



51st General Meeting Reflections

The BMCR is one of The United Methodist Church's five U.S.-based ethnic caucuses and represents more than 2,400 predominantly African-American congregations. BMCR's work includes advocating for the interests and inclusion of black United Methodists in the general church structures; serving as a spiritual agitating conscience for the denomination; and raising visionary and spiritual leaders.

The 51st General Meeting of National Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) was held on March 13-17, 2018, in Sacramento, California. The theme was *The Journey Continues: Celebrating Our Faith, Hope and Renewal*.

Three members from the Western NC BMCR Caucus enthusiastically attended the meeting: Mr. Henry "Hank" Dozier, Co-Chair; Dr. James Ferree, Parliamentarian; and Rev. Charlie Rivens.

The meeting began with highlights from Dr. Fred A. Allen, Executive Director, Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC21). SBC21 provides the training and measuring tools to assist churches in staying relevant and vibrant. We experienced the excellence of young leaders who are products of the work of SBC21 Academy. Dr. Allen also introduced us to his four year action plan: *Leadership Development - Church Growth - Engaging in Ministry with the poor and imprisoned -Improving Global Health -Intentional Hospitality extended to Youth and Young Adults*.

Five jurisdictional sessions were held individually. BMCR's Southeastern Jurisdictional Caucus Session was led by Coordinator, Dr. Bryon Thomas. Information shared included:

- The General Council on Finance & Administration (GCFA) will begin withdrawing denominational support from all BMCR caucuses. Not just BMCR but all racial-ethnic UM caucuses must become self-sustaining in the next quadrennium.
- It was suggested that BMCR be a line item in every African American church budget.
- We were also urged to send letters and make calls to General Conference delegates about BMCR's concerns and we asked to contribute our voices to the Council of Bishops deliberations, as it decides on the final report of its Way Forward Commission and prepares to make recommendations for the future policies of the UM church to the Special General Conference in February 2019.

Bishop Minerva Carcano, Resident Bishop of the California-Nevada Annual Conference preached the opening worship message using Psalm 121 and 1 Peter 1:18-21. She shared two key points: There is no retirement in ministry, because ministry is a lifetime commitment and from Jesus we expect help and from us Jesus expects leadership. "As United Methodists, can we not ... be those who line up behind Christ Jesus who above all others shows us the way to life that is truth, mercy, compassion, and justice?"

During her message there was comparison of the discrimination of blacks with that of the discrimination of the LGBTQ. Although used as a comparison to make a point, some attendees viewed it unfavorably and insensitive to the civil rights movement of African Americans -- the idea that orientation can be hidden, whereas skin color cannot.

The first business session address was given by BMCR Vice-Chairperson, Rev. Antoine Love. His reflection was that as a people of faith, our journey continues to the next level now and for generations to come. It will look different than our present but we must exercise our faith in God in the wilderness. Nominations and Treasurer's reports followed Rev. Love's address.

Rev. Antoine Love, BMCR Vice-Chairperson, also presided over the second business session. An in-depth report was given on the *Commission on a Way Forward*. The 32 member *Commission on a Way Forward* was appointed by the Council of Bishops to assist the bishops in their charge from the 2016 General Conference to lead the church forward amid the present impasse related to LGBTQ inclusion and resulting questions about the unity of the church. The Commission will present its final report to the Council of Bishops at the COB meeting in Chicago April 29-May 4. We need to engage in this conversation with our local churches. Presenters offered pointers on how to engage in this conversation with churches along with a breakdown of the models being reviewed that may go before the 2019 February Special General Conference for an adoption vote.

A panel discussion, *Unpacking the Prison Pipeline*, was led by Moderator Rev. Fred Allen, Gary Williams, Deaconess Angela Brown, Attorney Monalisa Tuitahi, and Rev. Anthony Jenkins. The discussion pronounced issues in our communities that lead to incarceration, studying the statistics of black and brown, the need for more involvement in our communities to deter this path, and ideas that could be helpful in developing ministries for these challenges.

The preached word, service of Holy Communion and Remembrance was led by Bishop Jonathan Keaton (retired). Rev. Theon Johnson III led a bible study entitled *Who Are You?*

There were two special highlights of the meeting: the unveiling of the new Black Heritage stamp which features singer Lena Horne and the raising of funds that benefited the Dillard University Choir during the Black College Fund Luncheon (an annual General Meeting event celebrating our denomination supported historical black colleges and universities).

A video on the history of BMCR was shared and the following four workshops were held:

- Being Difference-Makers in Action
- Leading through Black Pain and Social Trauma
- Practices of Self-Care
- Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Appointments and Awareness

The general meeting ended with a gospel extravaganza brunch and presentation of the 50th Campaign Givers Awards. Musical entertainment was provided by MARCHA and PICNAM.

Commission on a Way Forward

Below is a summary of the two sketches in process. Details may change based on the work of the Commission before they present their final report to the Council of Bishops at the upcoming 2018 April/May meeting.

ONE CHURCH MODEL

- The One Church Model gives churches the room they need to maximize the presence of United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible. The One Church Model provides a generous unity that gives conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context in relation to human sexuality without changing the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church.

MULTI-BRANCH: ONE CHURCH MODEL

- This model is grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice. The five U.S. jurisdictions would be replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology and perspective on LGBTQ ministry (i.e. progressive, contextual, traditional branches). Annual conferences would decide which connectional conference to affiliate with; only local churches who choose a branch other than the one chosen by their annual conference would vote to join another conference.

Excerpt from <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward>