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Edward Moultrie, Jr Date

Mobilizing St. Paul C.M.E. Church, and the African American Church to Do Prison Ministry:

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Abstract

Mobilizing St. Paul C.M.E. Church, and the African American Church to Do Prison Ministry:

By Edward Moultrie, Jr.

Being a chaplain in the South Carolina Department of Corrections, more so at the Lieber Correctional Institution. Which is a majority African American Prison, what I noticed over the years, was there were not a lot of African American churches that were not coming into the institution to do ministry. As a prison chaplain and pastor of a Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, I bought this as a challenge to the St. Paul Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, to develop a prison ministry. My end hope and goal will be that black Methodism will develop prison ministry as part of their National Evangelism Department within their general department.

Notes:

Mobilizing St. Paul C.M.E. Church, and the African American Church to Do Prison Ministry:

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Mobilizing St. Paul C.M.E. Church, and the African American Church to Do Prison Ministry

Introduction

I have given so much thought to the subject that I am writing about, and I pray that this will be helpful and useful in some way that will change how we view the ministry of the black church. The change that is often needed to give hope to a people includes giving precious time to those who are in a hopeless state of being.

There is a lack of African American churches entering the prison system doing prison ministry to a predominantly black population, generally, and more specifically at Lieber Correctional Institute, where I serve as chaplain. The lack of a black religious presence is a problem because it is visible to the black inmates who see the lack of black churches represented as volunteers within the Department of Corrections and at the prison. Inmates have expressed concern about this because racial and cultural representation of volunteers is essential to their incarceration experience. Since such representation will serve to bring normalcy and emotional support to their abnormal situation, the black church is needed and wanted in prison ministry. When considering this subject matter, there are a few things that I will raise concerning the problem of mass incarceration of black people and the lack of responses from the black church. This concern, I intend to bring to the forefront of my research.

The Problem: Mass Incarceration

In trying to address the problem, there is an inner need to look at the issue. Mobilizing black churches to do prison ministry is the problem but the issue that causes the problem is the mass incarceration of men of color. Being a man of color born in the inner city of Jersey City,

New Jersey, to Edward & Alemina Moultrie, one could say that I, or should I say we, my siblings have witnessed and are afraid to talk about prison. However, for this project, because it deals primarily with the black male, my focus will be on my brother Quentin and me.

***My Story*: Black Men as Endangered Species**

Quentin and I were born with the odds stacked against us. It has nothing to do with the fact that we were not born rich; it has nothing to do with the fact that I was even born with a speech impediment. The odds were not in our favor simply because we were born as black and male babies. Moses, in the Bible, was born a Hebrew, and because he was Hebrew, all Hebrew boys were to be drowned at birth because of their nationality. Quentin and I were stamped from the beginning because of our race! meaning we were born in a place where young black boys were destined for jail or the graveyard. Most times, black boys in the inner city did not expect to live to become men. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs refers to an endangered species according to Webster as "a class of individuals having common attributes and designated by a common name…. {which is} in danger or peril of probable harm or loss." The black male is considered an endangered species and in danger of probable harm or loss. [1]

My brother and I were vulnerable in our community; however, we did not know we were in danger. While we were living in a middle-class neighborhood in the inner city, many blacks were not as blessed as we were. We lived in a lovely house, and Dad had an excellent job by day and pastored a church, while Mom served us well as a housewife and mother, providing loving

[1] Jewelle Taylor Gibbs. *YOUNG, BLACK, AND MALE IN AMERICA: An Endangered Species.* Edited by Jewelle Taylor Gibbs. Westport, CT, Connecticut: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1991), 35.

support to all. We had our lunch prepared every day, but when we walked home from school, we were still in danger of probable harm or loss.

Now that I have had time to reflect while working on my project, it is becoming clear how we are an endangered species. I recall that while in our Village, which some referred to as the hood, police officers would often drive around our area. While thankful for law enforcement, I would think to myself, "Why is there always law enforcement in our neighborhood? What's going on? Was it that someone had done something wrong? Most of the time, some young black males would become a statistic of being an endangered species. In our neighborhood, young black males sold drugs, and many times, the buyers would be white men and women. While I have always been opposed to this fast-money-making trade, I became more against it when they sold drugs to these men and women. I would say, "It is a set-up because the people you are selling to may be undercover officers."

Secondly, the high school we attended was an all-black high school located near the police station in an all-black neighborhood. That police station near my high school was a symbol to us young black males that we had a choice to either get our education or you would be a statistic of dying young or be a part of mass incarceration. When looking at the mass incarceration of black males, it is evident that it has become and still is an epidemic here in America. Joycelyn M. Pollock indicates that is somewhat to be expected. She goes on to write, "One cannot discuss imprisonment without mentioning the disproportional number of minorities in the prison population. The incarceration rate for blacks is six times that for whites, and the rate for Hispanics.

The question that I raise when considering this statistic is simply this: Is this done by design? Is there one set of laws for one group over another, especially when a white man is

wrong versus when a black man is wrong? Is there more compassion for white men, while merciless eyes are on the black man when he is wrong?

