



CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, September 9, 2012

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I. Introduction and History

The African American church is one of the most influential institutions in the African American community. The role of the African American church has been and continues to be multifaceted, including serving cultural, political, social, and economic functions in the individual lives of its parishioners. W.E. B. Du Bois spoke of the African American clergy in his treatise, The Souls of Black Folk, when he wrote: “The preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.”¹ Particularly, the African American pastor has functioned as one of the utmost figures in the lived experiences of the African American community, with many parishioners contending that more esteemed than physicians, teachers, and all other professions is the role of the African American pastor. As one scholar writes:

Upon examination of the listed ways in which the African American pastor constructs communities of influence—civil rights activities, ministerial alliances, operation of child care centers, surrogate father in households headed by single mothers, and family arbitrators, just to name a few—one will find that the role of the African American pastor

of today is a continuation of the historic role assigned to them by the church and the community.²

The African American pastor does not live and serve in a vacuum but in a world of despair and hope, neglect and love, questions and faith, government and education, healthcare and finance, the good, the bad, and the ugly. Therefore, it is of the essence that the African American church set aside a portion of its time, energy, and efforts for a season of gratitude for the work of the pastor. This is what Second Thessalonians 5:12-13 references when it says, “But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.” Peter J. Paris writes:

The demonstration of the church’s loyalty and devotion to the pastor is ritualized in regular celebratory events traditionally called the pastor’s anniversary, which many celebrate annually and others at five-year intervals. In many modern-day urban areas these occasions may involve formal dinners in hotel ballrooms, tributes from government officials, lavish gifts from organizations and individuals, or the presence of specially invited dignitaries.³

Historically, and presently, the pastor’s anniversary is held on the date when a pastor’s relationship began with a local congregation and remains a unique moment in the life of the African American congregation because of the historic role of the pastor in the African American church. The anniversary celebrates those persons who stand in the lineage of those who affirmed African American humanity amid the backdrop of slavery; those who created cities of refuge during the brutal days of Reconstruction and Jim Crow; those who serve congregations faithfully in the midst of economic turmoil, global crisis, and political chaos; those who have endured the storms of personal catastrophe in order to continue leading the community of faith; those who have guided congregations and individuals toward opportunities of innovation and growth amid unemployment and incarceration rates at an all-time high; and those who have served willingly because of their love for God and people. In essence, the pastor’s anniversary is not so much about who the person is as much as it is about what the person does. **It is a celebration of praxis, not a celebration of personality.**

II. Personal Testimony

“If you just lift up your head, stick your chest out, throw up your hands, and walk with a new understanding of yourself, of your family, of your community, and of your God, there is nothing that can stop you from achieving what you are meant to achieve brother pastor; you are God’s elect, live like you know it to be true!”

I clearly remember these pointed words during a pastoral anniversary service. But more important than these words spoken from one African American pastor to his colleague, in ministry, was the response of the people to these words—shouts, screams, hollers, and tears flowing down the eyes of most. What inspired the shouts? What motivated the screams? What catalyzed the tears? At the core, this was a look into the intimate relationship between the

African American pastor and his or her parishioners. The words of the visiting preacher to his colleague were not only words *to* a colleague but were words to the entire congregation. Why? To an African American congregation, the pastor is a part of us—the pastor represents part of our lived reality. Therefore, hearing the words “lift up your head, stick your chest out, throw up your hands, and walk in a new understanding of yourself” being spoken to the pastor, was to hear those very words being spoken to each congregant in the church that day, thus causing a spiritually heightening response from all who were present. The African American pastor remains one of the most important yet undervalued members of the African American experience. Thus, the African American pastor is worthy of celebration.

Research suggests that humans need mental landmarks in order to make sense out of life in the present and conceptualize life in the future. Landmarks are easily recognizable encounters along the road of life that help keep us traveling in the right direction toward our destination. Landmarks are points of reference that inform us when to turn, when to continue, when to slow down, and even when to stop—“Turn right at the church, then get on the highway just past the bank.” Likewise, life landmarks do the same thing; they help us know when we are off track, when we need to turn around, when to keep going, and when to stop and rest. In the life of the African American pastor the anniversary is a life landmark. It helps the pastor celebrate the past, assess the present, and plan for the future.

III. Poem for a Pastor

[A Message from God](#)

Sometimes God says, *slow down, I want you to be still and listen.*
Can't you see you're going too fast? Know that I am here to take care of you.
Now and then our body needs rest; endless running can wear us down,
So rest a while and let healing work, slow down and let God speak.⁴

IV. Music for the Moment

Below are three hymns that speak to the Pastor's Anniversary. Along with these, a wide range of musical options for this special occasion in the life of the church can be found in the music and worship resources unit.

In a world full of chaos, catastrophe, and calamity, the role of the pastor becomes even more vital as they are to offer hope, love, and compassion to all they encounter. Often, this burden on pastors strains their physical strength, and thus, the crying out in the text of this psalm to “keep my body strong” is a cry for God to hold pastors up on “every leaning side” (as the golden saints would plea). Furthermore, as vessels of God, challenged and called to live a life of isolation, often walking this journey alone, how appropriate for the writer to pen, “I'm just a stranger here, traveling through this barren land.”

