

PROGRAM TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE, RACISM AND PROMOTE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & BLACK WEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Racism has adversely affected Black families for centuries. Where we live in relationship to others has historical roots. The quality of our education is a product of decisions made outside of the Black community. Black wealth accumulation has been frustrated by low income pay, faulty banking practices, and even violence as occurred in 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The challenge for all, Black and White, is to rebuild our neighborhoods and encourage the formation of Black Wealth. In a small way, **Clergy and Laity for Affordable Housing (CLAH)**, a program of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (CMM), does just that. Using volunteers from suburban and urban areas, CLAH improves homes of the underserved in the inner city who are hard pressed to keep up repairs.

Forces in society today are promoting division, creating mistrust, and growing separation. We need to rebuild relationships, talk to one another, listen hard, and work together. The general time layout of a CLAH worksite is to start work on a project of rehabilitation in the morning, stop to hold a discussion about the reasons we have to do this work (over a lunch provided by CMM), and continue working after lunch till 3pm or so.

How does this create Black Wealth?

Home improvements build up the value of the home, and thus create additional wealth for the home owner. In some instances, we increase slightly the stock of affordable housing, by creating an extra living space. The homeowner can gain income from renting this space.

We are seeking participation of both Black and White faith communities, to apply for repair of homes owned by persons in the congregations, to supply volunteers, to recommend disadvantaged youth for stipend work, and, where able, to contribute financially to buy materials, pay stipends, and give payment to the construction manager.

Our young people in the Black community have been neglected. They have little or no hope. We need to train teens and young adults in skills leading to high paying jobs. That is the only way to participate in the American economy.

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?

White and Black faith communities will work together to accomplish the goal of community economic development. We will also offer an opportunity for the Boston Police and Firefighters to participate as volunteers. We will work with the CMM curriculum known as **Values over Violence (VoV)**, which encourages the examination of the impact of violence, leading to genuine forgiveness and reconciliation.

Codman Square, Mattapan Community, and Whittier Street Health Centers will be invited to **address issues of public health disparities** in relation to high blood pressure, diabetes, and the impact of nutrition with regards to race. How do we work collectively to reduce these disparities? Young people will also be invited to examine how *structural racism* leads to these disparities, and contribute to solutions for better equity across the board.

We intend to have five aspects of this proposed initiative:

1. One faith community will be selected to pilot the project, identifying one to three homes in need of renovation. Once proven successful we will expand to other faith communities.
2. That faith community selected will nominate up to 20 youth to receive job training for well-paying jobs, such as HVAC, Solar, Carpentry, and Electrical. We will work with these youth until they are satisfactorily employed. They will also receive stipends for participating.
3. We will bring in volunteers, including the youth-in-training, from both urban and suburban areas, to work together to complete projects.
4. We will foster communication to discuss the impact of racism on economic and health dimensions of disadvantage. Using principles from the CMM program, Values over Violence (VoV), we will recognize the racist offender as a victim, not just an enemy. We must protest, but anger is not a healthy reaction, which leads to high blood pressure, heart problems, and gets in the way of progress. Forgiveness and reconciliation are lubricants to help us understand that we cannot live with hate.
5. We will bring Black and White youth together to discuss Black history. Often White youth are not taught the realities of racism, especially *institutional or structural racism*, and we will prepare and distribute information on this history to White and Black youth working on the project, to enhance their education in a multitude of ways.

Our goals are to rebuild neighborhoods, give youth hope, increase Black wealth and youth income, spread education, and expand affordable housing. We are also working to tear down institutional racism, showing respect for God's creatures of all skin colors.

HOW WILL THE FAITH COMMUNITIES BENEFIT?

1. Promote Black wealth through a revolving loan fund. This fund will, it is hoped, spur economic development through a cooperative economic development model.
2. Young people learn responsibility and get training in areas of employment demand: construction contractors, solar panel installation, HVAC, and related fields leading to well-paying jobs.
3. Disadvantaged folks get home repairs, which help to fend off gentrification.
4. Positive relationships develop from frank discussions between Black and White participants around issues of systematic racism.
5. We build positive relationships with police officers and fire department members, who are invited to contribute as volunteers to the project. They would be invited to sit down for constructive dialog, to get them to understand the strengths of a strong community, and the potential of our young people.

NEXT STEPS

- Reach out to Black and White faith communities.
- Reach out to historically-Black institutions and other partners.
- Reach out to foundations, banks and developers.
- GET YOUR SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS!