

AALC Juneteenth Celebration  
June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005

“Framing the Event”  
Rev. Kevin Turman

President Harrison, Rev. Moderator Games, to the clergy across the dais, conference participants, and guests, it is indeed my privilege to join with you in this Juneteenth celebration of Liberation and Challenge. It is my task and pleasure to attempt to put our coming together into a meaningful, relevant context.

We are here for any of a number of possible reasons. Some of us are here because we have been agitated by territorial directors or local organizers. Some of us have been invited by fellow clergy or organizational officers. But for whatever reason and by whatever cause, a few questions remain. What is the African American Leadership Commission? Why exactly are we coming together here? What will we accomplish while we are here? What is this all about?

Let me suggest that we are here for “Rev. Jones.” “Rev. Jones” is “just a pastor.” The city where he serves is not that important. It could be Cleveland, OH or Wheeling, WV. It could be St. Louis or Chicago, Gary or Detroit. Neither does his denomination matter. It could be Methodist or Baptist, COGIC or Lutheran, Catholic or Presbyterian. He is “just a pastor” not a politician or particularly interested in the political process or political affairs. His simple desire is just to faithfully shepherd his members.

But looking out over his congregation from Sunday to Sunday, there are a few things he has been noticing. His attendance is not down but the tithes and offerings are, because there are fewer and fewer jobs available to hire his members to steady, good-paying jobs. His young people are still graduating from high school, but the grammar and writing skills in their senior essays on their journey to faith and Christian maturity reflects a deterioration in the quality of education they are receiving.

On his way home from the church, Rev. Jones notices that another store is closing at the mall, while he remembers the strip mall that has closed altogether. College students are home from school, but there are few summer jobs, as the businesses in the area are not hiring. And those businesses where the openings are, seem to keep moving further and further away. As he drives the potholed streets of his neighborhood, he notices the many “For Sale” signs, and notes that they seem to stay up longer than they used to before they change to “Sold.” As he turns into his driveway he remembers the groceries he was supposed to pick up, but now it’s too late because you have to leave the community to get to a decent grocery store.

To be honest, “Rev. Jones” has considered moving away himself. Staying in the city requires him to pay an “urban tax.” He pays more to insure his car and to insure his house than those who live a few streets away, but just outside the city limits. He has to pay more in city taxes while receiving less in city services than in neighboring communities. He and his members spent hard-earned money on car alarms and home alarms, while some have invested in personal security systems called the “GUN” system. While other communities are gaining wealth on the equity appreciation of their homes, the value of home in Rev. Jones neighborhood is either at a standstill or in reverse.

“Bewitched, bothered and bewildered”, Rev Jones gazes upon his beleaguered flock on Sunday morning knowing that their challenges, like demons, are named “Legion, for [they] are many” Like Motown’s Marvin Gaye, Pastor Jones, every now and then must scratch his head and ask, “What’s Going On?”

Who can make sense and how can sense be made of the predicament of Rev. Jones community? In order to fully grasp the social, economic and political dynamics that have conspired against his community Jones would have to learn an entirely new language and come to understand a new reality. “Metropolitan Equity – the fair and equal distribution of resources across a region, “regionalization” and its implications for urban centers, “minority suburbanization”, “opportunity based housing”, “resegregation”, “MPO’s”, “sprawl” and “positive agitation” are terms that might as well be Greek to Rev. Jones, who just wants to shepherd his flock.

But what if there were a cadre of warriors who understood the nature and type of this urban fight? What if there were a trained and informed crowd, willing to join in the battle for justice? What if there were a cloud of witnesses who were willing and able to serve as guides to those brother and sister pastors who were lost in the modern urban jungle? What if there were a number of “Philip’s” who could help “Ethiopian” pastors to understand what they were seeing?

What if there were “Commissioners” who could help reveal where the plots and plans are, and strategize to fix them. What if there were “Commissioners” who could help organize and orient community residents and congregation members. What if there were “Commissioners” who could help people of faith keep justice for those in our urban centers within the boundaries of the faith experience? Then, “Call a Commissioner” would become the response of embattled and embroiled African American pastors, congregations and communities.

And this then, is why we are here! We are here to Listen and to Learn. We are here to share our Values, our Victories and even our Wounds. We are here to Inspire and to be Inspired. We are here to Inform and to be Informed. We are here to Teach, be Taught and to be Trained. We are here to open an account of African American intellectual and organizing capital, able to be drawn upon by African American communities all across the nation.

**“Call a Commissioner”** is the sound of our mission. **“Call a Commissioner”** – They understand what is going on! **“Call a Commissioner”** – They know how to engage the power of God in the affairs of humanity. **“Call a Commissioner”** – They will join in the battle for opportunity, fairness and equity. **“Call a Commissioner”** - They understand that we “wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places.

We are here to take the oath. We are here to raise our hands. We are here to enlist in the cause. We are here to enlist in the cause. We are here to become Commissioners.

“Hang on Rev. Jones!” Help is on the way!