

The Pastor's Pen

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Many thanks to all who participated in last Saturday's Stewardship Planning Session. I could sense the engagement and commitment of participants at the outset to stay the course to get the job done. The responses and enthusiasm of participants were examples of a five-star approach we aspire to achieve through our planning. Our next steps will be to follow up and monitor the status of our work in the following core areas: *Congregational Care, Education, Outreach, Social Justice* and *Worship*. As we face the challenges of ministering in an increasingly gentrifying community, our vision can only be fulfilled by employing strategic and intentional efforts in all that we plan and implement.

The vision for the next five years is "***To become the voice of justice for the Black Church in America.***" The present administration has already demonstrated how vitally important it is to keep our initiatives at the forefront of today's socially-heated climate, especially when executive orders are constantly being directed to roll back all of the Obama era initiatives.

In spite of the killings of Black males at the hands of law enforcement and the cries that rang out through national Black Lives Matter protests, the Attorney General of the United States indicated that "the Department of Justice would 'pull back' on the federal scrutiny of police departments for civil rights violations against people of color," to include confiscating and indefinitely withholding property if/when enforcers are suspicious of activities. In effect, this amounts to a violation of a constitutional right, which is protection from illegal search and seizure. The entire Black Lives Matter movement has been rendered immaterial by the power in the pen of the Executive Branch.

Throughout the coming years we will look for ways to develop and design plans to implement our vision. We are asking each planning area to determine how our vision can be incorporated in all our programs. One example was offered by the Worship/Music/Evangelism planning session -- *to have our choirs join Outreach and offer music at some of our Saturday fellowship meals*. Our choirs already do an outstanding job of providing Christmas music at various care centers. Providing that same service at select fellowship meals would be in keeping with our vision.

It will take all of us to develop creative and innovative ideas, plans and processes to keep our vision alive throughout the year. As we attest so often, if we take one step, God will take two.