

The Black Church: In relentless pursuit of the things of God

Written by Timothy Houston
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This week, the Minnesota Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) celebrates 90 years of ministry and service to our community. Congratulations go out to Bishop Fred W. Washington and State Supervisor Patricia Hayes. The theme for this year's celebration is *"In Relentless pursuit of the things of God."* This theme is both timely and relevant. Life has a definite beginning and an end, and in between it is the pursuit of God and His purpose for our lives. Having spent my entire life as a COGIC member, and almost 30 years in ministry, I am personally aware of the importance of relentless pursuit. As I continue this pursuit, let me remind you of how important the black church has been to our community and this country.

First, the black church has had a major role in shaping our society. Every significant movement in our community has its roots in the black church. From the early freedom movement to the most recent civil rights and equality movement, all work through the African American churches. From abolitionists Fredrick Douglas, who taught plantation slaves to read during his Sunday school class, to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who championed the civil rights movement through the pulpit, the black church, was instrumental in its success. If you look back through American history, you will see that every significant human rights initiative had its beginnings in the black church. This is our legacy.

Next, the black church has had a major role in shaping our families. The community is a collection of families, and the long term effects of slavery, racism, and discrimination has negatively impacted their spiritual and emotional health. Without the church as a healthy outlet to this negative spiritual and emotional energy, people will express themselves in unhealthy ways and the family as a whole will suffer. When this happens, drugs and alcohol become the coping mechanisms of choice. Everyday, the church stands as a beacon of light and hope. Here in Minnesota, for 90 years, the Minnesota Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Church of God in Christ has seen to the spiritual, emotionally, physical, and financial needs of the people because in church, there is help. This is our heritage.

Finally, the black church has had a major role in shaping us as individuals. Our view of community is shaped by our sense of self. When a man's heart is not right, the community as a whole is at risk. The church is the only entity truly qualified by God to deal with the heart or spirit of a person. It is at church that we learned that love conquers hate, and that we must do unto others as we would them to do to us. There we learned that personal victories always proceed public victories, and being honest with self supersedes being honest with others. Everyday, someone goes to church to present themselves to God so that He can transform their life for the better because in church there is hope. This is our faith.

The African American Church has positively impacted our community, families, and lives. It is my honor as member of the Minnesota Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Church of God in Christ to invite you to celebrate with us. Services will be held at North Central University, 910 Elliot Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55404. It is my hope that you receive beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and that you might be called the trees of righteousness (Isaiah 61:3). Please join us in relentless pursuit of the things of God because in church, there is power. "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers" (3 John 1:2). This is our prayer.

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