



Jacob's Ladder



A NEWSLETTER OF BURNS UNITED METHODIST AND HAMMITT HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES

Rev. Christopher C. Diggs, Pastor

Volume 15, Number 9, September 2015

EDITOR'S NOTE: Pastor Forrest Dickey of Stone Springfield AME Church of Macon, GA was the evangelist for Burns and Hammitt Hill UMC on August 24-26, 2015. Neither Rev. Dickey nor the 50 plus members of his church that made the journey with him had ever been to Oxford, MS before. He wanted to share his impressions and experiences of his visit to Oxford and Ole Miss. Pictures included are from the revival.

My Mississippi Experience by Rev. Forrest Dickey

For many persons living across America, there are many stories, fables, and tall tales about various places within the country. Some of the stories are rather haunting and sears the consciousness of persons that particular cities and towns across our great nation should be avoided.

I have traveled extensively across the United States throughout my career as a preacher, student, educator, and vacationer. I've even passed through the State of Mississippi on my way to New Orleans, Dallas and other destinations westward. Over the last 50 years the prevalence of racism and the great



divide over what is valued as icons of history in the south has permeated the minds of most. From what is believed to be sacred to



some is looked upon as torture and hatred to others. Many persons from Georgia, especially from the rural context, have a perception that Mississippi is the heartbeat of racism in the Southeastern United States. The moods and beliefs are that the state has worse racial tensions than Georgia, known for its racially segregated towns and municipal districts. Movies such as, *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *The Help* (2011), *In The Heat of The Night* (1967), and *A Time to Kill* (1996) have given many Georgians a subliminal opinion that Mississippi is a place that one should avoid at all costs, especially at night. Even the perceptions of higher education from the predominately white institutions carry a stigma from many African Americans in Rural Georgia that Mississippi State and Ole Miss (The University of Mississippi) consistently and insistentlly promote what they believe as "For Whites Only".

This past week, I believe that my journey to Oxford, MS was an epiphany. I was privileged to preach a three night revival at Burns United Methodist Church, 600 Molly Barr Rd., where Rev. Christopher C. Diggs is pastor. This church is one block from the Ole Miss campus. I was also privileged to lodge at The Inn at Ole Miss, one of the nicest hotels I've ever stayed in. This experience was phenomenal as I, like many other persons from rural Georgia, have had their misconceptions about the State of

Mississippi. I pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and my church is only 90 minutes from Charleston, South Carolina where on June 17, 2015, my fellow AME and colleague, Pastor Clemente Pinckney and 8 others were brutally murdered by someone who confessed that the killings were incited by racial hatred and to honor what the "Confederate flag" means to Caucasians in the south.

Part of me was reserved and the other was a position of observance. As I toured the city shopping and patronizing the various venues, I noticed how nice the citizens of Oxford were. Although I saw more black and white citizens than any other culture, I instantly noticed the difference in what I heard versus what I saw. Even on the campus of Ole Miss at various parts of the day, I've never seen such diversity on a predominately white campus. As I spoke to one professor, I told him that not at any single time at the University of Georgia would you see such diversity in one setting where students are not grouped off by race and it not be obvious. What I witnessed was amazing and heartfelt.

I also had the honor to meet Mr. Robert Khayat, past Chancellor of The University of Mississippi, who I learned to be a spirit-





filled, compassionate, and considerate individual that has dedicated many years of life and work to racial harmony. His efforts in eradicating the visual and presumptual tendencies that foster racial inequality was a highlight. The Confederate Flag, which has been the powder keg of racial tensions between blacks and whites in the past and the present was a non-factor in my experience. Surprisingly enough, I did not visually see one the entire time I was on the Ole Miss campus nor in the City of Oxford....I was completely surprised but thankful.

The trip to Oxford was one that was planned and coordinated for over a year. Pastor Diggs and I matriculated at The Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Ga where we both received Master of Divinity Degrees. Much of our research and study at The ITC was centered around knowing the TRUE INTENTIONS of the Scriptures and how we, humankind, can co-exist in harmony despite our cultural histories and embedded theologies while serving our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As Pastor of Stone Springfield AME Church, Stapleton, GA, I purposely envisioned that my church traveled with me to do ministry beyond the walls of our church and we were ministered to by the wonderful congregants of Burns UMC, Ole Miss University, and the City of Oxford. We toured the city, the

campus, had lunch with the students of Ole Miss and got a chance to see The James Meredith Statue. My congregation traveled by charter over 8 hours to experience this ministry with me. 56 of the best people on the planet got a chance to have their lives changed forever.

I've been told by many in my upbringing that "Experience Is The Best Teacher" and what we learned was far more than what we anticipated in love, in culture, in community, and in Christ.

We, the members of Stone Springfield AME Church, salute Pastor Diggs & Burns UMC, Chancellor Robert Khayat, Provost [Donald] Cole, Ole Miss, and the City of Oxford for opening our eyes to a new reality in life, "Mississippi is truly a blessed place on God's Earth because of you".



August: A Month To Remember

by Rev. Christopher C. Diggs

In the month of August, we have been very busy. We traveled to St. Paul UMC in Batesville, MS, St. Mary's UMC in New Albany, MS and Boyd Chapel UMC in Sturgis, MS for revival. Our regular services at Burns and Hammitt Hill and our church anniversary at Hammitt Hill further illustrate that our August was one to remember.

I must admit, I love sharing the gospel and preaching, however I also realize that all of

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the travel comes at a heavy cost. Therefore, in the future I will limit the amount of programs and revivals I accept. We will be very busy in the coming months as we embark on a new era of ministry with our churches. I pray that God will allow us to reach common ground on many pressing issues in the future. More importantly, I think we should brace ourselves for the blessings and opportunities which will be staring our congregations in the face in the coming months. (St. Mary's UMC pictured below.)



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P.O. Box 277
Oxford, MS 38655

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