

COGIC Church Brings Racial Reconciliation to White Community

Bibleway Outreach Ministries is Michigan neighborhood's first black and Pentecostal church

Some believers in east Grand Rapids, Mich., are hoping that their recently acquired church building will play a part in racial reconciliation. That's because the new home for Bibleway Outreach Ministries Church of God in Christ (COGIC), formerly Sherman Street COGIC, is located in a predominantly white, upscale neighborhood in what once was the St. Nicholas Antiochan Orthodox Church.

Bibleway Outreach pastor Bruce McCoy called the move a "great landmark in history" for his congregation. That's because it is not only the first African American church, but also the first Pentecostal church in the area. McCoy told Charisma that the neighborhood in which his church now makes its home is one that had been considered "off-limits" and reserved for the "higher, upper-class elite."

McCoy said that a developer had originally wanted to buy the facility, tear it down and build condos on the site. Neighborhood opposition and city commissioners' rejection of a zoning variance resulted in the church being given the opportunity to purchase the building.

"They put it back on the market and lowered the price of the building and called us to let us know they had lowered it after we had told them we'd be interested in it, and we went from there," McCoy said.

Even though city officials at one point had been interested in the site for a sports complex, McCoy said that a number of them have contacted him to congratulate the church on its purchase. McCoy said that they “have either stopped by or had me out at their office to congratulate us and welcome us into the neighborhood.”

Although he is enjoying the extra space, McCoy said that is not the only reason he is happy about the move. Since assuming the pastorate of the church, McCoy has been a strong advocate of racial diversity, so the new location will enable the church to practice what he has been preaching.

“We are trying to integrate our church and not just make it a black church,” McCoy said. “Other sectors of society are talking about diversity, so why not the church?”

McCoy said he pictures his new church location as being a spiritual link that can bridge the gulf between the city’s two disconnected parts. “ [They’ve] been disconnected for so many years. I feel like we’re the bridge to bring them together,” he said.

“So many of the neighbors are coming out who are Pentecostal who live right within the surrounding area of our church. It’s proved to be a wonderful move of God to have us placed in this area at this particular time.”

McCoy added that church members have responded to the move with an overwhelming sense of “pride, joy and excitement,” feeling that it opens up new opportunities.

William Redic, a church deacon, said that while the main

reason for the move was to accommodate the church's growing membership, he also sees it as an opportunity to move to a higher level by placing the group in a strategic location that will benefit both races. "If we can't get together down here, how are we going to get together up there?" he said.

Redic added that the church is not just sitting back waiting for community members to show up and worship. They are making a concerted effort to reach out to local non-African Americans. "We're sending them an invitation and inviting them to come and worship with us. We want to make it open to everyone who wants to come," he said.

Leora Brewer, who has attended the church for 53 years, echoed Redic's sentiments. She said she is "ecstatic" about the move, which she said will allow church members an ongoing opportunity to present Christ to different people, "all kinds of people instead of [just] black people."

Jeremy Reynolds