

Redefining the Position of an African American Baptist Church for the Millennials  
through Social Justice in the 21st century: LGBTQIA+

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### Abstract

My objective for this video/project was to shed light and concern about human sexuality in the black Baptist church and to review the idea that church engagement starts with our spiritual growth in re-teaching scriptures that have been taken out of context, especially scriptures that have been used to dehumanize our brothers and sisters of the gay community. Based on conversations with several pastors of traditional and non- denominational churches, it appears that the Bible has been a spiritual resource not learned and studied, but rather employed to justify our personal biases and cultural norms. According to Robert K. Gnuse,

“There are seven texts often cited by Christians to condemn homosexuality: Noah and Ham (Genesis 9:20–27), Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–11), Levitical laws condemning same-sex relationships (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13), two words in two Second Testament vice lists (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10), and Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 1:26–27). The author believes that these do not refer to homosexual relationships between two free, adult, and loving individuals. They describe rape or attempted rape (Genesis 9:20–27, 19:1–11), cultic prostitution (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13), male prostitution and pederasty (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10), and the Isis cult in Rome (Romans 1:26–27). If the biblical authors did assume homosexuality was evil, we do not theologize off of their cultural assumptions, we theologize off of the texts we have in the canon....”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gnuse, Robert. “Seven Gay Texts: Biblical Passages Used to Condemn Homosexuality.”  
Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011.

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In many black and white churches, these scriptures have been a source of reasoning as to why some believe that sex outside of marriage and homosexuality are a moral and biblical sins and condemned by God. However, when carefully reading the bible, they do not condemn the act of gay relationships and sex, but rather show the condemnation of the LGBTQIA+ community has been theologized from a cultural point of view.

The purpose of this project was to dismantle these myths and theologies, enlighten those who would condemn the LGBTQIA community through exegesis, and point the faith community toward an inclusive Beloved Community. The foundational question is: How does public theology engage communities and lead to the ethics and praxis of welcome and inclusion?

### **Rationale for Change**

Public theology must go beyond the standard turkey drives on Thanksgiving and toy giveaways during Christmas. Public theology stretches the imagination, inviting an analysis of both Holy texts and the community. It causes one to identify how to be God's hands and heartbeat in the world, offering support and love to all people. While researching and interviewing individuals in this study, I discovered that as a religious leader and community activist, it is my goal and obligation to educate those who feel exclusion and dishonesty is the best policy. This project has changed my outlook and sense of calling, forcing me to think beyond the box of how we can be inclusive of all races, creed, genders and sexualities, not only in worship and in congregational life, but also outside the walls of the church, to affect the lives of those who feel ostracized from their families and local worship assemblies.

As regards my context—the so-called Black church—I'm particularly concerned about the lack of spiritual imagination regarding LGBTQIA communities. Preston Washington states this particular concept, when he writes that “We have boxed our Lord into a spiritually- limiting confines of “down-home in the bible belt.”<sup>2</sup> Washington describes the notion that we have placed God in a canister where not only does God move and work for those who possess God, but God is available only for our choosing to open the canister and take pieces for our comfort, creating God to only be God's self in the acts of tradition and not the acts of liberation, justice, and inclusion.

I like this pitting of tradition and liberation in which the idea of God is not placed just for one idea of living, but that God roams and moves beyond just a canister or containment. God

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<sup>2</sup> Washington, Preston. *From the Pew to The Pavement*. Morristown, New Jersey: Aaron Press, 1996.

exercises God's self freely without any restrictions to our communities and borders. In my video project, I ask Rev. Dr. Renee Washington Gardner, the senior pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Harlem, "How do you respond to Bishop Washington's theory of "boxing our Lord in limiting confines?" She states, "I believe that we have boxed God in a container because we only believe and conceive him to be what we want him to be in our personal theology, especially when it comes to those who are gay. The reality is, that so many people in the black church are struggling with their own sexuality and because they have decided to stay closeted, they abuse those who chose to be open and affirming by using scriptures as a way of rebuke and correction."<sup>3</sup> There are a few Black Baptist churches that have lost their sense of the freedom and power of God to revolutionize communities, preferring to imagine God as something it can control.

