

Black Baptists Pledge New Era of Cooperation

See total numbers as power to make a positive impact

(AP)—Four black Baptist groups whose churches were a training ground for prominent civil rights leaders, but split partly over how that fight should be waged, said Friday they were embarking on a new era of cooperation meant to put the concerns of their community atop the national agenda.

The National Baptist Convention USA, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America hope to reclaim their historic role as leaders for broad social change. Among their top issues will be education, health care, jobs and foreign policy.

"We believe, and the numbers show it, that we have the power in terms of black registered voters across the country to make an impact," said the Rev. Stephen J. Thurston of Chicago, president of the National Baptist Convention of America.

His comments came at the end of the



Rev. Jesse Jackson speaks to four black Baptist groups whose churches were a training ground for prominent civil rights leaders, but split apart decades ago partly over how that fight should be waged. (AP photo)

denominations' joint weeklong meeting - their first in at least 90 years. Together, the convention presidents said they represent about 15 million Baptists nationwide.

The groups' initial split occurred in 1915, over control of a publishing house. A similar schism over governance issues hap-

pened in 1988.

But the most notorious break was in 1961, when a fight over the presidency of the National Baptist Convention USA led the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his supporters to form the Progressive Baptists. Opposition to King's strategy of civil

disobedience and mass protest were a key factor in that split.

The groups say little of consequence now divides them, other than the independent denominational structures each has created that would make full reunification difficult at this time.

They are now positioning themselves collectively as an antidote, not just for blacks but for all Americans, to what they call the narrow moral focus of President Bush and his religious supporters.

Like white evangelicals, black Baptists generally oppose abortion and consider gay sex immoral. In the presidential race, Republicans made common cause with some black leaders over blocking gay marriage, hoping the issue would chip away at the overwhelming black support for Democrats.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, during a keynote speech, asked the audience if any of their churches had fielded requests to perform same-sex weddings. When there was no visible response among the thousands packed into a cavernous hotel ballroom, he wheeled around the podium and shouted, "Then how did that get in the middle of our agenda?" People stood and cheered.

Church Hosts Gumbo Dinner

The Immaculate Heart Church will host its 21st Annual Creole Gumbo Dinner on Saturday, Feb. 5 from noon to 7 p.m.

The dinners will include rice, salad, bread, dessert and punch. Take-out is available. An adult Creole Gumbo plate is \$13, an adult Jumbalaya plate is \$10, and children under 12 are \$6.

Immaculate Heart Church is located at 2926 N. Williams Avenue and dinner will be served in the Parish Hall. Tickets are available at the door or by calling 503-287-3724.

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Thurgood Marshall

First African American U.S. Supreme Court Justice
1908-1993

For over 40 years, Thurgood Marshall fought for equal opportunities. The grandson of a slave, Marshall graduated from Howard University Law School in 1933. He joined the legal staff of the NAACP in 1936. Over the course of his career as a lawyer, he argued more than 30 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. His argument in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) against the "separate but equal" doctrine resulted in a landmark decision that outlawed segregation in public schools. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Marshall to the U.S. Supreme Court, making him the first African American to serve in this position. There, Marshall consistently challenged discrimination and supported free speech and individual rights.

For his pioneering legal efforts in opening opportunities for Americans of every race, color, gender, and creed, we honor him.



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