

STRATEGY FOR EVANGELIZING BLACKS

IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

12/1/04

PROFILE OF BLACKS IN THE UNITED STATES

General Background

The difficult history of the black population of the United States is well known to all. Out of its suffering past of experiencing the raw hand of abuse and injustice, the black Americans, now around 34 million people, have adapted to changing historical situations with an uncanny spirit of survival and creativity. Not only is this seen within the cultural African-American setting, but has also profoundly refashioned the values, perspectives and attributes of the majority culture itself, especially in the areas of language, art, food, music and technology, making a prodigious and immutable mark on America and the world itself.

At the same time, the African American/Canadian Church has retained huge influence as the major repository of black culture, in leadership style, worship motifs, Biblical interpretation, and societal involvement. The ministry functions more like the prophet Moses, leading the people of God out of bondage and into the promised land of deliverance from not only sins but also social oppression.

As such, the discreet line between sacred and secular disappears, as does the line between politics and proclamation. Many of the great black leaders function also in community leadership. Given their skills in community organizing, many religious black leaders double as political motivators and often as cultural brokers between the varieties of people that make up the city.

Several trends are most notable in the black community

1. Earlier and recent migrations from the South of the U.S. into the urban areas of the North and Central cities. Though they appear to be urbanites, they still retain much of the legacy of their southern and rural roots;
2. The growth of a powerful middle class black community, especially in urban suburbs such as Prince Georges County in suburban DC.;
3. The strong cultural allegiance to Christianity and Christian institutions. Many black megachurches exist as do storefront churches. Some of the finest preachers across the board are blacks, including Dr. James Forbes, Dr. T. D. Jakes, Dr. Gardner C. Taylor;
4. The social devastation of history on the black male has resulted in high rates of incarceration and probation, family abandonment, and early death due to violence and medical inadequacies. Over time, there is evidence that a matriarchal form of family has emerged in many instances to provide for nurturance and sustenance.
5. One response to this last phenomenon is the growth of the Muslim and Black Muslim faiths for young men, especially out of the prison camaraderie and inner city environments. This appeal, at times, dovetails with an Afrocentric view of history, and a hostility to the European trappings of Christianity.

The Missional Task of Evangelizing Blacks

General Suggestions:

See blacks as individuals and not collectively. Some may choose to attend non-black congregations for a variety of personal reasons. Others may feel called to minister cross-ethnically to majority or other congregations. Do not stereotype a black minister as a candidate only for black ministries, any more than a Euro-American is destined only to minister to whites.

Earn trust with Blacks before developing programs.

Understand the camaraderie of cross-denominational support systems within the black community. Allow it to develop naturally as there is a special bonding built in, that can supplement denominational weaknesses.

THE MISSIONAL TASK FOR DISTRICTS IS TO:

- Create cross-cultural linkages within the Nazarene community in partnerships especially between suburban and urban churches, which mutual activities can be encouraged, trade-offs of resources developed, and cooperative gestures shared. i.e. pulpit exchanges, tutoring services, work and witness teams, scholarship aid.
- Offer unconditional commitment to the development of new and struggling ministries, willing to go through the hard times but with the belief that the arrangements are prophetic and very important to the Kingdom of God and the future of the Church of the Nazarene.

THE MISSIONAL TASK FOR LOCAL CHURCHES IS TO:

- Acknowledge past failures and seek to hear where the Church has been insensitive or misguided. In other words, it must listen to blacks themselves.
- Admit any current attitudes of racism, oversimplification, generalizations that might impede the building of true relationships on which the Black Church can be built.
- Identify the various nuances between blacks. West Indians are quite different from those American-bred. Africans share little in common with North Americans. First generation black immigrants have different needs from either their parents or their American-heritage peers.
- Recognize the unique and precious history of the black Christian experience and seek to find bridges to it
- Recognize that black churches celebrate different styles of worship in much the

same way that majority churches do. However, realize that, in general, the worship service of a black congregation is far more “pulsating” with preacher “whoopin”, answer-response, oral and narrative sermonizing, participatory congregation, with considerable kinetic energy exhibited by both pastor and people. Prepare to enjoy the Gospel choir, the vibrant instrumentation, spontaneity, the ceremonial dress and gloves, and lengthy services.

- Learn the nuances of language. Some words used by the majority culture are offensive to the black culture and erode confidence, i.e. “we don’t see racial differences,” or pushing a political “conservative” agenda which is often perceived as failing the interests of the black community.
- Utilize the denominational assets, such as the newly minted materials for black awareness and church development, as well as conferences intended for the same. The biennial Rogers-Cunningham-Bowman Institute is an excellent place to train black leaders in compressed times.

