

Message From The Mount

2005 Volume 1

Lift Every Voice and Sing...

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Mount Aery
Baptist Church

Pastor Anthony L. Bennett, D.Min.

Message FromThe Mount

is the quarterly newsmagazine
of the Mount Aery Baptist
Church

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Mount Aery Vision Statement

To equip the disciples of Mount Aery Baptist Church with
the biblical and relational wisdom for the spiritual, educa-
tional and social work of ministry beginning in the Hollow
Section of Bridgeport, then spreading throughout the
Greater Bridgeport Area.

Ephesians 4:11-12 and Acts 2:44-47



Namaste brothers and sisters in Christ

It is our pleasure to greet you in this new year of 2005. I am so elated that God, through His grace and mercy, has blessed us to make it into this year. Many of us know that 2004 was a very challenging year as well as a year of tremendous flux and change. Nevertheless, God was there with us in the midst of it all. To God Be The Glory!!!

As we enter this New Year I am delighted to know in faith that God has many marvelous mani-festations of His power in store for Pastor and People of the Mount Aery Baptist Church. I have witnessed God answer our prayer that we become an example of a people excited about the move of God within our midst. We have also prayed that God would make us a resource Church so those outside our fellowship might experience the influence that comes from the Spirit of God. 2004 proved to be a year where God blessed us with several opportunities to bless others as God has so richly and fully blessed us. It is my belief that in 2005, God will place before us opportunities for even greater service to our Greater Bridgeport community. We must always remember *to whom much is given, much is expected!!!*

Consequently, I felt led to have us return to our unified study of the *40 Days of Purpose* curriculum. This year's theme, *The Transformation Continues...* has indeed been a blessing to all those who allowed themselves to engage in the studies and discussions. The purpose of this unified curriculum (Sunday school, bible study teaching the same subject) allows those who are not familiar with the five purposes (worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism), to learn them, as well as allow those of us who know the purposes to recommit ourselves to practice them in our daily living. I believe as we grow (numerically and spiritually), it is always good to every now and then return to the basics of our faith. It is my prayer that these 40 days of purpose will set the foundation for our future series of unified studies in laughter, health and wellness, and financial freedom.

We are also looking forward to the awesome experience the MAAFA production will bring forth as the Mount Aery Cast performs at the Saint Paul Community Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York on February 24th and 25th. We are praying for the cast and crew that God will give them the power to minister like never before. I cannot hold back the tears of joy at the miraculous way God has and is using this MAAFA production and cast to free those who are willing to be loosed from bondage of shame and denial with regard to our past and present conditions.

Finally, during our Lenten season, I am asking that we continue our study of how our culture is a gift from God that is to be acknowledged and honored as we worship God and minister on behalf of God in spirit and in truth. I am also requesting that during this time we make a conscious effort not to speak anything negative about our culture and our people. This is not only biblically sound; this will also give God's spirit an opportunity to direct our conversation. As the apostle Paul said to the Church at Philippi, *Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praise-worthy, think on these things. (Ph 4:8)*

God Bless

Pastor Anthony L. Bennett, D. Min.

A Note from the Editor



Hello Readers,

Welcome to the New Year. I hope, despite all of the turbulence and chaos we lived through and witnessed this past year, that you experienced a year of health, happiness and increased wisdom.

The year 2004 will forever be remembered because of the devastation caused by the Tsunami in South Asia. No one could have predicted the deaths of over 150,000 people. No one knows what tomorrow will bring. But with a new year comes a fresh start so I ask you -- where do we go from here? What will the New Year have in store?

Consider two simple words -- EXISTING and PRODUCTIVE. One of Merriam-Webster's definitions of existing is "*to live at an inferior level or under adverse circumstances*" (existing from day to day). One definition of productive is "*having the quality or power of producing especially in abundance.*" So the real questions become, which category are you in and how do you determine which category you're in?

The first step in determining where you lie is by understanding the need to be truthful with yourself. Then and only then can we take the necessary steps toward leading a productive life.

Questions to ask yourselves:

1. Am I living a healthy lifestyle to lead a productive life?
2. Am I getting up each and every day with the intent of bettering others and myself?
3. When was the last time I helped someone, other than a family member, where there wasn't anything in it for me?
4. Am I contributing to shaping the political structure of my city, state, and country by voting, attending City Hall meetings, school board meetings and church meetings, volunteering, etc, ect.?

If the answer to these questions are no or never, we need to begin to make changes in our thinking and our actions. In a time of chaos and uncertainty, we must begin to move from the sideline

and enter the game. There are a lot of needs to be addressed, particularly in the black community. There are our children, our elders, the educational system that's teaching our kids, health, drugs, the imbalance of resources, etc, ect..

I want to put a challenge out to my readers and to my Mount Aery family: If you're already living a productive life, continue but try something outside of your comfort zone. If you're just existing, ask yourself, "*Am I going to let someone else do all the work while I receive the benefit or am I going to begin to move from the sideline into the game?*"

Your answer and action can make a world of difference in the church community and the world at large. Pray about it, and then follow God's leading.

Michael L. Ferguson
Your Editor

Seek and You Shall Find:

My Quest To Heed God's Calling

By Monica Dennis

I know too many discontented people. Friends, co-workers, relatives, who are longing for an elusive "something else." They have been in their respective careers for quite some time and the thrill is gone. It all started harmlessly enough. We sought financial security for our families and means to our various ends. We went to college for certain degrees and enthusiastically started our lives upon graduation maybe using that degree, maybe not. But still it was our first job or the opportunity to make money or the chance to make a name for ourselves. Now we're older. We've experienced lay offs and/or worked a number of similar positions and we find ourselves still lacking something.

The Bible clearly tells us that we were created with a purpose and yet it often takes years for many of us to even begin to think of ourselves as having a higher calling on our lives. Ministers are "called." Doctors are "called." Teachers are "called." These are easy to swallow. But it seems hard for many to think of a graphic designer as "called" or a mechanic or a plumber. Yet if you work these professions and you know in your heart that you get a sense of inner fulfillment from doing so, then I say there must be a calling on your life to do that job. The Bible tells us, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men..."* (Colossians 3:23). How much easier it is to do that when you are always in pursuit of your purpose.

I admit I can be idealistic. But I do not believe God intended for us to merely work a

job, go on vacation, pay our bills, send our kids to school and retire so at that time we can REALLY live. There are more than a few times when the Bible tells us to act while we are "young." I would go so far as to interpret that youth as not only your chronological age but your mental, physical and/or spiritual ability no matter what age you are: *"Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment".* (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

After 11 years of being a copy editor and being content trying to live my purpose outside of my job, I have reached a place where I want to live my purpose in every aspect of my life. For me, that means working a job that fulfills me. I wish I could continue to be satisfied letting my work be my means to an end, but upon having the first of my two children, it became more and more important to me to live by example. My husband, Todd, exemplifies a satisfied worker within the constructs of a seemingly normal job, though he does have much leeway. He loves what he does and I want my children to see that and know they can have that lifestyle one day. I, on the other hand, want to be the example of living the *un-conventional* life, which feels natural to me. I am seeking to do the things I love to do, that fulfill me, and by the grace of God, pay me well. I want my children to see that lifestyle and know that they can have that as well.

Most of us know that

looking for a job IS a job but looking is required if you want to move on. I've learned some new things along the way and relearned others. I've seen some job-hunting tips actively put the test by myself or others and I've seen the fruit of that labor. The more I talk about it, the more I find that others are doing the same and so I write this to hopefully encourage those who have been looking for awhile and those who are still thinking about making that change.

May I offer a few suggestions from my travels?

1. Think out of the box. Looking for a job is like being a salesperson except you are selling – or marketing, if that sounds better – yourself. You are the product and you want to get people to buy that, which means you may need some tools to help you do that. Resumes are one way to market yourself. If you haven't updated your resume recently, do so. Try a professional if it's something you've never done before. One recruiter I spoke with told me that when you put that resume on sites such as **Monster.com** or **CareerBuilder.com**, you must remember to go back and update something on that resume. Say something in a new way; add a new skill you acquired. Do whatever you can do that will keep it fresh in the eyes of potential employers. If your resume has been there for more than 6 weeks, this recruiter suggested, potential employers will begin to wonder why you haven't been snatched up yet. Updating every week or so keeps your resume "fresh." Also consider posting that resume on smaller sites than **Monster** and **CareerBuilder**. The larger sites

cost more for employers to utilize so they may seek out smaller, less expensive sites to post their job openings. Put that resume on the big and small sites and do so on as many as you care to keep track of. You increase your chances of more people seeing your resume.

2. Another suggestion is to join a networking group. The one I joined specifically to aid my job hunt is on the Monster.com Web site. For \$9.99 a month, I can "talk" with all sorts of people about their careers, specific companies I am interested in, etc. I see it as a small investment in my future contentment. And for the chances I get to network with people face-to-face, I made up business cards to hand out that clearly indicate, "I am looking!" As of this moment, www.vistaprint.com is letting you order 250 business cards for free, but you pay for shipping costs. I'm sure if you think about it, there must be a creative way you haven't tried to get that dream job or to do the thing you always wanted to do.

3. Feel free to explore your options. Got an idea of what you want to be when you grow up but wish you knew more about it? Talk to people. Talk to people working the job you seek; talk to people at schools who teach the skill; talk to a career counselor – just talk! Asking specifically for what you want gets you what you want a lot faster than waiting for someone to bring it to you on a silver platter. Again, networking is a great way to do this. There are all sorts of networking groups but, for instance, taking a class and keeping in touch with the other students, the teacher and others is networking as well. You never know who has the opportunity you seek. I have read and

tend to agree that only a very small percentage of jobs are actually advertised. Depending on where you are reading, we're talking anywhere from 2% – 20% of job openings are out in the open. That's about 80% of jobs under cover. Networking pulls those covers back.

4. Don't settle for less. I cannot speak from the experience of looking for a job or trying to fulfill your purpose while unemployed with responsibilities. I can appreciate the difficulty of exploring your options while having to pay bills and I am sure you will do what you feel you must do at that time. But after you have obtained employment and feel secure once again, at least write down your dream and keep it in sight so that it does not get lost in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Maybe there will be opportunities on your new job to develop a skill you can apply to your dream job or dream life. Whatever you do, protect that vision. One day you will come back to that dream and how much easier will it be to do so if you don't have to dig it out of a bottom drawer or shake the dust of it. For those who are already employed and want to leave that job or have some sort of financial assistance where you can choose any job you want, then why take on a new job that you know from the start you will dislike in no time? I know that for now I can think about my ideal life and shoot for that. I try to plan for it and work on it so that if I were ever to lose this job unwillingly, I would hope I wouldn't feel like I have no clue what to do next. After a certain number of years in the job force, there comes a time when you must be willing to take a risk for the sake of your own happiness

and fulfillment, which eventually will touch those around you.

5. Know what you want to achieve. It's not always clear what title of job you want but do you know what you want that job to do for you? Do you know what kind of life you want? Do you know what you want that job to help you achieve? If you don't, think about it. Then focus on that and you will know when that job has arrived, title and all. The Bible says this best: *"Then the Lord replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.'"* Habukkuk 2:23

6. Form your own support group. This has proven tremendously helpful to me. I haven't actually formed a formal group, but there are about 5 of us right now who are seeking. We are not all in the same workplace or seeking the same thing, but we encourage each other and we encourage others we know who are in the same boat. It helps to know you are not the only one looking or the only one unsatisfied or the only one discouraged after months or more of looking. A support group helps keeps you encouraged and persevering.

7. Trust God. I saved the best for last but in all things He should be first. If the unbeliever can succeed at living their lives to the fullest, surely God intended for you to have that too. For a God who *"...makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:45) will certainly bless you in your quest

Salute the Queen in You in 2005

By Michelle Porchia

Patti LaBelle, in her song of a few years ago, talks about having “a new attitude.” We’ve been given the opportunity to see a new year, a new day. Let’s approach it with a new heart, a new mindset, and a new eye.

Every year people start the year with resolutions. By December, those same resolutions are often still intact.

I challenge you to approach 2005 with a new attitude. Rather than making resolutions, I suggest you challenge yourself to make a commitment instead. Make a commitment to:

1. Love yourself. You are made in the image of God. Therefore, you are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” This means love your mind, love your body and nourish your spirit.

2. Love your body. Get sleep. Eat well and pamper yourself.

Dress to impress...yourself.

3. Love your mind. Challenge yourself to think differently. Think positively.

Learn something new if not every day, every week. Read. Write. Have discussions with people on new topics.

4. Live your purpose. You have been put on earth for a reason. Live your life’s purpose. Stop making excuses. Dust off some of those dreams.

For your mind and for loving yourself, speak can-do, loving words to yourself. Respect yourself.

Open your eyes. See yourself in a new light. Hold your head high. Walk proudly and don’t allow anyone to treat you with less



than love and respect.

Lastly, learn to be still. We do too much. We are human beings who have stopped *being* and become human *doers*. Yolanda Adams sings about being “alone in a room, just me and you...” We need to take time to be not only with ourselves but also to “be still and know I am God.” Listen. Stop. Be still.

So, my queenly sisters, stand tall and be proud. Make the commitment to love yourself and to live the life God has given you. Stand up and be proud. “There is power, glory, splendor, greatness, intelligence and beauty of Great African Queens, the makers and creators of the world first-known high civilizations.” Their blood runs in your veins.



Life Begins at 50

By Thea M. Williams

A couple of months ago, I celebrated (yes, CELEBRATED) my 50th birthday. The truth is, I had been preparing for this birthday for the last 5 years. You may wonder what I mean by “preparing” for it. Let me explain.

You see, I have to admit I was somewhat conditioned by the world’s view that once you turn 50, you are “over the hill”, and it’s time to be depressed. There is no question that 50 years is a long time — whether it’s how long someone has lived, or how long a couple has been married, or the length of time one has been employed. But by today’s life expectancy, it certainly is not OLD. If you have the right mindset, it can and should be a joyous occasion.

The turning point for me actually came back in March of 2000. I had just found out that an acquaintance of mine from church (who I had just seen the day before) had

suddenly died. She was only 49 years old.

Actually, she was the third person within a 5-month period who died suddenly at a young age (the other two people were 47 and 39). I remember talking with my mother about it, and crying to her that “this isn’t supposed to happen.” I was NOT supposed to be going to funerals for people so young. It was right then and there that I promised the Lord and myself that if I made it to my 50th birthday, I was going to rejoice.

Well, the “Big One” finally came on November 9, 2004. I remember opening my eyes that morning and crying tears of joy, praising God for the fact that I made it! In fact, I spent the better part of that morning quite teary-eyed because I thought of all the people who had not made it this far.

I am excited about what God is going to do in my life and my daughter’s life. In fact, He has already begun to open doors for my

daughter and me that I almost believed would never open. New opportunities abound, and I praise God and thank Him for being so good to me.

Sure, my hair has begun to turn gray. In fact, I am blessed to have a natural gray streak right down the middle of my head. But I’m not worried about it. I’m just blessed that God allowed me to live long enough to get gray hair. I still have my physical, mental and emotional health. I have a beautiful daughter and loving family. I am blessed to still have both of my parents with me, and they are in good health too. I truly believe that my life—rather, the life that God has always wanted for me—has just begun!

So, for those of you who are approaching the “Big One”, don’t panic. Look in the obituary pages at all the young people who did not make it, and praise God for His faithfulness. Life really does begin at 50!

A Talented Brother with Poetry from the Heart

By Veronica A. Douglas

I met Justan R. Mitchell at this year's Kwanzaa celebration. You've seen him in church. He's the brother with dreads attending college in Vermont. That's right Vermont! He was at the celebration to promote his new book of poetry titled: *Pieces of Man...To the Master*. In the spirit of Kwanzaa, particularly the fourth principle, Ujaama, which stands for cooperative economics, I hope we will support this brother and his work.

Poetry is an expressive and sometimes very personal art form. In his book, Justan takes us on a journey through his past and shares his latest observations and ventures. Below is one of the pieces of Justan's work that he has chosen to share with his church family. It is called 'Not Fitting In the Place I Once Belonged'. Justan is so happy that his poetry will be shared with everyone through the *Message from the Mount*.