One of the issues that cause delay in the progression of theologies in Black Baptist churches is that we often do things not because there is a need, but often because it "looks" like we are doing the work of God. In the book of Matthew, Jesus makes a statement to the Pharisees after they witnessed his disciples eating in the temple before washing their hands. He states, "You people serve me with your lips, but your heart is far from me."<sup>4</sup> In essence, Jesus questions if the work of individuals is motivated by their love and passion for him or to keep up tradition. Traci West calls the church to this work of inclusion as she writes, "The testimony of local church pastors should build a supportive, trustworthy faith community that is centrally composed

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<sup>3</sup> Renee Washington Gardner, interview by author via zoom, New York City, December 18, 2020

<sup>4</sup> New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Matthew 15:8

of black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Christians.”<sup>5</sup> Warnock identifies the same issue, “We have not been able to become inclusive whether that be, gender, sexuality, race, and color.”<sup>6</sup>

In circumstances, African American Baptist churches have been its own setback. It is a struggle to deal with the LGBTQI+ community because “same gender loving” has been deemed as a sin. I do know that my church also struggles with the idea of openly acknowledging such individuals, but they don’t mind them working in areas of the church as long as they keep their sexual orientation a secret. Because of this struggle and the church’s judgement and condemnation, young millennials and young adults don’t attend or participate in some Black Baptist church’s events and services. It has been a perpetual cycle since the age of slavery here in America, that blacks have taken on the views and concepts of white slave masters when it comes to their religion and theology. And so, some blacks have kept the ideology of slavery concerning Christianity by creating the same bondage theologies and impressing them on others. This concept in particular has been an unsolved issue amongst most churches, that homosexuality is a sin.

I do know that this is a major risk for me when considering how “we” as the Black Baptist church take on the responsibility of inclusion for our gay brothers and sisters. This project also raised the question, “What would be the Christ-like response to the struggle of inclusion and acceptance of human sexuality in the Black Baptist church?”: In my view, the main principal of Christ being on earth and his ministry is that he grounded his work in love. In the

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<sup>5</sup> West, Traci. *Disruptive Christian Ethics*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Warnock, Raphael. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

video project, Dr. Eric Gill states “We hear the word love tossed around so much in our churches and communities, but don’t often take the time to dissect it in the concept of Jesus. When we look at the scriptures, we see the connection of love from John 8 with the adulteress women and how the Pharisees bring the women to Jesus because of an act of adultery. Jesus’ response was not one of adultery but rather it was about consistency and morality and having to apply this ethic and law through the lens of love.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus understood what love meant to the woman caught in adultery. Rather than the condemnation she was receiving from those who did not take the opportunity to get to know her, Jesus offered love and grace. The Black Baptist church might lean into what true love means toward members of the LGBTQIA+ community and friends.

The opposite of love is ignorance, and in my view, ignorance leads to hatred and fear. I have also realized while interviewing for this project that fear inhibits the pursuit of love, limiting the language, knowledge, and scholarship needed to have the conversation with leaders and congregants. In essence, I have found that there will be a lot of questions church leaders, members, and community activists will have and the church may not have the bandwidth to provide those answers and responses. This reality insists that the church needs allies (e.g., inclusive churches, community leaders, LGBTQI+ faith leaders, etc.) that educate individuals on human sexuality and inclusion from the lens of social justice and public theology.

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Gill, interview by author via zoom, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 23, 2020



### **Model of Engagement: Social Justice and Public Theology**

When considering the position of the Black Baptist church and the role it plays in engaging the next generation through social change, we must examine the question: What is the church's goal for Social Justice and inclusion? Social Justice is similar to the form of social services, it should provide resources for individuals who are not able to obtain proper distribution of wealth and health resources that are available to communities of other races. Doing social justice provides the church the opportunity to obtain access into the community, creating a level of trust, honesty, and safety for both the church and community. Within the Black Baptist denominations, there are several reasons why some churches have become stifled in their progress toward social justice. In my observation many Black Baptist churches suffer from outdated rituals, miseducation of church polity, lack of involvement in one's community, and social justice reform. For example, I have witnessed some Black Baptist churches struggle with mismanagement of those who come out as gay or lesbian by ostracizing them from activities, service participation, and not providing resources for living and spiritual growth. In this project, I am arguing that social justice and public theology are motivators of public change and service. Public theology addresses the issues of the public square with such individuals who are willing to come in contact with hatred and death in opposing injustice in striving for a better community. Public theology allows such leaders and allies to be willing to become martyrs for the rights of individuals who are oppressed and unable to speak out for themselves. Public theology must advance the Reign of God on earth, denouncing evil, systemic racism, segregation, and exclusion of God's people because of their sexuality and/or gender. In "A Companion to Public Theology " the authors' define public theology as "theology sharing a public space, not for heroes in the 21st century, but rather the community bringing their energy,

