

150TH SESSION OF THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church

LEXINGTON KENTUCKY

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STATE OF THE CHURCH

To Bishop Jeffrey Nathaniel Leath, Presiding Prelate of the Thirteenth Episcopal District; Dr. Susan Leath' Episcopal Missionary and Youth Supervisor; the Reverends James E. Smith, Host Presiding Elder; The Reverend Dr. William Easley, Associate Host Elder; the Reverend Kenneth Golphin, Host Pastor; Laity and the Members of this 150th Session of the Kentucky Annual Conference, we the committee on State of the Church, present the following report:

State of the African-American Church: Is our historical well running dry?

During times of slavery and the civil rights movement the African-American Church served as a nurturing place that sustained and revived the African American Community. The Black Church functioned as a life giving well. The black church was a place of freedom, relief, edification and fellowship. During the antebellum time period and after, it was a place where people of color attended out of a spirit of necessity. During the struggle for freedom and equality the African American Church served as a catalyst in forging unity, solidarity and hope. Just as humans have an indispensable need for water, church attendance for the Negro was deemed essential. Like the refreshing taste of a cold glass of water on a hot summer's day the black church was invigorating to the African American soul. The church's leaders shown as beacons of light and its members reflected that light.

In the year 2017, we the people of color, need to do some soul searching and ask ourselves some pertinent questions. Is the African American Church, our historical well, running dry? Are African -American churches still places of life giving soul rejuvenating substance? Are our landmarks of living water turning into valleys of dry bones? If the resounding answer is yes, how can we turn the tide?

In biblical times, drinking wells were sources life giving and life sustaining water.

Genesis 24:10-11 New International Version (NIV)

10. Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master's in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.

11. He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water.

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 New International Version (NIV)

10. When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build,

11. houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied,

12. be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Our grandparents and great grandparents possessed a good religion. For them, church attendance was not optional, but essential for well being. They may not have had much, but showed up to church in their best *Sunday-go-to-meeting-clothes*. The faith of our grandparents and great grandparents was tied to the civil rights movement. Liberation was a core belief ingrained in African American believers. Although we now live in a post civil rights generation and faith is more tied to the evangelical movement, we still need to hold on to the core values that brought us thus far. We cannot allow the transition from struggle to achievement of a level of equality to cause our great wells to suffer from evaporation of life giving vitality. We must not surrender to complacency in worship, discipleship and ministry.

Galatians 6:9-10 New International Version

9. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap the harvest if we do not give up.

10. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In this new millennium, there is no place for dry ministries. As preachers, teachers and evangelists of a liberating gospel, our sermons, teachings and messages, need to be full of life and relevancy. There is no place for proclamations that do not challenge people of color to change their minds, attitudes and desires and seek to parallel their lives with the holy and divine Word of God. Yes, slavery has ended. African Americans have more rights than we have ever possessed in the history of America. Times have changed for the better, but we are still in a battle and the struggle is not over. There is sacred ground to obtain and sacred ground to reclaim. There are still crucial and critical issues facing the African American community that need to be addressed. The African American family is still under attack. Young black men would rather have sagging pants than a saved soul. Black on Black violence continues to escalate. Black women of child bearing age, is the fastest growing population in incarceration. When it comes to church attendance and service the black male is MIA-Missing in Action.

Huff Post Blog-“The Black Church is dead.”

The death of *the* black church as we have known it occasions an opportunity to breathe new life into what it means to be black and Christian. Black churches and preachers must find their prophetic voices in this momentous present. And in doing so, black churches will rise again and insist that we all assert ourselves on the national stage not as sycophants to a glorious past, but as witnesses to the ongoing revelation of God’s love in the here and now as we work on behalf of those who suffer most.

Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. is currently the William S. Tod Professor of Religion and chair of the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University.

To realize the impact that your church is having in the community in which it exist, ask yourself one simple question, “If my church was to close its doors would anyone in the community know and would anyone care?” Does the conclusive response give you comfort or do you find it troublesome? If it is disheartening that means it is time for change.

There is no place for dry attitudes among the African American body of believers. Jesus did not give us new life for us to keep it to ourselves. Someone once said, “Love was not placed in your heart to stay, for love is not love until you give it away.” Everyone is given a platform. T.D. Jakes may have a platform in front of thousands. God may give you a platform where you are viewed by one. Your one may become the next T. D. Jakes. Remember, it is not the size of minister’s ministry that is crucial; it is the size of the ministry inside of the minister that makes the difference. When I accepted the call to preach, I felt like an ant in the front of a mountain. The question I presented to God was, “How can I make a difference?” (As the people saw themselves in Numbers 13:33, I saw myself as a grasshopper in the land of giants facing an impossible challenge.) God simply replied even an ant takes up space on the ground and influences its environment.” I then realized I am not held accountable for changing the whole world, but I must seek to be a positive influence everywhere I go and minister. In Luke 19:13 in

part, Jesus said "Occupy until I come." Seize opportunities to share your faith and ministries of your church.

For the first time in American history, we in ministry are dealing with a great number in the millennial African -American generation who are calling themselves "Nones." This is to say they consider themselves to be either non-religious or irreligious. **Irreligious and non-religious are terms defined as** absence, indifference, rejection of, or hostility towards religion. While they confess a belief in God, they refuse to attend any church. Yes, our work is cut out for us, but we must not give up. We must help this new generation find their voice in church. When they find their voice in church they will find their place. I am a firm believer that if just 10 percent of all African American congregations became active in witnessing for God outside of the church we would see radical change.

Now is the time for the African American church to be simultaneously internally and externally focused. John Wesley Work, the first collector of Negro spirituals, is accredited for the 1907 published spiritual bearing the words, "Go Tell it on the Mountain." In the year 2017, we still need to tell it. The black church needs to become its best and most outstanding public relations firm. Again, I say seize every God given opportunity to tell someone about the ministries of your local church and how lives have been changed by those ministries. I understand that the African American church is no longer the head of a great social movement, but it can still be an entity of great spiritual revival. Jesus Christ is still our source of life and life more abundant.

If our well is running dry, from where shall it receive water? For this question, the bible holds the answer.

John 4:13-14 New International Version

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,

¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

"It appears that the sense that one is loved and uplifted by God and the belief that one has received God's forgiveness work in tandem" to promote hope as a critical and central theme in the faith of African Americans, researchers said in a special issue of the *Race and Social Problems* journal.

Humbly submitted by the committee on State of the Church,

The Reverends Antonio Q. Stuckey, Linda Murray, Fonseca Frazier, Sisters Susan McConnell, Michelle Johnson, Ruth Allen, Enequita Harris, Brother Damien Nichols