Please support this brother and his work or just send him an e-mail to let him know how much we appreciate him. Justan can be reached at justan-mitchell@yahoo.com.

Not Fitting in the Place I Once Belonged

By: Justan R. Mitchell

*I'm attracted to that which I attract,
but once the heart reacts I'm taken aback
by the side effects of letting myself be left alone.*

*Now I'm left to be the last of the next to roam
Into the zone of fictional fantasies revealing blaring clarities.*

*The Sun is at my back.
And my eyes feel like they cried whys
Into the moon lit Vermont sky.
This place of comfort is too uncomfortable for me,
But I'm not ready to leave because I am still trying to see me.
This whole staged scene is another state of ambiguity.
I'm purging negatively persuasive language out of my mental bank statement
So that the final balance reads naked*

*Zero my gravity so I will never leave
this place of my current belonging.*

*I will control my weathers of unbearable storming.
Come home,
Listen to how I rewrite the recite of this poem.
I can read to you in modes of,
Life and death, crescent of full Moons.*

*This I'll do.
I see what we need,
We need truth*

Power to the People

MAAFA production takes lasting effect

By Gina LeVon Simpson

From the seasoned actor to the novice, the youngest to the most honorable elder, the experience of *The MAAFA Influence – Evoking the Pain of the Past...Building a Strong and Powerful Future* has taken root in the hearts and lives of the audience and cast members alike. MAAFA cast, you have ministered well! The sacrificing of your time through seemingly endless rehearsals was not in vain.

As a cast with a “HUMBLE HEART & TEACHABLE SPIRIT”, we have grown to become a close and loving family. I can see the closeness as I quietly observe cast members embracing and sharing conversations with other cast members, their former cordiality having blossomed into new-found relationships. How wonderful it was to watch Ellen Upchurch teach us how to pick cotton during rehearsals, telling us how important it was to pick the cotton a certain way so as not to injure our fingers. I know her grandchildren and nephew were proud of her in a different way. I noticed Michael Ryan’s eyes light up when he noticed Miss Ellen walking up the stairs to the balcony to take the offering. You would have thought he saw a family member he hadn’t seen in years! Hearts are still filled with the excitement that comes along with God being in the midst of MAAFA. Cast members have even joined Mount Aery! I said it before and I’ll say it again, “This Is Ministry!”

I am approached in the community by people repeating the refrain of “AFRIKAN DNA”. Let’s not forget our awesome children who are still reciting the *CHILDREN’S PLEA*. Parents have approached me weeks after the production to get suggestions as to how they can kindly but firmly encourage their children to go to bed on time because they are up after bedtime hours reciting their piece of the MAAFA Influence. To those parents I say, they can’t help it! It’s a part of them!

Michael Gary II wrote a poem

and presented it to me on the last night of our performance. He also told me about his honor report card a few weeks ago and told me that he was able to get such good grades because of his Afrikan DNA! I have spoken with a couple of cast members whose grades have gone from good to great, and this was accomplished during weeks of rehearsals that ended between 10:30 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. on many days! Bo “Bomani” Dewitt-Smith still walks around the church asking the question, “Can you tell me your story?” And I don’t know how many



Gina LeVon Simpson

times I’ve been asked, “What’s does your jacket say?” “What does it mean?” followed by, “Where can I buy one?” For the record, MAAFA means the great calamity which speaks to the African holocaust; the title – *Evoking the Pain of the Past...Building a Strong and Powerful Future* – speaks to the truth that as we reflect on our past, which can evoke pain, we learn of where we came from and how powerful we were and are. When we are open and honest with God and ourselves through the healing process we can build a more powerful future for our children as we honor and learn from our elders. The logo shows how we have broken the chains of bondage while yielding ourselves and walking toward the hand of God.

Countless people who have been in the MAAFA Influence 2004,

experienced it, or even heard of it, are now taking the time to communicate with family members, searching the Internet to discover their stories and now know more about their history. What a powerful influence the MAAFA production has become! That is one of the reasons why I wrote it.

I have been approached by so many of our elders at Mount Aery who tell me awesome stories of their life. There is so much that can come from this. Such as videotaped forums of our elders sharing their stories that can be edited and used for documentaries and teaching tools for T.O.T.A.L., Rights of Passage, Sunday School, P.L.U.G., Public and Private Schools, etc. Can you envision the path God can take us as we follow His lead?

This MAAFA Influence Ministry has given me a deeper sense of purpose. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to write and direct the production. It is and has been a sacred experience. This is a healing ministry for a great and powerful people as we reflect and are transformed through God’s healing process to build upon the foundation set before us, which can only bring forth a strong and powerful future for generations to come. I thank God for my Afrikan DNA! I come from greatness! Our ancestors from Moses to Sojourner Truth lived and died for all and have left a legacy that we must not take for granted. I’m sure we have made them proud for their living and dying will never be in vain. What a testimony!

For me, this has been a faith walk. Knowing these things, that faith without works is dead, I walk by faith and not by sight with high expectations, because now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, for Jesus is the author and finisher of my faith. I give thanks to Abba Father who has blessed me tremendously!

With a humble heart,
Gina LeVon Simpson

MAAFA INFLUENCE 2004

Evoking The Pain Of The Past





Building A Strong And Powerful Future



COOK WITH YOUR KIDS!!!!!!

EDUCATIONAL BAKING

Whether learning math skills, nutrition basics, or building self-confidence, kids can pick up a lot from baking. Here are five skills you can teach your kids while baking.