One could say that Lady Justice could be blindfolded when it comes to one particular race. In contrast, when it comes to the minority, the blindfold is removed to assure that the minority is given what society deems fit for him and his crime. Another thought could be that society deems it fitting for black men not to have a place at the table except a place among the numbers in prisons across this fruited plain. Mass incarceration is what Michelle Alexander calls "The New Jim Crow" in her book. There are a few things that she addresses in this new-age contemporary book about the results of slavery–one is mass incarceration. First, the author says, "I understood the problems plaguing poor communities of color, including problems associated with crime and rising incarceration rates, to be a function of poverty and lack of access to quality education- the continuing legacy of slavery and Jim Crow."[2]

Problematizing Mass Incarceration: Racialized Social Control

Michelle Alexander goes on to share that mass incarceration in the United States had emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow[3]. When we think of mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow, Pollock shares with us that in the South, prisons may still be considered prison farms with thousands of acres of crops, often cotton. Guards on horseback carrying rifles

[2] Jewelle Taylor Gibbs. *YOUNG, BLACK, AND MALE IN AMERICA: An Endangered Species.* Edited by Jewelle Taylor Gibbs. Westport, CT, Connecticut: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1991), 35.

[3] IBID 30

still watch over inmates who are taken out to the fields each morning in wagons pulled by tractors.[4]

In the prison where I serve as the senior chaplain, Lieber Correctional Institution, the men who are a part of the mass incarceration may not be in the hot cotton fields. However, these men are working for only $1.25. They work for the tire retreading plant that provides tires for school buses around the state. Mass incarceration has taken on the face of what Jim Crow was in the southern states of America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that enforced racial segregation. This law remained enforced by Southern laws until 1965. It was kept in place by southern Democrat-dominated state legislatures to disenfranchise and remove political and economic gains made by African Americans during the Reconstruction era.

Many presidents gave a boost to the idea of black men serving more time than one should for the crime committed when the war on drugs became a big concern. I am not suggesting that it should not have been concerning; however, I am suggesting that it became a big concern in the Reagan administration. The war on drugs proved popular among key white voters, particularly whites who remained resentful of black progress, civil rights enforcement, and affirmative action.[5]

Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton enthusiastically embraced the drug war. They increased the transfer of military equipment, technology, and training to local enforcement,

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[4] Joycelyn M. Pollock *PRISONS AND PRISON LIFE: Costs and Consequences.* Second. Vol. 2nd ed. San Marcos, Texas: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42.

[5] Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness.* Revised Edition. Edited by The New Press. New York City, New York: The New Press, 2010), 36.

contingent, of course, on the willingness of agencies to prioritize drug law enforcement and concentrate resources on arrests for illegal drugs. [OBJ]

Today, the political fanfare and the vehement, racialized rhetoric regarding crime and drugs are no longer necessary. Mass incarceration has been normalized, and all racial stereotypes and assumptions that caused the system are now embraced (or at least internalized) by people of all colors, from all walks of life, and in every major political party. We may wonder aloud, "Where have the black men gone?" But deep down, we already know. It is simply taken for granted that in cities like Baltimore and Chicago, the vast majority of young black men are currently under the control of the criminal justice system or branded criminals for life.[6]

When we look at mass incarceration, one can say that it has become a Crisis in the Village, as Robert M. Franklin talks about in his book. Dr. Franklin shares that African American communities are facing serious challenges. So are non-African American Communities. America is a nation of "villages', neighborhoods, and larger groupings, many of which are in crisis.[7]

The Benefits of the 'Village': Hedging against Mass Incarceration

Growing up on Dwight Street in Jersey City, New Jersey, we were part of a "village" that made us less likely to number among the mass incarcerated. Not to say that it could not have happened; however, our mom and dad were always there and were our role models for living. They allowed the "village" (meaning the grown people our parents knew had our best interest in mind) to help raise or look out for us. Those children that were not privy to role model "village"

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[6] Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness.* Revised Edition. Edited by The New Press. New York City, New York: The New Press, 2010), 39.

[7] Robert M. Franklin. *Crisis In The Village Restoring Hope In African American Communities.* Edited by Robert M. Franklin. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 22.

did not have a successful ending as we did. Their presence was a constant reminder to us that they did not want us to be a statistic or follow the crowd in doing wrong, causing us to end up as a mass incarceration statistic. Wherever we went, we knew their eyes were on us, and if we did something out of the way, the elders would say something to us right then and there. They still informed our parents, Edward and Alemina, of what we did, and we could expect additional admonition, if we were caught doing something that we were not supposed to be doing.
We were blessed back then, and we did not know it. All we thought at the time was that these people were getting us in deeper trouble with our parents. However, they told us that they did not want us to be a part of the statistics and that they cared. Without their concern for my brother and me, this could have meant a mass incarceration statistic.

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton called attention to these concerns in her celebrated book. She borrowed an African Proverb's evocative metaphor of "village" to remind us, all, of the collective responsibilities of every "village."[8] While other of our black counterparts experienced incarceration due to not having a "village," my brother and I strived without going to prison. When I think of the "village," I must talk about the two key people in my "village," my mom and dad. My father was the disciplinarian in our "village", our father had that tough love, he did not mind putting us in line when we got beside ourselves, at one point I thought that dad was a mean man, but I sat back and watch our dad to test that thinking.

Doing so, I realize he provided for us by making sure that we had what we needed. Dad was and still is a great provider. For thirty-two years dad got up at 4:30 to go to work on the assembly line at Ford Motor Company in Edison N.J., where no cars left his area without his

[8] Robert M. Franklin. *Crisis In The Village Restoring Hope In African American Communities.* Edited by Robert M. Franklin. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 25.

stamp of approval. Then, he would come home shower, eat, and head to church. We would go to the church he pastored in New York. Observing his work ethic, I wanted to be just like my dad. Our mother was and still is the very loving supportive one in the "village." Mom would get us up early to give us breakfast before she walked us to school. When we got out of school for lunch, she would have our lunch ready and then walk us back to school, even in the snow. She was our first teacher, and she made special efforts to help me. When I could not understand my lesson, I would cry and she would cry right with me, until I understood the assignment. Even with a speech impediment, I wanted to learn more; the impediment would not stop me, resulting in my being the first of my siblings to obtain a college degree, and beyond.

When "Villages" Vanish, Leaving Sole Care Takers—The Women

Marian Wright Edelman and the Children's Defense Fund says, "Neighborhoods become 'villages' when all of the adults step up to show care and concern for all children. Villages need grown-ups. Moreover, the hard and slow work of healing and reconciling broken people and fractured relationships that restore larger institutions must begin with all people and all color."[9] The black family is experiencing a significant setback with mass incarceration; it is destroying the black family. Mass incarceration is taking away dignity and pride from many communities by removing African American men from their families at an all-time alarming rate. It leaves children without a father, wives without husbands, and/or causes them to leave behind significant other responsible, leaving loved ones (i.e., women) to raise a family alone. The question has

[9] IBID), 27.

often been asked, where have all the black men gone? This question is common among black women who are frustrated about finding life partners.[10]

Black Men and Mass Incarceration, Today

More African American adult men are under correctional control today, either in prison or jail or on probation or parole, than they were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War. The mass incarceration of people of color is a big part of the reason that a black child born today is less likely to be raised by both parents versus a black child who was born during slavery.[11] The absence of black fathers from families across America is not simply a function of laziness, immaturity, or too much time watching Sports Center. Thousands of black men have disappeared into prisons and jails, locked away for drug crimes that are largely ignored especially when the same crimes are committed by whites.[12] Their absence from the home has left a void and affects the family greatly.

However, we must again have the mindset that we must return to the old landmark, where it takes a "village". Not only does it take a town, but it is also going to take one of the oldest institutions, the black church, to speak with a loud voice against mass incarceration.

Until this nation can put an end to the masses of black men incarcerated, we must allow those who are behind the prison wall to know that there is hope for them. This hope for many can come from faith, their expression of faith, and care from the religious community.

I am reminded that even though you can be trying to do "the right thing," as in the words of Spike Lee, sometimes you can be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or you could be

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[10] Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness.* Revised Edition. Edited by The New Press. New York City, New York: The New Press, 2010), 50.

[11] IBID), .180

[12] IBID), .180

minding your own business, yet something unfortunate could come your way. In 1991, after working overnight at the K-Mart in our city, I was making my walk home when two cars of police officers, four plainclothes, and two uniform officers walked up on me, and each one had guns drawn. They pointed the guns at me, looked at me, and commanded that I put my hands in the air. The plainclothes police officers wanted to know what was going on. I was told, "Oh, you fit the description of who we are looking for." Fortunately for me, one of the officers shared with the others that he knew me from K-mart and knew that I was not the guy who was being sought. What if he did not know me? What if, by chance, I had done something dumb because I was scared as hell? What if I were framed implicating me in wrongdoing? I could have become part of the mass incarceration problem and without cause! Today, as I reflect on it, if that one officer did not know me and I made one wrong move, perhaps I could have been Eric Garner, Treyon Martin, Walter Scott, or George Floyd. The situation and stories are real.

The Work of a Chaplain at Lieber Correctional Institution: Spiritual

At the Lieber Correctional Institution, when walking the yard or going into the housing units, one of the biggest questions I ask the men I am watching over is about their spiritual needs and, "How did you get here? Why are you here?" Most of them share that they are in the system for either selling or trafficking drugs and getting caught repeatedly in either crime until they get prison time. Lieber is a level three institution in South Carolina, the highest level an institution can be within the state of South Carolina. It is at Lieber that we have a population of 640 residents (inmates); sadly, 464 out of the 640 are men of color.[13]

[13] South Carolina Department of Corrections. *Profile of inmates in institutionsl count.* June Wednesday, 2022. https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/handle/10827/35506 (accessed September Wednesday, 2023).

The average inmate age profile is 34, with a sentence of four years to life. Most of them are high school dropouts or lack a G.E.D. and come from an impoverished and broken family. Many who a statistic of mass incarceration at Lieber have mental health diagnoses. Sadly, the inmates do not get the proper care that they need as drug users and unemployed. Very often, prisoners lack communication skills, problem-solving, character, life skills, decision-making, and disciplinary skills.[14]

As one who works in the system who works with these men who are in this system that is usually the case. We need a system that removes the blindfold from Lady Justice so that we see justice for all, instead of justice for some—those whom we choose it for.

The Project Focus: Background

Over the past seven years I have had the opportunity to be employed by the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), serving as an assistant chaplain for two years and now a senior clinical chaplain at the Lieber Correctional Institution in Ridgeville, S.C.

As a Senior Clinical Chaplain, one of my duties is to process volunteers who enter the institution and the groups that provide services to the inmate population. More than half of the inmate population are men of color. Over half of the volunteer groups that come into the chapel are Christians who help us provide either a Bible study, Christian worship, or furnish hygiene items. While I am grateful for the volunteers that enter to do ministry, I am also saddened that out of the three hundred and forty-six volunteers, none are from the black church. Many of these

[14] South Carolina Department of Corrections. *Profile of Inmates in Institutional Count.* June Wednesday, 2022. https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/handle/10827/35506 (accessed September Wednesday, 2023).

churches have African Americans who are a part of their group, or what I call a "face in the crowd" in order to show diversity; however, none of the groups are from a predominantly African American church. The lack of black church volunteers has caused me to ask 'Why?" and has also prompted my research into why this is.

