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Dedication Without Pay

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DR. J. CLAY SMITH, JR.
COMMISSIONER, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

AT THE
ANNUAL LAITY DAY
QUINN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH
FLINT, MICHIGAN
APRIL 25, 1982

DEDICATION WITHOUT PAY

I AM DELIGHTED TO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO SPEAK AT THIS 1982 LAY DAY MEETING UNDER YOUR GENERAL THEME OF "NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE LAITY IN SERVICE AND ACTION." I HAVE MODIFIED YOUR THEME SLIGHTLY AND I WILL ADDRESS THE SUBJECT OF "DEDICATION WITHOUT PAY."

LAITY DAY IS ONE OF THE DAYS THAT CLERGY ACROSS OUR GREAT NATION STEP ASIDE AND ALLOW THOSE OF US WHO ARE UNADORN TO STEP INTO THE PULPIT AND HAVE OUR SAY. LAYMEN AND LAYWOMEN DOMINATE THE RICH RELIGIOUS SECTS OF OUR NATION. THE CLASSICAL DEFINITION OF A LAYPERSON MEANS "ONE OF THE PEOPLE, AS DISTINGUISHED FROM ONE OF THE CLERGY." HOWEVER, IT HAS ANOTHER MEANING, ALSO. A LAYPERSON IS DEFINED AS "ONE WHO DOES NOT BELONG TO ANY PARTICULAR PROFESSION." HENCE, ANYONE IN THE LAYSHIP IS A SPECIAL INGREDIENT TO ANY ORGANIZATION BECAUSE LAYSHIP IS THE SYMBOL OF A FREE SOCIETY, A FREE SOCIETY IN WHICH RELIGION IS ALLOWED TO SPEAK.

MY NOTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH AND ITS RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY WERE DERIVED FROM MY OBSERVATIONS OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH IN WHICH I GREW UP. ALLEN CHAPEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH WAS A SMALL CHURCH IN THE CENTER OF THE PACKING HOUSE PLANTS IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA. ITS MEMBERS WERE BASICALLY POOR BY MODERN DAY STANDARDS. THE MEN WORKED IN THE PACKING HOUSE PLANTS. THE WOMEN OF THE CHURCH WERE MOSTLY HOUSEWIVES, WHO CARED FOR THEIR FAMILIES WHILE THEIR MEN WORKED.

THERE WERE FEW IF ANY COLLEGE EDUCATED MEMBERS IN THE CHURCH. FOR A LONG WHILE, OUR CHURCH DID NOT HAVE A PASTOR WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE. HOWEVER, OUR COMMUNITY DID HAVE AFRO-AMERICAN EDUCATED PEOPLE WITHIN ITS BORDERS, AND A FEW OF THOSE WITH HIGHER EDUCATION WERE MEMBERS OF ALLEN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH.

THE CHURCH IN WHICH I SPENT MY FORMATIVE YEARS WAS REQUIRED TO PAY ANNUAL DUES TO THE CONFERENCE TO WHICH IT BELONGED. THESE FEES WERE EXACTED FROM THE CONGREGATION AND WERE CALLED CONFERENCE CLAIMS. IN ~~THE BEST OF TIMES, THE CHURCH WAS ALWAYS SHORT OF THE~~ AMOUNT OF CONFERENCE CLAIMS NEEDED TO MEET ITS OBLIGATION. HOWEVER, THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH WOULD INVARIABLY HAVE FUND RAISING CAMPAIGNS SO THAT THEIR PASTOR WOULD NOT LOSE FACE WHEN HE WENT TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THE WORK DONE IN THE CHURCH WAS SPREAD OVER A WIDE THEOCRATIC BUREAUCRACY, SUCH AS THE WILLING WORKERS AND THE BUSY BEE CLUBS, THE TRUSTEE AND STEWARD BOARDS, THE SENIOR, JUNIOR, AND YOUTH CHOIRS, AND SEVERAL AD HOC COMMITTEES. THE SECURITY AND THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH WAS LODGED WITH THE LAYSHIP.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH NEVER CHANGED; HOWEVER, WHETHER THE CHURCH MOVED FORWARD DEPENDED ON THE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS OF ITS MEMBERS AND THE STRENGTH OF THE PASTOR, AND THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH AS ITS LEADERS. HENCE, I CAME TO KNOW EARLY IN MY LIFE THAT THE CHURCH COULD NOT SUCCEED IN ITS MISSION WITH INTERNAL CONFLICT AND DISTRUST OF UNITS WITHIN THE CHURCH BY ITS MEMBERS. THE CHURCH COULD NOT HOPE TO SUCCEED WITHOUT A SPIRIT OF COOPERATIVE THOUGHT AND WITHOUT JOY AS ITS OBJECTIVE UNENCUMBERED BY PETTY DIFFERENCES.

IT IS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THESE OBSERVATIONS THAT I BEGIN TO ASSESS THE VALUE OF THE CHURCH WHICH HAS SUSTAINED ME EVEN AS A POLITICAL PERSON TODAY. AS A YOUTH, I LEARNED THAT THE WORSE HATRED OF ALL COULD ~~ERUPT WITHIN THE HOLLOWED WALLS OF THE CHURCH. WHAT A~~ PITY, I THOUGH THAT MR. JONES, OR MS. McVAY COULD NOT LEAVE THEIR DIFFERENCES OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH. NOT ONLY DID THEY NOT LEAVE THEIR DIFFERENCES OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH, THEY SOUGHT TO ESTABLISHED

PLATOONS OF PARTISANS WITHIN THE CHURCH. SOON, THE CHURCH WAS AT WAR UNTIL ONE FACTION PREVAIL. TO PREVAIL MEANT THAT ONLY ONE FACTION OR ITS CONVERTS REMAINED, HAPPY OR UNHAPPY. DURING THE COURSE OF THESE UPHEAVELS, A PASTOR WAS USUALLY SACRIFICED, THE VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE CHURCH BECAME STAGNANT, THE CONFERENCE CLAIMS USUALLY BECAME DELINQUENT AND THE BISHOP OR THE PRESIDING ELDER USUALLY PAID A VISIT TO THE CHURCH.

THERE WAS ANOTHER ASPECT OF LAYSHIP THAT OFTEN AROSE HEATED DISCUSSIONS AND THAT WAS IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL CONCERNS. WHAT IS THE OBLIGATION OF THE CHURCH OUTSIDE OF ITS WALLS? IF THE CHURCH HAS SUCH AN OBLIGATION; WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THIS OBLIGATION?

FOR CENTURIES, THE AFRO-AMERICAN CHURCH AND ITS PASTORATE HAS LEAD THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE OF THIS NATION WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON BLACK AMERICANS. I OBSERVED, LEARNED, AND WAS TAUGHT THAT THE CHURCH MUST BE INVOLVED IN NOT ONLY THE SOCIAL CONCERNS OF THE COMMUNITY BUT IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONCERNS OF THE NATION AND THE WORLD. AS A YOUNG COLLEGE STUDENT, A PROTESTANT ATTENDING A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY, I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THAT PHILOSOPHIES MAY DIFFER AMONG DIFFERENT FAITHS, BUT NOT ONE'S COMMITMENT TO PRINCIPLE AND INTEGRITY AS RELATED TO THE CHURCH'S STAND AGAINST

RACE, SEX, AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE. AS I READ ABOUT THE UPHEAVELS IN THE RELIGIOUS WARS DURING THE MIDDLE AGES, I WAS CONVINCED MORE THAN EVER THAT THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE WAS A SOLID PRINCIPLE.

HOWEVER, THE CHURCH DOES HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THE GOVERNMENT. THE CHURCH IS A PART OF THE MORAL CONSCIENCE OF THE NATION. BUT, IT IS THE LAYSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH AS CITIZENS WHO SHOULD BE EVER MINDFUL OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE OBLIGATIONS TO SPEAK OUT ON IMPORTANT ISSUES.

