



## *"From Where I Sit ..."*

### **"50 Years Later ... Now What?"**

As I edit this article it is the day after the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my having been licensed to preach in the CME Church. Not a lot of people knew about this anniversary and it was my intention not to make a big thing of it with a huge celebration or letter writing or gift giving. I desired to celebrate it quietly with my wife and reflect on the Grace of God given to me to serve in the preaching ministry for 50 years. Instead, as is usual for the schedule of a General Officer, I attended the Spring Convocation (reporting) meeting of one of our Episcopal Districts and the birthday party of a dear friend and adopted sister.

Not having pastored over the last 11 years, a clergy general officer who serves the denomination without a pastoral appointment often misses the joy and fulfillment that comes with sharing personal dates with her or his own congregation. Dates like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, family milestones and of course preaching anniversaries. So even though I do not know the number of you who read these articles, let me be selfish today and borrow you as my own personal and faithful congregation for just a while and share with each of you this milestone of my ministerial life.

I could tell you about the beginning of this ministry with the confession of a call to preach at the age of seven and the waiting for six years to ultimately preach trial sermons under two different pastors before receiving the license to preach on March 16, 1963; but for the purpose of this article that beginning and even all that has been accomplished during those many years is not germane. What is probably germane is where we are now and what being at this place at this point in time now means.

When my ministry began President John F. Kennedy had not been assassinated, Blacks were not allowed to vote, interstate commerce was segregated along with drinking fountains, restrooms, housing and employment. Schools were segregated at both the secondary and collegiate levels. Although opportunities appeared to be more apparent in the North than in the South, segregation was still widely practiced in most parts of the country. But with all of the repression that had been a by-product of segregation, what was clearly obvious was the growing number of churches and church congregations, the rising numbers in student enrollment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, coupled with the expanding influence of Civil Rights organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, Urban League and others. God has truly been good to the Black Church and by God's Grace the Black Community "has come a mighty long way."



However, now after 50 years, I am concerned that perhaps the Black Church has begun to rest upon its laurels of past accomplishments. I know that it is my responsibility to be about the business of retirement benefits and insurance policies, market variances and acceptable risks, investment strategies and bottom-line returns, but as a preacher of the gospel, I also have the responsibility to put these departmental expectations into the "fuller" context of the life of the Church. To those in the world who say that the Church is a business, I say yes and that business is the spreading of the Gospel and the saving of souls. And for the Church in general and the Black Church in particular, the primary manifestation of our witness must always be seen in our

protection of and advocacy for the poor and the disenfranchised, both here in America and in our foreign work, lest we forget who we are and from where we have come.

To those who may not fully see it, I would say beware of the growing mood to disenfranchise the marginal people of our communities, the so-called acceptable losses, the ones whom Jesus has called “the least of these...” Attacks on health care, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other efforts to assist the impoverished, the working poor, and the marginal will also eventually affect each of us. The failure to ban extreme personal weapons such as military type assault weapons will only make it easier for more “of the least of these” to be killed or maimed. The refusal to punish those in high places for their mistakes, their extravagances, their indulgencies, and their lawless acts set a poor example for our young people to emulate. The flagrant attempt by various states and jurisdictions to limit the voting rights of certain citizens is an affront and an insult to the memory of the many who gave their lives to insure this precious right for all citizens.

And most importantly, we seem to have lost the sense of fairness, equity and decorum. For the first time in more than 200 years, this country has finally elected a Black President and since the very day of his election, new groups have come into being determined to reclaim this country from the apparent Presidency of this Black President. He has been disrespected in Congress and in the public, his judicial nominees have been forestalled, his programs blocked and his bi-partisan efforts have been rebuffed.

And through all of this, the Church, especially the Black Church, seems strangely quiet. There was a time when our leaders would cry out for justice. There was a time when we marched for equality. There was a time when we organized for change. There was a time when we could read the hand writing on the wall and prepare our people. And when the Church was active and immersed in the issues that affected the lives of our people, the churches were full and the Church grew.

I would encourage our members to read more newspapers, especially the foreign press. You will be surprised at the difference. Also, watch more of the news related television and cable stations. And finally, find out what the real issues are and discuss them among yourselves. Not only does your opinion count, but it can also influence others.

I would imagine that I am one of the few in our active itinerancy with 50 years of service which perhaps now makes me an “elder” of the church beyond my elder’s ordination. Whatever the case, I am yet hopeful and encouraged. I still believe some of our best years are yet ahead of us. God has given us all that we need to survive and succeed but we must take advantage of the now and make best use of it. I know that we can and I pray that we will.

Well my temporary appointment as pastor with you as my borrowed congregation has come to an end. I must put on again my green visor, roll up my sleeves and return to my perpetual task of watching the markets and promoting our insurance needs. It may be another ten or eleven years before I will be privileged to again borrow you as a congregation and share my pastoral concerns. However, if you have some of these same concerns, send me an email at [Tyrone.Davis@theCMEChurch.com](mailto:Tyrone.Davis@theCMEChurch.com) and let me know your thoughts. You may not think that they are important, but they are important to me. I believe that is the way things begin to change, one thought at a time ...Or at least that is the way it looks to me ...

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