



## BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH LAY ORGANIZATION DEVOTIONAL | AUGUST 2024

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

Sunday, *Sable* September 1, 2024

### **“GIVE ME A CLEAN HEART!”**

**“It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.”**

**– Mark 7:15 NLT**

Southern University and A&M College alumna, Dr. Margaret Pleasant Douroux, composed the lyrics and tune to the popular gospel song, “Give Me A Clean Heart” in the year, 1970. This accomplished Black Maestra served in the field of music education and leadership in the California Public School System and in Protestant and Catholic Churches in the state. Currently retired after 60+ years in active musicianship, Dr. Douroux still provides experienced instruction, wisdom and guidance to young and budding musicians. Dr. Douroux’s fine compositions continue to inspire artists, ideologies and institutions around the world. “Give Me A Clean Heart” is found on page 461 in the *African American Heritage Hymnal*, which is used in a number of progressive AME Churches to compliment, enhance and diversify corporate worship experiences. In this musical prayer, Dr. Douroux’s writes, “Give me a clean heart so I may serve thee. Lord, fix my heart so that I may be used by Thee...”

The first Sunday in *Sable* September is also the Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost on the Christian Liturgical Calendar. The concurrent Gospel reading is Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, in Year B of the “Lectionary” found on page 795 of the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal*. In this scriptural passage, a second delegation of Jerusalem Pharisees unwarrantedly observed that some of Jesus’ disciples failed to engage in ceremonial handwashing before eating. They criticized Jesus for not ensuring that His disciples followed Jewish tradition. Jesus admonished the Pharisees for sanctifying human/cultural traditions in an effort belittle and exclude people. In verse 6 of this passage Christ said, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’” To provide clarity to the laity in the midst, Christ said, “It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.” The hearts of the Pharisees were not clean. They did not have good intentions. They needed to ask God to “Give [Them] A Clean Heart.”

Currently, at every level of religious and secular government, there are people in positions of power and influence, like the Pharisees, who honor Christ with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. They sing the doxology weekly in Sunday worship experiences, but fail to research and implement cutting-edge initiatives to attract and retain new members. They vehemently advocate for “one nation under God,” but fail to legislate livable wage increases for citizens at or below the poverty line. They call for “thoughts and prayers” after school shootings, but are silent on stricter gun control policies. They raise educational standards in K-20 public schools by creating competitive metrics that continually reward those institutions historically resourced by racist policies, while simultaneously limiting equitable funding to minority serving institutions, which, in turn, breeds frenzy, anxiety, finger-pointing, turnover, closures and despair.

FAMU alumnus, Reverend Attorney Reginald Williams, Jr., writes in *Moving the Masses, Pillars of Prophetic Preaching*, that “[ministry] should be supported by, and lead to the creation of programs, policies, and practices which empower people to live into God-desired alternatives.” Are our actions and plans having a lasting positive impact on future generations? Jesus knew that the various ceremonial traditions of the Pharisees, were divisive and would be unnecessary, because of His sacrificial crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and second-coming. He was the inclusive alternative. Ask God to “Give [You] A Clean Heart” to make equitable decisions.

**The Bethel AME Church Lay Organization** 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 – 7:00 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