Workshop 2A
Strengths and Challenges in African American Relationships and Marriages: A Panel Discussion

Moderator/Panelists: Dr. Josephine Hauer

Presenters: Dr. Cassandra Chaney
            Dr. Linda Skogrand
            Dr. Jeffrey Shears
            Robert and Malverna Streater

Dr. Cassandra Chaney and Dr. Linda Skogrand studied 30 Black couples who have strong marriages. Based on answers to 30 open-ended questions, the study found four themes: communication, God/church/prayer, commitment, and respect. Understanding that one’s spouse is different was key. Drs. Chaney and Skogrand recommended that couples talk about decisions and compromise. Couples stated that “love of God” was necessary and they never gave up their relationship to their spouse even in rough times.

Dr. Jeffrey Shears found that African American fathers tend to engage in more physical play with their children; perform more care-giving duties; engage in more social activities; and do fewer activities that promote cognitive development with their children when compared to other minority fathers. The benefits of father interaction for children included: 1) better test scores by children; 2) greater cognitive abilities; 3) better school performance, and 4) increased social competence. Dr. Shears also enunciated the benefits marriage provides to African American fathers, including longer life, better health, higher income, and lower rates of depression and suicide.

Robert and Malverna Streater discussed the “Power of Presence” in the home. Their core principles included:

- Positive reinforcement of the father role
- Role-modeling positive images of a strong and healthy marriage
- Family hugs and exercising compassion
- Selflessness
- Understanding each other’s needs (other than physical)
- Good conversation versus just communicating
- Making time for intimacy
- Constantly practicing relationship skills