



BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH LAY ORGANIZATION DEVOTIONAL | OCTOBER 2024

501 West Orange Avenue | Tallahassee, Florida
Bishop Julius Harrison McAllister, Jr., Senior Minister

Tuesday, *Onyx* October 1, 2024

“Why Can’t Our Children Find Us?”

“People were bringing children to Him in order that He might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them.” – Mark 10:13 NRSV-UE

In 2010, thousands of civil rights activists from across the world descended upon the oldest Historically Black University in the South, Shaw University, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Among the celebratory activities, various workshops and panels focused on the ongoing struggle for equality in a myriad of areas, took place. During these sessions, some participants blamed immorality in Black communities for the supposed wayward and reckless behavior of youth. Others called upon leaders to center the needs and concerns of historically marginalized children and teenagers in order to create realistic solutions. Then, others trivialized these needs and prioritized other issues. However, artistic activist, Harry Belafonte, who was also in attendance, exclaimed, “Why can’t our children find us? Why can’t they hear us more clearly? What are we so busy doing that we can afford to abandon them and then have the arrogance and the nerve to accuse them of being lost?” Over 14 years later, this challenge still exists.

The first Sunday in *Onyx* October is also the Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost on the Christian Liturgical Calendar. The concurrent Gospel reading is Mark 10:2-16, in Year B of the “Lectionary” found on page 795 of the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal*. In the first ten verses of this scriptural passage, a delegation of Pharisees attempted to entrap Jesus by asking Him questions about the sanctity of marriage. In response, Jesus did not delve into controversial theological frameworks, but emphasized the centrality of love, dedication, fulfillment and unity of mind and spirit. In verses 13-16, crowds began bringing their children to Jesus. Here, one will find the disciples abandoning the concerns of parents and children. The disciples spoke harshly to the families, hoping that they would disperse – dismissing their importance. Maybe the disciples were tired and irritated – who knows, but that was no excuse. Jesus was greatly displeased, corrected the disciples and asked the people to bring their children to Him to be blessed.

Children deserve love, attention, guidance and protection. They should not be killed by indiscriminate military warfare in Gaza and Lebanon. They should not be given automatic assault rifles as birthday presents. They should not be taunted and threatened in Springfield, Ohio, due to racist remarks made by political candidates aspiring for the highest executive offices in the United States. Children deserve fully-funded Head Start, Pre-K, and after-school academic enrichment programs. They deserve quality, culturally inclusive Church School, Bible Study, Youth Church, and Vacation Bible School initiatives in their places of worship.

In the AME tradition, babies are brought forward to be baptized. We, as congregants, are asked by the pastor, to verbally proclaim that we will “order our lives after the example of Christ, that these children surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (Page 801 of the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal*). We, not just the parents, are obligated to welcome, bless and guide children, but when we fail to participate, deliberate, execute and assess the appropriate programming, our complacency, indifference and inactivity figuratively speaks “sternly to them.” One will soon ask, as the now Late Mr. Belafonte did over 14 years ago, “Why can’t our children find us?” All of us have a role to play in this matter. Make sure that you are not speaking “sternly to them”...i.e., Children, Teenagers, Young Mothers/Fathers, Parental Guardians...for they are needed to play an indispensable role in our churches. Don’t cause Christ to become “indignant” with you, “for it is to such as these [Children] that the kingdom of God belongs.” (~10:14). Selah.

The Bethel AME Church Lay Organization of Tallahassee, Florida, remains fully committed to the teaching, training and equipping of Methodists for liberating service in the church, community, country and world. Please join us at our next local Lay Meeting, tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, *Onyx* October 15, 2024, at 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. in Efferson-Morgan Fellowship Hall of Bethel AME Church. Refreshments will be served.

-Brother Kyle Harris, Ph.D., Contributor and Local Lay President