

Tennessee Annual Conference

151st Session

Wayman Chapel AMEC, Columbia, Tennessee

Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate

State of the Church Report

State of the Church Committee

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18 October 2018

Genesis 37:16 And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.

This passage of scripture was the heart of an evangelistic sermon preached by Theophilus G. Steward, during the Civil War and Reconstruction era. The sermon was simply titled, "I Seek My Brethren". This sermon was deemed as the clarion call to establish what we now know as the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

As we come together at this 151st Session of the Tennessee Annual Conference, we the church are facing turbulent times in which the church finds itself existing in a country that professes to be one Nation under God all the while proclaiming that "justice is for all. But we as a church must pause and ask the question, how do we the church respond to a nation divided by the oppressive and divisive manner in which the leader of the free world and his administration operates? How do we the church respond to a nation where justice for all only yields success for the oppressors while the oppressed and disenfranchised are victimized by a system where justice is not equally served. How do we the church universal reconcile the command of loving thy neighbor as we love ourselves and the word of God with the eisegesis rhetoric of evangelicals that purports the right's agenda while preaching a prosperity gospel that does not represent nor reflect the love of Jesus.

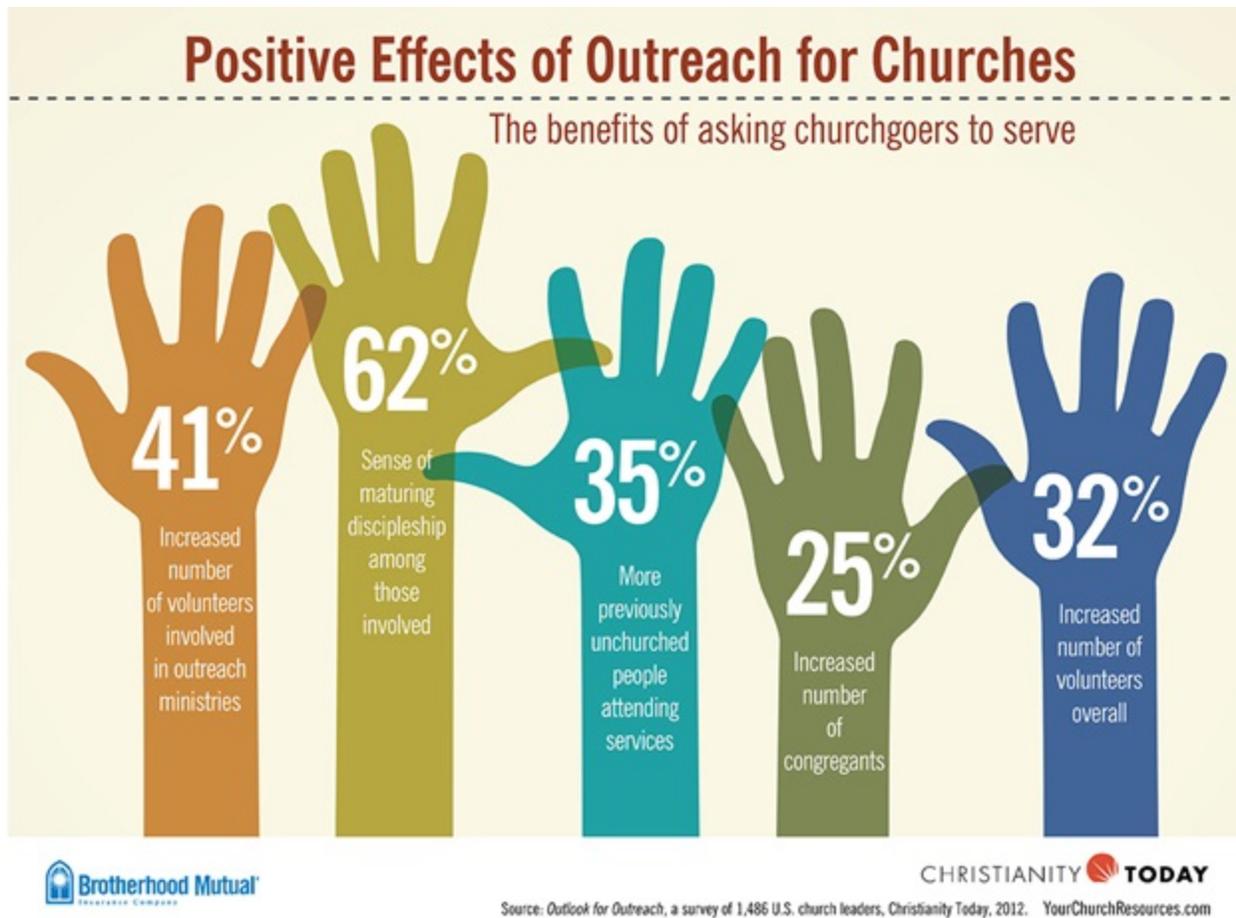
For such a time as this, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, must continue to carry out the vision of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, seeking out and saving the lost, all by the grace of God, while following the blueprint of Jesus.

