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Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate
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State of the Church Report

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The church world is the light of the world. Neither the church universal nor the African Methodist Episcopal Church is uniform throughout. By that I mean there are bright and hot spots here and there. There are churches and areas of the body that are not dissimilar to the seven churches that Jesus the Christ addressed in the book of Revelation chapters two and three.

The head of the church and His body is the only hope for the people of the world. The church must illuminate the world while resisting worldliness.

The church needs to pray incessantly for a move of God. In particular much of the church and the world need a "Great Awakening". In describing a Great Awakening in general terms, Patrick Morley writes, "God supernaturally transforms believers and non-believers in a church, a locale, a region, a nation or the world through sudden intense enthusiasm for Christianity. People sense the presence of God powerfully; conviction, despair, contrition, repentance and prayer come easily; people thirst for God's word; many authentic conversions occur and back sliders are renewed".

If a part of the church world is to be transformed from lukewarm, cold and formal and the end-time harvest saved, a moved of God is necessitated. Certainly God is moving powerfully in parts of the earth at present.

Sustained fervent prayer by a church, churches, or others believers often precede a move of God such as a revival or great awakening

The Lord told His disciples to wait until they received the promised Holy Spirit before they began witnessing. Jesus told them in Acts 1:8, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be my disciples in Jerusalem, and all Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth”.

God’s Christ Himself received the Holy Spirit at His water baptism. The Church today needs that Power. Apostle Peter stated in his sermon on the day of Pentecost that the promised Holy Spirit is for all that are far off and as many as the Lord our God shall call. It is available for every believer. The apostle Paul wrote the church at Corinth stating my message and my preaching was not with persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power. We must present the gospel message likewise.

AS the world grows darker the church must shine ever brighter. This requires intimate relationship and fellowship with the light bearing One.

We must become spiritually fit by employing the spiritual classical disciplines of prayer, fasting, study, meditation, solitude and faith to develop our spiritual muscles to fight the good fight of faith.

Moreover, as the apostle Paul confronted the apostle Peter when he observed him compromising the truth of the gospel, we too must be the uncompromisingly righteous. We must stand on and defend the integrity of the word of God.

As children of God we are to be led by the Holy Spirit and not by our ambitions. We would do well to follow the Lead of our Lord and savior who said “not my will but yours be done”.

The church today must take heed to the Apostle Paul’s admonition to the church at Corinth. He was saying in general that without love our works, sacrifices and gifts profits nothing. The Christian walk is a love walk. Faith is the “currency” of the kingdom of God and faith works by love. Additionally, love is the bond of perfection.

Following Christ is the churches’ call. Evangelizing and making disciples our chief work. As averred previously the end-time church must grow up. We can neither witness effectively nor model Christ likeness as carnal, non-discerning believers. Our Lord have given us the five-fold ministry gifts to in part ...come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13) We must endeavor to reach this goal.

Like the apostles in the early church we must prioritize and delegate responsibility and authority so that those that minister the word may use their time, gifts and energy to do so. The centrality of ministering the word must be maintained in the church.

The writer of Hebrews states that we should remember the saints in prison as though in prison with them and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles tells Timothy that all who will live godly will suffer persecution. Paul further tells his son to endure hardness as a good a soldier of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter states ...Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

In view of this it behooves us, the church of this generation, to prepare to suffer with and for Christ and reign with Christ. We must intercede for those believers who have to endure far greater persecution and censorship than we have to date.

It is imperative that the church imitate the master teacher and seek the lost so as to witness to them and disciple them. Statistics show that the percentage of churched Americans in the last several decades is considerable less than in the past. It is therefore obvious that the church must go to the hedges and the highways. Methods and modalities must be changed as appropriate. It would help us in this to remember the words of Paul who said in general that he became all things to varied groups of people that by all means he might save some.

Virtually all fishermen know you can't use the same bait to catch many and varied kinds of fish. We the church must realize the same and develop presentations that are pertinent and relevant to our target audiences.

The church has been a mainstay in dealing with societal ills and inequities. It is essential that the church continue to be proactive in doing so. Human trafficking, domestic violence, chemical addiction, mass incarceration, voter suppression, injustice and the like are rampant in our environs. Voter registration drives and get out the vote drives have long been organized by churches and it is important that this be continued.

Of great concern is the difficulty of retaining youth and young adults in the church and keeping them from falling prey to gangs, alcohol and drugs. Many of them are being killed by one another and others by police. Many are being subjected to, "the new Jim Crow, of mass

incarceration. Virtually everyone is cognizant of the fact that our children, youth and young adults are the future of our churches. We must advocate for justice reform and employ best practices to holistically save our children. On the contrary, many others are excelling in the church, academia and the market place.

Respectfully,

The Committee on the State of the Church: The Reverends Fred Blackwell, Barbara Jackson, Ronald Glenn, Tylan Orr, and Charles B. Sanderfur, Sisters, Lizzie Askins, Myra Cook, Delores Young and Brother Irvin Hines.