1. Math

Whether you're filling a pan with half the cake mix, breaking two eggs into a bowl, or measuring out 1/2 of a cup of oil, baking offers many opportunities to teach your children about arithmetic. Be sure to ask pointed questions to get them thinking such as: "How much of the measuring cup is still empty?" and "If this recipe calls for two sticks of butter and we only have half a stick in the fridge, how many do we need to buy at the supermarket?"

2. Culture

Baking desserts from different parts of the world is a wonderful way to teach your children about different cultures — including your own. Use a family recipe as an opportunity to talk about grandma's childhood. You'll see how the preparation of ethnic recipes often leads to discussions on customs, language, holidays, and more.

3. Organization

Getting ready to prepare dessert can help little ones learn patience and planning. Have them look over the recipe in advance and make a list of all the ingredients that are not in the kitchen and need to be purchased. Before launching into preparations, get out the pots, pans, bowls, and utensils. Once everything is set up, determine who will do which task.

4. Following directions

Baking is a process in which steps must be executed in a particular order for a recipe to be successful. Ask your child, "Wouldn't it be silly if we poured all the ingredients into the cake pan before combining them with the mixer?"

This is also a good time to reinforce the household rules: Wash hands before cooking and clean up before leaving the kitchen. Remember that kids get excited easily, so you may have to repeat directions often.

5. Responsibility

Give kids — even young ones — a role in the baking experience. Preschoolers can wash fruits and knead dough, while older children can break and beat eggs, measure out ingredients, and frost cakes. Clean-up is the perfect time to teach children about completing a project from beginning to end. Try this delicious recipe with the kids on your family night!

Double Chocolate Brownies

6 ounces good quality bittersweet chocolate, plus 6 ounces

3 tablespoons butter

3/4 cup granulated sugar

3 1/2 tablespoons water

2 eggs

3/4 cup flour

3/4 teaspoon salt

2 cups walnuts, coarsely chopped (optional)

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.

In a medium saucepan, combine 6 ounces chocolate with butter, sugar, and water. Cook over low heat, stirring, until melted. Set aside to cool a bit. Break up the remaining chocolate and stir into melted chocolate mixture. Whisk in eggs, flour, and salt. Add walnuts if desired. Batter will be thick and lumpy. Spray a 9-inch square pan with non-stick spray and scrape batter into pan. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes. Set on rack to cool. Garnish with powdered sugar.

Seeking Discipleship

By Paul Mendes

We are truly grateful to our Heavenly Father for all that He continues to bless us with in our daily lives. As Christians, our mission is to seek and save the lost. During the Christmas season especially, we are encouraged to remember that this is a time of celebrating the birth, life, death and resurrection of our precious Savior Jesus Christ.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory. The glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14 KJV

In the spirit of giving, I invite you to experience obedience to the Lord in the area of giving, for our giving releases God's abundance! The promise and the purpose — God's law of sowing and reaping — is an eternal, fixed law. *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."* Galatians 6:7 KJV

The potential of a seed to produce a harvest has nothing to do with the size of the seed. A seed may seem small in your hand, yet when you sow your seed in expectant faith, you release its God-given potential to produce a great harvest. *"...He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."* 2 Corinthians 9:6 KJV

The Word of God declares: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." *Luke 6:38 KJV*. According to this scripture, when you give, you receive seven times:

1 — It shall be given

2 — Unto you

3 — Good measure

4 — Pressed down

5 — Shaken together

6 — Running over

7 — Shall men give into your bosom

Are you ready for your harvest? As you apply these eternal principles of sowing and reaping, remember that God multiplies the seed

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Journey To Financial Freedom

Ephesians 6:7-8

"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free".

Tax time is coming, and whether you choose to put this task off to the last minute or you like to get it done as soon as your W-2 forms hit your mailbox, there are changes in this year's tax laws that you should keep in mind.

But first, prior to meeting with your Tax Advisor, remember to organize your financial records. This is an effective way to save you time and money.

Include the following:

1. W-2 forms from all employers.
2. A copy of your tax records for 2003
3. For itemized deductions, include:
 - Real estate and personal property tax payments
 - Union dues (subject to 2% of Adjusted Gross Income)
 - Interest expense, home mortgage interest, investment interest
 - Points on refinancing (only the amount paid in 2004)
 - Accounting for tithing in 2004
 - Educational expenses
 - Gifts to the United Way or the Red Cross
 - Out of pocket expenses to look for work
 - Out of pocket expenses when you serve a qualified organization as a volunteer

*** It's important to remember that for itemized deductions, you can elect to pay state and local income taxes or deduct state and local general sales taxes, but you cannot do both.**

One of the tax changes that 2004 filers will encounter this year is an increase in standard deductions. But this is only for taxpayers who do not itemize deductions.

For those who are married filing jointly or are a qualifying widow, the deduction is now \$9,700. Head of household - \$7,150; and for Single or Married filing separately - \$4,850. The amount that you are exempted for each of your dependents has also increased this year from \$3,050 to \$3,100.

Are you paying a student loan? The person legally obligated to make interest payments on a student loan may be able to deduct those interest payments. You may deduct a maximum of \$2,500 for the interest you paid in 2004. If your adjusted gross income is \$65,000 or more, you should consult your tax advisor for more details.