In my findings from Lifewayresearch.com, reasons, why there is a lack of prison ministries in the black church or the lack of volunteers to do ministry in a prison setting from the African American church, is that:

- 65% lack leaders who want to be a volunteer leader,
- 62% lack training for this type of ministry,
- 48% lack finances,
- 40% do not know where to start in prison ministry, and
- 29% of the church have too many other ministries that they are doing.
- Another reason that saddens me is that 21% do not see a need for the prison ministry.[15]

While looking at this survey from Lifeway, I found support for these statistics in my own personal and informal research. For instance, the lack of prison ministries or volunteerism around prison ministry in the black church is low funding and a mindset not to do it. The Black church focus tends to be internal with issues and concerns inside the church and community. I will share a few interviews with other African American chaplains from SCDC within the department and an off-the-recorder interview with an inmate currently in the department. Yet, where do we go from here?

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[15] Bob Smietana 3. *LifeWayResearch.com*. [Online]Tuesday September 2018. [Cited: Thursday September 2023.]1,000 surverys 95%confidence. http://www.lifeWayResearch.com .

A second part of this project that I have not covered in this writing but will be the basis of my future work will be to develop a “how-to manual” for becoming a volunteer, as well as the do’s and don’ts of ministering to an incarcerated population from a black church perspective. Two things helped me to develop my passion and goal of mobilizing St. Paul Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church to do prison ministry. First, I adhered to my denomination's social creed and history, the Christian Methodist Episcopal church has helped me develop my passion. Our creed says, “We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power and love, whose mercy is over all His works, and whose will is ever directed to His children's good.” Secondly, in my local congregation, the St. Paul C.M.E. Church, we have some Ex-offenders (former prison inmates) and family members of inmates currently serving prison time. I intend to share some findings from a survey disseminated with the membership of the St. Paul C.M.E. church in Walterboro, S.C., including interviews from both family members of inmates and interviews from an ex-offender.

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church: History

Out of the predominantly black Methodist churches historically founded by black people in America: African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E), African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E. Zion) Church, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (formerly the Colored Methodist Episcopal church), the baby of the three is the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church. This tender plant, the C.M.E. Church, as it has often been called, is now a plant that has grown to be a tree that has produced many fruits and continues to contribute to the World and affect our daily lives in the community. Historian Othal Hawthorne Lakey shares in his book that the

C.M.E. Church came into existence out of the context of American slavery, the tumultuous aftermath of the Civil War, and the problems of the Reconstruction Era.[16]

The church was organized on December 16, 1870, as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America. By 1930, the "in America" had dropped from the name, and in May 1954, the denomination changed to the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.[17] At its inception, the C.M.E. Church consisted of Negroes who, while enslaved people, had been members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South but who, dependent upon their freedom, requested from the church of which they had been members to form their own separate and independent religious organization.

The story of Colored Methodism is unique and captivating. Consider formerly enslaved people and former enslavers in the midst of a newfound freedom for the one, bitter defeat for the other freedom, sitting down together trying to decide how they could best preserve the church. Forty-one men, only five years removed from the shackles of slavery, organized their religious denomination in six days. They were poor and illiterate but determined black preachers traveling throughout the South (and beyond), building their houses of worship.[18]

It was in Jackson, Tennessee, that a "little company of men of heroic mold" met on December 16, 1870, at the First Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Those who came together for change in Jackson that December assembled under the authority of the 1866 and 1870

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[16] Othal Hawthorne Lakey. "The History of The CME Church." Chap. XVII in *The History Of The CME Church*, by Othal Hawthorne Lakey, edited by William E. George, 756. Memphis, Tennessee: CME Publishing House, 1996), 15.

[17] IBID, 1996), 15.

[18] Othal Hawthorne Lakey. "The History of The CME Church." Chap. XVII in *The History Of The CME Church*, by Othal Hawthorne Lakey, edited by William E. George, 756. Memphis, Tennessee: CME Publishing House, 1996), 15.

general conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They had a plan of action to form a church that has now been in existence for over one hundred and fifty-three years. Their purpose was to organize a separate and independent church for colored persons who had been members of that church. At the same time, they were enslaved and chose to remain in it to get their independent church upon the authority and goodwill of the White church.[19] The religious taboos and practices of White Christians in the South were substantially unchanged by the outcome of the Civil War. African Americans were still considered less than human, whether inside or outside of the church. Some whites saw the breakup of slavery as sufficient reason to be done with the inconvenience of the black constituency.[20]

While the more general sentiment was for the retention of black membership, there was no room for the expectation that they would be afforded anything other than the conventional status of subservience and segregation in all significant aspects of church life.[21] What would help present-day churches make their decision to do prison ministry is if these black churches realize that their very history makes them ideal to serve the incarcerated black populations.

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church: Today

Although the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church has grown over the years, it remains the smallest of the three black Methodist denominations, having a national constituency with a membership in 1989 of 900,000 now in 2023, at 1,000,000,000 in the United States and 75,000

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[19] IBID,1996), 15.

[20] C.Eric Lincoln & Lawrence H. Mamiya. "The Black Church In the African American Experience." Chap. three in *The Black Church in The African American Experience*, by C.Eric Lincoln &Lawrence H.Mamiya, 519. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), 61.

