

Former KKK Leader Ordained in Black Pentecostal Denomination

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✖ A former imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan is now an ordained minister in one of the nation's largest African-American denominations.

Johnny Lee Clary was ordained a minister in the 6 million-member Church of God in Christ (COGIC) on Saturday during a service led by Bishop George McKinney, pastor of St. Stephen's Cathedral Church of God in Christ in San Diego and a member of COGIC's 12-member general board.

Clary, who is based in Oklahoma, will serve as an evangelist under McKinney's oversight, and his ministry will emphasize racial reconciliation.

"Bishop McKinney and I both felt like racial reconciliation was needed now more than ever," said Clary, who befriended McKinney in the early 1990s when the two spoke during a Promise Keepers event. "We feel like it makes a huge statement that the former national imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan would join the Church of God in Christ and reach out with the Church of God in Christ to bring racial reconciliation to America."

"We want to take this back to where it was when William Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival was happening, when blacks and whites were together," added Clary, who preached at St. Stephen's on Sunday. "This is what's needed for this nation now to overcome racism."

After joining the Ku Klux Klan during his teens, Clary eventually became leader of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. But he grew increasingly dissatisfied and eventually resigned from his post. With two failed marriages, no friends and little money, Clary says he turned to the God he'd been introduced to as a child and accepted Christ in 1990.

Since then he has shared his story on talk shows including *The Phil Donahue Show*, *Geraldo*, *The 700 Club* and *Sally Jesse Raphael*, and he preaches in churches in the U.S. and Australia.

"I know the answer to racial reconciliation, and that's Jesus Christ," he said. "They all come to me, even secular people are saying, 'What changed you?' I tell them, 'The only thing that changed me was the Word of God.' Because when I accepted Christ ... I had to get my mind renewed, and that was through God's Word."

Both Clary and McKinney say the church has an opportunity to address racism, which they say did not disappear with the election of the nation's first African-American president.

Clary notes that white supremacist groups saw an upsurge in interest after President Obama was elected, with many of the organizations using nationalist labels to draw not only racists but also those who are fearful of the president's policies.

McKinney says failing urban schools and the disproportionate percentage of minorities in prison are also reflective of ongoing racism in the nation. "There continues to be tremendous strongholds of racist activity in the U.S., and the church has the responsibility, I believe, to be salt and light in this situation," McKinney said. "So the church has an awesome responsibility to speak truth in every area, every arena of life."

During the civil rights era, many white evangelical leaders

didn't see the fight for racial equality as their cause and did not get involved, McKinney says. He doesn't want history to repeat itself today when he says Christians are needed to fight not only for racial equality but also to preserve traditional marriage and end abortion, which he said is impacting black communities disproportionately and becoming "a kind of genocide."

"It's all the way through the Bible, that the children of God are to be advocates for justice and practitioners of love and forgiveness and mercy," McKinney said. "But somehow we didn't get that on our agenda, and we allowed the whole [civil rights] era to pass without many of those who were leaders in the evangelical church becoming involved at all. They stood on the sidelines.

"I hope that that doesn't happen again because we still have some serious fights, and we need all the people of good will, all of God's people. ... So we need Johnny Lee Clary and we need all the people who at one time were on the wrong side of the fence to come on and help us with the fight for righteousness [and] holiness."

McKinney said churches will remain largely segregated until they become welcoming to everyone—"the homeless, the aliens, to anybody who has a hunger for God."

Clary agrees. "I'm interested in seeing the church portrayed the way the first church was in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost," Clary said. "When the Holy Spirit came, all races were gathered together under heaven. Also in Revelation 7:9 ... every race was there gathered before the throne in front of the Lamb in heaven. People ... better learn to get along down here on earth or they won't be able to get along up in heaven."