

Keeping the faith in the black church

What better prime mover in spiritual values and community development?

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Who should be more in front of African-American wealth-building than the black church?

For centuries religious orientation has made the church the strongest institution in black America. Thus, shouldn't our focus be more than discussing whether Henry Lyons is a saint or scoundrel and ask the primary question: "What has Lyons and the black church done for us lately?"

Much has been done already, and the black church and its associates are in a position to play a major national role toward empowering African-Americans economically.

Progressive church leaders see their mission as broader than simply catering to the spiritual well-being of members.

In focusing on ways to uplift the financial well-being of their flock, churches need to implement programs to support black business, provide jobs and have a hand in the sale of everything black people use.

Toward this end, many of our churches are providing needed financial services, such as: credit counseling, credit unions and personal investment and small business training.

Churches are becoming conduits for the black consumer's business and financial information and opportunities to showcase ownership in black communities.

An example of getting more black Baptist in the revenue loop, in 1995, Lyons, president of a loose-knit congregation of 8.2 million called the National Baptist Convention USA Inc.

Business Exchange

By William Reed



(NBCUSA), signed a deal with Loewen Group Inc., a Canadian cemetery conglomerate, to become the organization's "death care provider of choice."

Funerals are a \$15 billion-a-year industry in the United States and under terms of their agreement, Lyons' church members are trained to be salespeople for the corporation. Although decried by many of the nation's 4,000 black funeral directors, NBCUSA churches and pastors receive a commission on the sale of gravesites and other burial-related items. Such sales open up new revenue sources that church members haven't had for 50 years.

Make money only for yourself and you're a scoundrel. Make money for everybody and you're a "lovable rascal."

While being chastised by the majority media and voices in

black America, Lyons' success in collective capitalism and ability to pay off portions of the \$5 million debt on NBCUSA's \$12 million Nashville headquarters is being celebrated.

His revenue stream is based on the black church having a hand in selling black people everything they use.

Lyons also serves as president of the two-year-old Revelation Corporation of America, a Memphis-based national marketing firm that provides Baptists single family home ownership, multi-family rental housing, commercial and industrial development, all types of insurance, real estate marketing, investment banking services, affinity credit cards and retail trade coupons.

Black Baptists have the ability to spend over \$250 billion a year on what Revelation provides. It is a "Marketing Dream" coalition of five historically black denominations — with a collective membership of 18,000,000 people and 40,000 churches.

With the current plight of African-Americans, we need to do more bonding with Rev. Lyons and the 250,000 black pastors across the nation. Instead of arguing with them, let's help churches help more of us get more bread each day.

As church members we should: get printing done by blacks or our own printing firms, put collections in our own banks or credit unions, and have church buildings by black contractors.

With faith, hope and financial savvy, churches can lead the way to full black economic empowerment.

William Reed is publisher of Who's Who in Black Corporate America.

Entrepreneur

(Continued from Page 6)

College Fund - The College Fund Telethon, the March of Dimes, United Way, Muscular Dystrophy, Easter Seals, AIDS walks - all of these events are usually sponsored and managed by volunteer executives from your city's major corporations. These events offer you an excellent opportunity to do good and potentially do well by establishing important social relationships with people who are decision makers.

Nearly every charity has a major corporate sponsor and, invariably, the sponsor's top executives will be major participants in events hosted by the charity. Most large corporations within your city take their responsibilities to "give back" to the community seriously and will support important charity fundraising events.

Are we saying you should get involved in a charity event simply to meet corporate executives in a position to make influential decisions about your business? Of course not. Get involved only with those charity events that support causes you believe in. But recognize that networking and building non-business social relationships with decision makers at the firms with which you want to do business is an essential activity. It's only good business (and a smart strategy) to combine both activities wherever possible.

The reality, as we've already noted, is that a majority of lucrative deals are made during non-business hours among friends.

Some of the resources that can yield information about charity/social events in your

Most large corporations within your city take their responsibilities to "give back" to the community seriously...

city include: Brochures and promotional literature from major charities and non-profit agencies. Most charities and not-for-profit agencies publish promotional literature on which are listed the names and corporate affiliations of their boards of directors and advisory members.

Your local newspaper's community activities section/social calendar will carry releases (including photos) announcing the participation and sponsorship of local corporations in charity events, as well as a six-month to one-year events' calendar.

You can find back issues of

these newspapers at your local public library. Those newspapers also print promotions and personnel changes at major, mid-size and non-profit corporations.

Once you've identified the charity events in which you would like to participate in, contact the beneficiary agency and ask for an information/invitation package. Those information packages will include the participants, sponsoring corporations and event management committee members - planning, publicity, sponsorship and so on.

Most charity events have many more jobs that need

volunteers than they have volunteers willing to participate. There are two ways to participate in these charity events/fundraisers - as a patron attending the event or as one of the organizers or committee members.

As a committee member,

you'll be working closely with other members who will have an opportunity to observe your skills and commitment to the cause supported by the fundraiser. You will be seen by other committee members as a valued colleague with expertise and resources. Your

fellow members can become strong advocates for you in many contexts, including business referrals.

Meeting and building relationships with key corporate decision makers is part of the sales and marketing process.

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