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J. Clay Smith Jr.

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ASBURY, SAVE THE CHILDREN OF MANKIND

by J. Clay Smith, Jr.,*

I am honored to serve as Co-Chair with Mrs. Everlyn Ricks as a team leader for the work session on: "Effective Christian Education - Children, Youth and Adults."

Asbury Methodist Church was organized in 1814. In 1936, a site was selected at the corner of 11th and K Streets in Washington, D. C. and Asbury began its development from a frame building erected on this site. Asbury is often referred to as the "daughter of Foundry Methodist Church."

When Asbury celebrated its 130th Anniversary in 1966, Harry J. Robinson, the Church historian wrote:

"the expansion of Asbury Church to meet its needs is our present concern. The erection of a four-story Educational building on the four lots adjacent to the present Church on the 11th Street side will help the Church in meeting its requirements."

Hence religious education was a prime concern of Asbury United Methodist Church in 1966. I would say that religious education has been a prime concern for Asbury since its inception.

The question today is: Is the Church School (previously referred to as the Sunday School) a prime concern of Asbury?

Since 1966, Asbury has completed the educational building on the 11th Street side. It's a grand building on the outside, but what is happening on the inside?

*These remarks were prepared for the Asbury United Methodist Church Planning Conference, May 17-18, 1985, at Airlie House, Warrenton, Virginia. the Conference Theme is "Rebuilding Asbury's Spiritual Legacy: Rebirth for Survival in the Twentieth-first Century." Mr. Smith has worked in the Church school for 17 years, three of which he served as its Superintendent.

Dedication: to the late Henry Philpot, Church School teacher of Class No. 2 (adults), and the late Hurbert Potter, who taught the Gallilean bible class (adults)

The New Century and the Church School. The Twentieth-first Century is upon Asbury. In the year 2,000, Asbury will celebrate its 164th Anniversary on 11th and K Streets, and its 186th year as an organized Church. The Church School will celebrate its existence, as well as other components of Asbury as permanent spiritual units of the Church. The Christian education of our youth and adults must not end. It must take hold and keep up with the times, for if it does not, time and technology will leave the Asbury Church School behind. The Church cannot afford such a consequence because the lifeblood of any church flows, in part, from its church school. Furthermore, the Church cannot withstand the death of its Church School: for it too will surely die.

When the new century arrives, Asbury will hopefully be prepared to assume its historic role as a leader in christian education for youth and adults in a society which will surely need it. Our present concern will not be, as it was in 1966, the construction of an educational building; but rather, our concern will be: What is inside of it?

THE CHARGE: The Church School needs attention. All who are concerned must not only voice its needs, but must demonstrate a new spiritual awakening if the Church School--as we have come to historically know it--is to survive. Let us not forget the fourth verse of the Asbury Hymn which was written in 1966:

"Asbury may thy very name forever be enshrined,
In hearts of faith, in witness brave,
In words that e'er uplift and save
The children of mankind."*

*The verses of The Asbury Hymn were written by Violet Geraldine Haywood and John Wilfred Haywood, Sr. The music was composed by Mark Fax in commemoration of the 130th Anniversary of Asbury United Methodist Church.