

ACTION ITEM FOR GAC BUSINESS

FOR GAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY. ASSIGNED TO:			
A. Evangelism and Witness		D. Leadership and Vocation	G. PCUSA, A Corporation
B. Justice and Compassion		E. Shared Support	H. Executive Committee
C. Spirituality and Discipleship		F. Audit	I. Personnel Committee
P. Plenary			

Subject:

Task Force to Develop a Strategy for African American Church Growth Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Recommendation:

10-01/08

The Task Force To Develop a Strategy for African American Church Growth Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do the following:

- I. Approve the report on “Developing An African American Church Growth Strategy.” within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).**

Rationale

In light of the General Assembly mandate to increase racial ethnic membership in the PCUSA by 20% by the year 2010¹, the National Black Presbyterian Caucus recognizes the critical necessity to take the lead in developing a Strategy for African American Evangelism and Church Growth.

We recognize that a disservice is done when focusing on models from the “mega-church” movement and trying to make those models adaptable and relevant for smaller churches. We also recognize that models which are successful for Anglo-American congregations and for non-African American congregations of color are not applicable to the African American church context.

For these reasons, it is crucial that NBPC, working in concert with the Office of Black Congregational Enhancement (BCE), take the initiative and provide the impetus for transformation and growth of the Black Presbyterian congregations.

- II. Approve the following recommendations:**

1. Encourage the GAC, specifically, the Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/Presbyterian Women ministry area, to appoint a Task Force to monitor the progress of African American Church Growth and report to the 219th General Assembly (2010).
2. Encourage the General Assembly Council to partner with the National Black Presbyterian Caucus, presbyteries, and synods so that the strategies outlined below for African American Church Growth become a reality in the church at large. These strategies were approved at the 39th Annual Convention of the NBPC, held in Society Hill, Philadelphia on July 11-15, 2007.

¹ 210th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), June 12-20, 1998, Charlotte, North Carolina

3. Encourage presbyteries and synods to help the church to reach the goals established by the 1998 Racial Ethnic Immigrant Evangelism Church Growth Strategy.

Background:

Rationale

These recommendations are a final response to the following referral: 2004 Referral: Item 10-01. Recommendation 8. To Direct Racial Ethnic Ministries to Assist the National Presbyterian Black Caucus to Develop a Strategy for Church Growth For African American Congregations – From the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (Minutes, 2004, Part I, pp. 56, 683).

In light of the General Assembly mandate to increase racial ethnic membership in the PCUSA by 20% by the year 2010¹; the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC) recognizes the critical necessity to take the lead in developing a Strategy for African American Evangelism and Church Growth. Despite the issuance of the aforementioned mandate, we have not realized significant net growth in African American membership in the PCUSA.

African Americans have been a strong witness in the Presbyterian Church for more than 200 years, which is testimony to our strength, resolve, and commitment in spite of seemingly insurmountable odds. African Americans have given voice and shape to the denominational structure. As it strives to do what God requires of us: “to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8), and in light of our Christian witness, the Task Force, on behalf of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus, invites the 218th General Assembly to partner with us as we continue to celebrate our faith journey within our denomination.

Following are strategies which we encourage presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly offices to implement in order to ensure that the 1998 Racial Ethnic Immigrant evangelism Church Growth Strategy achieve the objective of increasing African American membership in The Presbyterian Church USA.

- a. New Church Development and Transformation: Create a congregational-based educational resource and initiative.*

Rationale: This initiative will be designed to assist African American congregations to develop alternative ways of initiating and promoting New Church Developments and Transformation churches. This will include churches in transition in their respective presbyteries, with an emphasis on restoring what we perceive as a lost connection with our communities.

- b. Leadership Development:*
 - i. Create an Evangelism and Missional Church Institute for African American pastors and congregational members to train and equip Pastors for a missional approach to church growth.*
 - ii. Develop a uniform standard for training Commissioned Lay Pastors*
 - iii. Sponsor annual discernment events with prospective African American youth and young adult inquirers.*
 - iv. Establish Teaching Congregations*

Rationale: Missional theology maintains that the mission of the church *is* the mission of God. God is a missionary God Who sent Jesus Who sends us to carry out the *missio dei*. The Evangelism and Missional Church Institute will

serve as a repository of talent and knowledge for Pastors and congregational leaders. The institute will provide workshops, lectures, and seminars in the missional approach to church growth.

The future of African American Presbyterians is dependent upon a deep reserve of talented and gifted pastors, clergy, and lay profession. Discernment events will allow young and old alike to explore the various ministry tracks in which they may serve the church and fulfill God's call in their lives.

An emersion experience in a nurturing environment would provide pastors a fresh and challenging transformational setting for both a spiritual and vocational encounter. It is a sabbatical event and an opportunity to fine tune old skills and learn new insights for personal, community, and ecclesiastical transformation. Such a sabbatical experience will allow pastors to retool, refresh, and provide creative time to envision innovative strategies.

c. Youth and Young Adults:

- i. Provide leadership development institutes*
- ii. Host annual gatherings to help shape their Christian witness within the Body of Christ, i.e., education and discipleship training.*
- iii. To develop youth and young adult networks.*
 - a) Encourage the use of electronic media.*
 - b) Exchange of youth and young adult ministry models*

Rationale: Without the youth and young adults, the church will die. Youth and young adults will only stay with the church if they have a meaningful leadership voice and role, positions where they are able to see where their decisions take effect.

The Institute needs to establish a future leaders component of the institute to help those who hear God's call and are inquiring of next steps. Youth and young adults need a place beyond the church's immediate environment to explore and nurture their sense of call. They need a place where the approach is realistic and practical.

Fellowship and training opportunities are needed for young adults who have already answered the call to serve God. Many of our churches have a small segment of young adults for whom these gatherings will also create opportunities for networking with the larger body of Christ. As a vital part of the church today, youth and young adult options and dreams must be explored.

Youth and young adults communicate through electronic media. Their gifts in this area can be used as the vehicle to network and promote Christian witness in intergenerational ministry.

d. Clergy Women:

- i. Develop an accountability strategy for the calling of AA women as Senior Pastors*
- ii. Promote the call of women to viable and validated ministries.*
- iii. Design and create resources to emphasize and enhance awareness of the gifts of African American Clergy Women in the PCUSA.*

Rationale: The PCUSA for the last 33 years has acknowledged the gifts of Black women in ministry and has authenticated the call of Black women to serve in validated calls. However, the church still does not have an organized and systematic means to address the entrenched resistance in Presbyteries and congregations to call Black Women to validated ministries.

In several cases where females have been called to African American congregations, they are offered minimal salary, poor working conditions, and have to prove themselves in ways that are unthinkable by male pastors. Women pastors still have to settle for small, disgruntled congregations who, in many instances, only extend the call to a woman because a male pastor was not available.

The above reasons have resulted in a disparity in the number of women called to validated ministries.

Resources are needed (i.e. pamphlets) to highlight successful African American Ministry Models that can be used by Presbyteries, Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPM), Committees on Ministry (COM) and Pastor Nominating Committees (PNC) for the purpose of supporting clergy women in their call.

e. *Evangelism:*

- i. *Design creative ministries that attract our target population and encourage the development of a relationship with our faith community.*
- ii. *Provide gatherings for ministers of music and worship leaders.*
- iii. *Encourage partnerships between African Heritage Presbyterian Association of Musicians and congregations.*

Rationale: There is a need to create a network to research and develop creative ministry ideas to be shared among congregations. Each of these ministries will be designed to provide opportunities to share the gospel with the persons who participate in these ministries. The focus is to move beyond the expectation that new persons will primarily enter our faith communities through traditional ministries (i.e. Worship, Bible Study, Sunday School, and special events).

Equipping congregations with resources to deepen their appreciation for music ministry, and the diversity of options that are available to them, is the by-product of this effort.

ⁱ 210th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), June 12-20, 1998, Charlotte, North Carolina