The Earned Income Credit has also increased for tax year 2004. The EIC is a tax credit for working people who earn under \$35,458 and meet certain guidelines. It's money in your pocket. It reduces the taxes you may owe and it may entitle you to a refund. The actual amount that you will receive is calculated based on your income. To qualify, you must have earned:

\$30,338 (\$31,338 for married filing jointly) with one qualifying child;
\$34,458 (\$35,458 for married filing jointly) with more than one child;
or
\$11,490 (\$12,490 for married filing jointly) if you do not have a

Need A New Ride?

By Michael Ferguson



So you're in the market for a new car... would you like to save big bucks?

When shopping for a new car, consider a couple of options. One very good option for luxury automobiles is a CPO - certified pre-owned - vehicle. Another great option in the more practical class is a program car.

What does Certified Pre-Owned (CPO) mean?

To be certified, cars must meet age and mileage requirements established by the manufacturer. Then, they undergo comprehensive inspections at the dealership. Certified Pre-Owned cars often come with a warranty, features, and financing rates much like buying new. Choosing CPO may mean you get your dream car for a lot less money.

What Does Program Car mean?

Program cars are vehicles that are driven as rentals at such companies as Avis and Hertz. The cars are auctioned off to dealers about every 18 months. As rentals, these vehicles go through scheduled maintenance and checkups. You can pick up one of these practical deals with an average mileage of about 20,000 along with a very deep discount.

qualifying child.

Other tax changes to take note of this year are:

Educator Expenses – The deduction and an adjustment to your gross income for educator expenses were scheduled to expire in 2003. However the IRS extended it until the end of 2005.

Child Tax Credit – The maximum amount you can claim for the credit is \$1,000 for each child. However there are certain rules and requirements that must be met. Consult your tax advisor for additional information.

Standard mileage rate – The standard mileage rates increased for business travel from 36 cents a mile to 37.5 cents a mile. Mileage for medical reasons increased to 14 cents a mile. And the standard mileage rate for moving expenses also increased to 14 cents a mile.

Please consult your tax advisor for further details. Additionally, for free filings, contact The Charles Smith Foundation (Mrs. Debbie Sims) at (203) 382-0052, 755 Central Avenue Bridgeport, CT. This is a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) site for tax preparation. All Information is Confidential.

This information was prepared by the Financial Freedom Ministry. Our mission is to aid families and individuals in the development of sound financial management practices, through teaching money management, wealth building principles, and by providing practical informational tools that encourage and support financial self-sufficiency. Our next training session will be held in March 2005.

Brenda Burton-Seldon, Chris Malloy, Tonya Lee and Ron Everett

2004 - A Blessed Year in Review.. 2005 - The Best Is Yet To Come!

By: Veronica A. Douglas

The flu vaccine shortage; many lives lost in Iraq, capturing Sadaam Hussein while we're still on the look out for Osama Bin Laden (at least I think we are); Governor Rowland's resignation; soaring gas prices; the unemployment rate; the rise and fall of the housing market. these were the fodder for headlines in 2004. Some or all of these occurrences may have touched our lives in various ways here in Bridgeport and throughout Connecticut. But as Christians and disciples at Mount Aery Baptist Church, we should be able to see that the bad news of the day are clear reminders of the blessings for which we can all be thankful, as well as of the hope that sustains us.

Now, this certainly doesn't mean everything is wonderful, but as many of you have experienced, there is a blessing in giving praise to God in spite of and in the midst of life's challenges.

Take a look back at 2004 at Mount Aery Baptist Church and what we have witnessed right before our eyes. Step out of the door of 73 Frank Street for a moment and look to the left and look to the right. We are now the proud owners of three pieces of property! God blessed us to acquire this; it was a prayed answered. I remember taking the walk to join this congregation a year ago and shortly afterward, I heard Pastor talking about the need for more parking spaces and the plans to make it happen. Now thanks to the prayers, determination, hard work and sweat of our leaders, something as small as a parking space brings so many of us great joy because we were able to witness God's work first hand. It's more

than a space or piece of property. It is God answering our prayers, enlarging our territory and making more room for ministry beyond the four walls of Mount Aery Baptist Church.

40 DAYS OF PURPOSE

Do you remember the theme of our congregational fast, *40 Days of Purpose - Transforming in the Midst of Transition 2004*? Who can forget the celebration on resurrection Sunday and the relationships we developed through our prayer partners and collective study?

My God!! The experience was absolutely AWESOME! The testimonies shared and the lessons learned were real reminders of the importance of fellowship and of doing the "Great Commission", which is spreading the good news of our Lord and Savior.

If for some reason you didn't participate and really take part in this wonderful experience, please trust God and get your copy of our current devotional, *40 Days of Purpose - The Transformation Continues*. During the devotional time in 2004, Bible study attendance reached record numbers every Wednesday afternoon and evening. We look forward to reaching a new record in 2005.

Just think about it for a moment – the collective learning, studying and fellowship that occurred here. Many of you may be accustomed to this type of ministry, but as a new disciple looking in, I was amazed at what *40 Days of Purpose* did for us individually and collectively. How many of you study more now because of the *40 Days of Purpose* experience? Trust

more? Stepped out of your comfort zones? One of the major things it taught me is that although some of the personal challenges around me may not have changed, I've learned how to change the way I deal with them. The gift of discernment is a wonderful thing, a true blessing. It helps you to see things differently and to look internally to see what part you play in the midst of the situation(s) while changing your perspective and mindset. No longer will I say, "*Something told me this or that.*" I now know it's the God in me, talking to me, (sometimes through me) helping me to discern my choices, thoughts and actions. Praise God!!!