We must not rest on the laurels of our past. Yes, the A.M.E. church, played a vital role in the Civil Rights movement but we must rise to the occasion and find our collective voice because the history of our past is sure to repeat itself if we don't.

The Council of Bishops have been the collective voice (for the Connectional Church) and has spoken out against inequality and have fought for social justice on many levels. Locally, we have held meetings, workshops and have denounced the injustices that have taken place across the country, however the communities that we serve must reap a more bountiful harvest based on meeting their needs and meeting them where they are. The church must take its place back in the village where the occupants come to find solace, which in the past has been the church.

The state of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) is such that we have resorted to accepting this critique that we are dead and have move towards writing our own obituary. Many are quick to lament over empty pews but minimally offer consistent outreach ministry to bring new souls into the fold. We talk about youth leaving the church but we do very little by way of inclusion and support that produces a harvest of retention to ensure continued growth and longevity. The local church and its members cannot accept the declaration of death and has move toward securing the fellowship hall for the repast. Yes, Satan comes to kill, steal and destroy but we serve a God who revives, renews and restores. We must remember that in spite of what things may look like, God is still in control.

Statistics show that there are positive benefits to the church when it offers ministries based on identified needs in the community in which it serves. In order to strengthen what remains we must become intentional in creating outreach ministries that not only benefit those on the inside of the church but those on the fringes as wells.



In the article *Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?* By Gina E Rider, researchers found that 38 percent of Christians ages 18 to 25 have significantly doubted their faith. At the age of 15, 57 percent said they were less active in church and 59 percent have dropped out altogether. According to *You Lost Me*, one in four 18 to 29-year-olds said, “Christians demonize everything outside of the church.” And one in three believes “church is boring.” We must find a way to bridge the gap and bring our youth back into the fold.

People are drawn to ministries that meet their basic human needs as well as their spiritual needs and if we offer our youth a seat at the table when planning the work

then at that time their desires can be made known and effective strategies can develop programs that will address both issues raised.

Recommendations:

- Assess the needs of not only those in our church but assess the needs of the those who live within the communities we serve, tap into resources both inside and outside of the church. This will allow churches to create outreach ministries that benefit both the church and the community. Encourage partnerships between the smaller churches within the community to work in concert to meet the needs of the people.

- Spend more time intentionally developing youth ministry offerings that are specific to their needs. We must also include them in the planning process as a means to allow them ownership while building them up spiritually. Meeting the ministry needs of the youth requires that we talk with them and allow them to build and flex their spiritual muscles within the church body of Christ. We must recognize that everyone is vital to the success of the church.

- We continue to seek our brethren and live out the mandate “to love our neighbor as ourselves” in everything that we do and say and be conscious of the fact that our language must convey the love of Christ both in the church and the community while providing inclusive and effective ministries that combats the evangelicals misinterpretation of God’s word. When we are successful in our efforts the local church will again be the voice, the heart and spiritual solace for the village the way God intended.

Humbly Submitted:

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