



"From Where I Sit ..."

Unity Summit 2015 – "A New Paradigm" Preparing for Orlando in September

The late Reverend Joseph H. Henderson, former Presiding Elder of the Saint Louis District and one of my pastoral predecessors at the Jamison Memorial CME Church, would often say in preaching and conversation, "What can I say? Yes, what can I say?" Well, when speaking of the Unity Summit for 2015 and the import of its new paradigm changes, I find myself sometimes needing to say as did Reverend Henderson, "What can I say?"

As Executive Director of the Annual CME Unity Summit and one of the former directors of the 25 previous Annual CME Convocations, let me first say that the Unity Summit can be identified as a growing and evolving gathering of CME's and CME meetings. The Summit includes the training concept of the Convocation but goes further to include the meetings of the General Connectional Board, the Executive Board of the Women's Missionary Council, the Young Adult Retreat and the Institute of the Connectional Lay Ministry although all of these groups may not meet each year during the course of a quadrennial or four-year period.

Following the 2014 General Conference, a new team of episcopal leaders, led by Bishop Kenneth W. Carter as the Chair, was elected to further the change envisioned in this new paradigm. Joining Bishop Carter in episcopal leadership roles were Bishop Sylvester Williams, Sr. (Program Chair), Bishop Thomas L. Brown, Sr. (Finance Chair), Bishop Bobby R. Best (Logistics Chair) and Bishop Marvin Frank Thomas, Sr. (Sponsorship Chair). The College of Bishops also appointed a Unity Summit Steering Committee and an Advisory Committee to provide structures to implement the details of the annual programs while remaining true to the overall goal and expectation of the new paradigm. The 2015 Unity Summit in Orlando, FL will be the first test of the implementation of this new paradigm and thus far its potential for success is remarkable.



What will be different this year within this new paradigm? It has a different plan. With a goal of 3,000 registrations, this will be the largest gathering of its type in more than 30 years. The theme **"Investing Where You Are" (At Home)**, undergirded by Acts 1:8, is drawn from Bishop James B. Walker's presentation of the 2014 Episcopal Address and will serve as the guiding thought for the major presentations. From the Keynote address on Tuesday evening to the strategic planning and sharing by Episcopal Districts on Friday, the emphasis will be on how to strengthen the local church and its members throughout the Connection as investment factors in spiritual service. For the Church to be successful in its mission in today's world, plans and strategies must be developed and implemented that are relevant and meaningful to a new generation and to me that is the essence of this paradigm.

What is different this year will be found in the cadre of persons invited to be presenters. One of the most recognized contemporary religious figures of our day, Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., has been invited to deliver the Keynote address. Daily teachers, preachers, and plenary presenters, led by the programmatic General Officers of the CME Church (Drs. Crutchfield, Pinkett, Harris, Pegues and Allen), will include AME Zion Bishop W. Darian Moore, United Methodist Pastor Olujimi Brown (Bible Study), AME Senior Bishop John Bryant (Ecumenical Preacher) and Truett Seminary Professor Dr. Todd D. Still. Another very special guest invited is Grammy Award Winner Pastor Donnie McClurkin. Additionally,

these major presenters are also invited to facilitate the afternoon breakout sessions on Wednesday and Thursday.

What will also be different will be the caliber of the closing and finale events. A gala banquet is scheduled for Thursday evening with a “surprise” speaker. General seating tickets will sell for \$75 and tickets for special VIP reserve seating will sell for \$100. Friday night will close with a Commissioning Charge from Senior Bishop Lawrence L. Reddick in “unity” with a Summit sponsored concert featuring three renowned artists and the CME Unity Summit Choir. Invited to participate in the concert are Lady Tramaine Hawkins, Jennifer Holliday, and teenage Evangelist Jakalyn Carr.



And finally what will be different will be the registration and hotel reservation processes. The registration fee has remained at \$150 for those who register by Saturday, August 15, 2015. Afterward the registration fee becomes \$200 (from August 16th through October 2, 2015). Only **after** registering can an attendee secure a room in the Summit Room Block. Rooms in this resort hotel are \$120 plus tax per night. **A two-night hotel room deposit is required and the deposit will be charged at the time of the reservation.** Debit and credit cards will be charged immediately for the two-night deposit if used to secure the reservation. Unless revised at a later time, the cancellation date for the refund of the room deposit will be about fifteen (15) days before the opening of the Unity Summit (September 14, 2015). Of course, the opportunity to register online and to make hotel reservations online will again be available and is strongly encouraged.

Needless to say, I am excited about what is now in place with this new paradigm and what is about to happen. And my excitement is not limited to the potential success of this one meeting, but the expectation that what will come from this meeting will have been drawn on the overall vision cast in the 2014 Episcopal address and will be taken home to the various local churches in our several regions with an expectant belief for implementation such that the church may be prepared for the next part in this paradigm process: **Unity Summit 2016 - “Investing in the Community”**.

This idea of combining connectional meetings that was approved at the General Conference in 1986 and begun in 1987 with the First Annual CME Convocation and was reconfirmed in the General Conference of 2010 has now grown into a fully functional structure with the wherewithal to finally deliver on the hopes and dreams of those who dared to put forth such a thought. I was there in the General Conference of 1986 and I was there at the First Annual CME Convocation in 1987 and by the help of God I will be in Orlando to witness this coming of age manifested in the success of Unity Summit 2015. Every one of us should want to be present and not one of us should dare miss such a significant high-water mark for the CME Church ... Or at least that’s the way it looks to me ...

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Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.thecmechurch.org)