

Starting Strong Churches in the Black Community: A Guide for Pastors and Church Leaders

Oliver R. Phillips
Mission Strategy USA/Canada Director

Introduction

In his now out-of-print book, *Color Us Christian*, Dr. Roger Bowman says that the first Black church in the denomination began in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1902 as a storefront sidewalk mission at 568 Atlantic Avenue. By 1975, there were 64 predominantly Black congregations with approximately 2,500 members. In the same year, there were over 125 Blacks enrolled in Nazarene educational institutions.¹

By 1990, there were 122 congregations serving Black communities. The next 11 years were comparatively lean, with the present report of 121 congregations and a combined membership of 11,903.

The future cannot be held hostage to present alarm, nor can it be paralyzed by a protracted analysis of past failures. There must be an intentional and aggressive effort to bring Black people into the Church of the Nazarene. The most effective way to do this is by starting new congregations.

This booklet introduces a new currency of partnership, one that will seek and identify white Nazarene congregations that will become sponsors of new congregations to serve Black communities.

Authentic mission requires all of us to reach African-Americans for Christ. The nature of this mission places before every congregation the challenge to be missionaries in our neighborhoods with equal commitment and courage as we have employed in foreign lands. The Black community is, indeed, an inescapable mission field ripe unto harvest.

My prayer is that this booklet will bring you and your congregation some measure of hope that the cause is not lost, the effort is not futile, the ideal is not distant, the mission is not alien, the cost is not disproportionate, and the result will ultimately be left to God.

This is God's Kingdom, so may we join God in winning the lost!

Oliver R. Phillips, Black Ministries Mission Director, NCM USA/Canada

Section One **The Changing Face of Black America**

The third largest ethnic group in America is the African-American population, which is behind English-speaking whites and Hispanics. With stuttering advances, Black people have forged a particular niche in American society ever so conscious of the need to maintain their unique cultural characteristics. However, the one attribute that has defined their culture has been an abiding confidence in the daily discipline of spirituality.

Being Black in America is not an easy existence. The search for answers to transcendent existential questions has always been central to the quest for meaning, security, and friendship. For this reason, among others, religious life to Black people in America continues to be one of a constant tension between the God (they believe to be) of justice and the decaying conditions under which they are forced to live from day-to-day.

For whatever reasons, Black America is changing! Maybe it's because perceptions are being corrected. The common view of Blacks is that they are angry, unhappy, discouraged and unfulfilled—a rebellious group that feels oppressed and hopeless. Recent research done by the Barna Group paints a very different picture of 21st century Black America. By their own reckoning, Blacks are happy, optimistic and successful, and have lower levels of stress and a less pronounced perception of oppression than the media would have us believe.

Yet, there is cause for concern about the content of Black American faith. Inconsistencies have crept into Black thinking that may alarm those in evangelical circles. Observe:

- Four out of five believe that the Bible says "God helps those who help themselves."
- Six out of ten believe that Satan is a symbol of evil, not a living force that can influence people's lives.
- Half would say that a person could earn eternal salvation by being a good person or doing good deeds.
- Four out of ten contend that when Jesus was on earth He was a sinner.
- Four out of ten indicate that the Church does not help them handle the challenges they face in daily life.
- Four out of ten say that there are some crimes or sins a person may commit that not even God can forgive.
- Four out of ten state that it does not matter what faith group you associate with because all of the major religious faiths teach the same principles.

The most encouraging sign in all this is that, nationally, African-American churches are increasing at the rate of 13.5 percent annually.² White evangelical denominations must seize the opportunity to share their own theological preferences and options with people of African descent or they will be found guilty of contributing to the further polarization of the races.

The emphasis of this booklet on the contextual relevancy for the African-American new church pastor points to the urgency of the task for the predominantly white Church of the Nazarene. Unless the new church pastor takes pains to know the new group's social structures, problem-solving mechanisms, community history, leadership expectations, informal leadership approaches, and educational levels, starting a strong new church will not occur. Intimate involvement with the African-American community must take place for significance to transpire in a new church.

Section Two

The African-American Mission Field

Billions of dollars were appropriated in the 20th century to send missionaries to the continent of Africa under the mandate to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. While the task has been admirable and has resulted in the conversion of millions, no one should be so naive as to believe that it is forgivable to neglect the mission field on these American shores.

