

Black Baptist groups to meet, repair friendship

By Zenitha Prince

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NASHVILLE (NNPA) — After nearly a century of separation, four major Black Baptist denominations are meeting this week in Nashville in a historic joint board meeting that could have far-reaching effects on Black social and political solidarity.

Nearly 10,000 people were expected when the National Baptist Convention USA, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America gathered at the Gaylord Opryland Convention Center from Jan. 24 to Jan. 27.

Leaders of the denominations said the meeting is not geared towards forming one denomination but towards finding common ground in addressing the sociopolitical needs of African-Americans and other African descendants.

"This meeting and the relationships that will grow out of it hold tremendous promise for healing among the participants, and exponentially increasing our resources to

serve our Christ, members and constituents, and give strong leadership to our communities around the world," said the Rev. Dr. William J. Shaw, president of NBCUSA. "The event will signal to the nation our common cause, our common goal for Christ reaching those who are the least, the last, the lost, the disenfranchised. We will do this as a collective voice."

Historians purport that the first church created by Blacks, for Blacks, was Baptist; and by 1880, according to historian L.B. Jordan, there were about two million ex-slaves worshipping in Baptist churches. And early on, Black Baptists recognized the need for unity.

In 1895, southern and northern Baptists joined hands in the merger of the three largest Baptist conventions of that time — the Baptist Foreign Missionary Convention, the American National Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Educational Convention — to form NBCUSA.

But by 1915, the marriage began to sour. At issue was the autonomy of the National Baptist Publishing Board,

which published all Sunday school and educational material for the denomination and had grown into a thriving enterprise under the leadership of the Rev. R. H. Boyd. The outcome of the legal battle that ensued was the emergence of the National Baptist Convention of America.

In 1961, another split occurred. A group of NBCUSA members, including the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., L. Venchael Booth, pastor of Zion Baptist in Cincinnati, and the Rev. Gardner Taylor, broke away to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention after disagreements over election procedure, presidential terms and civil rights activism could not be settled.

The Rev. Vernon Dobson of Baltimore, who was there at the historic meeting, offered, "They split over personal jealousies, not because of Martin Luther King's activism ... Some preachers did not like the kind of power he had."

Despite the disharmony, there were some attempts at
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A family's grief: Sisters on different sides of shooting

By Christian Morrow

Special to Sentinel-Voice

PITTSBURGH (NNPA) — The weeping father of a shooting victim pleading for justice and the mother of an accused killer saying, "He's a good boy," are often the only hints of the trauma the public sees associated with street crime.

But such trauma ripples through communities and families in unseen ways, as it did with two sisters who live in the Pittsburgh area.

Venezuela Penn, 14, did not seek grief counseling when her 17-year-old friend and Oliver High schoolmate Rashan Farrow was fatally shot Dec. 22 near his family's home. But she did refuse to return to school the next day, fearing she too might be a target.

Janet Yuhasz, coordinator of student wellness for Pittsburgh Public Schools, said despite the availability of on-site mental health and counseling services for students affected by violence, fewer students take advantage of the services than in

the past.

"Kids have moved away from talking about it, and that's not good. Emotions build up and then explode," she said.

"She seems okay now," said Venezuela's mother Bonita. "That first day was a shock, but I think they grew used to it. We've lost a lot of friends in the neighborhood, five killed in the last eight years."

Two days after the shooting, Bonita was watching the news with another daughter, Simone Lee, when they saw Farrow's alleged shooter, 24-year-old Nathaniel Thomas, who is Simone's boyfriend.

"We were looking at the news and saw him, and she just started screaming and got on the phone," said Bonita. "I had to ask my oldest daughter [Winter Epps] what was going on."

Venezuela, who was still grieving her friend's death while spending Christmas in New Jersey, suddenly found herself trying to console her older sister, Simone, over the phone.

"She went crazy," said Venezuela. "She was going, 'I don't believe he did it.' And I was like, 'Well, I think he did. He confessed.' He'd been to the house. I'd met him."

She also had to console her best friend because the shooter is her cousin. Venezuela said she did not want to speak to a counselor about the shooting or her family's awkward association with the incident.

"I still think about (Farrow). I was thinking of him this morning, but I didn't do counseling because I don't like talking about it to other people. It's hard," she said. "And it was hard to think (Thomas) did it. I'm happy he confessed."

In his statement to police, Thomas claimed he fired in self-defense after Farrow approached his car and began shooting. Though Venezuela said their acquaintance with the rival parties in this shooting has not harmed her relationship with her sister, experts say the dynamic is more
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