Keep the Doors Open: A Case for Preserving Individual and Institutional History

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INTRODUCTION
How does a 127-year-old rural Black organization thrive in the 21st century?

Founded in 1889 by free Blacks and former slaves, this church witnessed both the beginning and ending of Jim Crow laws and the election of our nation’s first Black president.

Today it struggles to keep its doors open.

A small congregation of mostly older adults who are either descendants of the church’s founders must find solutions that will preserve their stories and pass down their songs and traditions for younger generations to cherish.

METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TECHNIQUES USED</th>
<th>METHODS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>Met a subset of Black Baptist Church staff with a local historian and described the church elders and family members. Also met with scholars in Black history, historical preservation, and archives.</td>
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<td>Observation</td>
<td>Attended Sunday services and Founder’s Day Celebration, which included the traditional Sunday service plus a church party for family and friends.</td>
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<td>Archival Materials</td>
<td>Collected and photocopied church documents including the original foundation charter and survey; historical photographs; church bulletins; and the church cemetery’s map.</td>
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<td>Oral History</td>
<td>Received approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board. Conducted and coded semi-structured, in-depth interviews with church elders, pastor, and those who wanted to talk about the church’s significance to their family.</td>
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<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Surveyed those who are descendants of the church’s founders or who have memories of Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church.</td>
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<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>The history of the church and past events, Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory; Knowledge Management; and Oral History.</td>
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LITERATURE CITED


I want to thank: my loving parents who inspire me every single moment of the day, my family and friends in New Kent County, Virginia – who help me cherish my life, keep your stories and the stories of our ancestors. Dr. Art Markoe and Dr. Day Special for guiding me especially when my path was blurry; Dr. Starks Turner for her guidance and support. All of the HDO professors for being so open and responsive to my needs and Dr. Michelle S. Sosa DeSoto Schuster, my mentor. Dr. Cassandra Alonso. I use the 2016 HDO cohort for acknowledging you to get all of my research done, my dear friends, colleagues, Dr. UT Austin community, and everyone else who listened, asked questions, and gave advice and encouragement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Secure the Roots
Embrace the organization’s unique history by recording, preserving, and sharing the stories of the founders and community.

Highlight relevant historical events that demonstrates the organization’s ability to thrive in spite of the odds.

Build a Strong Core
Celebrate the multigenerational diversity within the organization. Discuss the needs of the often most vulnerable group and design strategies to build a supportive infrastructure.

Anticipate the Changing Seasons
Utilize institutional memory to find creative solutions that grow the organization and move it forward.

CONCLUSIONS

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church
Oral History Project

1. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church relies heavily on oral tradition in order to tell its 127-year-old story and that makes it vulnerable to lose it. Developing a 21st century knowledge management system will not only preserve that historical data but it will also serve as a reference when the leadership team strategizes for the future.

2. The act of listing to one another share stories about themselves and their ancestors reminded them of the church’s profound significance to the community and reinforces a desire to work together to keep the doors open.

3. Using various disciplines like history, anthropology, psychology, and business to develop this capstone, my research brought me closer to my own story. The HDO program has afforded me the opportunity to learn and develop the skills needed to serve this organization as it will be a part of my life forever.

I want to learn more about the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Oral History Project?

Want to learn more about the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Oral History Project?

contact

Janice V. Williams at jvwilliamscl@gmail.com

or visit

http://myorginsaroots.wordpress.com

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church
New Kent County, Virginia

Blah, blah, and blah. 2012.

Literture Cited

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