

WHAT WOULD DR. KING SAY TO OUR CHURCHES TODAY? (Opinion, *The Community Informer*, Greenville, SC, January 21, 2015, p. 1C).

WHERE DO WE GO AFTER MLK DAY? (Opinion, *The Greenville News*, Greenville, SC February 9, 2015, p.8A)

As we remember the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., especially after the annual banquets, community service activities, and prayer vigils, a question still looms in many of our minds: where do we go from here? Do we return to “business as usual” where the chaos of injustice, inequality, and oppression reside or do we work toward the “beloved community” of justice, equality, and freedom? Dr. King left us with that choice and response in his last book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* before his death. Therefore, it is with his urgency that I pose that worry to the very institution that profoundly impacted his life: the church.

Lewis Baldwin, Professor of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN and a King Scholar, shares the following mandate from King in his book *The Voice of Conscience: The Church in the Mind of Martin Luther King, Jr.:*

It has always been the responsibility of the church to broaden horizons, challenge the status quo, and break the mores [traditions and values] when necessary. In the words of the Old Testament, the church is “set over nations and over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build anew and to plant”. We are called to be thermostats that transform and regulate the temperature of society, not thermometers that merely record or register the temperature of the majority opinion (Baldwin, 2010, p. 77).

In other words, King contends that churches must be in the business to move people toward their greatest potential and highest good, speak truth to power, and when needed, separate from traditions that prevent churches from exercising its social and spiritual roles, not just the spiritual. It is also important to note that churches are to set standards for the world to follow, not the world setting standards for our churches. Unfortunately, the same disorder, ignorance, lack of focus and interest, and complacency that persist in our land is prevalent in our churches, too. From our concern with materialism, status, pointless arguments/disputes, and obsession with the afterlife instead of the daily concerns and struggles that everyday people face, it is essential that we reclaim our role to be not only concerned with the issues inside the four walls, but also the outside. It

is significant for us to embrace the duty to meet the needs of the whole person, not just the spiritual and financial, while we work to combat racism, sexism, and classism. Hence, it is with this activism that we will provide holistic uplift, promote a never-ending faith, challenge systems of oppression, and extend social responsibility to all of humankind besides Black people.

So what would Dr. King say to our churches today? He would declare for us to self-examine our lives and roles in society, especially whether we are improving ourselves to enhance the existence of our brothers and sisters around us. He would also challenge us to become comfortable to feel uncomfortable. As Dr. King followed several examples, including Mahatma Gandhi, his parents, ancestors, and Jesus, who gave their lives for the greater good, are we willing to pay the cost of giving ourselves for the betterment of our world? Furthermore, he would want us to labor together, regardless of our social status and ethnic background, to eliminate our global community from the diseases of racism, economic materialism, and militarism for good.