

African American Ministry Fellowship celebrates unity in Cooperative Program

By Lindsey Williams

Writing Specialist

At the African American Ministry Fellowship dinner on Oct. 28, held the evening before the annual Mississippi Baptist Pastor's Conference, ministers and Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) employees gathered to celebrate unity in Christ and look forward to the 100th anniversary of the Cooperative Program in 2025.

Rev. Kenneth Clark, pastor of New Hope Church in McComb, shared his journey from Wisconsin to ministry in Mississippi. His first introduction to Southern Baptist churches occurred in the North. Despite the country's divisive history, Clark holds a positive outlook on what God will accomplish in Mississippi.

"I love a lot of things about the SBC," said Clark. "I'm learning to love my brothers more and more. It really gets me when we forget who God is. A lot of my Black brothers used to ask me why I joined the SBC. 'Do you know their history?' I said, 'Yes, I do.' And they'd ask me why I joined. It's like when Peter went to Jesus and asked, 'How many times do I forgive my brother?' Do we stop forgiving our brother? No, we don't. There is forgiveness that needs to be done on both sides.



(Photo credit: Bart Lambright)

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Retired Army soldier and pastor of Spangle Banner Missionary Church in Pace, Rev. Larry Young, promoted the National African American Fellowship (NAAF), a branch of the SBC. “When I retired, I was contacted about the SBC and encouraged to find an association office close to me. Sure enough, 10 miles from where I lived was the Mid-Delta Association, and I became a part of that.”

“At first, I didn’t like it,” admitted Young. “I brought our church into the SBC and didn’t like the idea of becoming a Southern Baptist only to become a Black Southern Baptist. Later on, I realized that it’s not so much that you’re a Black Southern Baptist, it’s just that you’re Black and worship a little bit differently than folks who are not Black.”

“In order for cooperation to exist, there must be trust,” said Dr. Shawn Parker, Executive Director-Treasurer of the MBCB. “I also want to acknowledge, from the history of Mississippi, that there is good reason for mistrust between the African American community and the Anglo community, the Hispanic community and the Anglo community, because far too many times we who have been in leadership have not done much to build trust. I don’t anticipate that it’s going to be addressed immediately. But I do want you to know that we’re working at it.”

Rev. Lowell Walker, African American Ministry contract consultant for the MBCB and pastor of Mt. Sinai Church in Tupelo, encouraged attendees to look forward. “There are things we can never undo. There are things we can never correct. So we have to start looking at what we can do now, and not focus on what was back then.”

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Rev. Brian Crawford, president of Mission Mississippi and pastor of City Light Church, speaks during the African American Ministry Fellowship Dinner on Oct. 28 at First Church, Jackson. (Photo credit: Bart Lambright)

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“There was a research study done in April, and it found that 81% of Americans say the country is more divided than united,” noted Crawford. “Dr. King said that he was thoroughly convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other and they fear each other because they don’t know each other.”

George Smith, former International Mission Board (IMB) missionary in East Africa, also addressed the fellowship,

speaking of the importance of encouraging African American Christians to pursue missions. "My wife, Geraldine, and I had no idea God would call us to full-time missions," recalled Smith. "After I went on a mission trip with missionaries in East Africa through the SBC, I came home and applied what I had learned there. But I had never been to seminary, and I was 48 years old when I went. We had four kids and nine grandkids. But we said goodbye to our kids, sold everything, and left. I don't know if you could imagine leaving your house today and leaving everything that you think is rock solid, but when I got a call from Jesus Christ, He became my rock solid."

Every year, the African American Ministry Fellowship convenes the evening before the annual state convention to encourage, exhort, and express appreciation to our African American pastors and ministers. Special thanks to Rev. Lowell Walker and Paula Smith (Director of MBCB's Multicultural Ministries) for hosting the event, as well as to Janeth McILwain (Ministry Assistant of Multicultural Ministries) and Jacklan Walker (wife of Rev. Walker) for organization and registration, and to Vesta Clary (Ministry Assistant/State ACP Contact), Gina Phelps (Mississippi Baptist Foundation's Executive Assistant), and Linda Burris (Ministry Assistant for the Evangelism Department) for serving dinner.

For more information on NAAF, Mission Mississippi, and the IMB, visit:

- NAAF
- Mission Mississippi
- IMB

International Mission Board