

# Bishop Stewart Urges Remain Focused on the Essential

By Mrs. Princess A. Pegues and Dr. Kenneth E. Jones,

Bishop Paul A.G. Stewart, Sr., presiding prelate of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Episcopal District preached an energetic and powerful message for the Keynote Assembly to begin the 24<sup>th</sup> CME Convocation in Louisville, Ky. Using Hebrews 12: 1-4, Bishop Stewart dealt with the subject, “Remaining Focused on the Essential, Regardless of the Conditions.” Nearly 2000 congregates filled the Ballroom of the Galt House to hear the bishop wield his tremendous hermeneutical prowess in speaking to the quadrennial/convocation theme, “An Essential Church: Poised for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” The service was led by the General Officers of the CME Church. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Episcopal District Choir rendered music. Bishop Sylvester Williams, Sr. host bishop, welcomed those in attendance. Senior Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr., introduced the keynote speaker.

In working with the theme, Bishop Stewart compared the mainline churches of today with a once-personal experience with a new cameral, noting that the camera didn’t take good pictures, as they were continually out of focus. Bishop said that after testing and taking many, many pictures, he finally took the camera back to the store where he bought it. He said he was stunned to find out that the camera was just fine. The problem was that he, not the camera, did not focus correctly when taking the pictures.

Bishop then said many of our mainline churches are out of focus. They are in trouble and have tried everything possible to get out. He said churches too often are like he was with his new camera. When he looked through the viewfinder, everything looked great. It was the taking of the picture that was blurred. Bishop likened the churches to his camera by saying, as members of the church, we too look good in our attire on the surface, but our looking good does not result in an essential church. By the same token of attempting to fix the camera, we will attempt every effort over and over again-trying the same old things. But the church’s problems still persist. He said the church will meet and meet and meet again, but if meetings alone could solve the church’s problems, the problems would long ago been solved.

Bishop Stewart said we are losing young people because they feel the church isn’t meeting their needs, and cited the work of theologians and scholars who suggest that, among other things, people avoid or leave mainline churches because members are too judgmental or critical. Bishop Stewart stressed that just looking good will not make it. God is calling us to do more than just look good. He is calling us to help improve the life of others, to be more caring, more friendly, and to minister to others. Bishop Stewart further stated that just like he took his cameral back to the place where he bought it, we Christians need to go back to the “One” who established the church in the first place –and that is God. The Bishop reminded the hearers that Hebrews was written by someone too scared to sign his name. But, as stated in the scriptural text, it reminds us that we are “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and the witnesses are pulling for us to win! God is challenging us to reach out to young people and folks on the street, and to lay aside our bitterness, and disappointment. He is challenging us to look to Jesus, because Jesus is perfect. Jesus is our author and finisher of our faith. Jesus is our God and He will give us the power to overcome our problems.