

# African American leadership institute launches in 2023

December 19, 2022

COLUMBIA, Md. (BP)—Formerly enslaved African American pastor George Liele planted churches in Jamaica nearly a century before beloved missionaries Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon spread the gospel abroad.

Two years after the Southern Baptist Convention added a George Liele Church Planting, Evangelism and Missions Sunday to the official SBC calendar, plans are underway to found a leadership institute in the name of the trailblazer who began his international ministry in Jamaica in 1783.

“In Southern Baptist history, we have a lot of role models, but we don’t have a lot of African American role models we have embraced historically that have had international impact,” said Bernard Fuller, a pastor in Lanham, Md. “If we’re going to get the Black church involved, we have to show them examples of individuals who look like them.

“And one of those individuals is George Liele, whom we’ve overlooked many years and haven’t brought to the forefront. George Liele is a great example because he fulfills everything we exist for.”

Fuller, pastor of New Song Church and Ministries, is a planning committee member of the George Liele Leadership Institute that the African American Fellowship of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware plans to launch in January 2023 with a Martin Luther King prayer and worship service. Classes are scheduled to begin in September. The regional convention is an institute co-sponsor.

“Image is important,” Fuller said. “Not that Lottie Moon or Annie Armstrong were not great missionaries. Our desire is to continue the legacy

of his life. It's something we believe not just African American churches can rally around, but this brings other Black churches, churches of color, (to be) engaged in this, because he went to Jamaica."

The institute will be designed as an affordable training option for Maryland and Delaware churches of all ethnicities, but will especially focus on equipping African American congregations in the areas of church strengthening, planting and international missions. In addition to pastors, congregational leaders including deacons, trustees, associate ministers and women's leaders will benefit from institute, Fuller said.

"This is multicultural. Anybody can come," Fuller said.

"The goal of the institute is to equip disciples to make disciples. It's an equipping institute in every area," he continued. "Our passion is discipleship, and we believe that a great commitment to the Great Commander who gave us the Great Commandments and the Great Commission will result in great results."

Charles Grant, associate vice president for African American relations for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, expressed "joyful anticipation" in advance of the institute.

"The African American Fellowship's emphasis on connecting George Liele's life and legacy to leadership training is a win for both African American churches and for Southern Baptists in Maryland/Delaware," Grant said.

"With focus and intentionality, leaders will be developed and educated about George Liele. The prayerful results will be healthy church growth, an increased pool of potential church planters and international missionaries from African American churches."

The African American Fellowship and the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware appointed a planning committee for the institute in the

summer of 2022. It will not be an accredited Bible college, but that option might be explored in coming years, Fuller said.

Joining Fuller on the George Liele Leadership Institute Committee are African American Fellowship Vice President Victor Kirk, pastor of Sharon Bible Fellowship Church, Lanham; and Mark Roy, senior pastor of Good Shepherd Ministries, Capitol Heights, Md.

The committee also includes several members of the African American Fellowship's board: Vernon Lattimore, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Rainier, Md.; Michael Mattar, senior pastor of Hope Fellowship Church in Ashburn, Va.; Byron Day, senior pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Laurel, Md.; Nathaniel Thomas, senior pastor of Forestville New Redeemer Baptist Church, Forestville, Md.; and Monroe Weeks, Hope Fellowship worship leader.

A survey of Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware pastors found the need for a financially affordable training center for lay ministers that emphasizes the teaching of core theology and Bible literacy, Fuller said. Surveyors also encountered young bivocational pastors who had not been able to receive formal training in ministry.

The logistics of the institute still are being planned, with the goal of a hybrid online and in-person format also utilizing webinars from Southern Baptist educators. The fee will be nominal, Fuller said.

In addition to the January Martin Luther King prayer and worship service, activities preceding the September launch of classes include a February George Liele Missionary Breakfast, an African American Fellowship Awareness Conference and a planning retreat.