



Northwest Texas Conference Lay Organization NWTC Lay Organization Newsletter

Connectional Lay Organization Executive Board Meeting

Special points of interest:

- Connectional Lay Organization Executive Board Meeting
- NWTC Lay Organization Service Project

The 2017 Fall executive Board Meeting of the Connectional Lay Organization will be held on Thursday, November 9—Saturday, November 12, 2017 in Birmingham, Alabama. The event will be hosted by the Ninth Episcopal District with Host Bishop Harry L. Seawright, Episcopal Supervisor Sherita M. Seawright, Episcopal District Lay President Bernella Knight Rose and the entire Ninth Episcopal District.

Connectional Lay President Valerie Bells plans a meeting of meditation, teaching, and training with the intent of making each meeting positive, productive and progressive within the agenda of the itinerary meetings.

The meeting will convene at the Sheraton Hotel, 2101 Richard Arrington Jr. Blvd. N, Birmingham, AL (205) 324- 5000.
The hotel rate is \$120 per night (+ tax).

Preregistration is \$150 through October 27, 2017.
Onsight registration is \$175.00.

All registration information should be sent to:
Ms. Lynda Mayo
CLO Financial Secretary

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NWTW LO Service Project

At our first quarterly meeting on November 4, 2017 in Mineral Wells, TX we will complete our service project that we agreed upon in our last meeting. We are to bring baby items for Care Net in Waco, TX. This agency deals with young homeless pregnant teens. Let us be a blessing to these young mothers. We are hoping to

be of help especially during the season that we are embarking upon. Our love can make a difference in the lives of many.

Making Religion Relevant: "What Does It Mean To Be Black And Christian?"

by **Jacqueline Trussell**
Founder and President of BlackandChristian.com

In October 1992, a group of African American religious leaders gathered at Vanderbilt University's School of Divinity to wrestle with the question, "What does it mean to be black and Christian?" The meeting was aimed at bringing the pulpit, the pew and the academy into national dialogue. According to Forrest C. Harris, director of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on Black Church Studies and convener of the conference, the program's purpose was to challenge African American understanding of these two critical and crucial pieces of African American religious identity. "What does it mean to be Black and Christian?" Harris writes, "is an identity question that lies at the center of the Black community's struggle for liberation." (1) The battle to interpret this question is being waged by clergy and with black Christian lay people who fill the seats on Sunday. African American theologians are engaging in this enterprise to help them relate their scholarly research with the spiritual lives of everyday people.

Comparatively, African theologians have raised similar issues on the continent of Africa. "Wrestling with the question of African Christian identity entailed not only confronting constantly the problem of how 'old' and 'new' in African religious consciousness could become integrated in a unified vision of what it meant to be Christian and African."(2) In their search for answers to these questions, both the African and the African American theologian turned to the Bible. Thus, we will briefly examine how African and African American theologians have searched for a black Christian identity in the Scriptures while trying to make religion relevant for the pulpit, the pew and the academy.

Liberation language is integral to how African Americans interpret the Bible. From the Exodus story of Moses in the Hebrew Bible to Jesus' ministry to the poor and

oppressed in the New Testament, African Americans have embraced the Word of God and made it their own. As Harris says, "The end goal of the dialogue is to encourage ways in which liberation ministry can be effectively reproduced not only through Black theological reflection in both the academy and in Black churches."(3) The aim was clear--to establish a methodology for bringing together the interests of those who teach and preach the Word with those who hear the Word.

One means of theological reflection has been through the application of an African American biblical hermeneutic, i.e. interpretation, to the scriptures. While efforts at this type of scholarship are not new, its acceptance in colleges, universities and schools of divinity has been slow, particularly because the dominant paradigm emphasizes scholars of European descent. Similarly, when black theology was first introduced as a discipline to be considered for serious study, white theologians were less than receptive. University of Chicago Divinity School professor Dwight N. Hopkins knows the difficulty and his work is trying to rectify the situation. "I'm working to get black theology accepted as part of the mainstream theological curriculum, so that it's taught not only in predominantly black schools, but in every leading seminary and divinity school across the country," he said. (4) Hopkins is among a new generation of black theologians who are seeking to increase the visibility of the subject matter into the mainstream.

