

16-03 African American Church Growth Strategy Report.
Source: Agencies **Sponsor:** No Assignment
Committee: [16-03] Church Growth and PILP **Type:** General Assembly Full Consideration
Topic: Unassigned
<http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4023>

ASSEMBLY ACTION

On this Item, the General Assembly, acted as follows:

Approve

Voice Vote

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On this Item, the Church Growth and PILP Committee, acted as follows:

Approve

[Counted Vote - Committee]

Affirmative: 47 [**This action has not been verified for accuracy by committee leadership.]

Negative: 0

Abstaining: 5

RECOMMENDATION

The General Assembly Mission Council, on behalf of the African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force, recommends that the 220th General Assembly (2012) do the following:

1. Direct the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) to hold a national consultation of representatives from the GAMC, African American leaders with experience in evangelism and church growth, the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC), and mid councils to be held in 2013, in order to develop strategies and collaborate on growing new and existing African American congregations and communities of faith in the PC(USA).

2. Direct the GAMC, specifically Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/PW and the Evangelism and Church Growth ministry areas, to train and deploy five regional coaches to collaborate with mid councils and congregations to implement the African American Church Growth Strategy.

RATIONALE

These recommendations are a final response to the following referral: *2008 Referral: Item 12-01. Report, "Strategy for Church Growth for African American Congregations." Recommendation 2. Encourage the General Assembly Council, Specifically the Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/Presbyterian Women Ministry Areas, to Appoint a Task Force to Monitor the Progress of African American Church Growth and Report to the 219th General Assembly (2010)-From the General Assembly Council (Minutes, 2008, Part I, pp. 12, 1235-37).*

The African American Church Growth Strategy is a strategy of the whole church. Thus all participants (GAMC, African American leaders serving congregations. National Black Presbyterian Caucus [NBPC], and mid councils) must commit to work together in growing African American congregations and communities of faith.

Local African American leaders who have demonstrated skill and passion for growing churches should be recruited to work closely with African American congregations, mid councils, and Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/PW and the Evangelism and Church Growth ministry areas in the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC), in order to collaborate on approaches for evangelism and church growth.

Growing African American Congregations: Striving to Build Upon a Legacy

African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force Report

African Americans have been strong witnesses in the Presbyterian church for more than 200 years. This is testimony to their faith, commitment, and strength in spite of seemingly insurmountable odds. African Americans have given voice and shape to the denominational structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As African American Presbyterians strive to build upon a legacy in this present age, the African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force encourages the PC(USA) to serve as an active participant and to engage fully in the African American Church Growth Strategy, as we continue to celebrate the faith journeys of African Americans in the PC(USA).

A. *Background*

The 207th General Assembly (1995) asked the Hispanic/Latino-a and Native American Congregational Support Offices (formally Hispanic and Native American Congregational Enhancement Offices) to develop strategies to help the church grow in these areas. The 208th General Assembly (1996) called for the PC(USA) to increase its racial ethnic membership to 10 percent by the year 2005, and to 20 percent by the year 2010. The 210th General Assembly (1998) approved the "Racial Ethnic Immigrant Evangelism Church Growth Strategy." The 216th General Assembly (2004) approved a recommendation directing Racial Ethnic Ministries to assist the NBPC to develop a strategy for church growth for African American congregations. Later, the 218th General Assembly (2008) approved the Strategy for Church Growth for African American Congregations and directed Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/PW to appoint a task force to monitor the progress of African American church growth. Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/PW appointed the African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force, and NBPC, in consultation with the African American Congregational Support Office, appointed an African American Church Growth Strategy Implementation Team.

In 2008 and 2009, NBPC held its biannual meetings in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, respectively. The focus of the biannual meetings was the African American Church Growth Strategy. Workshops and conversations were focused in five areas: (1) New Church Development/Church Transformation, (2) Leadership Development, (3) Youth and Young Adults, (4) Clergywomen, and (5) Evangelism.

