

**AFRICAN-
AMERICAN
DISCIPLES**

A Mini-History

Raymond E. Brown


ABOUT AFRICAN-AMERICAN DISCIPLES

African-Americans were introduced to the Christian Church primarily as slaves enrolled by their masters as members of a particular congregation. However, there were a small number of Black Disciples, Preachers and people who were free. From all of the records we have been able to discover, Black membership was in practically all of the first churches where the Disciples movement began. Therefore, one could say that the early Disciple church was a model church in so far as all people being under one shelter; the master, the freedman and the slave all worshiped together. ❀

THE BEGINNING OF SEPARATE CONGREGATIONS

The earliest Black congregation on record was at Midway, Kentucky. By the early 1830's there were so many Black members in the Woodford County churches that White leaders thought it appropriate to organize the "Colored Christian Church." In 1834, the congregation was constituted, given the Midway Church building, and provided with a Black pastor, Alexander Campbell. The Women's Mission group bought Campbell for \$1,000, set him free and provided him with some theological education. The congregation was accorded full church status, elected its own officers and conducted its own business. Under Campbell's leadership 300 new members joined the Church. That Congregation is still in existence today and according to the last Yearbook and Directory, has 35 members and an average attendance of 30

The first Black congregation on record in a free state was at Pickerel Town, Logan County Ohio and began in 1838. Henry Newsom pastored this church, which became an important station for the Underground Railroad, but for unstated reasons the congregation disbanded in 1856.

In 1849 the American Christian Missionary Society was formed and assumed responsibility for evangelizing Blacks. The largest period of growth was between 1861 and 1876. By 1861 the number of Black members of the Christian Church was about 7,000 with close to 5,500 of those being in predominantly white congregations. Following the sending out of evangelists, the number of Black members increased from having churches in five states to churches in fifteen states (from about 7,000 to approximately 20,000 members). 

CONVENTIONS

From the beginning Black Disciples were interested in conventions and in 1869 the Martin County Convention was formed. This Convention was the forerunner to the Washington Norfolk District Assembly. The South Carolina convention was started in 1871, Kentucky in 1872, Tennessee and Alabama in 1880, Texas in 1881, Piedmont Tri-State in 1882, and Mississippi in 1887.


As early as 1867 Black Disciples tried to establish a National Organization; however, this first effort failed. A more permanent organization was the National Convention of the Churches of Christ formed in 1887 by H. Malcolm Ayers and Preston Taylor of Kentucky. Ayers and Taylor spoke often before the General Convention asking for shared leadership with the White controlled Missionary Societies for the work among Blacks but with little result. This convention met throughout the remainder of the century.

By 1914 the question of self determination arose among Black Disciple leadership due to the realization that by World War I Black Disciples' work and their program seemed dormant. Recognizing that there were now approximately 600 congregation comprising some 48,000 members there was a desire for a National Convention. In 1917 two calls went out to organize a National Convention: Preston Taylor sent one from Nashville Tennessee; William Alphin sent the second for a meeting to be held in Kansas City.

On September 5th, 1917 a group gathered at Lea Avenue Christian Church in Nashville to organize the National Christian Missionary Convention of the Disciples of Christ. From the beginning, the Convention was not separate or segregated but Black controlled and

the majority of the participants were Black. Forty-one persons from fourteen states gathered: ten females and thirty one males. The first treasurer of the National Convention was Dr. J. E. Walker of Tennessee who served continually for fifty years until his untimely death.

The objectives of this organization were: to cooperate in preaching the gospel at home and abroad; to help in preparing and maintaining teachers and missionaries in America and other lands; to assist in promoting Religious education and benevolence.

The purpose of the National Convention was to create a medium of self expression and cooperative endeavors for the development of our churches that our best contributions may be made. This remained their goal even though the shape of the conventions changed, expanded and developed. 


MISSIONARIES

The American Christian Missionary Society decided to send a missionary to Liberia. The person selected was Alexander Cross. He was not an ordained minister nor a college graduate. He was a slave, "a man of good logic, Ready utterance and burning zeal."

The church purchased him for \$550.00. Together with his wife and eight year old son he made the long voyage across the ocean, landing in Monrovia, in January of 1854. So enthusiastic was he to begin the work that he underestimated the power of Jungle Fever. His strength was not sufficient to combat the first attack and after only two months on the field, Alexander Cross died and the mission was forced to be suspended.

