

# **Sixth Episcopal District African Methodist Episcopal Church**



**“Be Ye Doers of the Word”**

**James 1:22**

**Implementing the Four Priorities**

## **“Be ye doers of the Word”**

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### **Implementing the Four Priorities**

Since the Leadership Congress of 2016 in Savannah, GA., the Sixth Episcopal District has been focused on four priorities. These priorities are:

1. Church Growth
2. Christian Education
3. Handling Money God’s Way
4. Social Action/Justice

There has been teaching and workshops at each annual conference, Mid-Year, Founder’s Day, Planning Meeting and this year’s Leadership Congress. Every presiding elder, pastor and church should know the four priorities of the Sixth Episcopal District for this Quadrennial.

The theme for the first 15 months of this quadrennial was “A More Excellent Way.” A more excellent way to grow the church, make disciples for Christ, get out of debt and be better stewards of God’s blessings and promote God’s kingdom in our communities, state and nation. To help the AME Church in Georgia be the best it can be.

If the churches in the Sixth Episcopal District, are going to grow, make Disciples for Christ, our congregants practice good stewardship and get out of debt, and seek justice, then we must do more than teach and have workshops. In other words, we must do more than talk. We must do what the Word of God says, “be not only hearers of the Word, but doers as well.” (James 1:22) It is time to act, to do what we have been teaching and providing workshops about. The question is whether we are committed “to implementing” these priorities. If we are not, we have wasted the last 15 months. I ask you to commit yourself to “doing” and acting on these four priorities.

If we are committed to being a “doer of the Word”, then we need to know “how”, do we grow the church, provide Christian Education, manage money God’s way, and act to promote justice? Enclosed are some, but not an exhaustive list of ways we can act on and implement these priorities. I urge you to try and use them, to implement these priorities.

## **Church Growth**

The question is raised, “how do we grow the church?” Most of our churches are not growing, why? The answer to both questions are the same. If a church is going to grow, it requires an intentional and deliberate decision and commitment to grow. Our churches are not growing today, because church growth is not a priority, simple. We are not passionate or committed to saving souls for Christ. There is no other credible reason. Everything else is an excuse. As the angel gave the message to the church at Ephesus, so too does the same message apply to us today, “you have left your first love.” (Revelation 2:4)

If our churches are going to grow, if we are going to bring people to Christ, then we must recover our passion and zeal for Christ. Let’s be honest, for most of us it is gone. Our mindset is to maintain the church, not grow the church. We must renew our own personal relationship with Christ. As the hymn writer ask, “where is the blessedness I knew, when first I sought the Lord?” We must seek and ask God to renew our passion and joy for Him, and recommit ourselves to live and serve Him. This must be done before we do anything else, to seek to grow the Lord’s church. This is a personal decision, and nobody can do it for us, but us.

### **Why Is Your Church Not Growing: Maybe It’s This**

1. We are inauthentic – There is a gap between what we say and who we are
2. We’ve Lost Our Passion – More passionate about tradition than about mission, or no passion at all
3. We’re in conflict – spend too much time arguing among ourselves
4. More in love with the past, than we are with the future
5. We’re not that awesome to be around – Fake, judgmental, hypocritical, angry, unthinking, unkind, narrow minded
6. Too focused on ourselves – our wants, preferences, perceived needs. Outsiders don’t feel welcomed, valued or included
7. We think culture is the enemy – we treat our unchurches neighbor like an enemy. Why would they ever want to become a part of the church
8. Afraid to risk what is, for the sake of what might be – won’t try anything new, because we feel it might mess up what we are doing now
9. Indecisive, can’t decide anything – afraid to make decisions for fear of failure or disapproval
10. We talk more than we act –like to think, debate, talk, but won’t act
11. We don’t think there is anything wrong or could be better about our church
12. More focused on growth, than we are on God – we should first lead them to Christ, and then to the church. A relationship with Christ ensures genuine life change happens and last. People can join the church, and not receive Christ. This poses problems for the church

There is no set list of ways to grow the church, there are a host of ways to grow the church. Whatever way we seek to grow the church must be strategic and planned. Some ways to “do” church growth are:

1. Worship – worship must be spirit led and meet the needs of people. Sermons must be prepared, speak to people and their needs. Not impressive, but impactful. Music must be moving, not entertaining. Worship must be God centered and focused.
2. Must change the culture of many of our churches. Too many of our churches our mission is to the classes, not the masses. We don't want everybody in the church. We want educated, employed, middle class people, who have something to give. Our mission should be to "whosoever will." Church must project an attitude that everyone is welcomed.
3. Congregation must be encouraged and taught to invite people to come to the church every week. What does it mean if we don't invite people to come to our church. Most disappointing part of service is when there are no visitors. At the end of service congregation should be encouraged to invite others. "Thank God for His presence with us today. Now we go out into the Lord's world. Somebody in your family, some of your friends and co-workers, need Christ in their lives, need to discover what God can do in their lives. Everybody, invite or bring somebody to worship with you next week. Through worship somebody might meet Christ and become a part of this congregation. Look to see you and your guest, next week."
4. "Everyone Win One Campaign." Try to get everyone in congregation to bring someone to church during the calendar year. Once they come to church, pastor and congregation seek to win them to Christ through preaching, worship, fellowship, ministries, et ....  
A 2005 Pew Research Center study shows that 80% of congregants have never brought anybody to Christ.
5. Evangelize to millennials and involve them in life of the church. Plan ministries for and by millennials. Example: Social Action, Arts and DFree. Also include millennials in life of the church. Millennials should be included on the Steward and Trustee Board, and other leadership positions.
6. Ministries. We live in a post denominational period, where people no longer join a church because of its denominational label, but look for a church that meets the needs of their family.  
Possible Ministries
  - a. Food Pantry
  - b. Clothes Closet
  - c. Rites of Passage (Boys and Girls)
  - d. After School Program
  - e. Seniors Ministry (Ex: Generation One)
  - f. Health Ministry
  - g. Arts Ministry
  - h. Adopt A School
  - i. DFree Ministry
  - j. Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts
  - k. Social Action
  - l. Other

7. Make children and youth a priority. Have young people in church invite their classmates to come to church. Have activities specifically designed for children and youth. Bible Study, bowling, skating. Demonstrate an interest in young people. You will not only get young people, you will get their parents.
8. Relationship with community. Church should interact with community where church is located. Church should be hub of community life. Evangelize to residents in community, let them know what church is doing, provide ministries that meet needs of community. If community feels church has community at heart, residents of community will become part of church.
9. Consider demographics in planning, location, ministries and future of church.

### **Consequences of Failure to Grow Church**

Church Growth must be the number one priority of the church. The failure to grow has brought devastating consequences to the church.

- a. Many of our churches are slowly dying. The average age of the Black Church in the 1950's to late 70's was the mid to late 40's, and the Black Church was packed every Sunday. Because the Black Church is not growing, today the average age of the Black Church is 67, and most of our church memberships today are only a fourth or less than what they use to be.
- b. Church financial strength is insufficient to meet the needs of the church. Rather than giving going to ministry and kingdom work, it goes to help the church survive. For example, a church which had 200 members 40 or 50 years ago, may have 30 or 40 members today. That 30 or 40 members today struggles to carry what use to be the responsibility of 200 members.
- c. Facilities are in decline, because resources do not exist for upkeep, renovation or building.
- d. Many pastors are underpaid or go weeks, without being paid. You can't get what you don't raise.
- e. Ministries don't exist, because there are no resources to pay for them.

## Christian Education

If Church Growth is the number one priority of the church, Christian Education must be second. You can't have one without the other. Most people believe the number one way you measure church growth is numerical, but not so. The number one way you measure church growth is spiritual. If people who are already in the church aren't growing spiritually, the church will not grow numerically. Christian Education is about helping people to grow in Christ. To move from being members of the church, to become Disciples of Christ.

The best definition of Christian Education I have heard, comes from my Christian Education professor in seminary, Dr. Mance Jackson, who taught that "Christian Education is that ministry of the church, which undergirds every other ministry of the church." Christian Education is more than Church School, Bible Study or activities that affect children and youth. Everyone in the church needs Christian Education.