Just writing about our *40 Days of Purpose* celebration makes me feel warm all over and honored to be a part of such a wonderful, effective ministry. Right in front of our eyes we saw the fruits of our pioneers' labor unfold. During the celebration, a piece of that fruit actually represented God's ministries developed under Pastor Bennett's leadership and no matter how big or small your involvement was in the celebration, you were and are a part of a ministry that can truly say, "WE ARE GOD PEOPLE'S TRANSFORMING IN THE MIDST OF TRANSITION. A PRAYING PEOPLE WITH A POWERFUL WITNESS OF A PERFECT GOD!" Amen.

The T.O.T.A.L PROGRAM

2004 was a tremendous year for milestones and one of those was the 10th anniversary of the *T.O.T.A.L. Program*, which stands for Teaching Ourselves to Achieve Literacy. According to our Web site, www.mtaerybaptist.org, "T.O.T.A.L is a well-balanced educational diet of Academics,

Fine Arts and Sports/Recreation nurturing a holistic growth of the minds, bodies and spirits of our children." We celebrated a decade of teaching our children. Telling them our stories and the stories of our ancestors while at the same time giving them the essential skills they need to not only achieve literacy but to also become leaders in their communities.

If you've never experienced the T.O.T.A.L. program first hand, please do it when it returns even bigger and better. Teresa Cherry Cruz, Denise Roundtree, the youth leaders and administration staff are truly amazing. Watching them use their gifts to work with our children and helping them to see the greatness that lies within is just one more reason to be proud of this ministry.

The T.O.T.A.L program is an educational experience all teachers should learn from. The day I visited, the children shared with me their experience learning about Harriett Tubman. Their faces lit up when they talked about the journey and what it meant to them personally. On this day more than 90 children started their day with prayer, meditation and song. They studied together, exercised, brush up on their computer skills, ate a healthy lunch and ended their day on the tennis courts. This is the kind of learning our children need and deserve.

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE

For all of you disciples who were here 10 years ago, it was a day in April of 1994 when the man of God named Anthony L. Bennett was sent to us. I am sure you can go on and on about the transformation you've seen here at Mount Aery Baptist Church

over the years. You can attest to the way God has used and is using Pastor Bennett in a mighty way here in Bridgeport, Fairfield county and every place he visits. We heard so many stories throughout the week of *Celebration of Pastor and People*. There were stories of an awesome Pastor, a preacher, a teacher, a leader, activist and an "out of the box", theological thinker.

There are so many people who have a Pastor-and-Donna story to share in our church, the city and even throughout the country, as we witnessed during the celebration. It's remarkable that two people, a husband and a wife, can mean so much to so many people.

All the preachers who came talked about the metamorphosis of our ministry due to God and under Pastor Bennett's leadership. Friends old and new shared their stories of Pastor and Donna. The young adults celebrated Sister Donna and all she has meant to them over the years. Pastor's mom blessed us with her presence at the star-studded banquet and sat in her seat so upright and proud with a motherly smile that said, "*That's MY son!!*"

Mount Aery, we showed out and showed up to celebrate the magnificent journey of Pastor and People. Just think back to the smiles and tears on the faces of Pastor and Donna, a true indication and reminder (in the words of Luther Vandross) "*It's so amazing to be loved...*" And, they deserve all the support and love we have to give, just for who they are.

MAAFA INFLUENCE 2004

The presentation of the *MAAFA Influence 2004 - Evoking the Pain of the Past...Building a Strong and*

Powerful is another example of the uniqueness of the ministry here at "The Mount" and a reminder of Paul's words to the church of Philippi: "I (we) can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (us)."

We were blessed with our own Gina LeVon Simpson's leadership, direction and creative abilities. More than 120 actors and supporting staff; senior saints and children sharing their stories; and an extraordinary music and dance ministry presented a sold-out performance to people from throughout the state and the country. This is ministry at its best. God is using us in a powerful way and showing us great favor.

From the tent to the Narthex, and especially on center stage, we used all the principles of Kwanzaa. Together we exemplified our Umoja (unity), our Kujichagulia (self-determination), our Ujima (collective work and responsibility), our Ujamaa (cooperative economics), our Nia (purpose), our Kuumba (creativity) and our Imani (faith).

The vision of Pastor Bennett, coupled with the mighty baton Dr. Youngblood and the people of Saint Paul Community Baptist Church have passed on to us, has already touched so many lives within our congregation and beyond.

Take a moment and talk with the writer and director, Gina LeVon Simpson, or one of the wonderful actors of the production, the children or leaders behind the scenes and on center stage, such as Min. Lisa Anderson, Cathy Patton and Bo Dewitt-Smith (just to name a few). You will hear marvelous stories of how the MAAFA Influence 2004 has shaped, molded and stretched them beyond anything they could have

ever imagined. Our ancestors would be proud because through this awesome production we told them, "We will never forget the sacrifices made, the blood shed, the prayers and your hope for our futures and the future of our children."

2005 THE BEST IS YET TO COME...

Only God knows what 2005 has in store for us. The foundation has already been set for the expansion of the *T.O.T.A.L program*, and building the Imani Center. We are preparing for the *MAAFA Influence 2005* and our journey to Saint Paul Community Baptist Church in East New York, Brooklyn.

We continue our devotion via 40 Days of Purpose - The Transformation Continues, and look forward to the transformation of our health and wellness, laughter and finances. To accomplish these goals with must arm ourselves with the Word, trust through tithes and offerings, and become bolder and more sincere in our walk with the Lord. We traveled through the years by faith and in 2005, God will lead us on.

Mount Aery, we are claiming it now...The Best IS yet to Come!

To God Be The Glory for the great things He has done.



as your neighbor has been blessed in theirs. Keep your eye on the fact that He created you to do something and it is your job to ask Him what that is and to go after that. You can rest assured that even if it's a struggle to do it, God shall provide all your needs. He will provide for you because you are trying to do what He put you on this earth to do. That "job" won't necessarily look like the typical job or the typical daily life as we know it here in America. But it was the life He wanted for YOU. Trust that, honor that, and go for it.

I know, I know. This whole thing sounds so pie-in-the-sky, so unrealistic for some and unobtainable to others. "It can't be that simple." "Some people are just lucky." "You just need to keep living and you'll find out how life REALLY is." I've heard it all or a lot of it, anyway. All I know is what I've experienced and that experience tells me that God clearly has things in hand. I work toward my desired heart's goals and He gives the increase. I have seen others do the same. These days, I listen to my retired, 50+ -year-old mother gush about winning an award doing something she loves, which she could never do while working that not-so-fulfilling job that tied her down. Her experience confirms how important it is for me to press toward the mark. So with God and the support of my husband, parents and friends, I press on. I wouldn't be surprised if my changes are just around the corner.

Scholastic Ministry

The Scholastic Ministry is guided by the scripture found at Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it*". It is an umbrella ministry for church programs related to our students' higher-level education incorporating the activities of the Parental Participation Ministry, StarQuest College Tour Ministry, College Fair Ministry, and the Scholarship Ministry. The Ministry can be contacted through one of the Ministry Leaders or through the Ministry email address: scholasticmin@mtaerybaptist.org.

Each Ministry aims to support higher education amongst our students. The Parental Participation Ministry works to prepare children to enter college by encouraging parents to stay engaged and informed about the child's academic development. We firmly believe and studies show that children who have parental figures engaged in their schoolwork are more likely to attend and progress through college. The Parental Participation Ministry has presented seminars on "Understanding your Child's Report Card", "How to have a Successful Teacher Conference", and "Meet your School's Officials". More seminars are planned for 2005; it is to the advantage of every child you love for you to participate.

Once your child has progressed to college time you must figure out where they should go. Both the College Fair Ministry and the StarQuest College Tour Ministry aim to help you make an informed decision. On October 8, 2005, colleges from across the state and outside of the state will be represented with information about the school and application procedures. We will also have workshops related to college issues such as financial aid, separation anxiety, and scholarship avenues.

Many people find it helpful to visit a college to help make that final decision. So from April 17th - April 22nd the StarQuest College Tour will be visiting schools in Florida including Edward Waters

College, University of Jacksonville, Florida A & M, Florida State University, University of Florida and

Bethune Cookman. We focus on Historical Black Colleges and Universities but will also visit majority schools when they fit into the schedule. There have been several successful trips and space is extremely limited so we suggest parent's plan accordingly.

Another part of the decision on where to go is how to pay for college. The Scholarship Ministry provides scholarships to students for undergraduate and graduate work regardless to their age and church affiliation. In 2004 the Ministry awarded 49 scholarship worth over \$40,000 and this year new processes were incorporated to improve upon our quality of service to students including scholarship application windows to eliminate lost applications and reinstituting interviews to make better award decisions. The next semester of scholarship is for the Fall 2005 Semester and applications will be accepted between May 15th and June 30th. Also we encourage everyone to check out information about other scholarships and internship opportunities on the Mt Aery Baptist Church website: www.mtaerybaptist.org. As we get information we post it there to allow for every opportunity we can for students to gain funds.

The Scholastic Ministry has seen great blessings this year and will continue to serve God through service to Mt Aery Baptist Church and serve Mt Aery Baptist Church through service to our students. As we drive these initiatives we need more support from the congregation, in both the areas of participation in our activities and workers for the planning and execution. If you would like to get involved please contact the appropriate Ministry Leader or Rita M. Barksdale.



Seeking Discipleship cont...

we sow into an abundant harvest so we can sow and sow again...not just to raise your standard of living but to raise your standard of giving!



The Olmec Store

The Olmec is not just a bookstore it is our church store. We are here to provide Mount Aery and visitors with additional resources to help them as they continue to grow in spiritual relationship with God. The name Olmec comes from the Olmec people who were of African descent. They settled in the Americas centuries before Christopher Columbus arrived. The Olmec people were pioneers. So in the spirit of Kujichagulia (self-determination), the church store was named The Olmec.

At The Olmec, you will find the latest books we are studying, whether it is in Bible Study or the Academy of Ministry. We also carry other books for spiritual growth, music, and CDs or tapes of speakers who have ministered to our congregation. When we have a special event here at "The Mount," such as our current "40 Days of Purpose," you can find T-shirts and other related paraphernalia. You may also purchase tapes and CDs from all worship services. If there is something you don't see, please ask...it is possible we can order it.

So whether you are looking for a good book resource, a T-shirt, or worship service tapes or CDs, stop by The Olmec. We are located in the Wilson Hall after 11am worship services until 2:30pm.

Ujamaa Center

Cooperative economics emphasizes our collective economic strength and encourages us to meet common needs through mutual support.



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The Black National Anthem

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”

Lyrics by James Weldon Johnson

Music by John Rosamond Johnson

Originally written by Johnson for a presentation
in celebration of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln.
This was originally performed in Jacksonville, Florida, by children.

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, Our God, where we met Thee;
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our GOD,
True to our native land

Mount Aery Baptist Church

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www.mtaerybaptist.org