

THE HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE:
BARBERSHOP MINISTRY INITIATIVE—
SHAPING HEADS FOR THE FUTURE

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Advisors: Rev. Donna Ciangio, DMin and
Rev. Kevin Miller, DMin

Robert A. Thompson
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey
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ABSTRACT

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Robert A. Thompson

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ

132 West 116th Street

New York, NY 10026

The Barbershop Ministry initiative was created in March 2016 at the historic Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, New York. Canaan is historic primarily because of its pastor emeritus, the Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker's role at the chief staff strategist for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the civil rights movement. Dr. Walker was instrumental in fighting for the concerns African Americans and the architect in bringing people together.

The purpose of this barbershop project is to address similar concerns African American men face throughout the United States. Concerns such as mass incarceration, unemployment and underemployment, the lack of education, issues confronting the family, health issues, identity crises, and building a relationship with our Heavenly Father. These problematic issues prevent African American men from reaching their full potential in their community, their church and in the nation. This project seeks to address these issues and open a connection between the church and African American men that relishes the barbershop environment. The barbershop is more than simply getting a haircut. It's a place where a more significant relationship can be established by building bridges of trust, understanding and respect while getting a shape-up to make you look and feel good about yourself. It is my hope that through the formation of these relationships through this initiative, more meaningful conversations can be had concerning income, disparity,

education, justice, righteousness and being men of God. A disconnect presently exists between African American men and the response of the church to the issues preventing them from becoming more productive in their homes, in society and as servants of the living God. This initiative shall serve as a connecting factor between the church and African American men. Through dialogue on issues like unemployment, educational challenges, and the like, it is my expectation that the stumbling blocks to progress in spiritual growth and mental maturity can be weakened in their lives just as the forefathers of the civil rights movement achieved years ago.

The Barbershop Ministry is so named because of what the barbershop and the barber has meant to African American men and their neighborhoods for so many years. Since the end of slavery, the barber has been entrusted with the African American male's appearance, life, and well-being. Since all participants make a solemn pledge to maintain confidentiality, this initiative provides a safe environment for African American males to talk openly and honestly about what they are feeling and experiencing in their daily lives so solutions may be devised and initiated. The goal of the initiative is to help change the current mindset of African American men and alleviate some of their pain. The ministry is not only meant to initiate this change by assisting African American men in the fostering of a new mind, but to facilitate their development into new men—men who strive for justice in their lives, in this nation, in their homes; men who believe that God is still in charge and trust that He is not through with African American men yet. Just as barbers are known for shaping men's heads by giving them haircuts that can change their outward appearance, the goal of the Barbershop Ministry initiative is to change the hearts and minds of African American men and give them a different outlook. The hope is that these men can foresee themselves living in the future righteously, justly and unashamed with God.

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Introduction

The title of the Barbershop Ministry Initiative and of this paper is deeply rooted in Scripture. It comes from Matthew 5:6, part of the section known as the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”¹ The verse is a declaration that the promise made by YHWH and fulfilled through Christ for those who believe and turn their lives to God, because as our Creator, He sincerely cares for His children. The declaration is also an invitation to accept the grace God freely offers. Although African Americans are aware of this invitation, they allow ungodly thoughts to dictate what they know and believe to be true. For far too long and often, African Americans have been treated and told that they should not consider themselves as equal to a human being let alone a child of God. This message is reinforced in the stories we read in schools and in the media among other venues, and these stories weigh heavily on our souls. As the old saying goes, if one is told something long enough, one tends to believe it. However, this adage can be a driving force, intensifying one’s hunger and thirst to be accepted in this world as an equal citizen, or simply, as a man.

The Barbershop Ministry Initiative and this paper are both part of an attempt to address and discredit the age-old sayings, first by providing a better understanding of our current state of mind and then elevating our thinking to a more spiritual level. For this to

¹ The Gospel According to Matthew 5:6. Unless otherwise indicated, the New International Version of the Bible will be used throughout.

happen, the African American male must have access to a place where is safe for him to express his inhibitions, his lack of self-esteem and his disappointment in unfulfilled promises made by people he trusted. In order to shape the heads of African American men for the future, one must understand where they have been and where they are now so they can meet the future with a new awareness of self and our Heavenly Father. The initiative and this paper attempts to express the past and current psychological, physical, and spiritual state of the African American male by embracing how society often discredits and diminishes their very beings. To sincerely address the concerns of African American males, one must take a hard look at the actions and attitudes that have existed and persisted for centuries. Real and relevant statistics will be offered in this paper to help and assist the reader's understanding of the mindset that society has had and still has towards African American men. Hermeneutical and systematic processes, as all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. This mantra has been exercised to validate the place of the African American male not only in society but in biblical history as well.

Ultimately, the goal of the Barbershop Ministry Initiative is to empower our brothers to do God's will and to ignite a change not just in African American men's minds but in their hearts as well. The words shared in this paper and through the initiative must spark an emotion so the hearts of African American men, and every true Christian

person, can be opened to receive things that society and sometimes our mind prohibits us from receiving. As a servant of God, this writer's ministry is to speak truth to the wise and common sense to those with a willing ear to listen. The mission is not only to bring people to Christ and assist Him in reclaiming His children but to help them find their resurrected lives in the Son of God.

Chapter 1. The History of the African American Barber and His Barbershop

“The barber shop has provided an emotional safe-haven for men who have endured exploitation for more than two hundred years as African American males.”

Hunter Oatman-Stanford

There is something preciously authentic about the African American barbershop. It is the last refuge, a kind of fraternal lodge for African American males of all stripes, a place where knowledge can be traded, disputes resolved, wacky theories presented without penalty and where grand stories of extraordinary feats are fondly and comically shared. At the barbershop, social classes disappear and so does fear. Where else can the president of a bank and an ex-con sit side by side and find something in common? Where else can the neighborhood elder reach the otherwise inaccessible young men to share his profound wisdom and experience? Author and cartoonist Oliver W. Harrington wrote about Elite Air, a famous Harlem African American barbershop open in Harlem in the 1930s. After attending the barbershop several times he stated, “Every Saturday morning, some of the nation’s top second-class citizens filled the Elite Air with spirited public debate on such varied subjects as women, horses, politics, show business, surgery, boxing (both amateur and professional) and on what them s.o.b.’s were doing to keep the colored man down.”²

2. *Barbershop Harmony*, Merida, Kevin – Washington Post Staff Writer; Friday, July 10, 1998, 3

The barbershop is one of the few places where African American men can gather without feeling threatened. Why is the African American barbershop held to such high esteem in the African American community? What is it about the African American barber that he is considered everyone's confidant, psychologist, financial counselor, judge and juror?

The history of the African American barber and his barbershop can be traced back to before the Jim Crow Era. In a nation where institutionalized racism was the norm for centuries, African American barbershops were an anomaly. Initially blocked from serving African American patrons, these businesses evolved into spaces where African American men could freely socialize and discuss contemporary issues. "While catering to certain hair types may have helped these businesses succeed, the real secret to their longevity is their continued social import."³

For many African Americans, getting a haircut is more than a transaction—it's an experience that builds community and shapes political action. As both a proud symbol of African American entrepreneurship and a relic of an era when African American labor exclusively benefited whites, African American barbershops provide a window into our nation's complicated racial dynamics. Mr. Quincy Mills, a professor of history at Vassar College, explored these points in detail in his book, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black*

3. Straight Razors and Social Justice: The Empowering Evolution of Black Barbershops, Oatman-Stanford, Hunter, May 30, 2014; (www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/the-empowering-evolution-of-black-barbershops/), 7

Barbers and Barbershops. In his book, Mr. Mills states that in the South, barbers were both enslaved and freed African American men. There were white barbers in the North, however they were mostly Irish, German and Italian immigrants.⁴ People considered barbering and other service work unskilled labor. American white men believed themselves to be entitled to skilled employment, so they did not want to work in service professions.

Before the Civil War, most African American barbers explicitly groomed wealthy white men, such as executives and politicians. African American customers were not allowed to get haircuts in these barbershops, mainly because white customers did not want African American customers being shaved next to them. It would identify too much as social equality, so African American barbers in both the North and the South complied with their white patron's wishes. Then, where did African American men get their hair cut? They got haircuts on someone's front porch, in the yard, or in other noncommercial spaces. It is also quite possible African American barbers served their African American customers after normal business hours. There is a story of a fugitive slave who recorded his travels through Kentucky. Needing a place to hide out for the night, the slave looked for barbershops because he knew most barbers were African American men.⁵ He found a barbershop, and as he had guessed, the barber was African American, so he let the slave

4. Quincy Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line* (University Park, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 76

5. Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 9

in. The barber immediately locked the door behind him. The fugitive's name was John Brown, and he wrote that the barber said, "You can stay for the night, but you have to be gone before morning because if anyone finds you here, it will shut up my shop."⁶ What the barber meant was that if white folks found out the African American barber was harboring a fugitive slave, they would no longer patronize his shop. However, if the barber opened his door after hours to this fugitive slave, it also suggests that other barbers may have opened their doors after hours for other activities. Moreover, the incident indicated that the barber was trustworthy, noble, and could keep a secret for his well-being and another's. This may have been where the African American barbershop earned its reputation as a safe haven.

In the North before the Civil War, there was more freedom for African Americans so there was a discourse focused on respectable occupations for African Americans. For much of the antebellum period, activists like Frederick Douglass wrote against what they termed "color-line barbers" who only allowed white customers in their shops.⁷ They argued that this was too much like slave labor and if African Americans were going to be taken seriously, they needed occupations that were manly, respectable, and skilled. Douglass did not cry out against African Americans in the South because he understood

⁶ Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 9

⁷ Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 10

that they were in a slave society and the system would not allow them to cater to African American patrons.

After the Civil War, barbers in both the North and South were targeted by African American communities for refusing to shave African American men. In 1875, congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875 [18 Stat. 335–337].⁸ Also sometimes called Enforcement Act or Force Act, the act guaranteed Africans Americans access to public places of accommodation and equal treatment in public accommodations, public transportation, and prohibited them from being excluded from jury service. The bill was drafted early in 1870 by Senator Charles Sumner, a dominant Radical Republican in the Senate from Massachusetts, with the assistance of John Mercer Langston, a prominent African American who established the law department at Howard University. The bill was co-sponsored by Representative Benjamin F. Butler, another Republican from Massachusetts. The act was eventually passed by the 43rd Congress in February 1875 and signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant on March 1, 1875.⁹ Eight years later, the Supreme Court ruled that sections of the act were unconstitutional. Sections that upheld the Equal Protection Clause within the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibited discrimination by the state and local governments, was ruled that it did not give the

8. Library of Congress (<http://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1851-1900/The-Civil-Rights-Act-of-1875/>), 147

9. Library of Congress (<http://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1851-1900/The-Civil-Rights-Act-of-1875/>), 148

federal government power to prohibit discrimination by private citizens and organizations.

During Reconstruction, African American barbers were coming to terms with this law, which was originally meant to target white storeowners but resulted in all sorts of protests against African American barbershops who refused to serve the African American community. However, many of the African American barbers who only served white men were still deeply engaged in their communities. Take Mr. George Myers, who became a barber in the 1880s in Cleveland, Ohio, and served as barber to William McKinley before the latter was elected president, as well as Marcus Hanna, a prominent businessman. An instrumental figure in the Republican Party, Hanna helped McKinley raise funds for his presidential campaign and eventually to get elected.¹⁰ Hanna selected Myers to organize African American voters in Cleveland and the greater state of Ohio. Myers became the intermediary between African Americans and the Republican Party to the point that when McKinley was elected, Myers got a flood of letters from African Americans in the South saying, “I heard that McKinley was elected president. Congratulations on all your work. Can you put in a good word for me for this job here in Mobile, Alabama?”¹¹ People knew that Myers now had the ear of the president. Even though Myers only served white men in his shop, African Americans felt that if he could

10. Cutting Along the Color Line, 83

11. Oatman-Stanford, Straight Razors and Social Justice, 12

deliver those political resources to the African American communities, who he served in his shop wasn't an issue.

There were other prominent barbers like Mr. Alonzo Herndon in Atlanta, Georgia, and Mr. John Merrick in Durham, North Carolina. Like Myers, Herndon and Merrick were born in the 1850s and came to prominence in the 1880s and 1890s. Merrick and Herndon used the resources from their barbershops to establish life insurance companies—Atlanta Life (Merrick) and North Carolina Mutual (Herndon), both of which still exist to very day. The level of wealth these men accumulated helped them to become central figures of the African American community. Other African Americans barbers used the economic resources from their shops to establish insurance companies because major companies like MetLife were not insuring African Americans.

The only thing that changed in the South after the Civil War was that there were more African Americans speaking out against African American barbers who were still exclusively shaving white men. The argument was that since slavery did not exist anymore, there was no need to remain bound to these kinds' of distinctions and dependencies. However, the end of slavery did not necessarily mean the birth of freedom. In many cases, it meant the birth of a new kind of bondage. There was not a lot of money in the post-Emancipation South because of the war's destruction. African Americans were caught up in sharecropping situations, resulting in perpetual debt and no spending money. At this time, it was also very much about the mechanical trades or carpentry,

which were skilled positions. Barbering was viewed as an unskilled profession. African American activists felt that if barbers continued to shave only white men, then they would still be seen as inferior and as servants in this dependent position. The racialization of labor is a sentiment that still exists today. People wonder, “If we cut off immigration, who is going to cut my lawn? It suggests there is no dignity or any influence in saying, “I cut grass for a living” or “I work at McDonald’s.”¹² Even when there are very few jobs, many workers today do not want the kind of jobs society deems degrading.

As Germans, Irish, and Italian barbers came to America; they wanted to do the same thing in their new country as they did back home. However, they quickly learned what it meant to be a barber in America and sought to change America’s mindset about the occupation. They wanted to change the image of barbering to make it appear more skilled, more professional, and a more attractive field for whites to enter. Toward that end, German barbers were instrumental in the founding of the Journeyman Barbers’ International Union of America in the 1890s. The union pushed for licensing laws to regulate who could become a barber. This was part of a larger professionalization movement, similar to the efforts of the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association. The barber’s union also lobbied various state legislatures to pass laws requiring a degree from a barber college where African Americans were not admitted. These laws meant that one couldn’t pick up some scissors, hang out a shingle

¹² Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 13

and announce he was open for business. The barber had to know the anatomy of the body and something about disease; basically, the barber also had to be a scientist. Barbering textbooks appeared with “science” and “anatomy” in their titles.

