

It's Time!

Preparing for His Presence

The State of the Church Address delivered at Metropolitan Baptist Church, Washington, D. C., on Sunday, January 28, 2007 by the Reverend Dr. H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., Senior Servant.

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“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering ... And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.”

Exodus 25: 1-8

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Galatians 4:4-5



It is with an awesome sense of gratitude that I stand before you today to speak of the spiritual as well as the corporate health of this body of Christ known as Metropolitan. For the years of my tenure in this office I have jealously guarded my responsibility not only to shepherd the flock of God over which I have been made Overseer, but to report to you honestly and openly regarding the depth and the breadth of this ministry. I appear in this annual forum not to boast or to brag; nor am I here to criticize or complain. I am here to tell you what you already know – *“The Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting and His truth endures to all generations.”* (Psalm 100)

It has also been my practice never to come to this moment without an expression of gratitude for those who are my predecessors in this place of preaching: **The Reverend Henry Bailey, the Reverend Robert Johnson, the Reverend Moses Wilberforce Dewitt Norman, and the Reverend Dr. Ernest Clarence Smith.** They now sleep in Jesus and yet, as you see Metropolitan today, the scriptures are right: *“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”* (Revelation 14:13).

To Servant Donald Hines, Chair of the Diaconate, Servant Jeffrey Washington, Chair of the Trustee Ministry, Elder Bernice Mills, Chair of the Council of Elders, to the Council of Servants, to my Ministerial team, the Reverend Dr. Jesse Wood, Reverend Brenda Girton Mitchell, Dr. Sherrill McMillan, the Reverend Nolan E.

Williams, Jr., the Reverend Adrian Blair Wise, and the Reverend Melvin Maxwell and to my Metropolitan Family I greet you in the words of the Apostle Paul: “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 1:2)

As you know, this year is not like any other year. Today we stand on the cusp of a miracle that God has made possible in Largo, Maryland. God has literally opened doors for us that we were incapable of opening for ourselves. In addition, this year has special significance for me and for the congregation in that it marks the 30th year of our continuing odyssey as pastor and people. A ministry of three decades is far more than I had any reason to expect. Together we have experienced storm and rain, sickness and pain. And yet when I think of His goodness there is no right to complain. I do know that the blessing of these years is more than I deserve. I do not know how or why God chose me for this ministry except to say, in those words set to music by Reverend Nolan Williams, that ***“God made an exception for me.”***

I am aware that most of the persons to whom I speak today were not here in 1977 when Metropolitan issued its call for me to become the fifth pastor of this historic congregation. I have grown nostalgic in these last days as I remember those who faithfully worked with me side by side and who no longer walk on mortal soil. They don't live here anymore. That is why I am constantly intent on honoring their labor, their memory and their hope that Metropolitan would always

remain a viable institution committed to the word of God and to the service of God's people. For thirty years I have tried to be faithful to their memory and faithful to your expectations of me as your Shepherd.

As we make our journey to Largo I am not unaware of the great pain and anxiety that is occasioned by the move. There are those in our congregation who have been within Metropolitan's walls literally all of their spiritual lives. This has been the place where our children have been blessed and from which our loved ones have gone to be with the Lord. To leave R Street will not only change the church – it will change us. Our cars don't know how to go anywhere else. When we move – and we will move – we must move together as a family. Nothing else is acceptable. That is why it is essential that we love each other through this period of transition, we must reach back to reclaim those who have separated themselves from us, make sure that no one is left behind, and live securely in the knowledge that our vision and our journey will not end in Largo – it will end in a renewed fellowship that is stronger, dedicated and on fire for our Christ.

A YEAR OF PRAISE!

My hope, in addition, is that in the coming days you will honor God for the thirty years of our ministry together and that you will share with me a determination to praise Him for his grace and his favor upon us. Just a few Sundays ago I declared that this would be a year of worship and praise. I have made this

declaration because I do believe that if there ever were a time when praise was right and reasonable, this is that time.

As God leads us to a new place and a new purpose, we cannot walk through those doors as though **we** did something. We cannot possess the land as though it were ours by right or as though it were ours by any proprietary claim in the first place. On that day – whenever that day shall dawn – we must march in with praise on your lips and hallelujah in our hearts. I do not know the day or the hour but I do know there will be a praise party over there!

So, for the next year or so, the word is: **Practice your Praise!**

Don't wait till the battle is over; shout now! Practice your praise!

On that day, don't let anybody out-shout you! Practice your praise.

And in case you wonder why, here's why I praise Him. I praise Him because I was created praise Him. You may not know it but you weren't created to sit and look and let the praise go by. You were created to praise Him.

My **feet** were designed to dance – that's why I know I was created to praise Him.

My **hands** were made holy so they could clap – that's why I know I was created to praise Him.

My **arms** were designed to lift in adoration to him – I was created to praise Him.

I cannot praise Him just a little; I've got to praise Him with my whole **heart**. I was created to praise Him.

After 30 years I've come to tell you,"I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together." (Psalm 34:1)

There is a reason for this annual gathering to review the work of the church. This is it. Every leader must frame for himself the vision and the hope of the administration he or she will lead.

Abraham Lincoln (who was President the year Metropolitan was founded) stood over fresh graves at Gettysburg and declared that the focus of the nation would be to test whether this nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men were created equal could long endure."

John Fitzgerald Kennedy electrified the nation when he stood on the steps of the United States Capitol on the day of his inaugural with these words of challenge: *"Ask not what your country can do for you; as what you can do for your country."*

Soon after the death of his brother, Bobby Kennedy offered up a vision for visionaries and their visions when he quoted George Barnard Shaw: *"Some men see things as they are and ask "why?" Others dream things that never were and ask "why not?"*

These leaders “framed” the vision that projected and directed their actions. It is for that reason that we speak today as leaders and the people of God, to frame the vision given to us for Metropolitan and in order to direct our actions as we go forward.

UNDERSTANDING OUR VISION



and so, even as we praise, these are times of sobering challenge, and times when our vision must be articulate and clear. The opportunities that are now before us are staggering at the least. In many ways the challenges and the opportunities we face come as a direct result of an undeniable and inescapable vision that God has placed in me, and hopefully in this collective body. I must speak of this vision again and again because there are still those even now who are not clear or certain about the definition and impact of the vision about which we speak.

What is our vision? What is it about this vision that makes it singular and unique?

Broadly speaking our task as a church is

to offer spiritual alternatives to a post-modern culture, to find new and innovative ways to declare old truths,

to open up new avenues for expression of faith that will not do violence to the Christ we serve,

to expand the scope and reach of this ministry in proportion to the challenges we face and to position Metropolitan in a location and space where its ministries can efficiently and effectively operate for the next generation and beyond.

This is your Pastor's heart. What is in my heart, however, must be in your heart as well so that we will be able to reshape what we call the church into a dynamic community that fixes hearts, redeems ruined lives and puts the broken and shattered pieces of our lives back together again.

This must be our vision:

Creating programs that intentionally strengthen families and protect children.

Designing outlets for our teenagers and youth that will give them options and opportunities to live productive lives. If the Day School was a good idea, pre-school and a Middle School should be next on our agenda. We cannot save the next generation by sitting on our hands in despair. Today 51% of African Americans are under the age of thirty years. This is the first time in our history when persons under thirty comprise a statistical majority of our population. That means that young people, children, youth, teens, are not going to be a part of our ministry; they must **be** our ministry. We must continue to support Reverend Melvin Maxwell in his efforts to positively impact the lives of our children and youth as they struggle against the negative forces that cut short their lives. Rev.

Maxwell has been joined by his son, Minister Maurice Maxwell, who is giving leadership to our New Generation worship service, held in Johnson Chapel while we worship here. They tell me Maurice is taking in a new church underneath my feet! Simply because our children come to church, however, does not mean that they are not affected by a culture of drugs, sex and violence. This church must be programmatically alert to save our children and secure generations yet to come.

We must find ways to **honor and care for our Senior Saints**. I yet believe that God is calling us to a ministry of low and moderate income housing and to prepare for Senior Housing that will permit our Saints to retire and live with dignity and honor. It is my challenge to the Reverend Jesse Wood, my faithful assistant, to address this need through the Metropolitan Community Development Corporation.

We must explore avenues that will permit us to become **Christian entrepreneurs**. Our vision entails the reopening of the Metropolitan Bookstore and the opening of our own coffee shop. As the church ventures in to Christian commercial and business opportunities, we must find ways to strengthen personal and individual financial planning and money management training for the congregation as well as the community.

Our vision must explore the advantages of **new media and new technology**. We must address a generation that learns by the visual and the digital. Theatrical productions, dance and music academies must open the way for new expressions of faith.