power, and knowledge from resilient people. Influencing public ideas, public actions, and impacting policy led by public leaders who are willing to engage in public issues from a local and global perspective.”<sup>8</sup> The authors identify that our power, voices, and knowledge should be the driving force that helps to support and love those who have often been pushed away. Helping to create policies in favor of the LGBTQI+ community with our official leaders is one way we can engage in our public work to bridge the gap between the gay community and the Black Baptist church.

Kim and Day bring together theologians and educators to identify the different levels of public theology and public work, recognizing the public systems that need to be addressed. Esther McIntosh connects the work of public theology as “.... theology should engage with three publics: church, academy, and society.” Esther McIntosh also says “The three publics do not go deep enough into an examination of whose voices are heard and considered legitimate in church, academy, society. In all three publics, those who have access and those to whom we listen are demarcated by race, gender and sexuality.”<sup>9</sup> Leaving a community of people outcast by a patriarchal society that only works for individuals who can control the narrative of freedom and injustice for the LGBTQI+ community. These three publics should uplift and educate the community, but it also identifies that we must break barriers of race (white), gender (male), and sexuality (straight) in order to see real change. Moreover, public theology should engage with theology that finds itself outside of the church and academic arenas, creating treaties between mainstream, liberal, and conservative thinkers.

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<sup>8</sup> Day, Katie and Kim, Sebastian. *Companion to Public Theology*. Danvers, MA: Brill, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Day, Katie and Kim, Sebastian. *Companion to Public Theology*. Danvers, MA: Brill, 2017

In my project, I interviewed Rev. Dr. Gina M. Stewart who pastors Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis, TN. When defining public theology, she said, “Public Theology says that God has an intention for the world and in some ways the church has to engage with the world for our faith to bring to understanding that God’s intentions for human flourishing is most important as to how it relates to the world. Leading to transformation of institutions and structures that undermine human flourishing. Theology has a public dimension that brings about change and freedom. So often when we think of theology, we only think about a spirituality that’s from the neck up and we often consequently have a pietistic privatized faith in regards to theology. For there is a public dimension to faith and our faith should lead to transformation in our personal lives that should lead to transformation to systems, structures, and institutions.”<sup>10</sup> Our personal faith should be a public witness to the idea of inclusion for all, not just allowing our government to create policies for gay marriage, but that the church should agree in the same concept of acknowledging gay marriages. She continues, “Public Theology is an intersection that is privatized bringing personal faith that is vertical, but a public faith that is horizontal giving the idea of the “cross” and its purpose and meaning.”<sup>11</sup> I believe when we wed the two called public theology to our personal theology, we have a more holistic approach to the way we do ministry. Our concern then is no longer about personal sin, but rather a concern of moving theology into the public square.

Jones and Cox make a great point toward public theology by identifying the thoughts of millennials they interviewed when they mention, “Church is a place to recharge and rekindle hope in the face of overwhelming odds. Although many Millennials we interviewed were

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<sup>10</sup> Gina M. Stewart, interview by author via zoom, Memphis, Tn, November 20, 2020

<sup>11</sup> Gina M. Stewart, interview by author via zoom, Memphis, Tn, November 20, 2020

somewhat uncertain about what they thought about God, they talked about a connection to a higher power and something bigger than themselves as an important anchor for the social justice work, they were doing.”<sup>12</sup> It seems these millennials are not looking for a traditional view of God, but they are in search of a spiritual relationship with God. Millennials are in search of a more spiritual life than they are interested in religion and traditional Christian practices. Millennials are seeking relationships and restoration not only within themselves, but also for their communities through their service in social activism and justice.

