



MINUTE FOR MISSION

Freedom Rising

Freedom Rising is a witness to the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ. The Confession of 1967 says, “In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity, and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations”

Recognizing the symptoms of systemic oppression damaging the lives of African-American men, including mass incarceration, high rates of unemployment, and state violence committed against our black brothers, among others, the 222nd General Assembly established the Freedom Rising fund to facilitate the Church’s response. A \$5-million goal has been established to fund pilot initiatives in five American cities—New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Charlotte, and Baltimore—that will respond to the needs for support, development, and healing and result in the thriving of African-American men.

The response in each city will take the shape of local needs and work with programs and agencies in their midst. This ensures community responsiveness and will maximize impact. For example, Pittsburgh will be working on a program of church-based mentoring for young black boys, while Cleveland is focusing its work on undermining white privilege and using arts ministry as a tool for its work.

The initiative bears the name of the man who traveled to the Assembly meeting in Portland to advocate its passage, Eugene “Freedom” Blackwell, who died of cancer two months after seeing the passage of the overture.

“Eugene Blackwell was a friend and inspiration to many. He brought together a coalition of Christians (in Pittsburgh) to invest in his community that otherwise might never have worked together,” says Sheldon Sorge, general minister to presbytery in Pittsburgh.

“Freedom maintained great faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to do abundantly above all that we could ask or think. He lived in Scripture, then applied it to the great needs facing his community. He was unafraid.”

“Because of his life and witness, his community will never be the same. The churches that he motivated to join his mission will never be the same. Pittsburgh Presbytery will never be the same. And thank God that is so!”

And so, in the spirit of Freedom’s life and ability to inspire Christians from diverse backgrounds to work together, this initiative invites the whole church to consider using the portion of the Peace & Global Witness Offering retained by the local congregation or mid council to support these cities in this initial work. By coming together, the church will, as the words of the Belhar Confession claim, “stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged.”

For the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), this means standing with our African-American brothers in these five American cities, and by God’s grace we will keep working until we all see Freedom rise.

Let Us Pray

God of peace and reconciling love, may your justice roll down like waters to wash away racism and its impacts. Let freedom and equality gain a foothold in every community. **Amen.**

(These are the bullets from the overture that have citations for them as well)

- The shootings and beatings of African American males, including: Michael Brown, 17-year-old, Ferguson, Missouri; Eric Garner, 43-year-old, New York City, New York; Freddie Gray, 25-year-old, Baltimore, Maryland; Kimani Gray, 16-year-old, New York City, New York; Miles Jordan, 18-year-old, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Trayvon Martin, 17-year-old, Sanford, Florida; Tamar Rice, 12-year-old, Cleveland, Ohio; Tyree Woodson, 38-year-old, Baltimore, Maryland.
- Murder as a rising and prolific cause of death in African American males: While only 6 percent of the overall population, black males accounted for 43 percent of murder victims in 2011. Among youth ages 10 to 24, homicide is the leading cause of death for black males.
- The escalating and excessive incarceration of African American males: Nearly 3 million black adults were arrested in 2012. As of November 2015, blacks made up 37.8 percent of the jailed population but just 13.2 percent of the U.S. population. Of the 526,000 black males in state and federal prisons in 2013, 14.3 percent, or roughly 75,000, were between the ages of 18 and 24. There were 261,500 black people in local jails in mid-2013. In 2012, black males were six times more likely to be imprisoned than white males.
- Deteriorating educational and employment opportunities for African-American males: Blacks make up 32 percent of the students being suspended and/or expelled from grade schools but only 16 percent of the student population. During the summer months (June–August) of 2013, just 17 percent of black teenage boys (ages 16–19) were employed, compared to 34 percent of white teenage boys. Overall in 2013, half of young black men (ages 20–24) were employed, compared to more than two-thirds of young white men. This employment gap persists as men get older.