The barber union also attached itself to the sanitation movement. To convince legislatures that these bills were worthy of passing, barbers argued, “We’re trying to protect the public. What would happen if someone wandered into a dirty barbershop and got some kind of disease? We don’t want that, do we?”¹³ African American barbers recognized this as an effort to push them out of the trade. After all, there was no evidence of people getting diseases during a haircut. State health departments were baffled at these bills; most of the time they were not consulted. Restrictions were put into place such as the one in Richmond, Virginia, where, in order to get a license, barbers had to be tested for syphilis. Syphilis was contracted through sexual activities and not haircuts. However, the move was part of a larger pattern of segregating African Americans based on the unfounded threat of giving whites this disease.

Some states like Minnesota passed barbering licensing laws fairly quickly. But in states like Ohio and Virginia it took much longer. From 1902 to 1933, licensing bills were repeatedly rejected largely because of the connections of McKinley’s barber, George Myers. Myers frequently stated, “Look, if you pass the bill, I will be sure that

¹³ Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 14

African Americans do not vote for the Republican ticket.”¹⁴ At the time, Myers didn’t really have the power over the African American vote as he claimed but he used the perception of power to his and the other African American barbers’ advantage. As a result the licensing bill did not pass until Mr. Myers death.

Ironically, the Virginia bill was repeatedly denied largely because whites opposed it. They didn’t want to lose their African American barbers. For them, having an African American barber was a vestige of the Old South; similar to having an African American servant. Interestingly, the professionalization movement did not initially push African American barbers to cater exclusively to African American clientele or to open and own barbershops in their communities.

However, by the 1890s, there was a new generation of African Americans who had been born and came of age after the Civil War. They were not as connected to white communities as their predecessors were and didn’t enter barbering for the sake of grooming white men. Instead, they explicitly decided to open barbershops in their African American communities to satisfy a need and to trade the image of servitude for one of self-dignity and entrepreneurship. At this very same time, Jim Crow laws were on the rise, which made the choice to own an African American business even more challenging. African American barbers had to be mindful because their barbershops were no longer located in their homes, where permission was required to enter but where

¹⁴ Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 15

anyone could enter during normal business hours. Yet the shops were private in the sense that there was an expectation that what happened there, stayed there. African American barbershops were also private because whites no longer wanted to be around them, so their customers would not be under surveillance. In many African American barbershops today, for example, the nature of the conversation changes when a woman enters. Someone might say something like, “There’s a lady in here, and we have to be respectful so don’t curse.”¹⁵ There’s a certain type of respect, which is really about the display of masculinity, particularly around other men. In other words, while African American barbershops are public in terms of collective conversation, the dialogue takes place within a private business.

Yet the market economy was still central to the barbershop’s existence. The African American barber still needed to turn some kind of profit. With the needs of a private business balanced with the needs of this collective dialogue, the barbershop became the place to promote political action and activism as well. With the rise of Jim Crow, public spaces were becoming less accessible to African Americans. It helped that places like the African American church, the African American barbershop, as well as beauty shops and other businesses provided the space necessary for African Americans to safely gather, talk, and organize. The African American church was central to the Civil Rights movement because of its size while the African American barbershop could only

¹⁵ Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 15

accommodate five to six people at a time. Yet there are several cases where activists retreated to an African American barbershop to plan a particular campaign and there are other instances of African Americans coming to their own consciousness in the barbershop. African American newspapers were available in barbershops and many politically active barbers provided reading materials about the Communist Party or registering to vote. Stokely Carmichael, who would go on to be the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was first exposed to activism at his regular barbershop. When his family moved to the Bronx, the local barbers were Irish and could not cut his hair, so Carmichael would go to Harlem every week to get his hair cut. It was in this Harlem barbershop that he learned about the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and was first exposed to African American activism. It was in the barbershop that Carmichael gained a glimmer of awareness of the larger African American struggle for freedom.¹⁶

This dynamic of the barbershop providing a personal service is central to the customer's understanding of the African American identity. During the era of segregation, and even now, barbershops, beauty shops, and churches are key spaces for African Americans. Barbering remains an important trade for many African Americans communities largely because there are still few barriers for entry into the business. It's not like opening a restaurant where one needs a substantial amount of capital to be in

¹⁶ Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice*, 17

business. If one wants to become a barber today, one attends to barber school, secures a license and one is set. It's still an open avenue for many people, and men will always need haircuts.

Nevertheless, the nature of the African American barbershop is changing and technology has a great deal to do with it. The generation of men in their fifties, sixties, and older still go to the barbershops to hang out and talk about every day events—locally and worldly. They seek to engage their younger counterparts to impart their wisdom and hear what their views are for the future. But younger African American men waiting around in barbershops are much more likely to be on their smartphones than engaging with other men in the shop. This is unfortunate at a time when there is such a strong racial divide in the United States today. Although so much has been accomplished, there is still so much more to do for the African American male to be considered equal. Therefore, there still needs to be that safe haven where African American can gather to strategize, galvanize, and see their idea of becoming the man they want to be materialize in a world that consistently counts them out.

During the 2008 recession, when the national unemployment rate was upwards of 8% or 9%, the African American unemployment rate was double that, around 17% to 18%. Obviously anyone with any intelligence would look at those numbers and know that something is wrong. In the African American barbershop it's said that the Obama administration felt constrained to talk about this issue from the African American

perspective because the president serves a much larger population. But those numbers conjured up memories of the some old inequalities experienced by African Americans in the past. In the barbershop, one can also talk about the incarceration rate; health care, education, politics, etc. Of course, it's not to say that all African American males think the same way; in fact, there are plenty of debates and disagreements in barbershops. However, there is less of a need to convince people of the issues that matters. African American barbershops are important because one can cut through all of the unnecessary rhetoric and get to the heart of what African American males need to discuss, including their state of mind, their place in the family, how they as Americans fit in this country, how they as Christians fit in biblical history, and how they are seen before GOD—all issues that need to be addressed before moving forward.

In addition to examining the place of the African American male in relation to Christ, it is also important to examine the role of the African American male in the eyes of the United States and the world. According to Blackdemographic.com, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade produced the following trades:

It is estimated that of the 10 to 12 million Africans brought to the new world as slaves, approximately 500,000 to 700,000 of them came to the United States of America. This was only about 4.4% to 5.4% of all who were shipped to the Americas. The majority, about 35% were sent to Brazil and the remainder to the other South American and Caribbean colonies. The largest ports of entry for American slaves were Baltimore, Savannah, Charleston and New Orleans. According to the first United States census count, 92% of the 757,208 African American were slaves. The last census count during slavery in 1860 counted 4,441,830 African Americans of which 89% were slaves. By the turn of the century (1900), the African American population grew to more than 8 million and more than doubled in every 50-year period since reaching 42 million by 2010. From 1790 to 1865 when slavery was abolished, the count of Free African Americans never grew higher than 14% of the total African American population.¹

In 2013, the United States Census Bureau officially estimated that there are 21.5 million African American males in the United States. This number reflects those that identified themselves as African American regardless of their actual ethnicity. African American males accounted approximately 14.2% of all males in the United States. African American males made up 48% of the total African American population while

1. www.blackdemographics.com/population - US Census American Community Survey, 2

African American females made up the remaining 52%. All males in the United States had an average age of thirty-six years old while African American males' average age was 31 years old. In the under 18-year-old bracket, African American males have the same percentage of all male children at 51%.² However, the percentages decline very quickly as African American males get older. Per the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the life expectancy at birth for African American males in 2007 was seventy years old. Although the age has increased approximately four months every two years, it remains eight years behind white males.³

Based on information from the U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2011 American Community Survey, about 48% of African American males twenty-five years and older attended college compared to 58% of all American males. However, only 17% of African American males graduated with a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 30% of all American males. Furthermore, 18% of African American males age twenty-five years and up have less than a high school diploma compared to only 14% of all American males.

For the total African American population in 2011, 29% of African American households were identified as single-woman with family, 28% were married couples with

² www.blackdemographics.com/population - US Census American Community Survey, 3

³ www.blackdemographics.com/health - US Census American Community Survey, 2

a family, 21% were single women with no family, 17% were single-men with family, and 6% were single-men with no family.⁴

In 2011, the median African American household had just \$7,113 in wealth, more than fifteen times less than the \$111,146 in wealth held by the median white household. Today, a mere forty-two percent of African American families compared to seventy-two percent of whites own their homes, driving the historically durable racial wealth gap. At the end of 2015, the unemployment rate for the general population was five percent, yet 9.2% for African American workers and just 4.4% for white workers. The unemployment rate for African Americans has been roughly double that for whites since at least the early 1970s.⁵ There are also stark racial disparities in education, health access and outcomes, the criminal justice system and social mobility among many other arenas of economic security and well-being.

As the economy has faced its challenges, African American males have suffered as well. Numbers from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that in 2012 51% of African Americans were employed, 10% were unemployed and 38% were not in the labor force at all whereas 58% of all Americans were employed, 36% were unemployed, and 36% were not in the labor force. Statistics for African American males indicate that 64.6% were employed and 13.6% were unemployed. As of July 2016, the

⁴ www.blackdemographics.com/households - US Census American Community Survey, 3

⁵ www.blackdemographics.com/household - US Census American Community Survey, 4

African American unemployment rate was 8.4% compared to the national unemployment rate of 4.9%.⁶

The Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that from December 31, 2000 to December 31, 2010, there were 104,550 more African American males the white male populating the state and federal prison system. During the same period, African American males were three times more likely to be stopped, searched and arrested than white males. The National Prisoner Statistics Program indicates that the most arrests among African American males were for drugs and robberies.⁷

In every facet of life, whether its education, employment, family, health, society or just life in general, the state of African American males looks bleak and dismal. It is very hard to find a job with little education today. Most African American males are forced to take minimum wage jobs at fast-food restaurants, shopping centers, retail venues, and in the construction industry. These forms of employment are deemed as menial because it takes less intelligence and more physical ability to get the job done. Even if the minimum wage was increased to fifteen dollars an hour as has been recently proposed in some regions, it is still not enough to support oneself in today's society let alone a family, especially with the cost of shelter, clothing, mobile and internet connectivity, public transportation, and groceries.

⁶ www.blackdemographics.com/economic - US Census American Community Survey, 4

⁷ www.blackdemographics.com/prison - US Census American Community Survey, 5

As a result, African American males have gravitated towards legal and illegal get-rich-quick business schemes. They may invest in legal ventures such as real estate, home improvement contracting, or insurance. These options attractive because they typically require a modest investment but can yield big rewards. Most African American males see these possibilities and try them with good intentions, but then they notice their brother on the street who sells drugs for a living and has big rewards to show for it: designer clothes, fine jewelry, women and the latest and most expensive car. Material possessions announce to the world that you have made it; that you are somebody, the opposite of what the African American male has been told. The illegal business starts to look very appetizing to those who are lost and tired of society's portrayal of them. Some African American males become drug dealers, pimps, and thieves to escape the harsh life of being a nobody, even if it is illegal. In the process, he becomes the very "criminal" society has portrayed him to be.

Eventually society must imprison the criminal. The state and federal governments gather to build new prisons. They begin to tear down the run-down schools, not to rebuild them for the inner city children who are bused as far as fifty miles away from home but to build penitentiaries. Bankers invest in the rebuilding of abandoned factories, not to revitalize the industry so the community can find work but to construct new modern-day prisons. Investment firms buy these prisons from the government and place them under a new corporate name so they can be bought, sold, and traded as commodities on the stock

exchange for a profit. The government makes money, the banks make money, the investment firms make money and the small investor can make money on the *souls of black folk* by legally selling and incorporating the housing for those who have convicted of committing various crimes. In essence, society has invested little money for the opportunity to gain big rewards. Despite having an African American male president of the United States of America for eight years, political, economic, educational, and social action on behalf of African American males has largely been late, nonbinding, and uninterested.

Across the country, African American children attend under-resourced schools. A combination of exclusionary disciplinary policies and school-based arrests are often the first step along the school-to-imprisonment pipeline and play a key role in pushing students out of the school system and into the prison system. More than three million students are suspended from school every year. Far too often, vague and subjective infractions such as disrespect and willful defiance amount to countless hours of lost instructional time. African American male students are often punished more harshly for certain misbehaviors than their white peers and, as a result, they are denied an opportunity to learn. For African American males, the impact of exclusionary school discipline is far reaching. Disengaging them from academic and developmental opportunities increased the likelihood that they will be incarcerated later in life. According to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at the U. S. Department of Education,

African American students constitute 17.1% of the nationwide student population; African American male student population is even lower. Data from 2010 indicates that while African American males comprised 17% of all youth in the United States, they represented 31% of all arrests. These disparities persist even as juvenile crime rates have fallen.⁸

Young African American people who are incarcerated are more likely to be sent to solitary confinement or transferred to adult facilities. The disparities grow at almost every step, stealing the dignity of young African American males and forcing them onto lifelong pathways of criminalization and diminished opportunity.⁹ Tens of thousands of African American youth under the age of twenty-one are currently incarcerated for offenses ranging from truancy to more serious charges. Every crime bill passed by Congress throughout the 1980s and 1990s has included new federal laws against juvenile crimes and increased penalties against children. Similar trends can be seen throughout state legislation. There is mounting research that children under the age of twenty-three do not have fully-developed brains and that the cheapest, most humane, and most cost-effective way to respond to juvenile crime is not incarceration but programs and initiatives that strengthen families, increase stability, and provide access to educational

⁸ Andrea Ritchie and Arielle Humphries - Movement for Black Lives: End the War on Black People, (<http://www.policy.m4bl.org/uploads/end-the-war-on-black-people.pdf>), 17

⁹ Joshua Rovner, "Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System," The Sentencing Project, 2014, accessed August 4, 2016, (<http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Disproportionat-Minority-Contact-in-the-juvenile-Justice-System.pdf>), 19

and employment opportunities. Harshly prosecuting youth for crimes is not only cruel; but it also permanently disadvantages them with criminal records, which makes becoming contributing members of society unfairly difficult.