So then, how do we "do" Christian Education and why is it important? First, it is important for those who are already in the church. People want and need to grow spiritually. If they are not growing spiritually in their church, most of them will find a church where they can grow. It is why many people move from one church to another. Second, it is important for those who join the church. When converts and many others join the church, the mindset that they had in the world, is the mindset they bring to the church. Unless we teach and train them, they will keep that mindset, and often cause tensions and misunderstanding in the church. If you are going to change the way people think, and the way people act, you must change the way people think. This is what Christian Education seeks to do.

**How do we "do" Christian Education? There are a number of ways. This is not an exhaustive list.**

1. Each local church has someone trained to lead Christian Education in the local church. The Sixth District will provide training for every local Christian Education director. Training sessions will be provided beginning in February for each Presiding Elder District. Dr. Garland Pierce will assist in this effort. Every local church Director of Christian Education will be trained. It is important that every pastor appoint a local Director of Christian Education.
2. Every local church should have class for those who accept Christ and become a member of the church. Call it "New Members Class", "Disciples Class" "From Membership to Discipleship" or some other title. This will teach these converts or accessions about the importance of the decision they have made, how to develop a relationship with Christ, difference between membership and discipleship, the history and legacy of the AME Church, the structure and operation of the local church, doctrine, etc.
3. Christian Education must be continuous and ongoing, and it must impact every area of the life of people. This is particularly important for those already in the church. During the year, there should be workshops sponsored by Christian Education in the local church about health, finances and stewardship, music, arts, parenting, marriage, and a host of other areas that impact everyday life. Teach what God's Word says in these areas.
4. Recommend or provide reading materials and books for congregation to read

## **Handling Money God's Way**

In His Word, speaks of money more than He does anything else. More than love, forgiveness, prayer, even the cross. This is because God in His infinite wisdom knows that money more than anything else will come between Him and us. Mishandling money prevents God from being first in most of our lives.

The church does a disservice to most of our congregants, because we fail to teach them how to handle money God's way. The most many in the church hear about money is to give our tithes, the first 10% of all that God blesses us to receive. This is the sacred portion. Yet, less than 20% of our congregants are tithers. Most of our pastors are intimidated or reluctant to preach or teach about money, because we are afraid the people will be turned off, and speak the regular refrain, "all the church wants is money." Many of our people are not blessed, because they don't know how to handle money God's way. To be blunt, most of our congregants are ignorant, when it comes to handling money. We fail to live the abundant life that God wants us to have, because we don't know how to handle money God's way. The church owes an apology to our congregants because we have failed to teach them what God says about handling money.

There is no one who cannot tithe. All of us are on a fixed income. Whatever we make or earn is our fixed income. The issue is we don't handle money God's way, primarily because we don't know how. Most people don't give the 10% (tithe), because we mismanage 90%. We waste or mismanage most of what we receive. African Americans are the nation's greatest consumers. We spend, we do not save or invest.

God in His Word speaks over and over about how to manage money. But it is not taught by the church. Our people don't know. Today, African Americans are not making less, but more than we ever have. Yet, we are giving less, saving less and in more debt. We are in greater debt than we have ever been. If we are in unwise or poorly achieved debt, God cannot be first in our lives. The Word of God says, "owe no man except to love them." (Romans 13:8) The Word of God admonishes us to live within our means, yet many of us live beyond our income. We spend according to our wants and not our needs.

The goal of the Sixth Episcopal District is to help get our congregants out of debt, and handle money according to what God's word teaches us. Not to just talk about it, but to "do" it. This will not happen if pastors don't take initiative and follow through. For the past 15 months, we have had workshops and talked about handling money God's way. But the teaching has not been passed down to local churches and individual members of our churches. We are depriving our congregants from being set free from debt, and living the abundant life that God desires. Too many of our congregants are "cursed" because they are robbing God, and not handling money God's way. They are not giving God what belongs to Him, the tithe, or thanking God for His goodness (giving the offering), but getting deeper and deeper into debt and financial bondage. Through the DFree Ministry people will be able to get out of debt, have their credit scores increased, pay less in interest, pay off mortgages, save and become investors, not just consumers. They will also become tithers, which is part of handling money God's way. This will increase what the church receives to use for ministry.

### **So then how do we teach our congregants to handle money God's way?**

1. Provide training for representatives from each local church in how to handle money God's way. This can be done at the District Conference. Each local church should have representatives in attendance.
2. Pastors establish a DFree Ministry in each local church. The DFree Ministry provides classes for congregants in the local church to learn and study how to handle money God's way.
3. The representatives that have been trained how to handle money God's way, will be the teachers in the local church.
4. The Rev. Donna Baker and her team, will help train local church representatives set up their classes.
5. The local church will set up classes to teach congregants in the local church how to handle money God's way.
6. After classes graduate each congregant will be given a certificate.
7. One Sunday a month time will be provided for "praise testimonies" from persons who have completed classes and have had their credit restored, interest reduced, mortgages reduced, debt paid off etc.
8. Congregants will be taught to tithe, which is part of handling money God's way

### **Social Action/Justice**

Jesus in the Lord's Prayer prays "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." (St. Matthew 6:10) The church is God's instrument to promote His kingdom in the world. God's kingdom is a kingdom of justice. He says, "let justice roll down like water." (Amos 5:24) Historically the Black Church has been the "conscience" of America, however over the last thirty to thirty- five years the Black Church has become immersed in the "praise of God", at the expense of serving God. God deserves and demands both, praise and service.

During the late 1950's to 1970's, Black Churches were full, you couldn't get a seat. This is because nothing for the advancement of Blacks in this country occurred without the leadership and involvement of the Black Church. This drew people to the Black Church in droves. The leadership of Blacks, politically and socially came from the Black Church. Today, most Black Churches are half full at best, and almost empty at worst. The question is why? It is because the Black Church since the 1970's has become less socially active. Most ministers are not involved in their communities, and provide little or no leadership. They have confined themselves within their churches, and speak only to in house matters. Additionally, most of the leadership of the Black community, politically and socially, no longer comes from within the Black church, or even attends the Black church. Congregants within the Black church are not involved and seldom attend municipal council, Board of Education, Zoning Board or other municipal meetings, nor are involved in state issues.



Simply put, the greatest period of growth in the Black Church, was when the church was more socially active. This was particularly true among young adults, who were excited and involved in the struggle for justice. A major reason Black Millennials, Black Lives Matter and other such groups are critical and have abandoned the Black Church, is because the Black Church today seldom speaks to justice issues that impact Blacks, our families, and community.

The Sixth District seeks to reclaim the Black Church legacy of social justice. Again, the question is how do we do it? There are a number of things we can do at the Episcopal District, Annual Conference, and local church level.

1. The Sixth Episcopal District will organize an Episcopal District Social Action Committee, composed of the chairmen of each annual conference Social Action Committee, as well as two members, one clergy and lay from each annual conference.
2. Will try by December of 2018 to have a full time Social Action Director on staff. (Must first clear debt to connectional church, and related to St. Paul, Macon)
3. Organize Social Action Committee in each annual conference during the 2018 series of annual conferences.
4. Ask each pastor where possible to appoint a Social Action Committee in the local church. Local Church Social Action Committee will be involved with municipal, school board and local issues. Training session for local church Social Action Committee will be provided around the state. Dates to be determined.
5. The Sixth Episcopal District will organize in each annual conference a Voter Registration and Education Campaign to begin in January 2018 in anticipation of the 2018 Mid-Term and State elections. Will also provide either ourselves or in collaboration with other faith bodies a "Report Card" grading state officials on issues important to Blacks in Georgia. To be released in early October 2018. Report Card will include gubernatorial candidates, US Senators, US Representatives. Will seek one of the area colleges to assist in preparation.
6. Beginning in January 2018 Social Action Commission will provide a newsletter, providing news and opinion on issues impacting Georgia. Example: Clergy will be pushing Hate Crimes Legislation in partnership with Georgia Legislative Black Caucus.







## **Sixth Episcopal District Headquarters**

250 Williams St. NW  
Suite 2115  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
(770) 220-1770