

2016 American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) Convocation in New York

Tom Cutts
December 3, 2016



From Thursday, December 1, to Saturday, December 3, clergy and faith leaders gathered from around the country to participate in the 2016 American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) Convocation in New York. This year's convocation was organized under the theme, "Men and Women of Faith Healing a Divided Nation and World," a direct response to the spirit of division that has grown in strength over the course of the past year-and-a-half in the United States.



DAY 1: WELCOME, PRAISE, AND WORSHIP

The convocation began on Thursday evening over dinner at the Doral Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center in Rye Brook, New York.

Pastors Mark and Becky Williams of Indiana led the group in praise and worship to begin the evening's events and invite God's Spirit to be present for the duration of the conference. After singing several songs, greetings and introductory remarks were given by Archbishop George Augustus Stallings, Jr., National Co-Chairman of ACLC and Prelate and Founder of Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregations.

Archbishop Stallings welcomed the convocation attendees and invited them to prepare for a weekend full of discussion, reflection, and opportunities to strengthen their commitments as faith leaders to much-needed reconciliation and healing in America.

Later in the evening, Pastor T. L. Barrett, Senior Pastor of the Life Center of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in Chicago and founding chairman of ACLC, stood up with Rev. Levy Daugherty to offer more worship in song. The two were succeeded by the Williamses and Bishop Jesse Edwards, Vice Chairman of ACLC, on keyboard, trombone, and trumpet, who together closed out the night with praise music and even dance.



DAY 2: RECONCILIATION AND HEALING

MORNING

The second day of the convocation began early, with a prayer service before breakfast led by Dr. and Mrs. Jenkins. When the pastors and faith leaders reconvened in the conference hall after breakfast, the group gathered for their first session of the morning, a "Year in Review" presentation by Rev. Tom Cutts, National Executive Director of ACLC. With a humorous and light heart, Rev. Cutts showcased the many different events, activities, and milestones that have taken place this year, paying special attention to monthly ACLC Prayer Breakfasts and the increasing frequency of ACLC Marriage Blessing Ceremonies around the country.

Rev. Cutts was followed by Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA, who gave concise but powerful remarks about True Parents' vision for ACLC as its founders. Reflecting on True Mother's recent address on Capitol Hill, Dr. Balcomb shared:

"True Mother felt America has not yet fully met God's expectations. Think about what God's expectation for this country is. It's not just to be nation of great freedom and wealth. True Father said America has to be the champion, the nation that brings the Kingdom of God on earth. Those are fighting words. He said that when America builds the Kingdom of God here in this land, other nations will follow suit, whether or not they are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist. If one country can stand up and create the Kingdom of God, then other nations can follow. True Mother asked, 'Do you believe that? Do you really believe that God can build his Kingdom in this world or not?'"

Following Dr. Balcomb, the convocation attendees dove heart first into a Pastors' Forum on the theme of "The Principles of Restoration and Reconciliation." Supplemented by a PowerPoint presentation on the Principles of Restoration outlined in the Divine Principle, the forum proceeded in a fluid exchange between seasoned members of ACLC at the front of the hall and the rest of the attendees -- at times asking questions and offering answers, but on the whole probing deeper into the truths revealed in and through the Word of God together.



"What we often have to do is a self-evaluation of our hearts, and as we begin to stand in a position to evaluate one another as brethren and to love each other as God has loved us; as we begin to pray, as Job did, to pray for our enemies, for the opposition that has come up against us, God will begin to reverse and restore unto us our position from the beginning, the Three Great Blessings to be fruitful, to multiply and then have dominion. ...It all comes down to your self-evaluation, your moving in love, but love by faith -- love mixed with faith. In that we find total victory and total peace. I believe that now is the time when the church is truly coming into its fullness because we're taught that: how to suffer with God." --Rev. Glenda Philips-Lee

"How do you deal with people that are difficult? Well, I spend time in prayer -- you pray and you love them. You have to love them. I always pray, Lord, let me see them through your eyes, and that takes away all the clutter. Then we see them through the struggles that they're going through, and then we can see, Wow. And then we can have mercy on them. It's just having mercy on people because, if you give mercy, you're going to receive mercy. If you give love, you're going to receive love. It's not always easy to do, but if we walk in the Spirit, walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, we can give comfort, too." --First Lady Becky Williams

AFTERNOON

Following a delicious lunch, the convocation began the first of two panel discussions for the day, in which several attendees were invited to share testimonies on the theme of "Faith Leaders Helping America Rise to Its Fullest Potential." The panel was moderated by Archbishop Dr. Sulanch Grant-Lewis and Pastor Mark Abernathy, National Co-Presidents of ACLC, and covered such topics as choosing to change the world on purpose, how racism is a learned rather than an inherent trait, how to cultivate filial piety before God, our innate nature to love, and the ever-present calling to deny ourselves, take up our own crosses, and live for the sake of others.

