

Tribute to the Rev. Dr. Joseph Alexander Gaston
Memorial Presbyterian Church, Charlotte NC
September 12, 2011

On behalf of the Presbytery of Charlotte, which is composed of its staff with the Rev. Dr. Samuel Roberson General Presbyter/Stated Clerk, 131 Congregations, nearly 40,000 Presbyterians spread across seven North Carolina Counties and one church in Pageland, SC; we offer our condolences and heart-felt sympathy to the Gaston Family.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) when a candidate is ordained to the Office of Word and Sacrament or as we now referred to as a Teaching Elder, that individual no longer has membership in a local congregation. Rather, the membership is recorded and maintained on the roll of the presbytery in which the clergy person serves.

As a part of that candidates' ordination process, which is an act of the Presbytery, there are constitutional questions presented during ordination and for each time a Teaching Elder receives a Call to Service in the church. A few I lift up today:

- Will you be a Minister of Word and Sacrament in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and continually guided by the confessions? Dr. Gaston said, I will!
- Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit? Dr. Gaston said, I will!
- Do you promise to further the peace, unity, purity of the Church? Dr. Gaston said, I do!
- Will you be a faithful minister, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith, and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the governing bodies of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ. Dr. Gaston said, I will!

In so doing, the Rev. Dr. Joseph A. Gaston served faithfully the Presbyteries of Catawba and Charlotte, Johnson C. Smith University, Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary and the People of God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love.

Dr. Gaston's name and his contributions to Catawba Presbytery are interwoven and historically linked. In order to mention Catawba, one must also lift up the names of the Synod of the Piedmont, Cape Fear, Yadkin and Southern Virginia Presbyteries all together, which formed the Catawba Inter-Presbytery Program Agency. This agency functioned to staff the executive and programmatic services of the Presbyteries. The Executive functions as the Executive Presbyter; the program staff, along with Presbytery officers, constituted a team to implement mission activities which included congregational development, Christian Education, leadership development, stewardship development and personnel services.

In retirement, Dr. Gaston served the Presbytery of Charlotte well as a member of the Personnel Committee and as a member of the Seven Person Planning Team to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the Presbytery of Charlotte, which was celebrated on the Campus of Johnson C. Smith University February 14, 2009. This event honored and celebrated the work and contributions made by the antecedent presbyteries, namely, Catawba, Concord, Fayetteville and Mecklenburg – and produced a commemorative booklet.

Dr. Gaston was an academician. He was honorably retired in 1993 by the Presbytery of Charlotte. Then Administrative Dean of Johnson C Smith Theological Seminary, at the ITC in Atlanta Georgia, His final specialize ministry report reads: *“I serve as Administrative Dean of Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary. Johnson C. Smith Theological is one of the eleven theological institutions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), and one of the constituent seminaries of the Interdenominational Theological Center. In the ITC, where there is central administration administers center-wide functions and seminary administration for functions specific to the respective seminaries, the Administrative Dean is the chief seminary administrator.”*

Learning of the death of Dr. Gaston, the planning team for the Calling for the Order of the Day, will dedicate this summit to the memory of Rev. Dr. Joseph A. Gaston. This will summit will bring together African American Presbyterians from Charlotte and Providence Presbyteries to discuss the future of Black Presbyterians on October 15, 2011 at Ben Salem Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC. While we have invited Western North Carolina and Salem Presbyteries their commitment has not been secured at this point.

The Rev. Dr. Edward Newberry, Pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC, stated in his eulogy for Dr. Gaston, ***“Joe was never stymied; rather he served the Church with imagination, energy and love.”***

To God we give all honor, all glory, majesty, dominion, and power! Let the Church say AMEN!

Tribute delivered by:
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