

Tribute to Rev. Dr. Max L. Davies-Jones, Psy D

By Eugene Agbimson, CFO & Acting CEO
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Father Max was a man of great humility, vision, passion and compassion. It is important as we mourn his earthly departure and transition, and celebrate his life, that we reflect on his life mission, namely, to find ways to help and better the lives of the less fortunate, the afflicted and the helpless ones amongst us.

A brief historical background, on Father Max is in order here. His forebearers were shipped out from the West African port of Badagry in the present Southwestern Nigeria in early 19th Century to work in the plantations of the new American and West Indies colonies. At that point in time, slavery had been banned in England and Royal British naval vessels were dispatched, to intercept and return any transatlantic slave vessels back to Africa. The best and brightest among these returnees were trained by European Missionaries and the British Colonial administration as interpreters and interlocutors in the evangelization and subsequent colonization of West Africa.

The two major ports for these returnees were Freetown in Sierra Leone and Monrovia in Liberia. One of the best known African returnees was Father Max's maternal great grandfather, who was captured by slave raiders at about 13 years of age, but their vessel was intercepted by a British warship and taken to Sierra Leone where he was converted and baptized, taking the name Samuel Crowther. Samuel Ajayi Crowther later became a pioneer explorer, missionary and negotiator, subsequently becoming the first Anglican Bishop of West Africa in the year 1864. The life and work of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Father Max's maternal great grandfather largely inspired and influenced his decision to become an Anglican Episcopal Clergyman.

When Father Max became the Rector of St. Simeon's Episcopal Church in the Bronx in the 1970's, both the parish neighborhood and the South Bronx in general were in serious social and economic decline. People were moving out, many buildings were abandoned and dilapidated; older folks and the working poor, mainly Black and Hispanic population were the major inhabitants. Father Max was very much at home with his flock and the neighborhood.

Father Max was not content with his pastoral ministry. The plight of the community at large became a major focus of his overall ministry. He believed that parishes were not just worship centers but also provide access and direction to better lives which would benefit society as a whole. He reached out to community leaders, other churches, businessmen and non-profit organizations in the area.

In 1977 a group of six to seven people met with him as the Rector of St. Simeon's Episcopal Church to explore how best they could assist local folks cope with their plight in the South Bronx. They started by recognizing that for many residents of the South West Bronx life is a series of daily challenges and that one of the best ways to assist in enhancing the quality of their lives was through providing such essential needs as affordable housing, daycare, educational and other basic services. It was out of this meeting and others after that the non-profit umbrella organization Simeon Service Foundation, Inc. which later became Canterbury Heights

Development Corp. was founded in 1979. According to its By-Laws to “provide charitable services to the community in the hope that it would preserve and rejuvenate the South Bronx ... by providing a channel of cooperation and social action”. The rest is history. After his retirement from active ministry in 2003, he took time to complete his Doctorate degree in Psychotherapy. Thereafter, he spent half his time in the United States and the other half in Africa, where he planned to set up a spiritual, psychotherapy and counseling center. The challenges of aging and failing health did not stop him. He adopted his great grandfather, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther’s mantra quote “ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR US”. Father Max you will be missed. To many of us you are the architect and we will be the builders. Farewell!



Rev. Dr. Max L. Davies-Jones, PsyD



Eugene Agbimson delivering Tribute at Memorial Service in New York, January 6, 2013