A look at the spiritual propensities of the Black population would suggest that the harvest field is ripe. The Barna Institute's recent research on the Black community reveals a compelling mandate. Consider the following:

49% of African-Americans attend church on any given Sunday. (1999).
 81% of African-Americans describe themselves as "spiritual." (1999).
 African-Americans are more likely than average to say that they are "committed born-again Christians." A belief held by 61% of African-Americans compared to 39% of adults nationwide. (1999).
 94% say "having a close, personal relationship with God" is "very desirable" for their future—the top-rated desire for their future (1996).
 91% say their faith is source of emotional strength (1996).
 54% of Black adults are born-again Christians. (2000).
 82% believe that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Creator who rules the world today.
 2% believe that there are many different gods, each with different power and authority.
 1% believe that there is no such thing as God.
 69% believe that they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.
 12% do not know what will happen when they die.
 6% believe that they will go to heaven because they are a good person.
 5% believe they will go to heaven because God loves all people and will not let them perish.
 4% believe that they will go to heaven because they have tried to obey the 10 Commandments.
 3% believe that when they die they will not go to heaven.³

The Challenge for the Soul

There are two serious challenges for the souls of Black people in the inner cities. The first is Islam. Islam is gaining most of its U.S. converts in prisons and on university campuses. The majority of American converts to Islam—85 to 90 percent—are Black. Of the estimated 6 million Muslims in the U.S., 2.6 million are Black. One out of every 15 Blacks identifies him or herself as Muslim.

Why are inner city youth so attracted to Islam? Why has the Christian message of salvation and redemption become a relic of the past? The answer lies in the message, rather than the messenger. With calculation, the message of the Black Muslims has been designed to present a framework of relevance and hope. Here are some of the distinctives of the Islamic message to Black communities:

The Black Muslims are aggressively evangelizing inner city neighborhoods with an unequivocal gospel of strict morality, respect for Black women, and Black empowerment. The Black Muslims have had impressive results in rehabilitating drug addicts. In a street culture where teen pregnancy is rampant, many young women find the ultraconservative dress codes and practices of Islam great protection from some aggressive males. The Black Muslim's most visible appeal to Blacks is its message of Black pride and empowerment. The chief complaints about the Church are that it is too female, male unfriendly, and irrelevant to daily life. Islam is seen as actively trying to fill the gap. Black women, much concerned about their disappearing Black men, seem willing to adjust to a hierarchical system if it means saving the Black male.

The white evangelical church must inventory the methods appropriated by the Muslims as they have made inroads into the Black community.

The second challenge to the Black church is one of grappling with the perceived conspiracy to destroy the Black male by systemic and programmed incarceration.

The disproportionate representation of Black Americans in the U.S. criminal justice system is well documented. Blacks comprise 13 percent of the national population, but 30 percent of people arrested, 41 percent of people in jail, and 49 percent of those in prison. Nine percent of all Black adults are under some form of correctional supervision (in jail or prison, on probation or parole), compared to two percent of white adults. One in three Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 was either in jail or prison, or on parole or probation in 1995. One in ten Black men in their twenties and early thirties are in prison or jail. Thirteen percent of the Black adult male population has lost the right to vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws.

Black youths are 15 percent of the population, yet account for 26 percent of those arrested, 45 percent of those detained, and 40 percent of those in residential placement centers.

Section Three

Why Start New Churches?

Peter Wagner states that "church planting is the most effective means of evangelism."

God's redeeming love in Christ is the motivating factor, coupled with the mandate of the Great Commission. The very nature of God's Church is one of a living organism, growing, reproducing, and multiplying. Consider for a moment this trilogy:

New churches tend to be less internally structured and more outreach minded, aiming their ministries more at reaching the unchurched with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

New churches are often rallying points for newcomers to a growth area or for others who have drifted into spiritual inactivity.

New churches provide opportunities for Christians in older churches to become involved in the birth of something new, for which future generations of Christians will thank them.

If America is the new mission field, the relevant question must be, what do effective missionaries do? They go where the people are and start new churches.

Biblical Principle

The church is the gathered body of redeemed persons banded together for worship and witness. Called out by God to faith in Jesus Christ, the local church provides the framework in which the manifestation of His person can be seen in the world today. This leads to the operational premise that our task is not solely to evangelize the world, but to make disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). Next to the family, the Church is probably the most important institution that God has created.

