Black United Methodist Responses to Dual Crises: COVID-19 and Disaffiliation

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Introduction

Oxford Languages defines crisis as "a time of intense difficulty or danger."[1] Disaffiliation was a time of intense difficulty in The United Methodist Church. COVID-19 was a time of intense difficulty for The United Methodist Church and danger for the lives of United Methodists. This paper will delineate the impact of these dual crises on The United Methodist Church in general and the Black United Methodist Church in particular. It will also identify unique aspects of the black United Methodist Church which have helped it mitigate the negative impact of these dual crises.

Disaffiliation

Immediately following the 2019 Special Session of General Conference, The United Methodist Church entered an intensely difficult season because the General Conference allowed for a temporary suspension of United Methodist theology and polity. This temporary suspension was known as Disaffiliation. This season continued from February 27, 2019 through December 30, 2022 as congregations in the United States were given the power to vote to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church if they, as a matter of conscious, disagreed with the denomination's stance on homosexuality or how their annual conference was enforcing the denomination's stance. And further, these congregations were given the option, with some conditions including obtaining the affirmation of their respective annual conferences, to gain ownership of their local church's financial assets and property which had previously been held in trust for the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church (¶2553, 2019 Addendum to the Book of Discipline). It should be noted

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary l Oxford Languages (oup.com).

that some congregations were allowed to disaffiliate even if they did not, as a matter of conscious, disagree with the denomination's stance or the way in which their annual conference was implementing that stance.

Disaffiliation created a crisis in the church not only because of the grief associated with the loss of relationships as approximately 6,100 churches disaffiliated or because of the unfortunate vitriol of some of those who departed; but more consequentially because of the conflict in identity created for United Methodist who stayed, processed and voted to affirm the disaffiliations. For a season the church required members of the annual conference to behave in ways that were contrary to their Methodist identity.

For example, diversity of opinion on nonessentials of the faith is a hallmark of United Methodist theology. In *The Character of A Methodist*, John Wesley defined the essentials as the belief that scripture is inspired by God, that scripture is the only and sufficient rule for faith and practice, and that Christ is the supreme God. "But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of christianity, we think and let think. So that whatso ever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a methodist."[2] Allowing persons to leave because they disagreed on the nonessentials was a departure from this distinguishing mark of Methodism.

Connectionalism and the trust clause in the United States as a manifestation of that connectionism is also a hallmark of The United Methodist Church. Elements of the trust clause first appeared in the 1796 Discipline. The General Conference voted that the "deed of settlement" for all church property shall include language that the local trustees were holding the church property "forever in trust, that they shall erect and build, or cause to be erected and built thereon, a house or

[2] John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist,* (Philadelphia: Johnston and Justice, 1793) unnumbered.

place of worship, for the use of members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America…"[3] The Disaffiliation Agreements that were ratified by each annual conference represented a departure from this distinguishing mark of Methodism.

This suspension of theologically grounded United Methodist identity in conjunction with the loss of relationship and vitriol of departing congregations created a period of crisis in the church. Whether or not the financial impact of disaffiliation will add to the crisis is as of yet unknown. The 2025-2028 Apportioned Quadrennial Budget passed by General Conference following Disaffiliation represented a 38 percent reduction from the 2016-2020 approved budget. This budget reduction was greater than the 30 percent anticipated loss of revenue from churches that disaffiliated. Because the reduced budget will result in lower General Church Apportionments for most churches during the 2025-2028 Quadrennium, it potentially will allow local churches to use more of their financial resources for local mission and ministry. Consequently, it will also mean that fewer resources from the General Church will be available to support local churches as they engage in mission and ministry.

While the Black United Methodist Church experienced the identity crisis that resulted from Disaffiliation and it will be impacted by General Church budget reductions, the black church did not experience disaffiliations in the same proportions as the white church. While 10.4 percent of all United Methodist Churches in the United States were a majority people of color before Disaffiliation, only 2.2 percent of the churches that disaffiliated were majority people of color.[4] Consequently, The

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[3] Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *The 1796 Doctrines and Disciplines of The Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss Parry Hall, 1798), 174.

[4] Lovett H. Weems, "Lewis Center Report on Disaffiliating Churches through 2022: Similarities and Differences Compared to Other United Methodist Churches,"

United Methodist Church is more racially diverse now than it was before the season of Disaffiliation. Whether or not this reality adds to the crisis is as of yet unknown.

COVID-19

The crisis of disaffiliation was amplified by the crisis of COVID-19 which began impacting the ways in which churches did mission and ministry in the spring of 2020. Due to governmental mandates and health department regulations, most, if not all, United Methodist churches suspended in-person worship and ministry programs until after vaccines were distributed in the middle of December of 2020. Over the next several months following the release of vaccines and in response to infection rate data in their local communities, churches began to return slowly to in-person mission and ministry.

In a November 2023 study conducted through a collaboration among the Center for Church Management in the Villanova School of Business, Wheaton College, and ACS Technologies, researchers found that the financial impact of COVID was felt by churches during the first twelve months of COVID (April 2020-March 2021). During this time Protestant churches experienced a 3 percent dip in giving. However, even though they had lost some giving units, most Protestant churches recovered to at least pre-COVID levels of financial giving by the second twelve month period after COVID began (April 2021-March 2022). This leveling off and slight increase in giving was a result of fewer giving units giving more money. However, even though Protestant churches are now receiving slightly more money through giving than they did before the pandemic, as a result

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https://www.churchleadership.com/research/lewis-center-report-on-disaffiliating-churches-through-2022/ (accessed June 15, 2024).

of inflation, Protestant churches actually have 10 percent less spending power now than they did during the 12 month period (April 2019-March 2020) preceding the pandemic. [5]

While the impact of COVID-19 on in-person mission and ministry was felt equally for majority black and white United Methodist congregations, the impact of the disease on individuals was a greater crisis in majority black churches than white churches. As of March 2021 when The Covid Racial Data Tracker, a collaboration between the COVID Tracking Project and the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research, stopped collecting data, Black people were 1.4 times more likely to have died of COVID-19 than their white peers. Blacks accounted for 15 percent of all COVID-19 deaths when they made up only 12 percent of the population.[6] Although still alarming, this death rate is remarkably better than the data reported by this same organization at the beginning of the crisis when in August of 2020, blacks were dying at 2.5 times the rate of white Americans.[7] Also alarming was the fact that in June of 2020 according to a poll conducted by the *Washington Post* and the researching marketing firm of Ipsos, 31 percent of the blacks polled knew someone who had died of COVID-19 while only 13 percent of their peers had such a personal experience with the disease.[8]

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[5] Enoch Hill and Matthew F. Manion, "Study of COVID-19 Impact on U.S. Protestant and Catholic Church Giving," https://www1.villanova.edu/dam/villanova/VSB/Centers/center-for-church-management/COVIDImpactonUSCatholicandProtestantChurchGiving11.3.2023.pdf, (accessed June 15, 2024).

[6] COVID Tracking Project, "COVID-19 Is Affecting Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Other People of Color the Most," n.d., https://covidtracking.com/race (accessed July 15, 2024).

[7] COVID Tracking Project, (accessed August 15, 2020).

[8] The survey the Washington Post and Ipsos conducted online from June 9 to 14, 2020, is available at https://context-cdn.washingtonpost.com/notes/prod/default/documents/ef44160b-2164-413c-90ed-6c4f84565e70/note/e6b33bbb-c22b-4d8f-895f-176a8f705952.#page=1 (accessed August 12, 2020).

In addition to disproportionate deaths, the blacks were also disproportionately hospitalized for COVID-19. In a report published by the Pew Research Center in May of 2020, it was noted that, "black Americans [accounted] for a larger share of COVID-19 hospitalizations than their share of the population."[9] Some of the reasons for these health disparities are outlined in the "Black United Methodist Responses" section below.

The virus had a devastating financial impact on the United States. However, the impact was even more pronounced in black communities. According to a 2020 Pew research poll, 44 percent of black Americans lost a job or significant wages as a result of the virus, while only 38 percent of their white peers experienced such a loss. To compound the impact of lost wages, 73 percent of the blacks surveyed reported that they dd not have three months of expenses saved whereas only 47 percent of their white peers did not have this emergency savings fund.[10]

Historical Perspective

Black United Methodists and black organizations within The United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations have historically worked to mitigate the impacts of various crises because such work is a hallmark of Methodist identity. Mitigating the impact of crises by caring for the needs of all creation has been a part of the discipleship mandate of Methodism since its inception. This identity comes, in part, from the writings of John and Charles Wesley. "The Gospel of Christ knows no Religion but Social; no Holiness, but Social Holiness. Faith working by Love, the the

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[9] Mark Hugo Lopez, Lee Rainie, and Abby Budiman, Financial and Health Impacts of COVID-19 Vary Widely by Race and Ethnicity," *Pew Research Center*, May 5, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/05/financial-and-health-impacts-of-covid-19-vary-widely-by-race-and-ethnicity/ (accessed August 15, 2020).

[10] Lopez, Rainie, and Budiman, "Financial and Health Impacts."

Length, and Breadth, and Depth, and Height of Christian Perfection."[11] This work is the result of social holiness.

Historically black Methodists have been in the forefront of addressing the crises of social and economic injustices, crises which began well before the Methodist movement in 1619 when black people were first brought as slaves to the United States. For example, Richard Allen, a prominent Methodist preacher, and Absalom Jones, when he was a Methodist preacher, established the Free African Society (FAS) in 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The FAS provided financial literacy and medical care for widows, orphans, the sick, and the unemployed. Historian Julius E. Del Pino has asserted that the FAS was, "the first attempt to coordinate human and political efforts for improving living conditions for blacks."[12]

The Free African Society (FAS) was so successful that a prominent physician, Benjamin Rush, asked Allen and Jones to use the FAS to organize the black population to help mitigate the impact of the plague of yellow fever as it swept through Philadelphia in 1793. Rush asked Allen and Jones to help, in part, because he believed that if they provided care for those stricken with yellow fever, black people would gain allies in their fight for social justice. Although Rush was thought to be radically progressive in his day, he was, unfortunately subject to the rampant racism of his context. Consequently, he also asked for help from the FAS because he erroneously believed that the constitution of people of African descent made them immune to yellow fever.[13]

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[11] John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems,* 5th ed. (London: John and Charles Wesley, 1756), v.
[12] Julius E. Del Pino, "Blacks in the United Methodist Church from Its Beginnings to 1968," *Methodist History* 19:5 (October 1980).
[13] Anna Louise Bates, "'Give Glory to God before He Causes Darkness' Methodists and Yellow Fever in Philadelphia, 1793-1798." *Methodist History* 58:3 (April 2020).

Although there is no official record of him ever having said these words, the quote, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can at all the times you can, to all the people you can as long as ever you can" is often attributed to John Wesley. These words are probably often attributed to him because they encompass Methodist understandings of discipleship and social holiness. It is not, therefore surprising that Allen and Jones said yes to Rush's request because in their words, it was their "… duty to do all the good that we could to our suffering fellow mortals".[14] Allen and Jones also believed that helping in this way would lead to the mitigation of the crisis of racism as white residents would experience the humanity of people of African descent and would become more aware of the economic disparities between the two communities. Thus Allen and Jones organized black nurses, pastoral care givers, gravediggers, and others to serve white residents of Philadelphia who were impacted by yellow fever.[15]

Unfortunately the racist context of the city of Philadelphia was too much for the compassion of the members of the Free African Society (FAS) to overcome. Some of the white citizens who were helped by the FAS accused the workers of "causing needless death and stealing from patients."[16] Fortunately, because of the disciplined nature and copious record keeping that was undoubtedly nurtured by the Class Meeting structure of the Methodist movement and the fact that they were highly educated, Allen and Jones had kept a detailed accounting of all of the work of the FAS. They

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[14] A. J. and R. A., A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793: And Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown Upon Them in Some Publications (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1794), 3 (hereafter cited as Jones and Allen, Narrative).

[15] Jones and Allen, *Narrative.*

[16] Hahn, "Methodists Led Response in Earlier Epidemic." https://www.umnews.org/en/news/methodists-led-response-in-earlier-epidemic (accessed June 16, 2024).

were able to account for all of the funds given to workers by families to pay for the care and in some cases burial of their loved ones. They published their records and responded to the accusations in *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793: And Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown Upon Them in Some Publications.* After refuting the claims launched against the black workers, Allen and Jones wrote, "It is rather to be admired, that so few instances of pilfering and robbery happened, considering the great opportunity there was for such things: we do not know of more than five black people, suspected of any thing clandestine, out of a great number employed…"[17]

In their document Allen and Jones detailed instances of white workers who took advantage of the crisis by overcharging for funeral services or stealing medical provisions. In addition they included an affirmation from the mayor of Philadelphia who attested to all that was written in the Narrative. And in true Methodist fashion Allen and Jones ended the Narrative with a reference to the biblical story of Moses and a hymn calling persons to mission and ministry. (See Appendix A).

