

Detroit Pastor Marshals African-American Support for Israel

Glenn Plummer believes that by supporting Israel, the African-American community will experience blessing. Photo: Glenn Plummer (left) with Israel President Shimon Peres



[] A Detroit minister is on a mission to mobilize African-American support for Israel, which he said was commonplace during the civil rights era.

Through the Fellowship of Israel and Black America (FIBA), founder Glenn Plummer hopes to revive a relationship between African-Americans and the Jewish community that he said civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. nurtured. The senior pastor of Ambassadors for Christ Church in Detroit said during the 1950s and 1960s Jews marched for racial equality alongside King, defended African-Americans in court and even died in the struggle against discrimination.

Calling King a black Zionist, Plummer, 53, said the Baptist preacher encouraged African-Americans to support the Jewish community and planned to spend Passover 1968 with his close friend Rabbi Abraham Heschel but was assassinated days before the holiday. In the 40 years since King's death, Plummer said the relationship between the two groups has been strained, though black pastors have always been largely pro-Israel.

"When it comes to the issue of whether we're supportive of Israel or not, we're very particular not to violate Scripture," Plummer said. "Black believers are much more careful not to speak words that would curse Israel" than secular black leaders.

To show that many African-Americans are still friends of Israel, Plummer founded FIBA in 2005. The following year, when

Israeli rockets bombed Hezbollah, he flew to Israel to help and show solidarity with the Jewish nation. Also in 2006, Plummer hosted a national Black-Jewish Summit to help reconnect the two groups.

Founder of Christian Television Network in Detroit and former chairman of the National Religious Broadcasters, Plummer frequently takes groups of African-Americans to Israel and speaks often at U.S. synagogues. "During civil rights, white Christians, by and large, were nowhere to be found. But you know who was? Jews. Jews were there when black folks were fighting," Plummer said. "So I say to Jews: 'On behalf of African-Americans, thank you. Whether it was you or your parents,' I say, 'thank you.'"

In January, the month of King's birthday, FIBA presented the Martin Luther King Jr. Israel Award to recognize those who have helped advance relations between African-Americans and the Jewish State of Israel and the U.S. Embassy in Israel have officially recognized the awards event, which is held annually in Israel. The 2008 recipients included Israeli President Shimon Peres, Detroit pastor Kenneth James Flowers and Israeli musician Miri Ben Ari, who developed a creative outreach to African-American culture through her *Symphony of Brotherhood*.

Plummer believes that by blessing Israel, Christians will experience blessing themselves. "God promised in the Bible that whoever blesses Israel, He will bless them," said Plummer, who believes an ongoing revival at his church is partly a result of his support for Israel. "I do believe that if we bless Jews openly, unapologetically and clearly, God is obligated to bless us."

So far, FIBA has chapters in Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, Tampa, Fla., and Columbus, Ohio, and an office in Israel.

Linda Olmert, director of the Israel FIBA office and FIBA vice president, understands Plummer's passion. While growing up in Toronto, she declared that she would march with King when she turned 11. He died before that birthday, and for years she

searched for a way to join forces with African-Americans.

"This has incredible potential," she says of FIBA. Olmert also is the prime minister's sister-in-law. "Plummer believes Martin Luther King was a Zionist, and in the early 1960s when no one else was speaking out for Israel, King was, and African-Americans were blessed. During the civil rights movement, we marched and were jailed. We died with African-Americans. Now is the time to return that friendship and support Israel."

To that end, FIBA plans to build a Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Israel, conduct tours of historic sites from the civil rights movement and grow FIBA chapters. Flowers, whom FIBA honored for his church's musical celebrations, dinners and dialogues with Jewish leaders, said these efforts are necessary. "We have to work together," he said. "The Jews are God's chosen people, and God would not go back on His word."

Plummer also has support from other black ministers such as Ben Kinchlow, who co-hosts the international radio show *Front Page Jerusalem*. "I see this as a movement of evangelical Christians embracing their Jewish roots," Kinchlow said. "African-Americans, in particular, we say yes to Israel."

-Kimberly Hayes Taylor in Detroit