



Northwest Texas Conference Lay Organization

NWTC Lay Organization Newsletter

4TH ANNUAL WINTER RETREAT

Special points of interest:

- NWTC Lay Organization Annual Day of Training
- Will the Fracturing of The "United" Methodist Church Impact the Church of Allen?
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- What Will Keep You Going?



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Members of the Northwest Texas Conference Lay organization met on January, 11, 2020 at Anderson Chapel AME Church, Killeen, TX for the 10th Episcopal District Lay Organization's 4th Annual Winter Retreat. Much was

learned on the topic of the Lay and the Clergy working together within the community. Several learning activities occurred including a presentation by the NAACP regarding our role in the voting procedure for the 2020 Election.

NWTC Lay Annual Day of Training

The NWTCLAO Annual Day of Training will be held on Saturday, May 2nd at 9:00 A.M. at Adams Chapel AME Church, 125 E. Arlo Road, Harker Heights, TX. Registration is \$25.00 and can be mailed to Ada McKey
1901 Cantaloupe Trail
Harker Heights, TX 76548

As always, the expectations are high and we aspire to have the most amazing training that we have ever had. Please mark your calendars and get your registration in as the event is scheduled to be one like none other. See you at the Annual Day of Training!!!

Will the Fracturing of The “United” Methodist Church Impact the Church of Allen?

By John Thomas, III, Editor

As the new decade dawned, the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church (UMC) issued a press release on January 3rd entitled “United Methodist Traditionalists, Centrists, Progressives & Bishops sign agreement aimed at separation”. Within hours, news spread like wildfire across United States media outlets and social media as this agreement heralds the end of decades of turmoil over issues of human sexuality in one of the nation’s largest Protestant denominations.

The division over the acceptance and status of openly-LGBTQ members culminated in the UMC 2019 Special General Conference held in St. Louis, Missouri that voted to adopt a “Traditional Plan” which strengthened prohibitions on the ordination of LGBTQ members and the celebration of same-sex marriage and enacted legislation for congregations that wished to leave the UMC. (Click here to see our coverage of the 2019 UMC General Conference). With the provisions approved by the 2019 General Conference taking effect on January 1, 2020, it is unsurprising that a new plan would emerge sponsored by the UMC leadership allowing for an amicable separation while forestalling some of the more punitive policies adopted in 2019. The plan includes a \$25 million dollar set aside for a new “Traditionalist” denomination in exchange for no claim on UMC property. The plan is expected to be voted into action at the UMC’s General Conference to be held this May and a new “Traditionalist” denomination could be functioning as early as 2021.

Some AME members who followed the drama in the UMC immediately took to Facebook and other platforms with the question, “Will this happen in the AME Church?” It is no secret that the issue of gay marriage and open acceptance of LGBTQ members is a fraught one for the African American community and its pervasive “closet” culture. According to the most recent Pew Research Religion Landscape Study (2014), 61 percent of AME Church members accept homosexuality and 41 percent favor gay marriage compared to 51 percent acceptance of homosexuality and 40 percent in favor of gay marriage for churches in the Historically Black Protestant Tradition as a whole. The 2016 General Conference adopted a “Position Paper on Same Sex Marriage” that affirmed the prohibition against the celebration of same sex marriages and unions in the Discipline, but clarified the denomination’s stance towards members of the LGBTQ community and updated the 1976 “Statement on Homosexuality”. Outside the United States, biblical interpretations and social norms are far more rigid and the AME Church has a presence in several countries where violence against members of the LGBTQ community is rampant and indeed their open existence is illegal.

So, what of the division in the UMC? To quote a church adage, “What it’s about ain’t what it’s about.” The deeper roots of the impending split relate to The UMC’s creation. Since its founding, conservative groups (many with rooted in the former slaveholding Methodist Episcopal Church, South) created institutions to curtail the denomination’s progressive witness and endeavors. In recent years, there have been calls to hold apportionments for certain church agencies and restructure them due to a perceived “liberal” agenda. In his blog, “Hacking Christianity”, UMC pastor Rev. Jeremy Smith chronicles this history including rise of parallel entities—publishing houses, mission boards, and evangelism groups—created by Conservatives (now labelled “Traditionalists”) over decades culminating in the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA). The fact that the WCA still wishes to exit despite having its proposal being approved at the 2019 General Conference speaks to its deeper grievances with the UMC beyond LGBTQ issues.

And the AME Church? This writer does not see a split on the horizon for the Church of Allen. First, there are no clear lines of demarcation. We don’t have established AME Progressive, Conservative or Central Caucuses. Second, the issue of LGBTQ inclusion is much more nuanced and embedded in our structure (and the Black Church as a whole). We have opted for a clergy who subscribe to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy or are “out” in limited capacities to their congregations and their Bishop and active laity whose special “friends” we all know and welcome in our churches. Third, the Connectional AME Church does not have the money to finance a split. The 25-million-dollar settlement allocated for the conservative UMC denomination in waiting is more than the entire annual AME Church Connectional Budget of \$16 million.

What is urgently needed is a constructive dialogue that comes from a place of understanding and not from dogmatic proof-texting rooted in heteronormative patriarchy. At the 2019 CONVO, I was disturbed by the caustic tone of the brief exchange on LGBTQ issues which assumed that there was one theology that needed to be “told” to others. A constructive and open environment to discuss our understanding of LGBTQ concerns and reflect upon them with Christ-like hearts and minds grounded in theology does not exist in our denomination. But it must happen soon. As a global denomination, we will have to deftly address the issue of LGBTQ inclusion without maligning our work in Districts 14-20. The alternative is a church increasingly at odds with itself and its desire to serve “Humankind Our Family”.

WILL REMOVING THE DECALOGUE BRING MILLENNIALS BACK?

By Joyce Gulledge Harris,
4th Episcopal District

Having been a life-long member of the AME Church, I am having difficulty understanding why some pastors and other AME Church leaders believe that changing our order of worship will bring people flocking to our sanctuaries on Sunday mornings. There is a push to bring back millennials to the AME Church. One thought is to remove the Decalogue, thereby making the worship service more contemporary and appealing.

This proposal causes significant questions for me. How will we make the clarion call to let others know about this important change? Should we put flyers on cars in public parking lots? Should we use social media so that others know we are becoming more contemporary by excluding the Decalogue? Could it be that people are leaving our Zion or not attending our worship services for other reasons?

Could it be that as AMEs we are not true to our roots, have abandoned who we are, and are not excited about worshipping God? I asked a former member of an AME Church, a Generation Xer, why he and his family left the church. Chief among his reasons was how unimportant our order of worship seemed to have been.

Initially, he said, "It was the liturgy." He immediately clarified that it was not the liturgy but how we approached it. For example, we were not excited about worshipping God and we recited the call to worship like it meant nothing. He recalled that when he and his family attended worship service in the South, they were excited when they said, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." He also shared that he taught his children about the AME Church at home because he wanted

them to know about their heritage and history as they were not being taught this at church. He believes that we change things on a whim. The AME Church had become unrecognizable to him.

I asked where he is currently attending church. He and his family joined a nondenominational church in the city where the clergy and congregation are excited to worship, are organized, and follow a prescribed protocol. He is active and is a member of the operations team. He has no plans of returning to the AME Church.

Perhaps we should maintain the integrity of our denominational tradition as described in Bishop Frederick Hilborn Talbot's Foreword for the Second Edition of *Walking Through an Order of Worship in the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Perhaps we should be authentically excited about worshipping God. That just might be the keys to slowing the decline in attendance or church membership. Although Bishop Talbot was referring to the music in the AME Church, maintaining the integrity of our denominational tradition in all aspects of African Methodism may hold the key to our improved worship experience.

Joyce Gulledge Harris is the president of the Samuel "Sam" Mosley Lay Organization at Wayman AME Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



AFFIRMING ALL GOD'S PEOPLE INTO FULL MEMBERSHIP

By Dr. Ravi K. Perry, 2nd Episcopal District

God commands we love all. God commands we do justice. God commands we genuinely embrace and take care of the least among us. God desires all to experience love with another human being insofar as God is the center of their commitment. Sadly, church policy impacting LGBTQ persons does not reflect Jesus's life, witness, and message.

The church's silence on whether or not to openly and fully embrace members of the LGBTQ+ community is not just or loving. Such silence only contributes to the millions of examples of mental health challenges, tragedies, and deaths associated with Black children and adults in the United States. Does the church want to continue to be complicit in the indirect subjugation, isolation, violation, abuse, neglect, and murder going on in the Black LGBTQ community in the name of God?

Marriage is a civil right shared between two human beings. However, the AME Church has chosen to actively oppress members of the Black diaspora LGBTQ community simply for being who they are and how God made them.

For consideration at the General Conference in 2020, I have proposed that the AME Church delete Section XV, Part B of *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*. This text is antithetical to the church's mission, founding, and its future. By deleting the section, the AME Church would be signaling it permits what said section now bans, thereby permitting local churches and pastors to genuinely welcome

LGBTQ parishioners into full membership in God's house.

Our church, the first Black Christian denomination to permit women to preach, revised its prior *Disciplines* to allow women into ministry and eventually to be eligible to become bishops. This church, despite 1 Corinthians 14:34, rightly sought to ordain women as preachers, ministers, pastors, presiding elders, and bishops, not only allowing them to speak but to hold leadership posts. This was and is fair and just.

Holy Scriptures do not explicitly support or reject this action concerning gender and church leadership. Likewise, neither does the Holy Scriptures explicitly forbid same-sex attraction, companionship, love, and marriage—particularly, not as it is practiced in monogamous partnerships and is understood as today, entering the third decade of the 21st century.

As the only Black Christian denomination founded because of oppression, our spirituality began as a society of volunteers that provided free social services to the needy. Our spiritual legacy is about inclusion, the act of embracing all people that seek a close relationship with God. The AME Church is not ours. It is God's church and God welcomes everybody and wants all to experience the fullness of joy.

If the Section XV Part B deletion is adopted, the Church will no longer be complicit in the subjugation, oppression, discrimination, and—in some cases—death, of God's people. I invite the Church toward redemption, to once again be a beacon of light to the left out and to turn toward healing and love.

Responses to Previous Article

Dr Perry has written a very powerful articulated article. This provides a context for a serious discourse on the relevance of some of our doctrines, disciplines and policies in the 21st Century. He invokes the very foundational values of love, solidarity, brotherhood and inclusion. The AME Church globally, must be extremely careful that conservatism does not lead to its demise. Its history affirms the need to always never countenance oppression, marginalization or exclusion of people based on their sexual orientation. As the AME Church prepares for its General Conference, she must remind herself of the powerful sermon of Bishop Theophilus Steward based on the story of the biblical Joseph..” I Seek My Brethren”. I fully concur with Dr Perry that the AME must now expunge all doctrines or any policies which discriminate from its books and accommodate the LGBTQ community.

Darkey Africa-AME Church, Gabashane
Chapel, Vryburg, South Africa

I believe God loves all people and we should practice the same love. I do not believe that we should treat people differently because of any reason. The issue is not the treatment or mistreatment the issue in question is the Theology of the church as it relates to same gender marriage. I do believe that biblically marriage is between one man and one woman. I do not think that the global church should adjust thinking to fit the trends of western society. Basically we cannot have legislation without first having conversations. If the global church decides that the Theology of the church has changed to support, affirm and endorse same gender marriage the church should be able to handle the reactions thereafter.

Dr. Abdue Knox

Dr. Perry is correct in stating that wants us to embrace with love all individuals regardless to their choices in life. However that does not negate the will of God, that He desires for people to be holy because He is holy. Yes, the church universal is and has been silent on current issues of immorality, particular the LGBTQ community. While there must be conversation in addressing these issues, it must be done in the context of the Holy Scriptures. Revising the The Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church never takes precedence over God’s Word which is and will always be inclusive.

It is that kind of thinking as expressed in Dr. Perry’s article that has and is destroying the family, the church, schools and the world. This destruction is not confined to the Black community but crosses all ethnicities.

