

Bishop Jeffrey Nathaniel Leath, Dr. Susan J. Leath, Presiding Elders Rev. Dr. Eva Settles, Rev. Dr. Terence L. Mayes, Sr., Host Pastor The Rev. Dr. Charles Holsey, Jr. Pastors, Delegates and Members of the One Hundred Seventeenth Session of the East Tennessee Annual Conference;

Greetings in the Matchless Name of Jesus The Christ of God,

The Social Action Committee Report

The Statue of Liberty has stood in the New York Harbor since its dedication on October 28, 1886, 131 years ago with the invitation emblazoned on its base, "Bring me you huddled masses yearning to be free." Many would be adventurers are finding out what most African Americans already knew. The welcome sign may not be extended to all who desire to make this great nation their new home. This nation was founded on the premise that one could worship his/her God under their own vine and fig tree.

There is no country on the planet that offers such a lofty ideal for its citizens, on paper. But the harsh reality is this great nation, with such vast and expansive natural resources, situated between two major oceans, Atlantic on the East Coast and Pacific on the West Coast, can rightfully be compared to Biblical Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, to support the masses that huddle at our borders.

Shortly after this nation fought a civil war that took the lives of over 620,000 men, President Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg Address with hopes of seeing a divided nation come to its senses and embrace the brotherhood of all mankind. It is simply amazing how some people can come here with the ink barely dry on their passports, with green card in hand and enjoy the benefits of a free and open society while at the same time blocking every effort of others who would ask for the same privilege extended to them.

Immediately following the end of the civil war, new tactics were put in place, such as poll taxes, threats of violence and brute force were employed to prevent a vast portion of its citizens from participating in "The Great American Dream". More recently, convicted felons, after paying their debt to society and returning to the workforce, are finding the door of opportunity closed and striped of their citizenship inherent in the right to vote. The slow and tedious process of returning to life as normal can be challenging if not an impossible task. We owe it to posterity to help our brothers and sisters merge back into the mainstream of democracy so they may prove to be productive citizens making their God given talents available to help make this nation realize the greatness it is capable of achieving.

Additionally, each pastor should make it his/her business to see that every member exercise their voters rights in every election, and not just the presidential election cycle. Freedom and liberty are entwined with a process that must be supported with direct action in order to be maintained.