

# Trinity United Church of Christ

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Rev. Otis Moss III, Pastor

Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Pastor Emeritus

## **The Pastors' Word: June 8, 2008**

Many of you may have heard or read the divisive, distorted media reports concerning the status of the Pastoral Leadership Transition process for our church. Some of you have been accosted by members of the media, and others of you have once again been urged to respond to innuendos, and untruths.

We know that we should not and cannot believe everything we read in newspapers, magazines, and especially on the Internet; nor can we believe all that we hear on television or radio. We also know that there are elements in our society, enabled by small segments of the media that are determined to discredit and destabilize our congregation, to undermine the work of this powerful ministry; to discredit its mission; to taint the legacy of Dr. Wright, and to diminish, cripple and booby trap, the future leadership of our incoming Pastor. But most of all, we know that Jesus said, “*...Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!*”

We, Dr. Wright and I, want to set the record straight, and we want to share with you, our members and extended church family, the Good News in all of this, for we know God has a particular Word in this situation for God's beloved church, Trinity. We are not called to “respond” to non-issues created by the media and others determined to do us harm. But we are called and challenged to theologically reflect, and answer the questions: “What is God saying?” “What are we doing?” “What is our responsibility as a community facing another manufactured crisis?”

We believe that this attack and these attempts to destroy us provide an opportunity to strengthen our Trinity family during this time of transition. We believe that this attack and these attempts are an opportunity for us to again affirm who we are and Whose we are. We are a congregation whose roots are firmly planted in the belief that we can be and are “Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian.” We are a congregation whose vision is to live out our mission in the fullness of “Christ, Community and Culture.” So, this is a congregational moment, where we lay claim on our charge to be a community totally committed to Christ. We call our congregation to family meditation and prayer and we now arm you with the facts.

First, for the record, our church is the largest congregation of the 5,700 congregations in our denomination, the United Church of Christ. Our church ascribes to the polity and protocols of the United Church of Christ. Our denominational polity recognizes the autonomy of each local church to set forth how it will live out its covenant within the UCC, while having freedom to determine the direction of its individual ministry.

Trinity UCC has adopted and is governed by a set of By-Laws, which set forth the mission, management, and administration of this church body, including the appointment of its Pastoral Leadership.



On May 30, 2008, Trinity's Board of Directors, in response to the enthusiastic request and recommendation of Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. and the Pastoral Relations committee, by unanimous vote, bestowed upon Reverend Otis Moss III the awesome responsibility and honor of being named Senior Pastor-Elect. This was contemplated by the Leadership Succession Plan, adopted by the Board of Directors in 2005.

The By-Laws of Trinity United Church of Christ provide that "*The Pastor, once installed, serves as the spiritual and administrative head of the church.*" Within the polity of the United Church of Christ, installation is the responsibility of the Denomination, in cooperation with the local church, in this instance, the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ. The denomination has certain requirements that all pastors (including Pastor Moss) must meet before he or she can be installed. We joyously anticipate that the denominational process will be complete in the early fall of 2008, and that Pastor Moss' installation will be scheduled as soon as possible thereafter.

Until installation, Pastor Moss is "Senior Pastor-Elect." At the moment of installation, "elect" no longer applies. Pastor Moss, in the interim, has been assigned full pastoral, administrative and management responsibilities, as set forth in the By-Laws of our congregation, upon the recommendation of Dr. Wright and in affirmation of his leadership.

Additionally, for clarity and historical purposes, it should be noted that there is no such category in Trinity's By-Laws as "Senior Pastor." This designation was unofficially adopted by and bestowed upon Pastor Wright, by our beloved "Angel Spirit," the Reverend Barbara J. Allen, Dr. Wright's first Executive Minister. Rev. Allen thought that the title, "Senior Pastor" would be a distinction of honor and respect shown to Pastor Wright after his many years of esteemed leadership of the congregation

The title was not used at the beginning of his pastorate at Trinity in 1972. The Congregation embraced Rev. Allen's suggestion and Pastor Wright's new designation. The Board of Directors, by accepting the recommendation of Pastor Wright to affirm the leadership of Rev. Moss, has agreed thereby to adopt the unofficial designation of Senior Pastor, to meet the expectations of the Congregation, even at this early stage of Pastor Moss' tenure, even though it is not provided for in the church By-laws.

The protocol of the United Church of Christ also provides for the bestowal of the status of Pastor Emeritus by a congregation which wishes to recognize, honor and hold in high esteem the work, life, ministry and legacy of a former Pastor. This, too, was contemplated by the Leadership Succession Plan. The Board of Directors has adopted this protocol and will amend its by-laws to include the highly esteemed designation at its next meeting in July of 2008. Pastor Wright's title will officially become Pastor Emeritus upon the recommendation of the Board of Directors and affirmation of the Congregation, at that time, although regarded as such now prior to this official action.

Rev. Otis Moss III  
Senior Pastor-Elect

Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.  
Pastor Emeritus