



PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

Bethel AME Church Worship Service Sunday, March 2, 2014 – 9:30AM

To Rev. Dr. Frank Reid, Pastor of Bethel AME, to Lady Marlaa' Reid, other clergy and leaders of Bethel – Thank you for hosting Coppin in worship as we wind down our 2014 Homecoming activities. I am joined today by members of our Coppin State University Family who I ask to please stand at this time. If there are CSU Alumni in the congregation I ask that you also stand and be recognized.

In this our 114th year, and during this Homecoming Celebration week for Coppin, it is important for us to reflect on how far we have come from our humble beginnings. Coppin State University and Bethel have much in common. We share a rich history through a man of God named Levi Jenkins Coppin which connects us.

Levi Jenkins Coppin was born in Fredericktown, Maryland on the Eastern Shore of free parents who taught him how to read and write --- and also gave him religious training. His mother held classes secretly in her home at night and on Sundays before church and Levi assisted his mother in this task.

Sunday School had a different meaning then. For the young people, you ought to know that negroes were not allowed to go to school and could not read or write, so Coppin made a lot of money from young boys who paid him 10cents for writing love letters to their girlfriends.

In 1877, Levi entered the ministry from Bethel AME church in Wilmington, Delaware, and his first charge was Philadelphia City Mission as an assistant to Rev. George C. Whitfield. Upon Whitfield's death, Coppin became temporary pastor and later, a full-fledged ordained minister.

In 1881, Coppin was transferred to the Baltimore Conference and was pastor of this church. In the same year, he married Fanny Jackson, principal of the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth. She was born a slave, but gained her freedom and attended Oberlein College.

By 1900, Levi Coppin had been named the 30th Bishop in the churches history, and that year he and Fanny left for South Africa where Levi became the first resident AME Bishop.

Fanny and Levi's efforts to ordain black ministers and build churches and schools, and provide education for blacks, threatened the white elites. The British rulers felt that their work was dangerous and would empower the blacks to rebel. Despite the obstacles, Levi and Fanny established about 40 churches and opened Bethel Institute in Cape town.

In recognition of Fanny Jackson Coppin's, many contributions to educating our people, and ensuring that our people were not continuously enslaved because of a lack of education, in 1926, The Normal Department of the Colored High School, now a teacher training facility was renamed the Fanny Jackson Coppin Normal School, now Coppin State University. This recognition was for her pioneering work in teacher education. So now you can see our close connection.

Fanny Jackson Coppin reminds us of how God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Her story reminds us of how we can move from bondage to liberation, which is emblematic of our black youth struggles in the inner city today because of their lack of adequate education to meet today's job market. The many messages in the Old Testament regarding letting my people go, is so relevant today. However many of our youth are asking "let me go to do what - where is my promise land". Fanny's answer is simple, "education", and that is why we need Coppin State University.....today more than ever. That is why we need your resources. The time, talent, and treasure analogy of Christian discipleship is ever so relevant today in Baltimore.

God's story is a promise of deliverance from bondage. He promises and he provides and he delivers, but too many of our youth have taken it upon themselves to kill, and destroy; and so we need to act so that our inner city does not become a city of a lost generation.

Fanny Jackson Coppin had faith in the future of her people and she recognized the need for education. My plea to you is to have faith in the future of Coppin State University and the students we attract.

I learned of your program to connect youth to college opportunities, and we want to be a part of that effort to strengthen and enhance the opportunities. We would like to engage with you in financial aid counseling, academic advisement, peer mentoring, and general college readiness. My vision is for Coppin to become more connected to the faith-based community.

We encourage you to become a part of Coppin's Faith-based Advisory Committee and Dr. Gary Rodwell will follow up with you on this. We would like to facilitate students' attendance at your Sunday worship and other church activities.

I understand that several of our faculty and staff members are very active at Bethel. I especially want to recognize Dr. Henderson for her college access work, and other community engagement efforts. If she is in agreement, we would love to have her on our Faith based Advisory Committee.

Dr. Reid, I understand that you will be sowing a seed into Coppin today and, I want to express my thanks and appreciation to you and the Bethel Community. I hope your seed will bear fruit 100 fold and more. Your leadership, your stewardship reminds me of Margaret Walkers' poem "For My People" and I will share three verses.

For the cramped bewildered years we went to school to learn to know the reasons why and the answers to and the people who and the places where and the days when, in memory of the bitter hours when we discovered we were black and poor and small and different and nobody cared and nobody wondered and nobody understood;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied and shackled and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently and laugh;

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth; let a people loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men “and women” now rise and take control.

To our friends at Bethel – We share a common bond. **Let us unite and save our youth and to God be the Glory and may Coppin be blessed by your actions today.**

