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Democratic Party's New Leadership

An Interview with Pastor Kenneth Love

By Cheryl Norris Sanders

What is a small town to do when big city issues grow in magnitude? One good thing to do is identify someone who has experienced those same issues. Chattanooga's Democratic Party found that someone in their newly appointed Executive Director Reverend Kenneth Love.

During an interview with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, Reverend Love commented, "I grew up in Los Angeles and volunteered in the community during Tom Bradley's mayoral campaign. I watched as gangs grew in our neighborhoods and saw some of my friends deal with the consequences."

Community is important to Reverend Love. In his new position he will focus on issues that affect the region and put effort into visiting all neighborhoods, listening and gaining knowledge about the folks living there.

Love is the pastor of St Paul AME Church where there is a history of community involvement. African Methodist Episcopal churches, founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in Philadelphia, have long been in the forefront of community development and engagement.

When asked about his vision, Pastor Love thoughtfully replied, "Many of our youth seem to fear the electoral process, which is quite different from our elders. They faithfully showed up and fought for our right to participate in the process. I want to educate our youth of all cultures and engage them. Give them a chance to understand the importance of local elections and politics. I envision a time when our youth will cease making decisions based on fear and base their activities on achieving set goals. Hopelessness is based on lack of knowledge."

Love wants to address issues of finances, gangs and jurisdiction. In today's political arena, Democrats and Republicans speak different languages and fight over most issues, even their explanations sound different. Reverend Love is determined to bring the community together for the purpose of discussion; and moving forward to elect officials who are responsive to constituents.

One of Pastor Love's strategies will be to access social media to increase engagement. "Facebook, Twitter and email are the best means of communicating with large numbers of youth. We will use them to get the word out. Even though we are accessing modern means of communication, we want to build 60's style involvement. We have to close the gap between what we do in national elections and local ones. We understand that we need to vote for our President but not so much how important it is to support city council people and state representatives" commented Love. That point was magnified to me today as I read about Tennessee's legislature's entertaining the redistricting bill.

"We are also dealing with a disconnection between Hamilton County and the City of Chattanooga. We have new companies and residents that need to be incorporated into the process and gain an understanding of our culture," Love explained. Reverend Love wants to dispel the animosity and suspend the notion that a few people should give direction to the many. He feels that failure to succeed is based on lack of involvement and wants all sectors to bind together and grow stronger through engagement.

In reference to our new gang czars, Reverend Love said, "Unfortunately, their appointment is a symptom of the problem. Our culture has taken away the value of families and people. The focus is on money and earning funds. We must go backwards to place our highest value on our kids and realize they are much more valuable than money and things."