



“From Where I Sit ...”

Are You Ready to “bishop” ...?

Approximately 6 years ago (August, 2008) now retired Bishop Othal H. Lakey wrote a meaningful article in the Christian Index entitled “An Open Letter to Episcopal Aspirants in 2010 From the 44th Bishop,” which included what he termed “a strange question: Are you ready to *“bishop”* in the church?” As an aspirant at that time for the high office of the episcopacy, I read with great care this profoundly important article which I believe every serious aspirant for the episcopacy ought to review at some point during their candidacy.

I would dare not propose to rehearse the many salient points Bishop Lakey addressed in his article but, for the purpose of this article, I would reiterate his premise which was to emphasize his understanding of the difference in application of the term bishop as a noun and bishop as a verb. In other words, in his view the role of a bishop was not just about who a bishop was but also what a bishop did and that bishop’s readiness to execute the office; hence the question, “Are you ready to *‘bishop’* in the church?” Now we find ourselves six years later with five of the then aspirants having been elected to the College of Bishops in 2010 and the future expectation of three additional candidates being chosen in July 2014 among the many aspirants presently offering themselves.

Granted Bishop Lakey’s article was from the perspective of a bishop and the worldview that such a perspective included; however for the purpose of this article and from my perspective as a General Officer of the CME Church, I too feel the need to ask the same question but with a different context. Therefore, and with Bishop Lakey’s permission, I must also ask, of the many aspirants for the episcopacy, “Are you ready to *‘bishop’* in the church?”

As the regular readers of this series are already aware, the majority of past articles have focused on the work of the General Board of Personnel Services. This article is no different. As one of the ten General Departments of the CME Church, the question about being ready to *“bishop”* in the church is posed in the context of the General Board of Personnel Services (the other General Departments notwithstanding) with emphasis on the following:

- Are you significantly familiar with the three primary functions of the General Board of Personnel Services, i.e. CME Church Retirement Plan, CME Gift Fund, and CME Fire and Casualty Insurance Plan?
- Are you aware of Audubon Oaks (a housing subdivision in Memphis) and the partnership of the General Board of Personnel Services and the Department of Publications?
- Are you aware that the General Board of Personnel Services administers on behalf of the CME Church the Directors and Officers Liability Insurance program and the Key-Person Insurance program?
- Are you aware that the General Board of Personnel Services must rely on the Bishops to confirm the status and addresses of the retired preachers and the widows and widowers of deceased preachers within the bounds of their respective annual conferences which must be correlated with the CME Gift Fund?
- Are you aware that the General Board of Personnel Services must rely on the Bishops to communicate the status of ministers who have transferred to another annual conference (even if it is within the same episcopal district) and notify the Department of who have died (whether active or retired), who have become disabled (partially or totally), and who have either withdrawn or been discontinued?

- Are you aware that the General Board of Personnel Services, unlike other General Departments, is an incorporated entity of the CME Church and therefore has only one representative or director from each episcopal district?
- Are you aware that the General Board of Personnel Services serves as the administrator of CME Retirement Plan & Trust with assets totaling nearly \$30 million, sponsors the CME Fire and Casualty Insurance Plan with insured properties of \$200 million and manages a Key-Person Plan in excess of \$6 million?
- As a potential Board Chair for one of the CME affiliated colleges, are you aware that one of our affiliated colleges has been insured under our CME Fire and Casualty Insurance Plan at a premium that has saved the college thousands of dollars?
- Are you aware that the CME Retirement Plan & Trust is governed by a Plan document that is approved by the Internal Revenue Service and must be followed without exception?
- Are you aware that contributions for the CME Retirement Plan that have been paid to the annual conferences for the ministers (and in some cases lay persons) must be paid to the General Board of Personnel Services no later than December 1st?
- Are you aware that the CME Retirement Plan also administers an employee contributed tax deferred, salary reduced 403(b) Plan in addition to the 12% employer contributed tax deferred retirement benefit?



These are just a few of the many questions that will face the three candidates for the episcopacy who will be chosen by the grace of God and the deliberate vote of the delegates to assume the title of Bishop and, as Retired Bishop Lakey would say, begin to “*bishop*” possibly as early as the next week following the closing of the General Conference. And these questions do not include the additional questions relevant to other general departments, important issues of the connectional church, along with the pressing concerns of the annual conferences over which the chosen will be required to preside.

In any case, in light of the question, are you ready to “*bishop?*” the answer for the chosen three may be the response we learned with that childhood game, “Ready or not, here [we] come!” Or at least that’s the way it looks to me ...

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Tyrone T. Davis, D.Min, is the General Secretary of the Board of Personnel Services
 (Copies of earlier articles may be found on the
 Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.thecmechurch.org)