

Religion & Ethics Newsweekly
Season VIII Viewer's Guide
Final DVD Discussion Questions
Topic: African-American Churches

Church Hip-Hop, Show #825 - February 18, 2005

Lawndale Community Church, a nondenominational Christian church located on Chicago's West Side, is one of a number of churches across the country that are embracing the blunt-talking rhythms of hip-hop culture to bring young people off the streets and into the pews. The idea to offer a more contemporary worship service to teens living in the city's violent, drug-infested North Lawndale neighborhood was the inspiration of Phil Jackson, a former seminarian and father of two. Twice a month, in an old factory converted into a sanctuary, young worshipers gather together to proclaim the Gospel through intense hip-hop performances, dancing, music, testimonials and more. Bob Faw takes a behind-the-scenes look at this special youth ministry and how it is helping inner-city kids cultivate their faith and connect with their community.

- 1) What is your reaction to The House, the youth ministry program at the Lawndale Community Church? What do you think of this ministry? Are you surprised that there are over 150 hip-hop ministries across the country? Why or why not? What does "hip-hop" signify to you?
- 2) "Step sessions" are part of the service in hip-hop services. Can you think of other examples of dance or movement in other faith traditions? What are they? Do you consider dance a form of active prayer? Why or why not?
- 3) According to the segment, Phil Jackson believes that when it comes to reaching young people, most churches "just don't get it." Do you agree or disagree? With what effective faith-based youth programs are you familiar? What do you think the best way to reach young people with religion is? Would a hip-hop youth ministry work in your community? Why or why not?
- 4) Phil Jackson states that his goal is to "reach students where they are, and to take them where God would have them to be." Do you think this is an effective approach? Why or why not? What argument could be made for a more traditional approach?
- 5) When inviting participants to his services, Phil Jackson tells a man that the people at his services "look like you and act like you." Is it important for you to be in a faith community where people look like you and act like you? Why might this be appealing or not? Do members of your faith community look like you and act like you?
- 6) Games, raffles and prizes are all a part of services at The House. What is your reaction to this? Are religious services necessarily serious? Should they be? Why or why not? What words would you use to describe an ideal religious service?

7) The segment reports that the students who attend services at The House “are intrigued by the message,” as well as by the messengers -- those who perform and speak at the services. What do you think is most attractive about the services for young people? How do you think styles of worship have changed over time? Are you familiar with any alternative styles of worship?

8) Why might young people describe their relationship with God as “boring” or “weird,” as Meredith Kalina does in the segment? How or why does age affect one’s spirituality or connection to a faith community?

Hats in African-American Churches, Show #724 - February 13, 2004

For generations, African-American women have embraced the rich and cherished tradition of wearing hats to worship because of their social, cultural and religious significance. In the 1800s, slave women would cover their heads with bandannas decorated with wild flowers. Gradually, the wearing of hats by black women became more symbolic and spiritual, signifying respect for their African heritage and for God. Bob Faw explores the intersection of faith and fashion in the African-American church, and what hats really reveal about those who wear them.

1) Women wearing hats is a longstanding tradition in African-American churches. What does the segment present as the racial and historical significance of wearing hats? Do other groups or faiths have specialized clothing for worship? What are they? Are there any particular clothing traditions tied to your faith?

2) How has dressing changed over the course of your lifetime? Has society become more formal or more casual? Why? Why do you think the notion of “dressing up” for religious services was initiated? What purposes does it fulfill? What place does fashion have in faith?

3) The segment states that the hat tradition enables African American women to honor their ancestors. Do you have traditions or practices that honor your ancestors? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

4) Vanilla Bean, the milliner, states that “with the right attitude, any hat can be worn to church.” Do you agree? Why or why not? How do dress and attitude affect your self-understanding and faith beliefs?

5) Reverend Stanley says that hats give the women in his congregation “a moral authority.” Can clothing represent power or authority? How so? Can you think of any examples of “powerful” clothing?

6) After watching this segment, what do you think hats have to do with glorifying and respecting God? What have been the experiences of the women featured in the segment?

Gospel Music, Show #426 - February 22, 2001

In commemoration of Black History Month, *RELIGION & ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY* examines the role that gospel music plays in the African-American Church. Thomas Dixon Tyler, director of music ministries at Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington, DC talks about gospel music and explains that the energy of gospel music comes from history: "I look at this as more of a spiritual experience. It's an experience that took a people from one place of despair and oppression and opened up the windows of possibilities for hope."

- 1) What role does music play in your faith, if any? Why do you think music is such an integral part of so many faith traditions?
- 2) Thomas Dixon Tyler points out that African Americans shaped and fashioned white religion to meet their own needs. How have other groups, cultures or faiths shaped or fashioned existing religious practices?
- 3) According to Thomas Dixon Tyler, gospel music "tells a story." What role does the storytelling tradition play in your life and your faith? Do you have family, cultural or regional stories with which you are familiar? What are they? How are they preserved? How can music tell a story? What are the main differences between telling a story with words and telling a story with words and music?
- 4) Some gospel music is based on the songs of white composers. What are the origins or derivations of your favorite faith-based music?
- 5) What words would you use to describe gospel music? How is it similar to or different from other types of religious music? After seeing the segment, how did your impressions of gospel music change, if at all?