

# Your Spiritual Leader Does Not Need to be Your Educational Leader

By Shawnta S. Barnes - April 8, 2018

***“My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge.” Hosea 4:6 NKJV***



Even though I have been told over the years in church that God loves everyone and that heaven will be diverse, our places of worship are not. Although white people have been sprinkled into the various churches I have attended thus far in my life, I consider all of those churches, including my current place of worship, to be black churches.

The black church, especially the leader, has played a strong role in the black community over the years dating all the way back to slavery. When the weight of the world seemed to suffocate, a black person could count on the church, especially the pastor to pray and to offer support. I remember my grandmother saying, "Child, some days the church was the only thing we had that got us through."

My journey as a member of different black churches, one throughout my childhood, one in college, and two after I married my husband, has been immersed in internal conflict. Due to my openness about my internal conflict, I have been dismissed by some preachers and brothers and sisters in Christ because as I have been told on more than one occasion, "You're just confused because you come from an unequally yoked household." For my non-Christian readers, although both of my parents believe in a higher power, my mother is active in church and attends regularly and my father has not attended church since childhood and does not believe in the structure of the church, thus my parents are considered by the church as unequally yoked.

But, I'm not confused; I have a well-rounded perspective. As much as I see the value of the black church, I also see the detriment the black church currently plays in our society. Too many black Christians confuse blindly following Christ with blindly following pastors and preachers in our community. My great uncle Walter Jimison was the Pastor of First Trinity Missionary Baptist Church in Jeffersonville, Indiana until he became too ill. He was known for saying, "Some preachers were called and some just went." As it is frequently said in the black church, "Some of you will get that on the way home."

Just in case you can't figure this out, let me continue. He took ministry seriously and believed it was his calling and as an educator, I believe teaching is my calling and my gift. Everyone is not made for this work of educating our

children and this includes some pastors and preachers. Secular education is not the same as spiritual education. If you are a black parishioner, at some point in time, your pastor has probably quoted 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Typically this scripture is shared to emphasize the importance of being knowledgeable about the word of God whether you are in the pulpit or sitting in the pews. Your pastor might have great knowledge of the bible and provides you great spiritual counseling, but this does not mean your pastor has the knowledge or skill to influence your education decisions nor be responsible for a school.

I was appalled and deeply disturbed by an article I read a few days ago, "Merrillville private school barred from accepting new voucher students; state school board dismayed school wanted to shed students to improve its grade." Pastor Dennis Walton of Faith Temple of Christ asked for a waiver to be able to accept new voucher students next school year for his church's private school Faith Academy despite the fact the school has been failing for two school years. To be granted a waiver, a school must have a plan to show how it would improve. According to the article, this pastor told the State Board of Education, "Faith Academy was looking into eliminating its high school program because that would remove 17 low-performing students from its accountability calculation and help boost its A-F rating in the future."

That is not how education works. We should not get rid of low performing students. Walton asserts he needed to do this because the school should not have added the high school in the first place. A person who was called to be an educator would have known this and not have continued to add grade levels to a school. It seems that some schools are more concerned with expanding and adding grades than focusing on providing a strong education for the grades it currently serves. Let's say, as an education leader, you thought you had the capacity and skill to teach more grades. You don't kick students out if your plans fail. You double down and work even harder to make sure these students, whose families trusted you, will succeed academically.

Matthew 25:40 states, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Aren't the former Gary public schools high school students who were grade levels behind, whose families enrolled at Faith Academy, "the least of these"? How can this man, this pastor, come boldly before the State Board of Education and not understand the problem with removing students as the plan to fix the school's grade? It's simple; he has no business being involved in education.

The black church has to do better. Churches can be great partners to schools, but educators are the experts in education, not pastors. In the black church many times, pastors use the pulpit to share more than spiritual guidance. They share their views about politics and education. They sometimes go as far as to tell you what type of education or schools are best for your child. I implore the black community and black parishioners to stop taking every word that falls from the pastor's lips as the gospel and investigate for yourself, especially when that pastor is speaking about topics where he is not an expert.