

National Black Church Initiative

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The National Black Church Initiative Invites African American Men Back To Church

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans is committed to bringing African American men back to church. NBCI, in partnership with major black religious leaders and denominations nationwide, believe that African American men have nowhere to go but back to church. Given the serious issues facing African American men, including rising levels of incarceration, drug use and unwed fatherhood – we can no longer stand by while our men openly defy God’s word.

This program is a part of NBCI’s Healing Family Initiative, programming which seeks to bolster African American families against the tide of violence, poverty, moral depravity, and failure. It is time for the majority of African Americans to follow the examples set by successful African American families; the Obama’s being a shining beacon of accomplishment, and reverse trajectory of the African American family. Visit our website for more information about NBCI’s Healing Family Initiative at <http://www.naltblackchurch.com/healing-family.html>. Additionally, like all NBCI Initiatives, this program has education at its cornerstone. NBCI’s Education Initiative is a holistic approach - a whole family program wherein we also account for all of the adverse socio-economic factors impacting student achievement and family structure. Visit our website for more information about NBCI’s Education Initiative at <http://www.naltblackchurch.com/education/index.html>.

African Americans represent the strongest church attendance and affiliation amongst all ethnicities in the United States. According to the Pew Forum 2007 survey, people of black ethnicity were most likely to be part of a formal religion, with 85% being Christians. However, according to the Barna Research Group, a Christian research firm based in Ventura, Calif., more than 90% of American men believe in God, and 5 out of 6 call themselves Christian. But only 2 out of 6 attend church on any given Sunday. This means that in America, 60% of church attendees are women.

Black women overwhelming outnumber black men in regular church attendance. While black men may believe in God, in most cases it ends with belief. If single black women are attending church regularly and following the guidelines that the church has put in place and the black men are not, what does this say about the future of the black family?

Our focus is to open our doors, arms and hearts to understand the complex sociological and psychological factors that prohibit African American men from being consistent churchgoers, better fathers, less abusive spouses and better members of society. As a religious leader in the African

American community for the past twenty years, we take our position as a moral authority very seriously. NBCI believes that the first step for our African American brothers is to return to church – atoning for their sins and reestablishing their relationship with God through Christ. Over the next ten years we will develop comprehensive ministries to sustain this initiative and commit African American men to the path of righteousness.

The kick-off of this 7-year program is September 25, 2011 – but the first step in re-engaging African American men. Our goal is to reach over 10 million African American men nationwide, providing technical assistance to aid churches in reaching African American males and sustaining their membership. The black church must commit to reaching African American men to mold black males into strong fathers, husbands, members of society and protectors of our community. A society cannot exist without sober, ethical and functional men participating and leading families into a new age of African American successes. The black church must impart Biblical mandates for individuals, families, the community and the nation.

This will be an expensive initiative, fully funded by the church. Utilizing existing church programming and local, city, state and federal resources, this program will be an interdisciplinary response the issues facing African American males.

To achieve our goal of reaching over 10 million men over the next seven years NBCI will focus on the following elements:

1. **Removing Barriers to Church Attendance**

Male evangelism ministries will be created in each church nationwide - groups of 25 existing church members will design a comprehensive outline of issues and concerns facing their particular community.

Additionally, transportation will be addressed as lack of transportation could serve as a barrier for some African American congregants. Utilizing church transportation and city and state resources, African American males should have every opportunity to facilitate attendance.

2. **Counseling**

There are many types of counseling that the church is qualified to impart – the church has historically been a resource for the counseling needs of its congregants. Now, through partnerships with mental health professionals, medical professionals and private and public accredited resources the church is in a better position than ever to meet the counseling needs of African Americans.

- *Mental Health Counseling*
- *Spiritual Counseling*

Black men must be taught how to become effective followers of the ethics and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. These men must not be taught the language but the action – the implementation of God’s word is of the utmost importance.

- *Marriage/Sexual Counseling*

While the decline of marriage is clearly an American problem, statistics point to the glaring truth – African Americans are disproportionately devaluing the importance of marriage nationwide. The marriage rate for African Americans

has been dropping since the 1960s and today has the lowest marriage rate of any racial group in the United States. According to the 2001 US Census 43.3% of Black men and 41.9% of Black women in America have never been married and Black women are least likely in American society to marry. These figures are double that of white men and women. Between 1970 and 2001 the overall marriage rate has dropped, overall by 17%. However, for African Americans during this same time period the marriage rate dropped a staggering 34%.

NBCI addresses the needs of the African American family by focusing on the core of our community, facing problems head-on, developing innovative strategies to implement change, and enforcing new socially beneficial norms. Through intensive marriage counseling we strongly believe that the statistics surrounding African American marriage will improve.

3. **Drop-out Prevention**

According to the American Promise Study examining Cities in Crisis, “Nationwide, nearly one in three U.S. high school students fails to graduate with a diploma. In total, approximately 1.2 million students drop out each year – averaging 7,000 every school day or one every 26 seconds. Among minority students, the problem is even more severe with nearly 50 percent of African American and Hispanic students not completing high school on time.”

NBCI’s Dropout Prevention Initiative seeks to identify, assist, encourage, and sustain.

‘Identifying’ behavior that points to dropout risk, communities in which dropout rates are more prevalent, as well as the individuals who have dropped out of school. ‘Assist’ by resolving any social, psychological, academic, financial, or physical barriers to continuing education within a family with a focus on the student. ‘Encouraging’ putting the family and student back on a course which facilitates education and stability through after school programming, positive reinforcement, and counseling. Finally, the program is ‘sustained’ by integration these program strategies in conjunction with school systems, the faith community, the community at large, local, state and federal resources and businesses.

4. **Employment**

Historically, the unemployment rate for African Americans has always been higher than the national average. However, now it's at Depression-era levels. The most recent figures show African American joblessness at 16.2 percent. For black males, it's at 17.5 percent; And for black teens, it's nearly 41 percent.

The black church recognizes the importance of African American male employment – many factors contribute to impairing African American males from obtaining gainful employment. In this new effort we will emphasize entrepreneurship, good work ethics, and the importance of good financial management. The church also serves as a network of resources, specifically the 70,000 small businesses within NBCI’s membership network. We are encouraging these small businesses to hire African American males that are not their family members, to expand the opportunities available and increase wealth within the African American community.

Therefore, we have elicited a partnership with the National Black Chamber of Commerce in an effort to reach this goal.

5. **Incarceration Prevention**

Since the early 1970's the prison and jail population in the United states has increase at an unprecedented rate – a more than 500% rise resulted in over 2.2 million people incarcerated in our nation's prisons and jails. This growth has been accompanied by an increasingly disproportionate racial composition – Bureau of Justice statistics document that one in six black men had been incarcerated as of 2001 and if current trends continue one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during their lifetime.

Many churches currently participate in re-entry ministries; NBCI wants to increase participation 100 fold. Additionally, incorporating education, drop-out prevention, employment counseling and family interventions will seek to heal a community plagued by crime, drug-use and racial disparities.

This initiative will be amongst the most difficult of our programs to date. The black church also acknowledges that this will be an expensive initiative – we will be asking our member churches to donate \$5,000 yearly to fund this program over the course of the next seven years. We are committed to bringing African American men back to church, re-instituting God's word and infusing our families and communities with the moral precepts God mandates for our lives.