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PCA African American Leadership Development

MNA African American Ministries Coordinator Wy Plummer spent his early years in a church pew, but it wasn't until he was led to Christ by a PCA elder that he came to know Jesus as his personal Savior.



Left to right: Wy Plummer, MNA African American Ministries Coordinator; Alton Hardy, Church Planting Pastor of Urban Hope Presbyterian Church, Birmingham AL; Mike Higgins, Pastor of South City Church, St. Louis MO, and Covenant Seminary Dean of Students.

"I was led to Christ through the PCA, by a ruling elder I found to be my intellectual equal. I was impressed by his ability to answer many of my questions about Christianity. My faith led me to reconcile with and remarry my wife, and enroll in seminary in Baltimore. After graduating and serving as co-pastor of New Song Community Church for 5 years, I joined MNA staff in 2000." In that role, he has seen many in the PCA begin the journey toward a multiethnic united PCA church body.

"A growing number of PCA churches, events like the Leadership Development Resource Weekend, and ministries such as the African American Presbyterian Fellowship have grown and shaped the PCA in its pursuit to represent all tribes, tongues, and nations," said Wy.

"What impacted me most at that first LDR weekend, as someone who is black, reformed, and Presbyterian, is that it was the first time I'd been to a gathering where I had that much in common culturally as well as theologically with a group of people. It felt like a family reunion. I was passionate and convinced that we needed that kind of fellowship in an ongoing relationship."

~Jemar Tisby, Assistant to the Chancellor at Reformed Theological Seminary

Drawing Students to Seminary

The Leadership Development Resource (LDR) Weekend is one of the PCA's major avenues for encouraging and recruiting African American leadership in the PCA. It began when an African American student at Covenant Seminary asked Wy if there were PCA churches who had significant African American participation. Wy and the staff of New City Fellowship in Chattanooga TN put together a weekend program and invited students to come. Eleven students attended. When Jemar Tisby, a student from RTS Jackson, asked if the event could be repeated in Jackson MS, the LDR Weekend was underway as a repeat event.



LDR speakers discuss the church's role in advancing the Gospel and seeking justice in our communities. Left to right: Jemar Tisby; Sean Lucas, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg MS; Carl Ellis, PCA Pastor and Seminary Lecturer on Race and Culture.

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LDR Weekend Gathering at Covenant Seminary.

The LDR continues to grow. Michelle Higgins organized this year's LDR, hosted on Labor Day weekend by South City Church in St. Louis MO. Michelle is an MDiv graduate of Covenant Seminary and serves on the church staff as Director of Worship and Outreach. This year 350 attended. *"Jemar Tisby developed the informal fellowship and candid conversation time into a weekend forum with speakers, academic discussion, and significant insight into the workings of the denomination, all for the sake*



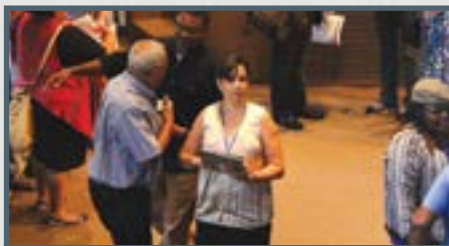
Left to right: Randy Nabors, MNA Urban and Mercy Ministries Coordinator; Michelle Higgins, South City Church Director of Worship and Outreach; Duke Kwon, Pastor of Grace DC Meridian Hill, Washington DC.

of explaining and hopefully attracting young pastors into the denomination—especially African Americans. However, it grew into an event that has become important for more than just potential teaching elders. It is now something of a family reunion for women as well as men; as a gathering for learning, fellowship, and worship, LDR Weekend reminds everyone in attendance that every part of God's body is vital, every part is equal," said Michelle.

As the LDR Weekend has moved between three cities—Chattanooga, Jackson, and Saint Louis—it has attracted a following from each region, which expands as its participants spread over the country. This year, professionals—young and old, college and seminary students, educators, pastors and counselors, lay and vocational ministry workers filled the seats, all with a shared goal: to engage with Christians across ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic divides on the subject of the faith-rooted empowerment of African American communities. Covenant Seminary, Covenant College, New City Fellowship, South City Church, Redeemer Church Jackson, and Reformed Theological Seminary partnered to help the

LDR Weekend gather young people who want to be mentored while they think about seminary and ministry in the PCA, and to host these young people in their homes.

"This year's theme 'The Church in Pursuit of Social Justice' was meant to challenge all of us – personally and corporately – to address the biases that hinder reconciliation in our contexts. LDR Weekend is an opportunity to focus on the beliefs that unite us, and an invitation to dialogue on the matters over which we disagree, while affirming that unity ought not be impacted by disagreement. The display of that unity was evident throughout the conference, especially during worship times, which included extensive participation in prayer, congregational singing, and confessional elements," said Michelle.



Karen Ellis, LDR speaker: "The end goal of activism in society generally is political and social change. The end goal for Christians is the glory of God and His Kingdom."

Jemar adds, *"LDR Weekend is different from any other Presbyterian gathering that anyone has been to because it is coming from a reformed background, so you can count on deep, rich teaching. But it has a different cultural context than the rest of the PCA. This year's LDR had black speakers, gospel choirs, an incredibly diverse mix of people – men and women, young and old, black and white. It's boisterous, in the sense of fun and*



Left to right: Thurman Williams, Associate Pastor of Grace and Peace Fellowship, St. Louis MO, and LDR speaker; Kevin Williams, Pastor of New City Fellowship, Chattanooga TN.

joyful, which feels like a vacation and not just a conference. It feels like a family reunion, with people you've never met, and yet you are united through The Spirit. LDR 2015 could be summed up as timely, significant, and encouraging."