There are many other stories of black Methodists who have tried to mitigate crises through the work of social holiness. The members of Sharp Street Memorial Church in Baltimore, Maryland developed and housed Centenary Biblical Institute (1867-1872) during the era of Reconstruction in order to educate African Americans. The institute later became Morgan State University. In the midst of attacks on her womanhood, ethnicity, and religiosity, Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in 1904. And when the white employees of the local hospital turned away a sick student, Bethune opened a hospital for the black community. Reverend James Lawson, Jr. taught nonviolent protest workshops during the 1950's and

[17] Jones and Allen, *Narrative,* 14.

1960's. The James Lawson Institute continues to provide education and training for nonviolent campaigns for justice.

These are just some examples of black Methodist individuals and organizations that have historically mitigated the impact of crises. The various mission and ministries outlined above arose out of crises similar to the contemporary dual crises of Disaffiliation and COVID-19. These examples bear witness to the ability of black Methodists to mitigate the impact of previous crises and they provide insight into the black Methodist church's ability to mitigate the impact of the contemporary dual crises of Disaffiliation and COVID-19.

While the examples above demonstrate the strength, resilience, creativity, and flexibility of black churches and black individuals within The United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations, the work of C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya provide a framework for understanding why black United Methodists have historically been able to mitigate the impact of crises. These examples and the work of Lincoln and Mamiya also provide insight into how black United Methodists are mitigating the impact of the dual crises now facing The United Methodist Church.

Dialectical Model

In 1990 C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya wrote a now classic text entitled, "The Black Church in the African American Experience." The conclusions in that text were based on a ten year study of seven mainline black denominations. The study included interviews with over 1800 rural, urban, and suburban clergy as well as extensive historical research. While their research did not include black United Methodists, the reasons they concluded churches in black mainline

denominations should to be examined using their model are reasons that are true for black United Methodist churches as well.

The authors concluded that other studies of the black church have been flawed because they have attempted to characterize the black church through a single typology such as "other worldly" or "compensatory". Lincoln and Mamiya concluded that single typologies cannot explain the complexities of the black church. They concluded that a more dynamic and theoretical perspective was needed because black churches, "have played a more complex role and assumed more comprehensive burdens in their communities than is true of most white and ethnic churches."[18]

Rather than a single typology, Lincoln and Mamiya proposed six dialectic polarities which the black church constantly holds in tension. The polarities are never resolved. And the work of those analyzing any particular church is to locate its leaders and members on the continuum in their orientation in relationship to the pairs of dialectic polarities.

The six pairs of dialectic polarities are: priestly and prophetic, other-worldly and this-worldly, universalism and particularism, communal and privatistic, charismatic and bureaucratic, and resistance and accommodation. Each of these pairs will be explained here.

Priestly functions could be defined as Wesleyan acts of piety which include worship, prayer, Bible study, and communion. Priestly functions also include maintenance of church buildings and church structures. Prophetic functions could be defined as acts of justice as involve political concerns and community activism. Churches can, at times, find themselves at either extreme end of this

[18] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), Black Church in the African American Experience, 18.

polarity. When they are at the extremes, "Priestly churches are bastions of survival and prophetic churches are networks of liberation."[19]

An other-worldly orientation focuses on heaven and eternal life. A this-worldly orientation focuses on politics and social life and the current context. The authors rejected the historic emphasis that researches have placed on an other-worldly orientation of the black church. They also asserted that "eschatological transcendence" can help to provide a this-worldly critique of the present social order as persons quickly move along this continuum. They lifted the example of Nat Turner who had other-worldly visions which propelled him to develop a this-worldly strategy to attempt to overthrow the system of slavery.

There is a universalism to the Christian message. However, there are also some particularities of the racial history of the institution of the church which impact the Christian message in a black context. There has historically been tension in the black community between wanting to share in the the universal experience of all siblings in Christ and the desire to confront the issues of Christian racialism or the desire to highlight the particular experience of black siblings in Christ.

Historically the black church has been involved in all aspects of the lives of its members. Politics, economics, education and social concerns are all addressed in the black church. This is in tension with what Lincoln and Mamiya defined as the secularization of the church. This privatistic move toward a more "individualistic sense of religiousness… also results in a psychologizing of religion, a focus on personal counseling and producing a sense of individual well-being."[20]

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[19] Lincoln and Mamiya, 12.
[20] Lincoln and Mamiya, 13.

Lincoln and Mamiya asserted that when compared to their white mainstream denominational peers, the majority of black churches tend to be closer to the charismatic end of the continuum. They asserted that the fact that black churches have relied more on charisma than bureaucracy is rooted in the prohibitions against persons of African descent learning to read and write. As a result leaders in the black church had to be great orators. Further, most members did not initially have the skills needed to keep copious written membership records or read books about church law or polity and thus were prohibited from engaging in the bureaucracy of the church.

Finally, when detailing the dialectic between resistance and accommodation, Lincoln and Mamiya asserted that, "Every black person and every black institution has participated in making compromises between these two poles."[21] There are times when the black church was influenced by the larger society and became a mediating and socializing mechanism for former slaves. During the civil right movements preachers were sometimes manipulated into preaching and teaching sermons about accommodation in order to reduce fear and anxiety in the white community. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. responded with resistance to attempts from the white mainstream Christian community with his Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Because mainline black denominations are the only institutions in the country that are not controlled by a white majority, they have enjoyed an ability to show resistance that has not been available to blacks in other settings.

Black United Methodist Responses

Because of my leadership role in The United Methodist Church, this author has observed several examples of black United Methodist churches moving along the continuum of the various dialectic polarities in ways that have helped them mitigate the impact of the dual crises. For example,

[21] Lincoln and Mamiya, 14.

when during the pandemic state governors, local health departments, or bishops limited the priestly functions of in-person worship, fellowship, and Bible study, some black church leaders quickly pivoted from priestly functions to prophetic functions. They highlighted the racial inequities revealed during the pandemic.

Denominational leaders who ordinarily resourced persons around the priestly functions sponsored a videoconference entitled, "Ask the Docs: Preemptive Planning for Public Worship."[22] Amid the training about how to safely return to in-person worship, presenters shared the health disparities illuminated by the pandemic and urged persons to work toward a more just healthcare system. For example, Dr. Robin Womeodu, Chief Medical Officer of Methodist University Hospital shared data about diabetes, hypertension, and end stage renal disease rates in the black community.[23] She concluded that all of these diseases are underlying diseases that complicate COVID-19 symptoms. Attendees were encouraged to think about ways to impact these health disparities.

Discipleship Ministries and Strengthening the Black Church for the Twenty-First Century also provided a virtual training event entitled, "COVID-19 and the Black Church Online Summit". They helped church leaders address priestly functions while simultaneously addressing prophetic functions and addressing the communal nature of the black church. Topics included providing creative and compelling preaching to address issues of loss and hopelessness due to the pandemic; fostering courageous action to address racial disparities in the health system; and encouraging impactful ministry in the midst of the pandemic restrictions. A portion of the training even dealt

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[22] Memphis Conference Black Methodists for Church Renewal, "Ask the Docs: Preemptive Planning for Public Worship," *Vimeo*, May 19, 2020, https://vimeo.com/420431114 (accessed August 15, 2020).
[23] Memphis Conference Black Methodists for Church Renewal, "Ask the Docs."

with the intersectionality of the criminal justice system, COVID-19, prison ministry, and programs for reentry.[24]

During the process of disaffiliation, some members of predominately white congregations that disaffiliated justified their defiance of Jesus' prayer for unity found in John 17:20-23 and John Wesley's call to allow for diversity of thought over the nonessentials by relegating Jesus's prayer and John Wesley's ideals to an other-worldly, "pie in the sky" existence that because of sinfulness, they said, is not possible in a this-worldly existence. Black churches, however, seemed to more naturally navigate this other-worldly and this worldly continuum. Black United Methodist churches, in order to exist in a predominately white denomination, have had to gain hope from glimpses of unity, foretastes of glory divine, in the midst of the sometimes very profound cultural differences that exist between black and white congregations. They have had to gain strength from the glimpses of unity that that God has graciously provided in the midst of the sinfulness of micro aggressions and systemic racism. Any of the cultural differences, micro aggressions, or instances of persistent systemic racism could have been an impetus for black United Methodists to leave The United Methodist Church. However, as they navigated a this-worldly focus with an other-worldly focus, black United Methodists choose to use their earthly existence as a dress rehearsal for heaven which will be full of sinful, diverse people and black United Methodists have not disaffiliated.