B. *Observations*

Implementation of the African American Church Growth Strategy has the possibility of producing positive results in contributing to the overall Racial Ethnic Immigrant Evangelism Church Growth Strategy. Such an understanding requires pioneering and visionary leadership, nurturing congregations, and supportive and consistent staff support from mid councils and the General Assembly. Presbyteries and sessions, who understand that healthy churches grow spiritually, programmatically, and numerically are the best allies in accomplishing the African American Church Growth Strategy.

The African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force reviewed and evaluated the African American Church Growth Strategy. This review included comments and conversations with the African American Church Growth Strategy Implementation Team, presbytery executives, African American staff persons serving the PC(USA), and NBPC members. We also reviewed statistical information from the Office of Research Services in the GAMC, and we offer the following observations:

1. The action of the 210th General Assembly' (1998), setting for itself goals for racial ethnic membership growth, was visionary, however, it needed more mid council support and funding in order to create and implement the Racial Ethnic and Immigrant Evangelism Church Growth Strategy.

2. A significant delay of ten years occurred in creating the African American Church Growth Strategy, from 1998–2008.
3. The African American Church Growth Strategy needed a clear structure of accountability.
4. The African American Church Growth Strategy was not clear on ways congregations and presbyteries could implement the strategy.
5. The African American Church Growth Strategy was not designed for the participation of the whole denomination.
6. The African American Church Growth Strategy needed more support from NBPC.
7. A more clearly defined vision statement would have contributed to a clearer plan.

African Americans are the largest racial ethnic group in the PC(USA) with 468 worshipping communities (463 congregations, 3 new church developments, and 2 Bible study fellowships) (Source: Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries/PW Statistics). African Americans have been members of the Presbyterian church for hundreds of years. The Reverend John Gloucester formed the first African American congregation in 1807 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Of the 10,560 congregations in the PC(USA), 463 are predominantly African American churches. Or in other words, approximately 4.5 percent of congregations in the PC(USA) are African American congregations. (According to Research Services, congregations reporting. Research Services considers an African American congregation to be one with African American membership of 80 percent or more. Note: These numbers do not include African American members of predominantly European American congregations, multicultural communities of faith, or African American new church developments or Bible study fellowships). Of the 463 African American congregations in the PC(USA), 49 percent (or 218 African American congregations) currently have vacancies in the solo pastor or head of staff position.

As of December 31, 2010, the total membership of the PC(USA) was 2,016,091. There were 70,256 African American members (Source: Research Services, congregations reporting). In other words, 3.5 percent of Presbyterian members are African American members.

What we know is this: the African American Church Growth Strategy is needed. It has not had the necessary time for implementation. Additionally, there are strong, vibrant, and growing African American congregations that can be studied and modeled for African American church growth.

C. *Biblical and Theological Foundation*

In the *Racial Ethnic Church Growth* report presented to the 210th General Assembly (1998), the section entitled, “A Theological and Biblical Foundation,” reads,

Through Jesus Christ, God offers salvation to every race and tongue, to every person and every nation (Rev. 5:6, Acts 17:26, Eph. 2: 14-15, Gal.3:28). God has created diversity and celebrates it (1 Cor. 12:11). The capstone of universality is the fact that God identified so much with the world that God gave God’s only child that the world would not perish but be saved (John 3:16).

God works within the language and culture of those to whom salvation is offered. God uses ones tribal, cultural, racial, or ancestral identity as legitimate gifts, means of revealing love and justice to the world. It is not necessary to surrender one’s cultural identity in order to be a Christian. All Christians, regardless of color, class, size, or gender are chosen people. They are saved, transformed into communities of praise, and sent forth to share the good news of God’s love with people of all nations.

The PC(USA) must increase its efforts to be a denomination that respects, values, celebrates, and empowers cultural diversity in mission, ministry, and governance; a denomination where differences are not seen as inequalities or evidences of inferiority; a denomination that is a covenant of kinship where all profess Christ as Lord and Savior; a denomination that sees evangelism as a reflection of personal and corporate faith, as well as a sacred witness for justice and peace; a denomination in which every one can exercise her or his gifts as moved by the Holy Spirit in faith, hope, and love" (*Racial Ethnic Immigrant Evangelism Church Growth Strategy Report, 2006, pp.3-4; see also Minutes, 1998, Part I, p. 407*).

God uses African American communities of faith with racially and culturally distinct ministries to help in reaching unchurched people. Evangelism and church growth to African American people is inherent in the mission of the PC(USA), thus the church continues to be challenged to live up to its vision of becoming God 's beloved community.

The African American Church has played a major role in the life and mission of Jesus Christ through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Called into being in the throes of American slavery, "The emergence of Black Presbyterian congregations was one prong of a battery of reactions to the prevailing social, economic, political and religious climate affecting the status and future prospects of blacks in the United States of America in the 19th and 20th centuries" (*Periscope: Black Presbyterianism—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: 175 Years of Ministry-1807-1982, 1982, p. 2*).

Historically, African American Presbyterian churches served as a sanctuary for those who were oppressed, provided opportunities and upward mobility for those who were consigned to the margins of life, and produced key leaders in movements for social change in America and abroad, including being instrumental in the abolition of slavery and the struggle for civil rights.

Led by the Confession of 1967, "The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it" (*The Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967 Inclusive Language Version, 2002, 9.44a*).

This noble cause is one that has not been easy to accomplish, and the journey to wholeness is incomplete. Systemically, African-Americans struggle disproportionately with health care, education, unemployment, housing, and incarceration. It is in this context, historically, that African American congregations have risen to the challenge to serve Christ in our society and throughout the world. As we continue to strive towards breaking down racial barriers that separate us and keep us from becoming God's beloved community, the call of African American Presbyterian congregations remains relevant.

D. *Future Directions for African American Presbyterian Congregations and Communities of Faith*

The foundation has been laid by African American Presbyterian congregations and communities of faith, their faithful witness to God has made an indelible impression upon the landscape of the PC(USA), locally, nationally, and globally.

Called into being in the wilderness of oppression, African American congregations and communities of faith responded to the voice of God to be sanctuary for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice. African American communities have faithfully stood in the crucible of racial tension, advocating for reconciliation and equality within the household of God.

This is the legacy of African American Presbyterian congregations and communities of faith.

This report of the African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force is presented to the 220th General Assembly (2012) with the hope that implementation of the African American Church Growth

Strategy will result in a new framework for discerning the will of God and building toward the next stage of missional journey in serving Christ in the world. Working collaboratively with the Office of African American Congregational Support in Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries/PW, the Evangelism and Church Growth ministry areas, mid councils, and NBPC, we strive to realize the vision of

- 6 percent new African American disciples by the year 2020;
- an increase in African American women serving as heads of staff and teaching elders in healthy congregations;
- spiritual growth among African American youth and young adults;
- African American congregations and communities of faith effectively engaged in the communities in which they are located;
- increased Bible study and prayer ministries in African American communities of faith that lead people to discern their sense of call to ministry in the church and in communities beyond the church walls.

The implementation of the recommendations in the African American Church Growth Strategy Task Force Report will provide African American communities of faith, those that are chartered congregations and those that are emerging new ministries, to grow African American congregations and strive to build upon a legacy. Working together with all in the church to fully implement the African American Church Growth Strategy will signal the beginning of an era in the PC(USA) where the good news of God's love is shared with people of all backgrounds and where we will begin living the vision of God's beloved community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION
(2013) \$41,750 (2014) \$12,525 [GAMC - Unrestricted]
COMMENT
COMMENT
ACREC ADVICE AND COUNSEL

ACREC advises that the Item 16-03 be answered by the advice and counsel of ACREC to Item 05-12 (Mid Council Commission Report of the General Assembly), which was to approve an alternate resolution to read as follows:

"1. Instruct the Moderators of the 218th, 219th, and 220th General Assemblies (2008, 2010, 2012) to appoint a Racial Ethnic Ministry Commission.

"2. Empower the appointed commission to develop strategies to address the questions raised in the reports noted above, and to be granted adequate budget for this work.

"3. Direct the commission, in consultation with representative groups, to develop strategies toward the path forward for the PC(USA)

"a. for the development and support of ministries and structures that support and grow established and emerging racial ethnic congregations;

"b. for the development and support of ministries and structures that support and grow multicultural congregations;

"c. for the development and support of ministries and structures that support new immigrant congregations;

"d. for the growth of understanding of the issues race, culture, and ethnicity raise within the Christian community, including development of churchwide strategies to raise consciousness of white privilege.

"4. Provide commission staffing from both the Office of the General Assembly and the General Assembly Mission Council.

"5. Give representation on the commission to the following groups:

- "a. racial ethnic caucuses
- "b. new immigrant congregations and ministries
- "c. racial ethnic congregations
- "d. multicultural congregations
- "e. Women of Color Joint Working Group
- "f. mid council staff
- "g. ACREC
- "h. GACOR;

"and that all decisions would be made by consensus in order to ensure voice for all commission members.

"6. Direct the commission to consult with other groups as needed, both within and outside the PC(USA), to develop workable and sustainable strategies.

"7. Bring recommendations to the 221st General Assembly (2014)."

Rationale

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns hears echoes of voices from across the church in the report's Recommendation 8, which calls for the formation of a National Racial Ethnic Ministry Task Force. Specifically in reports to this General Assembly, calls have been made for

- a national consultation to develop strategies and collaborate on growing new and existing African American congregations and communities of faith in the PC(USA)(Item 16-03, African American Church Growth Strategy Report, Recommendation 1);
- the development of a national strategy for Hispanic/Latino Church Growth, and infrastructure built to support this new strategy (Item 10-17, Hispanic/Latino/a Leadership Conversation Group Report, Recommendation e.);
- a national consultation to develop strategies and policies to support racial ethnic, multicultural, and new immigrant church growth in the PC(USA) (Special Task Force to Study Racial Ethnic and New Immigrant Church Growth, Recommendations 1-6);
- recommendations to develop effective strategies for the development of racial ethnic and new immigrant worshipping communities; train seminary students in emerging cultural realities, and develop strategies within our seminaries to work toward curricular and faculty reform and change, that we might train racial ethnic and new immigrant leaders more effectively; develop multilingual resources and translation capacities to better witness within our increasingly diverse society; explore disparities in compensation between those of more and less represented groups in our church; develop resources to support the growth of new immigrant ministries and congregations, and increase the understanding among Presbyterians of white privilege that we might repent and be renewed and empowered for more faithful service (Item 16-07, Report of the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church in the 21st Century, Recommendations 1.c., 3.a., d., e., 4., 5., 6.b., c., f., and 8, respectively).

These, in addition to the recommendation from the Mid Council Commission to develop a National Racial Ethnic Ministry Task Force, make it clear that while Presbyterians have been thinking about racial ethnic and new immigrant ministries for over a century—and while many faithful ministries have been launched in many contexts that have borne much fruit—we know and are voicing in many arenas our awareness that there is still much work to do. Race, culture, and language still divide us, marring the image of Christ we share with a world in need and blunting our witness to the good news. The current excitement about developing “1001 New Worshipping Communities” will not be realized without the engagement and investment of racial ethnic Presbyterians. To date, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has not addressed issues of race and culture sufficiently to ensure either that the needed engagement would happen, or that the voices of racial ethnic Presbyterians would be heard in the conversation.

Therefore, to faithfully steward the resources entrusted to us by taking a proactive approach to a number of overlapping initiatives and recommendations, the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) advises the 220th General Assembly (2012) to answer all the recommendations noted above with the approval of this recommendation.

GACOR COMMENT

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) respectfully advises that Item 16-03 be approved by the 220th General Assembly (2012) and offers this comment:

When mid council participation is a goal, committees on representation may be helpful partners. Especially when concerned about the adequate support and nurture of constituencies traditionally underrepresented in leadership and decision-making, committees on representation or entities that fulfill these functions have a role in the council. The GACOR is willing to assist the leaders of this task force in connecting to relevant mid council leaders for their purposes, and targeting digital training resources for leaders involved in the conversation.

The General Assembly Committee on Representation is made up of sixteen persons, elected by the General Assembly, who are drawn from ruling and teaching elders from across the church. Its mandate and functions are described in G-3.0103 of the Book of Order (Form of Government).