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Pastoring the Urban Church  
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### **URBAN CHURCH SITE VISIT**

There is no time like now for the churches to be involved in the community where they are located. People are hurting and need to find a place of refuge. They look to the church for the answer. Church leaders and pastors' responsibility is reaching out to the people in the community. On Tuesday April 18, 2023, I visited Hebron Baptist Church located 450 Fountain Avenue, Brooklyn. I spoke with Pastor Timothy Taylor. Pastor Taylor has been the senior pastor of that church for the past seventeen years. The church has been in existence for forty five years and has about seventy five members. In my interview with Pastor Taylor, we discussed how his church helps the people in the urban community. We also spoke about how he prepares leaders for urban ministry, his stand on social justice, church theology and challenges that he faces while doing urban ministry.

At the beginning of my interview, I asked Pastor Taylor how his church supports the people in the community. He responded by saying that they have a food pantry and they feed the people in the community. He said that the community is the focal point of his church. They try to find out the needs of the people in the community and help as best as they can. Pastor Taylor expresses the view that it is very important for the church to know who the politicians representing the people in the community are. He said his church makes it their duty to partner with those politicians, so that the people can get the help that they need. The church mission is to always be the voice for the people. The church also partners with the stores in the community so that they can get clothes at discount prices to give to the people in the community. He told me that during

the times of Covid that the church was a testing site for the people in the community. The church was also used as a vaccination site.

As I continue my interview with Pastor Taylor, we talked about how he prepares his leaders for urban ministry. He said that they have leadership training where they take into consideration the gifts and passion of the people. They encourage those people to understand that it is not about us but about them, meaning the community. The community is the bedrock for their ministry. He also said that they encourage the leaders to go out and have fellowship with the people in the community. He sends them to the local bars and restaurants. Their goal is to simply talk to one person and see where it leads. Pastor Taylor told me that a conversation is all it takes to peak someone's interest. He continued by saying that the people in the community need to know the church, and the only way that could happen is if the leaders meet them where they are. He gave me an example of a woman he met while shoveling snow outside of the church. He told me that she struck up a conversation by asking him if he was the pastor of the church, and why he was the one shoveling the snow. He said that he told her nothing is beneath him and that he was just a regular person. She smiled and said to him, I must visit this church sometime. Two weeks after she came to church and has never left the church since then. He also pointed out to me that it is very important to have something to keep the people when they come into the church.

My next question to Pastor Taylor was, what is his stance on social justice. He said in the 1960's when the civil rights movement was happening, he felt like that was church at its best. The church has been silent for too long and it is his belief that the church is the voice for the

people. He said in his church he teaches his people how to advocate for social justice. He believes in clarity, justice and fairness. He is a strong advocate for reparation. He said that God

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made provision for the poor and the marginal in the bible. He talked about the time when God spoke to the Israelites concerning the year of Jubilee and how land had to be returned. He also said to me that he preaches social justice from the pulpit anytime he gets a chance. He knows that the people don't like it but he does anyway. He believes that it is important for them to understand that the bible is loaded with social justice issues and Jesus constantly dealt with those issues. He also told me that when George Floyd was killed, he mobilized some of the leaders in the church and they got involved in a peaceful march of solidarity. He said church leaders should not be afraid to stand up for what is right, it is their duty to the people.

We also talked about the church vision for the community and the challenges they faced. He said their focus is on growth of the church, individual growth as well as family growth. His vision includes mind, body and spirit. He believes that if the church is healthy then the community in which they serve will be healthy. He also talked about evangelism and discipleship which helps the church to make a positive impact on the community. He hoped to be able to reach a broader community regionally. He said in the warmer months, the church services are held outside in the parking lot where the people of the community come and join them. When the weather gets colder, the people come into the church. The challenges he faces is getting a balance between self care and people care. He said that it is imperative not to get burnt out. The energy released must be restored. The way they accomplish this is by having family movies and game night where they fellowship with one another. Pastor Taylor said that ministering to the urban community can get overwhelming. He believes that the church should always be focused

on its vision. I asked Pastor Taylor how he would describe his church theology. He said that the church follows the theology of Jesus. Jesus mingled with the people. He won their confidence and he

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minister to their needs. His purpose was to reach the lost and hurting people. Pastor Taylor believes that this is the model that all churches should follow.

My interview with Pastor Taylor has been a blessing for me and my ministry. I realize that he has a clear understanding of what it means to be a church in an urban community. He seems to have a heart for the community. I can say that he is well up to date with some of the things we have been taught about pastoring the urban church. He is a pastor that is willing to take the church outside to meet the people. He stands very firmly on the issue of social justice and is ready to be the voice of the people at any time. I believe that this church will continue to grow because of its involvement in the community. He is a leader with a vision and he is training people to carry out that vision. He comes across as a servant leader who cares for the sheep. In my opinion, he truly knows how to pastor an urban church.