### **Outcomes**

Through this project's video, my church can provide resources for millennials and community agencies to create Black privileges that should equip our community. Privileges that directly support and give economic, faith, and health access to black families, churches and communities. I believe with such programs in creating a pipeline for black wealth, steady income, black businesses, and streamlined resources for healthcare, we will be able to engage a community of people all across the city and even the country, breaking barriers for inclusion and acceptance of all types of lifestyles. My passion for this work is to witness my church and stand with millennials in search of spiritual growth all while standing for the marginalized, the children and families on the borders, the LGBTQIA+ community. This work should affect the oppressed in low-income subsidized housing, and the families of those young black boys, girls, men, and women who have been shot down in our sacred streets because of the color of their skin and socio-economic backgrounds. I believe from this project it is in our best interest to make sure we

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<sup>12</sup> Cox, Daniel and Jones, Robert “Doing Church and Doing Justice; A Portrait of Millennials at Middle Church” Washington, DC, 2011

attract different types of individuals to the church through love and liberation. The work we do determines the way in which individuals are able to receive assistance and freedom from several areas of oppression.

This is what Raphael Warnock calls *Black Theology*. He states “Black Theology is a theology of liberation seeking to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity.”<sup>13</sup> I question if the African American church understands its power to help develop a vision and possibility of black humanity both for the church and to those of the LGBTQI+ community and their families. James Cone informs my thinking when he writes about Black theology, “The present work (Black Theology of Liberation) seeks to be revolutionary in the sense that it attempts to bring to theology a special attitude permeated with Black consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> Dr. Cone gives light to how revolutionary love and consciousness are essential to public theology when navigating in murky territory between personal theologies of exclusion and theologies of liberation.

I question whether Black Church theologies on *gay* have been constrained theologies of white supremacy. Cone informs my question as he asserts, “Unfortunately, Christianity came to the black man through white oppressors who demanded that he reject his concern for this world as well as his blackness and affirm the next world and whiteness.”<sup>15</sup> This means that Black Christianity can often come from a place of selfishness and unwillingness to help the oppressed,

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<sup>13</sup> Warnock, Raphael. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Cone, James. *Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Cone, James. *Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

perpetuating a space that is only convenient for themselves and not those who can benefit from the resources that can be provided. Cone and Warnock both assert the idea that congregations cannot become progressive until the leaders in such churches are liberated from their own restrictive personal theology. It is unfortunate, perhaps even bizarre that we as a Black Baptist church will not extend love and hope to those of the LGBTQI+ community. Not only is it bizarre, but it is also hateful and counterproductive to the work of social justice and public theology.

Kelly Brown Douglas, an Episcopal priest, offers the reader and some Black Baptist churches a concept to consider. Although she is not from the Black Baptist tradition, she offers every denomination and religion an idea of how we show love and acceptance with wisdom from Angela Davis. “Angela Davis acknowledges the role of white culture in shaping the black church’s response to homosexuality: The fear of homosexuality perpetuated by the church is related to a generalized fear of sexuality. This fear of sexuality takes on a new meaning when considered in light of the fact that the freedom to choose sexual partners was one of the most powerful distinctions between the condition of slavery and the post emancipation states of African Americans.”<sup>16</sup> Here is a cogent argument for why the Black church and specifically some Black Baptist churches want to exclude LGBTQIA individuals. It’s why my church creates an unsafe and unpleasant environment for individuals to worship and engage fully in ministry. Davis asserts that Black people have been taught a theology that is not grounded in love and justice but rather a theology of hate and injustice in which God’s love only shines on straight people. Because my congregation is of a particular age and older demographic, I understand that

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books, 1999.

there might be major push back toward this project. However, I do believe that there is also a large group of individuals who are waiting for their family members, friends, husbands, wives, and children to be accepted and acknowledged as a part of the church community while one who is gay, lesbian, and trans.

### **Identification of an engagement with relevant works of socio-political analysis**

In my project video, I had the pleasure interviewing Rev. Dr. Joshua Mitchell, the author of “Black Millennials & the Church: Meet Me Where I Am” in which in his book he states, “Black churches who are not willing to have serious conversations around their theology and ethics on human sexuality are not black churches who will survive the shift as it relates to spiritual formation choices for Black millennials.”<sup>17</sup> In the video, I ask him about this quote in his book and he amplifies his thinking by saying, “If Black congregations don’t have the conversation about Black sexuality, they will not survive the shift.”<sup>18</sup> Black gay congregants are not new to the institution of the church experience. When we observe how the church is led, we see that though there is often a heteronormative Black male pastor, and a gay Black male choir director, we are silent about issues of gender and sexuality so as not to disturb the status quo. We should and must have conversations on human sexuality and identify where God is and what God has to say about sexuality across the board. In Dr. Mitchell’s book he also calls it “The Ebony Elephant.”<sup>19</sup> Because Black Christians, from millennials to senior adults, have been taught

