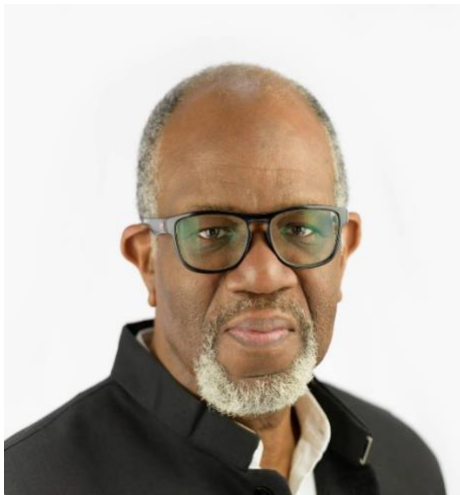




The Movement for Justice and Reconciliation (MJR) aims to increase our understanding of how modern society has been affected by the legacy of oppression left by colonial slavery and industrial exploitation.

Tribute to Revd Dr Joel Edwards CBE from Revd Alton P Bell, Chair of MJR



On the 30th June 2021 The Christian community lost one of its great leaders. Revd Dr Joel Edwards, a long-time friend and stalwart of the faith, went home to be with the Lord Jesus whom he served faithfully in the public square.

The first time I met Joel was at his church in Mile End, East London. He was gathering Black Church leaders together to deliver the first of many national Pan-Pentecostal meetings. My father, the late Revd Allan Bell, was the pastor of Assemblies of the First Born, Battersea, and went to represent them. He asked me to drive him to Mile End and I duly obliged. On arrival, all the representatives, sat around the table and I as the chauffeur, sat at the back of the church attempting to do the Telegraph crossword. Typical of the person Joel was, he invited me to join them at the table and be part of the conversation. Needless to say, I subsequently became the representative for our church group and went on to take part in all the Accord planning and delivery meetings from 1989-1993.

Joel was very meticulous in what he did and always had his feet firmly on the ground and his 'people' in his heart. In July 1992 Joel accepted the role of Director of UK Development for the Evangelical Alliance. And since we were members of the Accord planning committee, this is a snippet from the letter he wrote to me then, 15th July 1992.

'Dear Alton,

Christian Greetings in the name of our Lord.

It has been a distinct pleasure and privilege to work with you as the General Secretary for ACEA over the past four and a half years. This has been a very fruitful time of building working relationships with people such as yourself and developing the work of the African & Caribbean Evangelical Alliance. However, I am writing to inform you that my work as the General Secretary of ACEA will be coming to an end within the next few weeks. I will complete my time in this

position on the 31st July although I will be in a final “winding-up” stage to the middle of August.

On the 1st September I commence a new role in the Evangelical Alliance as the Director of UK Development. This means, in effect, that I will have the primary responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Alliance in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, ACEA and central UK. I am particularly pleased about this as it will allow me the opportunity to maintain direct involvement with the developments in ACEA. In a sense, my job means that I haven't gone – I've just moved across! It is my prayer that in this position I will be able to take your heart and perspectives with me to the wider evangelical community throughout the UK.'

Joel Edwards subsequently went on to become the first Black person and Pentecostal minister to become the General Director of the Evangelical Alliance in 1997. International Director of Micah challenge and Director of Advocacy for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) from 2009-2017. The recipient of many honorary accolades, including Doctorates and Honorary Canon of St Paul's Cathedral (2001), the author of several books, including: '*Let Praise Again: An African Caribbean Perspective on Worship*, (1992).', '*Lord Make Us One- But Not All the Same: Seeking Unity in Diversity*', (1999) and '*An Agenda for Change*', (2008). A critical analytical preacher and a regular contributor to BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*.

From July 2020 Joel and I were working together with Revd Professor David Wilkinson and Revd Dr Kathryn Pritchard from Durham University, on a programme called, “Equipping Christian Leaders in An Age of Science, (ECLAS).” Over the months we had many good conversations via zoom and telephone. Joel was very supportive of an online conference I organised and delivered in December 2020, entitled '*Does God want me to take to Covid-19 vaccine?*' aimed at the Black community to present the facts about the vaccine, the virus and to circumvent apprehension/hesitancy and conspiracy theories. With Joel's encouragement and the presentations from theologians, Professor Robert Beckford and Dr Carol Tomlin, Epidemiologist Professor Donald Palmer and technologist, David Palmer, we were able to convince a large proportion of the nearly 500 attendees that the vaccine was a safe way out of the pandemic, and it was a gift from God.

On the 22nd of June 2021, Mark and Sharon Sturge and I visited Joel in hospital. We sat, reminisced about the past and had a good time together. He posed us a riddle. “What is black and white very helpful?” we made several stabs at working out the riddle, then he told us the answer. He said it was the local Chaplain, who had been brilliant in supporting him whilst he was in hospital.

Joel's final words reflected the man who he was: A friend, brother, mentor. In his transitioning from the General Director of ACEA to the Director of UK Development for the EA, Joel wrote “*In a sense, my job means that I haven't gone – I've just moved across! It is my prayer that in this position I will be able to take your heart and perspectives with me to the wider evangelical community*” and in his farewell, message quips that he “wait to welcome you.”

Joel has 'moved across' and he is indeed waiting to welcome us, let us not disappoint him.

Joel's Final Message to the UK Church



Dear Friends

This is to say a final goodbye.
First, my incredible thanks for your prayers, love and holding on with me to that fingernail miracle.

Words cannot express the depth, breadth and height of my gratitude, but I have gone home.

My earnest prayer is that your faith and tenacity on my behalf will not be considered a pointless religious exercise, but that it will have strengthened your faith in a God who is marvellous, mysterious and majestic in all that He does: The Faithful One.

I commend my family to you. I know you will watch over them in the months and years ahead.

And I commend you to God and to the word of His grace that is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among those that are being saved.

I wait to welcome you...