

27<sup>th</sup> Annual State of the Church Address  
Metropolitan Baptist Church  
Washington, District of Columbia  
January 23, 2005

Sounds  
Of the  
Seventh Angel

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## Sounds of the Seventh Angel

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders which sat before God on their seats fell upon their faces, and worshipped God...”

Revelation 11:15-16

Ten thousand days ago, or thereabouts, a preacher from Texas along with his wife and two small boys came to the nation’s capitol anxious, excited and filled with hope and promise. I remember those days now; I remember them well. I remember coming to Metropolitan – a church larger than any I had known. I remember Sam Reynolds whose committee negotiated my salary. Sam had little money to offer but assured me that the church would be “fair.” Mrs. Hicks thought I had lost my mind. I remember Martha Howard and A. L. Lindsay and Fred Davis and Major White and Ruth Nesbitt – all the leaders of the church who gathered around to make sure our welcome was complete. I remember Druscilla Boddie and Lena Price Smith in the office and old Alexander Pritchard who rode his bike to church, washed pots in the kitchen and took pictures that we never ever saw. I remember those days; I remember them well. Those were the days that our romance began – when I became your pastor and Metropolitan became my people.

The memory of those days is important to me because I came to this soil with visions of what God would do in this place and how the heady dreams I held for the church would come to life within these walls. I was foolish enough to believe that the church could do more than preach and pray – that we could reach out and touch lives, lift the fallen and empower the weak among us. I was foolish enough to believe that a gospel could be preached from the pulpit of this church that would bring hundred, even thousands, to Christ. I was foolish enough to believe that the power of this church would not be what it does on Sunday but what it brings to the life of its community seven days a week. I was foolish enough to believe that lay leadership could be nurtured and trained, that Christian education would produce disciples and that leadership within the church would be predicated upon a principle of Servanthood. Like the Apostle Paul, I came to this church determined to be a “fool for Christ.”

Today, ten thousand days later, I have come to stand among you and to declare that God has been faithful to God’s promise. Let us be clear at the outset. Our ministry has not been without its challenges. Our efforts to be responsive to the needs of the congregation are always under the scrutiny of your collective eye.

The impact of change in the community that surrounds us as well as resistance to change internally has caused us to constantly evaluate the viability of our plans and strategies. Nevertheless,

- **The state of the church** is this: We are yet a vital and vibrant witness for Christ. We honor our heritage of 140 years yet we are determined to do more and to become more. Over the span of this ministry we have birthed multi-faceted ministries, four non-profit corporations, including a school for our children. Our resources have multiplied, our membership has grown, and our vision is clear.
- **The state of the church** is this: As a church we are biblically sound, we are organizationally secure, and we are financially well managed. Our worship is vibrant, our praise is liberated and free, our preaching is still on the word and under the cross. We are not content to be satisfied with what we have been; we are determined to grow and develop until we literally become the Kingdom.

- **The state of the church** is this: our seniors are honored, our children are nurtured, our families are supported, and the impact of our witness is felt at home and abroad. So I come today simply to say: Thanks be to God for the Great things He has done!

## ratitude

I cannot come to this moment without a word of gratitude to those who give primary leadership and support to the ongoing ministry of this church. No one leads alone. Those who lead best are those who do so with collaboration and respect for those whose names are never seen and often whose voices are never heard. There are also those whose work is tireless and who deserve the appreciation of the congregation.

I am particularly grateful for the consistent and prayerful support of our Council of Servants, The Diaconate under the leadership of Deacon Donald Hines, the Council of Servants and the Trustee Ministry under the direction of Deacon Jeffrey Washington.

There is no question in my mind that Metropolitan has been blessed by a ministerial team that is gifted, consecrated and anointed to do the work of our Christ. Reverends **Sherrill McMillan** (*our wonderful counselor!*), **Melvin Maxwell** (*a mentor for our men; a guide for our youth*), and **Nolan E, Williams, Jr.**, (*our maestro extraordinaire who has brought discipline to the ministry of music and life to our worship and praise*) – bring competence and integrity to our work and continue as part of a ministerial team with which I am honored to serve.

In this same connection let me acknowledge with gratitude the additions of two new members to our ministerial staff. The Reverend Jesse Wood resigned a pastorate of 18 years in Columbus, Ohio to come and join our ministerial team as my direct assistant. He and his wife Joan have joined our family and have made an immediate impact upon our work. In addition to his responsibilities here, Rev. Jesse has taken on leadership of the Metropolitan Community Development Corporation, bringing new energy and life to that portion of our witness. Joan has fully become an active part of our music ministry and has much to offer our ministry. I am grateful to count them both as partners in ministry and as friend.

Our ministry has been strengthened by the addition of its newest member, the Reverend Brenda Girton Mitchell as Minister of Discipleship. Along with her responsibilities as Associate General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Rev. Brenda continues to make a real contribution to the developing life of our congregation and to the discipling process in general.

Our administrative staff has been strengthened as well with the addition of Ms. Lela Harris. Lela has for some time now been in charge of the development of our web site. She brings her considerable marketing, information management and technological skills to her new position as Assistant to the Chief Operating Officer and we are pleased to welcome her to this new role.

For the last seven years Ms. Ida Moss and her firm, BIL Consulting, has provided outstanding accounting services for our church. Her commitment to the Church and to our Christ became even more evident this year when she accepted her call to ministry. I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Minister Ida Moss to the position of Chief Financial Officer for the church with the full confidence that she will bring an even higher level of responsibility

and accountability to the management of the financial resources of the church.

Week after week, day in, day out, the members of our administrative staff are here to serve the need of our congregation and our community. In every sense they are partners in ministry with me and I am grateful for them all. Would all the members of our staff please stand?

Finally, as I speak of our staff and its development, I am profoundly grateful to Mrs. Denise Gibson Bailey who has worked tirelessly to bring a spirit of excellence through management to our church. She has quickly gained the confidence of the staff and the trust of the Council of Servants. Hers is a level of commitment and devotion that is always sought but rarely achieved. Metropolitan is blessed because of her compassion and her competence.



## **Season for Servants**

Over the past year, at my urging, the elected and appointed leadership of the church has been engaged in a process of redefining their respective roles in supporting the Pastor/Senior

Servant in directing the life of the church. This review resulted in a reorganization of our church leadership structure, one designed to bring it new life and new energy.

The word *deacon* as it is rendered in the Greek New Testament is “**Diakonos.**” The word itself is most properly translated as “**servant**” and is often given in connection with the verb “**dioko**” which means “**to hasten after**” or to “**pursue.**” Deacons, then, are literally servants in a hurry for Christ. The work of church leadership is urgent work; it requires a commitment of time and of energy and must be empowered by the anointment of the Holy Spirit. The office of Deacon is not a title to be added to ones resume; it is an opportunity to serve Christ by serving others.

Our reexamination of purpose and role has occasioned several changes that we believe will strengthen the work and bless the church.

- The office of Deacon is a position of service and not one of entitlement. To be a Deacon is not to acquire power but to make a deeper commitment to serve the body of Christ at the side of the Pastor. A deacon is chosen – set aside – for servant leadership for

a season of time, not for life. In the spirit of service, the Board of Deacons shall now be referred to as the Diaconate, a word which emphasized their true purpose.

- Going forward, each Deacon will serve a three-year tenure. A deacon may complete two additional three-year terms, with a year of rest between each one, for a total of nine years active service. Inactive Deacons may retain the title of Deacon, but will no longer function in leadership roles. This system of rotation will give other members of the congregation opportunities to serve in leadership roles, and will ensure that the Diaconate is refreshed periodically with new gifts, experiences and skills for the work of ministry. The term of service for each remaining Deacon has already been designated. As was done this past Servant's Sunday, each year we will acknowledge the servant leadership of the departing deacons and welcome a new class.

Instituting the principle of a season of service requires training more persons chosen for servant leadership. Accordingly, it is my privilege today to appoint and introduce fifteen persons who shall

prepare to become Servant Deacons in Training. Would each of the Servant Deacons-in-Training please stand and face the congregation as I call your name?

**Reginald Arno  
Claude Bailey  
Jonathan Branch  
George Hazel  
Phillip Marion  
Joseph Miree  
Annette Patterson  
Garry Robinson  
Paul Robinson  
Claudine Sherwood  
Rosemarie Singletary  
James Taylor  
Wilma Tilson  
Delano Tucker  
Ayanna Watkins Northern**

Each of these persons will need your prayers and your support as they go through their training and discipling process. Please greet the Servant Deacons in Training Class for 2005.

In another organizational change the Official Board shall henceforth be known as the Council of Servants – a name that reflects what we do. The membership of the Council of Servants and the Official Board are one and the same: it comprises the active deacons, the Church Clerk, and the ministerial team.

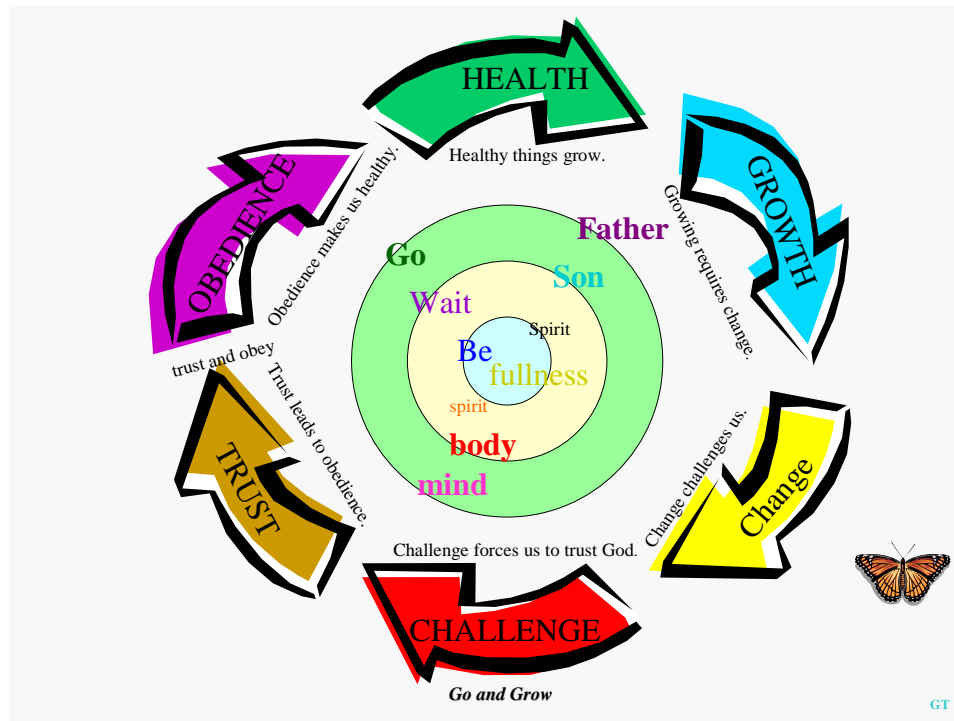
Deacons selected to serve terms as members of the Trustee Ministry – no longer the Board of Trustees – will continue to manage the overall business of the church.

With the Bible as my guide, as Pastor and Senior Servant, I have selected 12 persons to sit as members of a Council of Twelve. This Council will meet monthly to advise me on the administrative life of the church. It neither supercedes nor replaces the Council of Servants as the primary deliberative body for the church

Since we no longer distinguish between leadership roles for males and females in the body of Christ, we have eliminated a formal Board of Deaconesses. Our former Deaconesses, who served this church with distinction for many years, have joined with others in being designated as church “Elders.” From time to time the Elders will be asked to share their wisdom on issues of concern to the body. Previously ordained Elders – former Deacons and Deaconesses – will join active deacons in serving the Lord’s Supper each month.

Establishment of these new principles of servant leadership represents a process of change within Metropolitan. The church must change or it will not grow. If the church is alive it must grow. All living things grow! What does not grow will soon die. Bishop

Kenneth Ulmer put it this way: ***“Healthy things grow. Growing requires change. Change challenges us. Challenge forces us to trust God. Trust leads to obedience. Obedience makes us healthy. Healthy things grow!”***



I believe that this new direction is not only a sign of growth but will stimulate creativity and innovation in the way we manage the affairs of the church. So vital and significant is this emphasis on servanthood that even my own title has changed from Senior Minister to Senior Servant. If I am to lead, I too must be a servant.

Change is never easy. I am grateful to this Council of Servants and to the Council of Elders for supporting me in seeking to bring a new God-directed, biblically-based vitality to the leadership structure of our church.

## **R**aison D'etre

Every organization, and particularly the church, must examine its raison d'etre or its reason for being. This requires that we must understand who we are, what we are doing and whether our priorities and our direction is consistent with the Word of God and with the teachings of our Christ.

Over the last few months I have spoken often about “Becoming the Kingdom.” While the phrase is catchy, its meaning is too important to be heard as just one more slogan that will pass away. The Kingdom concept is so critical that every time Jesus preached His theme was the Kingdom:

He taught His disciples to pray: **“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”** (Matthew 6:10)

To Nicodemus he gave this word: **“Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”** (John 3:3)

To the disinherited he preached: **“Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”** (Matthew 25:34)

He told all who would hear: **“The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (Matthew 3:2)

And to those who were confused about their priorities He told them: **“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”** (Matthew 6:33)

From the Jesus point of view, the Kingdom is critical to a life in Christ.

So who are we, Metropolitan? What are we doing? Why are we doing it? What makes our work consistent, distinctive and vital to the cause of Christ? Are we just spouting words when we talk about “Becoming the Kingdom,” or do they have real meaning? Does the phrase really speak to our priorities as a church? How can “Becoming the Kingdom” become the central theme of our prayer life? As a church, how must we behave to become Christ’s Kingdom on earth?

Our ministerial team has given great thought to these questions. As we minister among you, we want to be sure that we are clear about what it means to become the Kingdom and we wanted the congregation to be able to articulate the meaning of our words to others as a form of our collective witness. In other words, we want everybody to be “on the same page!”

We have identified seven ideals that speak to what we mean when we say we are “Becoming the Kingdom.” These ideals, then, must be the focal point of our ministry and inform the priorities and goals we set for our church as we go forward. If we say we are “**becoming**” something people ought to be able to see it in our behavior. More than our words, our actions are what demonstrate that our goals are being met and our priorities are being kept.

The banners on the wall behind the choir name each of these ideals. Follow along as we examine what becoming the Kingdom really means.

**BECOMING THE KINGDOM MEANS THAT  
OUR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE IS MARKED BY LOVE.**

<b>Love</b>	<b><i>By God’s Spirit we bring unity in the body of Christ. The world will know we are Christians by our love.</i></b>
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Metropolitan is a congregation of great crowds, great worship and great music. That is not why we are here. The world will know we are Christians by our love. Every thing we do, every time we gather, every time we greet others on the street, our behavior must be a testament to the fact that our assignment is to be a community of

love. We will be known by our capacity to love. We will not be known by how we preach or how we praise or how we shout or how we speak in tongues. We will be known by the capacity and the quality of our love. The Epistle of John (4:7) says “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” Jesus said “A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another as I have loved you.” I have challenged our Diaconate to reinstitute a plan for pastoral care for members of the congregation, everyone of whom needs to know that someone here knows them, cares about them, and is available in their time of need.

**BECOMING THE KINGDOM MEANS THAT WE ARE  
COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

**Servant Leadership**

With Christ as our model, those who lead are those who serve.

Jesus said: “He that is greatest among you, let Him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” (Luke 22:26)

Leadership in the church of Jesus Christ is not a right; it is a privilege. The value and purpose of our leadership is not found in the seat we choose, the badge we wear or the position we hold. Christian leaders are servants among us, always seeking to support the body of Christ, to meet others at their places of need. No task is beneath a servant leader who toils only to give glory to God.

The call to servant leadership defines the work of the whole church. Every leader, every minister, every choir member must see themselves as servant. As your Pastor, it is my task to be the senior servant among you.

**Becoming the Kingdom means that we are committed to a ministry that serves humanity**

**Humanity**

***Our ministry must reach our community and our world. Our commitment is to racial equality, gender equality, and social justice. We are all the children of God.***

The great work we are doing in terms of reaching the homeless, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked must rise to new levels if

our ministry is to have a lasting impact on the lives of the people we serve.

Accordingly, today I challenge our ministries to look beyond providing emergency services that only help people today, to find ways to help them tomorrow. We must assist individuals and families to acquire the skills and resources to care for themselves. We must. When we see those who have fallen it is our job to help them up. We might provide transitional housing for homeless families, for women recovering from substance abuse or domestic violence, for youth who grew up in foster care and need role models and mentors to help them learn to care for themselves. Even as we build a new church, we must seek to build up people who need help to stand on their own two feet. We must strategically plan to offer job preparation, job-finding, job-training and job matching opportunities. This work is not just the work of the staff of the church; this is the work of the ministries of the church. We must think outside of the norm, move beyond our comfort zones and our personal time more than we have before.

Our sister corporations were formed specifically for the purpose of addressing such needs and purposes. The Metropolitan Day

School must continue its great work of giving our children and the children of our community an opportunity for a quality educational experience. The Metropolitan Community Development Corporation, the Institute for Counseling and Training (formerly IAMA), and the Metropolitan Delta Literacy Council will be actively involved in preparing people for tomorrow. In this connection, as soon as resources permit, I intend to augment the church with the skills of a professional social worker who can coordinate this new ministry direction. In addition and in keeping with our vision of Becoming the Kingdom, we must recognize the importance of ensuring a holistic ministry that meets the spiritual, physical, and psychological needs of our community. To this end, I have encouraged and challenged Dr. Sherrill McMillan to form an exploratory committee to consider the viability of and to begin preliminary planning for the development of a full service medical clinic that will offer a range of medical and psychological services that can meet the growing needs of the diverse communities we serve.

**Becoming the Kingdom means that we understand the church as family and will find ways to strengthen our personal families.**

**Family**

*We honor and strengthen the institution of marriage and family. We will always protect our children and honor our elders.*

The family is the most fundamental of all institutions. The church, as the family of God, must be committed by program and resource to strengthen the family of man. In fact, the church when properly understood is a family. The scriptures do not teach us to be a congregation. The scripture teaches us to be a family. That's why we call one another "brother" and "sister." The family works together, the family struggles together, the family prays together. And we must never forget - as Sister Sledge said – "We are family!"

Accordingly, our Marriage Enrichment must be encouraged to extend and expand its work. Our Singles Ministry must be enriched and supported for families come in all numbers and sizes – even when there is only one person, it is still a family. I have challenged our Diaconate to reinstitute a plan for pastoral care for the families and persons of our congregation who need to know that there are caring and supportive affinity groups that are available to one and all. To the extent that our individual families are strong, the church is also strong.

**BECOMING THE KINGDOM MEANS THAT WE SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN A CHURCH LIFESTYLE THAT IS PREDICATED UPON PREACHING AND PRAISE.**

**Worship and Praise** Our preaching is centered in the Word of God. Our praise and worship are free and open to the welcome activity of the Holy spirit.

I have often heard it said that God decided that preaching was so important that He made His only Son a preacher! Nevertheless, these are strange days for the preaching craft. Just the other day an article appeared in the *Washington Post* extolling the virtues of more modern congregations where Pastors have formed sermon writing committees to help outline and write the sermon for the coming Sunday. They want to be sure, as I understand it, that the preacher says what they want Him to say. Well, have no fear. No “Sermon Committee” will be formed here.

- I thank God for a church where the preacher is still allowed to preach.

- I thank God for a church where the preaching of the Gospel is based on the Word of God and not on the *Washington Post*.
- I thank God for a church where somebody comes hungering and thirsting for a Word from the Lord and where the age of prophetic preaching is still alive and well.
- I thank God for a church where the worship is open and free and where the Holy Ghost is a welcome guest every time He shows up!
- I thank God that when I get up on Sunday morning I've got somewhere to go where I can tell somebody "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Yet there is more. Preaching and praise must be underpinned by a full and complete understanding of the Word of God. Those who do not study the Bible usually sit idle in church because they have nothing to shout about. I am pleased with the work of Reverend Brenda Girton Mitchell and the Council of Christian Discipleship capably headed by Brian Long. Our Sunday School continues to

grow under the steady hand of Joseph Brown. As our Christian Discipleship Institute continues to grow and deepen it is my charge that we would begin now the process of seeking to create the Metropolitan Bible Academy, a fully accredited Bible college that will make full use of the wonderful resources of Biblical knowledge and instruction already available in our church. We must not only stand on the Word we must grow a generation of committed Christians who know the Word and live it.

**BECOMING THE KINGDOM MEANS WE WILL HONOR OUR CHRIST BY THE WORDS AND BEHAVIORS THAT ARE REFLECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY.**

### **Personal Development**

*We honor God by abstaining from addictive behaviors. We make godly decisions regarding our lifestyles, our relationships and our personal choices.*

If we said it another way we would say we have to be careful to clean up our “stuff.” The reality is that everybody has some “stuff!” We are all addicts of one thing or another. And the truth of the matter is that all of our addictions are choices. We believe that the life in Christ is one that grows and matures in multiple ways.

We are ever mindful that our conduct is a reflection upon the Christ we claim to serve. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth and shared this advise: *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ... for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”* (I Cor.3:16f.) Remember, however, that this was a word that even the preacher himself needed. Paul spoke of himself and of his own personal and spiritual development when he said: *“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”* And even this is part and parcel of the Gospel. While I may not be perfect, I am forgiven. While I may be weak, I know the source of my strength. While I may be down I know I can get up. Donnie McClurkin was right: “We fall down but we get up. We fall down but we get up. (I fall down but I get up!) For a Saint is just a sinner who fell down and got up!”

**Becoming the Kingdom requires that we develop a Kingdom Consciousness**

**Kingdom Consciousness. Our moral and ethical decisions are guided by a godly**

***concern for others through missions at home and around the world.***

Having a Kingdom Conscience means that our minds are constantly fixed on ways to bring the Kingdom of God upon the earth and to reach the world for Christ. In yesterday's church this meant that there would be a concerted effort in the realm of missions. For today's church we need to redefine missions as identifying and supporting the on-going needs of children and families in impoverished nations, especially throughout the Diaspora – in Haiti, in the Caribbean, in South and Central America, and in the countries of Africa. Through our work with the mission agencies of our convention we must begin to support small development projects, especially those for women throughout the developing world who often bear the primary responsibility of caring for their families in the presence of poverty and need. Even while we are in the process of building a church I believe we can find ways to sustain and support the prevention and treatment of AIDS in southern Africa, in southern Maryland and in southeast Washington, D.C. We must help to stop the violence in the world while at the same time we work to stop the

violence here at home. We must always respond to catastrophic tragedies around the world but we must also be sensitive to the catastrophes that are just around the corner as well.

Each of these “Becoming the Kingdom Principles” shall be reflected in how we work together, how we strategize together and how we provide and expend our resources. Both individual ministries and official church organizations must re-evaluate their focus and their program initiatives in light of these principles.

With God’s help, realizing our future is before us. The resources we need to make this program live are within our grasp. We must be a tithing church in more than word. To be quite honest, some of us claim that we are tithing when in fact we are not. We must move to the next level in our giving. Even if you are tithing trust God for one more percentage point. If you are not tithing, then start now. Trust God to open the windows of heaven and to pour out a blessing. Then get your plate ready, get your cup and your saucer, because God is faithful, God is not a man that He should lie, and He will provide for your needs according to His riches in glory.

# G od's Vision for Our Future

The challenge of building a Tabernacle for God is both arduous and enormous. Since our ceremonial groundbreaking we have made bold and significant steps toward actual construction. Let me review where we are, what we have achieved and what is yet before us, let me share a brief overview. First, the good news:

- Architectural plans are 85% complete.
- The Detailed Site Plan for our construction was submitted to Prince Georges County which will hold a public hearing on February 17, 2005. By prayer, we anticipate that our site plan will be approved. The approval of this Site Plan is the first step toward
- The Building Permit.
- The application for the building permit was made on January 13<sup>th</sup> of this year and is currently under review by the County. We anticipate final approval of the permit by May 30<sup>th</sup> or before this year.

- Meetings with representatives of local civic associations and community groups have been held and our project has been greeted with warm approvals.
- We anticipate that we will receive funding commitments for the project within the next 30 days. Three lending institutions are currently competing to finance our project.
- Grading and Site work should begin by April, 2005.
- Construction of the new church is scheduled for completion in October 2006.

**Now for the challenges.** When our project first began we anticipated a building somewhere in the range of \$22 million dollars. As we developed the design and determined the uses we anticipated for the building the cost escalated to the \$44 million dollar range. Obviously, it became necessary for us to do some serious value engineering to realign the project with a cost that the church could sustain and afford over the long term but without doing violence to the original architectural intent and design. Toward that end, several changes had to be made.

First, we removed from the design elements that, though lovely, made the cost unacceptable. For example, the water features in the front of the building have been eliminated. A basement was eliminated in order to place the building on grade and preventing more costly excavation. The building was designed to be built entirely of limestone; it will now be constructed with limestone and pre-cast concrete, a difference that will be hard to detect. Our efforts has brought the project back under \$37 million dollars. Under the guidance of our development manager, Mr. Paul Taylor of SRP Development of Columbus, Ohio, we are diligently seeking additional cost reductions that will enable us to still produce a quality building that glorifies God and reasonably accommodates our need for growth. Further value engineering may be necessary to bring the cost of the building in line with our ability to comfortably meet the debt. We are seeking to be responsible stewards.

By the way, if you wonder why this building is so costly just consider what you will be getting for your investment:

- ❖ A sanctuary that will seat 3,300 worshippers.
- ❖ A glass enclosed, water surrounded chapel that will seat 250 and include the baptismal.

- ❖ 25 classrooms and learning spaces
- ❖ A rehearsal and practice suite for the music ministry to accommodate all the choirs at once, a state of the art recording studio.
- ❖ A new pipe organ. And
- ❖ A fellowship hall that will accommodate 750 persons for a sit-down dinner and a commercial kitchen and food preparation center.
- ❖ A small theatre for plays, concerts, and other productions.
- ❖ A teen center, a children's center and nursery as well as areas customized specially for use by our seniors.
- ❖ Ample small, medium and large meeting rooms and so much more.

Finally, you should know that Smoot Construction Company, a major minority contracting company has been selected to construct your new church home.

Second, we decided to complete the building in two phases. The first phase will include the sanctuary, the chapel, classrooms and offices while the second phase will include the fellowship hall, the fine

arts theatre, additional classrooms and special use spaces. We anticipate that we will begin phase two approximately 6 months after completing the first phase depending, of course, on our having sufficient cash flow and resources to enable us to proceed.

Today you will see real examples of what the new church will look and feel like. Scattered around the building you will find artists' renderings of specific rooms. You will see design boards with samples of paint, flooring, stones, woods, carpet and other elements that will actually be used. You will even see and be able to sit in a sample of the seating that will be used in the sanctuary. I don't know about you but I'm getting excited. It's all coming together now; we are on the way to God's Land in Largo!

And it all depends on you. Every resource we need financially and spiritually to achieve this goal is within our reach. It's all in the house! We must commit, individually and collectively, to begin now with a new burst of energy and spirit to meet this challenge.



**Attention, Please!**

May I have your attention? This is your Pastor

speaking. This is a message exclusively for members of the family. We voted in December 1999 to construct a Tabernacle for our Christ. In reality, however, the pursuit of this vision began some fourteen years ago with the first introduction of Vision:2000. We've come a long way and we still have a long way to go. We can only do so with a spirit of unity and togetherness.

Let's be frank. Many of us who made pledges to the Hope Fund have not kept faith with our promises. Still others of us made no pledge at all and are just waiting to see if this thing really is going to happen. And there are still others who just joined a few weeks or months ago and who have not been challenged to contribute to this great move of God. This is what we're up against: In his recent book titled *Morph* by Ron Martania, a discussion is held on how church members typically support the church and the vision God has placed before it. This is what he says. 2% of us are what he calls "**Innovators**" – those who see and accept the vision and begin to support its. 14% are "**early adapters,**" those who take just a bit longer but are critical to the forward movement of the vision. 35% are called "**middle adapters**" who are influenced by the early adapters and who sooner or later come to accept the vision. Simple math will

tell you that these percentages leave us with **50% who never see, accept or support the vision.** These percentages are a fair estimation of the level of support we are now receiving.

Today is the day that a change must come. The paradigm must shift and the level of our financial support must rise to unprecedented levels. We must begin to give now at a level that will accommodate the mortgage we will face in the future. And this means that you, and especially you, must surrender this project to prayer and then become obedient to the task God has placed before us all. This is my request:

First, if you have made a pledge but have not kept that pledge covenant in the presence of God and these witnesses that beginning today you will make good on your promise.

Second if you have been waiting to see if this church is really going to be built I hope you can see that we're serious and that what you need to do is join hands with your brothers and sisters and begin giving to the Hope Fund today.

Third, if you are a new member who has never ever made a commitment,, there is a Commitment Card in your bulletin. Fill it out now and bring it forward at the conclusion of this message.

I know that the building of this Tabernacle will never occur until the church prays continuously in a season of prayer. The power we seek is directly related to the power of our collective prayer life. Therefore, I am proclaiming in and among our church family a season of prayer for the balance of this year. We will embark upon a series of specific prayer sessions in which we can assault heaven with our petitions for the fulfillment of God's vision. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of May of this year, in a continuation of the celebration of our 141<sup>st</sup> Church Anniversary, we will have a church-wide Prayer and Praise Breakfast that will accommodate every loyal member of Metropolitan. This will be a worship service that will bring about a new sense of commitment and consecration to the work God has placed in our hands. A 24 hour prayer vigil, a Prayer Revival and other opportunities for the church to find its unity and its power through prayer will sustain us throughout the year. I still believe that the Chronicler was right: "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

I began this address with a reverie of my early days here among you. I say again that I came to this soil with visions of what

God would do in this place and how the heady dreams I held for the church would come to life within these walls. So the vision is not new. I came with a vision. Any great mission, any great undertaking, any great mission always begins with a vision. To see is to believe and to believe is to become. This vision, however, is not my own. The vision we seek is not the Pastor's vision but God's vision for us. I may be the conduit for the vision but the vision is His and His alone.

For a church like Metropolitan – rich in history and the heritage of its ministry – I knew the vision must be equal to that legacy: clear enough to reveal new heights of excellence to which our community could climb, compelling enough to inspire us to believe we could truly be an institution whose ministry would be felt across the world, and challenging enough to motivate us to be come better than we are.

Our Council of Servants must reflect both confidence and competence as they give leadership and service to this congregation. Our Council of Ministries and indeed every ministry within this organism we call the church must reflect our dreams, our values, our history and our traditions – always with a view of doing new things with excellence for our Christ.

The book of Proverbs instructs us that “without a vision, the people perish.” But without a plan for how the vision will be accomplished – and that means to pay for it – even the greatest vision will languish. That is why I must constantly make this appeal to you – that our vision for Metropolitan has the kind of support it needs as we seek to meet our specific goals and objectives for our church.

As we look toward the future we must be prepared to face the challenges of the new millennium. We cannot afford to be blasé’ about this work. We must bring a new and more dynamic energy to the completion of the task before us.

The task to which we are committed today will have impact upon Metropolitan 100 years from now. We must intentionally choose to focus now on our vision realized – believing that it is already done, believing that what we see in our minds today, we will accomplish tomorrow.

This is a challenge that can only be met if all of us work together, committed to the vision, committed to each other, and committed to our Christ. The vision is larger than any person. This vision is about a people of God known as Metropolitan who are prepared to step boldly into the future for God. This is about a people

known as Metropolitan who are determined to live for Christ. This is about a people known as Metropolitan who will not be content just to “have” church or to even “build” a church – we are *Becoming the Kingdom!*

### Sounds of the Seventh Angel

After all of this, there is yet a word from God’s Word: John’s book of Revelation speaks with cryptic and enigmatic language of the end of time that is yet to come. Standing in the midst of his own tortured history, clearly conversant with the trials and tribulations faced by God’s people, all the while anxious to see what the end will be.

John is, as you know, the preacher-prophet who has found himself in exile on an island called Patmos, located somewhere in the Aegean Sea. From his isolated place of preaching, John had learned the art of praising God even if no one else was available or present to praise with him. John says: “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.” (1:10) In other words, ‘I’m here by myself but I’m in the spirit. Nobody

can see what I see but I'm in the spirit. Nobody can hear what I hear but no matter I'm still in the spirit.”

But when you get right down to it what John was dealing with was the matter of vision. And the trouble with prophets and preachers is that you have trouble making a distinction between their word and God's Word. The trouble with prophets and preachers is that while you may be obliged to hear them you may not necessarily understand them.

Prophets and preachers tend to have problems with vision. Prophets and preachers tend to see things that others cannot imagine. Preachers tend to see things with lenses that somehow blur the vision of others. Preachers tend to get in trouble because what they see and what others see may be vastly different things. And when you get right down to it what this book of Revelation deals with is the matter of vision.

John had a vision of the church – of seven churches – and his vision was minute in every detail. John had a vision of the church that others could not see and could not comprehend. So bold and daring was his vision of the church that he reached the conclusion that even though many could not understand he concluded by saying, “He that

hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

(3:22)

John had a vision not only for the Church of God but for the people of God. John had a vision of a day yet to come, when the war would be over, when the battle had been fought and when the victory had been won, and when the people of God would stand before God redeemed and justified.

Now, then, I shall not tarry longer. Permit me just a moment to tell you that John is at great pains to describe the vision which God has placed in his view. In the process of struggling through his description and accounts of what he sees as the end of time, he reminds his readers of the seven trumpet judgments, the coming of the antichrist, and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The tribulation that John describes is a tribulation that has never been seen by mortal men. The more John describes the end the more he is required to see the catastrophe and the horror of what appears to be a final devastation.

And yet, in the midst of the conflict John offers up a word of confidence. In the midst of the revelation of these horror, John offers a word of hope. Do not be in too much of a rush to fail to understand

that John is about the business of introducing three woes or three trumpets of judgment. By John's account the first woe will be the demonic locust-like creatures that will sweep the earth and torment people. The second woe will be demonic military horse-like creatures that will sweep the earth and kill one third of the ungodly and evil population. The third woe, or the seventh trumpet or the seven bowl judgments, is the judgment that results from the blast of the seventh trumpet. When these judgments of woe have come upon the earth they will be worse than anything else could ever be. It is the climax of human history. It is the end of time as we know it.

This, however, is what you must see. The judgments of which John writes appear in their progression as we find them in chapter 11. The Book of Revelation does not end, however, until you get to chapter 22. You didn't get that. The judgments of which John writes appear in their progression as we find them in chapter 11. The Book of Revelation does not end, however, until you get to chapter 22. Here's John's point. The future is bleak. There does not appear to be any way up nor any way out. Every thing that can go wrong has gone wrong. All of human history is about to come to a cataclysmic end. And yet, John's word is this: It ain't over until it's over.

This is what I came to tell you. We are engaged in warfare. And it will be a battle to the finish. If you wonder why things have not moved faster than they have it is because Satan and all His imps are hopping mad. Any time you get ready to do something for God roadblocks will get in your way, detours will alter your path, and enemies will camp on your door step. We are engaged in warfare. But here's what I came to tell you: It ain't over until it's over.

And the reason why this is important is because somebody here is engaged in warfare. Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong. Enemies and foes have camped on your doorstep. Every time you think you've got it made something else crops up. Just when you think you've won the battle all hells breaks loose somewhere else. Somebody came to church this morning and roadblocks got in your way, detours altered your path, you couldn't find a parking space after you got here, and you were about to throw up your hands in resignation and despair. But I came to tell you don't despair, don't give in, don't give up, don't throw in the towel, hold on a little while longer, if you can just keep faith till the morning, if you can just hold out through the night, everything will be alright. It ain't over until it's over.

And there's just a little more. Not only does John instruct us that it ain't over till it's over, John also give shouting instructions. Here's what happened: Knowing what the end would be, knowing what trials and tribulations lay before them, knowing that their lot, even in the best of times, would still be hunger, and poverty, and homelessness and disease. Knowing all of that, John says that "the four and twenty elders which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces and worshipped God." Here's what I'm trying to tell you, Metropolitan, the battle had not begun and they were already shouting. The battle was not even mid-way and they were already deep in worship and praise. The battle was not over by a long shot but they praised him. They had learned the art of shouting before the battle was over.

I don't know about you but I've got enough things in my day to discourage me. I've got enough things in my day to want something else beside what I'm facing. I've got enough things in my life that want to make me lose focus, that want to take me out of the orbit of my spiritual gifts, that are determined to make me step away from the purpose and plan that God has for my life, and when I think about it there is nothing to shout about. But I'm here to tell you victory is

coming, victory is coming, victory is coming. So before my victory gets here I'm going to praise Him in the middle of the mess. Is there anybody here that knows how to praise Him in the middle of your mess?

And here's the reason WHY they shouted? In the middle of a mess, in the middle of a calamitous circumstance, at the sound of the 7<sup>th</sup> Angel, something happened. Do not forget that there were seven angels. Each of the seven angels took their turn announcing God's judgment and the unrestrained activity of Satan in the earth. But when the 7<sup>th</sup> Angel sounded, something happened. "There were great voices in heaven, saying, The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." I want to take my turn announcing the Kingdom; not that we have built it but that we have become it. I don't know about you but I want to be a part of His Kingdom. I want to be one of the voices in heaven – voices to say the Kingdom has come and He shall reign forever and ever.

The problem with prophets and preachers is that they can't tell you where they're going. This Kingdom talk is too ethereal, to

surreal, it's too hard to get your arms around. For all their vision talk preachers don't seem to know where they're going.

### **Where are you going Abraham?**

I don't know where I'm going. I told Sarah I was going to a land that God would show me.

### **Where you going Joshua and Caleb?**

We don't know where we're going but it's over here on the other side of the river – they've got some giants in that land – but we're going to the other side of the river and the only way we can make it is if we stop by the Ho's house.

### **Where you going, Job?**

Well, I don't know where I'm going but I know where I want to go. I want to go to a land that is fairer than day; I want to go where the wicked cease from troubling and weary souls can be at rest.

### **Where you going, slaves?**

Don't mind us we're just going down by the riverside to study war no more.

### **Where you going, preacher?**

Well, I'm just going over here where the feast of the Lord is going on.

### **Where are you going, Hicks?**

I don't know where I'm going but I know who will meet me when I get there. "These are they who have come out of great tribulation who have washed their robes white in the blood of the lamb."

### **Where are you going John?**

I don't know exactly where I'm going but I had a vision the other night and this is all I can tell you: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea."

### **Where you say you're going John?**

I'm going to choir rehearsal and this is what we're going to sing:

"All hail the power of Jesus name, let angels prostrate fall."

### **Where you say you're going John?**

I'm going to a coronation and this is all we'll say: "The Kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever..."

He shall reign:

The first and the last, the beginning and the end

The keeper of Creation

The architect of the universe.

He always was, He always is, and He always will be.

He shall reign:

The world can't understand Him

Armies cannot defeat Him

Schools cannot explain Him

And leaders cannot ignore Him.

**He shall reign:**

He is my Savior

He is my redeemer

My guide and my peace.

He is my comfort,

He is my joy,

He is my Lord, and He rules my life.

**He shall reign:**

He will never leave me

Never forsake me,

Never mislead me, and

Never forget me

He's always got my back!

He shall reign:

When I fall, He lifts me

When I fail, He forgive me

When I am weak, He is strong.

When I am lost, He is the way.

When I am hurt He heals me

When I am blind He leads me

When I am hungry He feed me

And whenever I call Him He's always right on time!