

# George Liele's rich missionary legacy spotlighted with special recognition day, scholarship inaugural

RICHMOND, Va. (BP and local reports) – The first George Liele Day, recognizing the contributions of the African American pastor and pioneering missionary, will be celebrated Feb. 7 to kick off a month-long recognition of the diversity of Southern Baptists serving in missions.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee voted in February 2020 to approve the first Sunday in February as the annual George Liele Church Planting, Evangelism, and Missions Day, at the recommendation of the SBC's International Mission Board (IMB).



Ausberry

“The benefit of recognizing George Liele Day inspires and encourages people of the Great Commission that God can use all of us despite the most unlikely of situations,” said Marshal Ausberry, pastor of Antioch Church in Fairfax, Va., and president of the SBC's National African American Fellowship.

“Here a once enslaved man is so zealous for Christ that he shared the Gospel at the cost of imprisonment and under the threat of death,” Ausberry noted. “That alone should encourage all of us to live out the Great Commission.”

During February, IMB will showcase a series called Heroes of Faith and share stories of African American missionaries who have been faithful to respond to God's call. The month will close with another Future of Missions event, focusing on racial diversity.

The George Liele Scholarship exists to allow for support of efforts that grow international missions knowledge and experiences among Black and African American Southern Baptist churches. To contribute or complete an application on or after the March 1 opening date, visit <https://www.imb.org/give/project/george-liele-scholarship-f9li ele/>



Chitwood

"The IMB strives to represent the diversity of our Southern Baptist Convention of churches," IMB President Paul Chitwood said. "'Every church, every nation' isn't a slogan. It's the only pathway to see the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

"I'm praying that this celebration of the involvement and leadership of African American Southern Baptist missionaries will result in many more missionaries from African American SBC churches sending their missionaries through the IMB."

Liele, a freed Georgia slave, was one of the most significant figures in the history of Christian missions. He came to Christ in 1773 at the age of 23 and was baptized by his white pastor, Matthew Moore. After Liele's conversion, his owner Henry Sharp – a Baptist deacon – gave Liele his freedom so he could pursue God's call. After his conversion, Liele preached for two years in the slave quarters of plantations surrounding

Savannah and into South Carolina.

Because of his faithfulness and powerful preaching, many surrendered their lives to Christ. Liele was ordained on May 20, 1775, becoming the first ordained African American Baptist preacher in America. After his ordination, he planted the first African American Baptist Church in North America, a church still in existence today.

In 1778, Henry Sharp was killed in the Revolutionary War. After his death, Sharp's heirs took steps to re-enslave Liele and as a result of their actions, Liele was thrown in jail. Eventually, he was able to produce proper documentation concerning his freedom and was set free.

Liele, his wife Hannah, and their four children left Savannah and set sail for Kingston, Jamaica, in 1782. When the family landed in Jamaica, it was still a British colony. Liele found a people who needed the Gospel.

Slaves were brought from Africa to Jamaica to work on the sugar plantations. These men and women had no real knowledge of Jesus Christ and His plan of freedom and redemption. Liele planted a church, and held a baptism service every three months. The baptisms were public events in which professing converts were baptized in the ocean or a nearby river.

Not only did Liele's ministry have a spiritual impact on the island, his work also made a social difference for Jamaican slaves. By July 31, 1838, slavery was eradicated in Jamaica. In 1814, there were only about 8,000 Baptists in Jamaica including slaves, freedmen, and some whites. As a result of Liele's ministry, there were over 20,000 believers by 1832.

As an effective missionary and evangelist, Liele was known for encouraging his converts to go preach the Gospel to the lost. Missionaries under his leadership went to Savannah, Ga., Nova Scotia province in Canada, and the country of Sierra Leone in Africa. George Liele died in 1828.



Thomas

Jason Thomas, IMB's African American church mobilizer strategist, observed that Liele's life story has often been overlooked, but his legacy and those of other Black missionaries can encourage more diversity on mission frontlines around the world.

"Liele's legacy serves as a powerful symbol of how God's transforming power of salvation can lead men towards extraordinary obedience in faithfulness to the Great Commission [Matt. 28:18-20]," Thomas said. "IMB, in partnership with National African American Fellowship, has been given the privilege to introduce George Liele to the Southern Baptist Convention's missions community and beyond.

"Our hope is to inspire more African Americans and other diverse communities to embrace past and present missionaries like Liele who faced tremendous adversity, yet still persevered for the sake of the Gospel. He was born into slavery, but through the power of Christ became a messenger of the Gospel that multiplied African American Baptist churches in America, Jamaica, and beyond."

Resources for George Liele Day can be found at <https://www.imb.org/heroesoffaith/>. Resources include videos, promotional pieces, and a children and family activities book.