[21] C.Eric Lincoln & Lawrence H. Mamiya. "The Black Church In the African American Experience." Chap. three in *The Black Church in The African American Experience*, by C.Eric Lincoln &Lawrence H.Mamiya, 519. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), 61.

overseas. Like the A.M.E. church, the C.M.E. church has more churches than clergy. They also have church congregations of similar size, averaging 285 members. The national budget is $4,908,100.[22]

Both the C.M.E. church's local and national organizations closely follow the established model of Methodism. The General Conference, which meets every four years, is the national legislative body of the church. Its delegates, who by law must be half lay members and half ministers, consist of representatives from all the annual conferences. The Conference is presided over by the bishops on a rotating basis. The College of Bishops then meets twice a year to carry out the actions of the General Conference.[23]

General departments implement the program of the national church. Each department is designed to engage in meaningful ministries that can build upon the vision and mission of the denomination and within these departments have mandates to do ministry and to help meet the needs of the community, especially those who are impacted by the unfairness of the greater society. Thus, each board or department makes the church and its ministry more meaningful to reach the masses of people within the global world. The departments are administered by general secretaries, who are general officers of the church elected by the General Conference, the members of the department boards, along with other representatives from each departmental board, and representatives from each episcopal district who are apportioned based on population, comprise the General Connectional Board.[24]

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[22] IBID 1990), 61.
[23] IBID 1990), 61.
[24] C.Eric Lincoln & Lawrence H.Mamiya. "The Black Church In the African American Experience." Chap. three in *The Black Church in The African American Experience*, by C.Eric Lincoln &Lawrence H.Mamiya, 519. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990. 64

Each board comprises a bishop designated by the College of Bishops as the chairman or chairwoman and one representative from each episcopal district. This board, which meets once a year to coordinate and supervise the departments and generally carry on the work of the church, has several committees and commissions, each chaired by a bishop: Long-Range Planning, Hymnal and Ritual, Ecumenical Affairs, Archive, Chaplains, and Legislative Review.[25]

The C.M.E. Church has always set its sights on liberation, education, and salvation. Many leaders, past and present, of the C.M.E. Church have participated in the cause of liberation. Having seen many of the church leaders who have been at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, one person that comes to my mind was a pastor of the C.M.E. Church who could pass for white; however, he had albinism, but in many photographs in the movement he would be only identified as the white man. However, that man was later identified as Rev. Dr. Jesse Douglas—a black man. Dr. King would often request that Rev. Douglas sing before he spoke.

Let me add that many years later, I was his pastor when I served at the Logan Chapel C.M.E. Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The C.M.E. church would also claim a former president of Rainbow Push, retired Bishop Henry Williamson. The church would also have persons present and past to serve on the national board of the NAACP such as the late Bishop William Graves and now Bishop Marvin Frank Thomas. Each of these leaders proactively do ministry and good deeds outside of the church.

The C.M.E. Church is powerful in educating the minds of young people; this has always been a factor within the mission of the church, dating back to the founding of the church, which was not only the place of worship but also the place of education. The C.M.E. church supports

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[25] IBID 1990), 65.

five colleges: Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee; Texas College, Tyler, Texas; Miles College, Birmingham, Alabama; Mississippi Industrial College, which is now closed; Pain College in Augusta, Georgia, which is co-owned between the C.M.E. church, and the United Methodist church and the Phillips School of Theology, affiliated with the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

The national headquarters for the denomination is in Memphis, TN. Memphis is also the location of the C.M.E. Publishing House and the William H. Miles Bookstore. The C.M.E. Church stands strongly on education, as well as on the facts of salvation. This church also stands firm on the social creed that allows us to take a deeper look at what the church stands upon, what the church stands for, and the issues that are facing the nations and the global world.

The concern of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church for the social well-being of humankind springs from the act of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospel, and from the life and witness of John Wesley and other fathers of Methodism who ministered to the physical, intellectual, and social needs to the people to whom they preached the gospel of personal redemption.[26]

The interest and activity of the CME church in the improvement of the human condition parallels the very history of our church. The policy of active participation in solving social problems has been unrestricted to literary and journalistic endeavors. It can be seen in the individual contributions of some of our church leaders throughout its long history. It can be seen

[26] THE 2018 General Conference The Book Of Discipline. Conference 2018 General The book auth.*THe 2018 Book Of Discipline Of The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*. Memphis, The CME Publishing House, 2018), 440.

in those official programs and practices at the local, regional, and national levels that were designed to eradicate crime, disease, ignorance, poverty, and racial injustice.

The theological part of the social creed stems from our belief that the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church is a part of the body of Christ and must express itself in the world in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught us many things by word and example: to be concerned for the welfare and the well-being of others, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to be concerned for justice. For the church to be silent in the face of need, injustice, and exploitation is to deny the Lord of the church.

We believe that whatever is of interest and concern to the people—physically, intellectually, socially, economically, and politically—should also be of interest and concern to the Church. Primary among such concerns is stressing the family as the foundational Institution of care and nurture. The purpose of our worship is to prepare the participants for their divinely ordained redemptive witness in every place and circumstance.[27] Thus, these are the reasons why the C.M.E. church is well poised to develop a prison ministry.

The C.M.E. Church is a powerful in educating the minds of young people by supporting colleges. It has a publishing company that propels the church to be proactive in fighting illiteracy. Perhaps the most important reason C.M.E. is poised to develop a prison ministry is the deep devotion to sharing the teachings of Jesus Christ. Salvation is top on their check-off list of love for humankind.

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[27] THE 2018 General Conference The Book Of Discipline. Conference 2018 General The book auth.*The 2018 Book Of Discipline Of The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*. Memphis, The CME Publishing House, 2018), 440.

St. Paul C.M.E. Church: Surveying the Landscape for Prison Ministry

I am introducing prison ministry to the St. Paul C.M.E. Church, located in Walterboro, SC. Walterboro is a city in Colleton County, South Carolina, United States. The city's population was 5,398 at the 2010 census. It is the county seat of Colleton County. Walterboro is located 48 miles (77 km) west of Charleston and is located near the ACE Basin region in the South Carolina Lowcountry. The average attendance is between 50 and 100 on any given Sunday, the age range of the membership is from 1 to 90, and many of the members live right in that local community, the Ritter community. Most of the members have served in the community for 30 to forty years. Their occupations range from working in the school district to the nursing home to textile industries.

