

Bishop Jakes, Black press to support each other

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

CHICAGO (NNPA) - Bishop T. D. Jakes, the internationally acclaimed television preacher, and the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a federation of more than 200 Black newspapers, have announced a partnership designed to strengthen both the Black Press and Black churches.

"Today is the beginning of a reconciliation between the Black church and the Black Press. Not to say that we ever fell out, but, like many marriages, you don't have to fall out to grow apart," said Jakes during a meeting with the association's board members at the organization's 65th NNPA summer conference here.

"She gets busy, and you get busy; and you don't notice what day it is, but you have grown apart. And I think we were so busy finally building churches, finally

being able to buy churches and facilities, and you were so busy doing what you're doing that we just stopped talking to each other."

The relationship between the Black church and the Black Press dates back nearly 200 years. Samuel Cornish, one of the founders of the first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, was a minister. In 1827, Cornish and John Russworm, a lawyer, established the nation's first Black newspaper.

"We're interested in starting a dialog with a religious icon who has the capability of connecting with our readers in a different way and who brings to us an opportunity to expand our readership. On the flip side of that, we also bring our readers an opportunity to lift themselves up, to receive positive reinforcement, not just from a spiritual standpoint, but from an emotional, physical, mental, even economic, stand-



Sentinel-Voice photo by Roy Lewis

Bishop T. D. Jakes speaks to members of the National Newspaper Publishers Association after establishing a partnership with its 200 Black-owned member newspapers.

point," said NNPA outgoing chair, Sonny Messiah Jiles, publisher of the *Houston Defender*.

"Today, we are prepared to reconnect, reinforce, to regenerate the relationship between the Black church and the Black Press. There's added value in what we both bring to the community as being a leading spiritual source and a leading infor-

mational source."

NNPA's 15 million newspaper readers, plus thousands more viewers of its website, www.BlackPressUSA.com, could see tangible evidence as soon as July, says Brian Townsend, chair of the NNPA Foundation, which oversees the NNPA News Service. Townsend announced that Jakes will be writing a column for NNPA newspapers.

"Bishop T. D. Jakes has been called 'the New Millennium Billy Graham.' He's the number one preacher. Billy Graham's last preaching event is upcoming, and he's

already anointed Bishop T.D. Jakes to go forward. So, as our newspapers will bring his message of hope, that empowers our readership," says Townsend. Jakes says that the Black community will benefit from the partnership.

"I see our union as an opportunity to extend our voice to your audience and extend your voice to our audience. But that marriage has got to be a powerful tool and an impetus for great change," says Jakes. "I'm deeply concerned about some of the nuances in our community. I'm deeply concerned about the 233 percent increase in suicides amongst young Black males between the ages of 14 and 20. I don't think that we can sleep through that and continue on as business as usual, as if we were not concerned."

America's Black newspapers were established to champion the need for Black progress, says Les Kimber, publisher of the *California Advocate* newspaper.

"Here in 2005, corporate America continues to snub their collective noses at Black newspapers; so, my interest is, with the kind of

connections that you must have with presidents of corporate America and all of these folk, how can we get a message to them that in 2005, economic discrimination against Black newspapers can not be tolerated?" asked Kimber.

Pointing to his own difficulties in recruiting sponsors for his annual Megafest crusade which has drawn a half million people to Atlanta, Jakes empathized with the problem.

"The reality is that we live in a nation as African-Americans, that we cannot get a GED without understanding White culture, but they can get a PhD and not understand us. And because we live in that environment, they can be well-educated, well-informed, on the cutting edge, read the Wall Street Journal every day and not have a clue as to how to tap into our market base," Jakes explains.

Jakes says that has to change.

"By coming up with a way that we can say to our sources or to our sponsors that we not only represent 1.5 million on our mailing list,

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States are underreporting high school dropout rates

By Tessa Corie Smith
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Many states fail to report high school graduation rates to the U.S. Department of Education or submit figures that are so flawed or inaccurate that they threaten to undermine public confidence in the education, according to a new report issued by the Education Trust, an organization dedicated to fostering high academic achievement.

"We've got to end this rampant dishonesty about graduation rates, Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust, said in a statement. "If we are going to prepare students for the challenges of college work, and life, we need to transform our high schools."

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, states must now show that they are making progress in educating students and improving their graduation rate. The report, titled "Getting Honest about Grad Rates: How States Play the Numbers and Students Lose," revealed that three states — Alabama, Louisiana and Massachusetts — did not report any graduation rates. Seven others — Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Vermont — did not submit numbers that showed the disparity in graduation rates between Blacks and Whites, as required by the law.

And many of those that did report employed questionable techniques to disguise their failures, the report notes.

For example, New Mexico claimed to have a high school graduation rate of nearly 90 percent. However, it staked that claim by reporting on the number of high school seniors graduating, not those who enrolled as freshmen four years earlier.

North Carolina, according to the report, lists a 97 percent graduation rate. State officials report the number of students who receive their diplomas in four years or less.

Under this plan, dropouts are not counted, enabling the school to paint a rosy picture.

"It is astonishing that states are trying to pass off these numbers as legitimate," Daria Hall, author of the report and a policy analyst for the Education Trust, said in a statement accompanying the report. "Graduation rates are a fundamental measure of whether high schools are doing a good job. But rather than confront our very real dropout problem, many states have chosen to bury it beneath false data."

Still, other reports underscore the seriousness of drop-out problem among Blacks.

According to the Urban Institute, a non-partisan economic and social policy research firm, a reported 1,252,396 students who entered the ninth grade in 2000-2001 did not graduate within four years. More than 50 percent of these non-graduates (667,438) were African-American, Latino, or Native American.

"We know that urban schools with students of color and low-income students are not giving students the support they need," said Hall.

The study cites reports that show about one-third of students in high school quit before graduating — a decision that will have a major impact on their lives.

"No one can dispute the singular importance of high school graduation," the report states.

"The high school diploma represents the minimum requirement for successful participation in the workforce, the economy and society as a whole. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is more than 30 percent higher than that of graduates. And when employed, dropouts earn close to 30 percent less. Dropouts are also more likely to end up incarcerated and rely on public assistance."

Even so, some states are not aggressively

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