

T.D. Jakes Returns to Ministry Roots

✖ Already welcomed by full-page newspaper ads and the mayor who used to serve him barbecue, Bishop T.D. Jakes is today returning to the roots of his internationally influential ministry.

“The Birthing Place,” which begins tonight and ends Saturday, is expected to draw a capacity crowd of 13,000 to West Virginia’s Charleston Civic Center, which would make it the largest ever in his hometown.

Though Jakes has made several trips back since moving to Dallas in 1996 to plant the Potter’s House, this is his first large-scale conference in the city where he first delivered his seminal “Woman, Thou Art Loosed” teaching.

“We want the people coming to leave inspired, not only to birth their dreams, but to feed them, nurture them and to enjoy as they grow and come to full fruition,” Jakes said.

More than 60 churches are supporting the conference, which is expected to have a \$7.5 million economic impact. Mayor Danny Jones said the national exposure may be even more valuable. “I’m a personal fan of his,” said Jones, who in the early 1990s often hosted Jakes and his guests at the suburban rib restaurant he once operated. “He’s a wonderful person. I’m glad he’s successful.”

Other residents share the mayor’s enthusiasm, including Alice Barksdale, who was a member of Jakes’ original Temple of Faith church. “We’re very proud of Bishop Jakes,” she said. “His

teaching has not only been awesome to me, but to many other people of all ages and all races. He has put us on the map in a great way.”

Wayne Crozier, pastor of the charismatic Abundant Life Fellowship and a former elder at Temple of Faith church, said the conference is a “big deal” because Jakes is a native son who has represented West Virginia with excellence. He credits his spiritual father with teaching him the lessons that enabled him to become a minister.

Those lessons included an emphasis on the church as one, without racial or ethnic identity. Growing up in an African-American congregation and attending historically black colleges, Crozier never questioned that norm until he joined Jakes’ church. “He exposed me to the idea that you need to play a different type of music,” Crozier said. “We have four ethnic groups at my church. It’s something we make a conscious effort to do.”

Members of diverse denominations are expected to volunteer at the upcoming event. Allan Hill, pastor of Liberty Missionary Baptist Church, said this shows how the body of Christ is opening its eyes to the need for cooperation.

“It’s going to take the church as a whole to preach the gospel,” said Hill, president of the city’s Black Ministerial Alliance. “A lot of the barriers and lines is not the focal point of the ministry. Even in the midst of differences, we’re centering on things we do alike.”

Yet underneath the surface lies the acknowledgement that Jakes wasn’t always treated royally at home. “He wasn’t fully appreciated being here and what God had called him to be,” Hill said. “You hate to see anybody leave, but the bottom line is that sometimes to do what God called you to do, you have to leave.”

One of the reported sources of that lack of appreciation was

the Charleston newspapers. Shayne Lee, author of *T.D. Jakes: America's New Preacher*, once attributed the bishop's anger over harsh media coverage as a motivator in his move to Dallas.

In recent remarks, *Charleston Gazette* editor Jim Haught said it had reported on items involving Jakes that it saw as newsworthy. "It was simply factual news reporting," Haupt said. "The reaction of readers, the minister or his followers is not under our control."

Jakes said there never was a controversy. The bishop said he left because the demands of TV and travel made it increasingly difficult to do what God had called him to do from a rural state. "If one were to run from criticism you would have to move every week," Jakes said. "It was a matter of God's leading."

The current pastor of Temple of Faith sees Jakes' leaving as part of the birth pains that propelled him to greater influence. "God had to allow persecution to allow him to be what he had to be," Ron Jones said. "There's no way he could have done in West Virginia what he's done in Dallas."

Still, his departure cast a long shadow, according to Chuck Lawrence. The pastor of Christ Temple in Huntington—one of West Virginia's few megachurches—said Jakes helped build camaraderie among churches and brought in people from outside the state.

While it was tough to lose that kind of influence, Lawrence is sanguine about Jakes' move. "We feel like we've sown him into other soil because he's really bearing such great fruit," Lawrence said. "We didn't lose him, we've sown him."