THE SOCIETY IN WHICH WE LIVE IS PLAGUED BY ADVERSITY. WE ARE CHALLENGED EVERYDAY BY THE COMPLEXITIES OF OUR SOCIETY. WE LAYPERSONS ARE SOMETIMES PERPLEXED BECAUSE NO IMMEDIATE SOLUTION CAN BE FOUND WHICH STRENGTHENS OR RESTORES OUR FAITH IN GOVERNMENT, IN INDUSTRY, IN OUR CHURCH, OR IN OUR COMMUNITY. THE LAYSHIP IS FACED WITH A YOUTH POPULATION EVER CHALLENGED BY NEGATIVE AND EVIL FORCES. WE READ ABOUT IT IN THE NEWSPAPER EVERYDAY. FOR EXAMPLE, MORE TEENAGE BOYS AND GIRLS ARE BECOMING MOTHERS AND FATHERS; MORE TEENAGERS ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH HARD DRUGS; MORE PARENTS ARE THROWING IN THE TOWEL ON THE CONTROL OF THEIR CHILDREN BECAUSE THEY CLAIM THAT THEY JUST CAN'T COPE WITH THE NEGATIVE FORCES THAT IS CONSUMING THEIR YOUNG.

LAYMAN ARE FACED WITH ECONOMIC PERIL. THE PRESSURES RESULTING FROM HIGH INTERESTS RATE MAKES IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOUNG MEN TO BUY A HOME. YOUNG FAMILIES ARE RELEGATED TO APARTMENTS WHERE THEIR CHILDREN ARE RESTRICTED TO ROAM AND TO PLAY BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF TRAGEDY BY AUTOMOBILES OR CRIME. AFRO-AMERICAN LAYMEN ARE ON THE BRINK OF ECONOMIC DEATH. LAST HIRED, FIRST FIRED BLACK MEN AND WOMEN FACE A DIM FUTURE AND THEIR PROGENY FACE A DIM FUTURE, ALSO. THERE IS MUCH PAIN IN THE MIND OF PEOPLE WHO CANNOT GENERATE HOPE THAT IN THEIR LIFETIME THAT THERE WILL BE A BETTER DAY.

UNFORTUNATELY, PEOPLE AROUND YOU MAY NOT GRASP, RECOGNIZE, OR UNDERSTAND THE PLIGHT OF YOUR LIFE. PEOPLE SAY, "EVERYONE HAS DEBTS; EVERY FAMILY HAS SOMEONE UNEMPLOYED; EVERY FAMILY HAS SOMEONE THAT IS ILL; EVERY FAMILY HAS A YOUNG PERSON WHO IS GIVING THE FAMILY SOME SORT OF PROBLEM; EVERY CHURCH HAS ITS INTERNAL DISPUTES."

THE FACT THAT EVERYBODY IS IN PAIN AND WITH DIFFICULTY IS THE REASON WHY THE CHURCH AND ITS LAYSHIP ARE VITAL TO A FREE SOCIETY. NO HUMAN BEING CAN BEAR ALL THE PAIN OF LIFE WITHOUT A FRIEND -- A FRIEND, WHO IS CAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING WHAT PAIN IS.

DEDICATION IS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT TO LAYSHIP. A LAYPERSON MUST BE DEDICATED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF HIS/HER CHURCH OR TO THEIR BELIEFS, IF THEY ARE NOT MEMBERS OF A

CHURCH. I AM CALLING ON YOU THIS MORNING TO DEFINE FOR YOURSELF HOW DEDICATED YOU ARE TO YOUR LAYSHIP. IF YOU CANNOT DEFINE YOUR DEDICATION TO LAYSHIP, THEN YOU AND THE CHURCH ARE IN TROUBLE. IF THERE IS NOT ENOUGH DEDICATION IN THE BANK OF LAYSHIP, THE BANK MAY BE IN A STATE OF BANKRUPTCY.

I HAVE ELUDED TO THE MANY PROBLEMS THAT FACE OUR SOCIETY. THERE ARE MANY MORE, INCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR, THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE, RACISM AND SEXISM, AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE. THESE ISSUES CRY OUT FOR THE LAYSHIP TO ADDRESS, ALONG WITH OTHER MORAL ISSUES WHICH FACE OUR INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES.

BUT, THE LAYSHIP CANNOT BE EFFECTIVE IF IT IS NOT DEDICATED TO KNOWLEDGE. WE NEED A MORE INFORMED LAYSHIP TODAY. AFRO-AMERICANS MUST BROADEN THEIR KNOWLEDGE ON ISSUES BEYOND UNEMPLOYMENT AND BUSING TO WHY OUR CHILDREN CANNOT READ OR WRITE. THE LAYSHIP OF THIS CHURCH MUST SPEAK TO AND HOLD UP THE WORD OF EXCELLENCE AS THE PASS WORD TO PROGRESS. DEDICATION TO EXCELLENCE IS A BIG INGREDIENT TO LAYSHIP.

