



# The Office of Black Ministries

The Rev. Canon Angela Ifill

Priorities for the Episcopal Church in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for

Episcopalians of African Descent  
(African American, Caribbean, African National)

With thanks to

Deborah J. Shamlin

Christian Education and Formation Consultant  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Evanston, Illinois

## Black Episcopalians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Where we are today

Without question, black churches are gems and are still the most important institutions in the black community. The black church was the first school in its community, it has been the primary carrier of black folk culture. In addition to the black family it has been the pace-setter for values that are positive and affirming. It was the black church that preached not only spiritual liberation but total liberation. No institution in the black community has the global impact of the black church. No institution can address as fully the plight of people of color as the black church.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the church in the African American context will continue to be more than a place to come worship. *What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

In answering that question, the process began:

- first, with an articulation of who black people are within the Episcopal Church
- followed by an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Episcopal Church within the black American context
- which led to key questions that, when answered, keep in concert with the vision of the Episcopal Church (in the value of worship, congregational transformation, diversity and inclusivity) *and* provide an action plan to address the communities of faith of black Episcopalians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Strategies for the sustenance, sustainability, vitality and growth of congregations have been plentiful. Knowing that strategies, in and of themselves, do not revitalize communities, it is imperative to establish a plan with identified resources, attainable goals and measureable objectives to measure progress.

The Office of Black Ministries presents here the priorities and plans for the 2013 – 2015 triennium.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*



Who  
we are



# Black Episcopalians

## Who We Are

Black Episcopalians are people of color of African descent; Black Americans whose roots extend to slavery in this country, Caribbean Americans who arrived in this country from the Caribbean and are descendants of Africans in our country of origin, and African nationals, from the continent of Africa. A culturally gifted and diverse (age, culture, sexual orientation, immigration status, socio-economic, education) group of people.

### There are:

**133,119** black members of the Episcopal Church

- 6% of the membership of the Episcopal church; 13% of the population of the US

**338** congregations that are 70%+ black

- 45% have 61+ members

**49** congregations that are 50% black

### 35% of these congregations are located in 5 dioceses

Long Island	41
New York	39
Pennsylvania	22
Southeast Florida	19
Washington, DC	18

### Average Sunday Attendance is the Episcopal norm

	Black Congregations	All Domestic Congregations
Median Membership	141	158
Median Average Sunday Attendance overall	64	69

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

# Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat of the Episcopal Church

**SWOT analysis** is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective.

In our data gathering from a variety of predominately black Episcopal churches, the weaknesses and strengths were identified, and the threats and opportunities were compiled. From these conversations, we found that regardless of the size of the church – 61 members or less or 150 members or more, urban or cosmopolitan, revitalized or not – the perceptions of the Episcopal church were not dissimilar.

Using the original methodology of Albert Humphrey at Stanford University, who is credited with developing SWOT, setting the objective was done after the SWOT analysis was performed. This allows for achievable goals and the establishment of priorities for both the short and long term.

## Strengths:

- Organizational structure
- Long history of the Episcopal Church
- Relationships with higher education
- Liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer
- Property ownership
- Music
- Inclusivity - all are welcome at the table
- Christian

## Weaknesses:

- Lack of leadership development of clergy and laity
- Lack of financial training and economic development
- Shortage of financial resources
- Minimal seminarian pipeline in light of aging clergy population
- Lack of stewardship and evangelism training
- Lack of inclusion based on ethnicity (American, African National, Caribbean)
- Lack of ministry focused on strengthening the black family
- Lack of programming for at-risk African American males ages 12-17
- Communication
- Lack of young adult/singles focus
- Lack of culturally relevant Christian formation and worship resources

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

- Absence of men in membership

**Opportunities:**

- Leadership development
- Inclusion
- Economic development
- Church growth/revitalization

**Threats:**

- Retention of youth
- Traditional Afrocentric worship
- Disintegration of the black family

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## Where Are We Going?

Our **SWOT analysis** led to these conclusions and questions:

