

After we have been fed by the Word, lifted by the music, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we leave the Lord's House to go into the Lord's world to make a difference in the Lord's name. We go to City Hall, the Board of Education, the State House, our jobs, schools, and communities to do kingdom work. The church is to win the world for Christ.

We gather in the Lord's House on Sunday to be refueled, to worship, to be fed by the Word, and to be empowered by the Spirit. Then we scatter to serve God. Over the last forty years, the Black Church has not been as impactful as it was from the 1950s to the 1990s. Nothing for the advancement of Blacks in this country occurred without the leadership and participation of the Black Church. However, since the late 1990s, there has been a decline in the activism and engagement of the Black Church. The Black Church has become more inward than outward and has focused almost exclusively on praising God.

In our communities, we have churches on almost every block—sometimes, churches across from other churches and, in some cases, two or three churches on the same block. But when you come out the door, there is little difference in the community. Every now and then, there is a question every church should ask itself: "What difference would it make if the church I belong to closed down? Would anybody notice or care?"

Through the Prophet Amos, God speaks to the church today as He spoke to the temple then. God says, "I hate, I despise your feast days, I have no regard for your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me grain offerings and burnt offerings I will not accept them. Take away from me the noise of your songs, and the melody of your stringed instruments I will not hear, but let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:21-24). God wants us to worship Him and serve Him, praise Him and work for Him, be priestly and prophetic, and promote His kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven. We should aim to have it said of us, as it was said of the New Testament Church, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). They impacted and made a difference in the world.

ADD TO THE CHURCH

Third, if we are going to be the "Church at Its Best," we must add to the church. Our model for church growth must be the New Testament Church. The Word says, "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Unfortunately, the AME Church is not growing. It has not been growing for close to forty years. In fact, the AME Church (and other Black churches) have not added any new congregants for almost forty years. All we have done is take in some people to replace those who have passed or moved, but no additional congregants have joined. There are a host of reasons for this.

First, church growth or evangelism is not a priority of the church. It ought to be the number one priority. If it's not a priority for the leadership of the church (bishops), it will not be a priority for the congregants. The Pew Research Center conducted a study of the Black Church about eight years ago and reported that 80% of those in the church have not brought anybody to Christ or His church. We invite people to go to dinner, to the movies, to our homes, and other places but not to our church. What does it say about how we feel about our church when we don't invite anybody to come? Why do we have a welcome of visitors on our bulletins or during service when we haven't invited anybody?

Second, what do we have to offer? If we have something people need, they will come and get it. In other words, what ministry does the church offer to the elderly, families, children, or the community? For example, that single mom trying to raise her three children wants to know what the church has to offer to help her. An After-School Program, Tutorial, Seniors Ministry, Food Pantry, etc., are some examples.

Third, we have no relationship with the community outside the doors of the church. Nobody across the street or up the street attends or belongs to our church. Everybody drives to the church; nobody walks to church.