"Something had to change. I didn't want my daughter to have to go through this. I saw what my dad was beaten by, I saw what was happening in the culture and I didn't like it. So I decided to change it. You've got to decide that you're tired of what's happening with our culture and our situation. We've come here today, men and women of faith, to heal a divided nation." --Pastor Mark Abernathy

“We have an innate nature to love, to care about one another, to look beyond all that we see. It is a learned behavior to hate, to misunderstand, to not respect the difference of all of us because we stop looking at the soul of each of us.” –Dr. Simone Mason

Before the second panel began, Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Continental Chairman of FFWPU in North America, dropped by, sharing the convocation attendees the latest news about True Mother and recent events in Washington, D.C. at the International Leadership Conference (ILC).



“All of you who are here, you are not my guests, you are my friends. Your house is my house, and my house is your house. We are that kind of friends, but more than that, we are family members -- one family under God. This is the unchanging idea of True Parents, from the beginning of their ministry until now....In their eyes, it is very strange that people, whether they are looking up, looking down, or looking around, are discriminating against one another. That is not God’s idea. That is not God’s teaching.”



With that, the group turned to an educational session about the “Marriage Blessing Movement,” whose panel members testified to the spiritual value and vitality they have seen and felt in the Blessing, in both

their own lives and in the lives of their congregants who have participated in this movement to build a God-centered world, starting from God-centered families.



“In order for us to bring America to its fullest potential, we have to bring the church to its fullest potential. And it takes a while to do that. In order for the church to come to its fullest potential, we must realize its obligation to invest heavily in the family. Because everything that the Author of life, the Giver of life made, in the beginning, He made it in families. You cannot find a bachelor or bachelorette cloud, flower, fish, bird, insect -- anything. Everything God made, He made it in families.... We must understand that we must do whatever we have to do to enforce the consciousness of family.” –Pastor T. L. Barrett



The day’s events began to draw to a close with more song and testimony over dinner, as well as an evening session on the principles of church growth, led by Dr. Calvin Rice, Pastor of the New Jerusalem Baptist Church in Jamaica, Queens.

DAY 3: TRUE FAMILY VALUES AWARDS BANQUET

Following a second morning prayer service, the ACLC Convocation relocated to the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge to participate in the 21st annual True Family Values Awards Banquet.

The True Family Values Ministry and Awards Banquet was founded as a way to support, encourage, and celebrate those who are striving to serve and improve society through the “ideal of God-centered families, living for the sake of others.”



True Mother was the keynote speaker at the 2016 Awards Banquet. On the heels of events in Washington, D.C., True Mother exhorted the audience to step up and personally take responsibility for America and the world by attending the Marriage Blessing Ceremony and creating God-centered families who can be the foundation for the deep rebirth, reconciliation, and healing of themselves and others.

“Today, clergy members gathered here, we have the mission to properly teach about God. To properly teach about God, we need to understand the history of God’s Providence of Restoration, in particular, who are the central figures. The central figure is the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord of the Second Advent, True Parents. Hence, when it comes to educating and sharing the good news with the members of your congregations, I hope that you can align and unite with True Parents, but also unite with one another, so that people like you who received the Blessing can increase.

“The hope of humanity is to realize a world of peace, freedom, unity, and happiness where we attend God as our Parent. To realize that world, we need to change. What does this mean? This means that we need to move away from the realm of indemnity, to receive the Blessing of True Parents, and to be born again through the Blessing of True Parents. Unless we are born again, we cannot change, isn’t that so?”

Six awards were given out to individuals and couples who actively embody True Family Values in their families, ministries, and organizations. This year’s awardees included Chief George Akeen, Chairman of the Native American Church, and his wife, Eleanor Akeen, both of the Cheyenne tribe; Hon. Una Clarke of the New York City Council; Rev. Dr. Calvin Rice, Senior Pastor of the New Jerusalem Worship Center in Jamaica, New York; Archbishop Angelo Rosario and Bishop Nancy Rosario, Co-Pastors of the Church of God’s Children in the Bronx; Bishop Michael Sykes and his wife, Minister Zena Sykes, pastors of the United Missionary Baptist Church in East Orange, New Jersey; and Pastors Mark and Becky Williams of northern Indiana.

Convocation attendees joined over 500 people from around the country and the world at this year’s banquet, which closed with a beautiful musical offering from Pastor T. L. Barrett, singing to True Mother with both deep gratitude and a touch of heartfelt humor, “You are so beautiful to me -- and my wife.”

They were also invited to attend “A Celebration with True Parents” at the Manhattan Center, which brought a joyful close to the convocation.