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A Profile of the Reverend Michael E. Haynes of Twelfth Baptist Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts

by Kimberly R. Moffitt

The hand-clapping of “happy souls” stops. The singing of the choir’s songs of Zion ceases; and the minister no longer stands in the pulpit conducting his sermon. Sunday morning worship service is now over at Twelfth Baptist Church; but the work of the church’s senior minister, Reverend Michael E. Haynes, is not. For approximately forty years Reverend Haynes has made himself available in a variety of capacities to his congregation, his friends and family, and especially, the young people of Roxbury, Massachusetts. At times when it seemed others “threw in the towel,” he has simply stood steadfast, as his scriptures advise him, and persevered in his work to help young people.

And there is much to be done in the Roxbury community. Recognizing the true purpose of the Black Church, Reverend Haynes believes in blending religion and the concern for community together, in hopes of creating change socially, economically, and politically. This belief is easily demonstrated in his work of the past and present. Since the 1950s the minister served as a social worker, counselor, and friend to those viewed “at risk” by many in professional sectors. At any given point and time Reverend Haynes could be found sharing his knowledge with a group of young men standing on a street corner, sometimes reprimanding them for a mishap that could have been avoided or encouraging them to move forward beyond their many societal obstacles. It was the perceived potential in these young men that prompted the minister to start an effort he named “The Exquisite.”

The Exquisite was the project of Reverend Haynes and his friend, Clarence “Jeep” Jones. These men of great foresight wanted to demonstrate to others, as well as the young men, themselves, that something positive could happen in their community. This club, as it was referred, worked with young Black men encouraging them to excel at sports, as well as academics. Academics played just as vital a role in these young lives as sports; Reverend Haynes made sure of that. Scholarship information was provided; internship programs were sought; and college tours were coordinated. Simply put, sports would not be the sole focus of this group. Although Reverend Haynes recognized that a college education was not for everyone, he did support those who decided to further their education. Once students were admitted to college,

Reverend Haynes assisted in many ways to keep them there: tutoring, pep talks, or unexpected visits to dormitories just to verify how their studies were going.

And for those who decided not to attend college, Reverend Haynes organized an outdoor basketball league and a football league at the Norfolk House. The settlement house, formerly situated in Elliot Square, served as a link to the changing Boston neighborhood during the 1950s. It was a very difficult time for everyone: the white children of the area were trying to adjust to the Black children moving into the neighborhood and the Black children were trying to adjust to their new surroundings. But the sports leagues were able to diffuse many of those hostilities with success. Instead of the continued rivalries and rifts, the young men flocked to the settlement house for sports, as well as weekly parties and dances, tutoring, and arts and crafts. The foundation had now been laid for those that Reverend Haynes and Mr. Jones saw potential in and simply needed a little push, which they were willing to offer.

An example of the fruit of Reverend Haynes’s faith, and work with young people is the H. Carl McCall, a former pool hustler as a teenager. His first encounter with Reverend Haynes was in front of a Roxbury pool hall. The Reverend suggested that the youngster find more constructive activities to utilize his time; and soon after McCall began work with the minister at one of his summer camps. McCall, a former New York state legislator and deputy United States ambassador to the United Nations, is now a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and a vice president for Citibank. Then there is Albert Holland, Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Boston Public Schools, who reflects graciously on his time with Reverend Haynes. “Uncle Mike,” as he is referred by the former Exquisite, “was a father figure to many of us.” Mr. Holland spoke to the personal struggles in his own troubled teen years and how Reverend Haynes spent a lot of time with him and the other members creating a sense of community and family among them. And that family still exists for Al Holland was quite explicit when proclaiming, “There’s still a tight bond between many of us...and we still look to Uncle Mike for advise because we could and can always depend on him.”

Unfortunately not all of Reverend Haynes’s Exquisite achieved as McCall and Holland. He has seen his share of those that chose a life of crime, spending most of their time in correctional institutions, instead of enjoying a life of freedom. Nevertheless, Reverend Haynes still stood by them. He has even tried to help them in his former position with the Massachusetts Parole Board. For 16 years he read files on potential parolees, some who were past Exquisite members, others who were childhood friends, and even some who were members of his church congregation. Reverend Haynes viewed this appointment as another opportunity to help and encourage young Black men in trouble with the law; and hopefully demonstrate the choices (positive, of course) they had before them.

Recognizing his capacity and responsibility as a role

model, the minister decided to run for political office at the urging of a group of college students. In 1964 Reverend Haynes ran successfully for representative of the Massachusetts State House, serving three terms. In addition to fulfilling his duties as a politician, he also used his office to educate the young people of his community. He exposed them to the legislative process, many of the Exquisites spending lots of time in the corridors of the State House. But more importantly, he exhibited that they too could achieve anything with determination and desire.

The minister's commitment and inner strength has not changed, although today he leaves his more youthful styles for those who are younger than he. Reverend Haynes no longer approaches young men on the street or reprimands proprietors for selling alcohol and tobacco products to underage youths. He suggests it is too risky and dangerous now for many people are not willing and appreciative of his concern. But the minister does see a dire need for the value system to be re-built, which takes the whole community. The Black Church cannot be solely responsible for reinstating values in a community faced with drugs, violence, and crime. However, the Church does play a significant role; and Reverend Michael E. Haynes proudly stands at the forefront ready to participate in the move forward. He just hopes and prays that other

parts of the community are with him: parents, schools, and other non-profit organizations. With a re-direction of values for youth who have been lost, Reverend Haynes truly believes that Roxbury will revive.

So even though worship service has ended, Reverend Haynes realizes that the work of his Church and his duty as God's messenger is only beginning. "I only want to implement God's concern for people as much as I can," the Reverend proclaims.

"Gotta do better, gotta get better" are words often spoken by Reverend Haynes; and all his duties and positions served as a true testament to his own works. He only expected his young mentees to strive and achieve all they could, which is exactly what he does. For forty years, from the pulpit to the street corner, Reverend Haynes has definitely worked to do better and get better for others. And Roxbury's community will be blessed to have to have him for his years to come, and beyond.

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