Establishing a place for black theology within the academy has been strongly identified with the work of Union Theological Seminary professor, James Cone. In 1969 Cone's book, Black Theology and Black Power impacted future discussions on African American Christian identity. For the next thirty years, Cone and others would ask, "Is it possible for men to be really black and still feel any identity with the biblical tradition expressed in the Old and the New Testaments? Is it possible to strip the gospel as it has been interpreted of its 'whiteness,' so that its real message will become a live option for radical advocates of black consciousness?"(5) As Cone addressed these questions to the white theological establishment, African American biblical scholars were emerging whose work would provide evidence of a

positive black identity and presence in the Bible. However, the scholarship produced by this group of biblical interpreters was even slower in finding validity within the academy.

Thus, if those doing research were unable to have their findings published in journals of scholarly repute, how then were those in the pulpit and the pew to know what was taking place? Had anyone noticed how African Americans read scripture? Was there an effort to consider what African Americans brought to the text or found in the text? The answers are yes. One of the earliest appropriations by an African American biblical scholar is that of Rev. R. A. Morrissey, Colored People and Bible History, published in 1925. The book detailed the genealogy of Ham in Genesis 10 and 1 Chronicles 1. It took several decades before another publication raised questions of black Christian identity. In 1968, Albert Cleage wrote, The Black Messiah. Ironically, as the civil rights movement struggled for liberation from the throes of racism, so too did some within the African American community seek freedom from the images of the white Jesus.

During the 1970s important works were written in the area of African American biblical interpretation. To name a few, Robert A. Bennett's four articles including: "Africa and the Biblical Period", "Black Experience and the Bible"; "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Black Preacher", and "Biblical Theology and Black Theology". Bennett received his doctorate in Old Testament from Harvard Divinity School in 1974. Charles Copher is another who has become known for his pioneering work in the field. "Perspectives and Questions: The Black Religious Experience", first appeared in 1970 and "The Black Man in the Biblical World", was written in 1974. In 1993, much of Copher's work was collected into the book, Black Biblical Studies: An Anthology of Charles B. Copher, Biblical and Theological Issues on the Black Presence in the Bible. More recently, he contributed articles in Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Inter-

pretation and in a volume on African American religious studies. It should be noted here that many of the articles written throughout the 1970s and early 1980s were published in journals associated with black institutions.

As the pursuit for locating a cultural identity in the Bible increased within the consciousness of the African American community, scholarship on black biblical studies expanded and gained credibility. Black prophetic Christian clergy added kente cloth to their ministerial robes, hung portraits of Jesus as a black man in their sanctuaries and some adopted the theme, "unapologetically black, unashamedly Christian." (6) The black church began to embrace an African centered ideology and worship experience. To be effective in the pulpit, these ministers needed the research produced by black biblical scholars to help in translating the Bible into a language that spoke to the people's African roots. Renita Weems, an Old Testament scholar at Vanderbilt Divinity School wrote, Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationship in the Bible in 1988. Howard Divinity School scholar, Cain Hope Felder followed in 1989 with Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family. Clergy turned to these works as resources for interpreting the scripture in praxis, that is, applying black biblical scholarship to the lives of the people in their congregations.

In Africans Who Shaped Our Faith, the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., offers the reader twelve sermons delivered from the pulpit of his church, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois. The messages exemplify the use of black biblical interpretation in delivering the word of God to the people in the pew. Wright dispels the myth of the "white man's religion" as he weaves the lives of black biblical characters with that of ordinary Christians. In sermon after sermon we observe the influence of a black biblical hermeneutic applied to familiar stories from the Old and New Testaments.

Thus we see the progression: from the freedom movement of the 1960s to the black power call to conscious in the 1970s onward to affirmative action and political enfranchisement in the latter half of the twentieth century. Simultaneously, black theology and black biblical interpretation assisted African American religious insti-

Making Religion Relevant continued

tutions, clergy and congregants in gaining answers to the question of finding an African American Christian identity.

Several thousand miles away, the question of a black African and Christian identity was being raised by scholars engaged in a discourse similar to their African American colleagues across the ocean. North African theologians like the previously quoted Bediako and South African black theologians such as Itumeleng J. Mosala, searched the Bible for an African and Christian identity in their own struggles for liberation. As Mosala points out, "Black theology in South Africa first emerged in the context of the black consciousness movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s."⁽⁷⁾ This statement could just as easily be written on the sources of black theology in America. The parallels of the struggle for liberation taking place on two separate continents and the results produced by each, are interesting and are looked at in other studies, but it is not our purpose.