TO THE YOUNG LAYPERSONS OF THIS CHURCH I HAVE A SPECIAL MESSAGE. EVERY MORNING THAT YOU LIVE - ASK YOURSELF DO I KNOW WHO I AM? YOU MUST SEARCH FOR YOURSELF IN THIS WORLD. YOU MUST DEFINE FOR YOURSELF WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU ARE; WHO YOU ARE NOT AND WHAT

YOU ARE NOT. YOU SEE, THE CHURCH, LIKE ANY OTHER INSTITUTION, CANNOT SURVIVE, IF ITS LAYPERSONS DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE. I URGE YOU TO BECOME INVOLVED IN AN ACTIVITY OF SOME SORT WHICH HELPS THE COMMUNITY OR PEOPLE TO SURVIVE. THE BEST MEASURE OF ANY LIFE IS THE MEASURE OF HOW MUCH YOU HAVE DONE TO KEEP THE SOCIETY GLUED TOGETHER. THE TIME YOU SPEND IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION, ON THE DANCE FLOOR -- WHILE IMPORTANT FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT -- IS NOT A SUFFICIENT MEASURE OF YOU AS A PERSON. DO SOMETHING IN YOUR CHURCH - ANYTHING.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF DEDICATION WITHOUT PAY. A PERSON CANNOT BE PAID FOR EVERY SERVICE THEY RENDER TO THEIR CHURCH, THEIR COMMUNITY, OR TO THEIR NATION. THE PEOPLE THAT I REMEMBER MOST IN MY CHURCH WERE THOSE PERSONS WHO HAD NO MONEY TO GIVE TO THE CHURCH - BUT THEY WERE DEDICATED TO THE MISSION OF THEIR CHURCH. DEDICATION WITHOUT PAY? SOME PEOPLE WILL NOT VOLUNTEER THEIR TIME OR THEIR TALENTS WITHOUT ASKING FOR PAY. HOWEVER, NO INSTITUTION CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO GIVE SOME OF THEIR TIME AND TALENTS WITHOUT PAY. WHERE WOULD SOME OF US BE TODAY WITHOUT THOSE WHO SERVED WITHOUT PAY. I AM TALKING ABOUT THOSE PEOPLE WHO TEACH IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL, WHO LEAD VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN

THE CHURCH, WHO WORK ON BOARDS AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES
IN THE CITY.

I DEDICATE THIS SPEECH TO THOSE UNSUNG LAYPERSONS
WHO GO ABOUT THE JOB OF BUILDING THEIR CHURCH AND THEIR
COMMUNITY WITHOUT PAY; THOSE LAYPERSONS WHO ARE OFTEN
NOT EVEN THANKED FOR THEIR SERVICE - AND THOSE
LAYPERSONS WHO DON'T EVEN LOOK FOR OR EXPECT A SLAP ON
THE BACK.

HOWEVER, I CHIDE THOSE OF US WHO DO NOT HAVE THE
SENSITIVITY TO RECOGNIZE THE DEDICATION OF PEOPLE WHO
HOLD OUR SOCIETY TOGETHER AND ASK FOR NOTHING IN RETURN,
EXCEPT THE PERSONAL SATISFACTION THAT THEY HAVE HELPED
SOMEONE ALONG THE WAY. LOOK AROUND YOU - ARE YOU ONE
OF THOSE COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF DEDICATION WITHOUT
PAY? *

* I ARRIVED AT THE THEME OF "DEDICATION WITHOUT PAY" IN
EARLY APRIL, 1982, AFTER TALKING WITH MR. SAMUEL SINGELTON,
A NATIVE WASHINGTONIAN, WHO IS EMPLOYED BY HOWARD
UNIVERSITY AS CPT. OF ITS SECURITY OPERATIONS. SINGELTON
IS AN EXAMPLE OF A DEDICATED AMERICAN, WHO HAS WORKED
HARD ALL OF HIS LIFE, IS A DEVOTED HUSBAND AND THE PROUD
FATHER OF THREE CHILDREN AND WHO HAS HELPED MANY PEOPLE
OUT OF A DEEP SENSE OF CONCERN. HE IS ONE OF THE
UNSUNG HEROES -- WHO WITHOUT PAY HAS SERVED HIS
FELLOWPERSON.