1. *How do we create/maintain/revive vital congregations?* Congregational vitality is characterized by strong lay and clergy leadership, stewardship, evangelizing the un-churched, with provisions for education, Bible study, faith formation in a variety of small groups, vibrant and varied worship, effective planning and administration – all rooted in the Anglican Church, yet reflecting a rich cultural heritage. *How do we build relationships with congregations of African national, Caribbean and African American descent? How do we undergird and support new immigrant churches – Nigerian, Sudanese and so forth?*
2. Visionary pastoral leadership invites the community of God’s people to experience the reality of God’s liberating presence in this world, in this life, in the here and now. So, visionary pastors invite communities to participate in just actions, in almsgiving, in prayer, in mutual learning, in building safe and nurturing spaces as a means of embracing lifestyles that promote God’s peaceable kingdom. *How will we create the best trained clergy, possessing skills beyond preaching?* Clergy will need to be leaders in creating solutions.
3. The worship experience is more a verb than a noun in the Black community, a holistic experience engaging the head, the heart and the body. Telling the stories, testifying, preaching and praying are communal acts, set in the context of music, movement and dance. There are the common elements of Episcopal worship (gathering, Word, meal and sending out into the world), the core of worship, and there is space for the dialog between culture and faith, and flexibility in how this central core is communicated and celebrated. *How do we increase the number of worship resources that are contextually specific to the various cultures of African descent peoples? How do we increase the number of musicians available to support worship in Black congregations?*
4. Learning and living the Word is not just for individual benefit; it is also for becoming living examples of discipleship. Worshipping communities must also become learning communities through intentional and faith-filled study. There is an abundance of faith formation resources available in the Episcopal Church, and the development of culturally specific resources for use in communities of faith of African descent will provide learning opportunities based on these resources. Historically, the Black Christian community has a strong witness of prayer, Bible study, worship and sharing faith stories. *How do we build on this legacy and continue to pass on the faith to the next generation?* Our young people need resources that they see themselves in, that relate to the world around us today.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

5. As a result of the devastating conditions that are becoming more evident in Black communities, the challenge now is to expand involvement in all aspects of black family life. Innovative ways of empowering families, through a wide variety of means – economic growth networking, political astuteness, educational support, and other support ministries – are needed. Disintegration of inner-city families calls us to provide ministries/programs that help reduce teen pregnancy, keep children in school and provide at-risk boys and young men with mentors. The emergence of the seven-day-a-week church is the successor to the big Sunday morning churches of the 1950s. Frederick Douglas said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” *How do we challenge boys, specifically, and girls to live lives of responsible action and make a meaningful impact in the world, and provide support as they develop their unique strengths talents and gifts? How do we support the black family?*

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## How Will We Get There?

### What actions, plans, strategies answer these questions?

*How do we build relationships with congregations of African national, Caribbean and African American descent? How do we undergird and support new immigrant churches (Nigerian, Sudanese)?*

Episcopalians from the Sudan now make up a large portion of the Episcopal Church in the United States. Numbers are elusive because the groups move around to wherever jobs are available and become affiliated with the Episcopal worship experience in their local communities. But while numbers are anecdotal, a recent survey indicates that there are Sudanese communities in 40 dioceses across the United States, with four dioceses having congregations specifically identified as Sudanese: Diocese of Colorado (500 communicants), Diocese of Arizona (210 communicants), Diocese of Western Michigan (166 communicants), and Diocese of Western Missouri (100 communicants).

The dioceses in particular should reach out to help the Sudanese become more integrated into the Episcopal Church in the United States and give them opportunities to share their own unique experiences and perspectives with the wider church community.

In December 2010, a Listening Summit in Phoenix, Arizona, a collaborative effort by the Office of Black Ministries, Virginia Theological Seminary and the Africa Office, brought together Sudanese and diocesan leaders for listening sessions and to strategize for future ministries within the Sudanese communities, which are described below.

#### **The Emmaus Planning Group**

Sudanese leaders from 15 dioceses and three diocesan leaders comprise the Emmaus Planning Group, which grew out of the Sudanese Summit held in 2012. The purpose of this group is to strategize, develop, plan and implement the various aspects of ministry identified by previous gatherings, and to assist in the planning of the annual conference.

#### **Leadership Institute and Council**

The institute is planned as an annual conference that brings a small group of leaders who represent Caribbean and African National, and black Americans together to share their concerns, challenges and opportunities, and to develop strategies for solutions. This group will also participate in leadership training in areas such as problem solving and conflict management, learning more about the polity of the Episcopal Church, immigration issues, cultural norms, self-care, pastoral care, health and family well-being.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## **Asset-Based Community Development Training**

This four-day event is geared toward building capacity among the group to allow for self- and community development as well as to cultivate relationships with civic leaders and advocate on their behalf.

### **Future Ministries to be developed include:**

- Alternative theological training for ordained leadership
- Edifying and helping to build up the church

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## How Do We Maintain/Revitalize Congregations?

### New Visions Initiative

*New Visions* is an initiative that has started from the pain of the closing of black churches, for the task of restoring, reconstructing, redeeming, reconciling, revitalizing and renewing these churches for mission and ministry. There is a desperate need for black churches to be in mission in bold and meaningful ways.

*New Visions* seeks to strengthen Black congregations by providing opportunities for Partner Congregations (pastor and four team members) to step away from the persistent obligations of daily and weekly parish life and engage in a learning/mentoring/coaching environment for strengthening the congregation as well as for personal renewal and reflection. These Congregation Resource Center Training Events are times for intentional exploration and reflection, for being introduced to new and creative ways of planning and implementing various forms of ministries, for regaining the enthusiasm and creativity for ministry, for strengthening relationships, renewing a sense of call, meeting and serving neighbors in a new way, finding joy and purpose in ministry, creating opportunities where members of the congregation can exercise their gifts for ministry.

#### Goals & Objectives:

- Promote, interpret and recruit local congregations to enroll as Congregation Resource Centers and Partner Congregations.
- Recruit additional Partner Congregations to build new energies and hopes for transformation of their congregational life and devotion to ministry and mission in their communities, especially the economically depressed with little hope for the future.
- Explore ways by which Partner Congregations will have greater access to the programs and resources of the Episcopal Church in order to support their ministries.

#### Activities Plan:

- Capture the progress of Partner Congregations as they move along in their goal setting, planning, implementation and transformation.
- Connect the initiative to the places where ministry occurs, realizing that the work of changing lives and impacting communities occurs as Partner Congregations carry out their mission and ministries.
- Learning Portal Technology: to provide a variety of massive content and track training. This portal will be essential to the overall strategies that afford key ministry tools, to enable participation in new forms of ministry and spiritual growth.
- Staff dedicated to fulfill these responsibilities:
  - Provide oversight of training programs.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

- Contact and work with Congregation Resource Centers and Partner Congregations.
- Ensure training of leadership teams within Congregation Resource Centers.
- Publish annually a "Journal of Transformation," detailing learnings and insights from the work of New Visions.
- Build and maintain a communications protocol for participating congregations.

**Project Outcome:**

Sixty new Partner Congregations will be linked with Congregational Resources Centers from 2012 through 2015, and their churches and communities will be transformed and revitalized.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## How Will We Create the Best-Trained Clergy and Laity, Possessing Skills Beyond Preaching ?

### Transforming Congregations

The focus of this effort will be revitalized clergy and lay leadership, which will in turn lead to revitalized churches. Three tracks will provide delivery systems for revitalization: the small membership church; leadership development and congregational transformation; women's leadership and continuing education for clergy and lay leadership.

Continuing education is a critical component of leadership development, and one that needs to be treated separately from the specific plan for development and transformation. Continuing education leads to improved effectiveness of both clergy and lay leadership in local churches and ministry settings.

### Small Membership Congregations

Available for churches with an average worship attendance of 50 or fewer.

#### Professional Leadership Development

##### *Recruitment of Professional Leaders*

- Develop appropriate discernment environment to highlight the variety of ministry opportunities available along with the variety of ways of responding to these opportunities.
- Develop a plan to support clergy who elect to specialize in ministry with small membership congregations.

##### *Training of Professional Leaders*

- There is a need to train ordained clergy and deacons to specialize in supporting the ministries of small membership churches in urban neighborhoods.

#### Development of Lay Leadership

In small membership churches, local laity must often assume a wide range of leadership roles and responsibilities for ministry in their churches and communities. Opportunities for the local lay leadership of small membership churches must address general leadership proficiency and help prepare a next generation of leaders to step up to the task of leading their churches in the future.

- A Leadership Summit will be held every two years. It will feature key speakers, preachers and workshop leaders who will inspire vision, provide training and facilitate networking opportunities for laity of small membership churches.
- Next Generation Leadership Program will be a one-year training program for members of small membership churches who are between the ages of 25 and 45. It will consist of a series of workshops covering leadership skills, spiritual gifts and mission. Participants will be nominated for the program and sponsored by their local church and expected to

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

complete a mission project of their own design during the year. A class of 20-40 Next Generation Leaders will be formed every two years.

- Small Membership Church Shared Leadership Pilot Project is an affinity group by region/city. Participation will enable participants to explore and develop sustainable and replicable models for providing competent and revitalized pastoral leadership.

### **Leadership Development and Congregational Transformation**

Churches with full-time pastors would establish *Leadership Incubators* to address clergy leadership development, spiritual growth and congregational transformation.

### **Women's Leadership Forum**

The Women's Leadership Forum is a one-day event open to all women of the Anglican/Episcopal Church tradition of African/Black descent. This forum explores the various aspects of women's leadership styles globally, provides quality training and provides networking opportunities for women of the African diaspora. Completion of these seminars will lead to a Leadership Certificate.

- *Engaging Women in Ministry*
- *Leadership in Women's Ministry*  
A study of the philosophy, theology, skills and methods of personal leadership development, leadership team development that are unique to women's ministry in the local church. Students will conduct personal evaluations of leadership skills, develop a plan for leadership and create an administrative procedural resource.
- *Women's Ministry in the Local Church*

### **Continuing Education:**

Educational events available for all churches and clergy.

- Each seminar consists of a process-oriented section and a content-oriented section, with the two sections relating to one another. Process-oriented topics will include:
  - • You and Healthy Relationships
  - • Understanding Your Congregational System
  - • When Christians Disagree
  - • Making Time for Ministry
- Content-oriented topics will include:
  - • Vital Worship
  - • Evangelism
  - • Christian Education – small groups
  - • Stewardship

### **Other continuing education elements include:**

- A Continuing Education Resource Group will perform the following functions:
  - Assemble and publish an updated list of resources and events in which clergy might participate for continuing education purposes.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

- Establish criteria for acceptable continuing education events and determine, upon application from sponsoring groups or individuals, whether continuing education credit may be awarded for participation in specific events.
- Each clergy person will develop an ongoing three-year plan (to be revised each year) for his or her own continuing education. The plan will be developed in consultation with his or her or personnel committee so that an assessment of how the plan is being followed will be added to the clergy evaluation process.
- Congregational culture will be transformed and congregations will become more effective in carrying out their mission as congregational leadership engages in opportunities for ongoing education. Quality opportunities will be lifted up, and congregational leaders will be encouraged to participate. These opportunities will include events that regularly happen already, such as:
  - Christian Education – FORMA (formerly NACCED)
  - Distance learning opportunities

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## How Do We Challenge Boys, Specifically, and Girls to Live Lives of Responsible Action and Make a Meaningful Impact in the World, and Provide Support as They Develop Their Unique Talents and Gifts?

### Spiritual Opportunity to Unite and Learn (SOUL)

#### The Conference

The SOUL Conference is an annual event that provides a protective place for Youth and Young Adults of African Descent from across the church to meet and grow together in relationship with one another and with Christ. Activities include: Worship and Bible Study, Leadership Skills Development, Problem Solving and Conflict Management, Advocacy Training, Fellowship, and an experience of General Convention.

SOUL conference provides a safe place for Episcopal youth and young adults of African descent from across the church to meet and grow together in relationship with one another and Christ while participating in workshops toward leadership development.

Following the conference, participants are encouraged to join the SOUL network by accessing the following tools:

**e-SOUL** is an online tool that allows for the continuation of faith formation within the established community of those who have attended a specific SOUL conference.

**SOUL Talk** is an online blog that provides for the ongoing faith formation and development of young people between the ages of 18-25 who have previously attended a SOUL conference and are feeling disconnected from the Episcopal Church, want to reconnect, explore the tenets of other faiths and how their faith intersects or disconnects with other traditions, are looking to express their doubts and celebrate their confidences in their faith journey, or are in need of support on their individual spiritual journey.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

## Required Resources

### Dollars needed to bring this to fruition

God hears the cries of God's people. Faithfulness to God's way requires the re-imagining of community models for serving God's people. As congregations strive to live their call to advance God's kingdom in this world, God and God's love forever urges us to participate in the repair and mending of this world.

Therefore, we strategize, once again, not simply for self-survival; we also strategize, as a means toward faithfully participating in the repair and mending of this world. Trusting then that God is our strength and refuge, our very source of help in times of struggle, we recommend and request support for:

- Congregational transformation of predominately black (African American, African Caribbean and African National) congregations, the New Visions initiative
- Leadership training and development for clergy and lay leadership
- Development of ministries to enhance vocational discernment, and music leadership
- Lifelong Christian formation resources that are culturally relevant and sensitive

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*

# Appendix: New Visions Application (beta)

## Congregational & Community Information

1. What is the mission of your church? Do you have a mission and/or vision statement? If so, what are they?
2. Provide the date of founding and number of years at your present location. Describe any especially illuminating or distinctive historical events in the life of your church.
3. Provide the names and tenure of the last four pastors.
4. List the ministries, both internal and outreach, in which your church is involved.
5. Include a one-page summary of the congregation's current annual budget.
6. Who lives in the community surrounding your church? What is the church's involvement in the community, and how is the community reflected within your congregation?
7. How does your congregation understand its role in the community?
8. What are the demographics of your congregation? What are the demographics of your community?

## The Proposal Narrative

1. Begin with a summary statement describing the overall character of your congregation.
2. Provide a clearly articulated rationale for engaging in the program. Include a discussion about why this is an appropriate time for your Partner Congregation Team to participate in the program.
3. Give a brief description of the process by which the congregation determined whether to submit a proposal. Favorable consideration will be given only to proposals that provide evidence of broad congregational support for the program.
4. Provide a statement that describes the intended benefits, both for the pastor and for the congregation, of your team's participation in the program. This statement should summarize the congregation's views and should be incorporated into the body of the proposal.
5. Tell how the pastor and his/her team will communicate and share insights from their participation in the program.

*What will the commitment of the Episcopal Church be, to be faithful to Christ and minister to black Episcopalians and the vitality of its congregations?*