Mosala is critical of what he calls black theology's failure to reach the masses of people. He writes, "It [black theology] has remained the monopoly of educated black Christians and has often been unable to interest the white theologians against whose theology it was supposedly first developed. Further, it has been unable to develop organic links with the popular struggles of especially the black working-class people, the most exploited segment of the black community."⁽⁸⁾ This criticism has also been thrust at African American theologians who some say have developed theoretical frameworks rather than a methodology of application for the ordinary African American Christian. While I agree that this may have been the case for most of the thirty years or so of black American theological inquiry, I would argue that in the latter half of the twentieth century there has been an increase

in the number of clergy, churches and congregations actively engaged in the *practice* of black theology or what I and others call, applied black theology.

This type of theology, "works with the oppressed black community for their full humanity."⁽⁹⁾ This definition of black theology as used by Dwight Hopkins, is observed when black Christian masses, who hear the Word of God translated into a language relevant to their lives and experience as African American Christians, applies a pro-active response to the needs of the communities where they live, work and serve. Thus the practical aspect of implementing what has been researched and taught by the academy and heard from the pulpit begins. Rev. J. Alfred Smith, pastor emeritus of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California knows how this principle operates. Smith states, "I believe that the Church in the world is to continue the work agenda of our Lord in a servant ministry to a world in need of healing and reconciliation."⁽¹⁰⁾ He continues by prompting the church to act. "...I believe in the ability of the parish church to incarnate the heart and mind of Jesus Christ, in *action* [emphasis mine] to humanize and personalize its life in a dehumanized and depersonalized environment."

At Allen Temple, ministries are designed to include the community. Examples of the types of ministries at the church include: an elementary school and after school tutoring program; a community health and counseling center, a federal credit union and food center, a homeless shelter, prison ministry, teen, crime and youth delinquency prevention programs, political education and the rehabilitation of neighborhood housing. I would like to suggest that Mosala, on the one hand, would argue that this church has moved beyond "analysis" and gotten to "the bottom of real events, relationships, structures, and so forth."⁽¹¹⁾

Bediako, on the other hand, would point to the relevance of translating the Bible into "vernacular" language that transforms the human understanding of the Word of God thus moving the church to action. African Christians must learn to utilize their knowledge of biblical messages to engage in what Justin Ukpong calls inculturation hermeneutics. Here is where the process of, as he states, "rereading the Bible with African eyes,"⁽¹²⁾ begins--with an African interpretation that includes the social and cultural context. What results is the formation of a black African Christian identity that is lived rather than discussed.

Reflections on the Women's March



Rev. Jennifer Bailey, 4th Episcopal District

In 1965, Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Selma, Alabama opened its doors as a base of operations for the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as they crafted the strategy for and mobilized engage-

ment in the Selma campaign for voting rights. From the steps of the now historic Church, Hosea Williams and John Lewis led 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge to the massacre that would become known as "Bloody Sunday." Televised images of the March and massacre brought the horrors of racial terrorism into the living rooms of the American public as brutal images of bloodied and severely injured marchers dominated the evening news.

I first walked the labyrinth of Brown Chapel's sacred halls as part of the 50th Anniversary commemoration of the Selma marches in March 2015. I went to pay homage to the ancestors whose tireless work laid the foundation for the work I do today as founder of the Faith Matters Network, a non-profit social justice collective committed to catalyzing the leadership of marginalized communities throughout the American South. As a young African American clergywoman, the significance of the space was not lost on me. In a world where it is still controversial to claim that #blacklivesmatter, progress must not be confused with victory. Television images have been replaced by viral videos of black people dying at the hands of police. Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, we say your names.