St. Paul Christian Methodist Episcopal Church grew out of an idea from a group of six men who first came together in the 1860s. These men were Nep Pringle, John Campbell, Richard Jerido, Joe Reid, Luther Gethers, and Isaac Polite. The very first congregation met from house to house and started as the first mission of St. Paul C. M. E. church. Later, they held meetings in a bush-type structure—the roof was made with hand-carved wood. During this time, people would come to worship, bring tents, pitch them, and stay all night. In the early 1900s, the first frame church was built under the pastoral leadership of Reverend Anderson, Reverend Reid, and Reverend Poor.

During the next ten years, St. Paul grew rapidly in strength and membership. Reverend Blunt, Reverend Busken, and Reverend Gowdy came to the congregation, and many members were added to the church. These pastors are also remembered for their outstanding service to the community. For over 155 years, St. Paul has been a beacon of hope on Ritter Road, where people

knew that the church would be a place of refuge. By providing their time, services, and resources, St. Paul has offered the community hope.

Over the many years, St. Paul has stood for what was right. St. Paul's membership includes many middle-class parishioners, who work in all walks of life from the classroom to the factories. Some are retired and others receive Supplemental Security Income. Many in the congregation have a high school education and many of their children and grandchildren are college educated. St. Paul is a very resourceful church that does not mind meeting the needs of those within the church and the community.

Many members in St. Paul live in dwellings they were raised in or homes of their own. In August 2022, Reverend Edward Moultrie, Jr. was assigned as the new pastor. Significant church improvements have begun, and the church membership has been revitalized. A primary focus has been on the youth and young adults of the church. This has been a focus because young adults are more apt to do ministry or will dare to do new and innovative ministry when older members may not be so inclined to do so.

Being employed by the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) as a Senior Chaplain with Lieber Correctional Institution, I shared with St. Paul the idea of developing a prison ministry. Creating a prison ministry in a historic black church setting has been on my heart since I found out that there is a lack of black churches doing volunteer ministry at this Institution; in fact, in most of the other institutions of SCDC.

To determine the feasibility of starting a prison ministry, I did a few things. One was to get my board's advice on whether this would be a project the church would be willing to undertake. On Sunday, August 13, we distributed surveys to the membership; a copy of the survey's questions is attached. The responses to the surveys were very insightful. We passed out

over one hundred surveys and got an overall view from them. For instance, no one had ever proposed doing a prison ministry at St. Paul, as a meaningful ministry. For others, they thought that ministry was only isolated to the local church and the local congregation and did not stretch beyond the walls of the church.

Some wanted to know how much money it would be to undertake this ministry; while others were fearful of going to an unfamiliar, scary place, hearing the doors closing, and being locked in as visitors, never come out. Among the members of St. Paul are a few faithful who have loved ones, namely grandchildren who are in prison. To bring this ministry to fruition has given them renewed hope as a family knowing that the church, they love is on the verge of taking a leap of faith to do prison ministry, and that this ministry will impact their loved ones because it is their church.

The Fabric of the Correctional System: The Interviews

We are trying to get to the place of doing this as an outreach ministry since I am a pastor and a prison chaplain. To find out where others who are part of the fabric of the correctional system stand, I sought out conversations with them. With full cooperation, I was able to interview four individuals.

Two of the four are two former inmates who are members of St. Paul. One was released on July 30, 2023, and the other was released on November 1, 2023. Though I interviewed two, I have only included one of the two interviews, here. The following interview is from one former inmate and church member whose mother has remained an active member of the church, and although the other inmate's interview is not included, that inmate's grandmother is also a very active member of St. Paul.

After this, I had the opportunity to interview two of my colleagues, one of whom was a Senior Chaplain at Lee Correctional Institution, who experienced, on Easter Sunday evening four years ago, inmates killed in a gang riot, and many more injured, in his active role as a chaplain, during that time. The other chaplain is the Regional Chaplain, who is my boss. I have only included one of the two interviews here.

Sterling's Interview

The first former inmate, whose first name I will use, is Sterling. Sterling was committed for a crime that landed him in prison for twelve years. Sterling's mother and nieces are very active members of St. Paul. The first time that I met Sterling was when he came to the chapel at the prison to get some hygiene items. This is what most of the inmates do because we have a lot of the "good stuff," as the inmates call it, at the chapel (i.e., Dove, Irish Spring, Coast, etc.) that mainly the White church donates.

At the time, I did not know that Sterling was a member of St. Paul. The only thing that I knew was that his mother, who worked as a correctional officer at a jail in Walterboro, South Carolina, told me that her son was in prison at Lieber Correctional Institution and that he would soon be coming home after twelve years. About two months later, Sterling walked into the church one Sunday while I was preaching.

After that service, I found out that Sterling was indeed one of my inmates whom I have seen in the yard often. Of course, if I had known that it was him, I would have done what I do for other church members like making sure everything is going well with them and assuring them that they were as safe as possible in a prison setting while also making sure they call their family, for a few seconds of conversation.

The Interview with St. Paul C.M.E., A Church Member Who Was In Prison For 13 Years

Chaplain Moultrie: Sterling, thank you for the interview. I have a few questions for you.

Sterling: Hey, boss man, sure, I am delighted to share with you.

Chaplain Moultrie: How Long have you been with St. Paul?

Sterling: From a child, my grandmother, now my mother.

Chaplain Moultrie: OK, tell me about your time in prison. Why did you go in for?

Sterling: (smile on his face) Man, it was hell!! I was in for 13 years for kidnapping, armed robbery, and attempted murder.

Chaplain Moultrie: What do you mean it was hell?