Demonstrating the polarity of universalism versus particularism, some black United Methodists in Dallas, Texas organized a #WENEED2SURVIVE campaign in conjunction with media, city leaders, and ordinary citizens. The campaign organizers acknowledged the universality of the

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[24] United Methodist Church Discipleship Ministries, 'COVID-19 and the Black Church Online Summit," April 16, 2020, https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/covid-19-and-the-black-church-online-summit (accessed, June 15, 2024).

pandemic, however, they highlighted the particularism of the the way in which the virus impacted communities of color. [25] For example, in Dallas County where 23.6 percent of the population is black, blacks accounted for 35 percent of the reported cases of COVID-19.[26]

The campaign organizers monopolized on the communal role of the black church and used its structures and networks to disseminate information about the virus into the black community. The campaign spread information about health insurance for the underinsured, exacerbating preexisting conditions in communities of color, and myths about the virus.[27] The church leaders also, ironically, used the communal nature of the church to foster a privatistic response. They discouraged over spiritualizing responses to COVID-19 and encouraged individuals to get the secular help they need. Perhaps their cause was helped by prominent voices in the black United Methodist community like Pastors Rudy and Juanita Rasmus who have been advocating for black people to access mental health intervention.[28]

The process of disaffiliation was a process steeped in bureaucracy. Because of current systemic racism and the history of bureaucracy being used to harm black United Methodists, many in the black United Methodist Church are inherently suspicious of any processes that are laden with

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[25] Jennifer Prohov and Tashara Parker, Black COVID-19 Patients in Dallas County, Nationwide are Hospitalized at Higher Rates, Data Shows," WFAA–TV, April 9, 2020, https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/black-covid-19-patients-dallas-county-nationwide-higher-rates-hospitalized/287-8eacaf04-e7dd-48d5-a204-f053215b3098 (accessed June 16, 2020).

[26] United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts: Dallas County, Texas," n.d., https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/dallascountytexas (accessed August 30, 2020).

[27] A public announcement about #WENEED2SURVIVE dated March 27, 2020, is located at https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/141 (accessed June 15, 2024).

[28] Sam Hodges, "Pastor Found 'treasures' in Depression Battle" https://www.umnews.org/en/news/pastor-found-treasures-in-depression-battle#:~:text=The Rev.,and done a TED Talk (accessed June 16, 2024).

bureaucracy. At gatherings of black United Methodists stories of how the church has used bureaucracy to harm clergy of color are shared in order to encourage advocacy and discourage complacency. The fact that the only bishop in the history of The United Methodist Church to have been subjected to the bureaucracy of a church trail was a bishop of color, only to have been acquitted on all charges, is emblematic of this issue. It should also be noted that the Judicial Council reversed the bureaucratic process used to force another bishop of color into retirement. Consequently, the black United Methodist Church has traditionally relied on charisma because bureaucracy has been used to hurt it. It was the charisma of church leaders and an inherent mistrust of the bureaucratic process of disaffiliation that helped black United Methodists remain United Methodists.

The final example of the black United Methodist Church's ability to mitigate the impact of the dual crises to be outlined here highlights the resistance and accommodation continuum. At the beginning of the pandemic when many of the white congregations under the supervision of this author were having protracted conversations about resisting governmental mandates regarding the size of social gatherings, the black churches under the supervision of this author quickly moved to accommodate the restrictions and, therefore, had more creative energy to engage in conversation about how they could do ministry in the midst of the restrictions. Some more quickly decided to move to online worship and so a disproportionate number of black churches immediately applied for grants to purchase equipment to help them broadcast better quality services. Some of those grants were provided because the leadership of the Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry of the Northeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church dispensed with the bureaucracy of the grant making process and allowed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. They sent funds to annual conferences

in the Northeastern Jurisdiction with the simple instructions that the annual conferences were to dispense the money to churches of color who had been impacted by COVID-19.

As has been illustrated the black United Methodist Church has used its unique giftedness to operate within the tension of the dialectic model of polar opposites in order to mitigate the impact of the dual crises of Disaffiliation and COVID-19. Because of this historical and contemporary anecdotal and statistical evidence, it can be concluded that the black United Methodist Church has mitigated the impact of the dual crises of COVID-19 and Disaffiliation.

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#WENEED2SURVIVE CAMPAIGN AMBASSADORS We Need to Survive Rationale

#WENEED2SURVIVE'

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Appendix A[29]

By Absalom Jones and Richard Allen

YE Ministers, that are call'd to preaching,

Teachers, and exhorters too;

Awake! behold your harvest wasting!

Arise! there is no rest for you.

To think upon that strict commandment,

That God has on his teachers laid,

The sinner's blood, who dies unwarned,

Shall fall upon their Shepherd's head.

But oh! dear brethren, let's be doing,

Behold the nation's in distress,

The Lord of Hosts forbid their ruin,

Before the day of grace is past.

We read of wars and great commotions,

Before the great and dreadful day,

Oh, Sinners! turn your sinful courses,

And trifle not your time away.

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[29] Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 28.

But Oh! dear sinners, that's not all that's dreadful!

You must before your God appear!

To give an account of your transactions,

And how you spent your time, when here.