Our outreach must entail and must be marked by a new emphasis on missions – a programmatic **prominence for missions** that does not neglect foreign obligations but is insistent that we engage in urban missions as well. To meet this need, effective immediately, I have reassigned the Reverend Brenda Girton Mitchell to the position of Minister of Stewardship and Missions. I am confident that her gifts in this area will be a blessing to the church and facilitate our growth as Christian stewards and extend our hands to mission fields, both foreign and domestic.

As an aside, note that the new condominiums that have been erected across the street contain approximately 4,000 square feet of space that has been retained by Metropolitan in order that an urban ministry can take place. Servant Paul Robinson as a part of our Transition Ministry is giving leadership to the development of programs and usages for that space. Shortly, as promised, this insures that the Metropolitan Ministry will always be found on R Street in the District of Columbia and that it will touch the lives of those who yet require the persistent love and protection of this congregation.

In addition, you will be pleased to know that four of the housing units in the condominiums were also retained for the purchase of members of Metropolitan. Metropolitan now has four new home owners. They are **Marcus Edwards, LaTonja Estell, Joell Goode and Nona Florence**. Would you please stand to be greeted by the congregation?

My heart is bursting with the possibilities of a medical clinic, operated by the medical professionals who are a part of our congregation. We have named this venture "**The Garment's Hem**" with the hope that we will so work within our community that the people we serve will literally touch the Hem of His garment. This initiative, under the capable guidance of Dr. Sherrill McMillan has already begun with our application for a 501(c) 3 designation, a board of directors has been formed, and numerous services to the community, including partnerships with other churches and community based health fairs, are already being provided.

Our congregation must be prepared to receive **different cultures** within our community of faith. This will mean opportunities for bi-lingual worship and a challenge to reach beyond the narrow borders of Largo, Maryland to an even greater form and focus of mission.

Even as Metropolitan is poised for new growth I see now a vision of an expanded Metropolitan through the development of new ministries and the **spanning of**

new churches. God has blessed Metropolitan with 57 licensed and ordained ministers who are here and who need to be sent out to cultivate new fields. I have a vision for many Metropolitan's in multiple locations.

Finally, my heart is poised for the creation of the **Metropolitan Bible Academy** – an academy that will be academically serious and scripturally sound, an academy that will train men and women for the ministry in ways that traditional seminaries have not mastered.

And that's the vision. It's all about ministry. It's all about what Metropolitan can do and what Metropolitan must become. What I have in my heart is not about a building. The building will facilitate the vision; the ministries become the product of the vision. The building without a vision is meaningless; a vision that does not produce ministry is purposeless.

The truth of the matter is that Metropolitan has changed. This is not the same Metropolitan that called me in 1977. I am not the same. You are not the same. Nor should we be. Growth in Christ requires that we grow and mature and develop until we become the Church He would have us to be. After all, we serve a God who **“makes all things new.”** (Revelation 21:5)

A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENT



he work of our church cannot go forward without the dedicated labor and love of those persons who are selected for leadership and whom we know as the Diaconate, the Trustee Ministry and the Council of Elders. It is my honor to work side by side with these Christian men and women who take seriously their role as Servants of this congregation and who understand their responsibilities to assist the Pastor in the pursuit of the visionary objectives of this ministry. Metropolitan you are well served by these persons who stand before you now.

Accordingly, it is my purposeful intention to structure the Council of Servants (more formally known as the Official Board) and the Diaconate in such a way that, when the need arises, more among you will be tapped for service. We are yet in the process of establishing a viable process of rotation for the board and today we add a new class of persons who will be servants in training for the next year (or so ...!) as they will take their place among the cadre of those who serve. I present to you the Servants in Training for 2007: **Michelle Arnold, Kathleen Bryant, Terry Carter, Robert Caldwell, Floyd DeChamps, Dominique Evans, George Hall, Sharon Hilliard, Norman Jenkins, Harry Jones, Linda Prom and Sherrie VanHook.**

By any measure of evaluation it is clear that 2006 was a year of progressive achievement for the church. Let me list only a few:

In the arena of communications our church worship is now broadcast through **Streamingfaith.com**. Our broadcast has been well received and is now available through Podcast. The church website is faithfully maintained by Minister Lela Harris who constantly upgrades the site in order to insure its quality. Over 4000 unique visitors weekly visit our site, many of which are persons from around the world including Malaysia, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden Belgium, Pakistan, Canada and Italy. Metropolitan's reach is indeed global.