Studies indicate that if a denomination wishes to reach more people, the number of new churches it begins each year must equal at least 3 percent of the denomination's existing churches.

The Sullivan Principle

Bill Sullivan, director for US/Canada Mission/Evangelism Department, is probably the most articulate and passionate advocate for new churches in the Church of the Nazarene. He speaks to the church of the 21st century: "No single church can reach everyone. No two churches can

reach an entire population. Sizable numbers and types of churches are required in order to evangelize most towns and cities."

"Having a multiplicity of churches provides a congregation for various group preferences. This is the cultural task. Immigrants, cultural groups, and other persons having unique interests in common are able to find a church that meets their particular needs."

"More important, however, newer churches more often demonstrate the dynamics necessary for effective evangelism to occur."⁴

Testimony of Church Leaders

Elmer Towns: "The Great Commission implies that church planting is the primary method to evangelize the world.... God's primary method of evangelizing a new community is by planting a New Testament church to reach the area with the gospel."⁵

Raymond Hurn: "Older churches flourish and grow when challenged with the evangelistic effectiveness of starting new churches. New life and vitality form, creating a happy, rewarding, fulfilling experience for the sponsoring church. For too long, we have looked at new church planting on the basis of its costing established churches members and money."⁶

C. Peter Wagner: "Remember this single fact: It's easier to have babies than to raise the dead. Not that all existing churches are dead, or even that most of them are. Most can and should be brought to life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Still, the most exciting part of the hospital is the maternity ward."⁷

Section Four

Coming to Terms with Assumptions

By and large, white Protestant evangelical denominations have not been successful in reaching Blacks because of two basic excuses that are often used: Some have advocated relentlessly for the creation of blended congregations. It is very popular today to hear white Nazarenes rejoice in the day when both Black and white Nazarenes could worship together in the same sanctuary, at the same time. This is an achievable goal if it were not for the fundamental differences in the cultures. The problem with this is that it leaves out the Black communities in favor of the suburbs.

The second excuse is an unstated fear, perhaps, that if a congregation were to start a church in a Black community, it would never outgrow its financial dependence on the parent body. Starting Nazarene churches cost money—educated clergy, buildings, programs, etc.—more money than one finds in Black communities. Or so we think..

Upon in-depth investigation, it would be found that the second excuse could be dispelled. Proper stewardship requires of us that we invest in Kingdom-building without regard for the immediate results. The first of these excuses is more troubling.

God works in the language and culture of those to whom salvation is offered. It is not necessary to surrender one's cultural identity in order to be a Christian, or for that matter, a Nazarene. God uses one's ancestral identity as legitimate gifts, as well as a means of revealing love, peace and justice to the world. Churches that reflect culturally distinct ministries are being used by God to reach unchurched people. These churches must never exclude people of other cultures, but because of their context and/or their calling, they are oriented to a particular cultural, language or geographical settings. As our surroundings become increasingly multicultural, especially in the

urban communities, it is right that the people of those communities be given the opportunity of affiliating with a congregation that reflects their cultural heritage and meets their particular needs.

There are other factors that make it imperative to minister to a particular group of people. While some may suggest that we should minister to all people, it is also obvious that targeting a specific group may be the most practical thing to do. "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34 KJV). God loves all and "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). These scriptural idioms do not militate against selectivity in effective ministry. It is inconceivable to reach all people simultaneously with the gospel, as churches go—"one size doesn't fit all."

African-Americans like to worship with others who share similar cultural mores. If the neighborhood around the congregation has become Black, and the congregation has not been able to minister to the new residents, it may want to consider starting a church that ministers primarily to African-Americans.

It may well be argued that starting separate churches for Blacks may further divide the denomination between white and Black. Many beg to differ. Any strategy to facilitate a multicultural denomination should fundamentally employ a four-pronged comprehensive approach. These are:

- Start churches that reflect the cultural and ethnic composition of the community.
- Start churches that cater to the myriad immigrant groups that are becoming a vital part of communities.
- Start churches that are intentionally multicultural to provide a place of worship in multiethnic communities.
- Provide assistance to white as well as minority congregations who share a genuine commitment to racial and ethnic diversity.