Today, my ministry cannot be separated from my commitment to equity. Over the past several years that has meant taking to the streets alongside beloved brothers and sisters in acts of protest and civil disobedience on a range of issues from police brutality to climate justice. On January 21, 2017, I joined millions of men, women, and gender non-conforming global citizens in the streets as part of the Women's March movement. It was not an easy

decision. For many years, the "women's movement" has rendered invisible the experiences and challenges facing women of color and black women in particular. Nearly 57% of white women voted for President Trump despite the hateful and hurtful rhetoric he employed throughout the 2016 presidential campaign attacking immigrants, refugees, sexual assault victims, and "the blacks." I nodded in agreement with my black feminist and womanist friends who opted out of once again being called to stand in solidarity with white women who rarely stand in solidarity with us. Even the origins of the Women's March on Washington felt suspect as once again three women of color, Linda Sarsour, Carmen Perez, and Tameka Malloory, were called in to fix the mess created by the original, predominantly white, planning committee when critiques about the racial composition of the March leadership were levied.

Yet even with these doubts, as a young adult and clergywoman, I felt convicted to attend. Often in the spaces that seek to center the experiences of women, the loudest religious voices are those that seek to limit the rights of women and silence their concerns. So I went to the Women's March in Nashville, Tennessee with two friends from Divinity School. Adorned in my clerical collar and holding a sign with a quote from black feminist scholar Audre Lorde, I was struck by how many people said thank you. Not many clergy wearing the visible signs of our faith were present so I offered prayers, chanted scriptures, and stood to block counter protesters using biblical quotes to condemn us all to hell.

It would be easy submit to the seduction of hopelessness in this political moment and cower in the face of uncertainty. Yet, that day at the Women's March reminded me that as a Christian, I am a prisoner of hope. I believe in the possibility of transformation, salvation, and deliverance because they are the stuff that comprises my faith. I know this path to freedom will not happen alone. It will require all of us to dig deep, bridge our divides, surface the best of ourselves, and give it to one another. It will require a naming of that which is right and wrong even within movement space where we may agree on the substance of the concerns but not the strategy. It will require us holding in loving accountability those with whom we share common concerns when they ignore the concerns of those whose voices have been pushed to the margins.

It will require that we follow in the footsteps of the young leaders of the past and not allow our silence to become a

5 REASONS TO KEEP GOING WHEN YOU WANT TO QUIT

By *Kevin Campbell*

Before I became a pastor, I heard people in ministry joke about how they wanted to quit almost every Monday. I laughed, but didn't really understand. I then became a pastor and the light bulb came on. Or should I say the reality set in. We have seen in recent days ministers and lay leaders who have quit or are no longer serving in ministry because of burnout, emotional pain, moral failures, and alcoholism to just name a few. The list could go on. The reality hurts even more.

What do you do when those moments come and you're ready to throw in the towel? It may sound like the following statements. I know because I've been there.

"I'm not cut out for this."

"I'm exhausted and don't have anything left to give."

"No one really understands what I'm going through."

Here are five reasons to keep going when you want to quit:

1. You are doing better than you think you are.

Your emotions will lie to you. We are meant to doubt our doubts and feed our faith. The enemy will lie to you. He'll whisper you aren't making a difference. No one notices. God notices! You were His child before you became His minister. He knows what you are going through.

When King David was discouraged, He found strength in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:6). He stopped looking outward and looked upward. He remembered who he was, but more importantly who God was. Never forget who you are in Him.

2. You are further along than you think you are.

I've heard over the years to enjoy the journey because the destination is a mirage. Church planting has made us face that reality time and time again. Though you aren't where you want to be. Thank God you aren't where you were.

Thank God for what He has carried you through. If you don't have one already, start a gratitude journal. This has made the single greatest difference in my life

the last several months. I make myself write in it every day. Even the days I don't want to do it! It changes my heart and reminds me of what God has done.

3. God is doing more than you currently see.

Our world loves to glorify finished products. God is in the business of magnifying a work in progress. Don't let what's wrong with the circumstances around you keep you from worshiping the God who is alive within you. He is doing more than you can see. His current work *in* you is His preparation for what He is about to do *through* you. God is always doing more than you can see!

4. There are people in your community that need what you have.

It's why you entered ministry in the first place. To reach those who haven't been reached. To see one more life changed by Christ. When we are hurting or discouraged, we forget this. It's not that we don't care. We just tend to get lost in the details.

We will lose our WAY when we lose our WHY. Remind yourself of your first love (Revelation 2:4-5). Remind yourself why you entered ministry in the first place. You are where you are because people around you need what you have.

5. Stop carrying the burden. Share the burden.

It's not the burden that will crush you. It's how you carry it that will make all the difference. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and the burden I give you is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). That doesn't sound like what I carry most days.

We aren't meant to carry our burdens, but to share our burdens with others (Galatians 6:2).

As leaders in ministry, we **must** be there for each other. Let a friend know **today** if you need the encouragement from others who have been there, done that, and have the scars to prove it.

Hebrews 10:35-36 says, "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

NWTC LAY ORGANIZATION 200 CLUB

The Northwest Texas Lay Organization organized a committee named The 200 Club with Mrs. Donnie Thomas-Davis as its chairperson. The purpose of the 200 Club is to raise funds for The Paul Quinn College on behalf of the Northwest Texas Conference Lay Organization.

The funds raised will be presented at The Annual Conference each year to help Paul Quinn College's Gap Fund established by Bishop Vashti Murphy-McKenzy to help students. So often, we take for granite that our Paul Quinn College can exist without our help. On the contrary, every small contribution of whatever size helps tremendously. Because we as African American people have yet to arrive at the age where we bequeath our final possessions to our church and our colleges, those institutions survive purely by contributions they obtain from wherever they may.

Please, don't forget to fulfill your pledge of \$50, \$100, \$150, or \$200. Your contribution will be very much

appreciated. Please turn checks/money orders in today or mail to:

Mrs. Donnie T. Davis
109 W. Robin Lane
Harker Heights, TX 76548

- ◆ Third Best HBCU Accomplishment of 2014
- ◆ 2013 Finalist for the President's National Community Service Higher Education Honor Roll,
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PAUL QUINN HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Program, Fourth Best Success of the "Top Ten HBCU Successes of 2011,"
- ◆ Listed as one of 2012's 50 "Most Powerful People, Groups in HBCU Culture,"
- ◆ Named one of the 2012 top liberal arts HBCUs in America,
- ◆ "2012 HBCU Male President of the Year,"
- ◆ "2012 HBCU Student Government Association of the Year,"
- ◆ 2012 HBCU Male Student of the Year Nominee,
- ◆ "2012 Distinguished Campus Leader" Award,

We're on the web at <http://www.nwtclo.org>

LEST WE FORGET: TRANSGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES



Rev. Tamara O. Kersey

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children— (Deuteronomy 4:9 NRSV).

Many of us have heard the buzz words or have seen the documentaries that remind us of the hyper-segregation and Jim Crow tactics that continue to plague our nation, communities, and school systems: War on Drugs, School-to-Prison Pipeline, New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration, Racial Profiling, and Voter Suppression. Zero-tolerance policies in our school systems will criminalize minor behavior issues or infractions instead of offering rehabilitative practices such as In-School suspension or disciplinary actions which allow the child to remain in school instead of sending them home to no supervision or educational instruction. There is something about these systemic tactics that have created within us the inability to recognize these devices in a way that compel us with compassion to embrace our millennial generation versus reject them.

There was a recent social media post that called the young people of a predominantly African-American community “thugs,” “criminals,” and the like, with no regard to the systems and tactics designed to keep us bound in Egypt (Ex 14).

The 2017 Founder's Day for the Second Episcopal District was held in Greensboro, North Carolina. As I looked across the space that served as worship, there was a beautiful array of persons who showed up to worship and commemorate the founder of the AME Church; however, what was most noticeable was the lack of attendance by Generation X, Ys, and Millennial. An abundance of those in attendance were Baby Boomers.

Baby Boomers and Traditionalists have forged through discrimination, segregation, inequality, and strategies designed to keep them in second-class status. Their generation is well aware of the bonds of Egypt. In teaching, embracing, and nurturing the younger generation—the generation who wields Joshua's bravery, courage, and even the strength needed to forge through their own Egypt situations—the AME Church is positioned to instill the fortitude needed to prevent a generation from forgetting their ancestor's sacrifices as well as successes.

The Social Action Commission of Maxwell Chapel AME Church has developed Freedom TaIXs. These series are being held to discuss tangible social actions our community can take to help us remember the former and future generations, our identity, our possibilities, and our strength as one people.

The Rev. Tamara O. Kersey is the pastor of Maxwell Chapel, AMEC, Graham, North Carolina.