Currently, thirty-one states, the federal government, and the U.S. military have the death penalty. Nineteen states do not. Seven states, New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland and Nebraska, have repealed the death penalty in the past decade. For the first time in the modern era since the reinstatement of the death penalty in the mid-1970s, public support of the death penalty is at its lowest. New death sentences and executions are decreasing every year. Most African American males believe that the death penalty in the United States is nothing more than institutional lynching. The death penalty devalues African American lives. Statistically those convicted of killing white people are at least three to four times more likely to be sentenced to death than killers of anyone else. The death penalty is also geographically discriminatory (about 1% of U.S. counties produce more than half of the death sentences), expensive (even more costly than life in prison without parole), and has resulted in innocent African American males being sentenced to death and some executed. Among prosecutors who have the sole discretion to seek or not to seek the death penalty, most—upwards of 95% of whom are

white—randomly and arbitrarily seek it. The death penalty requires a high level of counsel, skill, and resources not available to most defendants.¹⁰

Clearly, punishment for criminal offenses has not been equitably distributed across all demographic groups. African Americans and Latinos represent over 60% of the people currently residing in prisons and one in every three African American males can expect to be arrested before their twenty-third birthday. Further compounding this problem is the fact that contact with the criminal legal system triggers a set of formal and informal legal and social restrictions, often referred to as “collateral consequences,”¹¹ which bar people with records from basic life necessities like employment, housing, and government assistance. Consequently, huge segments of African American and Latino communities are civically, economically and socially excluded from active participation in society, which is eerily reminiscent to the segregation experience in the Jim Crow South.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the United States currently imprisons more human beings than any other country in the world, both in real numbers and in terms of the percentage of the population. As of 2014, more than 6.8 million adults were living in prisons or jails or under the restrictions and surveillance of probation and

¹⁰ Cathy Albisa, Marbre Stahly-Butts and Patrick Mason, Ph.D. - Movement for Black Lives: Economic Justice, (<http://www.polcy.m4bl.org/uploads/economic-justice.pdf>), 23

¹¹ Cathy Albisa, Marbre Stahly-Butts and Patrick Mason, Ph.D. - Movement for Black Lives: Economic Justice, (<http://www.polcy.m4bl.org/uploads/economic-justice.pdf>), 25

parole. More than 2.2 million adults were confined in prisons or jails—more than a quarter of the adult population of this country. More than 54,000 youth were held in juvenile detention during this same period. While African American people represent about 13% of the population in the United States, they represent upwards of 40% of those in jails, prisons, and juvenile detention. African American women continue to be incarcerated at a rate twice that of white women and are among the fastest growing prison population. Among African American transgender people, half report having spent time in prison. While recently state and federal prison populations have declined slightly, jail populations continue to increase. The rate at which the United States imprisons its people and the staggering percentage of imprisoned people who are African American indicates the country's orientation toward containment and control as its primary modes of dealing with the issues created by social, political, and economic inequities. The use of imprisonment and increasingly long sentences as a catchall response to issues such as economic desperation, substance dependence, nonconforming gender identities has devastating effects on the communities from which imprisoned people come. A Pew Charitable Trusts report found that a family with an imprisoned parent earned, on average, 22% less per year than it did the previous year. Children with imprisoned parents are much more likely to be expelled from school than their peers—23% of students with imprisoned parents are expelled versus just 4% of the general student population. Communities suffering from high rates of imprisonment also frequently

experience the consequences of destabilized neighborhoods and families including poor physical and mental health conditions, struggles to keep families afloat financially, and the disintegration of family and other social bonds.¹²

In addition to the loss of freedom, those who are incarcerated encounter unbearable, often inhumane conditions including daily humiliations, physical and psychological abuse, sexual violence, medical neglect and abuse, and withholding of information and communication with the outside world. These conditions are designed to compromise imprisoned people's abilities to stay connected to their social networks, maintain physical and mental health, and develop their educational and vocational abilities. These conditions include:

1. Solitary confinement—the over reliance on solitary confinement (also known as segregation, isolation and restrictive housing) yields growing safety concerns. People are subjected to twenty-two- to twenty-four-hour-a-day confinement, denied human contact and participation in programming and often experience “no touch torture” including sensory deprivation, extreme temperatures, or forced insomnia;
2. Shackling—Although shackling is widely regarded as an assault on human dignity as well as an unsafe medical practice, women who are incarcerated

¹² Cathy Albisa, Marbre Stahly-Butts and Patrick Mason, Ph.D. - Movement for Black Lives: Economic Justice, (<http://www.polcy.m4bl.org/uploads/economic-justice.pdf>), 29

are still routinely shackled during pregnancy and childbirth. Restraining pregnant women at any time increases their potential for physical harm from an accidental trip or fall. It also poses a risk of serious harm to the woman's fetus, including the potential for miscarriage. During labor, delivery, and postpartum recovery, shackling can interfere with appropriate medical care and be detrimental to the health of the mother and her newborn child. Despite the fact that shackling pregnant women is degrading, unnecessary, and a violation of human rights, only ten states currently, prohibit the practice by law;

3. Physical and sexual abuse are rampant in prisons. The imbalance of power between people who are incarcerated and guards leads to the use of both direct and indirect physical force based on the prisoner's total dependence on guards for necessities and the guards' ability to withhold privileges. In popular culture, prison rape is often the subject of jokes. In public discourse, it is viewed as inevitable or even deserved, the consequence of one's criminality. Nearly half of prison staff who sexually abuse people who are incarcerated face no legal consequences. In cases where sexual abuse is confirmed, only 30% of victims receive crisis counseling or medical follow-up. The glaring levels of impunity, lack of treatment, and failure to take action against those who commit sexual violence sends a

dangerous message. Studies on abuse of women in prison reveal that male correctional officers sexually abuse women who are incarcerated with almost total impunity. In many women's prisons, male correction officers are allowed to watch women when they are dressing, showering, or using the toilet and some guards regularly harass women who are incarcerated. Women also report groping and other sexual abuse by male staff during pat downs and other searches. For victims of prior abuse, this environment further exacerbates their trauma. The full extent of the problem is unknown because many women who are incarcerated are reluctant to report staff sexual misconduct.

4. Healthcare—Incarcerated people are a population with significant medical and mental health needs, but prison health care services are often abysmal. In many cases, this leads to needless suffering, disability, and death and poses a serious threat to public health when certain diseases go undiagnosed or untreated. A 2011 national survey of transgender people by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found that 12% of people who had been in jails or prisons reported denial of routine health care and 17%—including 30% of African American respondents—reported denial of hormones. Additionally, there are now far more people with mental illnesses in prisons and jails than there are in state psychiatric hospitals.

People with mental disabilities may struggle more than others to adjust to the extraordinary stresses of incarceration, to follow the rules governing every aspect of life and to respond promptly to staff orders. Subsequently, mentally ill incarcerated people across the United States are subjected to routine physical abuse by guards, including being doused with chemical sprays, shocked with stun guns, and strapped for hours to chairs or beds. Such mistreatment has led to deaths, though the number of casualties is unclear in part because jails and prisons classify them in various ways. Furthermore, jails and prisons are not uniformly required to report the use of force by guards. Prison administrations across the nation are not sufficiently focused on mental health issues and are failing to offer sufficient mental health treatment. Too little is being done to protect mentally ill patients from physical abuse by staff members, who are often inadequately trained.

5. Prison Education—Inadequate or the complete lack of prison education fails to meet the needs of men, women, and children behind bars. The learning needs of people who are incarcerated for long and short term offenses are particularly challenging and complex, but it's crucial that their needs are met and every learning opportunity is fulfilled. Educational and vocational training as well as substance abuse treatment services are

crucial. There is also a greater need for overall consistency in the provision of educational programming as well as a national system for recording data, so that people who are incarcerated are given every opportunity to progress and develop their skills during the period of their custody and upon their release.¹³

Access to education is essential not only to ensure that our communities can thrive, but to ensure the political, economic, and cultural health of the nation. However, there has been a purposeful and systemic denial of access to high quality educational opportunities to African American people, especially males. Education in the United States has always been a subversive act for African American people. During enslavement, African Americans were legally barred from the most basic forms of education including literacy and this continues to have consequences today. The current racial equity gap in education has roots that date back to enslavement. In fact, recent studies suggest that racial educational inequalities may be the most measurable and enduring legacy of slavery. The same study also verified ongoing income inequality correlated to counties where slavery was prevalent. Post-Civil War, and even after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, African American people have been locked into

¹³ Mya Hunter, Mark Anthony Johnson and Andrea Ritchie - Movement for Black Lives: Community Control, (<http://www.polcy.m4bl.org/uploads/community-control/an-end-to-all-jails-priosons-and-detention-facilities-as-we-know-them-and-the-establishment-of-policies-and-programs-to-address-the-current-oppressive-conditions-expreienced-by-people-who-are-imprisoned.pdf>), 11

segregated institutions that are underfunded and underresourced and vulnerable to severe health risks because of the decrepit conditions of some school buildings. The cradle-to-college pipeline has been systematically cut off for the African American communities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, twenty-three states spend more per pupil in affluent districts than in high-poverty districts that contain a high concentration of African American students. The United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights shows persistent and glaring opportunity gaps and racial inequities for African American students. African American students are less likely to attend schools that offer advanced coursework, less likely to be placed in gifted and talented programs and more likely to attend schools with less qualified educators and more law enforcement officers but no counselors.¹⁴

Public universities, colleges, and technical education remain out of reach for most in the United States and policies to help students cover costs continue to shift towards benefiting families that are more affluent. Funding cuts across the country are forcing individual student's tuition and fees to cover more operating costs at public colleges and universities. At the City University of New York (CUNY), the largest city public university system in the United States, tuition and fees cover over 50% of the operating

¹⁴ Mya Hunter, Mark Anthony Johnson and Andrea Ritchie - Movement for Black Lives: Community Control, (<http://www.polcy.m4bl.org/uploads/community-control/an-end-to-all-jails-prisons-and-detention-facilities-as-we-know-them-and-the-establishment-of-policies-and-programs-to-address-the-current-oppressive-conditions-experienced-by-people-who-are-imprisoned.pdf>), 13

budget. Since right before the recession, government funding for higher education has fallen significantly.¹⁵ Forty-seven states spent less in 2014-2015 on per student funding than they did at the start of the recession. Since financial aid is not sufficiently covering the basic needs of students attending public universities and colleges, many of them struggle to eat and pay for housing, transportation, day care, and health care. A Wisconsin Hope Lab survey showed half of all students surveyed were struggling with food and housing insecurity, 20% didn't have money to eat and 13% were homeless.¹⁶

The rising costs of higher education and exploitative and predatory lending practices of private and for-profit institutions make African American students more likely to drop out, leaving them and their families stuck with debilitating and crippling debt. United States student loan debt totals nearly \$1.3 trillion, with close to \$900 billion in federal student loans and more than seven million borrowers in default. Historically African American colleges and universities (HBCUs) have played a critical role in offering African American students, especially from low-income communities, access to higher education in an environment where they are supported and able to thrive.

¹⁵ Mya Hunter, Mark Anthony Johnson and Andrea Ritchie - Movement for Black Lives: Community Control, (<http://www.policy.m4bl.org/uploads/community-control/an-end-to-all-jails-prisons-and-detention-facilities-as-we-know-them-and-the-establishment-of-policies-and-programs-to-address-the-current-oppressive-conditions-experienced-by-people-who-are-imprisoned.pdf>), 14

¹⁶ Mya Hunter, Mark Anthony Johnson and Andrea Ritchie - Movement for Black Lives: Community Control, (<http://www.policy.m4bl.org/uploads/community-control/an-end-to-all-jails-prisons-and-detention-facilities-as-we-know-them-and-the-establishment-of-policies-and-programs-to-address-the-current-oppressive-conditions-experienced-by-people-who-are-imprisoned.pdf>), 17

However, these institutions are systematically underfunded, compared to predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Since the recession, deep state funding cuts have disproportionately affected HBCUs, and impairing their ability to offer high-quality educational opportunities and jeopardizing the future of many African American students.¹⁷ Structural racism, particularly against African Americans, has and continues to shape the rules of our economy since the founding of the United States. The combination of slavery, America's deep-rooted system of racial capitalism, and long-lasting discriminatory institutions have for centuries denied African Americans equal access to the wealth created through their labor. Racism continues to drive unequal economic outcomes and opportunities that are passed on generationally. In the past, this took the form of Jim Crow and problematic racial and gender exclusions in New Deal social policies and the most glaring, example of our racialized system of mass incarceration. Today, an entire system of laws, regulations, policies and normative practices explicitly exclude African Americans from the economy and from leading safe, healthy and economically secure lives. The perception of African American males across the country and for that matter, across the world must change. The dehumanization and criminalization of the African American male must be stopped.

¹⁷ Lumunba Bandele and Andrea Ritchie - Movement for Black Lives: Political Power, (<http://www.polcy.m4bl.org/uploads/protection-ad-increased-funding-for-black-institutions-including-historically-black-colleges-and-universitites-HBCUs-black-media-and-cultural-political-and-social-formations.pdf>), 21

Matthew 5:6 (KJV) states, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled.”¹ This scripture is the premise of the Barbershop Ministry Initiative and the rationale to engage young adults, particularly African American males, to actively seek social justice with a biblical mindset. Throughout our recent history, the clergy and congregants of the African American church have been a significant factor in helping this country move toward justice. In their pursuit for justice, the occupants of the church were identified as either “Christians” or “agitators of the American government system.”² The biblical mindset of these so-called agitators sought to break down the immorality of human imposed laws against those laws with spiritual fortitude. Jim Crow, voting rights acts, and legislation promoting segregated education are a few of the laws that were negated by those who actively sought social justice based on the Scriptures. The righteousness of the Bible upholds the morals of a society that claims to be founded on the teachings of Christ. For over twenty centuries, these teachings have convinced law-abiding men and women to change their way of thinking and conform more closely to the image of Christ. It is based on this powerful context that the Barbershop Ministry Initiative seeks to empower the youth of today to tear down

¹ The Gospel According to Matthew 5:6

² Hendricks, Obery, “The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus’ Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted,” Three Leaves Press, 2006, 19

unjust barriers, uplift those who can't stand, and bear the responsibility of truth that God's will is for His children to be free of all man-made concerns that hinder them from serving Him.

The catalyst for the Barbershop Ministry Initiative was the injury of one of Canaan's maintenance workers, who was hit in the head by random gunfire in front of his home in November 2015. Through the grace of our Heavenly Father, he survived with no permanent damage. It was decided that this situation would be used to galvanize our youth and protest against the gun violence in our streets. A pre-event was developed to help support our main event, which was scheduled for March of 2016. To ensure the attendance of as many youth as possible, the pre-event—a protest march—was scheduled for November 27, 2015, the day after Thanksgiving. Although that is the day that marks the start of Christmas shopping season, it was decided that this would be a great day to bring awareness to the ills of our communities and the nation. The theme of the march was “Stop Killing God's Children—**Bestow Love Amongst All Children of the King**.” The first letter of each word in the subtitle was in bold to form the acronym B.L.A.A.C.K. since the day after Thanksgiving is Black Friday (see Appendix for a copy of the announcement made in the church).

The march needed to be promoted in a big way and an opportunity arose to do just that. Several of Canaan's congregants are also a part of the National Action Network (NAN) founded by Rev. Al Sharpton. NAN has a weekly radio show that airs every

Saturday morning. The event was promoted on the radio show on Saturday, November 21, 2015 (See Appendix for the comments made during the radio show).

Having a legal demonstration in the streets of New York City required the completion of paperwork with the New York City Police Department to receive clearance and police escorts along the route of the march. Although we were protesting gun violence in our streets, the march was also an opportunity to strengthen our relationships with the police officers that serve in our neighborhood. In the summer of 2015, a detective was assassinated execution style approximately fifteen blocks from our church. In support of and gratitude for this servant's life, the decision was made to start the march at the spot where the detective lost his life. As the police escorted the protesters through the streets, marchers paused at the precinct where the detective was stationed and prayed for those who lost their lives and continually risk their lives to protect the community every day. As marchers walked through the most populated streets, the protesters shouted, "Stop Killing God's Children, Stop Killing God's Children!" Some bystanders clapped their hands, some stood in silence, some nodded their heads in agreement, some looked annoyed, and some joined the rallying cry. From the starting point of the march to its end at the historic Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, the number of marchers grew from thirty-five to approximately sixty people.

Once the march finished, the protesters were invited inside the church, where they participated in a prayer vigil for the community and the nation. The service included

testimony from the church maintenance worker who had been shot in the head, community activists, the president of Canaan's Social Action Commission, and a word from our Senior Pastor. During the service, the sixty people dwindled down to about twenty-five but quite a bit of youth protesters remained in the audience (See Appendix for one of the messages presented on B.L.A.A.C.K. Friday, p. 7).

The seed for the Barbershop Ministry Initiative had been sown. Following the march, the challenge was to keep the church and the youth in the community focused on the injustices in the neighborhood in part by understanding the importance of strengthening one's relationship with our Heavenly Father so the future generations would be shaped in accordance to His will. The primary goal of the event was to present a safe haven for African American males, an environment where they would not be judged by their looks, actions or words. There was an unwritten policy that what was shared among the participants stayed among them; no one would share any information with anyone outside of the group. Since the only place where African Americans males typically feel free to say what is on their mind and not be judged for it is the barbershop, the decision was made to call the initiative the Barbershop Ministry. The theme for the main event was "Straight Talk: Shaping Brothers' Heads for the Future."

The event was scheduled for March 19, 2016. In the meantime several major holidays were coming up: Christmas, New Year's Day and Valentine's Day. My committee comprised of four key individuals – Deacon and Canaan's business

administrator - Tracey Hagans; Jr. Deacon and President for the National Action Network's Youth Huddle - Patrice Perry; renowned social activist - Brother Howard Inman; Canaan's president of the congregation and community representative – Sister Dawn Hill; and media consultant, Sister Kim Parker. The committee met several times before the event; three times in person and four times via conference call. We met to discuss various topics such as outreach to the community, where and how to set up the event, venue speakers and presenters, educational resources, employment opportunities and what results are we looking to achieve. An advertisement for the event was placed in the free Harlem Community Paper for two weeks and flyers were distributed in front of major places such as Harlem Hospital; the Adam Clayton Powell New York State Building; the Apollo Theater; neighborhood churches; and of course, barbershops. Letters of invitation were also sent to several senior pastors of neighboring churches (See Appendix for a sample letter). The Barbershop Ministry event was promoted on two local radio stations, on Facebook and Instagram, in church announcements, on posters placed outside the church, and by word of mouth.

Finally, the day of the event arrived and everything was in place, unfortunately, the first presentation for the day did not go well. But the Holy Spirit took control and the event was well received and appreciated. Of course, some things that worked well during the event and some did not. For example, we planned for our first presentation to be the showing of a portion of the movie *Barbershop* to demonstrate how the camaraderie,

humor, and trust among the characters in the movie mirror life in a typical African American barbershop, but the DVD would not play. Instead we began the event by welcoming everyone and speaking on the necessity of understanding the plight of African American men in this nation and around world.

Then, participants were asked to trust their brethren by confessing their dreams, nightmares, experiences, defeats and their current relationship with YHWH. In preparation for small group sessions to take place later in the day, participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- Do you know who you are?
- Are you willing to find a better way to live your life?
- Are you satisfied with your spiritual state?
- What is your definition of the church?

Then Brother Howard Inman, resident church activist and the founder of Canaan's Social Action Commission, made a presentation on Canaan's Institute on Public Policy (See Appendix). He expressed that if there is to be any kind of change for our families and their future, the planning must begin today. The day also included presentations on free GED and college courses to enhance one's educational skills as well as self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Following the presentations, the participants were organized into groups of seven men each. Each group had an assigned facilitator and were tasked with reflecting on one

of the previously mentioned questions. The group also reinforced the trust factor that each person needed to have in the other. After an hour, the participants came back together in one unified group to discuss what was shared in the small groups. As a person who pledged to be a confidante of my brother's information, this writer will not go into great detail but their experiences are very similar to those expressed in the previous chapters. The event attendees comprised of senior members of Canaan's diaconate, middle-aged African American males, young adults who had some college experience, and a few teenagers. Some attendees had experienced police brutality, drug abuse, lack of confidence, unfulfilled educational goals, incarceration, homelessness, a broken family bonds and no church home. In addition, we had a very lively small-group discussion as to why our participants did not believe it to necessary for them to attend church. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Although we were able to provide clothes and shoes for some of the attendees as well as resources to help fulfill our participants' educational goals and provide gainful employment on the spot, no one came forth to give their lives to Christ. Finally, we came together as one, holding hands and singing a song of comfort, trust, and love for one another. However, as the event ended, some lingering questions remained. How would the participants identify their place in God's ultimate plan? What is the significance of the African and African American male in Christianity and how do we claim our stake

before the presence of our Lord and the people who serve him? These are concerns we plan to address in a future event.

Chapter 4. A Theological Perspective: The African American Male Finding
Their Identity in the Holy Scriptures and Moses – The Great
Liberator

As mentioned and discussed heavily during the event, one of the things that keeps African American males away from the church and the Bible is that they seldom can see themselves in the Holy Scriptures. They are not taught how their heritage is linked to God's ultimate plan. If they question it, they hear responses such as "Where do you get off saying Moses is African? I have always been taught in Bible study that Moses was either a Hebrew, an Israelite, or a Levite but never, ever an African! I have studied the Holy Scriptures all my life because it comes under the authority of God and not those philosophical people in seminary. Son, I think you should pick up the Bible and try reading it sometimes. Don't let that mumbo jumbo you hear in school infect your mind because that's exactly what the enemy wants. Don't fall into his hands. Stay focused young man, the Black Panther Party died off many years ago and you will meet the same fate if you don't stop this 'I'm black and I'm proud' kick that you're on. Keep things the way that they are and don't disrupt the fabric of Christ. Son, does it really matter who is black, white, yellow or green? Just serve God and you shall be made whole."

This statement reminds me of the people who say "All Lives Matter" when our young African American males and females take to the streets under their "Black Lives

Matter” banner. Of course we know that all lives matter, because God has breathed into every living thing. However, just as those people miss the point about the movement, it’s those same people who resent the fact they African Americans are trying to shed light on what’s really going on in this world. People don’t want to hear the truth about their neighbor, their nation, or their Bible. Second Timothy 2:15 (KJV) states, “Study to shew thyself approved unto GOD, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” This writer has and will continue to pick up the Bible and read it not just for the sake of reading but to rightly divide the word of truth with the help of the Holy Spirit. Yes, all lives matter, but it’s the lives of my people who are being strangled by the images associated with every character in the bible all because someone else believed the true blackness of the Bible didn’t matter. In his book, *Moses and Monotheism*, Dr. Sigmund Freud states,

It might have been expected that one of the many authors who recognized Moses to be an Egyptian name would have drawn the conclusion, or at least considered the possibility, that the bearer of an Egyptian name was himself an Egyptian. In modern times we have no misgiving in drawing such conclusions, although today, a person bears two names, not one, and or although a change in name or assimilation of it in new conditions cannot be ruled out. So we are not at all surprised to find out that the poet Chamisso was of French extraction, Napoleon Bonaparte, on the other hand, of Italian, and that Benjamin Disraeli was an Italian Jew, as his name would lead us to expect. And such an inference from the name to the race should be more reliable and indeed inclusive in respect of early and primitive times. Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, no historian has drawn this conclusion in this case of Moses, not even one of those

who, like Breasted, are ready to suppose that Moses *was cognizant of all the wisdom of the Egyptians.*"¹

Exodus 2:10 declares "When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'" Dr. Freud further discusses the origin of the name Moses. He explains how the additional "s" was added when the Bible was translated into Greek; so the name was actually supposed to read, "Mose." Dr. Freud continues by mentioning the name Mose means "child" in Egyptian and was primarily used as a suffix or abridgement to identify whom the father of the child was. For example, Thut-mose means "Thut has given a child"; Amen-mose, "Amen has given a child"; and Ptah-mose, "Ptah has given a child." These were the names of Pharaohs with the identity of their father affixed to their names. Moses, however, did not have his father affixed to his name. Since Pharaoh's daughter did not associate the boy child to his father, she simply named him "child." Dr. Freud concluded that it would have been highly unlikely that the Pharaoh's daughter would have named Moses based on the fragmented Hebrew meaning, "to draw out." She would have been educated in proper Egyptian etiquette and not the traditions of the slaves.

Moses grew up as an Egyptian, was educated as an Egyptian, and studied as an Egyptian.² In the great tradition of the ancient Egyptian civilization, wouldn't Moses

1. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1937, 6

² Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1937, 13

have had to look like he was an Egyptian to pull off being Pharaoh's son? Historically, the Egyptians were dark skinned people. Genesis 10:6 indicates that Noah's son Ham had four sons of his own: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. Cush's descendants would later be referred to as Ethiopians. In Jeremiah 13:23, the prophet asks YHWH by asking, "Can an Ethiopian change his skin color or a leopard change its spots?" A Caucasian person can change their skin color by sunbathing while a dark skin person cannot change the color of their skin as easily. If Moses wasn't dark-skinned, he would not have been allowed to mingle among the great people of ancient times. For the Egyptians, a lighter skin color would have been an early sign of an illness or disease such as leprosy because it would have looked abnormal in comparison. It's difficult to believe that Pharaoh's daughter would have brought dishonor to her father's kingdom by adopting a boy child that did not resemble them.

After Moses slays an Egyptian, he flees to Midian where he marries Zipporah, the daughter of a priest named Reuel (or Jethro), has two sons with her. The father's name, Reuel, means 'friend of YHWH.' Again Moses becomes a member of a family that is rich in tradition and honorable to all that they serve. In the last example, the Pharaoh's daughter does her father's kingdom bidding by maintaining honor in the household while Reuel does exuberates this same honor for his father's kingdom. Neither Reuel nor Pharaoh's daughter would do anything to disrupt the order of things within the respective kingdoms of which they are a part.

Within the Bible, the oracles of the Old Testament prophets were sometimes structured so that the second portion of the verse of scripture would either be in agreement, in direct contrast, or extend the thought expressed in the first portion of the verse. For example, in Isaiah 55:8-9, the prophet quotes YHWH by saying, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your way my ways declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Another example comes from Habakkuk 3:7: “I saw the tents of Cushan overwhelmed by trouble; the tent curtains of the land of Midian are shaking.” Although the genealogy of Keturah, the mother of the Midianites and the second wife of Moses, is not mentioned in the Bible, it is clear that two tribes of the same ancestry are being compared in this text. The Scriptures states that the people of Cushan (a variation of the name Cushite and Cush) were of dark complexion. Therefore, from this text, one may derive that the Midianites are of the same complexion as the Cushites.

One tradition the Midianites and the Egyptians had in common is circumcision.³ In Exodus 4:24-25, Zipporah showed her African roots when she saves her husband’s life by performing the ancient Kemetic procedure. The text says, “At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it. ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of

³ Matthews, Victor and Don Benjamin, Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East, Paulist Press, 1997, 79

blood to me,' she said. So the LORD let him alone. (At the time she said 'bridegroom of blood,' referring to circumcision.)” Some commentaries state that Zipporah sensed a divine displeasure that threatened Moses’ life so she acted quickly to perform the circumcision on their young son. Without Zipporah knowing the ancient Kemetic ways of life and without knowing what her God had needed in the moment, Moses would have been dead and the Exodus would have ended before it began.

Moses took his education with him through the wilderness and to Mount Sinai. He had studied alongside the Egyptians gaining their wisdom and knowledge of history, mathematics, and the law. The Egyptians lived to adhere to 613 laws that are found in *The Book of the Coming Forth by Day and by Night*, more commonly known as *The Book of the Dead*. The Hebrews essentially adopted these same laws and divided them into precepts, decrees, ordinances and commandments. The Ten Commandments that YHWH wrote on tablets for Moses to present to the Hebrew tribe were probably very familiar to Moses already, as these ten laws were within the 613 laws Moses studied with the Egyptians. This thought may be limited as proof but the Holy Scriptures do not provide any additional text where Moses questions YHWH on the rationale of each commandment and how to instruct the Hebrews to obey them.

This writer believes that nothing goes to waste in the eyes of the LORD. YHWH has a great use for every kernel of knowledge He deposits within us, and Moses’ Egyptian education was no exception. No wonder modern-day societies discouraged

African Americans to read and write because it was Moses' (a black man) teaching that currently served as the law to civilize the land. "By a prophet, YHWH brought Israel up from Egypt and by a prophet, He was preserved" says the book of Hosea 12:13. Moses was the prophet whom preserves YHWH's laws, traditions, and His name.

In Exodus 3:14, God introduces Himself to Moses as "I Am Who I Am" but the Masoretic Text states that God introduced Himself as YHWH – Yode, Hay, Waw, Hay. In the book known as the Acts of the Apostles, chapter seven, verse twenty-two notes that Moses was educated in all Egyptian books and gained wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

Just as God blessed the Egyptians with a great civilization for over 400 years, He also blessed the Cushites, Midianites and the Canaanites. The Canaanites lived in the land of milk and honey; the land promised to the Hebrews. It is clear that at some point, these four African nations eventually fell out of favor with God and were subjected to His vengeance for a crime not clearly understood by us today. Moses understands that God has promised him a great nation that will fill all the earth. In all of Moses wisdom, did he ever question that his God could be the same God that led these nations to greatness?

The Holy Scriptures state that there is power in the name and the commandments says we are not to use it in vain. The law in Exodus 20:7 says, "You shall not misuse the name of YHWH, your God, for YHWH will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name." Scholars such as Victor Matthews and John D. Currid and James Charlesworth

agree, the name YHWH is an ancient name whose origin is Canaanite. It is also mentioned by scholars that the Canaanite and Egyptian people worshipped other gods for items such as prosperity, healing and notoriety. It is worth noting that the Holy Scriptures identifies YHWH in other names as well, such as *YHWH El-Elyon* is often translated as “God Almighty;” *YHWH Yireh* means God who provides (Genesis 22:14); *YHWH – Rapha* means God who heals (Exodus 15:26). The OT prophets called upon these same names to invoke the characteristics of YHWH and not other gods. Could it be that the Caucasian scholars wrongly interpreted the ancient text of these African nations as they called out to YHWH to invoke a specific characteristic to a specific need just as the Hebrew nation proclaims they do in the Bible? If the name of the Hebrew God has a Canaanite origin, it can be determined that the Hebrews identified with the Canaanite God and not one of their own origin. The point of all this is if Moses wants to fulfill God’s promise of having a great nation, he will emulate those great nations whom have come before him that God has also blessed. Therefore, Moses would want to preserve the will of God by invoking the same name the previous nations of African descent did, in order not to disgrace or dishonor his Lord and King, YHWH.

Jerome Bettis, the former running back of the Pittsburgh Steelers was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2015. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Bettis quoted his father by saying

I don’t have much to give you as you go off to college; I don’t have money for your pocket and I don’t have any educational experience to

share and help you in times of trouble but what I do have one thing to give, and I hope you sincerely cherish it in your heart – a good name! I worked very hard at my name and today, my name means something. It means respect and dignity because others know I will never cheat them. Son, don't go over to another neighborhood and mess up my good name because it's all I have to offer you.⁴

Scholars of the NET Bible primarily illustrate the descendants of Ham, the originator of the African people, as ones associated with hate, war or castration. Descendants such as Canaanites, Egyptians, Hittites, Jebusites and Cushites just to name a few. Their kings, pharaohs and administrators are viewed as demigods. The name of the African is vilified in the bible; and in turn, the African American is vilified in our society and vilified in the educational books taught in schools. One of the major keys in changing how society looks upon African American males is to first change how they perceive themselves. The best way to undertake this work is to reexamine those things that have been misinterpreted. For example, can God still be so angry with our Egyptian, Midianite, Cushite, and Canaanite ancestors that He still imputes His revenge on the generations that exist from the nations today? Did we not, as a people, have the favor of YHWH at some point on this earth? Doesn't the existence of the ancient pyramids of Kemet and Canaan display the favoritism YHWH once had for His children? Doesn't the stability of these ancient symbols show God's grace upon our ancestry and demonstrates His love for us as His child and He, as our Father?

⁴ Pro Football Player – Jerome Bettis, induction speech in to the Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio on August 9, 2015, 2

Exodus 3:6 states, “Then He said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.” When YHWH says, “I am the God of your father” which father is He referring to? As per Scripture, Moses’ Hebrew father is identified as Amram in Exodus 6:20 but Moses did not know this man. The Pharaoh, the father of the daughter who claimed Moses as her son, would technically be Moses adopted grandfather and may have known more about Moses than any other male figure growing up in Moses’ early life. Then, the Scripture should say grandfather and not father. Note, the names that follows, “I am the God of your father...” are spoken by YHWH in genealogical succession. For Abraham is the father of Isaac and the grandfather of Jacob. Initially, Abraham was called Abram before he made his covenant with YHWH. Abram means “exalted father” and Ham means “father of many.” The name Abraham is bestowed upon Abram only after he seals his covenant with YHWH by circumcision. Circumcision was not, as this time, documented and practiced by any other nation of people except for those people of African descent.

Previously, it was mentioned how the Egyptians would add on the father’s name to child for identification. Instead of the father’s name being added in front of the word for “child,” could YHWH have reversed the naming of children by having the earthly father’s name in the back? If this hypothesis has any merit, then it’s possible that, “I am the God of your father...” can refer to Ham as the father of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and

Moses. In an attempt to briefly legitimize this statement, YHWH adds His title “El” to those men that He believes are in accordance with His spirit. Men with names such as “Israel,”⁵ for Jacob, father of the twelve sons of the twelve tribes, “Reuel”⁶ for Jethro, the priest and “Emmanuel”⁷ the name prophesied by Isaiah stating the God is with us , as noted in the Holy Scriptures. Further, of the sons of Noah, only Japheth migrated to the Caucasus Mountains area, Shem, Ham and their children settled in what’s known today as Africa and the Middle East. First, Nimrod was the primary founder of the nations along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers; Nimrod is the son of Cush. Second, scholars suggest when names appear in both the genealogical list of Ham and Shem most probably means that they were Hamites and Shemites living in the same region in antiquity where they were free to intermarry. The names Havilah and Sheba appear in both genealogical list of Ham and Shem, meaning Abraham’s lineage can probably be linked to Ham by way of his father Terah. Terah means wanderer or a place in the Bible.

In Genesis 9:1 it states, “Then GOD blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.” The sons of Noah were instructed to increase the number of people and fill the earth. Again, the name Ham means “father of many.” The NIV Bible Commentary says of Genesis 9:25:

Some maintain that Ham’s son was punished because of his father’s sin but Exodus 20:5 restricts such punishment to ‘those who hate me.’ This

⁵ The Book of Genesis 32:28

⁶ The Book of Exodus 2:18

⁷ The Book of Isaiah 7:15

account of Noah's cursing and blessing of his sons is addressed to Israel. Most likely it is for this reason that Canaan is here singled out from Ham's descendants as the object of Noah's curse. Israel would experience firsthand the depth of Canaanite sin and the harshness of God's judgment on it. In that judgment Noah's curse came to be fulfilled in the experience of this segment of Ham's descendants.⁸

If YHWH has chosen to enforce judgment on Ham by punishing him, why would YHWH punish the supposed child of Shem and Jacob? This would be unjust. If Israel is experiencing firsthand the depth of Canaanite sin then Israel must be a descendant of Ham.

As for Noah's two other sons, Shem and Japheth, it is not documented that they served a god, let alone a god with a Canaanite name. However, it is clear that the Egyptians had some familiarity with angelic beings and/or the spirit of YHWH. After Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, it states "God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What is the matter, Hagar?' Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."⁹ God here is translated in the Masoretic text as Elohim which the Hebrews equate as another name for YHWH. Also, if Ham's descendants are cursed, why would a great nation be made from a boy whose mother is Egyptian? For that matter, why would two tribes with an Egyptian mother—

⁸ The Book of Genesis 9:25

⁹ The Book of Genesis 21:17

Ephraim (via tribe of Joseph) and Manasseh, replace the tribes Dan and Issachar in the book of Revelations?¹⁰ Why would GOD intervene and save this boy's life simply because He heard his cry? Were two promises made to Abraham being he is the father, as per the Scriptures, of two great nations? Although the text speaks of the angel telling Hagar not to be afraid, this doesn't appear to be in reference to her seeing the angel but regarding her not to be afraid that the boy will die because she states in Genesis 21:16, "I cannot watch the boy die." Therefore, she is familiar with God and comfortable with His angels for she follows the angel's instruction without any apprehension. This, in my opinion, is further proof that the Egyptians were in contact and in covenant with YHWH before the Exodus. Therefore, it may be concluded that Ham is the father that precedes Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Exodus 3:6.

In Exodus 3:15-16, Scripture pluralizes the word "father" which specifies that the text is speaking about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, in verse 6, the word "father" is not pluralized, meaning that YHWH is speaking about a specific person or father. Does Moses know who YHWH is referring to? Note, the text makes no mention of Moses questioning YHWH as to who this father was. Further, there remain lingering questions about the recorded birth of Moses in the Old Testament. Why would a mother, anxious to save the life of her three-month-old son, set him afloat in an ark of bulrushes close to Pharaoh's house when an order was made to kill Hebrew children at this time. Who was

¹⁰ The Book of Revelations 7:6 and 7:8

the princess who rescued him and returned him to his mother to nurse? Why was the life of the child, now returned to his mother, no longer under any apparent threat? Moreover, why, contrary to Egyptian custom, was an unmarried princess allowed later to adopt Moses and bring him up in the palace as her son?¹¹

The author Ahmed Osman has searched for answers to these questions in texts regarded as authoritative outside the Old Testament, the Talmud and the Qu'ran. After leaving Egypt to Midian, the Talmud speaks of Moses' departure as somewhat peaceful. But the Koran indicates Moses did not go directly to Midian after leaving Egypt. Instead he went to Ethiopia, became king and eventually had to flee because his life was in danger. Sura 28:20 states,

And there came a man,
Running from the furthest end
Of the City. He said:
O Moses! the Chiefs
Are taking counsel together
About thee to slay thee: So get thee away, for I
Do give thee sincere advice.¹²

Dr. Osman also notes,

It is reasonable to assume that scribes who wrote their accounts of these happenings many centuries later did not invent the facts but based what they wrote on genuine historical events whose memory had been transmitted orally for generations, with the distortions and accretions that are inevitable when stories are passed on by word of mouth. The principal points of the Moses story from the above sources are that he:

¹¹ Ahmed Osman, *Christianity: An Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 2005, 67.

¹² Holy Qu'ran, Sura 28:20

- 1) was a Hebrew child, born in the early years of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt;
- 2) posed a threat to the Egyptian throne;
- 3) was sent into hiding to save his life;
- 4) was later restored to his mother and lived in the royal palace;
- 5) became a king;
- 6) abdicated and fled to Midian when his life was again threatened;
- 7) and, of course, as we learn later, believed there was only one God.

To establish the historical identity of Moses we have to seek a personality of whom at least the majority of the above statements are true. There is only one such personality of whom they are actually *all* true—the Pharaoh Akhenaten.¹³

Therefore, if Akhenaten is Moses, then Amenhotep III is the father. Therefore, Ham would be the father of significance that YHWH is referencing in the Exodus scripture because Amenhotep is a descendant of Ham. Ham is the father of a multitude of nations, more numerous than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Today, more people are identify with their African descent than any other ethnicity. The authorities of this world work extremely hard to contain this truth by creating systems that are accurate once a certain culture and mindset is implemented and accepted by the people. Dr. Jan Assmann, author of the book *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* states, “In each case, man, who has fallen outside the order of nature either through his lack of a set of instincts or through a superabundance of knowledge, must create an artificial world in which he can live—and that is culture.”¹⁴ Dr. Assmann continues, “Culture does not seem to be a compensation for man’s lack of instincts and

¹³ Osman, *Christianity: An Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 2005, 67-68.

¹⁴ Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, 78

environmental adaptability, but rather as a space in which man, with his surplus of knowledge and his troubled spirit, can devise himself, exceed himself, and for a certain time, at least, bring himself into equilibrium.”¹⁵ This is what the African American male must accomplish for himself: to be in equilibrium not just in the world but within himself.

In his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, David Walker states,

Their destruction may indeed be procrastinated awhile, but can it continue long, while they are oppressing the Lord’s people? Has He not the hearts of all men in His hands? Will he suffer one part of his creatures to go on oppressing another like brutes always, with impunity? And yet, those avaricious wretches are calling for *Peace!!!* I declare, it does appear to me, as though some nations think God is asleep, or that he made the Africans for nothing else but to dig their mines and work their farms, or they cannot believe history, sacred or profane.¹⁶

African Americans need to change our thinking of who the true Father is and whom they are to serve. David Walker goes on to say:

All persons who are acquainted with history, and particularly the Bible, who are not blinded by the God of this world, and are not actuated solely by avarice—who are able to lay aside prejudice long enough to view candidly and impartially, things as they were, are, and probably will be—who are willing to admit that God made man to serve Him *alone*, and that man should have no other Lord or Lords but Himself—that God Almighty is the *sole proprietor* or *master* of the whole human family, and will not on any consideration admit of a colleague, being unwilling to divide his glory with another.

YHWH tells us that He is the God of our ancestors – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and our ancestors served Him with knowledge, wisdom and understanding in spirit and in

¹⁵ Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, 81

¹⁶ David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, Boston 1829, 47

truth. Christians are commissioned to teach and preach throughout all the earth how He built wealthy civilizations through our people; established covenants with our people; and formed a more intimate relationship with our ancestors. African American males need to see their life through the lenses of the African Moses.

In addition to the academic achievements, the education of self and how our Creator resides in His people is important for forming a relationship with Him, our church, and our community. Walker states,

I pray that the Lord may undeceive my ignorant brethren, and permit them to throw away pretensions, and seek after the substance of learning. I would crawl on my hands and knees through mud and mire, to the feet of a learned man, where I would sit and humbly supplicate him to instill into me, that which neither devils nor tyrants could remove, only with my life—for coloured people to acquire learning in this country, makes tyrants quake and tremble on their sandy foundations.¹⁷

Knowledge is what will liberate the soul of man and in turn, produce a community of redefined minds with a new self-awareness of Moses, the man called by GOD, as a wise, African liberator. Although African American males have lost their identity, they can find it in Moses. It is crucial that to remember the history of our ancestors and how YHWH interacted with them to learn and practice liberation. Semantic memory is fine but it's our episodic memory of spiritual events that will get us through. The oppression of the African American people is systematic. However, oppression is also circumstantial, and it can be defeated through individual and collective achievements.

¹⁷ David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, Boston 1829, 52

Let us never forget slavery (disjunctive memory); civil rights movements (adjunctive memory) until we are liberated (conjunctive memory). Moses stepped out on faith because he understood YHWH chose him and ordained him for a task. African American males need to trust in their faith by walking out on it, strong and confident in what they have heard. Their image must change for the better and be bigger than those who just see us looked up in chains and imprisoned—physically, mentally and spiritually.

There is truth about our ancestors and our history in the Scriptures. We must take the time necessary to rightly divide the truth through our memory, our experiences, our imaginations and our education. Without the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding Moses obtained from Egypt, he may not have been able to achieve all that he did. YHWH will use one's past experiences to advance His kingdom on earth. Therefore, we must restore and reform our covenantal relationship with YHWH and reestablish ourselves as leaders for the coming kingdom and for generations to come. We must take our rightful place as stewards of the Word and restructure our positions in the church by being accepting of what God wants us to do for Him. In turn, members of our communities will notice and rely on us to bring order and stability to those who do not live out YHWH's truth for them. If we do this, then there will be no more police brutally abusing our youth, no more African American males imprisoned for a profit and no more low self-esteem. Our achievements in higher education will be the norm and more importantly, our relationship with our ancestors and YHWH will be restored to the fullest.

Chapter 5. Pastoral Care: Strengthening Your Relationship through Reading
and Practicing the Holy Scriptures

Our hunger and thirst for true justice and righteousness sits in the plans our Heavenly Father has set for us. For African Americans to gain true knowledge of God's will and desire, one must study and yearn to accept His truth and not what one believes the truth to be. Second Timothy 2:15 (KJV) states, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Psalm 119:55-56 (NET) declares, "I remember your name during the night, O LORD, and I will keep your law. This has been my *practice* (italics this writer's), for I observe your precepts."

Historically, the psalter is in part about YHWH's justice. In His justice, He implores those whom claim to be in covenant with Him, to handle situations and dealings justly. Brueggemann states, "The struggle of the oppressed against the unjust, when cast theologically, is the issue of *theodicy* (an examination of God's justice). These concluding comments explore the ways in which the notion of *spirituality* is treated in the Psalms in relation to the issue of theodicy"¹. Therefore when one reads, one must learn to not just recall the words that were read but begin to embody the meaning and the thoughts behind the words. As we embody the spirit of the psalter, one must determine

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis, MN Fortress Press, 59

how the psalm is speaking in current circumstances. Brueggemann suggests categorizing certain psalms into three components: orientation, disorientation and new orientation.

The author equates these components to creation, disarray and new life respectively, and suggests that one finds one's human experiences in the psalms with these categorizations in mind.²

The components Brueggemann mentions are emphasized in the book of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." This suggests that creation flows from the words of God, in essence YHWH created all of us with the word. Therefore, we must handle the word of God intimately so we may gain knowledge and wisdom spiritually, as He intended.

In order to have this intimate relationship with God, one must learn how to read and study His word masterfully, and that requires time and discipline. Part of this writer's project will be aimed at an intergenerational group of learners. The hope is to unveil a Bible study during a retreat that will cause participants to want to conform themselves more closely to Christ by becoming one with the spoken Word. The plan would be to institute a disciplined reading regime that will include the deciphering of images in a spiritual context. Thus, reading Scripture with the understanding that it may have multiple meanings, experiencing the Psalms by equating their sufferings and pains with those of the psalmist, and learning to read with new lenses that breeds new light within

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis, MN Fortress Press, 64

this same life. This is the same premise Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses in his book *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible*. He implores the community of believers to live out the Psalter; to embody and become the Word so one may attain a better understanding of Scripture and become a more efficient being by personifying the image of Christ.

Bonhoeffer states,

Life together under the Word begins at an early hour of the day with a worship service together. A community living together gathers for praise and thanks, Scripture reading, and prayer. The profound silence of morning is first broken by the prayer and song of the community of faith. After the silence of the night and early morning, hymns and the Word of God will be heard all the more clearly. Along these lines the Holy Scriptures tell us that the first thought and the first word of the day belongs to God.³

Bonhoeffer adds, “The Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for His congregation. Now that Christ is with the Father, the new humanity of Christ—the body of Christ—on earth continues to pray his prayer to the end of time. This prayer belongs not to the individual member, but to the whole body of Christ.”⁴

The first part of the study would consist of having participants review printed images of people experiencing suffering and healing, chaos and peace, and life and death in their lives. In our future event, the attendees would describe, in a meditative practice

³ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 5. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress, 2004, 84

⁴ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 5. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress, 2004, 86

such as Lectio Divina, what they think the person/ people in the images are experiencing. Further, they will engage in the psalter by meditating on a selected psalm individually and proceed to call out verses, words, or phrases that speak to them in the psalm. In his book *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, Dr. Brian Stock states, “In general, ancient thinkers did not make a connection between the study of the self, the soul, or self-understanding and the composition of autobiographies.”⁵ However, according to Stock, St. Augustine of Hippo did make this connection and expresses it in his book titled, *The Confessions*.

Once a reader, thinker, or student of the Word experiences the Psalter through their own lenses of life, the Word can be rightly divided. Dr. Stock further states

Augustine was convinced that knowledge acquired through the external senses is transitory, and that it reflects the spatial and temporal situation of the observer. The person who relates his own life, as he did, tells the story within the limits of the knowledge available, not as it would be told by an omniscient author who has all the relevant facts at his disposal.⁶

The relevance of equating one’s life to the Psalter makes the word a living and breathing organism just as YHWH lives and breathes within us today.

This practice will take some effort as well as mental and spiritual strength to stay focused. However, it is important to remain purposeful in reading and reciting the psalms

⁵ Stock, Brian. *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2001, 55

⁶ Stock, Brian. *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2001, 61

so they may dwell in our hearts. The Psalter must be experienced so one can identify with the emotion of its authors and understand its historical significance today for a better tomorrow. In the book *The Context of Religious Reading*, author Paul J. Griffiths writes, “For most religious readers, the choice of what to read religiously is made based upon the authoritative curricular decisions of an institution of religious learning—and made without the fact that they are being made coming to consciousness.”⁷

Through a more disciplined reading, one not only conforms more closely to the image of Christ, but also gains a greater understanding of His pain, His sufferings, His wisdom and His love for all of us. One must learn to translate the image of His life into ours. It is in the psalter that YHWH expresses His emotional side to us because He, as the Christ, quotes them in specific emotional moments of His life here on earth. This writer suggests this was done as an example on how we must live our lives while we are on earth.

As part of the future steps for this project, I will request the participants to select images of people, places, and things they believe to express the emotions of the psalms. They will also select images that depict the emotions associated with what they have been dealing with within the last year, last month, last week, yesterday or even that day. The participants would then be asked to associate their emotion with the emotion Jesus may have been experiencing when He quoted the Psalter. For example, was Christ expressing

⁷ Paul J. Griffiths, *The Context of Religious Reading*, Oxford Press 1999, 64

a feeling similar to the participants when He cried out, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1) or when He quotes from Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18: “I am not referring to all of you, I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture. He who shared my bread has turned against me.” If the participants can determine a relationship between their emotions and those Christ expressed by quoting the Psalter, reading the Psalms will be much more intimate and gratifying to the participant.

The project will continue by having each participant not only express their emotions through the Psalter, but to link their life experiences to a psalm as well. They will need to relive an event that stands out in their lives. For example, if the participant experienced a situation when his or her spouse or significant other had committed infidelity, he or she might reflect on the comfort they experience in his or her reading of Psalm 34:18: “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit;” The participant would continue to draw comfort by rereading the same psalm, focusing on verse 17: “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them: He delivers them from all their troubles.” The participant might even come to an expectation that God will deliver him or her from his or her suffering, especially when they review verse 4: “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.” The disciple will begin to breakdown the psalm and simultaneously break down the event in their life and equate themselves to being righteous by crying out to YHWH and believing that He

hears them and will deliver them from future troubles because they have already been delivered from this past trouble. As the participants expound on the psalm further, say, by reviewing verse 8—“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him.”—they may be reminded of the hymnal “Taste and See, the Goodness of the LORD” and begin to make comparisons of how they tried the Lord in their darkest time and took refuge in His fortress of love, trusting that He would heal them from their infliction of pain. It is this writer’s belief that through this exercise, the participants relationship with God and His Word will be so much richer and rewarding.

My definition of mission has been drawn from the book, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* by Christopher J. H. Wright. He states, "Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation. Our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God."¹ This means He performs His missionary work through us. As the people of God and the priesthood of believers, we are tasked to invite all that have an ear to listen to receive Christ as their Savior and Redeemer.

Every servant wants to do the best job he or she can for his or her master, including yours truly. Therefore, as servants, we look to enhance the effectiveness of ministry by implementing certain tested strategies, being mindful of what society is experiencing and reviewing statistical analyses to better direct our efforts. Yearning to make as many disciples as possible, we are constantly seeking a better way, a new methodology ensure a greater harvest of disciples. At the same time, we display our ignorance by determining our growth based on numerical reports, such as "Outreach 100: Fastest-Growing Churches in America," rather than spiritual encounters. In other words,

¹ Christopher J H Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Intervarsity Press 2006, 7

worldly standards are applied to spiritual work and often lacking in the ability to actually measure results.

The book, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* describes how Rick Warren surveyed the community surrounding his church and identified specific needs of his neighbors. He took on the highest priority concerns and combated them head on through ministries within the church. As a result, Warren was rewarded with a huge congregation of worshippers in his flock. This strategy of determining the needs of the community and addressing it head on appears to be an effective methodology this writer would want to imitate and prayerfully duplicate in my ministry. Listening to the needs and concerns of the people is essential for any ministry to grow and be effective witnesses for Christ.

The book also mentions a quote from Kevin Sullivan of High Pointe Church that states, “I know you don’t want to talk to me, but can I bribe you with a little Starbucks?”² This tactic of influencing someone to talk with you with coffee or anything else seems to be an ineffective ministry because of its negative connotation. In my belief system, I don’t believe I would need to bribe someone to talk about the Gospel. As stated in the movie where Denzel Washington played Minister Malcolm X, “GOD ain’t no hustle!”

² Stetzer, Ed, and David Putman. *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006, 16

and using this strategy of bribery condones the lifestyle of the worldly and not those aspiring to be holy.

Most of the methodologies illustrated in Stetzer and Putnam's book seem to be effective strategies to use as I move further along in ministry experience, chiefly because of their thoroughness, precision, and emphasis in bringing more people before GOD and being in prayer. The strategies further define roles of laypeople and techniques to develop and enhance their spiritual formation which is essential to the effective implementation of a evangelistic method. In my ministry, lay personnel will be necessary and their spiritual

The *First View 2012* study area analysis for Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, New York ("Canaan"), summarizes areas of concerns in community as well as faith preferences. In its popular days, Harlem was known worldwide as a neighborhood with a consciousness for "black" social justice concerns such as civil rights and freedom from oppressive government laws. This consciousness still resides in Canaan.

Today, Canaan's congregation is predominantly African American as it was in the past. Yet, the study indicates that diversity in the neighborhood is extremely high. It states the area of study has an Anglo population of 37%, a Hispanic population of 34% and an African American population of just 19%.³ Based on the aforementioned statistics,

³ *The Percept Group*, <http://censusbureau.gov>, http://perceptgroup.com_first_view_2012_Canaan_Baptist_Church_of_Christ_132_West_116th_Street_New_York_NY_10032_three_mile_radius, 3

it is clear that the demographics of the community surrounding the church has changed dramatically. If Canaan is to remain relevant in the community, it must address social issues that are strategically color blind.

The family structures in the community are considered extremely non-traditional because the single-mother households are 17% higher than the national average. Furthermore, 20% of area households are below the poverty line; this is 7% higher than the country's average. The adult population of high school dropouts in the community is 5% above the country's average.⁴

It's no surprise that the top concerns for the area are to meet the very basic issues of life. Yet the study also concluded that the average household income is \$90,699 per year. the study indicated while 80.5% of the population aged twenty-five and over have graduated from high school as compared to the national average of 85.1%, college graduates account for 47.7% of those over twenty-five in the area versus 27.8% in the United States. This indicates that the numbers presented in *First View 2012* are perhaps a bit skewed. Another drawback is that the study does not include an ethnic breakdown of the single-mother households with children. It also doesn't breakdown the percentage of African American or Hispanic households in the following regionally indexed stress

⁴ *The Percept Group*, <http://censusbureau.gov>, http://perceptgroup.com_first_view_2012_Canaan_Baptist_Church_of_Christ_132_West_116th_Street_New_York_NY_10032_three_mile_radius, 5

conditions: 20% of households below poverty; 20% of adults that dropped out of high school and the 26% that identified the basics as their primary concern.⁵ A neighborhood with populations that have adults completing post graduate studies at a rate 14% higher than the national average and adults with incomes \$23,384 higher than the national average would not have the basics of life as their highest stress concern. This could have adverse effects as government funding becomes increasingly limited over the next few years. Based on the statistics presented in the First View, it might appear that the Harlem doesn't need financial support or educational opportunities.⁶ The government funds communities based on the majority needs. Therefore, for Canaan to satisfy the needs of African Americans, they must approach it from a context which seeks to work with the majority. The church must grow based on God's will and not an exclusively "black" context which was very relevant in the past.