Making policy changes should be guided by the will of God which is written in His Word. I refer us to Genesis 1: 26, 27; 19; Leviticus 18; 20: 13; Judges 19; 22; Romans 1: 18-32; 1 Corinthians 6: 9-20; 1 Timothy 1: 3-11; Mark 7: 20-23. (New King James)

None are left out if they keep Gods commandments.

Clyde D. Wiggins

I totally agree with Bro. Clyde D. Wiggins, who referenced scriptures that support why the AME Church should not change its stance on same sex marriage. The Bible is our guide and the AME Church should be guided by the word of God. he church should be the example to and for the world and not become the way of the world. Immorality is in and of the world, the church need not take part in it. Jesus is on his way back and it is crucial that we are found worthy to enjoy eternal life with Him. AMEN

Ann Rumley-Fields

FOOD JUSTICE: AFRICAN AMERICANS' FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENTS

By Rev. Betty Holley, PhD., Contributing Writer

In *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*, bell hooks wrote, "Collective black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth, when we remember the way of our ancestors... Living in modern society, without a sense of history, it has been easy for folks to forget that black people were first and foremost a people of the land, farmers." Persons, who are still farming in various states across the United States, are carrying on the fight for economic and civil rights for land-based African American people.

This fight began during the days of slavery. In 1920, African Americans owned nearly 15 million acres of farmland. Racism, violence, and massive migration from the rural South to the North caused a steady decline in the number of Black farmers. Institutional racism in agricultural policies of the USDA has played a major role in the decline of Black farmers.

By 2007, African American farmers numbered about one in 70, owning only 4.2 million acres. One of the most impressive contemporary examples of an organization that grew out of the civil rights movement and helped organize and support Black and small farmers in rural communities is the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. The Federation formed in 1967 and today has more than 100 coops in its membership across the South in 16 states. Other organizations like the National Black Farmers Association, the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, the Land Loss Prevention Project, along with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives have been challenging racism in agricultural policy through legal action.

There is, on the horizon, a fast-growing movement of African Americans reclaiming their connection to their urban land and food. This is being done as a part of food justice and food sovereignty movements. People's Grocery and Mo' Better Food in Oakland, Growing Power, Rooted in Community, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, and many others are organizing with farmers and connecting African American growers and consumers.

The work of these groups includes youth programs and



urban gardening in areas where access to healthy and affordable food is limited, which is the case in many low-income and people of color communities. More importantly, these groups, particularly the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, are working for communities of color to have democratic control over their own food systems. Raising awareness, relative to the ways that African American communities and communities of color have been sidelined with the food movement itself, is one of these many organizations' major roles.

The various groups involved must enable communities of color to gain democratic control over their food systems, continue to educate and organize—nationwide, on structural racism—as it impacts health, farming, food, and land. These organizations have shown that they are determined and committed to breaking and knocking down barriers to food production and food access. There is a need to have persons and organizations join the world-wide movement for food sovereignty in their own communities. This will afford citizen control over food and agriculture to exist globally.

Achieving racial justice in the food systems is not the sole burden of African Americans but a people's clarion call all over the earth! Raising awareness of systemic disparities and working together to end them is the responsibility of humankind's survival.

MENTORING A NEW GENERATION OF CLERGY FOR THE AME CHURCH

By Rev. Herman O. Kelly, Contributing Writer

As I grow older in ministry and age, I am entering a new phase of my life. As I take a retrospective view of my life and ministry, I have been blessed. I have been blessed to have wonderful pastors as role models throughout my journey in the AME Church.

Many times, I mention my father in the ministry, whom I met in Springfield, Massachusetts, as I pursued my theological education and journeyed through the Board of Examiners. My pastor was instrumental in mentoring me and giving me direction on my pastoral calling. Now, I am a father in the ministry to a few clergy. My journey is to help mentor them. The baton has transferred to me and the sacred journey must continue. How do we do it?

First, we must continue to share our stories of victory and defeat. We should share how God was with us in ministry and our service to our Zion. I always enjoyed the one-on-one discussions with my mentors and my father in the ministry. They gave me an opportunity to listen and reflect on my ministerial journey.

We live in a technological world but we should never replace a one-on-one talk with a tweet. I am thankful to God for those stories told to me in the middle of the night after an annual conference, district meeting, or official board meeting.

Our culture as African Methodist clergy is that we grow, we help others grow. As God opens doors for us, we help open doors for others. I am thankful for those who spent time with me despite their busy schedules.

I remember my pastor at St. Paul AME Church in Jacksonville, Florida. He gave a group of young people time to visit his office one Sunday morning to discuss some concerns we had as young laity in the church. To this day, that meeting has served as a model for my ministry. The pastor listened to us and made us stakeholders in the process.

Secondly, to mentor a new generation of clergy, we must hold true to our traditions of worship and polity. We are a unique Zion and our founding fathers and mothers loved the tradition of worship and liturgy. We are flexible in worship but some tenets of our worship come with special meaning as we encounter the Holy in our worship services. Our liturgy speaks to God and looks for clarity, direction, and salvation on our spir-

itual journey.

Lastly, we must take the call of God as a time for spiritual preparation and academic preparation. I visit my medical doctor each year for my physical checkup. The doctor checks my vital signs and monitors my wellness. As we mentor a new generation of clergy, we are helping prepare them to monitor

the spiritual life of individuals that they will serve. The medical doctor is prepared regarding the latest medical information. As clergy, we must also be equipped to understand and articulate God's language to a secular and technological world.

Our daughter is a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) person. As we talk, I always remind her, God is still in the midst of a technological world. God moves even when we do not know that God is moving.

Let us be willing and serious about training a new generation of clergy. I thank Bishop Julius H. McAllister for affording me the opportunity to serve as the Chair of the Board of Examiners for the Eighth Episcopal District. In this space, I can mentor and impact another generation of clergy. I am thankful for my sacred journey. Howard Thurman wrote, "The most profound journey one can make is the journey one takes with God."



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

What Will Keep You Going?

By Byron Washington, Columnist

Going into the new year, people have goals and plans. Whether it is to get in shape or launch a new idea, everyone is invigorated when the new year starts. We all start out fast, then we slow down; and in a lot of cases, we stop or burn out. Why? Although we planned for the start and how we wanted to finish, we did not plan for the peaks (mountains) and the plateaus (mundane moments) that we would encounter along the way.

Consider this illustration. An individual plans to ride his or her bike in a race. The person is excited. The starting point of the race is on the top of a hill. The race begins and the participants cascade quickly down the hill. They encounter a few small bumps and hills but they continue forward with minimal effort due to the momentum. However, they encounter a long stretch of flat land, a plateau. The riders must exert effort to continue moving because the flat terrain has robbed the participants of their momentum.

Then, they encounter a mountain. The participants start up the mountain with no momentum because it was lost on the plateau. Some participants continue up the mountain. Others give up and stop. Those that continue will regain momentum because they will eventually come down the mountain on the other side. However, many participants will quit because of the mountain.

Let me provide a few suggestions for completing your race in 2020. The first is to prepare for the plateaus. There are going to be points in 2020 that are mundane and not exciting. You will hit a point in working out that your weight loss seems to have stalled or all you are doing for your new business is making phone calls and completing paperwork. Place something on your 2020 trajectory that can encourage you when things get boring.

Second, prepare for the peaks. The peaks often come after a plateau and are hard to handle because of a lack of momentum. Peaks can encompass a multiplicity of items; however, the peak is usually the last hurdle(s) that needs to be addressed before success can be achieved. The key to the peak is pacing and patience. You will never get over the peak by rushing. Steady and consistent actions are the key to overcoming the peak.

Finally—and most importantly—throughout every stage, be sure to praise God. Praise provides perspective. Praise reminds us that God is in control. Praise provides the extra push we need when facing plateaus and peaks.

As you are speeding ahead in 2020, take a moment while you have momentum and plan for handling the slow and high places. Make a note on your 2020 timeline that every few miles on the journey, take a moment to praise God for his grace, mercy, and love. First Thessalonians 5:8 says, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Byron Washington, MPA is an author, consultant, youth mentor, and life coach. He and his family currently reside in Abuja, Nigeria. For more about him visit <http://byronwashington.org/>.

