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Black church celebrates growth



The black church has been expanding for the last 40 years

By Religious Affairs Correspondent Emily Buchanan

► **The BBC's Emily Buchanan**
"The black majority churches are growing in confidence"
 real **28k**

The black majority churches are growing in confidence and they have started to flex their muscles.

Their opening jamboree at the Brighton Conference Centre on Thursday featured dancers dressed in white, waving giant flags, swaying to the pulsing beat of gospel singers.

The audience danced and chanted in response as preachers called on them to invest their conference with the Holy Spirit.

There is no denying the energy of black church-goers.

They are part of the only expanding wing of the Christian church in the UK, and they feel they should have more political influence.

Their leaders claim their congregations have expanded continually for the last 40 years, and are now a quarter of a million strong.

Over half of all church-goers in London are black.

Mark Sturge the
General Director of the
Afro-Caribbean

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Evangelical Alliance feels that the churches represent what is best in the black community, and society would benefit from their having a greater say over government policy.



Mark Sturge with Tony Blair at the conference

"The black majority churches have a new sense of awareness of their responsibility in issues of justice, and social exclusion. We've invited the political leaders to be part of what we are doing.

It will be an endorsement of our work. We hope that the solutions that we have been finding within the black community we can now bring to wider society."

Many black churches have teamed up with local authorities to run projects to prevent social exclusion.

One in Plaistow East London includes a course in computing for young mothers who would not normally be qualified enough to get a good job.

“
When you become a Christian your whole attitude to life changes and that influences your socio-economic circumstances

The Glory House church not only organises the course, but runs a creche so there is no need for the mothers to look for child care. Christians and non-Christians are included.

”
**Mark Sturge,
 General Director of
 the Afro-Caribbean
 Evangelical Alliance**

One 23-year-old Portugese trainee said the course had changed her life.

"I'm a single mother, they've really helped me to get my confidence back. I would never have done a course like this without the church."

Black people who are

involved in churches are less likely to get involved in crime and drug abuse.

Mark Sturge describes this phenomenon as "redemption lift".

He says "When you become a Christian your whole attitude to life changes and that influences your socio-economic circumstances."



The church also provides practical support

The black church leaders will be looking to Tony Blair and William Hague at the conference, to address the issues that concern them most; high unemployment, under-achievement in schools, but top of their is concern over the abolition of Section 28 - the law which prevents the promotion of homosexuality.

They say homosexuality is against scripture, and they are worried that the government's moral standards are slipping.

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