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<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, Joshua. *Black Millennials & the Church: Meet Me Where I Am*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Joshua Mitchell, interview by author via zoom, Richmond, Va, December 23, 2020

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, Joshua. *Black Millennials & the Church: Meet Me Where I Am*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018.

heteronormative traditions of human sexuality, it has been taboo to discuss and identify the thoughts of one being gay or gender fluid. However, I do believe that the church has the resources around them to support conversations on sexuality amongst millennials and young adults. Traci West observes, “Building a faith community that is supportive and affirming of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Christians require subversion of heterosexist practices as well as the creation of alternative models of what it means to embody Christ.” This ongoing work of public theology can lead to the creation of a healthy environment in which all the people of God can be liberated for deep theological practice in loving communities.

While doing this project, I have also discovered that there are a few Black Baptist Churches that have Lead Pastors who are progressive in their theology and activism concerning Millennials of the LGBTQI+ community, supporting and affirming their sexuality. In contrast, many of their congregants will not permit some pastors to perform weddings or baby dedications for same sex couples either because of their lack of liberation theology or because they do not relate or understand sexuality.

I disagree with the theology that homosexuality is a sin and God will condemn one to hell if one engages in these acts. This project urges the Black Baptist church to examine its theologies of exclusion, and to welcome, love and support the LBGTQIA community. On the way to creating new theologies and practices, open dialogue is required to form a clear identity as to who we are as a body of spiritual believers. I hope my project invites such conversation.



### **What Leaders Need to Do**

There is a plethora of leaders in our communities who have already started the change work toward this topic and mission. However, I believe that Black Baptist churches can begin to make the change effective once they have normalized acceptance and inclusion in their churches, but also identify the testimonies of those of the LGBTQIA+ community and how they may have been affected by the language and output of the church. I believe it requires such leadership to look within themselves and identify what are the things that constrains them from being open to change. Jacqueline Lewis and John Janka identify the calling of the spiritual to look within themselves to bring forth the best parts of leadership. They mention, “A calling to spiritual leadership also requires tending to one’s own inner life, exploring fearlessly what Parker Palmer call the “shadow” side of ourselves, and bringing to the surface our inner life as the path to spiritual depth.”<sup>20</sup> In essence, in order for leaders to be change agents they must be willing to allow life testimonies to be the vehicle that assists individuals to feel wanted and compelled to be apart or allies with their ministries. When leaders are able to tell their testimonies, it allows those who are in need to see a sense of hope and God’s love for themselves. Your testimony is only a mere reflection of God’s grace and mercy. Your testimony also gives relief to individuals who have been abused by the Black Baptist church to see that we are all human and our struggles and suffering are primarily the same. In the fact that we all go through something and not one sin or mistake makes any of us greater or lesser than the other.

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis/Janka, *The Pentecost Paradigm- Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.

Being open and transparent are key components to a healthy ministry and thriving leader. I believe it is only when you are able to explore your inner self without fears and concerns of what others may think, you end up reaching people that have been waiting for your love and support. I honestly believe that as leaders, when we decided to allow our public ministry work to be the guidance for healing ourselves and the community, we then will find a mass of gay and lesbians community members who will feel safe and trust the inner workings of the church. Identifying our inner self and who we can be as individuals will shape the public theology we need to be an effective witness to the world and to resistant leaders.

With these testimonies, we must allow the LGBTQIA+ community see our compassion and love for them by hearing their testimonies and placing ourselves in their circumstances for a moment. Understanding the trials and tribulations they have experienced as a member of the gay and Lesbians community it will afford such leaders to take a deeper look into their personal and church ministries and how they can contribute to the healing process. In “Ministry Among God’s Queer Folk” Bernard Schlager and David Kundtz say, “As a pastoral caregiver to wounded people, especially if you are not LGBTQ, learn to develop the virtue of understanding, and specifically of trying to put yourself in their place. In other words, “Walk a mile in their shoes.”<sup>21</sup> Here, Schlager and Kundtz identify the wounded not those of the LGBTQIA+ community, but those who are not. In essence, I believe they understand church leadership has been abused by their own oppressive members and former leadership, and that it will take vulnerable leaders to address the abuse they have been projecting and walk a little bit in the testimonies of others.