The Religious Marketplace

In the religious marketplace there should be sufficient flexibility to develop ministries to various niche groups. Consider these initiatives made by businesses to make customers of the ethnic populations:

- Estee Lauder produced a slickly packaged cosmetic brand, All Skins, aimed at urban women with all skin colors.
- Mattel Inc., has offered Black Barbie dolls that, with the exception of their skin color, are identical to white Barbie dolls.
- Chemical Bank has installed Russian-language automated teller machines at its branch in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, to capture the business of the Russian population.
- The nine Tianguis stores of Vons supermarkets in California sell cuts of meats popular in Mexico, such as fresh beef lips and pig snouts.
- A New York downtown Hospital, near Manhattan's Chinatown, appeals to Chinese patients by serving dishes like congee, or rice gruel, and bean curd with black bean sauce.⁸

Section Five

The Uniqueness of the Black Experience

A common question asked about ethnic specific ministry is one concerning unity. Are we not all Christians and is this not the central commonality we should focus on? To this one responds with a resounding "Yes." We are all disciples of Jesus and inextricably of the same body. This is

indeed our common call. However, within the diversity of the body there is a unique call and place for ethnic-specific ministry to minister, teach, train, heal, challenge and reach a generation of people in the context of their culture and experience.

Even if we would recoil at the idea of separate churches, the fact remains that if Black and white Americans come from different worlds, it is only natural to expect them to have churches that are different, and to have adopted worship mores that are fundamentally worlds apart. Of course, there is only one true church and all Nazarenes are charged with being unified in Christ (Eph. 4:4), but the difference is one of degree rather than of kind. Where freedom is allowed there can be valid variations. The Black church is different in at least four areas: preaching, worship, pastoral care, and expectations.

Preaching

As Robert Franklin, president of Interdenominational Theological Center, has recounted, "Black Christians have come to expect sermons to be poetic masterpieces that are biblically rooted, politically prophetic, intellectually stimulating, emotionally evocative, rhetorically polished, pastorally positive, personally sensitive, and reverently and joyfully delivered."⁹ It is this hybridity that has given Black homiletics in general a preaching experience that is defined by the layperson as a chanted musical expression of the common biblical stories and language. Yet, it is more than a mere repository of cultural interpretations of the sacred Book. "Black preaching is a survival instrument designed to identify and restore hope in a people whose past is replete with reasons to be hopeless, and whose present is disconnected from the existential portfolio of success and meaningfulness that epitomizes the American dream."¹⁰ Above all, Black preaching is liberative.

Worship

In the Black church, music and singing are second only to preaching as the magnet of attraction and the primary vehicle of spiritual transport for the worshipping congregation. In some of the more traditional churches, even the sermons are still sung in a kind of ritualistic cadence peculiar to the Black church.¹¹

In the Black church, singing together is the reaffirmation of a common bond that, while inviolate, has suffered the pain of separation since the last occasion of physical togetherness. Black theologian, James Cone, says, "Black music is unity music. It unites the joy and the sorrow, the love and the hate, the hope and the despair of Black people;... It shapes and defines Black being and creates cultural structures for Black expression. Black music is unifying because it... affirms Black being is possible only in a communal context."¹²

One point of worship that should be noted is the decrease in the number of Wesley's hymns that are being sung in the Black church today. Cone explains that a major reason is that in European hymnody in general the textual focus is seldom on liberation. He noted, "White Christianity may refer to liberation in limited times and places, as shown by the abolitionists, the social gospel preachers, and the recent appearance of liberation theologians in Europe and North America, but liberation is not and never has been the dominant theme in white church songs, prayers, and sermons."¹³

Pastoral Care

The distinctive feature of pastoral care in the Black community is to be found in the way in which the pastor addresses the quality of life issues. Life stories have become the cornerstone. Black pastors narrate stories that help people catch a glimpse of hope in the midst of suffering. By linking their own stories and those of the Bible, Christians can find purposeful directions in life, despite suffering and pain.

The story of Joseph, for example, is most often used in Black pastoral care. The eschatological plot in the story is an unfolding of the purpose of God. The Black pastor's task is to reveal this unfolding plot, so that when Christians identify with that story, they have linked their own lives with the dynamic force behind the events of life.

