

**“BEYOND NEW WINE:
TOWARD A 21ST CENTURY BLACK PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH GROWTH STRATEGY”**

*A Focus Paper addressing issues
for prayer, study and action by
Blacks in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*



presented by the



Black Presbyterian Church Growth Committee

at the request of the

**National Black Presbyterian Caucus
and the
Office of Black Congregational Enhancement**

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BEYOND NEW WINE: TOWARD A 21ST CENTURY BLACK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GROWTH STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION:

This "Focus Paper" on Black Presbyterian Church growth was developed by a Black Presbyterian Church Growth Committeeⁱ (BPCGC) created by the National Black Presbyterian Caucusⁱⁱ and the Office of Black Congregational Enhancementⁱⁱⁱ. The committee includes experienced leaders from every region of NBPC and representatives from the Black Presbyterian Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Growth Development. The BPCGC examined several position papers on Black Presbyterian Church growth that emerged from leader consultations between 1990 and 1997^{iv}. (These papers can be retrieved from the NBPC website^v). This committee will continue to circulate this paper and gather the results from the discussions of Black Presbyterians across the Church. The results will be used to develop a comprehensive Black Presbyterian Church Growth Strategy.

One paper, "*Is This New Wine?*"^{vi} surfaced in 1993 with abrupt freshness within some Presbyterian circles. For many it was a challenge long overdue, and for others it was "sound and fury signifying nothing." However, regardless of the initial reaction to the document, it remains a significant evolution in contemporary Black Presbyterian thought. "*Is This New Wine?*" urges Black Presbyterians to reexamine their biblical calling as persons of African descent living in the Diaspora. It critically focuses the gazes of Black Presbyterians on their Africentric heritage and Christian imperatives. Citing the twin maladies of chattel slavery and self-hatred as demonic examples of human behavior gone wrong, the 1993 "*Is This New Wine?*" document argued for a new reality among Black Presbyterians, new spiritual, political and social consciousness and, ultimately, a new Black Presbyterian denomination, if necessary.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this "Focus Paper" is to engage NBPC local and regional chapters, Black congregational leaders, Black Presbyterian staff and governing body leaders and Black leaders in seminaries and other educational institutions to engage in serious discussion, planning, and action around what they will do to grow strong, vital, spirit-filled Black congregations and NBPC chapters for a maximum Black Presbyterian witness in their committees, presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly. This paper is a "Focus Paper" that will generate dreams, ideas, and actions within every arena of Black Presbyterian leaders.

We are asking the leaders to compile their suggestions for church growth and NBPC chapter development and send them to NBPC. The time line is included in the study guide for this paper. Suggestions from leaders will be incorporated in a Black Presbyterian Church Growth Strategy for the 21st Century. We hope this "Focus Paper" will give maximum opportunity for Black Presbyterian leaders to develop this much needed strategy.

VISION:

As Black Presbyterian leaders, we will proclaim the gospel of Jesus from an Africentric Christian spirituality and discipleship that liberates people, history, cultures and institutions from the dehumanizing effects of racism, classism, sexism and addictions of all kinds. We seek to empower Black Presbyterian clergy and laypersons to bear witness to the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. This resurrection power is embedded within our own experiences with God from our African and Black American legacy and it has relevancy for our homes, congregations, communities, denomination, and our global society today.

Black Presbyterian congregations will proclaim the good news in ways that effectively promote personal and congregational spiritual growth, evangelism, Caucus and community development. They will empower persons to overcome poverty, low self-esteem, unemployment, under employment, miseducation, racism, violence, destructive teen behavior, sexism, family breakdowns and classism. Congregations will be caring, nurturing communities of faith that proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to heal and transform persons and their communities. We will engage resources from both the public and private sector to transform broken down, dirty, poverty-laden inner city Black communities into beautiful, green, well cared for, growing and renewed parishes.

Black Presbyterian leaders will be empowered to reclaim the inner-faith convictions of their fore-parents about discipleship, liberation, justice, and fulfillment as revealed by the biblical witness of God's grace and love. They will learn to do church-based community organization ministries that provide employment, housing, economic parity, technological equity, and an overall better quality of life. They will develop the skills to creatively manage change in ways that increase the well being of communities.

The future development and growth of Black Presbyterian congregations demand that NBPC local and regional chapters take the initiative. NBPC leaders must look beyond the denomination for additional financial support for the ministry of Black American congregations and will become pro-active in developing new strategies for evangelism, church and community development. They will work with governing bodies to increase Black Presbyterian membership from less than 5% to more than 10% by the year 2010.

Black Presbyterian leaders are committed to continually joining with other Racial Ethnic Presbyterians to help the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to become authentically multi-cultural, to promote healing and reconciliation from the effects of racism and to fully express the Kingdom of God in its mission and ministry.

TOWARD A STRATEGY:

There are, no doubt, numerous specific areas of mutual concern upon which we could focus; and, the particular areas to be addressed would surely vary by region of the country and particular congregation and even individual consciousness. Each must be voiced and defined and pondered and acted upon accordingly. But, where do we begin? And, how far do we go? We must begin with the particular local congregation. The Book of Order reminds us that

“The particular church carries a vital responsibility in the mission of the church... Without this basic ministry to persons, neighborhoods, and communities, and the support given at the congregational level through prayer, personnel and money, any other significant ministry of the church becomes impossible...”[G-7.0102]. Therefore, our emphasis must be upon the development of healthy and viable Black Presbyterian congregations.

Some unarguably key areas of emphasis for effective congregational development/ redevelopment suggested by the BPCGC:

Leadership Development

There is an alarming and growing absence of Black students and teens in positions of responsibility in our congregations and in our governing bodies/committees. How can we be truly concerned about our predicament in the denomination without being alarmed that we might not even have “voices” to speak our concern in 20-25 years? Unless we build our leadership, we can’t perpetuate our legacy. We must take advantage of (and create) any opportunities to develop leaders, particularly among teens and young adults.

In most of our congregations, more than 90% of the members are not actively involved in Christian Nurture and the congregation’s ministry. They are not in a growing relationship with Christ which leads to discipleship. This must change! Congregations must increase their emphasis on the Spiritual growth and ministry through Christian Education, Evangelism and Community Outreach. Every means possible must be made to engage every member in Spiritual growth activities and ministry. The pew-sitting season is over!

Affirmation of Female Clergy

There are 80-plus Black Presbyterian Clergy Women serving the body of Christ within the local church, diverse governing bodies, college and seminary classrooms, and local and global mission sites. They are pastors, evangelists, community organizers, economic developers, healers, justice advocates and lobbyists, professors, authors, poets and Spirit workers. In 1999, African American Presbytery Clergy Women (AAPCW) celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Ordination of Black Clergy Women to the office of Word & Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In the beginning of this new millennium, the Black Presbyterian Clergy Woman can be likened to the unnamed woman in the account of Jesus’ anointing at Bethany. The Black Presbyterian Clergy Woman too often goes unrecognized, rebuked and rejected with bitterness in the very church which has birthed her. They are invisible, unrecognized and powerless; often the last “hired” to that church which is furtively trying to beat death back with broken spirits and diminished vision.

Black Presbyterian Clergy Women are the most underutilized constituency in the Presbyterian Church. The Church is greatly in need of their services; however, it is reluctant to extend the invitation of Senior Pastor to Black Clergy Women. This is not an omission; but, it is blatant

discrimination, ironically, by victims of discrimination. Black Presbyterians have internalized the disease of their oppressors, and now practice it with precision resulting in self-mutilation. We must end the practice of rejecting, rebuffing and resisting the authority of our sisters.

Accountability of Governing Bodies

We are empowered to demand qualitative changes in our relationship with PC(USA) governing bodies. Our attitude must change so that we recognize these entities as working for us – not over us or looming above us. We seek optimal, equitable relationship with these entities who are our partners in ministry. And, if a major initiative affecting Blacks is at first defeated on the floor of General Assembly, we can use this defeat to strengthen our remobilization efforts and keep coming back until we succeed.

Stewardship

Effective Black congregational development/redevelopment requires commitment to and a planned strategy for a “holistic stewardship” emphasis. This includes recognizing, affirming and utilizing the rich variety of gifts of people in the congregation, and increasing the financial base to ensure that the congregation is empowered for a 21st Century ministry.

The Book of Order affirms “A faithful member accepts Christ’s call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of his Church. Such involvement includes... supporting the work of the church through the giving of money, time and talents...”(G.5.0102d). Further, that the session has the responsibility “to challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship of money and time and talents...” [G-10.0102h].

The following strategy is recommended for the effective implementation of stewardship emphasis in Black Presbyterian churches:

Effective stewardship in Black congregations requires the following:

1. Teach members the spiritual blessing of giving.
2. Bold preaching and teaching on holistic stewardship, including tithing.
3. Commitment to be a “tithing church.”
4. Pastors who do not tithe should not pastor.
5. Elders who do not tithe should not serve.
6. Challenge officers and members to increase their giving, through tithes, offerings and service, by the vision of their ministry and mission.

National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC) Role

NBPC must develop a strategy for creation of chapters in every city and in areas where we have substantial Black Presbyterian presence. This strategy will be strengthened by: (1) a system of communicating with all chapters through newsletters, correspondence and regional gatherings; (2) maintaining regular contact with chapter presidents; and, (3) assisting chapters

in developing structures of governance and a clear understanding of their role with respect to church growth.

This strategy should include a clearly delineated relationship between NBPC local chapters and regions, presbytery and synod executives. In addition, each chapter should assist local churches in developing a church growth and ministry strategy designed to clarify its understanding of the need to reach out beyond itself and develop new relationships, consistent with the paradigm for ministry that trains and enables individual members to work and function outside the walls of the church.

NBPC must:

1. Develop a comprehensive strategy to register and recruit every Black Presbyterian for membership.
2. Develop a mindset that the Presbyterian Church can become a church for all people and, therefore, every Black person is a potential candidate for membership.
3. Develop a series of print publications that further clarify our goals to recruit.
4. Develop a strong website and Internet presence.
5. Challenge the General Assembly around the declining number of Black staff members and work to recruit additional Black staff at every level of church government.
6. Consider the areas where it is possible to develop non-geographic presbyteries and develop strategies for implementation.
7. Redefine and focus our energies to abolish the crippling and debilitating effects of racism, sexism, classism and other forms of racial injustice.
8. Negotiate with widespread and universal media such as cable television (e.g. Black Entertainment Television) and develop a national broadcast for Black Presbyterian witness.
9. Establish a strategy whereby a minimum of 10,000 Presbyterians gather each year for the general NBPC convention.

In the future, NBPC must also:

1. Consider the development and creation of an economic enterprise such as a Black bank or hotel/conference establishment.
2. Develop strong international relationships with Blacks in Africa and the Diaspora for the purpose of focusing our energies and ministries to alleviate pain and suffering and to promote a greater social righteousness.
3. Develop an aggressive, beneficial relationship with a bank or other financial institution, thereby creating a series of financial offerings, along with the creation of affinity tools such as an NBPC credit card.
4. Explore discussions with the Presbyterian Foundation about ways of utilizing their services to enhance the financial well being of the collective NBPC constituency.
5. Strengthen the relationship with Johnson C. Smith Seminary and consider the possibility of relocating the NBPC headquarters to Atlanta.

A CALL TO ACTION:

The National Black Presbyterian Caucus calls on Black Presbyterians to hear the Lord, and rise and pick up your pallet.

We call for a **National Summit on the State of the Black Presbyterian Church**. This is the end of seven years of prayer, study and reflection, as outlined in the “*Is This New Wine?*” paper. We urge all Black Presbyterians to convene in Los Angeles on April 25-29, 2001 at the Sheraton Airport Hotel to seriously consider what we do next, how we do it, and where we are going.

We urge all Black Presbyterian pastors and congregations and all local NBPC chapters, prior to the **Summit** in Los Angeles, to engage in intense study of this paper (and review of the “*Is This New Wine?*” paper) and come to the **Summit** prepared to discuss and begin the development and implementation of a 21st Century Church Growth Strategy for Black Presbyterians in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

God has called us to be partners of parity with all Presbyterians and not merely objects of mission. Unto Black Presbyterians much has been given; and, likewise, of Black Presbyterians much is required.

God bless you. See you in Los Angeles.

ⁱ Members of the Black Presbyterian Church Growth Committee are: Rev. Ella Busby, Rev. Jerry Cannon, Rev. Timm Cyrus, Rev. Dr. Rita Dixon, Elder Eleanor Doty, Rev. Leon Fanniel, Elder Valerie Giles Reynolds, Rev. Luther Ivory, Rev. Dr. Carroll Jenkins, Rev. Dr. Lonnie Oliver, Elder Roscoe Overton, Rev. Ethelyn Taylor and Elder Earl Thompson.

ⁱⁱ The National Black Presbyterian Caucus, an organization of 650+ members, represents the collective voice of advocacy and action for Black Presbyterians within the structure of the PC(USA).

ⁱⁱⁱ The PC(USA) Office of Black Congregational Enhancement is part of the Racial Ethnic Ministries Program Area of the National Ministries Division of the PC(USA).

^{iv} Historical Position Papers: (1) *Black Staff Consultation on Strengthening Black Congregations (1989)*; (2) *Report from Consultation on Strengthening Evangelism and Stewardship in Black Congregations (1990)*; (3) *The Balm in Gilead Report (1991)*; (4) *African American New Church Development (1993)*; (5) *A Survey of Selected African American Presbyterian Churches for the Study of Church Redevelopment*; (6) *Is This New Wine? (1993)*; (7) *Rationale for Non-Geographic Presbytery*; (8) *African American New Church Development: What Works and Why* (9) *The Black Church: Styles of Worship*; and, (10) *A Study Paper on African American Presbyterian Church Development (1995)*; and, (11) *A Vision and Action Strategies for Black Presbyterian Church Development by the African American Advisory Committee*.

^v NBPC website: www.presbyterianchurchusa.com/nbpc/nbpc.html

^{vi} See Attachment A: “*Is This New Wine? A paper addressing African American issues for discussion within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*”