tulsa, OK 1997, page 10
77. IBID, page 306
78. ²Maxwell, John C., *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1998, page 1
79. IBID page 6
80. IBID, page 5
81. IBID, page 131
82. Crutchfield, Carmichael, *It's All About Discipleship* CME Publishing House, Memphis, TN, 2017, page 12
83. Keck, Leander E., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume IX, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995, page 29
84. IBID
85. Hayford, Jack, Killinger, John and Stevenson, Howard, *Mastering Worship*, Multnomah, Portland, OR, 1990, page 19 (used to be #17 in original document)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Best, Bobby R., *A Brief History of Methodism and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*, Unpublished, 1996

Booker, Corey, "We Refuse to Turn Back the Clock: Advancing Criminal Justice Reforms in the Face of Retreat", National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/264, 12/03/2017

Callahan, Kennon L., *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 1983

Cowart, Jim, Hartfield, Matthew, Cowart, Jennifer and Acevedo, Jorge, *Grounded in Prayer*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 2017

Crutchfield, Carmichael, *It's All About Discipleship* CME Publishing House, Memphis, TN, 2017

Crutchfield, Carmichael and Ross, Willa, *21st Century Discipleship: Reclaiming the Vision*, CME Publishing House, Memphis, TN, 2009

Dunkle, William F. Jr. and Quillian Joseph D., *Companion to the Book of Worship*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1970

Farmer, William R., *The International Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1994

Freeman, W. B. Concept Inc., *God's Little Devotional Book for Leaders*, David C. Cook Publisher, Tulsa, OK 1997

Grant, Gwendolyn, "Bad for your Health: The Link Between Unemployment and Willingness", National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/235, 12/03/2017

Hayford, Jack, Killinger, John and Stevenson, Howard, *Mastering Worship*, Multnomah, Portland, OR, 1990

Hightower, Stephanie, "Earn It, Keep It, Grow It: Smart Consumers Greater Economic Mobility", National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/214, 12/03/2017

Hoyt, Jr., Thomas, *Introduction to New Testament*, Self published, 1992

Keck, Leander E., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume IX, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995

Lytle, Julie Anne, *Faith Formation 4.0*, Morehouse Publishing, New York, NY 2013

Matthaei, Sondra Higgins, *Formations in Faith*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2008

Matthaei, Sondra Higgins, *Making Disciples*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2000

¹Maxwell, John C., *Leadership Gold*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2008

²Maxwell, John C., *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1998

Munroe, Myles, *Becoming a Leader*, Pneuma Life Publishing, Bakersfield, CA, 1993

National Urban League, "Protect Our Progress: State of Black America 2017," 41st Edition, pp. 1-20, www.stateofblackamerica.org, 12/03/2017

Rainer, Thom S. and Rainer, III, Sam S., *Essential Church*, B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN, 2008

Richmond, Cedric, "Resisting the Rollback, CBC Congressional Priorities in the Trump Era," National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/267, 12/03/2017

Roberto, John, *Faith Formation 2020*, Vibrant Life Publishing, Deerfield Beach, FL, 2010

Roberto, John, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages and Generations*, Vibrant Life Publishing, Deerfield Beach, FL, 2015

Robinson-Whited, Linda, *Three Simple Rules for Following Jesus*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2008

Rowland, Beth, ed, *Learn It, Live It Bible Studies: Spiritual Disciplines*, Group Publishing, Loveland, CO, 2003

Runner, Shari, "Young, Jobless and Black: How Opportunity Works to Ensure Progress," National Urban League: State of Black America, soba.iamempowered.com/node/218, 12/03/2017

Sergeant, Wendi, *Christian Education and the Emerging Church*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR, 2015

Schnase, Robert, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2007

Spivey, Robert and Smith D. Moody, *Anatomy of the New Testament Fourth Edition*, McMillan Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1982

Spurgeon, C.H., *The Soul Winner*, Gideon House Books, Dallas, TX, 2016

Teasdale, Mark R., *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2016

Vickers, Jason E., *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX, 2011

Watley, William D., *12 Standards for Church Leaders*, New Seasons Press, 2009

Wimberly, Anne E. Streaty and Parker, Evelyn L., *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2002