

Assemblies of God Stands With COGIC in 'Black Lives Matter' Campaign

Bishop Charles E. Blake Sr. of the Church of God in Christ has asked COGIC churches to observe Black Lives Matter Sunday this coming Sunday, Dec. 14. As Bishop Blake's friend and counterpart in the Assemblies of God, I ask that all AG churches do the same. I have two reasons for doing so.

First and foremost, black lives matter. The lives of all people are precious to God, of course, but at the present moment, many of our black brothers and sisters in COGIC and the AG feel that their lives are not highly valued by many in white America. As examples, they point to the recent controversial decisions of grand juries in St. Louis County, Missouri and Staten Island, New York, not to return bills of indictment against white police officers in the deaths of two black males, Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

Whatever your opinion of those controversial decisions, can we stand with our brothers and sisters and affirm the value of black lives generally and of their lives specifically? Scripture teaches that God does not take pleasure in the death of people, not even the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). If so, then whatever the circumstances, we can be certain that God did not take pleasure in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Therefore, neither should we. Can we affirm, then, the grief our black brothers and sisters feel about these men's deaths?

Think of it this way: If the families and friends of Michael Brown and Eric Garner attended your church, how would you minister to them in their sorrow?

Scripture teaches us to "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15). Black Lives Matter Sunday is a way for all Assemblies of God churches to do that with our black brothers

and sisters in the Church of God in Christ, our own National Black Fellowship and the many multicultural churches in the Assemblies of God. Scripture teaches, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). Let us suffer with our brothers and sisters in their time of mourning.

Second, America is racially divided and needs the church to heal its divisions. The Pentecostal movement, to which both COGIC and the AG belong, traces a large portion of its spiritual genealogy to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California, at the start of the 20th century. In that revival, led by a godly black man named William J. Seymour, the Spirit of Jesus Christ powerfully knit together the hearts of people who attended, regardless of race and ethnicity. For a shining moment at Azusa Street, when the surrounding culture was segregated by color, "the color line was washed away in the Blood," as Frank Bartleman famously put it.

Unfortunately, the forces of segregation reasserted themselves among white Pentecostals, and for many decades thereafter, they allowed the spirit of Jim Crow into their churches.

Great strides have been made in civil rights and racial reconciliation over the past century, of course, but America still experiences racial divisions. If Spirit-filled Christians cannot find a way to work together to heal these divisions, what hope is there for the rest of the country? The Church of God in Christ and the Assemblies of God share a like, precious faith, including our belief in and experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ has already united us in doctrine and experience, in other words. If we cannot unite at this hour, how can we expect America to be united, when it has no spiritual foundation for unity?

Because black lives matter, and because America needs the Church to heal its lingering racial divisions, I ask that Assemblies of God churches join the Church of God in Christ on Sunday, Dec. 14, 2014, and pray for the following things:

1. Pray during the service that God would bless the ministries of the Church of God in Christ, our own National Black Fellowship, and the many AG multicultural churches, enlarging their territory through Spirit-guided influence on the communities where they minister.

2. Pray that God would unite the hearts of all Spirit-filled believers, but especially COGIC and the AG, so that together, we would become a "Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (Is. 58:12) in our nation.

3. Pray for law enforcement and judicial officers, especially Spirit-filled believers among them, that they would be servants of justice, reconciliation and peace in the communities they serve.

I recognize that some of you may find my request to observe Black Lives Matter Sunday controversial because of deep disagreement over the Michael Brown and Eric Garner cases. I do not wish to be controversial or to bring further division within the Church or within America. We have enough of that already.

Rather, I wish for us to find points of unity and cooperation across racial lines. We can take steps together in that direction by affirming the value of black lives and by praying for unity in our churches and our society this Sunday, Dec. 14. I hope you will join me in observing Black Lives Matter Sunday with our brothers and sisters in the Church of God in Christ.

Finally, at this Christmas season, may we take to heart once again the glorious announcement of the angel that the birth of Jesus is "good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10)!