Similarly, in the arena of technology the Transition Technology Team under the leadership of Servant Lindsey Merritt did a full **assessment of the technology** that supports our ministries. Consequently, systems changes were made that improved our efficiency, saved costs and prepared the staff and the congregation for new technologies that will be transportable to the new location.

Financially speaking, we have recently been evaluated by **Injoy Stewardship Services**. Their evaluation has determined that based on our giving history, growth trends and membership stability our growth rate places us among America's most financially stable and successful churches. Simply stated, the growth curve of the church is steady and growing; our overall health and financial strength is stable and secure. More to the point, you should be encouraged to know that annually our financial records are subjected to a full scope audit and our records have consistently been acknowledged as meeting the requirements of generally accepted accounting standards.

In terms of our outreach in this community you will be pleased to know that the Metropolitan Day School, now in its 9th year of operation is making strides toward becoming a more viable educational institution. We will soon begin the process of evaluation toward accreditation. The first step in that direction has been to stabilize the schools financial condition. I must not fail to mention that several members of our congregation have made exceptional contributions to the school for which we are extremely grateful. As of today, the Day School is operational and has no debt. I cannot speak of the Day School without acknowledging the exceptional volunteer work that has stabilized the internal and operational structure of the school. Servant Crissie Nash and Mrs. Viola Lipscomb have taken the Day School into loving hands and set it on a path toward continued growth and development.

Another point of achievement is with the **Metropolitan Community Development Corporation**. We have now reached the point where the two office buildings owned by the corporation that are adjacent to the church property in Largo are now generating income sufficient to cover their monthly costs. Thanks to the hard work of the Reverend Jesse Wood and his fine staff, the programmatic thrust of the corporation continues its work in the arena of financial literacy and its collaborative partnership with *Breaking the Chain Foundation*.

We rejoice with our music ministry with the purchase of new vestments for worship and praise. We rejoice even more so because the robes which were retired were not destroyed; the robes are being used by a sister church in Liberia, West Africa as Metropolitan and its music ministry have extended our hands across deep waters in a gesture of Christian love at work. Of course we continue to celebrate the professional achievements of Reverend Nolan Williams, not to mention the continuing development of one of the most outstanding music ministries in America.

Our church continues to reach out in order to serve the hungry and the homeless; we have made this facility available to persons infected by that silent killer we know as HIV/Aids, with the hope that we can have some role in facilitating the necessary education that can combat this disease.

STAFF CHANGES



Who undergird and give direction to our work is the Metropolitan administrative team. Mrs. Denise Gibson Bailey serves as our Chief Operating Officer and gives of herself untiringly to the pursuit of an administrative matrix that is both efficient and productive. Her dedicated service is of incomparable value to this church and to her we owe a debt of gratitude. In our administrative matrix one change is important to note. For the last three

years **Mrs. Andrea Kittrell** has served as my Executive Assistant. She has served with diligence and integrity and has made a genuine contribution to the work of my office and has fared well with the thankless job of keeping me in line. Effective today, Andrea will move to the office of the Chief Operating Officer as Executive Assistant there. We believe this move will enable us to gain the benefit of her numerous technological and administrative gifts and, in so doing, bless the church. Serving in the role she leaves will be **Mrs. Constance McCrimmon-Tabron**. Constance is a former church employee and we welcome her on her return. Would you please thank Andrea and welcome Constance?

On the ministerial side today we effect a shifting of responsibilities. **The Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell** clearly has a leadership gift in terms of stewardship and a passionate gift in terms of missions. I have asked her to step down from her position in Christian Discipleship to become Minister of Stewardship and Missions. It is my hope that she will bring a spirit of discipline and intention as we bring the congregation to understand the grace of giving as well as expanding our view of missions both to our community and to our world. Simultaneously, **the Reverend Adriane Blair Wise** has served our church well in the arena of Transition in preparation for our move to Largo. Her underlying gift, however, is obviously in the arena of Christian discipleship. I have asked her to take on the role of Minister of Christian Spiritual Formation an expansion of the former discipleship title and an indication of our serious intent to shape and develop our congregation in terms of Christian values and Biblical instruction.

Not coincidentally, I have appointed today the **Rev. Sonya Neal Reeves** as Superintendent of the Sunday School with the very real hope that her keen Biblical study and her administrative skill will lead the Sunday School to the next level of excellence in learning.

TOWARD THE TABERNACLE IN LARGO



Since December of 1999 our congregation has been consumed with prayers and thoughts about its future, about its location, and about the continuance of its ministry. Nearly seven years ago our church reached a very difficult decision. It was a decision to relocate our church and to erect a new Tabernacle for our Christ. And if you wonder how such a thing could happen you simply need to know that God did it.

