

Narrative Description of Churches, Activists and Police in Solidarity for Loving, Outspoken Communities (C.A.P.S.L.O.C.)

- 1. In the preamble to Our Social Principles, the Methodist Connexion determines to 'pledge ourselves to acknowledge and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arise among us, accepting them as evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God's people.' We pledge, therefore, to be in 'respectful dialogue with those with whom we disagree, to explore the sources of our differences.' We continue in our Methodist self-understanding to say that, to foster and grow the nurturing community, we will 'support social climates in which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons and their growth.' This leads us to an understanding of the social community in which racism cannot be tolerated as it is 'the combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races and a *value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others*' ((emphasis added) para. 162 A). We specifically commit ourselves to breaking down barriers of institutional racism which supports said value systems, recognizing racism as a sin.
- 2. Our project will create dynamic and evolving spaces for people to come together in the wake of heightened awareness of police violence against minorities. We acknowledge that there are differing understandings of the causation of this violence but stand firm in our belief that systemic racism is central to these excessive acts of aggression and that they are harmful to those who are overtly victimized as well as to the officers programmed to perpetrate them.

It is our conviction it is essential to create sustained environments for those who have or may be involved in these unnecessary incidents to explore their own motivations, social location, and the outside pressures placed upon all individuals in a tense situation involving the police. By so doing we might better prepare minority civilians and police of all ethnicities to prevent or deescalate situations before tragedy strikes.

We are convinced that we have an opportunity to reach allies at the same time, thereby creating new communities where learned understandings of superiority based on race and social status begin to be disrupted and healthier replacements built on multiple fronts. By specifically working with churches, community groups and police departments we aim to work at the personal and institutional level simultaneously.

We live in times increasingly divided. Racial and ethnic minorities are, in many instances, expressing fear and deep trepidation regarding how to interact with their government under the changing presidential administration. This is, of course, magnified since there were already such deepened rifts between law enforcement and communities of color in the wake of the now infamous list of fatalities at the hands of police.

Entrenchment, retreating to our ideological and ethnic corners will, of course, only broaden the chasms between us. However, new paradigms for how we come together must be established. It has never been enough to show solidarity in the moment if the commitment does not prove lasting. This is why our program seeks to build ongoing relationships, especially at the leadership level, even as we foster ever expanding circles of leadership.

Empathetic and imaginative listening is a central component of our plans. It is our belief that when people are invited to explore their own motivations and also the motivations of others they will come to understand both better and from that point real solutions and lasting change will come.

- 3. C.A.P.S.L.O.C. is designed to:
 - a. Bring community leader/activists together with police to find the places in which they have common cause.
 - b. Help police see the ways in which their actions create a culture of fear and resentment.
 - c. Help police and the communities they serve see that they are subject to triple forces: the 'white is right, brown get down' messages we have all been fed a steady diet of; protect and serve, which should say everyone is innocent; and the world is full of bad guys, which gives police the conflicting messages that everyone they meet is good, and bad, and this must be reconciled with those universally received messages regarding race.
 - d. Deepen the dialogue around Black Lives Matter to proceed to 'they matter so much we must prepare police to protect them' through access to counselling and develop opportunities to interact with their communities out of uniform.
 - e. In short, our goal is for communities and police to realize they are part of the same narrative of trauma and therefore are unlikely to extricate themselves from the story without mutual participation.

- 4. The workshop experience that we propose is multivalent. Our first experiences are planned for clergy, police and activists as both leaders and participants so we can train as many people as possible to facilitate workshops quickly. This has the added benefit of allowing us to include innovation and adjustments that the Spirit may suggest. Following is an outline of a workshop:
- * Opening: a short viewing of related but separate material. Suggestions might be video of black and white children being shown dolls of different ethnicities and asked about which dolls are 'good,' 'smart,' 'nice,' 'mean,' 'bad,' which show that, regardless of the child's background, they choose the white doll to have positive traits and the black doll to have negative ones. Or interviews about *The New Jim Crow*. For a lighter approach, Jay Smooth has excellent and often funny pieces about systemic racism. This is also the time to name white fragility and openly acknowledge it is not the responsibility of anyone in the room to make it okay for white people present.
- * Introduction: each session should be crafted and led, with help from us, by a pastor, a community leader, and an officer. This is the time for them to introduce themselves and explain why this is important to them. Also, rules of engagement, as in 'this is how we are going to speak and interact so we can all be honest, be heard, and learn, even though we know some things may be hard.'
- * Conversation: What is happening in *this* community? In what ways is it the same as and or distinct from the broader narrative nationally? How has police violence affected those present? What are the fears, concerns, and hopes for what could come next? What would those in the room change about the system if they could design a just system?
- * Transition/break.
- * Embodied learning: in small groups, act out police stop scenarios, almost like a theater exercise, to take time to examine what each person is thinking/feeling/doing along the way. At what points is each participant's anxiety highest? Why? In what ways can you empathize? In what ways does it feel strange to you, or is your experience different? How does that make you feel?

- * Now what: This is not, cannot effectively be, a single event. Organizers need to have follow-up events and actions for people to participate in. A discussion of how the workshop changed or deepened understanding should be followed by encouraging participation in the next step. These might include community-police picnics, screenings/readings and discussions of longer pieces about systemic racism, lobbying days to change the laws of accountability, volunteering to join community review boards, bible study (reference Exodus study), etc.
- 5. These workshops strengthen local churches, especially predominantly Black churches and host churches in multiple ways. We are seeking to maximize our reach by partnering with Rev. Doris Dalton and the Martin Luther King Institute for Nonviolence of West Chester, allowing us to grow the program exponentially faster. At the heart of the work are also Vandervere Park and Metropolitan Community United Methodist Churches. Host churches become an even greater and deeper presence in their community. They become a tangible place where safe, though difficult and challenging speech and questioning of police authority is sanctioned. They become a space where police can seek out a listening ear for the very real challenges that come with law enforcement. Churches become places where the communion table, the coming together of diverse people for the creation and healing of the kingdom of God is lived out in radically transformative ways. While this is always the goal, it is a critical act of healing and sustaining in a time when so many are feeling profoundly marginalized and silenced.

When we discuss community policing, it becomes increasingly incumbent upon churches to model the beloved community. It becomes our task to build bridges of understanding between a populace seeking protection and receiving abuse and law enforcement tasked with protection and equipped with fear and misinformation. Our workshops will be designed to break down the barriers. At the same time we will build up voices that have been afraid to speak, speak to police, speak about their fears, speak truth to power, expanding the number of activist minded Christians in the churches where we hold workshops.

- 6. While I cannot give percentages for the ethnic makeup of participants, I can say that at least two of our early churches are predominantly African American, and the MLK Institute has a Caucasian base committed to equality. Police participation will be based upon departments, and we would never turn anyone away. There is, of course, every reason to anticipate that the largest group of churches to desire these programs will have largely minority congregations, however.

- 7. Martin Luther King Institute for Nonviolence, with Rev. Doris Dalton; Vanderveer Park UMC, Rev. Hermon Darden; Metropolitan Community UMC, Rev. Richard Hayes. We still need to seek the support of local community relations officers from nearby police departments.
- 8. By Feb 1.
 - · Have basic FB page built for people to connect through.
 - · Identify wide number of starter churches, clergy, community and police groups interested in participating.
- · Identify local after-school programs and other venues where teens will be concentrated to canvass for participants post training workshops

By Mid March

- * Hold first training workshops.
- * Have FB page built out with upcoming schedule

By Mid April

- * Have solid core group of organizations, and first trainers prepped.
- * Have materials ready for canvassing and canvassers ready to distribute material.
- * Be prepared to start workshops beyond the training phase and support workshop leaders.
- * Have press packets ready and any advertising in place.

Scheduling conflicts should be the biggest challenge before us. There is a certain sense of urgency to begin since tensions always run highest in the summer months and we want to be active before the heat sets in. Since the goal is for these programs to become ongoing and lead to sustained engagement, a conclusion date is more difficult to give. Ideally, once several monthly training events have happened and workshop teams have been established to offer the service at as many churches as possible, the Conference would be able to say that an event was happening somewhere in NYAC every two weeks. This estimate does not include spin off Bible study or other activities. It assumes many trained teams over and against a few working extraordinarily hard.

- 9. To evaluate the efficacy of C.A.P.S.L.O.C., there are several useful benchmarks. These include:
 - a. Do participants feel increasingly comfortable asking difficult questions of themselves and others in the room?
 - b. Do participants take their learning with them? How do they describe their police perceptions and interactions as being different after the workshop?
 - c. How does the event change police perception and conduct?
 - d. Do local incidences of police misconduct go down?
 - e. Are our trainers invited into police departments or are officers encouraged to participate in an official way?
 - f. Is there any fresh conversation around counselling and care for police in the weeks after our events?

Funding Request

To reach the maximum volume of people, advertising and social media will be crucial for this event. After the initial training events, young African-American men need to be a target audience, as they are so consistently targeted. Funding will go to:

- * Honoraria for trainers/travel expenses/etc.

- * Money to create and place materials where they will be seen by those we need to reach, and perhaps a couple of pizza thank you dinners for volunteers who canvas neighborhoods with those materials.
- * Refreshments for workshops, especially the early ones.
- * Supplies and printing of canvassing materials.
- * Local media advertising.