

Vanderbilt Divinity School
presents

Kelly Miller Smith Institute on *Black Church Studies*

*The Church and
Public Policy
Conference*

April 4-6, 2006



Conference Schedule

Tuesday, April 4

Scarritt Bennett, Social Room E

6:00 p.m. Reception

Scarritt Bennett, Wightman Chapel

Opening Statements

James Hudnut-Beumler, Dean of the Vanderbilt Divinity School
Forrest E. Harris Sr., Director of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute

7:00 p.m. Public Policy Formation and Community Involvement

Phil Bredesen, Governor, State of Tennessee

Response: Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, 13th Episcopal District
Denominational Influences of Public Policy

8:00 p.m. Preaching and Public Policy

Brad Braxton, Vanderbilt University

Wednesday, April 5

Scarritt Bennett, Bennett Hall, Raintree Room

Opening Statements

Alice Hunt, Associate Dean of the Vanderbilt Divinity School

10:00 a.m. The Church, Health, and Public Policy

Kenneth Robinson, Commissioner of Health,
State of Tennessee

10:40 a.m. Black Churches: Moral Actors and Civic Influences

Victor Anderson, Vanderbilt University

Response: Kenneth Robinson, Commissioner of Health,
State of Tennessee

Audience Dialogue

Noon Break for Lunch

2:00 p.m. Government, Public Policy, and Civil Society

Harold Ford Jr., U.S. Congressman

Response: Dennis Dickerson, Vanderbilt University
Civil Society and the Politics of the Black Church

Audience Dialogue

Thursday, April 6

Vanderbilt Divinity School, Room G-23

10:00 a.m. The Tradition of Black Church Activism

Lewis Baldwin, Vanderbilt University

Response: Victor Singletary,
First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill

Ministry and Social Action in Contemporary Black Churches

Audience Dialogue

10:40 a.m. Civic Priorities for Social Justice Activism

Herbert Marbury, Vanderbilt University

Response: Edwin Sanders, Metropolitan
Interdenominational Church

Black Church Social Activism

Audience Dialogue

Noon Closing Statements

Forrest E. Harris Sr., Director of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute
James Hudnut-Beumler, Dean of the Vanderbilt Divinity School

Conference Rationale

The public influence of black churches during the civil rights and post-civil rights era in America is well documented. Contemporary black churches find themselves in a continuous struggle to shape public policy to effectuate social change in the communities they serve. As outlined in the recent publication "The Long Road Ahead: African American Churches and Public Policy in Post-Civil Rights America," the increasing complexity of public policy advocacy, the underdevelopment of the organizational structure of churches devoted to public policy work, and tension between religious imperatives and political activism significantly impact the political role black churches could play in shaping public policy.

This conference examines public policy priorities of black churches and the methods churches might employ to engage the task of public policy. The goal of the conference is to broaden the church's theological understanding and civic capacity for public policy work. The conference is designed to promote dialogue regarding the kind of creative partnerships and alliances necessary to bridge community stakeholders in the development of public policy for the communities black churches serve.

Conference Objectives

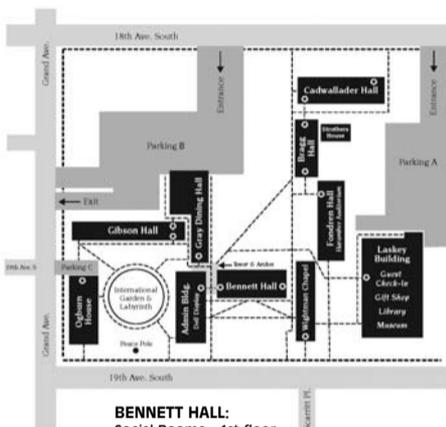
1. Identify pastors, theologians/ academicians, community leaders, and community organizers who can serve as potential allies for public policy formation and influence.
2. Explore challenges and opportunities for establishing a network of African American pastors who have been, or may presently be, involved in public policy and social justice initiatives and issues.
3. Examine the most recent public policy priorities of black churches and the methods they used to engage public policy.
4. Explore strategies for organizing an infrastructure (collaborative between the academy and the church) for researching public policy issues for local church usage.

The idea of the conference is to create an environment of dialogue between government representatives, church leaders, and Vanderbilt scholars on the church's role in public policy activism. Issues to be addressed include:

- The tension between religious and political imperatives, with attention to the prophetic tradition in African American political activism
- The organizational obstacles to effective black church public policy activism, particularly the rather limited infrastructure of black denominations for formal public policy advocacy
- How the public policy agenda is shaped within government and how black church activism interacts with the process
- The growing social and economic problems faced by black churches and the growing inability of many local churches to engage the knowledge and resources necessary for influencing public policy
- Tapping into the public energies around health and health care in Tennessee by providing a forum for church leaders, government officials, and academicians to engage each other around public policy issues and matters of social justice

Who Should Attend

Black church clergy and laity, leaders of nonprofit organizations, agency leaders, and advocacy groups interested in effective organizing around public policy issues for social justice change such as health care, education, and poverty should attend this conference. The conference will identify resources for pastors and organization leaders interested in transforming civil society and how the church can participate in shaping public policy. It is hoped that the conference will create a network of local pastors, church laity, and agency leaders who wish to continue dialogue around the formation of public policy issues regarding social justice change for the poor.



The conference is free and open to the public.

For More Information, Sha'Tika Brown, Kelly Miller Smith Institute
(615) 936-8453

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