THE MEMPHIS MIRACLE
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aised in the multicultural environ-
ment of the Church of God of Prophecy, my personal journey of commitment to the equality of all God’s children started at a young age. The tapestry of my life has been intertwined with the rich culture of various peoples, especially an African American as best friend and “best man” in my wedding in 1970.

Through the years of preaching, worshiping and even serving together as executives at the World Headquarters of the Church of God of Prophecy, my life has been enriched as my non-white friends and I formed a loving community. Seminary teaching and preaching in excess of 40 countries has brought me face-to-face with fellow pilgrims who are among God’s choice vessels.

These experiences, coupled with intense study of related issues, elevated the level of my engagement in such affairs. Those who live in isolation do so to the peril of the body of Christ.

The Memphis Miracle

I had the privilege of participating in the October 17-19, 1994, meeting of Pentecostal Partners: A Reconciliation Strategy for 21st Century Ministry. The cover picture celebrates a highlight of the event labelled the “Memphis Miracle” by the press.

I value the washing of saints feet and understand the significance attached to the symbolic footwashing captured in this photo. However, as we meditate on this experience, we cannot remain content with only an episodic repentance, but must have an eternal commitment to justice and righteousness. Our daily words, deeds and attitudes will be held accountable in this on-going reconciliation process.

The IPHC can celebrate the fact that without the intervention of Bishop B.E. Underwood, there would not have been a transition from the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) to the newly integrated Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA). A man who turned his convictions into a deed of significant healing. An example well worth imitating.

Conference-Appointed Archivists

In 1983 the General Board of Administration (GBA) established guidelines for the IPHC Archives & Research Center. Among their...
The modern Pentecostal movement began in 1901 under the leadership of Charles Fox Parham. But the miraculous expansion of this sovereign move of God took place under the leadership of William J. Seymour in Los Angeles, California, in 1906. The spiritual explosion was the beginning of the greatest phenomenon of church growth in the twentieth century. This Pentecostal/Charismatic movement now numbers approximately 500,000,000 strong in the world.

One of the most dramatic aspects of the Azusa Street Revival was the breaking down of racial barriers in the midst of a racist American society. The statement often quoted was, “The blood has washed away the color line.” There is no questioning that the Holy Spirit performed a tremendous miracle in bringing to this dynamic movement a unity of the Spirit which transcended the shameful racist culture into which it was born.

But tragedy lurked in the midst of this triumph. The fledgling movement came under vicious attack by the secular media. One of the primary points of this attack was the miracle of racial reconciliation. The press became spokesmen for a racist society. This blistering attack on the prophetic Pentecostal movement was too much for the Euro/American participants. They succumbed to the pressures of the racist culture, rather than continue to surrender to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. The manifestation of racial reconciliation survived at Azusa Street for about three years—from 1906 until 1909. With few exceptions, however, all signs of this racial unity had disappeared by 1924.

There is no doubt that God Almighty was providing a supernatural remedy for racism in America. The recipients of the supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit could conceivably have provided a beautiful paradigm shift in the midst of a culture dominated by Jim Crowism. Sadly, they missed this God-given opportunity. They heeded the call of the wild rather than the bidding of the Spirit.

The result of this fall has been three quarters of a century of division in the Pentecostal family in America. What a difference it could have made during the civil rights movement in America if all the children of the Pentecostal revival had stood together as a shining example of what God could do to solve the problems of racism and discrimination!

When the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) was formed in October of 1948, in Des Moines, Iowa, all of the participants were from white Pentecostal denominations. This pattern continued until the PFNA was disbanded in 1994.

While there had been many efforts to bring African-American Pentecostals into the fellowship, none had succeeded. The division was too deep for this kind of reconciliation. Several members of the Board of Administration of PFNA had discussed and deplored this state of affairs over the years, but a dramatic move was necessary in order to bridge this racial chasm.

I became chairman of PFNA in October of 1991. At the first meeting over which I presided on March 6, 1992, the Board of Administration of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America voted unanimously to pursue the possibility of reconciliation with our African-American brethren.

What a difference it could have made during the civil rights movement in America if all the children of the Pentecostal revival had stood together as a shining example of what God could do to solve the problems of racism and discrimination!

