

# Black Baptists decry 'disrespect' directed at Obama

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WASHINGTON (RNS) A black denomination that began 50 years ago in support of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. has decried the "disrespect" shown to President Obama since he took office.

Citing slurs and remarks such as "you lie," "boy" and "tar baby," the Progressive National Baptist Convention called for the ouster of elected officials who have made such statements about the nation's first black president and his family.

"Conventional wisdom suggests if comments like these were targeted to past holders of this nation's highest office of another/preferred hue, serious repercussive actions would have immediately followed those making said comments," reads a resolution passed during the PNBC's annual meeting that concluded Friday (Aug. 12) in Washington.

In other statements, the denomination, which began in 1961 to support King's civil rights agenda, reaffirmed its commitment to social justice and hailed the upcoming dedication of a memorial to King on the National Mall.

"God is calling us to start revolutions of dignity, civility and social justice in our own backyards to improve education, health care and the well-being of all people," a resolution reads.

As PNBC leaders celebrated their denomination's 50th anniversary, they launched an effort to reach out to other African-American Christian groups, including Pentecostals, with the new Faith United Action Fellowship.

"We're living in a society now where we've discovered that it's increasingly more important and germane to us that we do cross boundaries in working together," said the Rev. Carroll Baltimore, president of the PNBC, citing common interests in poverty, education, health disparities and incarcerated black men.

Presiding Bishop Charles H. Ellis III of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World was among the leaders attending the PNBC meeting for the first time.

"I absolutely hope that wherever we can have joint interests and things in common to serve the greater community that we would be able to not just walk hand in hand but to work hand in hand," he said.

The Rev. Gardner Taylor, who is known as the dean of black preachers and who helped found the PNBC, said it was important for the denomination to be reaching out to other Christian groups.

"I would think the witness to Jesus Christ ought to be one," he said, "and the more we can pull down these barriers and these divisions the better off I think we all are."