- When we had no land on which to build, 34 acres of land just showed up. God did it.
- We started out to purchase one side of the street and wound up with both sides of the street. God did it.
- When we had no money with which to build, a charitable trust showed up with money in it we never imagined. God did it.
- The land we purchased in Largo just over six years ago for \$3.5 million has been reappraised and is now valued at \$6 million. God did it.

- The amount that has been mortgaged for new construction is \$30 million. The appraised value of the proper after construction is complete including the land and its improvements is \$51 million. God did it.
- They told us hard opposition would show up to block our path but instead friends showed up to make rough places plain and crooked places straight. How? God did it.
- There were those who left us to join other churches; those who would not help us and refused to give a dime. But advocates and allies started knocking on the door in order to make the impossible possible. How? God did it.

And now here we are and construction has begun! Bulldozers are running, backhoes are digging and permits are in our hand. The parking lots are being paved, street lights around the property are in place, footings for the new foundation are in and the pouring of the concrete foundation will begin within two weeks of this address, steel has been ordered and should arrive in the near future, interior fixtures and furnishings have been selected, the Cassavant Organ – an imposing instrument of worship that is composed of 5,000 pipes at a cost of more than \$3 million dollars, has been ordered and is now in production in Montreal, Canada. Metropolitan – your new church is on the way!

By the way, we have diligently pursued the greatest economic value for this project. Demand has driven construction costs up in the Washington DC area

over the last several years. This increase in costs has affected the construction estimates for the New Metropolitan requiring us to seek creative ways to contain costs. Over the last year we have been engaged in a process of **value engineering**, a strategy which permits us to maintain our original design quality and intent while at the same time reducing out of pocket costs. To date, through the dedicated work of the Millennium Building Committee, chaired by Claude and Denise Bailey, along with our project developer, Mr. Paul Taylor of SRP Development, Inc., of Columbus, Ohio exterior reductions have netted at least \$3m and our projection is that by this process we will save a total of **six million dollars** for the entire project.

This is the heart of the matter. I am using this time and space to share with you the detail of this engagement so that every member will not only know what is being done but when, where and why. Knowledge is power and my effort now is to empower the congregation with enough knowledge so that you are confident that what we are doing is reasoned, appropriate and in order to ensure your buy-in to the process as a whole.

Based on our past financial performance and strong financial projections, Strongtower Financial Services has financed construction to the new Metropolitan. Just six weeks ago, in this sanctuary, we signed the final papers closing on \$30 million dollars in municipal bonds to finance our construction.

Strongtower Financial Services has loaned us the money to build. We must give the money to pay the loan back. It's as simple as that!

Bond financing requires that we begin to amortize – pay back – the note immediately. This means that our monthly **mortgage note has increased** to the level that you would expect if the building were completed. Remember that our note is fixed for twenty years with no prepayment penalty. Eradicating this debt ahead of time will mean millions of dollars in savings to the church and therefore to you. Our projections point toward increased growth of the ministry once we have moved to Largo. Nevertheless, that growth is a “blessing we are about to receive!” We must address this increased cost now through containment of expenses and the generation of income. That income will only come from those who are a part of this fellowship and who are committed to this cause. This means that we need to pay this note off immediately if not sooner. Our ultimate goal is to have a Metropolitan that is debt free. Only our work together can make it so.

STEWARDS FOR THE KINGDOM



In order to eradicate our debt today we launch officially what we are calling Stewards for the Kingdom. “Stewards” is what we are and what we are called to be as we manage the resources of God’s people. The “Kingdom” is the goal to which we aspire, it is the frame and focus of the ministry

of Jesus Christ and it is what we are called to become. We are Becoming the Kingdom!

Stewards for the Kingdom is not just another financial campaign. We have had other campaigns and they have been sufficiently successful to bring us to this point. Our last effort, in fact, secured \$5.5 million dollars and those funds underwrote our initial expenses, including hard and soft costs of architectural, engineering and development activities. Today we move to another level – a serious level – that requires the best of our physical, financial and spiritual resources. What we face now is a new phase of the journey, one that will take us to greater responsibility and accountability as stewards of this great work.

I have asked Reverend Brenda Girton Mitchell to chair this initiative. She has already structured over fifteen committees with over 200 members involved in their work. This effort can be broken down into several easily understood parts.

First. As of **April 1 any and all pledges** that are outstanding – including those made at our Heart Matters Prayer Breakfast – will **come to an end**. If you can, pay them in full by that date – and we encourage you to do so, we will be grateful. If not, we will simply consider the debt paid and the matter closed. Be assured that we are appreciative and humbled by the consistent giving that has been demonstrated by so many of you. This latest effort on our part is simply to unify the congregation toward this God-directed purpose.

Second. Our request is that on April 1, **Resurrection Sunday**, each member of Metropolitan will do two things: First, **bring your completed Commitment Card** for the new Stewards for the Kingdom Initiative. Second, **bring your first payment or your “first fruit” offering** for Stewards for the Kingdom. We ask that you do this in order that we can all start out fresh, on the same page, and with the same goal in mind. Just as an aside, on **March 31 and April 1** there will be a **celebration** on the church grounds at Largo and here at Metropolitan on R Street. We will celebrate the victory and shout about what God is doing even before the harvest. Please save those dates – March 31 and April 1 on your calendar and plan to spend the day in celebration with us.

You must always remember that commitments to the Stewards for the Kingdom initiative are gifts to the church that are above and beyond tithes and offerings. We must not reduce our tithes in order to increase our gifts to the building. Our ministry continues even while we give sacrificially for the eradication of our building debt.

Third. This week you will receive in the mail a brochure which describes what we are doing and why. Please take time to read it carefully and thoroughly. If you read it closely you will find your picture has been included as well. **Do not make your pledge today.** We want you to surrender your decision to God through prayer. We want you to consider prayerfully and thoughtfully the decision you are about to make. You know the amount of your previous pledge; I

am praying that God will touch your heart so that you will increase that pledge and help us on toward the achievement of our goals. I am praying that God will touch your mind, your heart and your spirit so that your new pledge will be an “extra step,” something more than you think you can handle.

It’s in that extra step that faith is found.

It’s in that extra step that sacrifice becomes real.

It’s in that extra step that we truly “walk by faith and not by sight.”

It’s in that extra step that you will have the opportunity to see what God can do.

It’s in that extra step that you will have an opportunity to see what God can do through you in a manner you had never imagined.

The goal for this effort is \$10 million dollars over a period of three years. That’s the achievable goal. I am praying that God will touch the hearts of this congregation in such a way that our pledges will be not less than \$15 million dollars in three years. That’s the faith goal.

God has given you something to give. You must decide if you have a willing heart to give it. The making and keeping of these commitments is not something than can be done by a few; this is a task for the whole church. Before you leave church today talk about this with your neighbor on your pew, pray together, covenant with God and with each other that you will make a commitment and keep it. We can only achieve our goal if we do it together.

Fourth. Many of you will want to make specific gifts in addition to your pledge commitment. That will be possible beginning on the fourth Sunday of May when we celebrate our 143rd Church Anniversary. You will be able, through your gifts, to give seats for the sanctuary, dedicate and name classrooms, secure pianos and other musical instruments as well as to provide other **memorial and honoring gifts**. Be on the look out for more information on this program.

Just a final word about money. I know you don't like for me to talk about it but in this instance I really have no choice. The construction of the new church is expensive. Let's be clear: **\$30 million dollars is a lot of money!** It's about money but it's not about money. It is about a people who understand these efforts as preparation for growth, who live in the expectation that God will prepare the way and give provision for the vision and who understand that whether we like it or not we cannot play church any more. This is serious and I need you to be serious with me. I believe that this is more than a purchase and more than a financial transaction; this is an investment. And, as with most, there will be a great return on the investment. It will be an investment that some will find difficult to see or calculate. But then, how can you calculate changed lives? What value do you place on saved families? I would not ask you to buy a building; nobody wants to buy a building. I would ask you to invest in the spiritual growth and development of a people, and of a community, and of persons who come to Christ because you thought it important and significant enough to give.

A VISION SURRENDERED

This is why we are here at this hour of Metropolitan's history. God has given to us every blessing we need to do this great work for Him. God has provided the money, the land, and the vision. God has literally opened doors and made ways. With every ounce of energy in my body I have labored among you to cast the vision, to preach the vision, to sing the vision, to write the vision and give voice to the vision. There is literally nothing left for me to do. While the vision has been given to me I now surrender it to you. I have brought you as far as I can. I have brought you to the crest of this Jordan; you must decide in your hearts to cross over.