Sterling: You are told what to do when you go into your room, the food is bad, and the shit will make you sick!

Chaplain Moultrie: Did you ever get sick inside.

Sterling: Yep, I got sick a few times.

Chaplain Moultrie: Well, I am glad that you got better. I tell every man who gets out, the first thing that needs to be done is to go and get a complete physical.

Sterling: True that.

Chaplain Moultrie: Did you take part in any program, or church while you were in prison?

Sterling: Not really, however I did work in the chapel.

Chaplain Moultrie: How did that make you feel?

Sterling: It gave me free space to think.

Moultrie: What did you think about it?

Sterling: Life, the fact that I was a part of the new slavery moment, and the only church that was coming in was the white church.

Moultrie: Did you get mad sometimes, not seeing some African American faces coming to worship and fellowship?

Sterling: Yes, the only thing I saw was old white men coming in, sometimes making us feel worse for already being there and not saying anything we could relate to.

Chaplain Moultrie: How did you feel not seeing many black faces of the black church or your church?

Sterling: Man, it seemed they were hypocritical and lacked morals and spirituality. For some part, they seem to attribute to the oppression. Have they not read the Bible in Matthew 28:19-20 about the great commission?

Chaplain Moultrie: Did the black church come in to provide a meal to the men?

Sterling: No, if it were not for the White church, we would never have a holiday meal that brings some holiday normalcy

Chaplain Moultrie: I have seen you coming to church several times since you have been out.

Sterling: I have. The reason that I came is because you took the time to talk to me and want to know how I have been since being out. I want to come more, but people look at you like you are a ghost! By the way, I saw that the white picture of Jesus in the church is not on the wall anymore.

Chaplain Moultrie: Yes, the picture of white Jesus, I took it down. A member asked me why I had took it down. My answer was that I had to embrace the context of where we are.

That picture was old, and no doubt in my mind that picture, along with a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Kennedy, were hanging in some of the members' houses. Would you ever want to return to prison one day to volunteer, hopefully?

Sterling: Indeed, after I can come in with a group, or even if you invite me in.

Chaplain Moultrie: Yes, after five years, I believe I can invite you as a guest.

Sterling: I would love to come back in and talk to the young men, but right now, I want to share my story with the church so they can hear me and feel the pain that I was going through, that at least no one else from this church can say that they thought the way I felt, but Rev., I hope no one from this church will have to hear me in that setting.

Chaplain Moultrie: My prayer is the same, Sterling. Man, thank you for taking the time to do this interview. You do not know what this will mean for the church to hear your story and for others who will read this to listen to your story.

Sterling: Reverend, you are welcome.[28]

Interview with Chaplain Edward McKnight

Chaplain Moultrie: Chaplain McKnight, thank you for taking time out of our chaplain retreat to participate in this interview.

Chaplain McKnight: You are welcome, my brother.

Chaplain Moultrie: Chaplain, how long have you been with S.C.D.C, and what have you seen in your years, as far from the black church taking part in ministry?

Chaplain McKnight: I have been with S.C.D.C. for ten years; like you, I am a bi-vocational pastor in the United Methodist church. We have some African Americans coming in. However,

[28] Sterling Grant *Feeling about the absence of the black church (St.Paul C.M.E. Church).* Moultrie Edward interview. Walterboro, Monday, December 2023 2.

they come from the other church, not the African American church. They go but under the lead of someone else.

Chaplain Moultrie: Chaplain McKnight, often when my Caucasian volunteers come in, I listen to them when they are providing service to the men, and sometimes I think that they are intimidated by them because they come in preaching salvation, and not touching on the fact that maybe, just maybe that some of the men who are in prison may be in our prisons where they are because the system has been unfair to them. Lady Justice tends to bend against black men. We are already given a bad hand, and if you do not have positive male figures in your life, you can end up in this place. And when you have the Caucasian church coming in telling you, you better get Jesus!!!! Well, hell, you can get Jesus, but the one who is saying it cannot identify with my struggles. They come in, and I wonder if they only see another black face in a jumpsuit. Often, they talk down to them while the black church is talking to them because they can identify with the brother. After all, they have a family member who has been or is in prison!

Chaplain McKnight: Chaplain Moultrie, you have spoken with so much boldness. At Lee and I guess across the state, you have more Caucasian churches that come in and worship with these guys which I think is good. However, the black church is not doing its part to bring hope to these men. These guys would want to see someone to whom they can relate. Sometimes, these volunteers can get rough and talk down to these guys in the church's name. You know, and I know that these guys have done whatever they did, and the last thing is for these guys to come in and talk to them, and then they leave and go back to the gated communities where they live.

Chaplain Moultrie: How do we get the black church involved in prison ministry?

Chaplain McKnight: You must plant the seed of ministry in the people's minds, just like we talked about, encouraging the church to do faithful ministry beyond the walls of the church and going out of its comfort zone. As we talked about, those who come in here must be trained. You can come here and still be at a standstill out of what you may see. You know, about five years when we had that gang-related killing on that Easter when we had seven inmates killed. We had one of our colleagues who froze up when he came in and saw the bodies and blood all over the place. I am saying that this is not new to us because many of us black chaplains have seen this all our lives. I am saying that many black inmates would love to see the black church come in and provide worship.

Chaplain Moultrie: One thing that I want to know in closing is that many of these men have a max out date. Many max-out dates are 999, but some are getting out at the end of the month. Are these Caucasian churches going to be willing to give them a job when they get out? Or are they coming to make sure that the Negro is still on the plantation?

Chaplain McKnight: Well, Chap, I want to make sure you are here each week. Chaplain Moultrie, thank you for bringing this before the black church; it is needed.[29]

Where Do We Go From Here?