The missional purpose of God's rule in this world is to draw all people and nations into God's story, so that the resources of God's reign can be made available to them for their growth and development.¹⁴

Expectations

Black churches and clergy have been continually involved in a broad range of social justice issues. This attitude stems from the liberating tradition of the heritage of Black churches, which were based on their own interpretations of Old Testament stories, prophetic pronouncements, and the New Testament apocalypse.¹⁵ The Black minister is expected to be more than merely a spiritual gadfly in the community, calling people to repentance. The minister and the church must help the community grapple with the social and systemic structures that adversely affect the yearning for justice and equality.

Section Six

The Sponsoring Church

One of the most exciting and rewarding things a church can do is start a new community of faith. It can also be one of the most difficult and daunting ministries the congregation will ever undertake.

Christian Schwarz writes, "Hardly anything demonstrates the health of a congregation as much as the willingness and ability to give birth to new congregations. The opposite is true as well. Hardly anything is a more clear indication of illness than structures which by design hinder church multiplication, or at best permit it as an absolute exception."

Rick Warren, founding pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, while growing the congregation to over twelve thousand people, started at least one congregation every year.

In his book, *Starting Strong New Churches*, Bill Sullivan drew attention to the characteristics of the 7% of the churches started in the 80's that had attained economic viability. These were, a core group, financial support, and ongoing emotional support from the sponsoring church. His conclusion was that sponsorship carries obligations. These obligations are:

Excellence - A commitment to excellence in starting the new church. The goal is a strong new church, fully organized and fully self-supporting.

Leadership - A willingness to permanently give leadership and other personnel to form the core group of the new church.

Oversight - A willingness to provide continuing concern for, and oversight of, the new church project until it is fully organized.

Certified Leader - Agreement to work closely with the district superintendent in the selection of a new-church pastor and to choose leadership that has been approved and recommended to begin a new church by a certified Assessment Center.

Finance - A willingness to assume financial responsibility for starting the new church and bringing it to fully organized status.... A graduated scale of budget responsibility should be instituted during the years that the new church is under the direction of the sponsoring church.

Self-Support - Agreement that the new church will not be returned to the district for responsibility until, and unless, the new church is fully self-supporting.¹⁶

Be Prepared

The local congregation should begin a bridge-building process that would open the doors for an awareness of the particularities of the Black community. Here are some ideas:

- Establishing a care fund (for people who need initial help with bills).
- Driving people to appointments (doctor, dentist, social services, etc.)
- Know good lawyers who can help with landlord-tenant disputes.
- Know where the welfare office is, and how to apply. Be willing to go with them and assist with application.
- Know where the clothing and food banks are, what their hours are.
- Find out where jobs are and help with completing job applications.
- Learn about GED and other vocational programs for those who wish to be involved in adult education.
- Know where childcare services are available.
- Know what the qualifications are for low-income housing, where to apply, how to apply; assist with follow up with these agencies during the "waiting period."
- Know where there is rental housing where 'ethnics' are welcomed (or accepted) by the management. (Not many, but some landlords are pressured not to allow "too many" minorities into their complexes).
- Find out when and where the job fairs are.
- Know when and where free immunizations are available.

Interaction with the African-American community would inevitably become the cornerstone for any future church planting effort among the targeted group.

Recognizing the felt needs within the community sends a message to the group that the sponsoring organization cares about the things that matter most. Too often mission groups are not sensitive to the temporal needs of persons and cultures who find it difficult to access the basic amenities of life. When churches are planted after attention is given to these needs, relationships are fostered that are meaningfully constructed.

Section Seven

The African-American New Church Pastor

The sponsoring congregation should be committed to finding a Black pastor or church starter who would be the pioneer of the new work. This does not by any means suggest that cross-cultural ministry cannot be effectively accomplished. It is only a recognition that affinity and familiarity with the customs and culture should be something to be treasured.

Although such homogeneous churches raise important theological questions about inclusivity and the breaking down of social, racial, and generational barriers in the Church, they are likely to be the most effective means of reaching a plural culture. At the same time, good models of multicultural churches are needed in the mix. The questions must not be dodged, but the traditional answers and structures (many of which are homogeneous by default rather than design) may not be the only ones.

