President’s Greetings

Reverend Little, Members of the Clergy, Distinguished Guest, Ladies and Gentlemen – Good afternoon and Happy New Year. It is indeed an honor and privilege to bring greetings from Norfolk State University on the occasion of this Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration at Metropolitan AME Zion Church.

Let me begin by giving recognition to a mutual friend, Reverend Kenneth Crowder. Reverend Crowder it is great to see you here today. Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of this celebration and for your many years of service to this church, this community, and the Norfolk State University Board of Visitors.

For those of you who do not know me, I am Melvin T. Stith, the new Interim President of Norfolk State University. As a son of Sussex County, Virginia and a 1968 graduate of Norfolk State, my wife, Patricia and I are no strangers to NSU or the Hampton Roads community. I am delighted to have an opportunity to serve in this capacity at my alma mater and equally as excited to continue the important work of building a lasting partnership with a church such as this where caring and serving the people matters.

The legacy of Dr. King is one that should be celebrated and remembered by everyone because his work and leadership was so transformative to our communities, our country, and the world. Having come of age during the Civil Rights Movement here in Norfolk, I can remember vividly piloting the Norfolk YMCA, so that my fraternity brothers could also sign up to join. My wife led and coordinated student busing from Norfolk to the March over to Hampton. We and so many of you that are present here today - joined King in the fight for Civil Rights not because it was easy or popular, but because we believed that all mankind should be afforded basic dignity and respect and that every individual that was willing to put in hard honest work deserved a fair shot at the American Dream.

In the year 2018, we have achieved a great deal, but there is still much more work that must be done before the dream can be fully recognized. Martin once said that if you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward. As a people and as a community we will continue moving forward against racism and injustice because perseverance is part of our DNA.

Let us also continue the important work of educating this generation and the generations to come on the monumental sacrifices Dr. King and those who worked alongside him made for the
freedom and liberties that we continue to enjoy today because those who do not know history are destined to repeat it.

It takes a village to raise a child and to grow a university. The doors of Norfolk State University are always open for community dialogue and partnership. I hope to see each of you at one or more of the many activities we host on our campus.

Thank you for providing Patricia and I with the opportunity to be here today to bring you greetings and for serving our communities and being examples of what true leadership means. Be blessed and please enjoy the rest of this service.