

## **In-reach Before Outreach**

The theme for the 11<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) is, “It’s A New Season.” The theme for the Daytona Beach District is, “Ready, Set, Grow.” Both themes point toward doing something radically different from what was done in prior years. The prophet Isaiah says “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it” (Is 43:18-19)?

The prophetic voice of Isaiah and the themes of the 11<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District and the Daytona Beach District collectively point to and give permission to churches to “serve this present age, our calling to fulfill.” This does not mean that the traditions of the AMEC are antiquated and must be poured out with the bathwater so to speak. On the contrary, it means that a new season has dawned, and the church must reform herself to keep pace with what God is doing in salvation history in this the 21<sup>st</sup> century in each context of ministry. This also means that each church must decide how best to accomplish these themes, and the prophetic utterance of Isaiah based on the community she serves, and the financial and human resources available to her.

When Jesus arrived on the scene to begin His earthly ministry, He called 12 men who became His disciples. These men’s prior occupations were vastly different from the work that Jesus called them to do. As a result, Jesus had to do a new thing in their lives to enable them to carry on the work of ministry in His absence. Today is no different. We must examine the work that the Lord has left on record for us to accomplish until His coming again in final victory. The work that Jesus commanded us to do is based on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Although these two commands make up the law and the prophets, they are necessary for today’s church to be able to build the kingdom of God to prosper beyond our years.

The Great Commandment galvanizes our relationship with God and God alone, while loving everyone as the Lord loves us. The Great Commandment necessitates **in-reach**. In-reach refers to the efforts within the church to nurture, support, and strengthen her existing members toward becoming and sustaining the body of Christ and the family of God.

The Great Commission prepares the church to concretize her relationship with the Lord. The Great Commission necessitates **outreach**, which involves extending efforts to bring new people into the body of Christ and the family of God. As members spiritually mature, they are able to witness and teach new believers in the faith to develop a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord, and ultimately go and make new disciples for the glory of God and the advancement of God’s kingdom on earth.

Focusing on in-reach before outreach is important for several reasons:

- It builds a strong church foundation as the body of Christ
- It matures and equips members to go and make disciples
- It provides for sustainable outreach efforts as a way of life
- It demonstrates spiritual integrity and ethics within the body of Christ
- It fulfills the internal needs of members to be used by God in the service of others

Neither commandment is easy. Inherent in both commandments is a willingness to trust in Jesus, believe in Jesus, be taught about Jesus, and ultimately, following Jesus and doing what Jesus did; made disciples. Both commandments places each born again believer on a journey toward everlasting life as part of the larger body of Christ. No born-again believer can afford to sit on the sidelines of life and refuse to encourage someone to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The synoptic gospels put it this way:

“Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Mt 9:17).

New wine represents new believers in Jesus Christ and new wineskins represents members of the church who have individually and collectively repented of their sin, ask for forgiveness, reconciled with their neighbors, and have been restored to a right relationship with one another and God. This is the new thing that the prophet Isaiah spoke about, and this is the work that Jesus did and left on record for us to do until his coming again.

Every church on the Daytona Beach District should resolve to take advantage of this new season of ministry in addition to preparing itself to ready, set, grow the church and community by make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and the AMEC.

The next article will provide tips on how the churches on the Daytona Beach District can participate in this “in-reach/outreach” effort. Until then, remember, God’s work done God’s way always brings God’s good success.

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