The black church is at a very critical point post-COVID-19, where many churches are trying to find new meanings for their practice of religion and faith and for doing ministry in new and innovative ways. At this defining moment, the Black Church needs to go where so many do

[29] Chaplain Edward McKnight *The lack of African American Churches volunteering in the South Carolina Department of Corrections Chapel*. Moultrie Edward Chaplain interview. Myrtle Beach, Monday, October 2023. .2

not want to go to do meaningful and life-changing ministry. The days are over for just sitting in a warm building waiting for the lost to come to us. No, No! This is the time for the Black Church to come out of its comfort zone of in-house programming. We must now leave the building and bring hope, forgiveness, and love to the least of these.

If the White church can make investments in black inmates at predominantly black prisons across the state, then the Black Church must answer the call to do more. Their efforts may include adopting an inmate child while a parent is serving his time or visiting with his elderly mother or father. The Black Church is obligated to minister to black families. Dr. Martin Luther King said, " 'Life's most persistent and urgent question is, What are you doing for others?'"

The Black Church: Priestly and Prophetic

There are two aspects of black church ministry, the priestly and the prophetic, which combined make for the church's holistic character. The distinction between the two is made below. The priestly ministry of black churches refers to their healing and comforting work. The prophetic ministry involves its social justice and socially transforming work. The bridge between these is the relationship between love and justice. This interdependence provides for liberating and reconciling relationships producing holistic ministry to persons and people.

In an oppressed community, the priestly and prophetic aspects of ministry are two sides of the same coin.[30] It is my opinion that black Methodism—the CME, AME, and the AME ZION churches respectfully should have a department within the structure of the church that addresses prison ministry and those who are affected by loved ones within their Zion that are incarcerated.

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[30] Deotis J. Roberts. *Roots of a Black Church: Family and Church.* edition First. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, First edition, 1980 152.

Family and friends can add money to the budget of each denomination. This would be a great outreach to those members who may be incarcerated from the perspective of these church communions and the families actively involved with these communions. This ministry can become a branch of the Evangelism Department of each church. Over the years, I have viewed these departments dealing with evangelism from a mission standpoint. I view a segment of evangelism dealing with the incarcerated within each communion.

Prison Ministry at St. Paul CME Church: Action Plans

One of the things St. Paul did to put us in the mindset of doing ministry at the prison as a church was to have the church membership buy hygiene items for the incarcerated population. Doing this put us in a more excellent state of mind to provide services for the inmate population beyond the church's walls. One key thing I shared with St. Paul was that we needed to do mission work. While we think of mission work as being in some third-world country, working with inmates means sharing hope with men and, more so, African American men who may need some meaningful relationship, especially behind prison walls. It is past time for the black church to assume this ministry and not turn its back on black men who are in prison. Moreover, it is high time that we embrace these brothers and visit them in their uncomfortable environment and, for some, their new normal. We must understand that when a person is in prison, it strips them (i.e., you) of bare essentials; the release system steals everything from them (i.e., you).

One sad thing is that many of these men who do get out of prison have no place to go when they get out. For some, all of their loved ones have died while they were making their bid. Prisoners get out with one strike against them; many are often homeless. Unfortunately, they become likely to be offenders again and end up right back in prison. However, if the black church does its part, this does not have to be so. Using an old house that the church owns as a

halfway house for men who are getting out of prison with no place to go, can be an undertaking. Nevertheless, undertaking a mission as such can do a few things:

- It can give the man a place to live when he exits prison.
- It can be economic development for the church.
- It can also provide employment for someone within the church or the community.

Charities may help, but more is needed. Fee waivers are inadequate and far too rare, for the most part, for those returning to the leading society, to the families, and to the familiar communities they came from. The inmate's return to the community they had left years before and without sufficient funds is disastrous since those families and communities are often poor. They can't afford thousands of dollars in fees and drug tests. Like the exorbitant price of prison phone calls, the system is a vacuum designed to suck money out of the pockets of the poor and those struggling the most.

In his chapter of the book Root Of a Black Church, Family, and Church, Bishop Joseph A. Johnson, a deceased bishop, and biblical scholar of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, says, "It is incumbent upon the black church to discover what its ministry, indeed its special ministry, has to be." When this discovery is made, it will be incumbent upon the black church to see that ministry occurs wherever black people are. Wherever black people are, there is an opportunity to meet them where they are. Bishop Johnson stated, "It is very important to know what ministry is."[31] This ministry will be to those who may be without hope. Having a race or group of people who may identify with them in some small way allows these inmates to gain hope in a hopeful place. Because some may ask how I got my church involved in prison

[31] Deotis J. Roberts. *Roots of a Black Church: Family and Church*. edition First.. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, First edition 1980), 152.

ministry, the second part of this undertaking is to put together a handbook for the black church on how to get started in prison ministry. Because of the limits of this first work, I am simply addressing the contents of the future handbook.

This handbook will discuss what a black church must do to enter a state prison. Also, we will talk about the myths about prisons. We will engage young men and women with some critical tips on how to do the right thing, so they will not end up in the pipeline. The pipeline is from school to prison, and we must do all we can to break this pipeline. I am passionate about this work, and because of this, I would love to visit churches as I have done so far via Zoom, and within my annual conference, the Carolina Conference of the 7th Episcopal District of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, with my Bishop, Bishop James B. Walker, who has a mind and passion for ministry, I am grateful for him for the space he has made for me to talk about the misconceptions surrounding prison ministry and how to begin one in black church settings.

I want to talk about what I see as a chaplain and how the prison system's health system is so poor and inadequate to encourage the black church to take up this mission.

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