

COGIC Celebrates Black History by Pushing the Kingdom Forward

If Charles Harrison Mason were alive today, Church of God in Christ Presiding Bishop John Drew Sheard says he would have only one thing to say: "I told you so."

The founder and first senior bishop of the Church of God in Christ, Sheard says Mason prophesied in the early 1900s that COGIC would grow exponentially and that there were be "no building large enough to hold the people that would come."

Mason was spot on. From "humble beginnings," the Church of God in Christ has blossomed today into what is the largest Holiness Pentecostal church denomination in the world with more than 12,000 churches in 112 countries.

In an exclusive interview with Charisma News, Sheard says he's extremely encouraged by what God is doing with the predominantly African American denomination these days as it not only continues to grow in membership, but also continues to expand its horizons in ministries he says God has richly blessed because they are "helping individuals in their communities live better lives."

As the nation continues to celebrate Black History Month this February, the denomination's kingdom work is especially valuable these days when the culture is giving everyone a reason to run away from God. People are clamoring for something—anything—to cling to that will help them live more satisfying lives, and Sheard says COGIC is continuing to develop ministries to do just that.

"Our churches and our kingdom warriors are involved in so many levels with things like economic development. It is a blessing

to have the opportunity to affect people's lives," says Sheard, who is also the Chief Apostle of COGIC. "When a person has good living conditions, their mindset is going to be different. It eliminates a level of stress and you are able to live more comfortably.

"When Jesus speaks to us about saving souls, it is also about making their living conditions better. Because of what God has given us, the Church of God in Christ has been able to change people's lives, and that's what's gratifying. But it's not us, it's all about God. We can't help everyone, but we're sure trying."

Sheard says in the city of Memphis the Church of God in Christ has funded and helped to build 20 units of affordable housing in the inner city. With rent prices across the nation continuing to spin out of control, COGIC officials want to make sure many individuals and families are able to afford a decent place to live.

COGIC Director of Economic Development Darrin Burns told Action News that "a downtown is for everyone. And so, we want to make downtown affordable for anyone who lives here, regardless of your economic status. Our target is to make it (rent) under the threshold of what it is right now because again, our motto is 'affordable housing for downtown.'"

In 2017, COGIC joined forces with Memphis city leaders to create an affordable housing community called Mason Village, which located next to the COGIC headquarters. Sheard says they are looking to break ground on another site very soon.

COGIC Charities continues to help with worldwide relief efforts, including its campaign to help with physical needs in Syria and Turkey, who were recently hit by a devastating earthquake. More than 47,000 people have died from that natural disaster. COGIC Charities is providing humanitarian aid to individuals in those countries.

But that's not all, Sheard says. COGIC wants to do ministry that will "affect coming generations." COGIC has begun a partnership with Waste Management for a comprehensive employment program not only to get individuals into the work force, but to give those individuals a sense of purpose and identity within their community.

"It gives these people an opportunity to not only be a blessing to themselves, but to be a blessing to their spouse, their children and their community around them," Sheard says. "In the agreement, Waste Management will pay for their school and will pay for their children to go to college. So, that's how we're affection generations."

And speaking of generations, Sheard says he knows how difficult today's youth have it to walk the straight and narrow path. The American culture has continued to grow cold against Jesus, and indeed millennials and members of Gen Z are falling away from the church.

It is the church's responsibility, Sheard says, to provide meaningful ministry and to find out exactly what "our young people are in need of, ministry that will meet the needs of the people."

"We have to come up with ministry that can pull the kids back into the church and back to Jesus," Sheard says. "We have not changed our methods, and our methods must meet the needs of the kids today. We have to find effective new ministries and be open to what they need. That doesn't mean that we will compromise, because Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

"We've got to find out what exactly is keeping our young people from church, and then we need to make those changes. I believe we're doing that. I know that I am here at my local church. I listen to what they are saying, and we have to deliver ministry that's attractive to them."

Which is exactly, Sheard says, what Mason and the forerunners of the COGIC denomination—people like Arenia C. Mallory, and J.O. Patterson—did from the beginning.

And that, Sheard says, gives COGIC a lot to celebrate during Black History Month.

 “We are so appreciative of how God has used Black Americans to move the kingdom forward,” Sheard says. “We have so much to appreciate as far as Black History goes. But we also need to continue to move forward and build not only ministries that will contribute to making mankind better, but also to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“We hope that God continues to smile down upon us and give us direction to do His will every day. Then, generations to come will be able to continue to celebrate Black History month and point to those individuals who have pushed forward with the gospel and with God’s work.” {eo}

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