

Published by the  
FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Mark Rathel

Secretary Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Historical Society

### **Welcome to the Second Issue of *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage!***

Florida Baptists are a rich mosaic of cultures, traditions, and languages. Indeed, Florida Baptists minister in a context of international missions within the state boundaries. This second volume attempts to celebrate our diversity by reflecting on the history of selected ethnic groups in Florida Baptist life. Perhaps a future issue will reveal the history of additional Florida Baptist ethnic groups.

Numerous people contributed behind the scenes in order to make this issue a reality. Particularly, I express my thanks to Rev. Hubert Hurt, former director of language missions for the Florida Baptist Convention. Rev. Hurt functioned as issue editor by suggesting authors for the ethnic histories and first-hand comments of many of the articles. As well, I want to express thanks to a group of committed people—the editorial board of *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*: Dr. R. C. Hammack, Dr. Gary Poe, Dr. Thomas Greene, Dr. Hugh Hurt, and Dr. Greg McBride. These individuals reviewed the articles, made corrections, and offered invaluable assistance. The very-human secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, however, is responsible for final product.

Dr. Sid Smith, Director of the African-American Ministries Division of the Florida Baptist State Convention, contributed an excellent article

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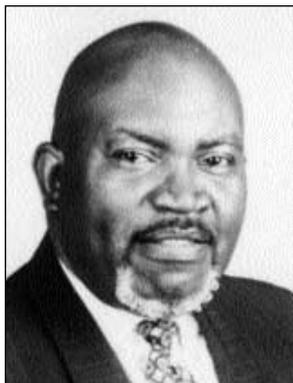
on the history of African-Americans in Florida Baptist life. In addition to discussing the role of African-Americans in nineteenth century Florida Baptist life, Dr. Smith provides an historic overview of various ministry approaches of the Florida Baptist State Convention in reaching the African-American community. While Florida Baptists have made much progress, particularly under the leadership of Dr. John Sullivan, there remains much gospel for us to learn.

Rev. John Hillhouse, a director of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, contributed an article which provided a brief overview of Native Americans in Florida and then describes the sacrificial efforts of Oklahoma Seminoles to minister to their own people. Jack wrote his article out of a deep compassion for the Seminole people; he served for a lengthy time as the interim pastor of a Seminole church.

Milton Leach, retired catalytic missionary of the North American Mission Board, provided a review of Hispanic ministry, particularly the commitment of Cuban leaders. Rev. Leach chose to provide an annual overview of the progress of Hispanic ministry.

In our final article Lulrick Balzora, a U.S. Navy Chaplain, wrote an excellent description of the history of Haitian Southern Baptist churches in Florida. The remarkable growth among Haitian Baptists functions as a testimony of their zeal and aggressive evangelism.

Finally, I ask you to pray for the ethnic groups highlighted in this issue of the journal.



## A HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FLORIDA BAPTISTS

Sid Smith

Director, African-American  
Ministries Division,  
Florida Baptist Convention

**I**n order to understand the present status of African American Southern Baptists in Florida it is helpful to have information about their past. Since denominational existence does not occur in a vacuum, it is necessary to understand the foundations on which the present is built. Therefore, we will focus upon some significant factors contributing to the development of contemporary Florida Baptists in the African American community.

The focus will consist of three periods of African American history in Florida relative to African American Baptists: the period of early African American presence in Florida; the period of Nineteenth Century African American Southern Baptists in Florida; and, Twentieth Century African American Southern Baptists in Florida.

### **The Period of Early African American Presence**

Documentation of earliest African American presence in Florida unfortunately is almost nonexistent. Therefore, most information about the subject is lost to history. However, it is possible to identify two phenomena relative to the early African American history of Florida: earliest African American presence in Florida; and, early African American Baptists in Florida.

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## Earliest African American Presence in Florida

According to history, the first known African American to come to Florida was Estevanico the Black, from Morocco in Africa, who arrived just fifteen years after Ponce de Leon. In 1528 he arrived at what is now St. Petersburg with the Spanish expedition led by the great explorer Panfilo de Narvaez. After exploring Florida with Narvaez, Estevanico explored Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. He was the first African to explore Florida and much of the southwestern area of what is now the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in 1687, the first African American runaway slaves began appearing in Florida. Because of its proximity to Georgia and South Carolina, Florida became an option for slaves determined to be free in the New World. Encouraged by the comparative leniency of the Spanish who ruled Florida at the time and the social implications of the efforts of the Catholic church to convert them, African American slaves found life in the territory an attractive alternative to British oppression.

The earliest free African American settlement in North America was Fort Mose, established two miles north of St. Augustine in 1738. This settlement contained approximately 100 African Americans who occupied the fort, farmed the fields, and assisted in the successful defense of the city of St. Augustine against the British, before the fort was destroyed in 1740. For twelve years the fort was not used until it was rebuilt in 1752. During this period the African Americans lived with the Spanish in St. Augustine as free people. In 1763, when the British captured Florida, the African Americans of Fort Mose abandoned the fort and relocated to Cuba along with the Spanish to begin life anew.

The earliest history of Florida reveals three strands of African American presence: the African American explorer; the free African American who had escaped from slavery in Georgia and South Carolina; and the free African American settlement north of St. Augustine which existed 1738-1763 as Fort Mose. These are the roots out of which early African American religion in the state grew.

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## Early African American Baptists in Florida

While the earliest African Americans to embrace Christianity in Florida were runaway slaves attracted to Catholicism, in all probability the first Baptists in the territory were African American. African American Baptists had been around since 1639 in Providence, Rhode Island. There had been African American Baptist churches since 1756 at Lunenburg, Virginia; 1773 at Silver Bluff, South Carolina; and 1778 at Augusta, Georgia. It was a matter of time before African American Baptists arrived in Florida. According to Florida Baptist historian Dr. Edward Earl Joiner, No one knows for certain exactly when the first Baptists set foot on Florida soil, but it appears possible, even probable, that some of the first Baptists were Southern slaves who had escaped to promised freedom under the second and last period of Spanish rule (1738-1821).<sup>2</sup> Based on the scholarship of Joiner, it is possible to conclude that the African American Baptists were probably the first Baptists in the state. Certainly they were among the first. So, African American Baptist roots go back to the earliest Baptist presence in Florida.

Very little is known about these earliest African American Baptists of Florida, since their story is almost totally lost to history. However, we do know that they held meetings in St. Augustine in 1784.<sup>3</sup> They were runaway slaves from Georgia or South Carolina attracted to Florida by promised freedom from the Spanish. Their names and dates are unknown. Their work was undocumented. However, their presence laid the groundwork for the foundation of African American work in the state.

### **Nineteenth Century Florida African American Southern Baptists**

This section will be characterized by listing significant facts about Florida Baptists and the African American community in the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century was a period of significant African American presence among Florida Baptists. The greatest percentage of African American presence in the history of the Florida Baptist Convention occurred during the nineteenth century. Some significant facts are:

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- ¥ *The first established Baptist church in Florida was integrated.* The Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, organized in 1821, was the first Baptist church in the state, and had at least one African American member, Peter Lopers.<sup>4</sup> Lopers joined the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church in Nassau County near what is now Callahan on July 22, 1822.<sup>5</sup>
- ¥ *African Americans comprised forty-six percent of the membership of the Alachua Association when it was organized in 1847.* In the twelve churches there were 230 African Americans out of the total of 500 members.<sup>6</sup>
- ¥ *African Americans were part of the first Sunday School in the state.* When G. G. Tripp organized the first Sunday School at Key West Baptist Church in 1844, African Americans were part of the membership.<sup>7</sup>
- ¥ *African Americans were the most faithful members of the first Sunday School in Florida.* When H. D. Doolittle reorganized the Sunday School at Key West Baptist Church in 1845, he observed better discipline and faithfulness among the African Americans than among the whites.<sup>8</sup>
- ¥ *The first African American preacher of record in Florida is Austin Smith.* In 1843 Smith was licensed to preach by the Key West Baptist Church under the pastorate of Charles C. Lewis. During the period when the church was without a pastor, he served as interim preacher for the African Americans and conducted prayer meetings each week.<sup>9</sup>
- ¥ *Most Florida Baptist churches were integrated during the nineteenth century.* Joiner states, Integration in the churches, moreover, was the rule rather than the exception. Negroes held membership in most Baptist churches in all areas, often outnumbering white members.<sup>10</sup>
- ¥ *The church where the Florida Baptist Convention was organized had African American members.* Although the

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Convention organizational meeting was held in the home of R. J. Mays, the nearby Concord Baptist Church had African American members.<sup>11</sup>

- ¥ *African American presence in nineteenth century Florida Baptist churches was treated with social ambivalence.* Although the churches practiced inclusive membership, that did not mean that they practiced equality regarding the African American members. Joiner reminds, In some churches they were treated just as were other members, and the quality of their contribution to the life of the church was not only recognized, but praised. Concern was often expressed for their welfare. Nonetheless they were generally relegated to a status in the church which could not be described as equal, despite the fact that in many Florida Baptist churches Negroes were in the majority. <sup>12</sup>
- ¥ *Although included in the membership of the churches, African Americans were usually under white control.* In meetings of African Americans, the minutes of the West Florida Baptist Association in 1854 reveal, African Americans were permitted to hold separate conferences and business meetings, pertaining only to their own business, always under the supervision of the white brethren, one of whom should act as moderator. <sup>13</sup>
- ¥ *After the Civil War there was an exodus of African Americans from Florida Baptist churches.* Because of the unwillingness of white Florida Baptists to grant freedom and equality to the African American community, African Americans found alternatives to membership in Florida Baptist churches after emancipation, most frequently reflected by the establishing of African American Baptist churches in the state.<sup>14</sup>
- ¥ *After the Civil War, there was a movement to form African American associations in Florida.* In 1880 there were four African American associations: Bethlehem No. 1, Bethlehem No. 2, Jerusalem, and Nazarene. By 1884 there were eight African American associations in the Florida Baptist Convention.<sup>15</sup>

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- ¥ *As late as 1883, African Americans were a majority in the Florida Baptist Convention. In that year, the Florida Baptist Convention Annual reported a membership of 16,857 African Americans compared to only 9,190 whites. This means that at the time the Florida Baptist Convention was almost two-thirds African American.*<sup>16</sup>
- ¥ *The Florida Baptist Convention helped support the movement of organizing the first African American Baptist convention in the state. Joiner states, The Florida Baptists helped (1) by establishing friendly relationships with the Colored Baptist Convention of Florida (as it was then designated), (2) by providing some help in the construction of Negro Baptist churches, (3) by holding institutes for Negro ministers and deacons, (4) by sharing use of buildings with them, and (5) by encouraging support for Negro schools.*<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

The nineteenth century was a period of significant African American Southern Baptist presence in Florida. African Americans were present among the earliest efforts to start churches in the state. The evangelistic efforts among African Americans were so effective that African Americans outnumbered whites in the Florida Baptist Convention by almost two-to-one at one time.

Although the churches of the Convention were normally multiracial, the evidence compels the conclusion that this integration was not healthy. Social ambivalence about the status and rights of African Americans reveals that the churches were captured by the pathological values and practices of the nineteenth century South.

The great tragedy is that the white brethren were not ready for the demands of equality and brotherhood for the African American community. Their recalcitrant resistance forced the African Americans to leave in order to experience the full implications of freedom within the church. By 1900 there were no African American congregations remaining in the Florida Baptist Convention.

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## **Twentieth Century Florida African American Southern Baptist Work**

For more than a half century Southern Baptist ministry with the African American community was characterized largely by a Baptist Plessy vs. Ferguson. This separate but equal approach was facilitated by two major dynamics that significantly impacted the church community.

The first factor was the dominant trend of racial segregation in American culture in the South. The Jim Crow system in society heavily influenced the churches in the region and yielded a segregationistic mindset for most congregations. The segregationist mindset yielded the practice of an informal community agreement that assumed that the African American community was the domain of the African American denominations and the white community was the domain of Southern Baptists in the South.

The second factor was the organizing and ascendancy of the National Baptist conventions. In 1895 the National Baptist Convention of America was organized. In 1915 the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. was founded. These African American national denominations provided an alternative to the Southern Baptist Convention, which was not ready for racial equality. These two major African American denominations attracted the overwhelming majority of African American Baptist churches to their membership.

Although dim, the light had not gone out on Florida Baptist ministry in the African American community. Florida Baptists responded to the ministry challenge in the African American community through various approaches described in the following periods: the Inclusiveness Period; the Cooperative Ministries Period; the Church Extension Period; and the African American Ministries Period.

### **The Inclusiveness Period**

**1900-2000**

The practice of inclusive ministry among Florida Baptists never ended. Although almost all African American members had participated in the post-Civil War exodus and found membership in a National

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Baptist convention by 1900, some Florida Baptist churches retained some African American members. For example, it is reported that First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, has always had African Americans in their membership. Other churches across the state report that they have enjoyed African American presence among their members for years.

While some Florida Baptists chose to minister to the African American community by welcoming them to their church, this form of inclusiveness was the exception rather than the rule. Most Florida Baptists displayed little interest in reaching the African American community for Christ.

In the late 1960s, another form of inclusiveness began to emerge in the Florida Baptist Convention. It was the inclusiveness manifested by predominantly African American churches joining the Convention. In 1968 Rev. Joseph C. Coats led Glendale Baptist Church, Miami, to affiliate with the Miami Baptist Association, which was a move that made the church the first predominantly African American congregation to become a member of the Florida Baptist Convention in the twentieth century. By 1994 there were seventy-two predominantly African American FBC churches. Today there are almost 400 churches in the African American community affiliated with the Florida Baptist Convention.

So, in summary, some Florida Baptists never abandoned the concept of including the African American community in the focus of their ministry. This was accomplished by inclusive congregationalizing and by openness to receiving predominantly African American congregations into the Convention. These two phases of inclusiveness covered the entirety of the century.

### The Cooperative Ministries Period

1965-1989

In addition to inclusion of the African American community in their own ministry, Florida Baptists, under heavy influence of the Home Mission Board, adopted the strategy of working with and through the National Baptists to reach the African American community in the state. This strategy involved working with the General Baptist State Convention of Florida and the Progressive Missionary and Educational

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Baptist State Convention of Florida, under the able leadership of Florida Baptist Convention staff assigned to spearhead cooperative ministries.

The first Florida Baptist Convention staffer elected to lead this phase of the work was Dr. Julius Avery who served as Director of Cooperative Ministries With National Baptists 1965-1973. He provided significant leadership in the field of communications between Southern Baptists and National Baptists. He initiated the concept of associational joint committees in Florida which resulted in improved leadership training opportunities for African American churches. Dr. Avery was known as a friend of National Baptists.

Dr. Avery was succeeded in 1974 by Dr. Murray McCullough as Director of Cooperative Ministries With National Baptists. Serving until 1979, McCullough was known as an effective pulpiteer among African American churches, frequently becoming the first white to be invited to preach in their pulpits. He led First Baptist Church, Sarasota, to sponsor the first African American mission in the twentieth century among Florida Baptists. McCullough was well respected and honored by African American Baptists across the state for his efforts at racial reconciliation and for continuation of cooperative training events with African Americans.

After retirement for medical reasons, McCullough was succeeded by Dr. Larry Elliott in 1979. Elliott was known for his warm personal relationship style with the African American church leaders and is cited in African American church literature with deep appreciation. He served when the concept was changed to African American church relations from cooperative ministries with National Baptists. During his tenure, which ended in 1989, the focus was on: fraternal relations with the two National Baptist state conventions; a church leadership training conference for African American Baptists at Lake Yale, with several hundred in attendance; a scholarship program for African American students; regional Vacation Bible School clinics; missions skills workshops; church development conferences; evangelism seminars; publication of a newsletter named Koinonia Co-op News ; conducting New Work Probes; and supervising a staff of four regional directors of African American church relations. A distinctive of this era was the

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decision to focus the work of this program on starting churches in the African American community.

## The Church Extension Period

1989-1994

In 1989 a strategy was initiated by the Missions Division of the Florida Baptist Convention to shift the thrust of the African American ministry to church starting in the African American community. This work was assigned to the Church Extension Department of the convention and the African American Church Relations Program was phased out.

The new strategy involved the church extension consultants spearheading the effort to start churches in the African American community. This was a new direction for Southern Baptists, but there was some readiness in Florida for the approach. From 1989-1994, forty-three predominantly African American churches were started.

The major direction of this period was the adoption of the unitary conventional approach as the strategy for Black ministry. Inclusiveness was to be the order of the day. There would be one program and African Americans would be included like everyone else.

This period was also characterized by the inclusion of African Americans on state boards, committees, and as speakers at some state conferences. Revs. Joseph Coats and Elroy Barber served on the State Board of Missions. Dr. V. L. Roy Liburd served on the Florida Baptist Family Ministries Board. Rev. Cleo Albury, Jr., served on the Pembroke Foundation Nominating Committee, and Dr. R. Eugene Burly was selected for the Committee on Order of Business.

Some associations in the Convention made great progress in electing African Americans to top offices. Drs. Joseph C. Coats, V. L. Roy Liburd, Lewis C. Lampley, Revs. Elroy Barber and Joshua Garvin were elected moderator of their associations. Mrs. Floria Gibbs was elected WMU Director of the Miami Baptist Association.

Some predominantly African American Churches were leaders in the state convention in baptisms by 1994. Bible Baptist Church, Miami, was

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led by pastor Rev. Cleo Albury to post the twentieth highest baptismal total in the state. Rev. Joshua Garvin led New Life Baptist Church, Carol City, to the sixth highest baptismal ratio in Florida that year.

During this period, African American churches in the Florida Baptist Convention organized the African American Southern Baptist Fellowship of Florida. The new group endeavored to promote fellowship among African American congregations and to encourage participation in the mainstream of SBC life. An expanded program was inaugurated under the administration of president, Dr. Elroy Barber.

The new direction of the unitary conventional approach met with limited success. While some predominantly African American churches embraced it enthusiastically, others were slow to become significantly involved. While training programs were open to African Americans on the same basis as to others, many African American pastors reported that there were still cultural bridges that needed to be crossed before most of their churches would be significantly involved. A major conclusion could be reached about the unitary conventional approach: while a few African Americans could be reached through this single approach, it would take a dual approach to reach most Florida Baptist African American churches.

A major lesson from the limited effectiveness of the unitary conventional strategy for African American work is that, at this time in history, the evidence reveals that the most effective strategy for reaching the African American community is the cultural specialty approach. Eschewing resegregation, this approach is the model which has been demonstrated effective in other pioneering state conventions such as California and Texas and at SBC national agencies such as the Baptist Sunday School Board and the Home Mission Board. It relies upon African American Southern Baptist leadership for strategizing to meet the needs of the African American constituency or community.

It ushered in the era of African American professional program leaders for Southern Baptist programs involving the African American community.

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## The African American Ministries Period 1994-Present

In 1994 the Florida Baptist Convention under the leadership of Dr. John Sullivan, Executive Director-Treasurer, instituted the African American Ministries Program. This program was the most advanced strategy to reach the African American community in Southern Baptist history.

The mission statement of the African American Ministries Office reflected the commitment of the state convention to minister to the African American community seriously. The Office's mission was defined as to provide leadership for the design and implementation of the Florida Baptist Convention's strategy for ministering in, with, through, and to the African American community.

The following characteristics governed the program:

- ¥ *The African American Ministries Office was structured at division level.* For the first time in Southern Baptist history, a state convention structured its African American program ministry as a division with all rights, privileges, responsibilities, budget, and accountability appertaining thereto. This move was incontrovertible evidence that the Florida Baptist Convention was serious about healthy ministry in the African American community.
- ¥ *An experienced African American Southern Baptist leader was employed to lead the program.* In 1994 Dr. Sid Smith, a veteran of twenty years of Southern Baptist denominational service, was called as Director of the African American Ministries Office. Smith had served as a home missionary for the Home Mission Board and as Manager of the Black Church Development Section at the Baptist Sunday School Board, as well as a pastor, minister of education, and owner of the first African American church consulting firm.

The prolific author of twelve pioneering books on African American Southern Baptist church studies, he brought relevant

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qualitative experience to the position. Recognized by the Baptist Sunday School Board as The Father of the GOSS (Growth Oriented Sunday School concept), he also brought a background of pioneering in practical resource development for African American churches and Southern Baptist denominational servants engaged in ministry in the multiracial context.

- ¥ *A relevant philosophy of ministry was developed.* The African American Ministries Division Office developed a philosophy of ministry which identified its programmatic involvement through two major thrusts: conventional program assistance and cultural specialty leadership. In this approach, the African American Ministries Office assists the state convention program organizations with their assignments through their involvement in the African American community. The Office also leads in the planning, organizing, and conducting of African American cultural specialty training events designed to bridge cultural/racial dissonance and encourage participation in conventional programming.
- ¥ *The priorities of the African American Ministries Division Office were well defined.* The four priorities were: church starting, church development, evangelism training, and diversity appreciation strategies.
- ¥ *Two departments were organized.* Eventually the African American Ministries Division was able to organize the African American Church Planting Department, Rev. Eugene Bryant, director, and the African American Church Development Department, Rev. Milton Boyd, director. This was the first time a state convention had organized both departments for African American work.
- ¥ *An experienced staff was employed.* A staff of veterans of the Florida Southern Baptist African American experience was employed as regional directors of African American Ministries. The fulltime staff consisted of: Dr. Lewis Lampley, Western

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Regional Director; Dr. V. L. Roy Liburd, Mid-Florida Regional Director; Rev. Clifford Marity, South Florida Regional Director; and, Dr. Joshua Smith, Northeastern Regional Director.

Part-time contract workers served as local directors of African American Ministries for the specific assignment of church starting through institutes and coordination of covenant cluster church training programs. The following have served as local directors: Rev. Kendall Anderson, Jacksonville, FL; Rev. Ricky Armstrong, Miami, FL; Dr. Elroy Barber, Hollywood, FL; Rev. Woodrow Benton, Miami, FL; Rev. Darrell Britt, Quincy, FL; Rev. Harrison Freeman, Ft. Pierce, FL; Rev. Richard Fuller, Crestview, FL; Rev. Arthur Groomes, Panama City, FL; Rev. Danny Harris, Miami, FL; Rev. Tyrone Herndon, Winter Springs, FL; Dr. Walter H. Johnson, Jacksonville, FL; Rev. Joseph Jones, Tallahassee, FL; Rev. Barrett Lampp, Quincy, FL; Rev. Maxie Miller, Plant City, FL; Rev. Robert Moss, Miami, FL; Rev. Willie J. Nelson, Opa Locka, FL; Rev. Keith Scott, Palm Harbor, FL; Rev. Quenton Smith, Satellite Beach, FL; Rev. Lester Ward, Miami, FL; Rev. Glenn H. Webster, Winter Haven, FL; Rev. Paul Williams, Sarasota, FL.

¥ *African American Ministries was made the state convention emphasis for 1996.* The African American Ministries Division programs were made high priorities for the year and served to introduce a massive church starting program in the African American community.

¥ *A multifaceted church starting strategy was implemented.* The African American Ministries Division designed and implemented four strategies for starting churches in the African American community: the church starting institute; an associational church starting program; a congregational church starting program; and, a staff-based church starting program. The goal was to start at least 100 churches per year.

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¥ *A church development seminar training program was launched.* African American-oriented church development seminars were conducted across the state utilizing clusters of African American churches who covenanted to participate in training sessions in Sunday School, discipleship training, church community ministries, family ministries, women s ministry, church music, prayer ministry, and evangelism.

¥ *An African American-oriented communications medium was established.* The African American Division established The African American Chronicle, a periodic newsletter focusing on African American Southern Baptist affairs as a channel of cultural communication for the African American community to supplement denominational publications.

¥ *Church starting accelerated.* From 1989 through 1993, Florida Baptists averaged starting seven churches per year in predominantly African American communities. Since the establishing of the African American Ministries Division in 1994, the Convention has averaged starting more than fifty churches per year in those communities.

In 1995, the African American Ministries Division set a goal of leading Florida Baptists to start 500 churches in the African American community by December 31, 2000. To date, the churches of the Convention have been responsible for starting almost 300 churches. Under leadership from the African American Church Planting Department, the God-sized challenge remains before Florida Baptists.

¥ *Church development training multiplied.* The African American Ministries Division does its assignment of leadership training through the African American Church Development Department. Primarily through culturally customized seminars, consultations, and conferences, the Department trains leaders in Florida Baptist programming and encourages participation in state convention events.

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It is estimated that from 1989 through 1993, African American Southern Baptist participation in Florida Baptist leadership training events was sparse at best, averaging only about thirty per year for a total of approximately 150 for the period. Since 1995, under the leadership of the African American Ministries Division, an average of more than 1,500 leaders per year have been trained in Florida Baptist predominantly African American churches for a total of more than 9,000 trained during the period.

The African American Church Development Department leads the Southern Baptist Convention in leadership training among African Americans. In 1998-1999, 3025 leaders were trained. In 1997 Florida Baptists trained more African American church leaders than the other SBC state conventions combined. The training provided by the African American Church Development Department since 1995 represents the equivalent of training offered for more than 1,500 Christian Growth Study Plan diplomas.

¥ *Evangelism training assistance increased.* While the Evangelism Division carries the assignment for evangelism, the African American Ministries Division assists with training in predominantly African American churches.

The proliferation of new churches, special worker training, and evangelism training seminars has resulted in a baptismal ratio of one-to-eighteen in Florida Baptist African American churches. Consequently, it is projected that more that 4,000 persons are baptized in predominantly African American churches in the Convention per year. Since 1994 it is projected that more than 8,000 persons have been baptized in predominantly African American FBC churches. The goal is to have a total of more than 10,000 baptisms by the end of 2000.

¥ Diversity appreciation leadership was provided. The African American Ministries Division provides leadership for the Convention s diversity appreciation focuses. In a culturally

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pluralistic state, the adequately equipped convention will have a strategy to equip the churches for the reality of the multicultural ministry context.

Florida Baptists have prepared staff for cultural diversity by conducting cultural sensitivity seminars. Annual focuses have included: Issues in Multicultural Sensitivity for State Convention Staff ; Understanding, Identifying, and Dismantling Inadvertent Institutional Racism In Denominational Structures ; Understanding the Hispanic Culture ; Understanding the African American Culture.

Florida Baptists are among the leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention in in-service-training for diversity appreciation.

- ¥ *Associational cooperative programming was initiated.* The African American Ministries Division has initiated joint planning and program implementation with associations in the state. The Division participates with associations through joint church starting in African American communities, African American church development conferencing, and serving as liaison consultants with African American churches. Some associations have established the position of associational director of African American ministries, with assistance from the division. The Division has established twenty-one associational/regional cluster planning groups to assist in need assessment in African American churches for church development training purposes.
- ¥ As a result of the impact of the African American Ministries Division, associations have experienced unprecedented growth in the number of churches started in the African American community, as well as a dramatic escalation of African American associational involvement.
- ¥ *Accredited seminary education was provided.* The African American Ministries Division has initiated through New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary the Pastoral Ministry Certificate in African American Church Studies. Students may

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earn the certificate through The African American Ministries Church Training Institute by successfully completing an accredited course in: Old Testament, New Testament, Evangelism, Christian Ethics, Church History, Church Planting, Sunday School Growth, and Preaching.

This is the first time a state convention has established such a program with a Southern Baptist seminary. Since its inception, more than 100 students per year have been trained.

¥ *Culturally customized resources were produced.* The African American Ministries Division has been involved in the generation of culturally specific resources for Florida Baptists. The Division has produced pioneering books, videos, articles, and newsletters. The books produced by the Division are used by colleges, seminaries, and state/national convention training conferences across America. Consequently, Florida leads the nation in the production of contextualized training resources for African American churches.

¥ *A strategy planning committee was organized.* The African American Ministries Division has organized the African American Ministries Strategy Planning Committee. The committee consists of leading African American pastors, laypersons, and directors of missions who meet annually to provide input to the Division and other FBC program departments on needs and wants in African American churches relative to training conferences. Seminars, conferences, and consultations are conducted based on their preferences.

This grassroots approach to planning has resulted in unprecedented participation in training programs by African American churches.

¥ *An arson fund was administered.* The African American Ministries Division administers the Florida Baptist Convention's arson fund. This fund was established in 1996 as a response to the rash of burnings of African American churches.

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Several Florida churches have been assisted in the rebuilding of their house of worship as a result of the fund.

¥ *Projects were shared with the Florida African American Fellowship.* The Florida African American Southern Baptist Fellowship is an organization of churches which predates the creation of the African American Ministries Division. The Fellowship exists to promote fellowship among African American churches and to encourage their full participation in the Florida Baptist Convention. Dr. Winston Rudolph, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, Pompano Beach, serves as president.

The African American Ministries Division participates in joint projects with the Fellowship. The Florida African American Southern Baptist Fellowship leads the nation through visionary leadership and involvement in the Southern Baptist African American Fellowship.

Dr. Elroy Barber, former president of the Florida African American Southern Baptist Fellowship, serves as second vice president of the Southern Baptist African American Fellowship.

¥ *National recognitions were earned.* The African American Ministries Division's impact has been recognized nationally in the area of church starting. The Home Mission Board awarded the 1996-1997 Church Starter of the Year Award to Dr. Elroy Barber, pastor of Westside International Baptist Church, Hollywood. The North American Mission Board awarded the 1998 On Mission Church Starter of the Year Award to Rev. Mark Coats, pastor of Grace of God, Miami.

¥ *National leadership was provided.* The African American Ministries Division has achieved leadership status in the Southern Baptist Convention relative to African American affairs. The Division provided leadership in the founding of the Black Southern Baptist Denominational Servants Network, the first national fellowship of African American Southern Baptist denominational employees.

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- ¥ The African American Ministries Division is represented in national planning and training sessions at the North American Mission Board and LifeWay Christian Resources.
  - ¥ State program leaders from other states are mentored by the Division.

### **Contributions of Florida Baptists**

Florida Baptists have been pioneers among Southern Baptists in working with the African American community. The following significant contributions have been bequeathed to the racial progress of the Convention.

- ¥ Florida Baptists pioneered in improving religious education in the African American community by demonstrating that the principles of Southern Baptist Sunday School administration, so effective in white congregations, also are viable for African American churches. When Glendale Baptist Church, Miami, proved this point by growing the largest Sunday School in the African American community, it was only the prelude to the proliferation of a new movement in African American churches nationwide the Growth Oriented Sunday School, a Blackenized cultural adaptation of the Southern Baptist Sunday School program pioneered by Florida Baptists.
- ¥ Florida Baptists pioneered among Southern Baptists in the intentional starting of churches in the African American community. For decades the concept of Southern Baptists starting churches in African American communities was controversial due to the threat to denominational relations with African American Baptist denominations fearful of proselytizing efforts. The Florida Baptists led the way among Southern Baptist state conventions in concentrating their strategy for African American ministry in church starting. Although seriously questioned at the time, this strategy has become the primary philosophy among Southern Baptists today.

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It was the forerunner of the modern African American church starting movement.

- ¥ Florida Baptists pioneered in the employment of African American denominational staff among Southern Baptists. While not the first to employ a African American to serve on the state staff, the Convention was the first to invest so much in multiple African American state staffers. When the regional directors of African American work were brought aboard, a model was set for other states in the Southern Baptist Convention. (Reverends William Campbell, Larry Hunt, Bernard Blount, John Giles, and George Sadler served as regional directors during the 1970s and 1980s.) The point was made that if a state convention was serious about ministering to the African American community, that seriousness must be manifested in staffing involving skilled persons from the community.
- ¥ Florida Baptists pioneered in prioritizing the African American program of work among Southern Baptists. The Florida Baptist Convention was the only state convention to structure the African American program focus at division level. Most other state conventions that have African American-focused programs structure them at consultant level or, in some cases, at associate level, while a few have structured them at department level. However, the Florida Baptist Convention has structured the African American Ministries Program at division level. This paradigm sends the strongest positive message to the African American community about their acceptance by the state convention. As more state conventions prioritize ministry in the African American community, it is predicted that this will be the model of the future.
- ¥ Florida Baptists pioneered among state conventions in the Deep South by electing an African American to serve as president. In 1998 Florida Baptists made history by unanimously electing Dr. Elroy Barber, an African American, to serve as president of the Florida Baptist Convention. Although

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thirteen other African Americans had served as president of their state convention, this marked the first time a Deep South Southern Baptist state convention had elected an African American president.

Although Dr. Barber is a proud man of color, there appears to be consensus that he was not elected because of his race but because of his outstanding qualifications. At Westside International Baptist Church, Hollywood, where he pastors, Barber had distinguished himself as a strong leader in Kingdom work by developing a strong record.

The administration of President Barber was a highlight for the Florida Baptist Convention. During his presidency, Cooperative Program giving was at an all time high. Baptisms by Florida Baptist churches were at record levels. The increased ownership factor by minorities was reflected by unprecedented participation in Florida Baptist training events, especially by African Americans proud to have one of their own as president. Other Baptist state conventions in Florida responded with unprecedented desires for cooperation as their trust level of the Florida Baptist Convention has escalated as a result of encountering a president of color.<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The creation of the African American Ministries Division has paid tremendous dividends to Florida Baptists and the Kingdom of God. The Convention has discovered an effective way to accelerate its ministries of church starting, church development, and evangelism in the African American community. God is at work in the Convention through the Division.

In conclusion, Florida Baptists have made history in their approach to ministry in the African American community. Based upon the mountain of insights gained from the historic contributions of the denominational pioneers from the Florida Baptist Convention who worked with the African American Community, the state convention has

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evolved into the leader among Southern Baptists committed to healthy multiracial ministry.<sup>19</sup>

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## A HISTORY OF NATIVE AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

John C. Hillhouse, Jr.

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weekly newspapers;

Presently serves as a director of  
the Florida Baptist  
Historical Society

**T**he bumper sticker on a car in front of the First Seminole Indian Baptist Church at the Hollywood, Florida, reservation declared, America was built on the graves of Indians.

It s a sad commentary with too many supporting illustrations. To add insult to injury, the typical depiction of an Indian (based on Hollywood, California motion pictures, a major creator of American popular culture) often used non-Indian actors playing to the California image of real Indians.

What s real about the Indians, specifically Indians of Florida?

### **Europe Settlers and Florida Indians**

During the Easter season of 1513, Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon saw land from his ship. He was so impressed by the flowery scene, that he named the land Easter flowers (Pascua florida).<sup>1</sup> Today we remember the Florida part, but forget the Easter significance.

University of Miami history professor, Charlton W. Tebeau, says that April 1513 discovery by Ponce, who was simply trying to find the island of Bimini, is merely the first official discovery of Florida.<sup>2</sup> Other Europeans may have visited before that, but they were very temporary tourists. At least six major Indian groups were permanent residents when Ponce visited.

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Ponce stepped ashore for about a week's visit near the modern city of St. Augustine, where about 14,300 of the powerful Timucuan Indians were located, out of the state's then total of an estimated 25,000 Indians. Modern Broward, Dade, and Monroe counties were home to an estimated 800 Tequesta Indians. There were about 2,375 Calusa in the Lake Okeechobee-Fort Myers area; 6,800 Apalachee (including 800 Apalachicola, 500 Chatot, and 300 Pensacola) and 800 Ais.

On April 30, 1562, Jean Ribault, an ardent Calvinist, arrived at the mouth of the St. Johns River. The Timucuan Indians welcomed the French Protestants. Ribault left twenty-eight men and eight pieces of artillery at what he named Port Royal, where they built La Caroline, named for King Charles IX.<sup>3</sup> (South Carolina historians claim Port Royal was far north of the St. Johns River, in the vicinity of the Parris Island Marine Corps Base south of Charleston.) Port Royal was the first French settlement in North America. Ribault left enough food for the colonists' needs until he imagined he could return from France.

Things went wrong. A fire destroyed the food and the Timucuan didn't have enough food in winter storage to share with their new neighbors. The desperate Frenchmen decided it would be better to attempt to sail home to France in a small boat they built without a compass or navigator than to starve in Florida. Becalmed in the Atlantic, they were ready to resort to cannibalism when they were rescued by an English ship.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the Spaniards discovered the French incursion into Florida. The Spanish launched an attack from Cuba against the fort. Finding it abandoned, they destroyed it and carried off a French lad who had chosen to stay with the Indians rather than risk the small boat.

The first European women arrived in Florida on June 22, 1564, as part of a second French Protestant expedition. The Timucuan again welcomed them near the mouth of the St. Johns River. Then a third French expedition arrived with an additional 500 men and seventy women.

But the Spaniards were now alarmed about the French presence, which threatened the sea lanes used by Spain's treasure galleons. A major offensive from Spain and Cuba, involving more than 1,500

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persons, was initiated. King Philip II ordered Admiral Pedro Menendez to dislodge the French from their new fort at La Caroline.

The Spanish victory led to the founding of the city of St. Augustine, following a mass on Sept. 8, 1565, and the introduction to Florida of 500 slaves, 400 sheep, 400 hogs, 200 heifer calves and some goats.<sup>5</sup>

Diseases brought to them by the French, Spanish, as well as attacks from other Indian groups decimated the friendly Timucuan Indians, whose population went from the tens of thousands in 1562 to an estimated 550 in 1698. There are no survivors today.<sup>6</sup>

The English started to show an aggressive interest in Florida two decades later. Englishman Sir Francis Drake attacked and burned St. Augustine in 1586. British buccaneers plundered the city in 1665.

### **Seminole Indians**

The Seminoles began moving into Florida in the early 1700s.

After the British captured Cuba, Spain traded Florida to the British in 1763 so Spain could reacquire Cuba. The Spaniards carried many Indians to Cuba when they departed from Florida. But the British tired of Florida. In February 1783 they ceased hostilities with both the new American nation and with Spain. America won its independence and Spain reacquired Florida. But now the Seminoles were beginning to pour into Florida, largely replacing the earlier Indians.

The Seminoles are a great people, Edwin C. McReynolds said in his Preface to *The Seminoles*. The virtues of the Seminoles are the product of hardship, war, and their struggles for existence. <sup>7</sup>

The Seminoles are part of the Muskogean language group spoken by Seminoles, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws.

In 1716 the Creek Confederacy was formed in what is now South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama to bring together several Southern tribes to fight the Cherokees. But one of the confederated tribes, the Oconee, left their native area around today's Milledgeville, Georgia, and migrated southward, some reaching the area of Gainesville, Florida, in the early eighteenth century. The earliest recorded Seminole town, Alachua, was organized in North Florida in 1740. Because they had

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moved away from the more populated Indian communities of Georgia, the Muskogee-speaking Indians nicknamed them Sim-in-oli, meaning wild ones.

Around the time the American Revolution was being fought, the wild Oconee were joined by at least six other tribal groups, some speaking Muskogee and others speaking Hitchiti. Following the Creek War of 1813-14, the Seminoles tripled in size with refugees from many tribes in Alabama and Georgia. Many runaway slaves, veterans of fierce African fighting tribes, also sought refuge among the Seminoles, who welcomed them as warriors. By 1821 three of the Seminoles thirty-four Florida settlements were African American communities.

From this alliance of many peoples rose the Seminole tribe, wrote Wilfred T. Neill in *Florida's Seminole Indians*. The Muskogee language was used by a majority of the people, but Hitchiti-speaking members of the community supplied most of the leaders. A part of the Hitchiti-speaking peoples moved to South Florida and were called Mikasuki Indians.<sup>8</sup>

By 1813 the United States was busily expanding west across Indian land in Georgia and Alabama. This pressure against the Native Americans led to the Creek War in Alabama. Gen. Andrew Jackson, commander of United States Army and Tennessee militia, marched through that area to defend New Orleans against a British invasion. Besides being in the path of this American drive, the Seminoles and Creeks were pro-British in the War of 1812 (1811-1815).

With the British thwarted at New Orleans, Jackson turned his attention toward the Seminoles and invaded North Florida in 1816 for the First Seminole War. Vowing they would not surrender, many Seminoles moved deep into Florida. In 1819 the United States acquired Florida. In the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek, the Seminoles were forced to give up twenty-eight million acres to the United States and were allowed to keep only four million acres. In 1832 the Treaty of Payne's Landing promised the Seminoles five million acres in swampy Southwest Florida.

On December 28, 1835, Osceola led the Seminoles in the Second Seminole War (1835-42) at the Battle of Withlacooche (near Ocala),

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where Major Francis Dade was killed. He would one day have a Florida county named after him. In 1837, Osceola attacked Major Zachary Taylor and Taylor's victory at the Battle of Lake Okeechobee led to his promotion to Brigadier General. Osceola, on the other hand, was captured under a flag of truce and imprisoned in South Carolina, where he died the following year. For two years Taylor unsuccessfully fought the Seminoles and finally asked to be relieved of this frustrating duty in 1840. Later that decade he led troops fighting Mexico's Santa Ana and was elected President in 1848.

The massive forced movement of Native Americans from their homelands, known as The Trail of Tears, started in 1838 when President Andrew Jackson ordered that 3,000 Seminoles and 16,000 Cherokees be uprooted from their North Carolina-Georgia-Alabama-Florida homes and shipped to the Indian territory, now the State of Oklahoma. Thousands died on the forced journey.<sup>9</sup> Many of the Muskogee-speaking Seminoles were uprooted from Florida for the Oklahoma migration.<sup>10</sup>

An officer serving under Colonel Zachary Taylor was Major William Lauderdale. With a company of the United States Army Third Artillery and 200 Tennessee Volunteers, the major established a fort on the New River in 1838 and called it after himself, Fort Lauderdale.<sup>11</sup>

In 1855 Billy Bowlegs led an attack against United States Army surveyors and the Third Seminole War began. It ended when he was captured in 1858. But a few hundred Seminoles had successfully resisted Federal attempts to move them from Florida and that year the U.S. Government decided it would no longer try to remove the remaining Seminoles from Florida.<sup>12</sup> United States Secretary of War Jefferson Davis admitted that the Seminoles had baffled the energetic efforts of our army to effect their subjugation and removal.<sup>13</sup>

Missionaries had been working with the Seminoles for many years. By the start of the Civil War, there were many Indians who had become Christians in the Indian territory. But the War Between the States split the Seminoles. One author suggests that the Presbyterian Seminoles favored the Union, while the Baptist Seminoles fought for the Confederacy. At one point during the war along the Red River,

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Confederate Seminoles backed by Texas cavalry attacked the Union Seminoles.<sup>14</sup>

The Union had three regiments of Home Guards comprised of Seminoles, Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, while the Confederacy enlisted twenty-one Indian organizations each typically smaller than a regiment. These included the Confederate First Seminole Regiment.<sup>15</sup>

When the Confederates attacked the Union Indians, they didn't differentiate between the Indians in the Union Army and the neutrals who didn't want to participate on either side. The neutrals and Unionists were forced to retreat into Kansas during 1861. Many died there due to the harsh winter and being attacked by Kansas Indian groups. This led many of the neutrals to join the Union forces to regain their homes.

During the latter 1880s, some whites aimed gunshots at a band of Seminoles in the Everglades, and United States Cavalry troops were rushed from the West to Florida. Nothing came of the incident, and there were no further hostilities, wrote Neill.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1890s, Seminoles and whites began trading peacefully near the Everglades. In 1901 Seminoles became United States citizens.

When the Tamiami Trail (U.S. 41) opened in 1928 between Tampa and Miami, Seminoles along the route began selling crafts and demonstrating alligator wrestling for tourists.

In 1936 the Seminole cattle industry began at Brighton reservation and the first formal education for Seminoles started three years later. In 1947 the Seminoles petitioned the United States Indian Claims Commission to pay for lands taken from the Seminoles; and that year students at Florida State University in Tallahassee made Seminoles their mascot.<sup>17</sup>

The Seminoles in Florida and Oklahoma sued the United States Government in 1950, seeking compensation for their losses under the treaties of Moultrie Creek (1823) and Payne's Landing (1832). In 1964 the Indian Claims Commission set the 1823 loss at 23.8 million acres of land and 5.8 million acres in 1832.<sup>18</sup>

Surprisingly, neither the Broward County main library nor its West Regional branch in 1998 had materials on the Seminoles' successful

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land claim, other than their lawsuit was clouding innumerable ownership titles throughout the state and the work of several water management districts, according to librarians questioned. First action apparently was the Seminole Indian Land Claims Settlement Act of 1987. An act dated April 30, 1990 (Pub. L. 101-277) authorizes the use and distribution of funds awarded the Seminole Indians in dockets 73, 151, and 73-A of the Indian Claims Commission, according to a person answering questions at the United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Dania/Hollywood reservation.<sup>19</sup>

The Seminoles and the Miccosukees were the same tribe until they could not agree politically. They are kin. The United States Government recognized the Miccosukee Tribe in 1962.

### **Seminoles and Baptist Missions**

Apparently the Seminoles have been more receptive of Christianity while the Miccosukee hold to earlier ways. Persons in the same family might associate with either tribe.

Neill notes that although many religious denominations have concerned themselves with the Seminoles, only the Episcopalians among Tamiami Trail-side Indians and Baptists among reservation Indians have made noticeable headway in Florida.

In recent times, most of the (Seminoles ) Baptist ministers and missionaries have been Indians, either Florida Seminoles or Creeks and Seminoles from the Oklahoma reservations. <sup>20</sup> *The Lakeland Ledger* noted on September 29, 1946, that five Seminole Indians had enrolled at the Baptist Bible Institute there (now Baptist College of Florida in Graceville): Junior Buster, Josie Billie, Barfield Johns, Billy Osceola, and Sam Tommie.

Junior Buster became a lay preacher but not a pastor among the Seminoles. His son, Paul Buster, was the interim pastor in 1998 of the First Seminole Indian Baptist Church.

Josie Billie was a notorious medicine man, very strict, recalls Paul Buster. The Lord changed him sometime around 1945. He told his followers, I can provide you with medicine, but what you need is for

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Jesus Christ to come into your life. About thirty to fifty confessions of faith were made during that service.

Barfield Johns of the Brighton reservation died around 1980, according to Betty Osceola, the church's Director of Discipleship Training and WMU participant.

Billy Osceola and Sam Tommie became preachers in the church, Buster said. Billy Osceola was the main person in organizing the tribe. When the Seminoles organized in 1957, he became the first chairman of the incorporated tribe. He organized the tribe along Christian lines, Buster said.

Genus and Carolyn Crenshaw, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board missionaries to the Florida Seminoles 1951-1983, wrote a history in 1997 of the Florida Baptist Seminoles to be part of Gulf Stream association's 1998 *We Came From Many Nations*. (Genus Crenshaw <sup>21</sup> died in 1998.) The Crenshaw history follows:

The first missionary had been a Seminole Indian from Oklahoma, Andrew J. Brown. He preached his first sermon to the Florida Indians in 1907, at Indian Town, 22 miles south of Jupiter. Indiantown (current name) was home for many of the Indians in Florida after the Trail of Tears. He traveled by an ox drawn wagon to bring the Gospel to the Seminoles in the Everglades.

There were many hardships and struggles for the early missionaries but they moved forward slowly. W. L. Joseph, a Creek Baptist preacher, helped missionary Brown in the work.

The early missionaries came and went in the beginning. Brown and Joseph returned to Oklahoma and a second group was sent after a two-year lapse. This group was headed by Andrew Brown. With him was George Scott, John Wesly, and Daniel Long. All of these gentlemen were preachers. There were also several women in the group, but we do not have their names.

When this group returned to Oklahoma they gave a favorable report. They suggested opening the doors of mission work just south of Jupiter, Florida.

As time moved on, the sponsoring Wewaka Indian Church of Oklahoma met with financial difficulties and was unable to carry on the

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work it had so bravely and nobly started. This church turned the work over to the Creek, Seminole, and Wichita Association in 1912. This was a strong association that had begun in 1875 and was made up of twenty-six churches. These small churches banded together in the association to accomplish together what they could not do separately. Seminoles were not part of the original name, but they later became part of the association's name. There are currently more Seminoles in Oklahoma than in Florida.

In 1912, this association sent out its first missionary, Byer Beaver. Missionaries sent out by the Creek, Seminole, and Wichita Association to South Florida were: Byer Beaver, George Washington, William Green, Henry Land, Willie King, and Stanley Smith. Some churches in this association sent others to help these missionaries. Some of them were: Albert Stake, Charley Bowers, Jerry Morris, Alfred Goat, Martin Goat, Lewis Brown, and Abe Marks. All of these early missionaries and helpers did a good work. The Indians of Florida were opposed to the Gospel and the early work was slow and difficult.

The women of the Creek, Seminole, and Wichita Association were a strong group and were not willing to sit idly by. They also sent workers to Florida. The first white missionary woman was Mrs. Elsie M. Quinn. The Indians of Florida learned to love and respect her. Along with her the ladies sent helpers: Mrs. Lena King, Mrs. John Smith, Mrs. Susie Ewin, Miss Minnie Deer, and Mrs. Nancy Smith. They used a scripture for their work. *That ye received her in the Lord, that ye assist her in what ever business she has need of you* (Rom. 16:1-2).

The First Seminole Indian Baptist Church was organized Sunday, June 7, 1936. For this occasion eleven ordained Indian preachers came from Oklahoma bringing their families. Among those was Rev. Raly Canard, the chief of the Creek nation. (He was appointed to this position by President Franklin Roosevelt.) He was from Wetumka, Oklahoma and a devoted follower of Christ.

The moderator for the occasion was preacher Jobe Smith of Wetumka, Oklahoma. The clerk for the organization was Brother Lewis C. Brown of Saskawa, Oklahoma.

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The pastor of the church was missionary Rev. Willie King, a Creek Indian from Oklahoma. He visited with the Seminoles in their open camps for years, getting them together for hot dogs, beans, and preaching. The church was located on the north side of Stirling Road in Hollywood just east of the entrance to the Indian mission property.

A few whites were present including Dr. C. M. Brittain, State Secretary for Florida Baptists, and Dr. Frank A. Keene, pastor of First Baptist, Fort Lauderdale.

The name First Seminole Indian Baptist Church was unanimously adopted. The newly organized church expressed a desire to become a part of the Creek, Seminole, and Wichita Baptist Association.

The following presented themselves with a letter of dismissal from their Oklahoma church to organize this church among the Seminoles of Florida: Rev. Raly Carnard, Rev. John Smith, Rev. Martin Goat, Rev. Jobe McIntosh, Rev. Joe Colbert, Rev. Lewis Harjo, Rev. Lewis C. Brown, Rev. George Scott, Josie Marpeyarcher, and Deacon Chippie HarJo. They adopted the Articles of Faith and the Church Covenant.

In 1938 the Creek, Seminole, and Wichita Association of Oklahoma asked the Florida Baptist Convention to help with the work by supplementing the salary of Rev. Willie King. The Oklahoma association and the Florida Baptist Convention then asked the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board to take over the work, which it did.

The first mission of First Seminole was Big Cypress, in Hendry County. This mission was south of Clewiston, 133 miles from the mother church. Once a month on Saturday, the entire group would ride a truck to meet in business session. They would spend the night and worship with the mother church and return home in the afternoon. The mission pastor was Rev. Sam Tommie. Rev. Henry Cypress became pastor in 1953, serving for ten years.

Rev. Stanley Smith was the sixth missionary. There were eleven members on August 15, 1943, when Rev. Stanley Smith began his ministry. During the six years he was there, the work experienced its greatest growth. The church recorded 221 candidates for baptism. In 1948 his last year of pastoring, gifts were \$3,799.00. Under Smith's

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leadership, Billy Osceola was ordained to the full Gospel ministry. Sam Tommie, Josie Billie, and Morgan Smith were licensed to preach. The Smiths were the first missionaries to live in the mission home.

After Smith left, Mr. & Mrs. D. DeHass were sent to live in the house and do mission work until a missionary couple could be sent.

Rev. Genus Crenshaw of Kentucky, and his wife, Carolyn of South Carolina, moved into the Seminole mission house September 23, 1951. They had graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that year and worked during the summer in New Mexico with the Pueblos and Navajoes. She had worked in Oklahoma and he in Cherokee, North Carolina. Their love for working with Indians was realized as they participated in summer missions. It was the decision of the Home Mission Board to send them to the Seminoles in Florida. They served as a missionary couple until the Board retired them in December 1983.

First Seminole Baptist Church is very supportive of the Cooperative Program, giving sixty percent of its budget to mission projects, according to the Gulf Stream Baptist Association in 1998. Stirling Road Hispanic Baptist Church is located next to the First Seminole Indian Baptist Church on Stirling Road east of the Florida Turnpike.

There are six Seminole reservations in Florida: Dania (between Hollywood and Dania along U.S. 441/State Road 7); Brighton touches Lake Okeechobee in Glades County; Big Cypress sits astride Alligator Alley (Interstate 75) in far western Broward County with extensions into Hendry and Palm Beach counties; Immokalee northeast of Naples; Tampa; and Fort Pierce. Numerous Native Americans sacrificially labored to evangelize their fellow tribesmen; Florida Baptists need to continue to evangelize the Native American residents of our state.

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FLORIDA BAPTIST  
HISPANIC HERITAGE:  
1950s TO 1988.

Milton S. Leach, Jr.  
catalytic missionary, Southern  
Baptist North American Mission  
Board (retired)

### **Early Beginning**

**T**he first Hispanic work in South Florida began in 1940 when the Home Mission Board started a good will center in Key West. It was directed by Miss Mary A. Taylor. Following a revival conducted by Abdiel Silva of Tampa, several Hispanic persons were baptized at the First Baptist Church. In 1947 Ismael Negrin became the first pastor of the Hispanic congregation with financial support of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. He served there for about fourteen years.

In 1948 the Home Mission Board constructed a building on Watson Street for the Hispanic church. The church continued to meet there until September 5, 1953, when they moved to a new building on White Street. Services were held in English and Spanish for many years. Pastors at White Street Baptist Church have been Ismael Negrin, S. A. Candal, Gary Carpentar, J. C. Lewis, Luis Manuel Lopez Munoz, Alberto Joaquin, Eliseo Rodriguez, Alberto Saenz, Gus Sanchez, Israel Garcia, and Rafael Melian. The church property continues to be owned by the Home Mission Board.

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Early in the 1940s, the Home Mission Board began efforts to reach the Hispanics of Ybor City, a section of the city of Tampa. The Ybor City population was made up largely of Cubans and Italians who were involved in the cigar industry. Through the years unsettled political conditions in Cuba had resulted in an exodus of refugees to Tampa and Key West. The Hispanic church in Ybor City began approximately in 1945 with Abdiel Silva, Sr. as pastor. As in the case of the Key West Hispanic mission work, the Home Mission Board conducted a good will center at the same location. Beside the good will center the Board, constructed an attractive Latin style church building.

At one point R. B. Armstrong led this work. Following the pastorate of Abdiel Silva, the Home Mission Board sent a non-Spanish speaking pastor to Ybor City. The result was a departure of a major number of members who formed the Latin American Baptist Church, an independent congregation. Latin American Baptist Church reaffiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention in 1980 under the leadership of pastor David Leyva. It is now, by far, the largest Hispanic Baptist church in the Tampa Bay Baptist Association. The Ybor City Hispanic Church was pastored in later years by Frank Ramirez and Alexander Pasetti. In 1968 the church disbanded.

Work has been carried on for many years in Immokalee where large numbers of migrants gather each year to produce the crops. The state mission board furnished a parsonage for the missionary and the Home Mission Board supplied the workers.

The Hispanic work in Miami began in Miami in 1948 as a department of Central Baptist Church. Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Aguayo were enlisted to head the department. In 1950 Aguayo was ordained in the church and named the first pastor. In 1952 Aguayo resigned and Jose M. Fleites was called as pastor. During the first ten years, the congregation met in the chapel of Central Baptist Church.

### **Miami Baptist Association**

In 1954 the Home Mission Board sent Milton S. Leach to Miami to assist the association in the development of Hispanic work. The only

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Hispanic Baptist congregation in Miami were the Spanish department of Central Baptist Church and the Spanish mission of Stanton Memorial Baptist Church. South Miami Baptist church maintained preaching stations for the migrants in Princeton, Florida City, and Goulds.

Reinaldo Carvajal and Antonia Maria De Los Reyes were the first volunteers who offered to help start new work in Miami. They were members of the Spanish department that was meeting in the chapel of Central Baptist Church.

The Director of Missions was Dr. J. T. Gillespie. It was estimated that there were 60,000 Spanish-speaking people in Miami.

The first official report of Spanish mission work was in the Miami Baptist Associational Annual of 1954. The report indicated that there had been forty-nine additions by baptism and eighteen other additions: total additions were sixty-seven. Total offerings \$8,149, gifts to missions were \$249

Milton Leach, the director of Spanish missions reported having preached 319 sermons during the first year.

By 1955 there were a total of seven missions functioning in Miami Baptist Association but five of them did not have pastors. Leach and the two volunteers conducted services and taught Sunday School at each of the seven missions. Services were conducted and food and clothing distributed weekly in approximately fifteen migrant camps among the 5,000 migrants who came that year.

In 1956 it was estimated that there were 70,000 to 80,000 Spanish-speaking people in Miami of which 248 were members of the Baptist Hispanic congregations. One tenth of the people in Miami were Spanish speaking. The seven Spanish missions reported a total of 100 additions during the year with a total of 248 members. Total gifts for all purposes amounted to \$15,000 with \$360 being given for mission causes. This was the year that the first Spanish encampment was held. A group of fifty-two people of all ages traveled to Key West where Rev. and Mrs. Negrin had prepared space in the mission Center buildings for the first encampment. The Brotherhood of South Miami Baptist Church built a small building for the migrants of the Princeton area. Services were started at First Baptist Church of Miami Beach where some 40,000 Cuban tourists spent their vacation each year.

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In 1957 two new missions were organized making a total of nine. Five mission couples and two single part-time workers were employed. Offerings amounted to nearly \$24,000 with \$1,200 going to mission causes. The second encampment was held at Key West with an enrollment of ninety-three and the group reported ten professions of faith and eighteen rededications. Nine Vacation Bible Schools were held with a total enrollment of 609 children. The first simultaneous revival campaign was held this year. The Spanish-speaking people pledged \$5,670 to the Baptist Hospital project but on the day that the hospital was dedicated a group of Spanish speaking people from the missions went to participate but were turned away by the guard at the gate.

In 1958 Riverside Baptist Church began a mission making a total of ten Spanish-speaking congregations. The Forward Program of Church Finance was translated and used in each of the Spanish missions. Spanish conferences were held in connection with all associational meetings. A full time worker, Mike Cassidy, was sent by the Home Mission Board to work with migrants. The Spanish pastors who worked with the migrants reported 105 professions of faith. There were a total of 387 professions of faith. Nine hundred and fifty people were reported enrolled in the Sunday Schools with an average attendance of nearly 800. One hundred fifty campers were enrolled in Spanish family camp with thirty-five professions of faith and eight rededications.

The Spanish radio program, La Hora Bautista began on station WMIE and continued for the next seven years. It was picked up by a station in Bonaire, off of the coast of Venezuela, and was beamed into Venezuela, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other Spanish-speaking countries. New Sunday Schools were started at Emmanuel, Northside, and Sunset Heights churches.

In 1959 the Spanish chapels participated in the statewide Sunday School Clinic and Enlargement Campaign. Workers came from Cuba and Texas to participate in this campaign. Sixteen Spanish Sunday schools were participating in monthly associational activities. Training Union work was growing and 192 people attended the Spanish M Night program. Six evangelists came from Cuba for simultaneous revivals in ten Hispanic chapels. They reported 199 decisions. The first

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Spanish Pastors and Workers Institute was conducted at the new associational campgrounds at Florida City with twenty-two pastors enrolled. The Baptist bookstore in Miami began selling Spanish books, Bibles, and gospel recordings. First Central Spanish Mission became a constituted church with 268 enrolled in Sunday School. They moved to the former Westminster Presbyterian Church, a building which was purchased jointly by the Home Mission Board, Miami Association, and the State Mission Board at a cost of \$72,000.

### **Revolution in Cuba, Refugees in Miami**

January 1, 1959, was destined to bring a dramatic change to all Baptist work in South Florida. Fidel Castro and Communism took over the Caribbean nation and Fulgencio Batista, president of Cuba, went into exile. Refugees began to flee Cuba by the thousands. Most made Miami their exile home. Among the refugees were many Baptists and some of them were pastors. Most of these were assigned to pastorless congregations in Miami.

In January of 1959 about a dozen men came to the Baptist office in Miami and introduced themselves as Cuban refugees. They had just arrived in a small boat and needed help. They had no food, no money, no place to stay, no jobs, and spoke no English.

Milton Leach made some calls to pastors and made arrangements for the care of the men. Each day more refugees appeared until an average of 125 refugees were coming daily for assistance from the Baptist office. In 1959 the Home Mission Board contributed \$10,000 to the work. Food and clothing was distributed from the basement of Primera Iglesia Bautista Central and resettlement arrangements were made in the offices of the Spanish department of the association on the second floor. Cuban refugee pastors and laymen from the Spanish missions came every day to help with the distribution of food and clothing.

The Spanish population in Miami was increasing at the rate of 1,000 per month while the Spanish enrollment in the public schools had increased from 3,500 in 1956 to 21,000. Many churches were employing Spanish-speaking pastors to develop Spanish departments.

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The association promoted A Spanish Sunday School Enlargement Campaign and Mrs. and Mrs. C. F. Barry were brought from the Florida Baptist Convention for this purpose. Rev. J. Ray Dobbins was guest speaker for the Spanish Action Night program, which was attended by 114 Spanish Sunday School teachers and workers.

The M Night program was attended by 214 people. Mrs. Marjorie Caudill, wife of Dr. Herbert Caudill, director of Baptist work in Cuba, directed a Spanish Music School, which was attended by seventy-seven people. All of the Spanish congregations reported having systematically contributed to the Cooperative Program. When the associational Schools of Missions were conducted, Spanish-speaking workers were brought from Mexico, Texas, Cuba, and other parts of Florida to direct the Spanish schools. Two hundred and ninety two people were enrolled in mission studies.

The Latin American Center of Key West was constituted and named White Street Baptist Church on September 25. This was the second Spanish Baptist church to be constituted in the State of Florida. The Spanish extension of Stetson University was organized with seventeen students enrolled. Three full time workers were employed for work with the migrants in the Princeton and Homestead areas. Spanish departments were opened in Sunset Heights, West Hialeah, and Shenandoah. Northeast, Flagami, and Flagler Street churches were conducting some work.

Miami had come to be called The Gateway to Latin America. In October 1960, the city built a monument with an eternal flame to perpetuate the friendly relationship that existed and that they hoped would continue. On October 26, 1960, The Torch of Friendship was dedicated in Bayfront Park. The Mayor, Robert King High was a member of the Flagler Street Baptist Church. He invited Rabbi Irving Lehrman of Temple Emanuel-el, Rev. John Sweeney, pastor of Gesu Catholic Church and Milton Leach representing the Evangelical churches to pray for God's blessings on this relationship.

Children in Cuba were being taken away from parents and sent to rural schools in Cuba or to Russia for Communist indoctrination. At age fifteen the boys were sent to military camps. The Catholic Church organized what they called Operation Peter Pan, a government

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approved plan where planes flew to Cuba each week bringing loads of children back to the United States. Catholics, Baptists, and other Evangelical denominations sponsored many of the children and cared for them. Some children arrived with notes pinned to their clothes giving the name of the child and the name of the parents, asking that someone would care for their children until the parents could escape Communist Cuba. From 1960 to 1962, 14,000 children were able to escape.

Cuban refugee pastors, their wives, and laymen from the Spanish missions came to the Baptist center every day to help with the distribution of food and clothing. They also interviewed those who were willing to be sponsored by Baptist churches and to be resettled to other parts of the United States.

With the arrival of thousands of Cuban Refugees in Miami, Hispanics began moving to West Palm Beach. First Baptist Church started a Spanish Mission. Rev. Torres was the first pastor. Some of the early pastors of the mission were Reinaldo Padron and Dr. Jose M. Sanchez. On September 20, 1987, the mission was constituted as a church. Rev. Cecilio Farinas was the pastor.

In 1961 the Spanish-speaking population in Miami increased from 100,000 to 190,000. There were approximately 70,000 refugees in Miami who had fled from communist domination. First Baptist Church and Flagler Street established new Spanish departments. Preaching services were being conducted also at First Baptist Church of Opa Locka and First Baptist Church of Miami Beach. Earlington Heights agreed to open a Spanish department as soon as workers were available. Property was purchased by the Home Mission Board for the Northside Spanish Mission and for Jerusalem Spanish Mission involving an investment of more than \$70,000.

During the Billy Graham Evangelistic Campaign, Milton Leach and Nona Platillero translated the messages through a system of earphones, and more than seventy people from the Spanish section made decisions. Dr. Graham held a special service at the Bayfront Park Bandshell for the Spanish-speaking people. More than 4,000 were present with 131 making decisions.

Weekly Spanish radio programs were conducted in Miami,

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Homestead, and Key West. Twelve of the seventeen Spanish chapels were functioning now as departments of Anglo churches. All associational activities were either conducted simultaneously in Spanish and English or the Spanish-speaking people participated in the English activities through simultaneous translations. By 1961 there were seventeen Hispanic chapels of which twelve were departments in Anglo churches.

In 1962 eleven English-speaking laymen from four different states conducted layman's revivals. The Training Union M Night program was attended by 518 people and 204 attended the Sunday School Action Night program. The Womans Missionary Union of the Florida Baptist Convention contributed \$500 to be used as scholarship money for Spanish-speaking students. Charles Peterson, director of the department of Stewardship of the Florida Baptist Convention had many of the stewardship materials translated and made available. Nearly all of the churches in the association were now participating in some way in Spanish mission work and refugee relief. The refugee center ministered to 1,175 people from fourteen Latin American Countries who represented ten different religious faiths.

A group of five refugee men came in a small open boat and arrived somewhere in the Keys. As they walked North toward the mainland they stopped several times to ask where they could get help. They were told, If you can find the Baptists they will help you.

For more than a year, mission work has been carried on with Mexican and Puertorican migrants and Cuban Refugees in the Belle Glade area. A layman, Mr. Reinaldo Padron and his wife Reina from Miami have been conducting that work which is sponsored by First Baptist Church of Belle Glade where Rev. Luther Key is pastor. The Gulf Stream and Palm Lake Associations employed Rev. Francisco Plantillero and his wife Nona to work with the Spanish-speaking people of that area. Plans were made to start work next season in the Sarasota area where Rev. John Whitt served as District Missionary.

In 1962 four new Spanish-speaking pastors were employed. A number of pastors having fled from Cuba came to work with us. Spanish departments were organized in Coral and in Earlington Heights. Some work as being done on a regular basis at Flagami, Northeast, Bird

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Road, and Coral Villa, in addition to the chapels where full time work was being conducted. Northside and Jerusalem missions became constituted churches this year making a total of four constituted Spanish speaking churches in the association.

The refugee relief and resettlement Center was moved to a building provided by Dr. John Halderman and the Allapattah Baptist Church. Milton Leach had directed the relief and resettlement program since its beginning in 1959 but was no longer able to direct the increasing load of refugee work along with his other duties. The Home Mission Board employed Rev. Robert Fricke, a former missionary to Cuba, to direct the refugee relief and resettlement work. He soon developed a program, which was serving 1,000 families (about 4,000 individuals) per month. During the first eight months of his service, seventy family units, or about 235 refugees, were resettled to other states under the watchcare of Southern Baptist churches. The Home Mission Board appealed to the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention to provide food and funds. Georgia alone gave 50,000 pounds of food and about \$22,000 in cash offerings.

In 1963 new work was started by Miami Shores Baptist Church and a Spanish-speaking pastor was employed by Northeast. Central Baptist Church began sponsoring Spanish work at Key Largo and a new mission was started in the facilities of the Spanish Refugee Center. There was now one mission, seventeen Spanish departments and four organized churches or a total of twenty-two Spanish congregations in the association. Both a family camp and a youth camp were conducted this year with a total of sixty-one decisions. A scholarship fund made it possible to send four students to Baptist schools. The Baptist bookstores in Miami and Tampa were selling Spanish books and literature. A program of training for Spanish-speaking pastors and lay workers was conducted regularly in Miami as an extension of Stetson University. Robert Fricke directed this school.

For seven years (1956—1963) a Spanish encampment was conducted annually in the South Florida area. As a result of this camp, several young people have made decisions to prepare themselves for full time religious service. Many others have accepted the Lord as their Savior.

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New Spanish work was started at Central Baptist Church and Melrose Heights. Perrine Baptist Church moved to its new building and made the original church property available for a much needed migrant center. The Cuban refugee program provided food and clothing to approximately 5,000 people. Eighty families with 960 members were resettled. Approximately 2,000 refugees were being aided monthly by the Center. The Home Mission Board invested \$27,000 in this work and promised more than \$36,000 for future needs. From 1961 through 1963, 154,000 Cuban refugees came to Miami. More than 600 refugees have been resettled through the Baptist Spanish Center. More than 500 families are receiving aid at all times from the Baptist Center. Exiled Cuban Baptist pastors were available, but where could they serve? New churches and missions were needed but where could they meet? One of the biggest problems in starting new missions was in finding meeting places. No money was available to purchase or rent property.

Lloyd Corder, Director of Spanish work for the Home Mission Board, came to visit. He told about an Anglo church in San Isidro, Texas, a small town on the border of Texas and Mexico, that had invited the Mexicans to use their building and have Spanish services when the Anglos were not using it. J. Ray Dobbins, Director of Missions, Miami Baptist Association, approached Milton Leach with an idea. Why not put the exile pastors to work as associate pastors of English-speaking churches? They could serve as pastors of Hispanic departments until the Hispanics were fully integrated into the Anglo churches. After all, he reasoned, all the Cubans would be speaking English within ten years or perhaps Castro would fall and most Cubans would return to their homeland. Churches began offering their facilities for Spanish departments and it proved to be the best thing that had happened to Spanish work. If Spanish missions could be started in Anglo church buildings, that seemed to be a good way to start. These were referred to as Spanish Departments. Miss Ruby Miller and Miss Lucille Kerrigan were expelled from Communist Cuba and upon arriving in Miami were added to the staff of the Spanish Center.

On September 5, ten pastors of Anglo American churches met with Rev. Ed Taylor of the Home Mission Board, and with Milton Leach and

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J. Ray Dobbins of the association, to make plans to start a number of new missions in the thirty-seven migrant camps located in South Dade County. Approximately 10,000 migrants were in the area at the time.

In 1963 Iglesia Bautista Central was meeting in its own building with more than 200 members in Sunday School.

In 1964 there were 130,000 Cuban exiles in Miami, 55,000 permanent Cuban residents, 40,000 Puerto Ricans, and approximately 9,000 other Spanish-speaking people, making a total of 234,000 Latin Americans in Dade County. In Miami association there were twenty-three Spanish chapels in addition to eight Anglo American churches that had Spanish Sunday schools and a dozen preaching stations in the migrant camps. The Baptist Spanish Center was giving emergency aid to 300 to 500 people monthly and had resettled approximately 1,175 Cuban refugees in twenty-five states.

The association was contributing approximately \$5,000 a year to general Spanish mission work. Other churches were contributing another \$10,000 to \$15,000 annually and the Home Mission Board provided \$75,000 to \$100,000.

Spanish literature was needed for the growing work in Miami and other parts of Florida. Loyd Corder and Milton Leach met with Dr. W. L. Howse, Director of the Education Division of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee, to discuss the need for Spanish literature. A meeting was set for the following year with representatives from several departments and it was agreed that a monthly bulletin, *El Pastor Bautista* and adult Training Union quarterlies in Spanish would be provided for use in Spanish-speaking missions and churches. Plans for additional literature were made with new material to be added each year.

By 1964 the Hispanic population in Dade County stood at approximately 234,000. There were 130,000 Cuban exiles, 55,000 permanent Cuban residents, 40,000 Puerto Ricans and approximately 9,000 other Hispanics composing about twenty-three percent of the total population. The number of Hispanic Baptist missions and churches stood at twenty-five. Cuban exile pastors were pastoring most of them.

In the latter part of 1964, Milton Leach was transferred to Puerto Rico by the Home Mission Board to give direction to Baptist Mission

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work there. For about a year, Robert Fricke served as Interim Missionary-Director of Hispanic Missions for the Miami Baptist Association. At the close of the year, Fricke and his wife, Ann, were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board to serve as missionaries to Mexico.

### **One Era Closes and Another Begins**

On September 1, 1965, Hubert Hurt, who had served with his wife, Eva, for four years in Cuba and five in Panama, was reassigned by the Home Mission Board to Miami. Hurt became Florida Baptist's first State Language Missions Director. At the time Hurt began his ministry there were four Hispanic congregations outside of the Miami Baptist Association; two in Tampa, one in West Palm Beach, and one in Immokalee.

In 1972 Richard Bryant, the director of missions in Miami Association, selected Harry Holland, a former military chaplain, to coordinate the Hispanic ministries. Holland's ministry there was short lived for he died of a brain tumor in 1973. Ramon Martinez came with his wife, Rosa, from a church in Fresno, California, and succeeded Holland. Martinez served in the position two years.

John Pistone came in 1976 and continued in that position until 1982. He was followed by Reinaldo Carvajal.

The Ethnic Branch of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in Miami was started in 1978. The first director of the training program was James Benson followed by Julio S. Diaz. Diaz was succeeded by Raul Vazquez.

In May 1981 Hurt was elected to serve as Director of the Language Department of the Florida Baptist Convention. He assumed his duties on June 15, 1981.

Hispanic congregations numbered 108 in 1988. Congregations were located not only in Miami, Tampa, Immokalee, and Key West as was true in 1964, but in Jacksonville, Orlando, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, Pompano Beach, Indiantown, Lakeland, Gainesville, Deltona, Bowling Green, Wauchula, Naples, Fort Myers,

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Sarasota, and in other cities and towns. The United States Census Bureau reported 1,250,000 Hispanics in Florida in 1985, in contrast with 60,000, mostly in Miami in 1954, and 782,371 in the state in 1980.

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**NOTE:**

This report was prepared from histories previously written by Milton Leach and Hubert Hurt, with some information from the Florida Baptist Witness, Miami Baptist Progress, minutes of Miami Baptist Association, The Miami Herald, Home Mission Magazine, monthly reports made by Milton Leach to the Miami Baptist Association, The Baptist History and Heritage, July 1983, No. 3, and from the Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel.



# A HISTORY OF HAITIAN SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN FLORIDA

Lulrick Balzora  
Chaplain, United States Navy

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to examine the history of Haitian Southern Baptist churches in Florida. These churches were some of the first to join their respective Southern Baptist Associations in Florida. They exemplify a larger number of congregations who humbly did the Lord's work at a crucial time in history. To comprehend their story, one must examine the way that Haitians viewed themselves and the way they planned, funded, and worked to solve problems of acculturation within the larger community.

There is not enough space to discuss all of the churches and individuals who, during the formative decades of the 1970s and 1980s, helped launch the large and thriving church movement among Haitians in Florida. However, to understand the process by which Haitian and American Southern Baptists cooperated, one must mention certain non-Haitian servants who did much to help Haitians at the local and state levels. These include men such as Hubert Hurt, James Goodson, Milton Leach, Ramon Martinez, John Pistone, Reinaldo Carvajal, and Joe Courson.

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## **Some Characteristics of Haitian Southern Baptist Congregations in Florida**

### The Haitian Understanding of the Words Mission and Church

**H**aitian Southern Baptists share with their American counterparts a similar definition of the word church. They believe in both a universal church and a local church. However, Haitian congregations often consider themselves as churches; while the state convention and associations label them as missions. Dependent Haitian congregations often carry both the names *eglise* (church) in French and mission in English. Unless otherwise noted in this document the word congregation will also be used wherever the French term *eglise* might be applicable in the Haitian understanding.

### ***The Question of Identity***

During the late 1970s, Haitians in America proceeded in two cultural directions: Haitian and American. Also, they were forced to choose between three languages: Creole, French, and English. Haitian congregations had the burden of meeting the needs of an older generation still attached to the culture of Haiti, while meeting the challenge of new generations who were quickly becoming acculturated in the ways of America.

The problem of identity for Haitian-Americans intensified from 1979 to 1984. Negative stereotypes prevailed in South Florida. Near the end of the 1970s, some Floridians generated unfounded rumors that Haitians carried tuberculosis. They claimed that Haitians carried and spread disease throughout Florida.<sup>1</sup>

Members of south Florida's political elite, including Democratic party members, elected officials, and some Cubans, believed that the boat people were a disruptive force, destroying the community, and draining public resources. They appealed to their local members of Congress, who apparently pressured the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) into a response. The INS thereafter began to expand a far greater effort in controlling the flow of Haitians than was expended on

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nearly any other group of illegal immigrants. The campaign included imprisonment of new arrivals, the denial of work permits to those who were allowed out of jail, the wholesale rejection of Haitian claims for political asylum, and since 1981, the permanent deployment of United States Coast Guard cutter in Haitian waters to intercept potential refugees.<sup>2</sup>

In defense of their actions, United States government officials often cite the distinction between political and economic refugees. Haitian boat people were branded economic refugees. However, in 1980, despite statements made by many Cuban refugees that they came to the United States for economic reasons, the United States government sought to grant wholesale political asylum to them.

### ***Language and Haitian Americans***

In the climate of prejudice and hostility toward Haitians, young Haitians found few incentives for retaining their Haitian language and culture. Many took great measures to cover up their Haitian background. The abandonment of their native language served as a cause of great misunderstanding and alienation between young Haitians and their parents.

Haitian Southern Baptist churches often found themselves in the middle of that conflict. Generally, when Haitian parents faced cultural problems with their children, the attitudes of children toward their churches were set based on which side the church took. Most of the time Haitian leaders, threatened by American culture, sided with the parents.

### ***Education and Training***

In 1977 the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary established an ethnic branch in Miami with the collaboration of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Miami Baptist Association. In 1979 Julio S. Diaz assumed direction of the school. In 1980 he enlisted the aid of Renaud Balzora to reach out to the Haitian community for prospective students and to teach them in Creole and French.<sup>3</sup>

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In December 17, 1983, the seminary Ethnic branch gave Associate degrees to several Haitian graduates.<sup>4</sup> Those who graduated in the fields of Pastoral Ministry were: Jean Alfreide, Hector Clerveaux, Pierre Delinois, Joachim Jean Baptist, Ernst Moise, Imales Previlon, and Yvon Previlon. Those who graduated in the field of Religious Education were Nathalie Balzora and Rose M. Moise. They were the first graduates from a seminary in the United States to be trained entirely in French.<sup>5</sup>

Of 170 Southern Baptist Haitian ministers in Florida who were actively pastoring churches by 1990, two had doctorates, five had master degrees, thirteen had bachelor degrees, and twenty-six had associate degrees. Of these forty-six, most could not pursue a higher level of education due to having secular jobs in addition to church work. While many could not gain further education for themselves, they worked hard to provide it for their children.

In 1990 bivocational pastors headed 148 of 170 Haitian Southern Baptist congregations. Of the twenty-two who were not bivocational pastors, four were retired from secular work and nine worked inconsistently at odd jobs. That left only nine full time pastors. Yearly pastoral incomes for the full-time pastors ranged from \$7,000 to \$26,000.<sup>6</sup> Many pastors relied on their wives to supplement their meager incomes. Much of the combined incomes of pastors and their wives was used to help their congregations with leases and church transportation.

### ***Giving and Moisson in the Haitian Church***

The *moisson*, a uniquely Haitian event, is similar to the Old Testament idea of the harvest feast ( *moisson* means harvest). Once a year in Haiti, celebrants bring offerings of money and livestock. In the United States, worshippers bring money. The *moisson* is used to raise funds for use in the normal operation of their programs and buildings.

Ideally, churches should operate on tithes and offerings. The Biblical concept of the tithe requires members to faithfully give to the church. However, very few Haitians tithe consistently over time.<sup>7</sup> The *moisson* provides a way to recover the funds needed to meet the annual expenses of the church. The *moisson* offering can have a profound

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effect in the financial status of the church. In a single *moisson*, a church may collect more than it did all year.

The *moisson* may last a few days or an entire week. Area Haitian churches meet together for services that may last for several hours. In the United States, some congregations incorporate this with the Thanksgiving holidays. The *moisson* parallels the old fashion revival meetings in the United States. The difference lies in the emphasis on giving.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Start and Expansion of Haitian Southern Baptist Churches in Florida**

#### *1973—The Field of Ministry in Florida*

In 1973 Miami had approximately 210,000 Hispanics.<sup>9</sup> Haitians, however, had not yet begun to come to South Florida in great numbers. The few Haitians in the area came primarily from northern states such as New York. Most were predominately Catholic. The Catholic Church had a great influence among Haitians because many priests spoke French and because of the official status of the Roman Catholic Church in Haiti.<sup>10</sup>

#### *1974—Emmanuel Haitian Baptist Church, Miami*

Armand Augereau started Emmanuel Haitian Baptist church with a group of eight people in the early 1970s. In August 1974, the group joined the Miami Baptist Association. They were the first Haitian congregation on record at the association.<sup>11</sup> Their timely appearance in Dade County kept many from falling into the hands of various sects which were prospering in the community. In 1983 Wilner Maxy became the pastor of the congregation. The church continued to thrive under his leadership.

In 1988 the church took steps to buy an old furniture warehouse and showroom. Through the church's phenomenal fund raising efforts and with support from various agencies from the convention, they purchased and transformed the 60,000 square-foot structure into a sanctuary that seats 600 in polished wooden pews. The building is more than enough to accommodate their congregation, Sunday school, day care, health clinic, and elementary school.<sup>12</sup>

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*1975—Bethany Haitian Baptist Church, Miami*

In 1967 Paul Lasseur worked tirelessly in the Bahamas to minister to the Haitians who lived there. However, he realized that some were moving from the Bahamas to Miami and that there were no Haitian Baptist churches to accommodate them. In his travels between 1967 and 1970, he began planting the seeds for future ministry in Miami. In 1971 he started a small group with the help of Raoul F. Pierre.

Pastor Lasseur started several prayer cells and Bible studies at the homes of Silverus Francois, Cadet Mesinor, and Sadrac Jonassaint. Once the groups began to grow, they moved to a storefront property and later to an Adventist church. In 1975 the church moved to a building on 54th Street in Miami. Soon afterward, they joined the Miami Baptist Association. In the years following this, Pastor Lasseur led the church in several successful missionary ventures in the Bahamas, Haiti, and south Florida.<sup>13</sup>

*1976—Haitian Baptist Mission, Pompano  
(First Haitian Baptist Church of Pompano)*

In 1975 Jacques and Raymonde Dumornay moved from New York to South Florida. Jacques Dumornay worked at American Express as an accountant. They attended First Baptist Church of Pompano Beach. While there, they met with other Haitians at First Baptist and discussed starting services for the Haitian community.

By 1976 they grew from six to 18. On May 16, 1976, they named themselves First Haitian Mission of Pompano. First Baptist provided them with a house where they met for Sunday School and worship. By 1979 the congregation had grown tremendously and they called Renaud Balzora to pastor the mission.

From 1978 to 1981, 70,000 Haitians entered Florida. Many came to the mission for help. Jacques and Raymonde Dumornay led the mission to conduct English classes, food and clothing distribution, kindergarten, day care, immigration assistance, sewing classes, and temporary housing for homeless Haitians.<sup>14</sup>

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*1980—Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church, Miami*

In July 1980, Pastor Balzora left Haitian Mission in Pompano to start Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church of Miami. He met with thirty-eight people on their first Sunday at the home of Berthulia and Gerson Vincent in Miami. By the second Sunday, the group grew to fifty-seven people. The home became too small to accommodate such a large crowd. That week, Pastor Balzora found a church willing to lease a space to them.<sup>15</sup>

The first service attracted eighty people. Mrs. Carmel Dubois was instrumental to the rapid growth of the church. She tirelessly called and visited people. She and Nathalie Balzora led a Saturday morning prayer and fasting service. Mrs. Dubois attended all meetings, except some Sunday mornings. On Sunday mornings, while the church met inside, she walked around the neighborhood, talking to Haitian pedestrians and invited them to church.

*1980—The Southern Baptist Refugee Resettlement Program, Miami*

In July 1980, the Miami Baptist Association together with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board established a refugee center at Highland Park Baptist Church in Miami. They elected Milton Leach to oversee the entire program. They elected Luz Garcia, a teacher at the New Orleans Baptist Ethnic Extension, to direct the Spanish program and Renaud Balzora to direct the Haitian program. The refugee center provided a wide range of services to the community during the early 1980s, at the height of the influx of refugees from Cuba and Haiti.

In October 1980, at the annual association meeting, the refugee center officially took the name of the Southern Baptist Refugee Resettlement Program in Miami. In April 1981, Milton Leach left the center to direct the Southern Baptist National Immigration and Refugee Ministry. By that same time, the need for the Spanish program began to lessen and Luz Garcia left the center. Renaud Balzora remained to direct the center for Haitians. While need among Cubans lessened at the center, the need among Haitians increased between the years of 1980 to 1983.<sup>16</sup>

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Between the months of October 1980 to October 1981, the center distributed 590 French Bibles. They held ninety-two Bible studies with 2,250 Haitians in attendance. The center held forty devotions with 1,145 Haitians in attendance. The center helped 409 Haitians with job interviews, provided classes in English for 2,220, and gave out 1,600 hot meals and food provisions for 9,740 Haitians.<sup>17</sup>

### *1979—1985 A Growing Need for Haitian Church Camps*

On Labor Day 1979, Haitian Mission of Pompano held their church camp at Camp Perry Christian Camp. Rev. Deralus Balzora traveled from Haiti to speak at the camp. After Pastor Renaud Balzora left the mission in 1980, he led Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church to hold their church camp at Coral Pine Christian Camp.

These camps helped leaders overcome some of the difficult challenges that existed between older and younger Haitians. Young Haitian Americans posed a challenge to older Haitians in terms of church culture, language, and theology. A different set of values between the two age groups developed. Many older Haitian church members valued cultural and religious beliefs that control individualism. In many Haitian homes and churches, rules were strict and respect for authority was paramount. They valued marriage, especially for young women, as the only acceptable course to independence and adulthood. They valued the French and Creole languages. They also valued conservative dress codes. For example, women were not allowed to wear slacks and were directed to cover their heads in church.

The new Haitian American culture valued the English language, spontaneity, singleness, dating, and independence after high school or at eighteen years of age. These conflicting values negatively affected the way churches ministered to their younger members.

The church camps provided an environment free of these normative tensions and a new way to minister to young Haitians. The camps allowed pastors and youth leaders to focus on the gospel and to reexamine their cultures, languages, and theologies under that light.

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In 1982 Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church met at Lake Placid Christian Camp. From 1983 to 1985, they met at Gold Coast Christian Camp. The camps grew in popularity and other churches sent their leaders and young people to attend them.<sup>18</sup>

*1985—A Statewide Haitian Missionary Worker*

In 1982 the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board honored Renaud Balzora as the Language Pastor of the Year. He was selected from all the international pastors in the eastern United States.<sup>19</sup> By then the number of total Southern Baptist Haitian churches in the state of Florida had increased to eighteen. Between 1982 to 1985, Hubert Hurt, the Director of Language Missions in the Florida Baptist Convention, sought to enlist Pastor Balzora to help with the Haitian work statewide.<sup>20</sup>

In 1985 Renaud Balzora left Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church to work as the Haitian Catalytic Missionary for the State of Florida. He took as his first task finding smaller Haitian Baptist congregations struggling to survive by themselves. He worked with several such churches in West and Central Florida, along with the more established Haitian churches in Florida.

*1989—The Haitian Baptist Youth Federation*

Keeping in mind the success and usefulness of prior retreats for young Haitians, Pastor Balzora worked together with several key people to establish a statewide camp for Haitian young people. He worked closely with his wife, Nathalie; convention personnel such as Hubert Hurt and Ramon Martinez; Haitian pastors such as Usler Auguste and his family; and several college students, including his sons. The camps provided leadership opportunities for young Haitians to help their peers and younger children in the Haitian community.

After each retreat, the camp leaders led youth crusades in Dade and Broward counties. French, Creole, and English were used at these events. In 1988 the crusades attracted 2,000 for eight nights in Broward with more than 3,000 at the final evening. There were twenty-one professions of faith and 1,500 rededications made at the crusades.<sup>22</sup> By

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1990 nearly 2,000 young people were involved in organizing youth rallies, camps, and crusades.<sup>22</sup>

In 1989 the college students who helped lead the camps formally named themselves, the Haitian Youth Federation. They elected Israel François as president. Some of those who served with the youth federation have gone to the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS). Israel François was ordained in 1997 and presently attends the seminary. Gary Toussaint, a counselor for the children camp, served four years with the United States Marine Corps and presently attends the seminary.

Marie Claire Beauville, a treasurer for the federation, made frequent short-term mission trips to Haiti. She graduated from NOBTS in 1996 with a Master's degree. Kenny Felix, the second president of the group, continues to attend the seminary after receiving his Master's degree. He was recently ordained in July 2000.

These are just a few examples of many young Haitian Americans whose lives were affected positively by the camps in the latter part of the 1980s. Many Haitian Americans grew up with these events and accepted God's call to ministry there. Overall, the camps served to provide a place for young Haitians to understand their identities and to discover their potential for ministry in God.

### **A Brief History of Individual Haitian Congregations in Florida**

The following is a brief history of some Haitian Southern Baptist congregations. This is not a comprehensive list, but is representative of the many noteworthy congregations whose histories tell the Haitian story. The churches are listed according to their regional associations in Florida and the Associations are registered alphabetically.

#### ***Big Lake Baptist Association***

Belle Glade First Haitian Mission

Morales St. Hilaire started the mission in December 1993 with the support of Roland St. Marc, pastor of Emmaus Baptist Church in Fort

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Lauderdale. The church ministered mostly to migrant workers. The mission began at the home of Nazius Jean. Soon afterward, First Baptist Church of Bell Glade elected to sponsor them. Within four years they bought a small building.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Black Creek Baptist Association***

First Haitian Mission of Green Cove Springs

In 1981 Jean S. Siliac started the mission in his home. In 1982 the congregation joined the Black Creek Baptist Association. Later the Florida Baptist Convention and the association helped them purchase a building.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Florida Keys Churches Baptist Association***

Key West First Haitian Mission

In 1994 Jean Alfreide, pastor of Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church of Homestead, sent Aleus Joseph to a mission in the Florida Keys. They share a building with a Spanish congregation.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Greater Orlando Baptist Association***

Apopka Haitian Church and Fairvilla Haitian Baptist Church

Clement Jeantilus started Apopka Haitian Baptist Church in 1985. Antoine V. Fils-Aime became the pastor. After realizing that most of the church members commuted from Orlando, he met with Al Guardo, Orlando's Director of Mission and with Renaud Balzora, the Florida Baptist Haitian Consultant and developed a plan to move the church to Orlando.

In 1986 the congregation moved to Orlando and renamed the church, Fairvilla Haitian Baptist Church in Orlando. They constituted in 1991 and changed the name to First Haitian Baptist Church of Orlando. They had left a group in Apopka, their previous location. This small group grew and was constituted as a church in 1992.<sup>26</sup>

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## ***Gulf Stream Baptist Association***

### **Bethany Haitian Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale**

On July 1980, Sauveur Marcelin started the church with the sponsorship of Bethany Haitian Baptist Church in Miami. In 1984 the mission ordained Usler Auguste to pastor the church. In 1987 they constituted as a church.<sup>27</sup> Through remarkable leadership, sacrifices made by church members, and help from the state convention and their local association, they brought a large parcel of land in Fort Lauderdale. They cleared the land and within three years built one of the most beautiful Haitian churches in Florida.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Bethel Evangelical Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale***

In 1979 a small cell from Haitian Baptist Mission of Pompano began meeting on Sunday evenings. In 1980 with the increasing need for more Haitian congregations in the area, the cell became a mission and began to meet at the First Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale.<sup>29</sup> In 1981 Paul Honore became the pastor of Bethel Evangelical Baptist. In 1984 Bethel moved from First Baptist to a single room at a storefront property. That same year, they incorporated as a church. In 1987 they purchased their own building. In 1992 they constituted as a church.<sup>30</sup>

### **Emmanuel Haitian Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale**

Roland St. Marc started the church in a house in 1982. It grew quickly and in 1987 a complex was built near downtown Fort Lauderdale. In 1993 Emmanuel Cesar became their pastor. Through his leadership the church has grown and established several cells throughout the county.

### **Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church, Dania**

Maurice Louissaint started the church in March 1981. A tireless evangelist, Louissaint rigorously walked the Dania area looking for Haitian prospects. Twenty-eight people came to the first service, which was held at the home of Tael Agenor. On May 5, 1981, they moved to Dania Heights Baptist Church.<sup>31</sup> In 1983 they moved to a storefront property. In December 1985, they began to meet at a former Kentucky

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Fried Chicken store, which they later purchased. The mission constituted as a church in 1992.

#### Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church, Pompano

In 1981 Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church of Miami moved to Highland Park Baptist church. Renaud Balzora, the pastor, and Pierre Yvon Delinois, the assistant pastor, began to pray about starting a new congregation in Broward County.<sup>32</sup> Pastor Delinois spearheaded a group, which met at the home of Frantz and Roseline Fequiere in Sunrise, Florida. In February 1982, the mission moved to South West First Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale. In October 1982, the church moved to a storefront property in Pompano Beach, Florida.<sup>33</sup> In 1984 they became a mission of the Gulf Stream Association. In 1986 they constituted as a church.<sup>34</sup>

#### Pembroke Road Haitian Baptist Church, Miramar

Henri-Claude Moise started the church as a mission of Pembroke Road Baptist Church in 1987. They began under the close supervision and planning of Milton Leach in the Gulf Stream Baptist Association.<sup>35</sup> The mission constituted as a church in 1996 and Pembroke Roads Baptist Church gave them the rights to a property adjacent to them.

#### ***Indian River Baptist Association***

##### First Haitian Baptist Church of Fort Pierce

In 1984 the Haitian Baptist Mission of Pompano sent Edner H. Montpoint, along with an evangelistic team to start this work. Pastor Montpoint engaged in a rigorous evangelistic campaign. At the same time, he also started the Haitian Baptist Mission of Vero Beach. He remained with them until he moved to Orlando to start the Maranatha Haitian Baptist Church of Orlando.<sup>36</sup>

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### ***Jacksonville Baptist Association***

#### Haitian Baptist Church of Jacksonville

In 1991 Renaud and Nathalie Balzora, in conference with Dr. Bill Coffman, the Director of Language Missions at Florida Baptist Convention, made plans for a Haitian mission in the area. They began at the home of Joseph and Gloria Charleus. Later, they met at the Primera Iglesia Bautista in Jacksonville. In March 1992, the mission called Samuel Pierre from Canada to serve as their pastor. He remained for a few months, but felt compelled to return to Canada. After this, Pierre and Marie Prinvil arose as the natural leaders of the group. With more Haitians entering the area, church membership increased and the church has brought their own building.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Manatee Southern Baptist Association***

#### First Haitian Mission of Palmetto

When Luc Francois came to the congregation, they were in a state of decline. In the years of 1992-95, the number of members fluctuated between thirty-five to forty-five. Pastor Francois provided much needed direction to the mission. His leadership has taken them to a place of steady growth. They now have over 170 members and average seventy-six in worship services.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Miami Baptist Association***

#### Bethel Haitian Baptist Church, Miami

The church began in 1979 under the leadership of Franck Francois, along with the help of Luc Dominique. In 1980 Pastor Francois moved to Delray Beach, Florida to start another mission. In 1983 St. Louis Felix from Guadeloupe became their pastor. He led them to purchase their own property in the community. Through his vision and hard work, the church became one of the most influential churches in the Haitian Community.<sup>39</sup>

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## Ebenezer Baptist Church, Miami

In 1979 Clement S. Jeantilus started the church with the help of Luc Dominique. They started with great zeal in evangelism. The church has thrived throughout the years because they remained focused on the importance of prayer and evangelism. Although they started out in a storefront property, they now own their own building in Miami.<sup>40</sup>

## Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church, Homestead

Jean Alfreide started the church in 1982 with the guidance of Renaud Balzora. The church began as a mission of Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church of Miami. They sent Pastor Alfreide to Homestead with a small delegation from the church. After first meeting in a public library, the worshipers moved to a storefront property. The church overcame many obstacles and outlasted the other two Haitian congregations that they found there.<sup>41</sup> In 1990 they acquired a church building. Although Hurricane Andrew caused a great deal of damage to the building in 1992, the congregation drew closer together because of it. They labored to renovate the building into a beautiful complex.<sup>42</sup>

## *Palm Lake Baptist Association*

### Bethel Evangelical Baptist Church, Delray Beach

In 1980 Franck Francois started the church at his home. In 1981 they met at an elementary school. Soon afterward, they rented a church building. By the end of the year, they bought the building. They have renovated it periodically to accommodate their constant increase in membership and worship attendance.<sup>43</sup>

## *Southwest Florida Baptist Association*

### First Haitian Baptist Mission, Sarasota

Edouard Boyer started the mission in November 1991 with a large commissioning ceremony at First Baptist Church of Sarasota. Two hundred and ten Haitians attended. Many came from other areas. As the only Haitian church in the area, they serve the community by providing a food closet, help with immigration and translation work.<sup>44</sup>

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## ***Tampa Bay Baptist Association***

### **Ebenezer Haitian Baptist Church, Tampa**

In April 1986, Jean A. Lubin started this church with the support of Bethel Baptist Church in Miami, after a survey was done of the area by Renaud Balzora, Antoine Fils-Aime and St. Louis Felix. Hubert Hurst found a house that would serve as a parsonage and sanctuary. Pastor Lubin experienced several difficulties at the beginning of this work in Tampa. There were only 100 Haitians estimated to be in Tampa. Yet, he remained patient. He faithfully conducted services every Sunday with just his family in attendance. In time, God blessed the work as more Haitians moved to Tampa.<sup>45</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Southern Baptists have often challenged churches to keep a vision for starting new congregations and to concentrate on the spiritual. These are mandates in which Haitian churches have excelled. The past 35 years have shown that Haitians are masters of starting churches with an emphasis on the spiritual. They have started new congregations with little bureaucracy and with prayer and fasting at their foundation. Most Haitian congregations began, existed, and consistently insisted upon weekly late-night prayer meetings and Saturdays of fasting.

Haitian Southern Baptists have worked as missionaries to America for three decades. Many Christian believers braved the dangerous seas on leaky vessels piled upon mounds of flesh or in cramped compartments. Certainly, some came for personal gain, but many believers came by faith. They came with their chants d'esperance (a Haitian hymn book) in one hand and their Bible on the other. Once here, they evangelized, started churches, and involved themselves in Southern Baptist agencies. Ultimately they, along with other ethnic groups, have changed life permanently for all Floridians.

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