

THE UNION OF BLACK EPISCOPALIANS

An Opportunity for Christian Action



The Union of Black Episcopalians encourages the involvement of Black people in the total life of the Church - on every level and in every way - mission, stewardship, evangelism, education, sharing, liberation, empowerment, leadership, governance and politics. To translate these words into action in the Christian commitment of all Episcopalians and at all levels of the Church's mission, black people *must* be involved in the decision-making processes of the General Convention, provincial synods, dioceses, districts, deaneries and Executive Council. The Church is not whole unless all of God's people are an integral part of it.

One of the major reasons for the existence of the Union is to institute and exert an all-out effort to eradicate every vestige of racism within the Church, and wherever it exists. We are called to name institutional, intentional, unintentional, and attitudinal racism, and excise its poison of suppression.

The Union of Black Episcopalians, formerly the Union of Black Clergy and Laity, is an organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Delaware in 1968. Signers of the original incorporation papers were: the Right Reverend John T. Walker, Diocesan Bishop, Diocese of Washington; the Right Reverend Quintin E. Primo, Retired Suffragan Bishop, Diocese of Chicago; the Reverend St. Julian Simpkin, deceased, past Rector of St. Cyprians, Rochester, New York; the Reverend Austin Cooper, Sr., Rector, St. Andrew's Church, Cleveland; and the Reverend Canon Frederick B. Williams, Rector, Church of the Intercession, New York City.

THE UNION OF BLACK EPISCOPALIANS — AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE

CHAPTERS

The Union of Black Episcopalians is a confederation of chapters. There are presently over twenty chapters and ten interest groups throughout the continental United States and Hawaii.

Chapters are considered the strongest link in the Union's chain. Financial support from the chapters and individual memberships are the chief support of the National Board of Directors. The Board of Directors helps to organize chapters, but chapters develop their own local priorities and programs. For additional information on organizing a chapter or how to contact a chapter near you, please contact the National President.

NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The National Board of Directors serves the following functions:

1. COMMUNICATION, information-gathering and dissemination;
2. ADVOCACY, for Black Episcopalians within the National Church;
3. REFERRALS, to national committees and commissions, search committees, nomination committees, of Black Episcopalians;
4. REPRESENTS Black Episcopalians with other minority, cultural and special-interest groups in the Episcopal Church and in ecumenical circles (eg. Episcopal Urban Caucus, Black Churches of America, TransAfrica, National Urban League, NAACP, etc.);
5. LOBBIES for and encourages continued support of the three predominantly Black Episcopal Colleges by the National Church, dioceses, black churches and UBE chapters;
6. DEVELOPS RESOURCES for chapter and program initiation and implementation;
7. PLANS AND EXECUTES an annual conference for Black Episcopalians that promotes preaching, singing and fellowship reflective of our heritage, that presents workshops to educate and inform, that helps us to discover and use the special gifts we have been given;
8. PROMOTES active and greater participation of black people in the life of the Church by tracking diocesan, provincial and national Church elections, making sure that at least one electable black candidate is on each slate and 'flagging' potential cancellations when two or more black names appear;
9. MONITORS minority exclusion wherever it exists in the Church.

PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS

- I. The Right Reverend Quintin E. Primo, Chicago, Illinois
- II. The Reverend Canon Frederick B. Williams, New York
- III. The Reverend Jesse Anderson, Jr., Washington, D.C.
- IV. The Reverend Austin Cooper, Sr., Cleveland, Ohio
- V. The Reverend Dr. Joseph N. Green, Norfolk, Virginia
- VI. The Right Reverend John M. Burgess, New Haven, Connecticut
- VII. The Reverend Canon Edward Geyer, National Church Center
- VIII. Mr. Edrick Bain, Boston, Massachusetts



BURGESS

The Union of Black Episcopalians desires to promote the mission of the Episcopal Church in the black community of America and in the Caribbean and Africa. Through its liturgy, its theology and its life style, the Union believes that the Episcopal Church can effectively offer the Gospel of salvation to this large segment of the Family of God. The Union is convinced, however, that this evangelism will not be productive or honest so long as racism pervades the church's life. Political and social scientists and community activists may change their concerns and enthusiasms to fit the popular whim, but, as victims of discrimination and exploitation, Black Episcopalians must continue to insist that the Church be constant in its determination to erase this blemish from its life and that of American society. Membership in parishes, the composition of the clergy and the structure of each diocese and the National Church must reflect the diverse character of our life together. It is our purpose to remind members of the Episcopal Church that no other consideration must be allowed to divert their attention, if the Church is to be truly catholic in its constituency and truly evangelical in its mission.

- the Right Reverend John M. Burgess, retired Bishop of Massachusetts and Past President of the Union of Black Episcopalians

The Union of Black Episcopalians has long been regarded as the only viable Black Caucus within the Episcopal Church. To merit that distinction, the Union must take seriously its role as a potentially powerful negotiator and arbiter of black concerns in both church and society, for all that this implies. It requires cognizance of the fact that while fellowship with all people of goodwill is an important outgrowth of self-awareness, the UBE's paramount purpose, call and function is to serve the interests of black people. In faithfully fulfilling this responsibility, it will serve the whole Church.

- The Reverend Barbara C. Harris, Executive Director, Episcopal Church Publishing Co.



HARRIS

To many of our Church people the term *Union of Black Episcopalians* is something of an anomaly. For in the minds of the larger American society, Episcopalian is often understood to be synonymous with a middle- and upper-income WASP establishment. In that context the term UNION and BLACK are anomalies. They are inconsistent in relationship to other known and accepted impressions.

I perceive that the Episcopal Church endeavors to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Happily, we count people of black, white, red, yellow, and brown hues as full members of the branch of Christ's family.

To be sure, in a perfect Church in an ideal society, there would be no functional purpose for UBE. But, history and present-day realities clearly teach us, that while we have come a long way, we still have miles to go. At this very special moment in history, it is very important that UBE present the black agenda with vigor and clarity to the Church and our society.

- The Reverend Canon Edward B. Geyer, Jr., Executive for National Mission in Church and Society and Past President of the Union of Black Episcopalians



GEYER

One word that continually creeps into the language of Holocaust survivors is the word, 'invisible.' It is the word with which I most strongly identify. Blacks in the South, where I grew up, and blacks throughout the Episcopal Church in the United States (ECUSA) continue to be invisible: on Standing Committees; in the Office of World Mission at the Episcopal Church Center; on Executive Council; and in Provincial and Diocesan leadership roles. Blacks are strongly and actively involved in Church life at the parish level. But, we have difficulty gaining access to nearly every governing body in this Church. Thus, since we are not 'visible' at the upper echelon levels, we are 'invisible' to members of the hierarchy, when it considers positions of leadership within the Church.

UBE strives to assure the strong and constant visibility of the sons and daughters of Hagar and Abraham, at all levels in the Episcopal Church. UBE serves as a prophetic voice - a voice often crying in the wilderness of an indifferent Church - to prepare a way by opening its ears to the needs of all of God's people. UBE attempts to awaken the "Sleeping Giant" to the realization that, until all are free, none are free. UBE unmasks the evils of all forms of oppression and leads the way toward a new day where all God's people are free. UBE calls ECUSA to cease mirroring the evils of society and join our march toward Zion, as together we work to conform society to a vision of what the Church should be.

- Mrs. Nell B. Gibson, Member of Executive Council (1985-1991) and Executive Assistant to the Bishop of New York



GIBSON

“Different Names But The Same Agenda: Precursors to the Union of Black Episcopalians”

The Reverend J. Carleton Hayden, Ph.D.

Rector, Holy Comforter Church, St. Andrew's Parish, Washington, D.C. and
Chairperson, Department of History and Geography, Morgan State University



HAYDEN

The earliest known national organization among Black Episcopalians is the PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE EXTENSION OF THE CHURCH AMONG COLORED PEOPLE founded in 1856 by James Theodore Holly of St. Luke's, New Haven. There were then four black clergy and seven congregations. With their female auxiliary, the Good Angels, they fought the exclusion of Blacks from the Episcopal seminaries and diocesan conventions as well as the refusal of the Episcopal Church to take a stand against slavery. The SOCIETY, like all black America, was divided over the issue of emigration to Africa or Canada for immediate freedom, or remaining in the States for eventual freedom. In 1861, Holly emigrated to Haiti. A remnant carried on for a few years under Samuel V. Berry of St. Phillip's Church, Buffalo, New York.

After the Civil War, General Convention's PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL FREEDOM'S COMMISSION established schools and churches in the South. White southern resistance, northern white apathy, and dwindling revenue led to the disbanding of the Commission in 1876.

That same year a group of blacks in Baltimore founded the SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHURCH WORK AMONG THE COLORED PEOPLE. It pressed for the re-establishment of a national program for black evangelism and education. In a few years it ceased to meet.

In 1882, a Mississippi priest launched a virulent attack on blacks, arguing that sparse black Episcopal growth was due to their intellectual, moral and leadership inferiority. The southern bishop then proposed the Sewanee plan to segregate blacks into a racial diocese. John Peterson, an aged teacher and deacon at St. Philip's Church, New York, called the black clergy together who organized the CONVOCATION OF THE COLORED CLERGY with the distinguished Cambridge scholar and missionary, Alexander Crummell of St. Luke's, Washington, as the first president. Later the name was changed to the CONFERENCE OF CHURCH WORKERS AMONG COLORED PEOPLE since some black laity and two white priests had joined.

The CONFERENCE met annually. Every third year it met at the site of General Convention and appointed lobbyists to press for black goals. Conferences were highly organized with grand festive services, lectures, reports, and stirring debates. Annual proceedings were published. It sponsored a monthly newspaper, *The Afro-American Churchman*, and later *The Church Advocate* edited by George Freeman Bragg, Jr. of St. James, Baltimore. The interaction on a national basis fostered a common and distinctive churchmanship among black Episcopalians.

The CONFERENCE, through protest and agitation, served as the conscience of the Church, recalling it to its catholic ideal. Over the years, the CONFERENCE partially achieved many goals. Segregation was never written into national policy or canon law. Another national commission to evangelize and educate southern blacks was established. A black priest was appointed to the commission. Academic standards for black candidates were not lowered. A black priest was added to the staff of Bishop Payne Divinity School, the South's seminary for blacks. A theological college for blacks, King Hall, was established at Howard University. After several unsuccessful appointments, a black priest, William Victor Tunnell, professor of history at Howard, was named Warden. Industrial education never became the sole focus on Episcopal schools in the South and St. Augustine's College was eventually developed into a four-year, degree-granting college. In 1937, a black priest, Bravid Harris, became Secretary for Negro Work. He was succeeded by Tollie L. Cautin.

The CONFERENCE continued until the mid-1960s, although it gradually gave way to the EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL AND RACIAL UNITY (ESCRU) founded in 1957. Although ESCRU seemed more in tune with the political thrusts of the Civil Rights Movement, it was unable to adapt to Black Power and ceased to function.

On February 8, 1968, seventeen Black priests met at St. Philip's Church, New York, and founded the Union of Black Clergy and Laity to remove racism from the Church and society and to stimulate the growth of black membership. The name had changed, but the agenda remained the same.

It is understood by most people that politics affect every facet of our lives, including religion. The structure of the Episcopal Church mirrors exactly the government of the United States. With that comparison in mind one can begin to visualize the roles and the relationships between the UBE and the Episcopal Commission for Black Ministries (ECBM) and the Episcopal Church. Black Episcopalians constitute a minority in the Church. Therefore, it is imperative that a viable network be established to formally address issues that affect black people. UBE is the organization through which the black presence can be identified. UBE enables black people to participate in the decision-making process locally, regionally and nationally. UBE also performs the important function of monitoring to insure that the Church ministers to the needs of black people fairly and consistently.

The ECBM is appointed by the Presiding Bishop and funded by the Standing Committee on National Mission in Church and Society, to initiate programs, projects and training which target some of the issues raised by UBE. The ECBM serves an 'in-house' function, by advising the Church on ways to affirm, involve and work with Black Episcopalians through recommended policy and/or programmatic changes. The ECBM distributes over half of its annual budget to fund congregational-based program. The remaining funds are allocated for the leadership conferences, special concerns task forces and emphasizing the heritage and contributions of Black Episcopalians to the Church and to the nation through various publications.

Neither the ECBM nor the UBE can function adequately without the other. They are mutually dependent on and supportive of each other. And, if both continue to focus their collective energies on similar goals and objectives, we the people and the Church, reap the benefit.

- Mrs. Ora L. Houston, Chairperson, Episcopal Commission for Black Ministries



HOUSTON



ROBINSON

It is a source of personal satisfaction to salute the Union of Black Episcopalians as the *Torch Bearer* for Black Episcopalians. The Union represents the cement which holds together the ethno-cultural blocks of the black heritage in the Episcopal Church. The Union is the sinew - the link that ties the past to the present - the synthesis of all discordant parts. It is the voice of 200,000 Black Episcopalians united under the banner of Christ to seek his kingdom through worship, study, activism and fellowship.

The Union is an advocate for the black colleges because it realizes that it and these colleges are interdependent; they need each other. The Union serves as a conduit for promoting and advancing the cause of these colleges. We at the three colleges (St. Augustine's, St. Paul's and Voorhees) are grateful to the Union for its strong commitment to education generally, and more specifically to the three black colleges of the Episcopal Church.

- Dr. Prezrell R. Robinson, President, St. Augustine's College

Lest we forget . . . The 1970 General Convention . . . The Union is ours and only we can make it work. It is vital that each Parish make financial commitment to the fund-raising campaign currently in progress. Anything less will seriously curtail our activities.

The Union consolidated its position and internal cohesiveness in a way and to a degree that I thought was far off in the future. We went in together, fought together, and emerged from the convention stronger than we have ever been before.

The issue we lost was adequate representation on the Executive Council and the right to name our own representatives to the Council. My reading of this is that, because of the conservative nature of the Council, the Church has put itself on the spot. Either they respond in a positive manner to the issues UBCL raises or they will be exposed as the racists we believe them to be. In any case the Union is in a favorable position.

- The Reverend Canon Frederick B. Williams, Rector, Church of the Intercession and Past President of the Union of Black Clergy and Laity (Episcopalians)



WILLIAMS

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