Barna Research:

"The research findings demonstrate why most of the efforts at developing multi-racial congregations or creating multi-ethnic worship services fall flat. These different population groups have relatively little in common. They may believe in the same Jesus, but the ways in which they express their faith and experience their savior are radically different. Frankly, our interviews suggested that most Blacks don't have much interest in being part of a multi-racial worship experience. They don't hate whites and they do not dismiss the white spiritual experience—but neither do they feel any need to appropriate it as their own. Their faith culture is unique and is one life element that Blacks are neither willing to alter nor abandon."¹⁷

Qualities to Look for in a NewStart Pastor

- Spiritual gifts package that includes leadership, faith, discernment, evangelism
- Communicates vision in an inspiring and practical manner.
- Capacity for excellence. Self-starter and self-managed strong need to achieve.
- Creates ownership of ministry. Recruits, coaches and delegates effectively.
- Cooperation and agreement of spouse and family about roles and expectation in ministry.
- Appreciates and accepts a wide variety of people, able to respond with compassion when needs arise.
- Consistently develops relationships with unchurched people.
- Community responsive, culturally relevant ministry mindset

Robert Franklin best describes the expectations that the Black community has of its ministers and church:

- The minister should serve as an anointed spiritual guide who mediates an encounter with the holy.
- The minister should be a grassroots intellectual encouraging informed public discussion.
- The minister should be the civic enabler who empowers neighborhoods through the political system and volunteerism.
- The minister should be a steward of community economic development.
- The minister should be the cultural celebrant who affirms the African past and designs rituals to teach values that animated traditional African societies.
- The minister should be the family facilitator designing programs to address the needs of entire families.
- The minister should be technologically literate, a visionary harnessing technologies to improve lives.¹⁸

Preparation of the Church Starter

It would be to the best interest of the sponsoring church to seek the approval of the district superintendent in the selection of the person to start the new church. Two critical steps should be advised.

1. Assessment Centers

The New Church Leaders Assessment Center is an intensive four-day event during which ministers and spouses are observed and evaluated to determine the appropriateness of a specific minister to serve as the founding pastor of a new church. It is not an evaluation of a person's qualifications for ministry in an existing church. It is essential that married couples attend together if at all possible.

The emphasis of the centers is on the evaluation of the new-church skills, not on pastoral abilities.¹⁹

2. College of New Church Knowledge

The second step that is essential to success is the participation in the annual College of New Church Knowledge . These are 3-day workshops that focus on entrepreneurship skills and ideas for starting a new church. These Colleges of New Church Knowledge are held in each of the eight regions of the United States once a year.

Section Eight

The Black Church in the Urban Culture

The Black church recognizes that it cannot afford to be an isolate in community. It is an integral part of the political, social, and economic system, and unless the church awakens to this reality, it will become a powerless institution incapable of bringing about genuine liberation.

There must of necessity be an interdependent link forged between the Church and the Black community. Herein lies the survivability of the church and community. The Black church is called upon to shape and determine the destiny of Blacks in the urban setting. The cities of our nation are faced with economic, social and political problems that equal and to some extent surpass the problems of an earlier era. In his classic book, *The City of God*, the African theologian, St. Augustine , Bishop of Hippo, argued that justice is the first condition required for the existence of the city.

The Black Church and Social Policy

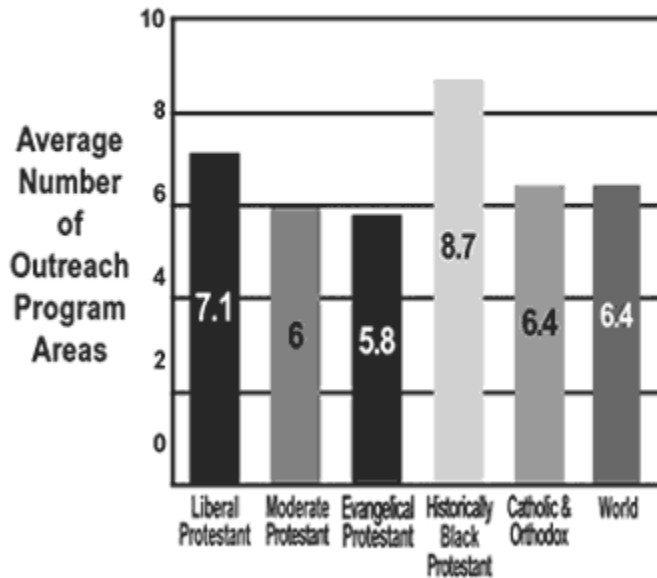
A critical issue for the Black church is the question of fairness regarding equal opportunity and affirmative action. There are many in the evangelical circle who would suggest that preferential treatment or quotas are inherently unfair because they give preference to one group or race over another. Still others passionately assert that discrimination is something of bygone years. The Black church must champion the advocacy for the implementation of affirmative action because it is designed to redress grievances and to hire and promote a proportionate number of minorities.

