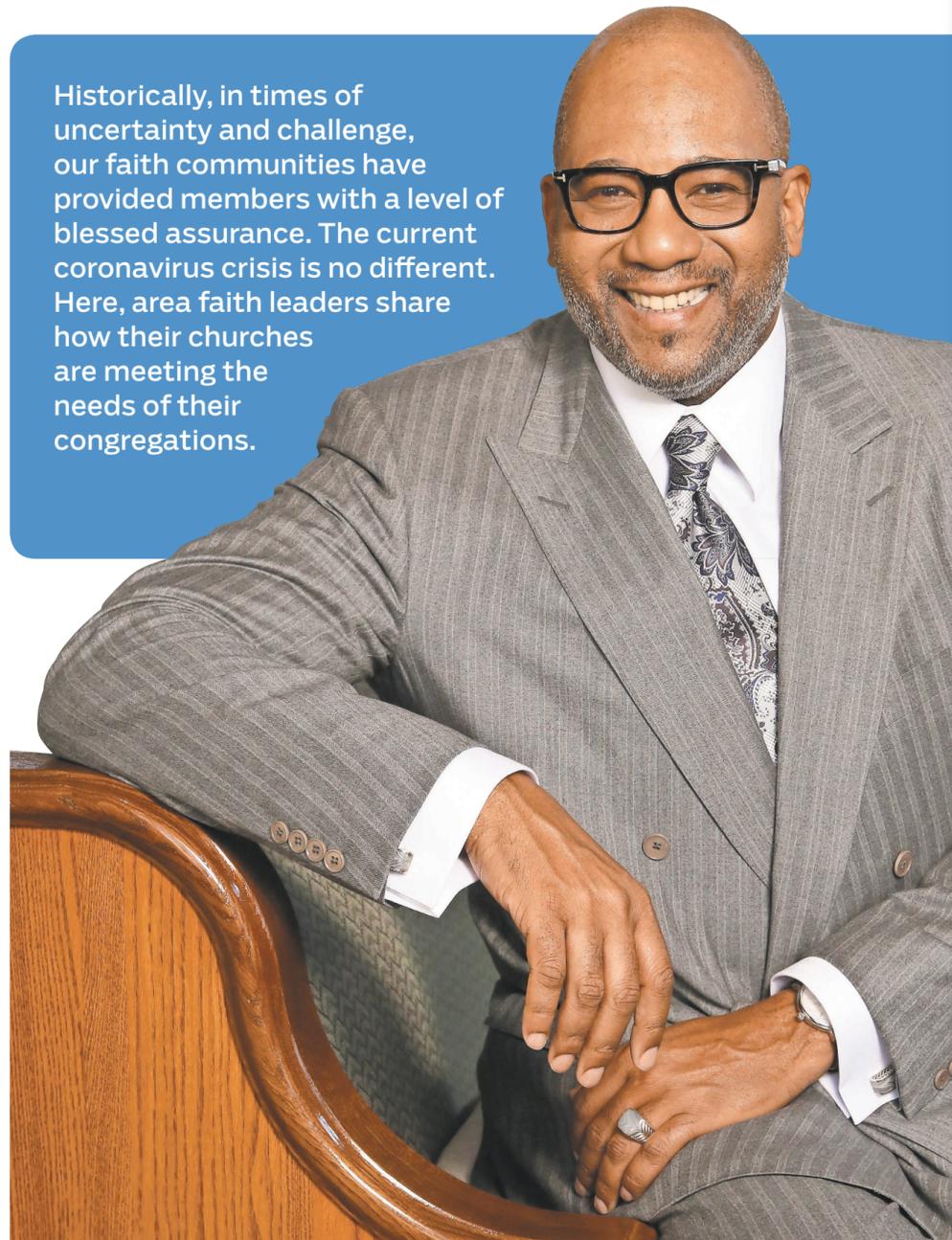




BLACK CHURCHES & THE CORONAVIRUS PASTORS ADAPT

By Aswad Walker

Historically, in times of uncertainty and challenge, our faith communities have provided members with a level of blessed assurance. The current coronavirus crisis is no different. Here, area faith leaders share how their churches are meeting the needs of their congregations.



PASTOR RALPH DOUGLAS WEST The Church Without Walls

Q: ENCOURAGING WORDS FOR HOUSTONIANS?

For the faith community, sacred and secular, things will improve, get better, and return. For a while, we have to live with a different kind of normalcy. For the church community specifically, we have 3,200 years of history. We've been through crusades, wars, pandemics, racism, Jim Crow, depressions, recessions, etc., and the church still goes on. Nothing has stopped the church. The church will go on, move forward, and the gates of hell shall not prevail. God will take care. The church is in God's hands.

Q: WHAT IS THE CHURCH CORONAVIRUS STRATEGY?

Our strategy is to move from physical church to virtual church with the motto, "Bringing God's house into your house." We will comply with guidelines established by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO).

EASTER PLANS: Participatory worship, unison prayers, choral and sermon engagement (streaming)

Streaming worship: Sundays, 8 a.m., 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 11 a.m., noon, live.tcww.org, www.tcww.org

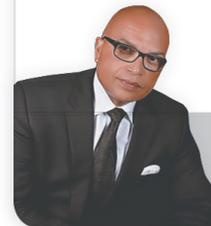
PASTOR D.Z. COFIELD Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church

Q: ENCOURAGING WORDS FOR HOUSTONIANS?

STAY IN. Make sure you follow the directions of the CDC by practicing social distancing and personal hygiene. This is important for our seniors, but it's applicable to everyone. STAY CONNECTED. Take the time to reconnect and recommit to family and friends. STAY CALM. This is a very stressful and anxious time, and you need to realize stress is not what you go through, but how you respond to what you're going through. STAY COMMITTED. Be encouraged and see this time to disengage as a gift. In the midst of it all, put your faith and trust in God. He will see you through.

Q: WHAT IS THE CHURCH CORONAVIRUS STRATEGY?

Our strategy can be summarized in the phrase, "Maintaining Spiritual Connectivity While Practicing Social Distancing." While we work to comply with the ever-changing CDC guidelines for social interaction, we view the life of faith as essential to a person's mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. As part of a body of believers, we are committed to staying connected with our members, serving our neighbors in need and practicing social distancing. In an effort to keep our at-risk members safe from the virus, our Membership Team along with the Houston Food Bank through our nonprofit (Hope for Families), is providing them with essentials and distributing food to those in need.



EASTER PLANS: Streaming & drive-in services

Streaming worship: Sundays, 8 a.m., 10 a.m., ChurchStreaming.tv, mobile app (I AM HOPE), Facebook (Good Hope MBC), YouTube Live (Good Hope), IGTV, www.goodhope.org

PASTOR KALONGI JONES Shrine of the Black Madonna

Q: ENCOURAGING WORDS FOR HOUSTONIANS?

We are a surviving people, and we have always proved throughout history to prevail against impossible odds. Stay alert and be proactive. We at the Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church love you, and we are ready to serve the community at call.

Q: WHAT IS THE CHURCH CORONAVIRUS STRATEGY?

The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church was built to deal with community crisis. The fellowship of the church is centered on community engagement and upliftment. Our strategy is to stay in constant contact through email, telephone, and social media with our members and the surrounding Black communities. We have an emergency response team prepared and ready to serve our members and the community on call. We have also teamed with the other Black community organizations to serve as needed.



EASTER PLANS: National combined live service

Streaming worship: Sundays, 11:30 a.m., www.shrinesoftheblackmadonna.org

PASTOR LINDA DAVIS Boynton United Methodist Church

Q: ENCOURAGING WORDS FOR HOUSTONIANS?

I know that there seems to be bad news everywhere, but there is still good news for the believer. God is still on the throne and we will get through this by faith. Continue to use wisdom by taking the necessary precautions and pray the prayer of protection found in Psalm 91 over you and your family. Exercise your faith over your fears!

Q: WHAT IS THE CHURCH CORONAVIRUS STRATEGY?

We are taking things week-by-week. We are encouraging our congregants to take things easy and play it safe. We know that our lives have been radically changed due to the COVID-19 virus. We are following the instructions of our local and federal government of no gatherings of more than 10 persons. Therefore, we are taking care of the business of the church by meeting via conference calls, Zoom, and a lot of emails. We're also participating in the conference calls that are being held by our Bishop Scott Jones of the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and Houston Methodist Hospital in which we receive updates on the COVID-19 virus and how it affects us all locally and globally.



EASTER PLANS: Saturday food pantry & Easter bags for kids

Streaming worship: Sunday, 10:30 a.m., Facebook (Boynton Chapel UMC-Houston)

PASTORS RUDY & JUANITA RASMUS St. Johns Downtown

Q: ENCOURAGING WORDS FOR HOUSTONIANS?

Here's a mental protocol as we are "Learning to Be!" BREATHE in through your nose, exhale deeply and slowly. Breathing grounds, you and allows you to release tension. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR THOUGHTS. You choose to spiral down, or you can choose to spiral up! Choose life! Be kind to yourself. Be the adult to reassure your inner child that all shall be well. Access the Divine living and breathing in you. You can get more tips for "Learning to Be: Finding Your Center After the Bottom Falls Out," my (Juanita Campbell Rasmus) new book available on Amazon.

Q: WHAT IS THE CHURCH CORONAVIRUS STRATEGY?

Several years ago, we began to see a drop in church attendance and began asking the hard questions like, "What is the future for the church?" During that time, I was completing a doctorate and research on Black millennial culture. We began taking steps toward creating an online presence and realized there were more people viewing the services online than there ever was in the actual building. The onset of the pandemic only confirmed this fact and we found ourselves prepared for what was to come...



EASTER PLANS: Brian Courtney Wilson, Motown gospel artist, featured preacher.

Streaming worship: Sundays, 8 a.m., 10 a.m., Facebook (St. John's Downtown) www.stjohnsdowntown.org