There is a spiritual richness that resides in the praise and worship of the African American church, a richness that can break social barriers and erase stigmas. The worship experience needs to continue to be celebratory, inspiring, and informative as it was in the past if the church is to grow and play a role in transforming the lives of individuals, the

⁵ *The Percept Group*, <http://censusbureau.gov>, http://perceptgroup.com_first_view_2012_Canaan_Baptist_Church_of_Christ_132_West_116th_Street_New_York_NY_10032_three_mile_radius, 6

⁶ *The Percept Group*, <http://censusbureau.gov>, http://perceptgroup.com_first_view_2012_Canaan_Baptist_Church_of_Christ_132_West_116th_Street_New_York_NY_10032_three_mile_radius, 7

community and the nation as a whole. According to Dr. Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, “Worship should become a medium for the prophetic dispensation of new information and knowledge. Personal, social and spiritual transformation are the keys here, and information should aid in their realization.”⁷

Although people are looking for a church that will enhance their relationship with God, they also want their worship experience to fit into their own personal, social and spiritual mindset. A *USA Today* article entitled, “More Americans Customize Religion to Fit Their Personal Needs” by Cathy Lynn Grossman, reveals some interesting information. A bar graph illustrated the religious beliefs and practice shifts of approximately 1,000 to 1,621 adults nationwide, from 1991 to 2011. Six of the seven categories show a decrease in what adults do today as opposed to twenty years ago. For example, the article points out that people read less of the Bible outside of church, do not volunteer at church as much, and do not attend adult Sunday school or Sunday worship. Fewer people believe in the authenticity of the Bible and fewer define God as an all-knowing, all-powerful ruler. Yet, there was an increase in people that accept Jesus Christ and expect to be saved.

In one of our classroom discussions, most of the group felt the increase in people accepting Christ and their expectance to be saved was a positive thing, something with

⁷ Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry*, Abingdon Press, 1994, 69

this writer concurs. However, one component of the study is not enough to conclude all is well. There is clearly something to build upon—and there is still hope. This increased acceptance of Christ poses new questions for me as a minister such as, who informs the people’s theology if they do not attend worship or Sunday school or read the Bible? What principles of the Bible do they feel are not total accurate? Are the principles the adults deem inaccurate the ones that do not fit into their lifestyle? If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, then who is? Finally, if, as Grossman’s article states, people address their basic issue of getting to know GOD by interpreting Him for themselves, will the world’s 310 million⁸ occupants, worship have 310 million different religions?

The mission work of the church has been watered down and people realize this. Therefore, they take matters into their own hands, even when it comes to seeking God. Pastor William D. Watley stated in his book that, “Before some of us can move to the next level, we are going to delete some of the stuff we have been carrying in our lives.”⁹ It is clearly not enough to form our own theologies to fit into our individual concept of life; we must adhere to the will of God and live the life He planned for us to live before the foundations of this world. Pastor Watley goes on to say,

And if you ever start deleting stuff and receiving something new from the LORD, you will wonder why you held onto some stuff for so long. David asked the LORD to create within him a clean heart and to renew within

⁸ For illustration purposes and not an actual estimate of the world’s population, 3

⁹ Watley, William D. *GOD Wants You to Grow: How To Live Beyond Your Limitations*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003, 96

him a right spirit. However for that to happen, David realized that he had to get rid of some of the stuff he had been carrying. So he asked the LORD to delete it. He said, “Search me O GOD, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” [Psalm 139:23-24]¹⁰

As with many other churches, Canaan will need to get rid of some of that stuff and ask God for a clean heart as a congregation. The church needs to recover and redefine our mission to secure YHWH’s reputation as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

As stated in class, for growth, building a community must precede building a congregation. To build a community, relationships must be established. As mentioned earlier, our context just can’t be a “black” focus because we will miss what God is showing us through others. There must be a commonality of life, where hopes and basic needs are shared. There is hope for this to be accomplished because we all have an increasing heart to accept Yeshua as our Lord and Savior. There must be *koinonia*, a fellowship that happens when there is a sacrifice, an authentic common life, and the sharing and caring of life together in which the people of God dwell together in the Holy Spirit.

I believe *koinonia* can be achieved through the concept of “Three Streams, One River” model. It’s an approach that this writer believes will grow the church and help satisfy the mission of God. Dr. Michael J. Christensen characterizes this model as one in

¹⁰ Watley, William D. *GOD Wants You to Grow: How To Live Beyond Your Limitations*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003, 104

which “A church in which the people of GOD claim their priesthood, find their passion for ministry, and flow within the stream of their gifts and calling in the New Reformation of the Laity.”¹¹ The model interprets the vision of the river mentioned in Psalm 46 as “a metaphorical basis for the ministry of the baptized, ordered not around traditional roles and distinctions between clergy and laity, but rather around spiritual gifts, graces, passions, callings and streams of ministry.”¹² According to the model

The river then, is an eschatological vision of the heart of God and fruit of ministry when all of the world shall feast. The river of God is meant to flow to and through believers and bring healing and wholeness to broken lives in the city of need. God’s intention is for all to share in Shalom – the peace, joy, justice, healing and wholeness that comes from freely drinking the water of life. But the river has become dammed up, obstructed by sin and injustice, and polluted by exclusivity and privilege. Who will purify the polluted streams and restore the life-giving flow? The church of Jesus Christ, the *Laos* of God, the priesthood of believers are God’s chosen means of purification, restoration and spiritual access. “We are ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us” – Second Corinthians 5:20, NIV. Our mission on earth is to find out and cooperate with what God is doing in the world, until God’s kingdom has fully come.¹³

However, we must gather the “called-out ones” to help to fulfill God’s mission work according to His will. So much healing on so many levels. Although the situation in Ferguson, Missouri, tells the story that a “black” focused ideology and theology is still

¹¹ Christensen, Michael J., and Carl E. Savage. *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000, 161

¹² Christensen, Michael J., and Carl E. Savage. *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000, 160

¹³ Christensen, Michael J., and Carl E. Savage. *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000, 165

necessary to combat the ills of today, we must embrace this situation and the many other police brutality situations as a call for African Americans to take the initiative to understand what is truly happening in America. For too long, we have sought justice from man-made laws only to be utterly disappointed when the outcome is not justice but more hatred. The Heavenly Father is warning us to stop looking towards man for justice to come for His people because justice comes from the LORD—and Him alone. If want to truly experience divine justice, we must seek and worship Him collectively, as one body with all of the diverse gifts a diverse God has granted us. With Christ as our High Priest, we will fulfill the work of GOD in His context, in His season, and ultimately glorify His name.

Working within a flawed system and affirming the value of African American men are two major objectives that must be implemented going forward. With respect to the first goal, this Barbershop Ministry Initiative has brought to the light the need to become a part of a system that we often complain about. In order to make change, we need to become actively involved and let our voices be heard. Therefore, we must work with society, with this premise in mind despite those that work against us.

Toward this end, I have become a graduate of the Citizens Police Academy, a program where selected citizens take part of the recruitment process for police trainees. The program teaches members of the community about the laws that govern and protect both citizens and police. It provides an inside look at the dilemmas our police officers encounter on a daily basis. The program also promotes a process to unify our communities and law enforcement. In joining the academy, this writer seeks to be a liaison in building a better relationship between African American men and officials.

If we are to promote effective changes in neighborhood, we must discuss with our youth. Also, we must have a legitimate say in the legislation and policies that are written. Therefore, our Social Action Commission has identified several African American male members of the Canaan congregation to run for elected offices in our community: District Leader, Judicial Delegate, and Community Board Member. These

offices provide no pay but they secure us a seat at the table, so our voices are heard and a precedent for future generations of African American males.

Canaan and an accredited educational institution have also partnered together to offer accelerated bachelor degree program classes at the church. This will enable African American men and women to take undergraduate classes twice a week in their neighborhood and eventually complete their degree. The hope is that the graduates will have the ability to earn higher wages and be the example for their children.

Our second goal is to equip God's children by letting African American men know that they are chosen to fulfill the work of God simply because they are His work fulfilled. It is our role to teach and pray for the future of God's kingdom and for all of those who are ordained to reside in it. From the men and women in the church, this writer obtained knowledge on how to handle some of life's biggest issues, lasting foundational skills that are still relevant today. It's disheartening to know that so many of our youth have not had the privilege of having GOD's servants as mentors for the life that is ahead. Instead, we hear how brothers are killing brothers, how a life was taken by those who have sworn to protect it; and how our children are dying senseless deaths. We live by a mentality where it's more about "me" than it is about "we"; where it's about I and not thy neighbor; and where it's more about our life today than the one GOD has promised for us tomorrow. After all we have been through as a people, the world needs to know that black lives do matter.

As an African people, the children of Ham, the world instills a dogma that we are the children Noah cursed in Genesis 9:25, “Cursed be Canaan. The lowest of slaves will be to his brothers.”¹ It’s true, we are the descendants of Ham. But for far too long, society has continued to impress this curse upon us. Yes, our ancestors were brought to America and were enslaved for 400 years. But our lineage goes much more deeply than that. God made us kings and queens, builders of great civilizations. That is why we must constantly fight off that slave mentality the world imposes upon us

With all of the chaos in the world today, we must ask ourselves if we are ready to be the foundation for our youth today so they can continue as a people tomorrow. Are we prepared to be the church God has ordained us to become? Are we willing to be the cornerstone of faith for those who lack hope in man and in GOD?

In the Gospel according to John 4:35ff, Christ said to the disciples:

...Behold, I say unto you! Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; and see that they are already ripe for harvest. The one who reaps receives pay and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together. The saying is true, one sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap what you did not work for, others have labored and you have entered into their labor.²

Many African American men don’t understand why we still exist today after all we have gone through as a people. Some other races of people have been extinguished from this earth, yet despite all of the pain and suffering, the African American male still exists

¹ The Book of Genesis 9:25

² The Gospel According to John 4:35-36

today. We exist simply because we are reaping all what the previous African American men sowed for us. Unfortunately, we have been so focused on reaping that we have neglected to sow for those that come behind us. Christ said in verse 37 of chapter four, “the sower and the reaper will rejoice together.”³ Many of those have sown for us have transitioned from this earth. Therefore, we must take on the role of sower, so there can be continuity in the rejoicing of togetherness just as God ordained.

We must ask ourselves the question and answer it honestly: Are we playing church for those who show up on Sunday or are we ready to do God’s will and become the church? If so, then we must be ready to do His work and step into the position as a sower of souls. The plan going forward is to link up with mentoring programs, establish ways to gain better education, and develop a means where we are self-sufficient. We need to acknowledge ourselves as the sowers and the keepers of the gate for God’s children.

If we do nothing, our youth will continue to be preyed upon by ungodly spiritual forces just as we have been and in some cases, still are. Our children are trying to fight a battle without knowing who their enemy truly is. Instead they get arrested falsely and commit black-on-black crime thinking that their brother is their enemy. They suffer from high unemployment rates, lower achievements in education, voter suppression and a misunderstanding of they should serve, and they think those are enemies. Everywhere we

³ The Gospel According to John 4:37

turn, there seems to be a force against us. Things appear to be so hard that it's easy to fall prey to the belief that the curse of Canaan is upon us today.

As a steward for the Almighty GOD, I feel that it is my calling and duty to remind the African American men of today that they are the children of the living GOD and HE will not forsake them. Just as it says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."⁴ When we believe in Christ, then we know the curse can and has been be reversed. Christ reminds us two things, in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first"⁵ and John 14:12-14, "Verily, verily, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing and they will do even greater things than these." Christ continues by saying, "I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."⁶ We may ask Christ anything in His name and He will do it. He made the blind see, the sick to be healed and the dead to come to life. If Christ reversed the afflictions of man then, He can definitively reverse the minds of this world today so they will see that the African American male is a child of the living God and we will continue to promote this everywhere, at any time, moving forward.

⁴ The Epistle to the Galatians 2:20

⁵ The Gospel According to John 15:18

⁶ The Gospel According to John 14:12-14

Therefore, we will continue to develop the Barbershop Initiative at Canaan to bring all of our men together to get to know Christ on a deeper level through reflection and sharing on their call to be his disciples in our time. Our goal is to continue to bring change to our neighborhood and the world.

APPENDIX

FREE EVENT

Social Action Commission
Presents

The BARBERSHOP Ministry

Straight Talk:
"Shaping Brothers Heads for the Future"



Barber Shop

**Brothers Gathering in a Trusted Place for Real Conversation on
Life...Jobs...Education...Gangs...Community...Family...
& GOD ☩**

WHO: Men 18 & Over

WHEN: Saturday, March 19th, 2016 @ 1:00pm

WHERE: Canaan Baptist Church of Christ
Founders Hall
132 West 116th Street - New York, NY 10026

RSVP: Eventbrite OR Email: barbershopstraighttalk@gmail.com



Canaan Baptist Church of Christ
132 West 116th Street
New York, NY 10026
212-866-0301
cbccnyc.org

CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENT – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2015:

Grace and Peace to Canaan and our visitors, ---- In the aftermath of the attacks in Mali, Africa, and to the family of Jamar Clark, please know our hearts are with you. Gun violence continues to be at the forefront of the media, the nation, and the world. God sees this wickedness and His justice will prevail. But as children of God we must be at the forefront as well; standing with God by walking these streets, proclaiming our allegiance to our KING, our Savior and Redeemer. We must unite and tell the world that we are not going to just stand by and allow the violence of today prevail un-accosted. We are standing by GOD because He said it would get worse before it gets better. Brother Malcolm X said, *“If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for anything.”* We are not falling for the fear tactics that guides most people’s thoughts. Tell the world that you fear only GOD by coming out to march with us on this BLAACK Friday, 11/27/15. The march will begin at 12:00 pm on East 120th Street and the FDR. The march will end right here at Canaan where we will have a rallying service speaking to strategies that will combat the violence in accordance with GOD’s will. --- Thank you to Jr. Deacon Patrice Perry and the NAN Youth Huddle for arranging my appearance on yesterday’s radio show. Please continue to reach out to your family and friends asking them to join the march. If they can’t come to the march then come to the service and if they can’t come at all then pray that God’s name will be glorified.”



Canaan Baptist Church of Christ

132 WEST 116TH STREET, NY, NY 10026 PHONE: 212-866-0301

Fax: 212-865-6150 www.cbccnyc.org

THOMAS D. JOHNSON, SR., D. Min., *Senior Pastor*

WYATT TEE WALKER, D. Min.
Pastor Emeritus

REV. DAVID FRANCIS, *Assistant Pastor*

SAMPLE LETTER TO CLERGY

November 6, 2015

Rev. Dr. _____ - Senior Pastor of _____ Church

Address, City, State, Zip Code

RE: Invitation to Join "Stop Killing GOD's Children: B.L.A.A.C.K. (Bestow Love Amongst All Children of our King) Friday March on November 27, 2015

Rev. _____,

Giving honor to GOD, I address you as my family and friend in His merciful name. As the church continues to bask in the glory of GOD brought upon during our revival experience, I ask that we keep that sense of spiritual community and build on it. Our community needs us to come together on a matter that implores us to worship our LORD and Savior in a very direct and public manner. We call upon your love for GOD and your love for His children to join our consortium in letting the world know that GOD is still alive and well; and that HE alone, will respond to those whom have killed HIS children on these city streets. Whether GOD's children walk in police uniforms or without, the wickedness must be addressed with GOD's love and hope.

Canaan's Social Action Commission has planned a march on B.L.A.A.C.K. Friday – November 27th, 2015 to emphasize our disdain for the senseless gang violence and more importantly, to promote GOD's love for all of HIS children. We sincerely ask for you to join us and commit to send hundreds of congregants to walk and demonstrate with us that GOD is still on the throne. HE hears our cry, suffers our pain and plans to respond to the gun violence and all other atrocities against HIS children in accordance to HIS will. We as the children of GOD, want to be unified in our message and remind the world that GOD walks these streets too; with all who claim HIM as their King. We as faith leaders are tasked to ensure that GOD's love is expressed on these streets as well. Join us on B.L.A.A.C.K. Friday. Together, we will **Bestow Love Amongst All Children of our King**.

There will be a service/ rally at end of the march inside Canaan Baptist Church of Christ. Please contact Rev. Robert Thompson or Deacon Tracey Hagans for further details on the speaking/ remarks schedule.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Thomas D. Johnson Sr. - Senior Pastor

NATIONAL ACTION NETWORK RADIO SHOW- NOVEMBER 21, 2015:

“First, giving honor to YHWH, our GOD and His Son, Yeshua the Christ, I say Grace & Peace to you that are streaming and to those here in the house of justice. -- I am here to announce that Canaan Baptist Church of Christ where the Rev. Dr. Thomas D. Johnson is the Senior Pastor, is sponsoring a march on Harlem. We are making a plea to our Brothers and Sisters to “Stop Killing GOD’s Children – but Bestow Love Amongst All Children of our King.” The march will be held on B.L.A.A.C.K Friday, November 27, 2015. We have received confirmation that your very own Youth Huddle has agreed to join the march and our fight in addressing the wickedness that is going in our streets, in our communities and in the world. Our purpose is simple, it’s to let our neighborhoods and the world know that God walks these streets as well, and to trust that God is still on His throne. There is so much killing and gun violence in our streets; we continue to lose our future every time a child of ours is killed just for killing sake. But even in this wickedness, God is in the midst and it’s proven by the miracles He performs. If you haven’t heard, our church maintenance worker was shot in the head opening the door to his building and he lives to talk about. He maintains his full mental and physical faculties and is a living testimony of God’s power and grace. However, we know there are still so many losing their lives proving that this war is not just man against man but man against a false spirit. So before we can take

the guns off our streets, before our youth can understand that violence is not the answer, before gun manufacturers are held accountable, before laws can be adopted and implemented properly, before our children truly comprehend that they are doing the work of the evil one, before our youth can know that this war on them is truly a war of a different spirit; before our youth can see that their violence is big business; and before our youth can truly appreciate that they are a children of God, we who are believers must be God's servant and act according to His will and not our own. Trust that God sees the wickedness and knows your pain. The Bible says His Holy Spirit moans and groans with us in our suffering, trials and tribulations. The Holy Spirit will even speak to God on our behalf if we believe His Son came to save us. Be a witness for God and show your allegiance to Him by coming out on BLAACK Friday to march with us. In Romans, chapter one, Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." Walk the streets with the Youth Huddle and others confessing that God is alive and well. Our march will begin at 12:00 pm on East 120th Street and the FDR where the officer was gunned down, walk through the area where our brother survived a gun shot, and end about 3:00 pm at Canaan Baptist Church of Christ for a rallying service giving our God, our King, and our Savior all glory for this journey we call life. Thank you and may our God bring justice to those that live in His peace."



Canaan Baptist Church of Christ

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WYATT TEE WALKER, D. Min.
Pastor Emeritus

REV. DAVID FRANCIS, *Assistant Pastor*

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CHURCH

November 6, 2015

MEDIA ALERT:

Stop Killing GOD's Children: B.L.A.A.C.K. (Bestow Love Amongst All Children of our King) Friday March on November 27, 2015

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem will lead a march with other houses of worship citywide to emphasize our disdain for the senseless gang violence and more importantly, promote GOD's love and hope to all that have been affected by the violence and the gang members who has committed the violence. The march will commence where Detective Holder was killed near the Harlem River Drive and end with a service at Canaan Baptist Church on West 116th street. The event is currently scheduled to begin at 12:00pm. It will take place on B.L.A.A.C.K. Friday – November 27th, 2015. B.L.A.A.C.K. is an acronym for Bestow Love Amongst All Children of our King. We want the world to know that GOD, our King and our Savior, walks these streets as well. Our GOD still sits on the throne and HE will address the gun violence and all other atrocities against HIS children in accordance to HIS will. We as servants of GOD, want to be unified in our message that GOD's hope and love will always be victorious over all evil.

B.L.A.A.C.K. FRIDAY MESSAGE – NOVEMBER 27, 2015:

First, giving honor to YHWH, our God and His Son, Yeshua the Christ, I say Grace and Peace to you that thought is not robbery to promote our God's existence here on earth on such a beautiful day. ---

Family, today is a great day because you have chosen to stand by God in His fight for justice. As we look around the world, we see so much violence, greed and self-righteousness. From the terrible gun violence in our streets and those in the city of Chicago; to the terrorist attacks in Paris and Mali; to the greed of big business evidenced by store sales this very day; to our youth having to protest on college campuses so their voices can be relevant tomorrow; I say to you, trust that God sees and accepts you as His child and that He has not forsaken your life so evil may live. This day, we as His children, can tell the world that our King is alive and well; and He demands for us to speak to His existence and to be witnesses to how He has brought us through the many storms of our lives. Continue to go out and tell somebody how God found you job so you didn't have to sell drugs on the street; -- go out and tell somebody how God put a meal on your table so you would not need to steal from another; -- go out and tell somebody how God had calmed your anger so you did not act violently against your brother; -- go out and tell somebody how God now directs your path so you don't get locked up again; -- go out and tell somebody that your God is a way-

maker for He makes a way out of no way; -- go out and tell somebody how God saved your life because He loves me and He loves you too. ---

I can't explain what I have done to be worthy of His love but I know that my heart and my soul talks with the Holy Spirit and He tells me this is true. Just as a child cannot explain the love they receive from their mother but can feel it; you know that its genuine, you know that love is real and unwavering no matter what you do; God's love for you is even greater than that.

Brothers and Sisters, put down the gun and release the spirit of violence; let go of the anger and release that spirit of self-righteousness; let go of your depression and release that spirit of hopelessness for God made a promise a long time ago, to carry your burdens when life's challenges take hold of the spirit within. God calls upon you to find the strength to give His love a chance. God understands this is not easy because He knows you will be ridiculed, you will be rejected and you will be weakened by this world but, be strong for He is with you. --- In the book of Joshua, God tells Joshua in the first chapter three times to be strong and courageous. See Moses had died and Joshua was installed as the new leader, so God told Joshua that He will be with him just as He was with His servant Moses. So Joshua was commanded to be strong and courageous in that belief of trusting that God will be with him in every situation he would encounter. In the book of John, Christ gives us a new commandment – to love. To love someone, you must

be willing to lose yourself in order for that person to experience your love in all its truth or else it won't be genuine. It takes strength to love and it takes courage to express that love in its holiest form. So if we learn to see that person we hate, that person we have beef with - as a child of God, then turning away from the thought of being violent and pulling that trigger, will be made much easier in the love of God expresses for us. Rely and support your actions on the unconditional love God has for you in order for you to show true love to someone else.

Family, be strong & courageous in being a witness for God because HIS love endures forever; be strong & courageous in being a person loved by God because He commands the same of you and be strong & courageous in being a child of God because the world needs a believing leader who is not ashamed to proclaim their allegiance to the gospel of Jesus the Christ; for the Word gives life to the dead; sight to the blind; healing to the sick; wisdom to the fool; hope to the hopeless and love to those in need of love.

Encourage yourself by trusting that GOD is always with you and know, His justice will prevail to those who lives in His peace. AMEN”



Canaan's Institute for Public Policy & *ACTION!*

WE ARE SEEKING JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

Join us in developing leadership skills and creating strategies for building power and change in our city, state, nation, and worldwide community.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God
Romans 12: 2 (King James Version)

Vision

Steadfast in faith, we aim to rise above the ordinary by developing a “faith based” institute that can transform lives and communities. Inspired by our faith in Christ and together with all Canaan Disciples, supporting congregations, and community organizations that support our vision, values and principles, we aim to build a public policy research institute to teach leadership skills, create proactive strategies for building power and change.

Objectives

1. To help participants look into the future and suspend the belief that the future will just be more of the present and that today's problems are so overwhelming that we “don't have time” to look past today.
2. To focus the participants on designing logical links between the present and the vision, and to enhance group problem-solving and brainstorming skills.
3. To help institute participants design actions that are needed to achieve the vision objectives, to estimate the time and resources necessary to complete those actions, and to ask for participant commitment to specific actions.
4. To be a research and action oriented Institute that provides pertinent data on developing proactive issues and actions.

What we believe

1. That all people have the right to life's basic needs.
2. That all people should be able to live together as a whole community, without wide disparities between those who have too little and those who have a disproportionate share of the world's goods.
3. That a fair and equitable dispensing of justice is the right of all people
4. That as Disciples of Christ we actively work for reconciliation of all people.

Strategies

1. Create learning sessions for institute leaders and participants.
2. Create sub-committees needed to do the research and documentation of issues of concern and need in our city, state, nation and worldwide communities.
3. Develop a cadre of trained leaders that are competent to teach and lead others in issues of public action and policy.
4. Develop accountability sessions for our local and national leaders.
5. Design activities to engage the Canaan Congregation.
6. Partner with the staff of the Canaan Voice to communicate the activities of the Institute.
7. Partner with other faith based organizations to build power and create change.
8. Join international efforts to advance the cause of justice and liberty on the African Continent and other areas of the world.

Institute Core Sessions

1. Problems-Issue-Action

- This session will illustrate the difference between what is termed a problem as apposed to an issue. When the participants have understood how to define the issue, this session will give the critical skills that are needed to arrive at the appropriate action.

2. Group Meeting: Leadership and Relational power

- This session will teach the critical skills needed to transform a congregation or community. This session will teach how to conduct a relational meeting, its outcome, and how to build a group meeting from this process. Role play is essential in this session to cement the learning.

3. Power in Action

This session provides some elements of Power in Action;

- How to craft Issues into actions.
- Effective letter writing and media strategies.
- How to confront authority with imagination and courage.

4. Power Analysis

- One of the aims of Canaan's Institute for Public Policy is to gain enough power to successfully pressure the authorities to do what is demanded. The Institute believes that power comes from relationships, and there are two sets of relationships we must consider: our own and that of the opponent. While the institute seeks to cultivate its own set of relationships among its allies to increase its power, it must also understand the dynamics of power and the network of relationships of its target or opponent. This session,

therefore, is aimed at developing in its participants the skill of determining:

- Who has power in a particular situation?
- How that power is exercised?
- What is the self-interest of these people?

5. Leadership and Action

- This session is designed to talk about leadership and its relationship to power and action. Some of the elements of this session are;
 - What is leadership?
 - Are leaders born or made?
 - What is the role of leaders in the process of issues and actions?

6. The 21st Century citizen and the vote

- Every year since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the percentage of African Americans, and others, voting has significantly decreased. This session discusses the reasons why and put in prospective the role of the vote in a democracy and its relationship to power, issues and actions. This session will emphasize that the vote is but one key, albeit an important one, to citizenship and power in a participatory democracy. The participants in this assembly will learn the power relationship between the citizen and their elected representative.

7. Accountability

- This session teaches the importance of accountability. In a public relationship it is important to hold yourself and your allies accountable to your commitments to each other. It is also important to develop skills on how to hold public authorities accountable as well. There are two elements in the process of accountability:
 - Yourself first.....Then others
 - This session will demonstrate accountability strategies to be used in the process of issues and actions.

8. Basic research methodology

This session is designed to teach basic research skills on a particular issue or topic. This session will also tie research strategies to developing issues and actions.

**YOUTH
EMPOWERED
FOR ACTIVISM!**



“A New Generation of Activism”

Join us for a Discussion on

**RACE, COMMUNITY & POLICE
RELATIONSHIPS**



FRIDAY, AUGUST 12TH, 2016

CANAAN BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST

132 WEST 116TH STREET

6:30PM - 8:00PM

SAMPLE OF EVENTS SINCE THE BARBERSHOP MINISTRY EVENT

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