

Black, White Pentecostals Mark Historic Lynching With Unity Services

✖ **April 14, 2009** – Leaders from the Assemblies of God (AG) and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) are crossing racial divides this week to mark the anniversary of an infamous Springfield, Mo., lynching that occurred more than 100 years ago today – the same day the Azusa Street revival began in Los Angeles.

Dubbed “A House No Longer Divided,” the three-day preaching event began Monday and is designed to foster unity among Pentecostal churches in Springfield, where three African-American men were murdered by a white lynch mob on April 14, 1906. The same day, William J. Seymour, who was African-American, began holding revival services in a run-down mission at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, sparking the modern Pentecostal movement.

“April 14, 1906, was witness to both the darkness of humanity and the light of God,” said Darrin Rodgers, director of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, the official research center for the AG and a co-sponsor of the event. “It is important that we not only remember, but also overcome, our painful history of racial disunity. A House No Longer Divided offers an opportunity to tell the world that, just like at Azusa Street, ‘the color line has been washed away in the blood [of Christ].’”

The event is also co-sponsored by Timmons Temple COGIC, Kingdom Movement Ministries and the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, all in Springfield. Speakers include leaders from both the AG and COGIC. The services will be held at Timmons Temple tonight, and at the William J. Seymour

Chapel at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary tomorrow.

"The city really needs it," said John Wheeler, who came up with the idea as a way to build bridges across racial and denominational lines. Wheeler is a student at the AG's Central Bible College and the great-grandson of COGIC founder Charles H. Mason.

"Walls have been set up," Wheeler told *Charisma*. "I just believe that this can be the beginning of breaking down those walls."

Although Rodgers disputes the claim that the AG broke off from COGIC in 1914, he said racist practices were at work within the denomination. Rodgers noted that from 1939 until 1962, the AG had a policy against ordaining African-Americans and encouraged them to join their sister church, COGIC, instead.

"That attitude of separate but equal was a reflection of the evil structures of society of that time," Rodgers said. "We have taken and continue to need to take measures to overcome that." (Read Rodgers' article on the AG's origins.)

Wheeler said he believes one day COGIC will no longer be predominantly black. "I can see that day," he said. But beyond seeing every church become multicultural, organizers say they want to see ministries fellowship with one another and work together to meet the needs of their community.

"Right now, cross-racially we don't do much with each other," said Elder T. J. Appleby, pastor of Timmons Temple COGIC. "There's very little, if any, kind of interracial fellowship. Even if we're not thinking that there are negative racial divides, where people are having negative feelings about a different race, we aren't coming across the racial line to fellowship and ... do things together in this community."

Rodgers said he hopes A House No Longer Divided will be more than just a single event. "We hope that this will not only

allow us to get to know each other better but to establish a continuing, ongoing relationship between our bodies, not just between individuals but between organizations so that maybe we can better relate to each other in the future," he told *Charisma*. "We don't know exactly what the future holds for us, we just believe that God's going to be there, and this will lead to great things."