I cannot beg, I cannot plead, I cannot cajole. You must find the faith, and the will, and the heart to do as you believe God is leading you to do. I cannot do this alone; nor should I have to. This must be your heart's desire, your *raison d'être*, the determination of your soul. You must speak to this mountain and move it. You must believe God for the victory and then claim it. You must seize this moment and, in the words of the Apostle Paul, *"call those things which be not as though they were."* (Romans 4:17b) From this day forward this must be your vision. It is not a matter of your pocketbook, it is not a matter of your intellect, it is not a matter of your mind, it is a matter of your faith and it is a matter of your heart. Never forget: Heart STILL matters!

IT'S TIME!



here is a word here. It is a word that is **enigmatic** and puzzling on its face. And yet, at the same time it is a word that offers direction to the path that is laid before us.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats hair, and rams skins dyed red, and badgers skins, and shittim wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil and for sweet incense, onyx stones and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.”

Exodus 25: 1-8

This is a text that comes from the crucible of Israel's escape from the slavery fields of Egypt. In fact, you know this story so well that I shall swiftly pass its salient points only in summary review. They had been in slavery, bitterly but bravely suffering under the lash of Egypt's whip. With one brief, yet powerful sentence – “Let my people go” – an ex-convict, fresh from the solitary confinement of Jethro's sheep fold, summoned a nation to move from the encampments of their pain to a land that God had promised – a land that flowed with milk and with honey.

Look again to this word and you will discover a strange occurrence in their travels. On their way out of town the Lord gave them favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. Follow the scene. They are slaves. They have been slaves for 430

years. They had nothing to their names except the clothes on their backs but the Lord gave them favor in the eyes of the Egyptians.

I am headed to Exodus 25 but I need you to see what's happening in Exodus 12:35. This is what it says:

“And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.”

In chapter 12 they get favor, jewels and a free pass out of town.

In chapter 12 their enemy becomes their ally and they get favor, jewels and a pass out of town.

In chapter 12 they are sitting on donkeys and ox carts but they are wearing furs and jewelry, they're wearing wigs and weaves. They've got favor! And that's in chapter 12.

But in chapter 25 God says 'take up an offering.' Wait a minute, these are slaves. How you going to take up an offering? These are the remnants of a people who lived their lives in bondage and pain. Why would you think you could take up an offering? These are homeless people. These are people who don't have jobs, they don't have stocks, they don't have bonds, they don't have bank

accounts, they don't have a "pot" or a "window." But I tell you what they do have:
They have chapter 12.

"And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required."

What I want you to know, however, is that there is a purpose for the offering. Moses is not just taking up an offering for the sake of taking up an offering. There is a purpose for the offering. God says – I didn't say this – God says, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering...And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them."

There it is. *"...That I may dwell...!"*

The only reason I want you to take up an offering is because I want to dwell with you. *"...That I may dwell...!"*

The only reason I sent you through a season of slavery, across the Egyptian desert, across the Red Sea and down through this wilderness is because I want to live with you. *"...That I may dwell...!"*

I'm not turned on by buildings. I'm not turned on by land. I own the land and the buildings. I'm not trying to get you to build something because I've got an *edifice*

complex. I want you to take up an offering, and do it with a willing heart, because I want to reside where you reside, I want to tabernacle in the place of your testimony, I want to take up residence where you worship, I want to sit where you sit, in the place you call sanctuary. I don't just want to walk with you, I want to live with you, dwell with you, abide with you, take up housekeeping with you. Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

So, here's the point: The reason why I bring my offering and the reason why I build up the Tabernacle, is because we are in the process of preparing for His presence. You didn't understand that. The reason why I bring my offering and the reason why I build up the Tabernacle is because I know **company's coming**.

Now listen. I don't know where you come from but where I come from when you know that company's coming you have to get ready. When company's coming you pull out the best you've got. When company's coming you get out your finest linen, your finest china and your finest crystal. Company's coming. You sweep the floor and then you mop the floor because you know that company's coming. You clean up your house and you clean up your act because you know that company's coming.

The reason why I bring my offering, the reason why I give Him the best that I have is because I want to stand in His presence. Listen, the offering I bring is the offering He gave me. I was in Egypt but now I am on the precipice of the

Promised Land and the offering I bring is the offering He gave me. The only reason I have the jewels and the gems, the money and the resources is because everything I have He gave me. That is why what He gave me is what I am now using to make preparations for His presence.

You didn't understand. But you do understand company's coming. Is there anybody here that knows company's coming? Is there anybody here that knows He's coming back again?

Ask Malachi:

“Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, she shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 3:1)

Ask Paul:

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (I Thessalonians 4:16)

Ask John:

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2)

I do not give because of bricks and mortar. I do not give because the Pastor said so. I do not give because I want a parking space all my own. I give because I know that I know that Company's Coming!

So, I've come today to tell you it's time. Paul said that "...when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son..." (Galatians 4:4-5) Do not miss it. God acts in the fullness of time. God acts when the time is right. God acts – not out of chronos (that's man's time) – God acts in Kairos (that's God's time)! God acts in the Kairotic moment. God does the right thing at the right time. The old folk said it this way: "God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm."

Metropolitan was not ready to build this tabernacle five years ago or even ten years ago or even twenty years ago. But this is the kairotic moment. This is God's time. Tell your neighbor: **"It's time!"**

It's time to pray as though everything depended on God but work as though everything depended on us.

It's time to become the beloved community where all are welcomed in and none are excluded or left out.

It's time to move beyond petty bickering and backbiting and step into the sunlight of the promise that God has for us.

It's time to shake off yesterday's shackles of custom and tradition and usher in a new generation of innovation and creativity for our Christ.

It's time to assure seniors that they will not be forgotten or dismissed and that no one will be left behind.

It's time to teach our children that the sacrifices we make today are in order to insure their future and their tomorrow.

It's time to wipe away the tears of our collective sadness at departing and rejoice that God has something glorious awaiting us on the other side.

It's time to give ourselves to something larger than ourselves and to work together, and plan together, and pray together, and praise together, and sing together, and shout together.

It's time to do away with doubt and realize that "God has not given us a spirit of fear but of love, power and a sound mind."

I say it's time to do away with doubt. I heard somebody say, "I don't feel no ways tired. I've come to far from where I started from. Nobody told me the road would be easy. I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me."

It's time to speak up on behalf of your church and refuse to permit your church or your pastor to be evil spoken of.

It's time to move away from that old Metropolitan that is afraid to praise Him and become a part of a new generation that is armed and dangerous and heading for the gates of the enemy.

It's time to take on a sacrificial spirit that will bring from the bowels of the earth an tabernacle of praise and worship where we shall shout and "sing until the power of the Lord come down."

An old man was about to make his way into church one Sunday morning when another man stopped him told a conversation. The old man was not well dressed. The old man appeared as though he had had a hard life. The old man could hardly put one foot before the other. His speech was slurred and he did not use the King's English very well. Said one man to the other, 'Old man I see you going into this church. I'm not going to church – in fact I don't belong to

any church but I saw you going in and I wanted to know what is it about this church that causes you to climb these stairs trying to make it.' The old man looked at the other and replied, 'Well let me tell you about the church I 'long to.

The church I 'long to has a good preacher.

The church I 'long to has good deacons.

The church I 'long to has good trustees.

The church I 'long to has some good ushers.

The church I 'long to has some good choirs and good singing.

The church I 'long to even has some good fried chicken.

But that's not all.

The church I 'long to has some hell raisers.

The church I long to has some folk that will scandalize your name.

The church I 'long to has some folk that will tell your business all over town.

The church I 'long to has some deacons that can't pray and some singers that can't sing.

The church I 'long to has some folk that are stuck in their ways and never want to change.

But I'm not here today because of **the church I 'long to**; I'm here because of **the church I long for.**

The church I long for – every day is Sunday and Sabbath's have no end.

The church I long for – there's no more sickness and no more sadness, no more pain and no more sorrow. In

The church long for you can shake glad hands with the elders. In
The church I long for it's always "Howdy, howdy" and never good-bye. In
The church long for you can shout and never get tired. In
The church I long for I hold His hand and He holds mine. In
The church I long for the gates are pearl, the walls are jasper, the streets
are gold. In
The church I long for I shall see Him face to face.
Not in this church but in another church I shall see Him face to face.
If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming to because I want
to see face to face.

I cannot do this alone. We can only achieve this great purpose together. I
humbly ask for your prayers and your support.

I Need You to Survive!

**I need you, you need me.
We're all a part of God's body.
Stand with me, agree with me.
We're all a part of God's body.**

**It is his will, that every need be supplied.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.**

**I pray for you, you pray for me.
I love you, I need you to survive.
I won't harm you with words from my mouth.
I love you, I need you to survive.**

**It is his will, that every need be supplied.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.
Hezekiah Walker & LFC**