



"From Where I Sit ..."

What Have I Missed Most Since Becoming a General Officer?

This is my 14th year as a General Officer and it has been such a great pleasure to serve the Church in this capacity. However, every now and then when I have a moment to reflect, I sometimes think about how my life has changed since my election in Atlanta, GA in 2002. It is during times like these that my inner self questions "What have I missed most ... since becoming a General Officer?" Naturally such a change in one's life requires many adjustments, so rather than list all of what I may have come to miss most, I will only list the top three.

Having now served in the ministry of the CME Church for more than 50 years, the number one thing I have missed the most has been the opportunity to preach on a regular basis. When I was a new General Officer, my preaching schedule was fairly frequent and I would preach during an average year at least twice a month. But now the routine is at best only about four times a year. In fairness, there have been times when I have been invited to preach but due to the timing of the invitation I was either already committed or unfortunately out of town. Of course, it is a good feeling to be invited even when you are unable to accept. It means that you have, to a certain degree, not been forgotten. But after more than 50 years of preaching and having obtained a seminary degree in Homiletics (which is the study of preaching), there is a sense of emptiness when one is unable to exercise his primary gift from the call to preach. Several months ago, I received a letter from a former pastor of my home church in Alabama who is now retired and has relocated to Illinois. In her letter, she too, lamented the sense of emptiness that comes with the absence of preaching on a regular basis. Her words have led to my reflection.

The number two thing I miss most is pastoring. Having pastored 10 congregations in 7 states (one in high school and one in college), I relished the opportunity to learn new families and work with them to plan ministries that would build the congregations and strengthen the spiritual lives of the members. I especially enjoyed the meetings held and the teaching opportunities that were couched in real life situations. Because it is a sin, I struggle not to envy my colleagues who have been given the opportunity to pastor while serving as a General Officer. For those of you who may not be aware, our Church has 10 General Officers five of whom happen to be clergy and the other five lay. My four fellow clergy General Officers each have congregations, but due to the various demands of my General Office, an assignment of a church to me would ultimately be unfair to its congregation. And again in fairness, this circumstance was made plain to me before I was elected and I knowingly accepted this sacrifice. Yet, every now and then, I can't help but feel as a shepherd without a flock.

Finally, the number three thing I miss the most is connecting "as a pastor" with the children of a church as they grow from infancy to adulthood. In our method that is required for Admission into Full Connection, there is a question that every preacher must answer affirmatively: "*Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?*" That question has been key in every church that I have served because I believe that when special attention has been paid to the children, the parents automatically become involved. And as such, the whole family becomes children of God. I also believe that if the children have had positive religious experiences as they have grown into adulthood, the families that they produce will also be an integral part of God's Church. "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*" (Proverbs 22:6 NKJV) Yet as a

preacher in full connection who does have the opportunity to visit other churches on a fairly regular basis, I try hard to remember to stay in “my lane” and recognize that there is only “one pastor” and that pastor is not me.

If given an opportunity, my fellow General Officers can also share equally personal aspects of their lives that have changed after their elections, but I can only share my own. Your reading of this article may cause you to feel somewhat sorry for what I have articulated as my losses, but please do not shed a sympathetic tear. Although I truly miss these aspects of my ministry, I find great joy in knowing that I can touch and aid so many more members and preachers of our denomination through this great office. You may ask, “Why then have I then shared these top three losses?” and I hope you understand that as a General Officer in the CME Church, you are my family and therefore the only ones, apart from God, with whom *through this form of communion* I can share even my personal concerns. Or at least that’s the way it looks to me ...

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