

Reconciliation and Global Missions

African Americans have served in white mission organizations for at least 170 years. The Methodist Church began using African American missionaries by 1835, the Protestant Episcopal Church and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions by 1836, and the Southern Baptist Convention by 1855.¹ African American mission societies have existed since at least 1897, with Baptists founding the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention.²

Since New Testament times, Christians have been tainted by ethnic pride and prejudice, carrying dominant cultural attitudes into their mission work. Racial problems have surfaced when blacks serve in white organizations. Issues of candidate qualifications, leadership on the field, and, historically, potential intermarriage have strained relationships. Conversely, few if any whites have served in black foreign mission organizations.

If our application of the Gospel does not reconcile ethnic Christians on this side of the ocean, it won't work on the other side, and we shouldn't export it. However, when blacks and whites show up together, obviously love one another and serve in harmony, that Gospel is difficult to refute, particularly against the backdrop of racially motivated hate crimes worldwide. These have been committed almost daily in Russia, Germany, the Balkans or the US, and more widely in Rwanda, Darfur and Kenya.

Dr. Michael Johnson is an African American missionary with World Gospel Mission, which is predominately white. He is a catalyst for ethnic unity in missions and wrote in *Making the Lame Man Blind* (p. 158):

The challenge for white mission agencies is how to incorporate people of other cultures into their programs. How can they possibly minister to other cultures in a more effective way than they are doing? My answer is to start understanding and accepting other cultures right in their own back yard (that is, if they haven't moved from the "changing" neighborhood).

This challenge is addressed in a unique partnership between the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Association (FBFA) and the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE)--groups partnering in the US for missions overseas. Racial reconciliation in missions is also a focus of an African American Missions Strategy Seminar January 17-19, 2008 at Columbia International University.

It takes history to overcome history. According to EC Haskell, Executive Administrator of Missions Relations at ABWE, several at that mission have known a member of FBFA for years, Frank Gainer, a scientist.³ ABWE president Dr. Michael Loftis and EC Haskell got to know FBFA president Dr. Allen McFarland. Cooperative mission began with personal relationships.

Illustrating the pivotal role of repentance in racial reconciliation, Haskell and Loftis became aware at a June 2006 pastor's consultation of a man who had applied to be a missionary with ABWE, but had not gotten a response. He went elsewhere. Loftis met with the man, now in his nineties. Records weren't kept of applicants who didn't join ABWE, so there was no paper trail. However, this minister was called forward at the consultation and Loftis apologized for the failure of ABWE to respond. Some black leaders came forward after the meeting in tears saying significant progress in reconciliation had taken place, and that they felt themselves accepted. According to an ABWE news release, "Dr. Loftis stated that the ABWE leadership is humbled and grateful for FBFA's spirit of forgiveness regarding sins of the past, as some members of the FBFA were denied entrance into ABWE in the 1950s."

Dr. McFarland was later contacted by ABWE about a partnership --then he came with other FBFA leaders to ABWE for three days in December 2006, during which they hammered out a partnership agreement. ABWE leaders had been concerned for over ten years that missions should be promoted among non-white churches. Loftis felt the need partner in missions with African Americans, according to McFarland.

Why did Loftis and McFarland initiate this partnership? McFarland had personal history to overcome. He came to the US, was saved in Washington, DC and took classes at Washington Bible College. He asked himself, If the school was so evangelistic, why didn't they come to my community? Eventually he lost his hatred of whites. He studied at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Today he pastors a rapidly growing church. He wanted more blacks to become involved in mission. At an ABWE missions consultation in October 2006, at which Loftis had asked him to give

devotions, Loftis learned more about FBFA, and it was “a no-brainer to join together,” according to McFarland.⁴ ABWE missionaries work with missionaries FBFA knows in Ghana, and FBFA leaders visiting in Africa were impressed with ABWE field staff, further bonding the relationship.

However, misunderstandings had to be overcome. McFarland was concerned that white missionaries were living in compounds and that missionary children (MKs) went to their own schools. He was told that missionaries lived in compounds due to security issues. Through honest interchange McFarland and Loftis developed their friendship. He probably helped ABWE see missions from an African American perspective.

Each organization contributes to the partnership. According to Haskell, ABWE provides fulltime missionary service opportunities and more generally can help give a global vision to FBFA churches, beyond Africa. Missionary qualifications are clear in advance, to prevent misunderstanding if someone doesn't qualify. FBFA can provide a better ethnic representation for ABWE in its constituency, home office, Board, and mission force.

McFarland listed the mutual benefits as: (1 FBFA churches are willing to allow ABWE missionaries to do deputation in their twenty-eight member churches, so that FBFA churches will support more missionaries and so that FBFA churches will want to have their own missionaries. (2 ABWE will accept qualified missionary candidates from FBFA churches. (3 ABWE missionaries coming off the African field will hopefully get involved in FBFA churches. (4 ABWE encourages FBFA members to come and work at headquarters, so white folks aren't the only ones seen there. (5 FBFA and ABWE will partner on the mission field.

How could similar partnerships be formed? According to McFarland, the first thing is for white organizations to make it known that they have no color or racial barriers, but instead wish to tear them down.

White organizations exemplify the fact that they don't need African Americans, as demonstrated in brochures and conferences. It's a silent message. The story's being told that African Americans can't be found. When one makes it known publically who we are and all are welcome, and market strategically to African Americans, that's the beginning....

How important is repentance as a foundation for partnership in ministry? It's very important to McFarland.

If one feels that he is slighted, we have to repent and acknowledge it and ask for forgiveness. It's good for FBFA people to see efforts being made for peace and for ABWE to see that the president acknowledged wrongdoing. It's destroying the works of the devil, the hidden things being revealed to work openly and honestly. Helps the world to see that we are one in the church.

Haskell said that ABWE began to call black pastors to involvement with ABWE particularly in the last ten-to-twelve years, and has seen increased benefit with time. ABWE has learned about the concerns and fears and where blacks are coming from. ABWE did its best to try to reconcile attitudes over the years. It started by reaching out and being transparent. “Sometimes we must try to confess sins of fathers.” ABWE members have visited Black churches when there was an open Sunday--not to speak, but to show up. They have invited African American pastors into their homes. Any time ABWE has a conference, African Americans have been invited. Once a year a four-day consultation on world evangelization is held, to which both rural and city churches are invited.

It takes a while to catch on. We've had Filipinos and Chinese to come. African Americans have been slower to accept the invitation to come to the campus than have Filipinos and Chinese. The purpose has been not to look for something from them—they are not a cash cow, or a place for more missionaries. But to work with African American churches to see the Great Commission fulfilled. The “real deal” is the Great Commission together. There is no hidden agenda.

Such partnerships are based upon a foundation of repentance, trust, long-term friendship, and respect for gifts and competency on both sides. They can develop from a friendship at the highest level of a mission and church organization, of brothers focused upon a more credible global Gospel proclamation.

1 Wilbur Harr, 1945. The Negro as an American Protestant Missionary in Africa. PhD diss., Univ. of Chicago, pp. 16-24. 2 www.lottcarey.org/history.html 3 EC Haskell (ABWE), phone interview by J. Sutherland, 1/12/07. 4 Allen McFarland (FBFA), phone interviews, 1/07, 1/11/08.

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Mobilizing the African American Church for Global Mission

www.RMNI.org



Southern Sudan/ Uganda Ministry, June , 2008

1. We still have room for 3 on this ministry trip to Southern Sudan. Christians with gifts in teaching, preaching, evangelism and service are especially needed, as well as Christians with vocational medical skills. We'll also serve for three days in Uganda.
2. The fee is \$3,900. Please go to www.RMNI.org/1/sudan.html for complete information, and you may call 423-822-1091.



North India Ministry, September, 2008

1. Our third India trip partners with a highly regarded ministry in Uttar Pradesh, NE India. Christians are 1.4% of the Uttar Pradesh population. Eighty percent of the populace is Hindu (World Christian Database). This too is an intensive ministry opportunity. Needed are Christians with teaching, preaching and service gifts, as well as those with medical competencies. Our Teams focus upon unity and intercultural friendship. Many take multiple trips with RMNI.
2. The trip fee is \$3500, at present fuel costs. Go to www.RMNI.org/1/india.html for more information.

Prayer and Praise



↑ We're thankful for your prayers. Kippy has another job—please pray that he'll do well with it. Deon needs a job. Harry continues to keep his job. Pray that they will join good churches. We also need divine appointments for the best use of our visits.

↑ We are in need of two new Board members, a third having accepted the post.

↑ Please pray for the best mission team members for both Sudan and India in 2008. We would like to have 3 more for Sudan and at least 6 more for

India.

↑ Gratefully, editing was completed in time for the missions book by an African American missionary friend.

↑ Again, I believe your prayers are heard. A counselee sent 5 resumes and got 4 interviews for good positions. "This has never happened," he said.

↑ James Wilson has suspended his studies for the next semester, and continues to raise support to join RMNI.

↑ Please pray for the missions strategy seminar at Columbia, SC in

January that the Spirit will greatly use the teaching, exhortation and relationships to thrust forward African American missions. Our Board chairman will help lead a workshop.

↑ Our long Oct. reporting trip went well. We visited supporters in NE states.

↑ Spiritual warfare issues have abated somewhat, but prayer is still needed.

↑ To be able to complete the African American missionary census in 2008.

↑ That God will bless a Cedine Men's Retreat workshop in March.