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RACIAL RECONCILIATION MANIFESTO

Challenged by the reality of our racial division, we have been drawn by the Holy Spirit to Memphis, Tennessee, October 17-19, 1994, in order to become true “Pentecostal Partners” and to develop together “A Reconciliation Strategy for the 21st Century Ministry.” We desire to covenant together in the ongoing task of racial reconciliation by committing ourselves to the following agenda.

I . I pledge in concert with my brothers and sisters of many hues to oppose racism prophetically in all its various manifestations within and without the Body of Christ and to be vigilant in the struggle with all my God-given might.

II . I am committed personally to treat those in the Fellowship who are not of my race or ethnicity, regardless of color, with love and respect as my sisters and brothers in Christ. I am further committed to work against all forms of personal and institutional racism, including those which are revealed within the very structures of our environment.

III . With complete bold and courageous honesty, we mutually confess that racism is sin and as a blight in the Fellowship must be condemned for having hindered the maturation of spiritual development and mutual sharing among Pentecostal-Charismatic believers for decades.

IV . We openly confess our shortcomings and our participation in the sin of racism by our silence, denial and blindness. We admit the harm it has brought to generations born and unborn. We strongly contend that the past does not always completely determine the future. New horizons are emerging. God wants to do a new thing through His people.

V . We admit that there is no single solution to racism in the Fellowship. We pray and are open to tough love and radical repentance with deep sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as Liberator.
VI. Together we will work to affirm one another’s strengths and acknowledge our own weaknesses and inadequacies, recognizing that all of us only “see in a mirror dimly” what God desires to do in this world. Together, we affirm the wholeness of the Body of Christ as fully inclusive of Christians regardless of color. We, therefore, commit ourselves “to love one another with mutual affection, outdoing one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10).

VII. We commit ourselves not only to pray but also to work for genuine and visible manifestations of Christian unity.

VIII. We hereby commit ourselves not only to the task of making prophetic denouncement of racism in word and creed, but to live by acting in deed. We will fully support and encourage those among us who are attempting change.

IX. We pledge that we will return to our various constituencies and appeal to them for logistical support and intervention as necessary in opposing racism. We will seek partnerships and exchange pulpits with persons of a different hue, not in a paternalistic sense, but in the Spirit of our Blessed Lord who prayed that we might be one (John 17:21).

X. We commit ourselves to leaving our comfort zones, lay aside our warring, racial allegiances, respecting the full humanity of all, live with an openness to authentic liberation which is a product of Divine Creation, until the shackles fall and all bondage ceases.

XI. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Azusa Street Mission was a model of preaching and living the Gospel message in the world. We desire to drink deeply from the well of Pentecost as it was embodied in that mission. We, therefore, pledge our commitment to embrace the essential commitments of that mission in evangelism and mission, in justice and holiness, in spiritual renewal and empowerment, and in the reconciliation of all Christians regardless of race or gender as we move into the new millennium.

manifesto committee:

Bishop Ithiel Clemmons  Dr. Cecil M. Roebeck, Jr.
Dr. Leonard Lovett  Dr. Harold D. Hunter
The Reconciliation Journey

There were four steps in the road to the “Memphis Miracle.” This could be called the “Reconciliation Dialogue Journey.”

◆ First, there was a meeting on July 31, 1992, at the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Hyatt Regency Hotel. There were ten people in this meeting, but only one was African American. Bishop O. T. Jones, Jr. made a significant contribution to the reconciliation process. His presence at the meeting was crucial to the journey. There were several other African-American leaders who were invited to this meeting, but none of them came. Two or three did send their regrets and expressed their desire to attend.

◆ The second meeting took place in Phoenix, Arizona, January 4-5, 1993. This was a powerful meeting. Thirty-three denominational leaders and pastors spent two days in prayer and dialogue concerning this reconciliation.

This [racial reconciliation] meeting will certainly not be the end of God’s reconciliation strategy.

...We must purpose to travel this road together.

...We will have to travel through times of both repentance and forgiveness.

While the only African-American representative present was Pastor Reuben Anderson from Compton, California (he was sent to represent Bishop Charles Blake), he was a powerful catalyst for this meeting. God spoke prophetically in this meeting and all of the participants became convinced that we were involved in a move of God. I knew following this meeting that God was at work to accomplish on page 7

(Excerpt from B.E. Underwood’s focus statement to the Racial Reconciliation Dialogue.)