South City Church in St. Louis is a PCA church with a vision for cultural diversity and unity. Covenant Seminary Dean of Students Mike Higgins, Michelle's father, serves as the church's lead pastor. Michelle describes the church this way, *"South City Church is an 'uncommon family,' a Gospel-centered congregation of should-be antagonists that is dedicated to the active striving of viewing one another as friends. The membership is predominantly white and culturally Presbyterian. Leadership is more diverse, men and women from multiple ethnic and denominational backgrounds. We celebrate the many God-given distinctions in our family, which empowers us all to be dedicated to the elimination of ethnic and socioeconomic barriers in all forms. It is my job and my joy to connect with people who are visiting the church for the first time, people who live in the neighborhood whom we have not yet met, people who believe in God and people who do not."*



A Gathering Fellowship



The Village Church Congregation.

“When as an African American you embrace reformed theology, you wonder if you are the only one. We hope the African American Presbyterian Fellowship (AAPF) will help the PCA better understand the African American culture, encourage African American participation in the denomination, highlight the virtue of racial unity to which God has called His people, assist local churches as they seek to minister among minorities, recruit minority leadership in leadership agencies, mentor and coach African American leaders, and provide resources and connections to African American men and women in the PCA.

“We know that if we are to develop leadership in the PCA, we need a pipeline to the PCA from seminaries. A huge way of getting minorities to seminary is to meet them at

college. Developing Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) is a major way to do this. Jackson State University in Jackson MS has an RUF, as does Alabama A&M at Huntsville AL, and Delaware State University in Dover DE. In the PCA, there are 3 African American RUF ministers and 6-8 African American interns.

“The best way to minister among minority cultures is to have friendships with minorities. When you do that, you come to them as equals, as human beings. When you build relationships with minorities, you see things from their perspective, and it brings us closer together. People in the majority need to come



The Village Church, Huntsville AL.

to birthday parties. Come to minority friends’ houses. Build genuine relationships with people different from you.



Alex Shipman, Pastor The Village Church, Huntsville AL, and AAPF Acting Director.

“As a relational body, we do not claim to speak for all African Americans in the denomination. Our mission is to work within the PCA to expand African American leadership and involvement. Our vision is to give African Americans an elevated, integrated presence. Continue to pray that God will keep us humble and grounded, and realize this is a marathon, not a sprint. It’s not just for those in the PCA now – we are in the building stages, and we are giving the Spirit time to move in it. Right now, the African American presence in the PCA is very small. Through the fellowship, we are paving a way for the future of the denomination, to make things better for them. I want to leave the denomination more diverse for the next generation.”

–Alex Shipman, Pastor of The Village Church, Huntsville AL.

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–Alex Shipman



The Ministry of the Church in Crisis



Aaron Turner and Mark Tucker, Pastors Midtown Church, St. Louis MO.

Churches who have an ethnic mix in their membership are still a minority among PCA congregations. As racial tensions flair up in communities in North America, PCA churches can come alongside those who are facing crisis. *MNA Multiply* asked Aaron Turner and Mark Tucker at the Midtown Church in St. Louis to talk about their response when the shooting of Michael Brown left Ferguson MO in crisis in August 2014. Here are their thoughts:



Midtown Church

The Old Testament prophets have much to say about justice and mercy, and they point us constantly to Christ. We are called to lead our church in being salt and light. Midtown Church members wanted to focus on loving people who were hurting and show love from the St. Louis Christian community to the Ferguson community.



Midtown Church

“The church offers a unique message of forgiveness and the opportunity to call to prayer those on both sides in a conflict. Pastors should be willing to speak into issues that people in our communities and nation are struggling to understand. The Old Testament prophets have much to say about justice and mercy, and they point us constantly to Christ. We are called to lead our church in being salt and light. Midtown Church members wanted to focus on people who were hurting, and show love from the St. Louis Christian community to the Ferguson community. We created Hope for Ferguson as a gathering point and then joined with other churches in events in which the people of the community could come together. Pastors led in creating peace and calling for

justice, engaging with the community to be the hands and feet of Christ. We attempted to address needs in the community. Our counsel to others? Address what is troubling people. Sin causes alienation all around. Be active in the community. Develop relationships with other churches and pastors – before crises occur. Take risks. Use your power to help those who have no power. Pursue righteousness and justice even when not in crisis. Teach and model love for enemies. Learn with Jesus to be friends of sinners.”



The Old Courthouse in St. Louis, where the infamous Dred Scott case was argued. The Dred Scott Decision upheld slavery, thereby contributing to the launch of the Civil War. After the war, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the US Constitution abolished slavery and assured African Americans of citizenship and the right to vote.

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From the Coordinator

*"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;
... Therefore, **we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.***

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." **2 Corinthians 5:18, 20**



Dear Friends,

This is a challenging time of cultural change in North America. Conflict between black and white, sometimes growing into violence, is too frequent an occurrence in our communities. As God's people, we have a great opportunity and calling: to be His ambassadors of the Reconciliation that is found in Christ.

In this issue, we take a closer look at how God is moving within our denomination to heal the wounds from fractured race relations and to develop African American participation and leadership in the PCA. Churches such as the multiethnic South City Church and the majority white Midtown Church in St. Louis MO have provided leadership in the midst of crisis in their communities.

The emerging African American Presbyterian Fellowship (AAPF) and the annual Leadership and Development Resource Weekend (LDR) are encouraging African American Leadership in the PCA. The LDR began as an event and has become a growing movement that draws college and even high school students into seminary training and lay leadership in PCA churches.

God is at work, moving in our denomination to raise up the next generation of leadership, black and white working together to advance the Gospel. May the PCA be the light of Christ, calling for justice, practicing love, and proclaiming redemption.

In His Name,
Jim Bland, MNA Coordinator