
Black Adventists Hold Ministry Meetings

by Penelope Kellogg Winkler

Over 400 Adventist black pastors, evangelists, and Bible workers from all over North America met on the Oakwood College campus during the 1983 Thanksgiving vacation for the annual Professional Growth in Ministry Meetings. These meetings, which were started in 1977 by E. E. Cleveland, now director of missions at Oakwood College, and Calvin Rock, president of Oakwood, are designed to promote, growth, morale, and professional pastoral competence within the black community in North America. Six years after the first of these meetings, they reveal the growth in the regional conferences and continue to sustain the morale of black Adventist workers.

An indication that issues of church politics were an important part of at least the informal discussions at Oakwood was a T-shirt worn by some attendees. The T-shirt both promoted the establishment of a black North American division, and decried the recent shutdown of the Riverside Adventist Hospital in Nashville, Tenn. (the only Adventist health institution operated primarily by blacks). Indeed, at an awards ceremony held as part of the meetings, C. E. Dudley, president of the South Central Conference, was presented with a plaque by E. E. Cleveland, chairperson of the meetings and former associate director of the General Conference Ministerial Association, for Dudley's valiant efforts to prevent the closing of Riverside.

Riverside Adventist Hospital, established in 1927, had been sustaining heavy financial losses over the four years it had been administrated by Adventist Health Systems/Sunbelt. While many black Adventists feel the General Conference should have done something to save the hospital, Riverside's problems did not lie in the lack of continued General Conference support alone. One of many factors involved was that blacks themselves did not patronize the small, 50-bed hospital when they felt they could get better care at larger, more modern hospitals. In June of 1983, when it was closed by Adventist Health Systems/Sunbelt, Riverside was \$4.5 million in debt, including the mortgage left on the new hospital building.

Some black Adventist workers emphasize that the mostly white-administered church is not adequately supporting its black-operated institutions in North America, and ask if Riverside has been allowed to shut down, which of the other institutions will be next? Apart from the regional conferences, the closing of Riverside Adventist Hospital leaves the Seventh-day Adventist Church with only four black-operated institutions—Oakwood College, Pine Forge Academy, the "Breath of Life" telecast, and *Message* magazine.

At the meetings this year other workers besides C. E. Dudley received plaques mostly for achievements that dramatized the rapid growth of the black Adventist community. Oscar Lane, a freelance evangelist, received an award for raising new congregations in Huntsville, Ala. and Atlanta, Ga. The new congregation in Atlanta consists of over 1,000 members. An award was also given to Joseph Rodriguez who, while still a senior at Oakwood, baptized 600 Liberians during the 1983 spring quarter he spent in western Africa. Finally, Randy

Stafford, pastor of a Kansas City, Mo., Seventh-day Adventist church, was recognized for baptizing 900 people in Zimbabwe during the summer of 1983.

This year's speakers included Roy Hartbauer, member of the department of communicative disorders at Andrews University, talking about ministry to the handicapped; Harold Cleveland, past president of the Allegheny West Conference and current director, for the regional conferences, of the Thousand Days of Reaping program, surveying the "Thousand Days of Reaping"; and Robert Olson, secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, discussing Ellen White's view of the sanctuary. Caleb Rosado, pastor of the All Nations Church in Berrien Springs, Mich., elicited the strongest response when he challenged black church leaders to help Hispanics and Asians, now suffering from the lack of visibility and representation within the Adventist church structure that used to plague black Adventists.

The 1983 meetings were coordinated by a planning committee which consists of E. E. Cleveland; Benjamin Reaves, chairperson of the religion department at Oakwood College; and Eric Ward, pastor of the Oakwood College Church. The annual Professional Growth In Ministry Meetings grew out of a one-day session on professional growth held at Oakwood in 1977 for black workers from the South Atlantic and South Central conferences. The meetings are now sponsored by all nine of the regional conferences, and the regional departments of the Pacific and North Pacific unions. For the first two years, workers from the regional conferences met without official General Conference sanction, violating an unwritten but generally observed church policy against unapproved inter-conference sessions. Although such meetings would usually be organized by the unions concerned, the regional conference presidents decided to go

ahead and organize on their own. The first two years, the General Conference sent unofficial representatives to observe only. By the third year of meetings, the General Conference had voted the Professional Growth In Ministry Meetings onto the official church calendar, finally recognizing them, according to E. E. Cleveland, as a "positive rather than negative force in black Adventist life."

E. E. Cleveland emphasizes the benefits of the meetings, and stresses the importance of both the "politics of information" and the "politics of growth" within the black community. Black Adventists are making a conscious effort to bring myriad new members into the church. Eventually, the size of the regional conferences may make black unions not only economically feasible, but politically necessary.

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Winds of Reform: Structural Transition in North America

by Bonnie Dwyer

By 1985, when the General Conference session is held in New Orleans, the denomination's structure will have received many critiques from study groups established by the church at various levels. The General Conference has already instituted a committee, chaired by a general vice president, to look at the structure of the world church, and current plans indicate that not only committees and commissions, but constituency meetings of conferences will study the topic as well. The Pacific Union has appointed a committee to consider how to