

Pentecostals Heal Old Divisions

The gathering of charismatic, Pentecostal, Word of Faith and Oneness Pentecostal leaders was called 'a first'

Leaders of America's major Pentecostal and charismatic movements met privately in April in a historic meeting intended to build bridges between different groups that have been at odds or distanced for years.

Almost 30 senior figures representing Word of Faith, charismatic, traditional Pentecostal and Oneness Pentecostals met for three days at a Washington, hotel to talk and pray in an unprecedented move toward unity. Some in the diverse group have talked about cementing the groundbreaking April gathering with some sort of united ministry effort in the months to come.

Among the participants were TV preachers Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, International Foursquare President Paul Risser, Assemblies of God General Superintendent Thomas Trask, International Pentecostal Holiness Church General Superintendent James Leggett, and United Pentecostal Church (UPC) International General Superintendent Kenneth Haney.

Also taking part were Billy Joe Daugherty, pastor of Victory Christian Center in Tulsa, Okla.; Church of God of Prophecy General Overseer Fred Fisher; Lamar Vest, general overseer of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn.; Bishop George McKinney of the Church of God in Christ; and Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Together 2002, as the gathering was named, was convened by Robert Fisher, director of the Center for Spiritual Renewal (CSR) in Cleveland, Tenn. He was also behind Solemn Assembly 2001, which brought thousands of Pentecostal leaders and lay members together for a 50-hour prayer vigil renouncing past divisions in Atlanta.

Fisher described the 2002 meeting as “the first time ever top leaders from all the streams of Pentecost—classical, charismatic, Oneness, Word of Faith, Third Wave—came together in a spirit of unity, not to discuss doctrinal differences, but to rejoice in their common spiritual heritage.”

Vinson Synan, dean of the School of Divinity at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va., and a leading Pentecostal historian, who took part in the meeting, said it had been “truly a first.” It was especially significant because of the participation of those who have not usually attended Pentecostal leadership events, including the Copelands, healing ministry leader Francis MacNutt, and Haney and Nathaniel Urshan from the UPC.

“The Oneness brethren were warmly received and participated equally in all the discussions,” Synan said. “This may mark a new day in relations with Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals.” The two camps split in the early 1900s because of differing views of the triune nature of God.

For his part, Daugherty found the meeting “especially significant in bringing the streams of the Pentecostal-charismatic believers into a mutual appreciation of one another.” He added: “People work together when they know and trust one another. We know each other now, and trust was built. There are no limits to what God can do when we come

together.”

Haney said that he appreciated the opportunity to meet with others he had only known from a distance or met briefly. “I found them to be sincere, caring men and women,” he said. “We have varied agendas and some theological differences but share a common bond as advocates of the Pentecostal experience that is being poured out in unprecedented measures around the world, and must not allow focus on this great experience to be derailed.”

Jeff Farmer said the event was “the most empowering, encouraging and affirming” meeting he had been in during six years as president of Open Bible Churches. “There was no bottom line other than that God was among us and that we would meet together again and keep listening.”

Andy Butcher