[Lord, Keep Me Day by Day](#)⁵

Lord, keep my day by day,
in a pure and perfect way.
I want to live, I want to live on
in a building not made by hand.

Lord, keep my body strong
so that I can do no wrong.
Lord, give me grace just to run this Christian race
to a building not made by hand.

I'm just a stranger here,
traveling through this barren land.
Lord, I know there's a building somewhere,
a building not made by hand.

The text of the next song is an earnest plea for an intimate walk with God, who is asked to lead, guide, and protect the believer. Before a pastor can begin the journey of one's calling, she or he must spend time with God discovering the path that God wants one to walk. At the core of this hymn is a discerning of God's will and direction; and the first step in discernment is the fervent prayer that God will lead, guide, and cover. The deeply personal stanzas emphasize that divine guidance is essential because of our lack of human strength, our blindness to life's realities, and the swaying distractions that will inevitably arise along our Christian journey. Only God can lead us on the narrow path and through all the complexities and challenges of temporal life. Like many of the psalms, this text of this song pours out in prayer the yearning of the individual Christian, a prayer that reminds us of these words of the psalmist: "Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy righteousness; make thy way plain before my face" (Psalm 4:8).

Lead Me, Guide Me⁶

Lead me guide me along the way
For if you lead me I cannot stray
Lord let me walk, each day with Thee.
Lead me, oh Lord, lead me.

I am weak and I need thy strength and pow'r
to help me over my weakest hour
Help me though the darkness
Thy face to see, Lead me, oh Lord, lead me.

I am lost if you take your hand from me,
I am blind without Thy light to see,
Lord, just always let me Thy servant be.
Lead me, Lead me, oh Lord, lead me.

In his commentary on Leviticus 8:35, Matthew Henry wrote: “. . . every one of us has a charge to keep, an eternal God to glorify, an immortal soul to provide for, our generation to serve, and it must be our daily care to keep this charge, for it is the charge of the Lord and Master . . .” Charles Wesley penned the words of the following text, drawn from a priestly commandment of the Hebrew Bible: “You shall remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting day and night for seven days, keeping the Lord’s charge so that you do not die; for so I am commanded.” As pastors, leaders of local tents of meetings, a charge to keep they have, a God they must above all things glorify, to serve the present age with relevance and honor, all to fulfill and keep the will of God.

A Charge to Keep I Have⁷

A charge to keep I have,
a God to glorify,
a never-dying soul to save,
and fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,
my calling to fulfill;
O may it all my powers engage
to do my Master’s will.

Arm me with jealous care,
as in thy sight to live,
and oh, thy servant, Lord,
prepare a strict account to give!

Help me to watch and pray,
and on thyself rely,
assured, if I my trust betray,
I shall forever die.

V. Quotes

These quotes can be placed in the bulletin/order of worship during your pastor’s anniversary service.

If sheep do not have the constant care of a shepherd, they will go the wrong way, unaware of the dangers at hand. They have been known to nibble themselves right off the side of a mountain. And so, because sheep are sheep, they need shepherds to care for them. The welfare of sheep depends solely upon the care they get from their shepherd. Therefore, the better the shepherd, the healthier the sheep.

—Kay Arthur

The truth is, the shepherd is only a steward of the sheep.

—T. D. Jakes

The secret to strong leaders is that strong leaders are strong because they have been tempered by the negative. They have discovered the secret of combining the negative and the positive to PRODUCE their very own POWER plant!

—John Paul Warren

Before you speak, listen.
Before you spend, earn.
Before you invest, investigate.
Before you criticize, wait.
Before you quit, try again.
Before you retire, save.
Before you die, give.

—William Arthur Ward

We must be silent before we can listen.
We must listen before we can learn.
We must learn before we can prepare.
We must prepared before we can serve.
We must serve before we can lead.

—William Arthur Ward

VI. Practical Information for Planning a Pastor's Anniversary Service

There are many instances where churches would like to celebrate the pastor for his or her commitment and dedication to the church. This information is meant to provide practical ideas to aid in such planning:

1. Formulate an anniversary committee, establish regular meeting dates, and determine assignments for each committee member. Allow at least six months for planning the anniversary.
2. Once the committee and pastor agree upon the date for the anniversary, it can be publically announced even before a theme or other specifics are determined.
3. Decide on a theme or a subtheme. Often the church theme for the year is used as a foundation for the theme selected for the Pastor's Anniversary. If using a subtheme, select a Scripture for that subtheme.
4. Develop a budget with estimates of all expenses. Estimates should be based upon past anniversary costs and basic market increases. If a committee does not have previous information from which to draw, all costs should be best estimates. It is a good idea to check with three vendors to do price checks for purchases and for services such as printing or rental of music equipment. Also, add three percent to the budget total to cover unanticipated costs and cost over-runs.

5. Ensure that select persons are responsible for advertising especially if a banquet will be held on or off-site as part of the anniversary. Members of this committee should be quite knowledgeable of how to use modern technology to promote the event. It may be wise to include teenagers on this committee. A minimum five forms of advertising should be used including: Church announcements, the church's website, radio, Facebook, and Twitter.
6. Begin discussing and selecting speakers for the morning and afternoon services. Develop a form with the speakers ranked in preference by the committee. Then present the form to the pastor or appropriate staff who will contact the speakers to determine their availability.
7. Determine in concert with the director of worship and arts and the pastor which guest choirs to invite for the afternoon service. Have appropriate personnel contact desired guest choirs as far in advance as possible to determine their availability. Confirmation letters should be sent at least six months in advance to the ministers who agree to preach and at least four months in advance to the choirs who agree to render songs.
8. Decide which churches, friends, and family should also receive invitation letters. These letters should be sent out at least two months before the program. See administrative staff for sample invitation letters, or request administrative staff to prepare and mail the letters.
9. Coordinate with the appropriate staff regarding advertising in the Sunday bulletin. Also create a special pastoral anniversary display that can be prominently displayed in the church at least two months before the anniversary.
10. Decide whether an anniversary program booklet will be created. If so, expect that it will take significant time to develop. Areas of focus:
 - a. The cover design typically includes a picture of the honoree and may also include his or her spouse and children and perhaps a special anniversary logo or design
 - b. Letters: from the pastor to the church, and from church ministries to the pastor
 - c. The Order of Worship for the morning and afternoon services
 - d. Biographies of the pastor and guest preachers
 - e. A list of the ministries of the church
 - f. Congratulatory letters and notes from a variety of sources including state, local, and federal officials, business professionals, relatives, and others, and
 - g. Other details: whether the program booklet will contain photos, if it will be in color, and the deadline for having all materials collected so that the booklet can be timely printed.
11. Discuss with the appropriate staff the compensation protocol for preachers and others.
12. Complete an expenditure authorization form and stick to your budget.

13. Create a financial reimbursement form. Be certain that all persons with the authority to purchase materials and enter into contracts for the anniversary understand that reimbursement forms can only be accepted if accompanied by receipts and pre-approved as part of the anniversary budget.
14. Determine with the committee the gifts for the pastor. Will individual ministries present gifts or will the church present one collective gift? Will there also be gifts given to the pastor's spouse?
15. Decide whether there will be any special recognition(s), i.e., plaques and similar presentations from elected officials, fraternities, sororities, and others.
16. Decide if there will be an anniversary dinner banquet, a reception, and/or light dinner. If so, determine a venue, ticket cost, a special banquet planning team, the menu, costs, and important deadlines related to ticket sales and payments that will have to be made if the banquet is not held at the church.
17. Coordinate with the culinary and hospitality ministries regarding food, refreshments, set up, clean up, decorations, flowers, etc., if food will be served at the church.
18. Ensure that the janitorial staff or others are available to clean the church in between services.
19. Decide the order of service:
 - a. Decide who will do prayers, Scriptures, the welcome, etc. Discuss all areas of the program with the pastor and the person in charge of music and worship at your church. Be clear that not everyone who wants to be on program can be. Work hard to ensure that the afternoon service is not too long.
 - b. Select an officiant (preferably an ordained clergy) or you may decide to use a non-clergy person, perhaps a highly respected area announcer.
 - c. Decide when and who will do presentations. The head of the Deacon Board or Board of Elders usually does the presentation from the church to the pastor.
 - d. On the day of the anniversary make sure that the hospitality plan and the plan for ushers/greeters go smoothly. This includes ensuring that parking spaces have been reserved for speakers, changing areas are available for choirs, access for those who are disabled has been provided, that there are activities for small children, and that there are people available to help guests find their way around your church, etc.
 - e. Finally, ensure that a copy of the anniversary program and videos are given to administrative staff to go in the historical files of the church.

VIII. Printed Books and e-Books for This Moment on the Liturgical Calendar

- Rubietta, Jane. How to Keep the Pastor You Love: Caring for Ministers and Their Families. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- George, Denise. What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew: Helping People Understand and Appreciate Their Leaders. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.
- Sherman, Daniel. Secrets to Understanding Your Pastor. Online location: <http://www.my-pastor.com/pastor-appreciation-book.html>

IX. Audio Visual Aids

- Pastor Appreciation Day Video. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRxY97yz9VA&feature=related> (assessed 19 February 2012)
- Eyes of a Shepherd Hip-Hop tribute to pastors. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8n3deEy2K6w&feature=related> (accessed 19 February 2012).

Notes

1. Du Bois, W. E. B. The Souls of Black Folk. 1903. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1999. pp. 120, 123.
2. Jenkins, James. "The African American Baptist Pastor and Church Government: The Myth of the Dictator." Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry 2.1 (2004): 74.
3. Paris, Peter J. The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. p. 98.
4. Crowe, Judy. Online location: <http://www.my-pastor.com/pastor-appreciation-poems.html> (accessed December 20, 2011)
5. "Lord Keep Me Day by Day." By Eddie Williams. African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #129
6. "Lead Me, Guide Me." By Doris M. Akers. African American Heritage Hymnal. #474
7. "A Charge to Keep I Have." By Charles Wesley. African American Heritage Hymnal. #467