If the church is to be viable in the urban setting, then it must radicalize its perspective regarding its role as an institution and begin to understand its strength in order to change the nature of urban America . The mandate of the prophet Amos still holds today because there remains a need for justice and righteousness to prevail. The church has a responsibility to its constituents and to the larger society to help transform our society into one where liberation and justice will be realized during our lifetime.²⁰

Hartford Institute for Religion Research

(from *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States*)

Hartford Institute for Religion Research



Recent studies conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research confirms that the Black church has traditionally involved itself in issues of justice and advocacy. Contrary to some published experts, congregations with a strong commitment to social justice and with direct participation in community outreach ministries are more likely to be growing than other congregations. This pattern of social involvement contributing to congregational growth is true across all denominational groups.

Any church in the Black community, to be credible, cannot ignore the plethora of needs that are the result of systemic and societal neglect. Here are some areas of needs that could be addressed:

- Single female heads of household
- The problems created by excessive welfare dependency
- The increasing number of marginally educated and school drop-outs
- The chronically unemployed
- Criminal and prison recidivism
- People who need help in meeting financial emergencies
- Counsel in coping with addictions
- Advocacy on behalf of those who cannot deal with the bureaucracies of government.

Ministry of Compassion

Involvement in some form of ministry to the needy is critical in the Black community for three reasons:

It provides a point of redemptive connection with the community. Simply proclaiming the Word is one-sided; people must believe that the Word is worth listening to and that it is relevant to their lives.

It adds credibility to our communication. People see the good news as good news only when we have done good in their lives.

Compassionate ministry is commanded by God. "Religion that God our Father accepts is pure and faultless in this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress," as well as "to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).²¹

Section Nine

Practical Steps From Conception to Birth

Wayne Schmidt says, "Dysfunctional churches tend to beget newer but still dysfunctional churches—healthy churches are necessary to impact a whole community."

Prepare for Parenthood

- Get God's vision for your ministry.
- Expose yourself to a successful NewStart and its pastor.
- Establish dialogue with two or more Black churches in the community.
- Conduct a demographic study of your ministry area.
- Raise the "mission temperature" of your congregation and its leadership.
- Appoint a task force to investigate the feasibility of starting a new church.
- Secure congregational approval for the new project.
- Communicate clearly with district leadership.

Plan for Parenthood

- Search for and identify a pastor for the new church. Is the new pastor going to be bi-vocational or full-time, lay or ordained, home-grown or imported?
- Develop a strategic plan including the targeted geographical area, timing of the first service, and the relationship with the sponsoring church.
- Allow time for prenatal development. Establish opportunities for the new-church pastor to bond with the sponsoring congregation and cultivate commitments to the project.
- Determine a dear, decisive birth for the new congregation.

Proceed with Parenthood

As has historically been acknowledged, parenthood has its own peculiar problems that are inherent in the process.

Sponsoring Church Issues

It would be naive to presume that there would not be lingering causes for concern as complex problems surface in the nascent stages of birth. As with human birth, it would be wise to anticipate these areas of possible tension, some of which are:

- The appearance that more time and money is being spent on the new arrival.
- Be prepared for bumps along the way.
- Members of the sponsoring church should exercise patience and tolerance.
- Growth is sometimes qualitative rather than quantitative.
- Prepare for the emotional loss brought on by the increased independence of the new congregation.

NewStart Issues

- A long-term framework for continued accountability should be established.

Responsibility for self-funding of the new church should be expected.
Budgets and allocations should be prayerfully accepted.
Independence should be the ultimate goal of the new church.
A strategic plan should be crafted for the development of new leadership.

Endnotes

- 1 Bowman, Roger E. *Color Us Christian* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1975).
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