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<sup>21</sup> Schlager, Bernard and Kundtz, David. *Ministry Among God’s Queer Folk: LGBTQ Pastoral Care*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019

Everyone I have interviewed and spoken with in regards to this project, identifies that the Black Baptist church leadership must begin to challenge their own personal theology in order to find a sense of freedom and relief. I believe with leadership training, workshops, open dialogue at places such as the Hampton Ministers conference, IC3 Conference and other Black Baptist conventions and organizations, we then will be able to see the affective change we will make in our churches and community. From seminars to even a curriculum that identifies the Rationale for change and what leaders need to do, would be helpful in assisting the effective pedagogy that is needed for biblical interpretation. I believe the questions we must address from such workshops and curriculums for spiritual leaders are:

- One of the reasons noted, millennials have left organized churches (synagogues, mosques, churches etc.) Is there a lack of these institutions talking honestly about sexuality, do you feel the church has a responsibility to talk openly about sexuality?
- According to the Pew Center study, people who identify as LGBTQ, have abandoned the church (mainly Protestant & Catholic) because of what they say is hypocrisy, a double standard and moral failure of church leaders, especially when you look at the sex scandals that rocked the Catholic Church. How can the church begin to deal with such hypocrisy and double standards?
- Should the church not accept an openly gay member's talents and gifts? Why or why not? And if so, how do we educate members of our church to be inclusive.
- Is the future of the organized church contingent upon getting millennials back in? What about LGBTQ millennials?
- In your opinion, what steps must churches take to engage millennials and LGBTQ millennials?
- Is there a way that a church "can love LGBTQ members" without compromising that love with what many believe the scriptures stipulate?
- Is continuing to start "gay" or "LGBTQ friendly" churches the answer to getting that community back into the church?

## Conclusion

Because tradition has shaped the church and its identity, becoming more progressive, inclusive, and forward-thinking requires new theological work and spiritual development. John Janka and Jacqueline Lewis state in their book that “Leaders also exhibit the courage to effect change in the face of resistance and have the capacity for risk-taking.”<sup>22</sup> In essence it is the job of the leader to provide theological resources for individuals to identify what social and moral change should look like not only in the church, but also in the public square. It is the obligation of the leader to discern what hurts people and how to heal it with public theology that engenders love and justice. In my Theo-ethical paper written in preparation for this dissertation work, I identify Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker led not only as pastors of a church, but also as social justice warriors and public theologians that deepened the hearts of individuals and cracked beyond the surface of active work. This is why I strongly resonate with this scripture in 2 Chronicles 7:14 “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”<sup>23</sup> It is the church’s obligation to be responsive to the cries and calls of the hopeless and fight for justice. The church is also responsible to eradicate injustice done to our communities and exemplify revolutionary love toward our gay community and millennials.

The leadership at my church can be challenged, in training or in conversation, to take risks and to imagine what it might look like for the church to accept the LGBTQIA community into our doors. Scripture teaches us in 2 Timothy 1:9 that “God has not given us the spirit of fear,

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis/Janka, *The Pentecost Paradigm- Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, 2 Chronicles 7:14

but of love, power, and a sound mind”. This spirit of fear that comes as a result of a lack of vision, and inclusion, puts young adults in a place where they cannot function at their fullest potential. This fear leads them to join other churches that challenge their thinking and theology, which causes strife, disagreement, and lack of respect for one another.

The impact this work will have on my ministry is that it will allow me to think beyond my comfortability and capacity. I do believe that this project will allow me to gain a deeper appreciation for ministry and the work of public theology. This study has shown me how to lead with confidence on this issue, how to step out on faith to do this critical theological work. I believe that this will positively impact my ministry setting, allowing my congregation to create new theologies that lead to doing ministry differently, not only on the issue of gay folks in church but others that stretch who we are as a people. There will be some resistance from individuals who do not want to change. However, I believe that when you can gather a few faithful individuals that believe in a new vision, others will have no choice but to join. Especially, when it works for the betterment of the ministry and community. Because of the church’s older model, I do accept resistance in this process in knowing that there will be a major push back to the issues I am presenting.

I believe redefining the position of the African American Baptist Church on the issue of including the LGBTQIA community fully in our ministries will open the doors for millennials to find their way to a 21st century church that is relevant to them. This is the transformative work of public theology that keeps God’s love available for this generation and the next.

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