Jacob Kenely, some fifty years later, went to Liberia and found work as a carpenter, but was soon taken down with African fever. Because of his ill health it was necessary for him to live near the coast so he relocated in Shiefflin, a sea coast town 25 miles from the capital city of Monrovia. Here in 1907 he opened his school, the Liberian Christian Institute, and his permanent work began. In 1908, the Christian Women's Board of Missions assumed support of the work and the government gave them a land grant of 500 acres. There were 62 students in the day school and 50 in the night school. In 1910 he married Ruth Walker who was eager and capable to serve with him. In 1911, soon after plans were completed to provide him with some help, he went out fishing for food and drowned. Bravely and efficiently his wife carried on with his work until new recruits arrived.

Among the recruits to Africa were Harry G. and Lula Gettis Smith. They arrived in Monrovia in 1912 and set in immediately to the work at Shiefflin. Shortly after beginning her work Mrs. Smith was stricken with Black Water fever and it became evident that she must leave. Mr. Smith continued to work in Liberia until 1916 when he returned home after several attacks of Black Water fever.

There have been other African-Americans who have served on the mission fields, including but not limited to, Effie Burford, Lois Hodrick and Hanna Toomey. Currently there are nine African Missionaries, six females and three males, including Alabama's Sandra Rucker Gourdalt. 

SCHOOLS

Black Disciples began founding schools as early as 1867, when Peter Lowerey chartered the Tennessee Manual Labor University at Muresseburo. However, the strategy soon shifted toward the building of institutions for the training of Ministers and Church leaders.

The first of these was Louisville Bible School, organized in 1873 under the leadership of P.H. Moss. This school remained in operation for only four years. Southern Christian Institute at Edwards, Mississippi was chartered in 1875 and began operation in 1882 under the leadership of Mrs. Lutitina Faurot. It had a long and glorious history before it's merger with Tougaloo College in 1954. The Christian Bible College of New Castle, Kentucky, was organized in 1886 and lead by J.M. Maimuring and J. August Reed. It remained in operation for six years. The Lum Grade School in Lum, Alabama was established in 1884 under the guidance of H.J. Brayboy. It did glorious work in it's field, but it was too short-lived to make a lasting impact on the Christian Church.

Other schools established were: Louisville Bible school (1892), Lum Institute (1894), Piedmont Christian Institute, Martinsville, VA (1900), Jarvis Christian Institute (now the Jarvis Christian College) and Central Christian Institute and Tennessee Central Christian Institute in Shepardsville, KY and Tennessee respectively.

Jarvis was the last missionary institution established by the Christian Women's Board of Missions. Jarvis is the only Missionary Institution established by the Christian Church for the training of African-Americans that is still in existence. Lack of Leadership and funding caused the closure of all the others.

FIELD WORKERS

- Preston Taylor was hired as National Evangelist in 1884.
- Sara Lou Bostick was hired as a field worker in 1899 by the Christian Women's Board of Missions.
- In 1914 Mrs. Rosa Brown was chosen to work among the women beginning July 1st.
- Rosa Brown Bracey continued to staff until 1938 when she became the Executive Secretary for the National Convention
- Mr. P.H. Moss was selected to serve the Bible Schools beginning October 1st, 1914.
- After the organizing of the National Convention, at each session the Evangelist reported. These Regional Evangelists were hired and paid by the Indianapolis office, but sanctioned by the Convention. One report listed these Evangelist as follows:
 - I.C. Franklin-Alabama, Florida, Georgia, S. Carolina (He lived in Mississippi)
 - H.G. Smith-Texas
 - R.B. Wells-Arkansas, and Oklahoma

In the 1924 Convention these were four field workers for Negro Work:

- J.B. Lehman-Superintendent of Negro work (also President of S.C.I.)
- Rosa Grubbs-Field Secretary-St. Louis
- P.H. Moss-Bible School Department
- Deetsy Blackburn-Children's work-Bible School Department

In 1935 Robert Hayes Peoples became the first African-American Secretary of all African-American Church Work and Caruella Jamison became the Field Secretary for Women's' Work.

PUBLICATIONS

It was in Port Gibson, Mississippi that we started the publication called, "*The Gospel Plea*." King Ryans Brown was the first editor and held the post for three years. Ma. J.B. Lehman, president of Southern Christian Institute, then became editor and published it until 1924.

At the National Convention in 1924, it was felt that they needed a greater opportunity for self-expression. Elder Vance G. Smith was elected as editor and the name was changed to "*The Christian Plea*." Vance served until August 1928 when Price Albert Grays, Jr. then of Kansas City, MO was elected as his successor. Grays held the post from 1928 till 1931. Warren Brown of Jarvis Christian College was elected next and served until 1934. In October 1934 C.H. Dickerson became the editor and served until August 1939. Merle R. Eppsa, a Professor at Tennessee A&I State College then became editor and served until January 1948. In 1948 L.L. Dickerson became editor and served until December, 1952 when William K. Fox was elected. He took over his duties as editor in February 1953 and served until March 1956, at that time the publication was moved to the National Convention Office in Indianapolis where the National Staff was made responsible for its publication.

Following the merger of the National Christian Missionary Convention with the International Convention the "Plea" was discontinued and replaced by the National Convocation publication named "Selah" which continues to be published today. ☺

THE YOUTH CONFERENCE

To provide an atmosphere for the education and recruitment of youth for Church vocations a Youth Conference was designed and implemented. The first of these conferences, called the Magnolia Conference, was held at the Southern Christian Institute of Edwards, Mississippi in 1928. The conference lasted for a week and had as its goal the intellectual, physical, social and spiritual development of young people. Courses were offered in "Training for Leadership," "The origin and nature of the Bible," "Vocational Guidance," "Story Telling," and "The Task of the Church." During the day and following the Vesper service there was opportunity for informal conversation with adult faculty and counselors and supervised recreation.

The spiritual development of those attending was enhanced by a "Morning Watch." This was the time when conferees went to a secluded spot with their Bibles for meditation and engagement in prayer. The climax of the day was the closing Friendship Circle which was conducted in a simple but impressive fashion.

On the final evening of the conference, the friendship circle was preceded by communion and was a time when conferees could make a commitment and dedication to full-time Christian service. It was one of the major sources of recruitment to Christian Ministry in the Black Churches. Sadly, the recruitment of African-Americans to the Christian Ministry has declined as the youth conferences declined in frequency and popularity.

A similar conference movement developed among the predominantly Anglo-American states and areas. But for African-Americans in the early years of racial separatism, the Convention encouraged the summer conference idea to spread from the Magnolia Conference (S.C.I.) In Edwards, MS; to the Midwest at Bonner Springs, Kansas; Southwest at Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Texas; Alabama; Central Kentucky; and Piedmont Tri-State District in Martinsville, Virginia.

STAFF

The 1944 National Christian Missionary Convention voted that the Board should employ it's own staff and establish it's own headquarters.

Emmet J. Dickson, a Jarvis College faculty member in 1945 was chosen to become the first (and only) executive secretary of the National Christian Missionary Convention.

Carnella Jamison was the successor to Rosa Brown Bracey. She had been working as a national secretary of missionary organizations while completing her studies.

Lorenzo Evans of Atlanta, Georgia, had been serving as program secretary of the Gutler Street YMCA. He came to the staff in 1946 as the director of Christian Education.

C.L. Parks who had been a Flanner House staff person in Indianapolis was employed in 1944 to do the part of the National Negro Secretary that Peoples had been doing. However, he eventually accepted a challenge from the Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ in the Goldsboro-Raleigh District to cooperate with the UCMS in upgrading their Minister's Institute program.

In 1949 Charles H. Webb of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, made his first report to the annual meeting of the convention as the new director of Church Development and Evangelism. In 1957, soon after the annual Convention, Charles Webb, Sr. resigned having accepted a call to become the senior minister at Park Manor Christian Church in Chicago, Illinois.

Emmet Dickson assumed Webb's responsibilities as well as serving as Executive Secretary. This dual role continued until the merger in 1980.

Carnella Jamison was succeeded by L. Ruth. Ratten in 1945. Ruth was succeeded by Alva Shackelford who served until her marriage to a Disciples Pastor, Leonard Brown.

Anna Bell Jackson became Director of Missionary Education and Christian Women's Fellowship in 1950 and her work included planning and leading church workers conferences and schools of mission.

In 1960 the work carried by the National Director of Christian Education was transferred to the Department of Christian Education of the United Christian Missionary Society. The program and services of Missionary Education, CWF and Women's Work was transferred to the Christian Women's Fellowship Department of the United Christian Missionary Society, where Annabelle was succeeded by Bernieca Holmes from Oklahoma. Lois Mothershed served during the early sixties and was followed by Eunice Miller from South Carolina. Eunice left to teach in the Indianapolis public school system. The service of Church Development and Evangelism was transferred to the Department of Church Development and Evangelism of the United Christian Missionary Society. The United Christian Missionary Society Covenant was to employ at least three additional African-Americans on its executive staff. ☺

THE NATIONAL CONVOCATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The National Christian Missionary Convention was established in 1917 and operated continuously until 1968 at which time it merged with the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ).

Raymond E. Brown was the last President of the National Christian Missionary Convention which retained its local integrity and the purpose there of. Raymond was also the first President of the National Convocation of the Christian Church and John R. Compton was its first Administrative Secretary.

The national convocation of the Christian Church began in 1969 and has continued since. The National Convocation is not a corporation, it was formed with the following purpose, *"to provide an instrumentality within the structure of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a forum for the discussion of pertinent issues related to Negro life in the context of the total church life; for fellowship; program promotion; leadership training; and such other general purposes as shall strengthen and support the congregation involved in the total mission of the church."* The National Convocation meets biannually in the even numbered years while the General Assembly of the Christian Church meets on odd-numbered years.

The National Convocation has a board composed of sixteen persons with the following executive offices: The General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); President of the Division of Homeland Ministries; the Vice-President of the

Center for Congregational Growth and Vitality and the Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation.

The Administrative Secretary's office is lodged symbolically in the heart of the Church along with the office of the General Minister and President. ☪

ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARIES

The National Christian Missionary Convention in 1944 selected its first and only Executive Secretary who served with distinction until the merger of the National Convention's with the International Conventions-Emmet J. Dickson.

The National Convocation would be led by an Administrative Secretary who also would serve as an (Assistant, Associate, Deputy Associate) General Minister and President and whose offices would be lodged in the General Office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

On April 1st, 1970, Dr. John R. Compton became the first Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation and served to December 31st, 1971. He was succeeded by the following:

- William K. Fox, Sr. - June 1st, 1972 to December 31st, 1982
- William W. Hannah - January 2nd, 1983 to December 31st, 1984
- Thomas J. Griffin - January, 1985 to August, 1985 (Interim)
- Raymond E. Brown - October, 1985 to February, 1986 (Interim)
- John R. Foulkes - February 1986 to present

AFRICAN-AMERICAN STAFF AFTER THE MERGER

1971

John R. Compton - Assistant to General Minister and President
Emmet J. Dickson - Division of Homeland Ministries
Lorenzo J. Evans - Division of Homeland Ministries
Enoch W. Henry - Division of Homeland Ministries
Gerald Cunningham - Division of Homeland Ministries
Thomas J. Griffin - Director of Reconciliation
Raymond E. Brown - Board of Church Extension

1976

William K. Fox - Assistant to General Minister and President
William W. Hannah - Executive Secretary, Department of
Evangelism and Membership (DHM)
Enoch Henry - Director of Special Congregational Services (DHM)
Gerald Cunningham - Director of Church in Society (DHM)
Effie Blair - Director of Education for Minority Constituencies
(DHM)
Clarence Johnson - Director of Black Ministry (DHM)
Thomas Griffin - Director of Reconciliation (General Office)
Ann Douglass - Executive Secretary for Latin America and the
Caribbean (DOM)
Raymond E. Brown - Vice President, Board of Church Extension

1990

John R. Foulkes - Associate General Minister and President
Julia Brown - Vice-President, Division of Overseas Ministries
Raymond E. Brown - Sr. Vice-President, Board of Church
Extension
Deborah Thompson - Director of New Congregation

Establishment, Board of Church Extension
Ernest Newborn - Director of Reconciliation, Church Finance
Council
Janice Newborn - Executive Secretary, Department of Church
Women (DHM)
William Edwards - Director of Special Congregation Services
(DHM)
Jack Sullivan - Director of Education for Minorities (DHM)
Ozark Range Sr. - Director of Black Ministries (DHM)
La Taunya Bynum - Director of Women in Ministry (DHM)
Gerald Cunningham - Director of Church in Society (DHM)
Belva Brown Jordan - Director of Youth Ministry (DHM)
Louise Evans - Director of Children's Work (DHM)
Clifton Willis - Office of Communication

1997

John R. Foulkes - Associate General Minister and Administrative
Secretary
Julia Brown Karimu - Executive Secretary for Personnel, Division
of Overseas Ministries
L. Wayne Stewart - Director of Reconciliation, Church Finance
Council
Deborah Thompson - Director of New Congregation
Establishment, Board of Church Extension
Eugene Randall - General Consultant, Board of Church Extension
Gerald Cunningham - Senior Associate, Center for Education and
Mission (DHM)
Billey P. Bridges - Associate, African-American Christian
Education (DHM)
Sotello V. Long - Associate, Evangelism (DHM)
Janis M. Brown - Associate, Disciples Women (DHM)
Charles H. Webb, Jr. - Associate, Black Ministry (DHM)
Clifton Willis - Office of Communication

1997 Regional Staff

Alabama - Lionel Young, Part-time
Illinois - Dwight E. Bailey, Associate Regional Minister

Indiana - Kenneth E. Hall, Associate Regional Minister
Kentucky - Henry A. Snook, Jr. , Part-time
North Carolina - J.O. Williams, Sr., Associate Minister
Ohio - Robin E. Hedgeman, Associate Regional Pastor


THE LEGACY WE HAVE

Preston Taylor has been mentioned earlier as a National Evangelist and a Pastor, and one who called together the first National Convention; but he was much more.

At age fifteen he was a drummer boy with the Union Army. He bid to do work on two sections of track for the Big Sandy Railroad. He created employment opportunities for a struggling Black community, fostering education, making possible home ownership and demonstrating how to make good news.

For five years he worked for a white Christian preacher and undertaker. Now thirty-seven years old, his former trade as a craftsman in stone, his ability as a building engineer for the rail road, and his knowledge of the mortuary business all combined to make his ministry a lesson for all church people of all times. He started a mortuary in 1888, and in 1899 he purchased thirty-seven acres, part of which became Greenwood Amusement Park and the rest Greenwood Cemetery.

Following his death and the death of his wife his estate was left to the National Christian Missionary Convention. The Amusement Park had been closed for many years and that land was sold. This has provided a trust fund in excess of one-half of a million dollars, the income from this underwrites the National Conventions Greenwood Cemetery which has had a long struggle but in the last decade has

prospered. In addition to the original Greenwood Cemetery was added Greenwood West and within the last eight months has acquired Greenwood North. Preston Taylors' Legacy provides us with more than one and one-half million dollars in assets. 

THOSE WONDERFUL WOMEN

It is difficult to find information about the contributions of the African-American Female Disciples. There is information about female staff but the information on women volunteers is inadequate. Though none of their names are available, as early as 1880, Black women decided to organize the Kentucky Christian Women's Board of Missions Conventions.

The Christian Women's Board of Missions hired Sara Lou Bostick, from Pea Rada, Arkansas, as a field worker in 1899. This relationship continued until the time of the first National Convention.


In 1914 the Christian Women's Board of Missions was seeking someone to serve as field worker among the women of the churches. Rosa Brown, a young woman who was Dean of Christian Education in Christian Institute in Lum, Alabama was chosen. She held the position for almost a quarter of a century.

In 1882 Southern Christian Institute officially opened. This school molded the lives of many African-American leaders of the Christian Church. Three of the women who were fellow students: Deetsy Blackburn Gray, Rosa Brown and Rosa Page. Deetsy Blackburn became Deetsy Blackburn Gray, Rosa Brown became Rosa Brown Bracey, and Rosa Page became Rosa Page Welch.

Mary Jamison was born in Murfreesboro, TN. She and her family moved to Topeka for 15 years. There she met and married William Alphin and they moved to Waco, TX where she became very active in the Women's Missionary Society. She worked with the women of Texas to get Jarvis College started.

Some of the leaders of women of the National Christian Missionary Convention were: Mrs. Preston Taylor, Mrs. Henry Herod, Mrs. Cynthia Martin, Mrs. H.A. Singleton, Mrs. Geneva Towns, Mrs. Arah Garret, Mrs. J.B. Moseley, Mrs. Zellie M. Peoples and Mrs. Philandria Dickerson.

Some leaders of children and Youth were: Bessie Chandler, who was first a staff person and then the leader of Laboratory Training School serving as a volunteer. Youth workers were: Mrs. E.G. Starling, Pauline Staples, Edna Ritchey, Edith Bristow and Mary Washington.

This Section cannot be closed without acknowledging the first office secretary of the National Convention, Marjorie Chenwalt Parker, who came from Kentucky to set the office in order and establish a professional ambience, and Ann Dickerson of Tennessee, a rising young leader whose life was cut short when she died while at a meeting for the General Church. 

SCHOOL OF FAITH AND LIFE

Under the leadership of P.H. Moss, Vance Smith and Robert H. Peoples the "institute" approach to Christian Education was used as the major way to assist congregations. However, in 1947 Lorenzo J. Evans had recruited a significant number of qualified volunteers to sponsor the first National Conference on Christian Education during the Cincinnati annual meeting. There was something for every church leader and every organization in the congregation.

Heretofore, the "observation Bible School" was the principle model used by religious educators to communicate models and concepts. But it was usually limited to biblical materials and sometimes narrow in its application of principles to contemporary life and work. The conference idea, running as an integral part of the convention meeting, provided a setting for Christian education activity to be experienced by all persons attending the convention.

The conference concept involved two hours a day for classes with the first hour being lecture and discussion and the second being for organization and promotional concerns. The director of Christian Education sponsored a fall planning conference at Thanksgiving time for state, area and selected congregational workers to review, evaluate and project programs for the convention. Convention officers and age-level fellowship presidents were expected to attend and do serious planning for the next National Convention as well as state and area events. Program staff from United Christian Missionary Society, along with others provided leadership and the conference developed into a school and became an integral part of the National Convention program. It was stated by many church leaders that this school was unparalleled in Christendom.

The School of Faith and Life concept has been adopted by the National Convocation of the Christian Church and by most of the predominantly African-American church substructures among Disciples of Christ. Regional and General Church participation in these events has been a major way to deliver field serviced to predominantly African-American Congregations. ☪

AMBASSADOR OF GOOD WILL

During the early 1940's it was an established UCMS policy to deploy a "Missionary" as a special youth conference leader. The "Missionary" conference leader was sometimes African-American in a traditionally all Anglo-American youth conference, or Anglo-American in a traditionally African-American youth conference. One of these conference "Missionary Leaders" who developed into a world renowned figure as an "Ambassador of Good Will", was Rosa Page Welch, a product of Southern Christian Institute and resident of Chicago, Ill. During the celebration of the International Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, October 25th thru 30th, 1949, Rosa Page became the first African-American Disciple chosen by the program committee to lead convention singing.

It was in August 1952 that Rosa Page Welch started on an eight month trip around the world as an "Ambassador of Good Will". She was sponsored by the Presbyterian Board of Missions which initiated the project; the Disciples of Christ's United Christian Missionary Society; The Disciples Ministries Wives Fellowship; the Department of United Church Women of the National Council of Churches; and the Women' American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

Welch spent from two to six weeks on mission locations in Tokyo, Japan; the Phillipines; the World Conference of Christian Youth in

Travancore, India; the Annual Convention of Christian Churches in Jabalpur, India; Thailand; Pakistan; Beirut, Lebanon; French Camerons; Belgian Congo; visiting the World Council of Churches in Geneva Switzerland and other European Countries. Welch returned and traveled extensively among congregations and major events within all five sponsoring church groups. She gave testimony to her experiences at a plenary session during the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ on July 7th, 1953, at Portland, Oregon.

Four years later she was one of the principle speakers at the first Quadrennial Assembly of the International Christian Women's Fellowship of the Christian Church, meeting at Purdue University.

What an influence on the lives of persons in the church of whatever race, sex or age! 