

- The community far too often sees the church as the enemy. The church does nothing for the community or invites them in. The church desperately needs young people. Churches ought to adopt the school in their community. Provide back-to-school bags for students, provide tutors, assist teachers, invite the school to worship from time to time, and plan activities. The school and students will love it. And when parents see that the church takes an interest in their children, you will not only get the children but also their parents. Ministry is important. We must not only worship, but we must also minister.

Fourth, the church must be engaged in the life of the city. The church must be socially active. The greatest period of growth in the history of the Black Church was during the Civil Rights Movement. You couldn't get a seat in a Black Church. People knew that the church was involved. Nothing for the advancement of Blacks in this country occurred without the leadership and participation of the Black Church. Today, many of our churches are not involved in issues of social justice. The church has turned inward rather than outward.

Fifth, congregants must be generous in their giving to God. We can't grow without giving. Too many of our churches are struggling to survive because they aren't growing. We complain about "the budget" or assessments, yet the connectional budget hasn't increased in over twenty years. The problem is that today we have fewer people trying to pay the same amount a lot more used to pay. It's because the church isn't growing, and we are not generous in our giving.

DO GREATER THINGS FOR GOD

Fourth, if we are going to be "the Church at Its Best," we must do greater things for God. Listen to Jesus as He speaks to His disciples, "Most assuredly I say unto you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (John 14:12). How unrealistic, in fact, impossible this seems. When we think and read about all the great things that Jesus did, how are we supposed to do greater things than Jesus did? It is because we are not to do it by ourselves. Too many of us have become so arrogant that we believe we can do the Lord's work without the Lord's help. We are trying to do ministry by ourselves, change communities, and do social justice alone. But Jesus reminds us, "without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Too many churches today have low expectations about what they can do. We no longer seek to do great things. We seek to do those things we know we can do, which do not require the Lord's help. We boast because we painted the church or got new doors and windows. We can do these things by ourselves. But "the church at its best" seeks to do those things which can only be done with God's help. This is how God is glorified. The church should seek to do great things for a great God. Saving souls, changing communities, fighting for justice, and promoting God's kingdom on earth—these are examples of greater works that we can do for God.

The key is that we don't do them by ourselves but with the Lord's help. Notice Jesus says we will be able to do greater works because "I go to my Father." Then He adds, "I will pray to my Father, and He will send you another Helper" (John 14:16-17). This Helper is the Holy Spirit. He helps us to do greater things for God. The Holy Spirit does more than make us shout. He enables us to stand, speak, fight, and be courageous. We can't do it by ourselves, but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, enables us to do "greater things" in the Lord's name.

BISHOP REGINALD T. JACKSON

132ND BISHOP OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH