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Presenting the Issue

The editors of *JITC* are pleased to present this theme issue—journey inward, journey outward. This proposition is Howard Thurman's concept of "social regeneration"—"a vital response to outward situations as a result [in part] of an inward movement."¹ Thurman's "divine discontent" forced him to reach out, to seek, and to explore new possibilities for life. The ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 Study of Black Churches has pushed us to the "cutting edge" of a faith-based community revitalization initiative—an examination of African-American religiosity with the Black Church as the central reservoir, the inward sanctuary.² *Project 2000* enables congregations to understand what is happening regarding worship, spiritual growth, community outreach, and managing, and leading. With the dissemination of this information to church leaders and congregational members (the outward thrust), a long-lasting legacy of the Black religious experience is reconfirmed.

Robert Franklin frames our central thesis in his "Introduction," citing *Project 2000* as identifying one of the central themes of African-American religiosity—the inseparable linkage of

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¹Alton B. Pollard, "Mystical Religion as Social Leaven: An Excursus in the Sociology of Mysticism," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* XVII (Fall 1989/Spring 1990): 69.

²Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953; reprint, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1976), meditation no. 15, 173 (page citation is the reprint edition).

spirituality and community outreach. For Franklin, the inward and outward journey is not oppositional but complementary, which mirrors a spiritual reality encompassing the whole person and the whole community.

Michael Dash and Steve Razor in their "ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000: An Affirmation for the Journey Inward and Outward" provide an overview of *Project 2000*, the nation's most current and comprehensive survey of Black religious life. For them, the religious community celebrating God supports both a personal and a communal spirituality. *Project 2000* verifies that the Black Church ministers to the whole person and the whole community

Lawrence Mamiya's "Faith-Based Institutions and Family Support Services Among Muslim Masjids and Black Churches" explores the data on the kinds of family support services and programs in which African-American Muslims masjids ("place of prayer") and Black churches are currently involved. The characteristics of congregations and leaders, which facilitate relevant family programs, are considered. The data provide indicators to determine which religious organizations and their leadership will sponsor relevant community outreach programs.

Steve Razor's "The Black Church in Town and Rural Settings" delves into an important segment of Black religious life—the town and rural church. This article gives a brief overview of all rural churches in the United States and follows with a more detailed analysis of Black rural settings. Three hundred and fifty African-American faith communities in the southeastern section of our country are highlighted. Rural ministry is important; and new understandings enable denominational leaders, seminary faculty, and local pastors to build on the strengths of this existing ministry.

Michael Dash and Steve Razor in their "Storefront Churches

in Atlanta" investigate these churches as a significance presence in the landscape of African-American congregations. They are spiritually vibrant institutions involved in their neighborhoods and tend to focus on strengthening the lives of members, providing economic services in the community. The majority of the storefronts studied in *Project 2000* identify themselves as being independent or Pentecostal in terms of religious affiliation.

Christine Chapman's "A Story Behind the Data" utilizes a case study of *Project 2000* data to develop a profile specifically for a particular congregation. The purpose of the congregational study is to examine ways spiritual vitality impacts the congregation and how important this is to the effectiveness of its social outreach programs. Chapman's analysis of a particular congregation concludes that this fellowship is spiritually vital, exemplifies the characteristics of a growing church with a wide diversity of programs, assimilates new members well, is financially healthy, and has strong pastoral leadership.

Sandra Barnes' "Then and Now: A Comparative Analysis of the Urban Black Church in America" offers insight into the myriad of unique challenges confronting the urban Black church—a religious, political, economic, social, and cultural institution. The urban Black church responds to the varied needs of congregates and members of the Black community. The challenge to be faced involves creative and proactive methods to address new and chronic problems. Its involvement, however, in political and social arenas has waned, and its stance on traditional forms of activism and civic involvement is decidedly conservative. Concerns to be addressed are new forms of racism and the AIDS pandemic.

Michael Dash's "African-American Congregational Life" enables us to understand that congregational studies are the scrutiny of a congregation's story, including exploration into

identity, theology, and context. For Dash, in studying congregations, leadership becomes an activity by which tasks are accomplished, including gaining a realistic self-understanding, experiencing a vision of life and purpose under God and manifesting that vision to fulfill being called as Christ's disciples. Congregations are able to envision new possibilities and shape their future for being faithful and effective agents in transforming the lives of persons in society.

Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs' "Get on Board, Little Children, There's Room for Many More: The Black Megachurch Phenomenon" takes us into the fascinating arena of African-American megachurches where 2000 – 20,000 people attend weekly Sunday services. Most of these churches, even if they are affiliated with a denomination, are in fact functionally nondenominational; they are generally conservative, Pentecostal, or Fundamentalist and evidence a neo-Pentecostal theological orientation. Black megachurches embody Christ both within the walls and beyond the walls by equipping all people regardless of race or origin—to make "the Word become flesh."

Ihsan Bagby's "A Profile of African-American Masjids: A Report from the National Masjid Study 2000" presents a basic statistical profile of African-American masjids. The article analyzes data gathered from 415 interviews from a list of randomly sampled 631 masjids. Two important issues are identified. The first is the relationship of African-American masjids to normative and traditional Islam. How are African-American Muslims to interpret and implement the basic texts of Islam? To what extent should they follow the traditional practices of the Muslim world? The second is the relationship of African-American masjids to American society. How should they view and interact with other religious groups, American institutions, and mainstream politics?