

# As King's colleagues leave the pulpit, a new generation steps in

Continued from page 5B

year ago, preaching a social justice gospel is still viable and necessary—even without King and his compatriots.

"God is always raising up a voice or voices to speak to the needs of the present day," he said. What's important, he said, is to follow the example that King and others set of working for justice.

The new generation definitely has its work cut out, in terms of reaching people who may be paying more attention to a different kind of preaching: prosperity gospel,

which focuses more on personal health and well-being. "I think there's an enormous social justice gospel education agenda that faces this generation that succeeds some of the towering figures in the black pulpit," said Robert Franklin, professor of social ethics at Emory University.

Along with Walker, a number of well-known pastors—many with ties to King—have either retired recently or announced intentions to do so.

The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, one of the founders of the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference, stepped down from the pulpit at the Greater New Light Baptist Church in Cincinnati last year. The Rev. James A. Forbes Jr., the first black senior minister at New York's Riverside Church, will officially retire in June.

Rev. William H. Gray III, the third generation of his family to lead Bright Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia, will step down next month. And the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. has announced he will step down from Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago in 2008.

Gray is hopeful about the future. His church selected 32-year-old Rev. Kevin R. Johnson, assistant pastor at Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, to be the next senior minister.

"I think one of the mistakes that we make is to institutionalize a person rather than institutionalize a movement," he said. "Guys like me moving on, passing the torch to a new generation of young folk is good. That's positive."

Shuttlesworth agreed. "In each generation people come and they affirm their commitment," he said.

A new generation of leadership could also provide an opportunity, a way to make struggle for civil rights more relevant and not something that ended decades ago, said Harris-Lacewell.

"I think it's potentially really healthy for us to move away from imagining that the social gospel theological or the civil rights movement politically started with or ended with Martin Luther King," she said.

"It might actually be good to move into a new generation that has to make claims and arguments for civil rights that are not rooted in

a movement that's 40 years old."

At 32, there is no question that Kevin Johnson represents the younger generation as he takes over at Philadelphia's Bright Hope Baptist for Gray, who has long been one of the nation's most influential black ministers.

"I see the church as really the beacon light for the black community," said Johnson. "The light may have dimmed in the past few years, but I believe with this new generation of preachers, that they are going to make sure that the mantle is carried and the light still shines."

## Church pews remain separated by color despite desegregation

Continued from page 5B

said the man soon left the church.

"There was simply no common ground. People are satisfied with worshipping segregated and nothing challenges the church to be integrated. That can't be applying the Word of God. There has to be unity," he said.

To Lewis, that unity comes by addressing race as an issue.

"When you see race in the scriptures you don't skip over them, you address them and you realize we as people are much more alike than we are different," he said. "If you don't make race a public issue it becomes a silent issue. Christ broke down the dividing walls and made us one on common ground. My passion, my burden, is to show that at least one church in Dothan is that way."

The Rev. R. Paul Hollman of the majority black Greater Beulah Baptist Church congregation said he believes change is happening throughout Dothan and must continue through pastors. Churches are marketing integration through billboards and magazines. Television ministries, black and white, he said, are ministering to people through all walks of life.

"Pastors and leaders must be the advocates and open to diversity and we must lead our people to do so. When you preach the truth I don't think people care what color you are," he said.

Calvary Baptist Church hosts several integrated programs for residents in order to reach everyone with God's word, said Wright, associate senior pastor. The church is predominantly white. "There's still some old school thinking that everybody has their own place, but I believe that's slowly fading away," he said.



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