We are gathered here in Memphis, Tennessee, to return to our roots and to recapture the initiative of the Spirit. This will be a time of repentance for the sins of the past. This will be a time of forgiveness as we rely upon the wonderful grace of our loving Heavenly Father and mirror that grace in our relationships with one another. The time has come for reconciliation! The time has come to recapture our heritage! We gather here at the children of God and heirs of the twentieth century Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal of the church. Our Father has called us to unity.

The theme of our meeting is “Pentecostal Partners: A Reconciliation Strategy for 21st Century Mission.” The goal is to bring healing to this part of the Body of Christ. We really have no choice. Our Lord has called us to unity. The high-priestly prayer of our Savior is that we all may be one, so that the world may believe in the only begotten Son of God. We grieve over the 88 years of rebellion against the reconciliation work of the Holy Spirit. We return with all our hearts to the unity of the Spirit manifested during the blazing revival at Azusa Street.

The Reconciliation Dialogue will deal with some of the major issues facing us. We will look at the historical roots of racial unity and division. We will examine the problem of racism and discrimination in the Pentecostal movement. But we will then turn to the biblical pattern for unity. And finally, we will focus on a strategy for reconciliation.

We have not gathered just to talk about the issues. We are here to act. We must take substantial steps toward implementing the strategy for reconciliation. As a first step in this direction, the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America will conduct its final convention tomorrow afternoon. The final act will be to dissolve the PFNA in order to make way for a new fellowship which will be an interracial fellowship.

The organizational meeting for the new interracial fellowship of Pentecostal churches will be held Wednesday afternoon. We have a prepared constitution to be considered and a proposal for a twelve-person executive committee composed of an equal number of African Americans and Euro/Americans.

We must also identify and enlist a key group of leaders who will serve as catalysts in major cities across America to implement the vision of this reconciliation. The example set by the Pentecostal/Charismatic community in Memphis during the past six months may well point the way for dozens of other locations. God seeks to restore the unity of the Spirit that will position us to truly evangelize our nation. Racism in the Pentecostal/Charismatic community must be eradicated. The communion of saints must become a visible reality.

This meeting will certainly not be the end of God’s reconciliation strategy. It is just the beginning. We have a long road to travel. We must purpose to travel this road together. Like a marriage that has come apart, our recovering the unity of the Spirit will require both courage and commitment. We still have much to learn about each other. We will have to travel through times of both repentance and forgiveness. But thank God, we have set our faces in the right direction!

Seven years from now, if Jesus tarries, the Pentecostal World Conference will meet in Los Angeles, California. During the week leading up to Pentecost Sunday, we hope to have the largest gathering of Pentecostal/Charismatic believers ever held on the North American continent. As we gather to launch the second century of the Pentecostal renewal, we want to present to the whole world a model of racial reconciliation in the American Pentecostal community.
The “Memphis Miracle” was widely covered by the media. Newspapers from the Boston Globe to the Los Angeles Times gave considerable space to the event. It also triggered action toward racial reconciliation on many other fronts. Several denominations and para-church organizations took significant steps toward reconciliation in the months following the Memphis meeting.

Editor’s Note: During this October, 1994 meeting, the PFNA was disbanded and the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) was formed with the top three officers as follows: Chairman, Bishop Ithiel Clemmons (Church of God in Christ); Vice-Chairman, Bishop B.E. Underwood (International Pentecostal Holiness Church); and Second Vice-Chairman, Reverend Thomas Trask (Assemblies of God).
resolutions was the establishment of conference and local church archivists/historians. This is an important resolution that I have sought to activate in order to involve every PH member and friend who values their historical roots as a pentecostal and member of the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Too often we hear from local church members, “I just threw away old PH booklets and magazines. If only I had known you wanted those old items.” Our goal is to have someone in every conference to be an advocate for preserving our historical roots, then have each local church appoint someone to help gather and send these items to the IPHC Archives and Research Center.

Conference Archivists to Meet in 1988

The first training session hosted by the IPHC Archives and Research Center for conference archivists will convene April 25, 1998, at Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA. We are still awaiting the appointment of conference archivists from more conference superintendents.