

MASS INCARCERATION AND PASTORAL CARE

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## ABSTRACT

### MASS INCARCERATION AND PASTORAL CARE

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This project addresses the lack of resources and services available to individuals seeking to re-enter society after incarceration. I conducted this project at Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church (CLUPC) through a validated ministry I created there. Although the project was initially accepted and properly established by the sanctioned leadership to do so, eventually church politics slowed down progress and the project was not able to survive. As the Pastor, my tenure also came to an abrupt end during the beforementioned church struggle and by resignation and by the time of the defense of this project I had been unanimously voted as the Installed Pastor of Mt. Olive Presbyterian Church by unanimous vote. At Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church I was employed as the Designated Pastor for a term of three years and I fear the temporary nature of my call at CLUPC was a crucial factor in the eventual power struggles.

The project itself is a project about providing support to a growing population in our society. This population, returning citizens, are in need. They need love, support, resources, advocacy and at bare minimum a second chance at life. This is a personal

project for me. I am a convicted felon. That statement is easy to write but the statement is not easy for me to say out loud. To say, “I am a convicted felon,” in many ways as a society we have been conditioned to think that I am saying I am less than human not quite a citizen. By the grace of God and the love of some, “I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). I have paid my debt to society, turned in my “pound of flesh” and feel called to make a difference. When Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church called me, I assumed they understood it was a package deal. However, during the contentious church “fight” individuals spread through the congregation I was a convicted felon. As a society, we have made progress in reducing the stigma associated with a criminal record, this tenure, this project taught me we have so far to go.

By being branded felons, entire communities have been reduced to the status of second-class citizens. The mistakes young people have committed have been a death sentence leading to poverty and limiting access to education, housing, and employment. A question addressed is: what is the lingering impact of incarceration? The study sought to explore what sort of ministry would be needed to address these crucial needs facing urban communities. What is the non-negotiable ministry mindset necessary for urban areas where ex-offenders and residents attempt to survive in open air drug markets? Upon release from prison, young adults turn to gang affiliation for a place of being and acceptance. Is the church available for a returning citizen who is not capable of obtaining gainful employment, housing, or mental health services? Regarding opportunity, there is a specific type of ministry needed in urban neighborhoods considering the symptoms of mass incarceration and the war on drugs. Should there be opportunities for a ministry that

encourages, inspires, advocates and brings resources to families and communities burdened by unfair laws, policies, and procedures?

To understand the impact of mass incarceration and the war on drugs on the lives of individuals and their families, the project employed narrative-based research, which revealed the stories of those who have been negatively impacted by generation after generation of oppression inflicted upon the African American community. Officials and participants helplessly trudged along with no real solutions, giving their harrowing stories. To grasp a more in-depth understanding and sensitivity to those impacted by mass incarceration and the war on drugs, the project will include narrative-based research with those participating in the Circle of Inspiration at CLUPC.

The project also examined the dynamics and difficulty of a congregation attempting to adapt to the contemporary complexities of ministry in the 21st century. The church is on the decline and needs to reinvent itself and the way it introduces the gospel to those living on the fringes of society. The guiding biblical passage for this project is the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable, the father interrupts his celebration of finding his “lost son” to retrieve the older son he is now losing to bitterness. In Luke 15:32 (ESV) the father says, “It fitted to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.”

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I would like to thank the members of the Lay Advisory Committee (L.A.C.)<sup>1</sup>: Ralph Green-Member of Session of CLUPC, retired warden of Hudson County, thirty-years of experience in the state and federal corrections industry. Ralph Green, at the time of my installation, was a president of the Trustee Board. It was important to have him attached to the project because CLUPC was a bi-cameral board. Ralph served as the lead of the incorporation of the church. Ralph, as a former warden, also had a unique expertise serving returning citizens.

Debra Fleming-Department of Employment and Training, Debra Flemming was an employer of Jersey City Employment and Training and had by the nature of her job worked with returning citizens. She understood the complexities of job placement as it pertained to returning citizens.

Evangelist Cynthia Matthews- Evangelist Matthews is a retired federal employee and a dedicated Community Activist. Evangelist Matthews was positioned on this L.A.C because of her passion and persistence in providing care to those imprisoned. Evangelist Matthews through another organization was already visiting the penitentiary for women when we met.

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<sup>1</sup> The L.A.C is comprised of members of the community and congregation. If the L.A.C. would have been comprised of all church members, the progress would have been interrupted because the church's relationships were too toxic.

Gloria Walton- Mrs. Walton is also an ordained minister within the Baptist denomination and has been working with returning citizens for years as the owner operator of Most Excellent Way. Mrs. Walton runs a non-profit residential program and receives county funding.

Frank McMillan-He is the lead organizer for Jersey City Together which is a subsidiary of Metro IAF. Metro IAF has for years organizing in distressed areas and has assembled a robust community led team in Jersey City. I acknowledge and deeply appreciate the residents of Jersey City especially those living in Ward F and the citizens of the South Side of the City. To Frank McMillan of Jersey City Together, I am grateful for the platform and the thinking we were able to do around the issue of mass incarceration. Thanks are necessary for the members of Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church who supported this project and were willing to offer support. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Evangelist Cynthia Matthews a passionate person and dedicated member of Circle of Inspiration. Also, to Thomas M. Thomas Presbyterian Church and Bethel Presbyterian Church, I want to deeply thank you for the ministry opportunities and for all the affirming moments that inspired me.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Regarding pastoral identity, I feel called to the ministry of young African Americans reduced to the fringes of society because of incarceration. Michelle Alexander has said this population is subject to a “New Jim Crow.”<sup>1</sup> They are treated like second-class citizens. My father was a soldier for the United States of America, but his son was a victim of America’s other war, the war on drugs. My life could have been altered forever by my actions as a teenager, but through God’s grace and mercy, I have been able to recover. Based on this favor and forgiveness, I approach the returning citizens in my ministry context with the mind set of “there but for the grace of God, go I.”<sup>2</sup>

I am the current pastor of Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church (CLUPC) and creator and founder of Circle of Inspiration. Circle of Inspiration is an auxiliary of CLUPC that I created during my tenure to work with those recently released from incarceration. I have had a history of growing up in neighborhoods impacted by the mass incarceration of African Americans. While engaging in the process to become a

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012),

<sup>2</sup> This phrase is attributed to evangelical preacher and martyr, John Bradford (circa 1510-1555). He uttered the phrase while seeing criminals being led to death. Gary Martin, “There but for the grace of God, go I,” *The Phrasefinder*, accessed June 1, 2018, <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/there-but-for-the-grace-of-god.html>.

minister and employed as a case manager for three different non-profit agencies, I have experienced first-hand the difficulty of overcoming the obstacles and shame associated with imprisonment. My responsibility to organize the plans of those released from incarceration gave me another perspective of this system, which becomes a revolving door for people of color and the poor. My concern and anxiety regarding the state of incarcerated African Americans have always been present and at the forefront of my consciousness; however, there has been a deepening of concern in the last seven years after serving inner-city Presbyterian churches in Chester, Pennsylvania and North Philadelphia. In my current ministry context in Jersey City, New Jersey, the neighborhood has been fragmented and crippled by unemployment, poverty, and violence. Based on my calling as a Pastor and employment experiences in case-management, I have wondered what an infusion of the two—parish ministry and case-management—would look alike.

The concern this project is seeking to address is the character of ministry in the immediate future as leaders attempt to resolve the lingering impact of mass incarceration, which has turned communities into war zones and battlefields. The problem this project is seeking to address is the problem of ministry in urban contexts in the aftermath of mass incarceration. With so many people of color being released from prison after being convicted of minor crimes and subsequently branded felons, can the church provide this growing community support, transition, and healing? Can the mission statement of Circle of Inspiration if applied appropriately, address this epidemic known as the mass incarceration of African Americans and people of color? What is the non-negotiable ministry mindset needed in urban areas where ex-offenders and residents attempt to

survive in open-air drug markets and where young adults turn to gang affiliation for a place of being and acceptance. For example, what options are available for a returning citizen not capable of obtaining gainful employment, housing, or mental health services?

There is a specific type of ministry needed in urban neighborhoods considering the concerns of mass incarceration and the war on drugs. Should there be opportunities for congregational care that encourages, inspires, advocates and brings resources to families and communities burdened by unfair laws, policies, and procedures? This project sought to address these questions through the listening and gathering of stories and interacting in the community. Congregations in distressed communities need to develop a deeper relationship with at-risk families and returning citizens. Based on the analysis of the surveys and the personal interaction during the six weeks of engagement, churches should consider a system of care management to engage and care for those oppressed in their community. After the conclusion of this project, my goal was to have the Circle of Inspiration become a validated ministry of the PCUSA as an auxiliary of CLUPC.

I assert that a macro-analysis of the demographics of the area of Jersey City, New Jersey—where CLUPC is located—reveals that the phenomena “mass incarceration” and the “war on drugs” has had an adverse impact on urban communities. Therefore, the question before this project is: as a society should there be multi-dimensional programming and strategies to match the growing concern of the damage caused by mass incarceration and the war on drugs? The damage is multi-faceted therefore the solutions will have to be multi-faceted. Returning citizens have returned to their communities with emotional injury only to find a damaged society. This proposed project, Mass Incarceration and Pastoral Care, is seeking to address the lack of resources and services

available to individuals who have spent time incarcerated and are then trying successfully to re-enter society.

### **Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church**

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 impacted all of Jersey City. There are fewer jobs in the city now than there were ten years ago. The housing projects have been demolished and replaced with housing that is unaffordable. Returning citizens with felonies are having an impossible time finding gainful employment, leading them to return to criminal activity. To achieve the objective of strengthening families, our ministry sought to find ways to inspire, motivate, and care for returning citizens and their families.

The goal of CLUPC under my pastoral leadership has been to help alleviate the hunger and poverty in the community surrounding the church. For the past two Thanksgiving seasons, we distributed about 300 turkey dinners. In addition to this mercy ministry, we provided programs to promote spiritual formation of those impacted by incarceration and gentrification. This ministry named and confronted the social barriers and economic injustices that prevented them from realizing wholeness and the presence of a loving Lord. What Paul taught the church of Ephesus in Ephesians 6:12 can be applied to the church today:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

### **Circle of Inspiration**

Circle of Inspiration is the name of an outreach ministry I created and was validated by the session of CLUPC. The mission statement for the Circle of Inspiration is “to provide resources, research, and advocacy to reduce recidivism.” This Doctor of Ministry project worked with the community volunteers from May 11 to June 30 of 2017 to determine the effectiveness of the mission statement in reducing recidivism and having a positive impact on the lives of ex-offenders. The project also explored the essence of the program, examining the essential components in working with the local church. Circle of Inspiration had activities and programs leading up to the project period thereby, providing program activity for this paper to dissect and expound upon.

## CHAPTER 2

### PASTORAL CARE IN THE AFTERMATH OF MASS INCARCERATION

America has a problem. Prisons are overcrowded with people of color. Statistics demonstrate that African American communities are aggressively policed. They are criminalized for non-violent offenses and incarcerated disproportionately in comparison to other racial groups. For example, about 77,000 people have been sentenced for crack-related federal crimes since 1992, according to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, which sets federal sentencing guidelines. In 2008, over 80% of offenders convicted that year were black, and 10% were white.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 before commuting the federal sentence of forty-six non-violent offenders, President Barack Obama provided context for his actions:

What we have done is instead of focusing on treatment — the same way we focused, say, with tobacco or drunk driving or other problems where we treat it as a public health problem — we've treated this exclusively as a criminal problem," the president said. "I think that it's been counterproductive, and it's been devastating in a lot of minority communities. It presents the possibility at least of unequal application of the law, and that must be changed."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theo Emery, "Will Crack-Cocaine Sentencing Reform Help Current Cons?" *Time*, August 7, 2009, accessed July 13, 2017, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1915131,00.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Newman, "Obama Says Treating Drug Use as a Criminal Problem is 'Counterproductive,'" Drug Policy Alliance, January 21, 2015, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/blog/obama-says-treating-drug-use-criminal-problem-counterproductive>.



## Jersey City, New Jersey

The geographical location utilized for the gathering of stories is an extremely impoverished neighborhood. In certain sections of Jersey City, unemployment is very high and there have been generational problems of government corruption, an ineffective, state-run school district, and gun violence. Due to the high unemployment of returning citizens, individuals turn to the drug trade as the only available means of gainful employment for convicted felons. In the Greenville section of Jersey City known as Ward F, residents remarked that “the F stands for forgotten.” Jersey City is a gentrified segregated city where the citizens of densely populated black areas have been overtaxed and left out of the construction explosion that has made Jersey City a leader in construction, on pace to overtake Newark as New Jersey’s largest city.<sup>6</sup> According to the, *I Love Greenville Community Plan*, which is derived from the U.S. Census, the area’s population is primarily African American or Black (81.5%). Roughly sixteen percent (16.9%) of the population is Hispanic ethnicity. Only 5.33% of the population is white or Caucasian.<sup>7</sup>

### *Gentrification and the Crippling of the Black Community in Jersey City*

Most people who are on the positive end of gentrification talk as if they made out well because they were either smart or the tooth fairy just happened to leave excellent investment acumen under their pillow one night. However, those who are on the negative

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<sup>6</sup> “Croson Study,” City of New Jersey, accessed July 15, 2017, [http://www.cityofjerseycity.com/uploadedFiles/Public\\_Notices/Press\\_Releases/Crosson%20Study.pdf](http://www.cityofjerseycity.com/uploadedFiles/Public_Notices/Press_Releases/Crosson%20Study.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Garden State Episcopal Community Development Corporation, *I Love Greenville Community Plan* (Jersey City, NJ, 2012), 9, accessed July 15, 2017, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5138ed87e4b0731209652637/t/534598c0e4b0a363b95a6d76/1397070016691/I+Love+GCP+\\_++Final+Plan+Lowres.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5138ed87e4b0731209652637/t/534598c0e4b0a363b95a6d76/1397070016691/I+Love+GCP+_++Final+Plan+Lowres.pdf).

end of gentrification can smell a rat. They just cannot find its corpse. In my opinion, gentrification has taken so well in Jersey City because Jersey City has a severe, documented problem sharing its economic prosperity with people of color. This is important to understand for this study because of the economic implications of so many young black men who cannot find employment after periods of incarceration for minor crimes. New Jersey was the last of the northern states to abolish slavery. The Negro, who left the cotton and tobacco fields of the south, migrating north for opportunity, used those same fingers that picked cotton and tobacco to build up the economy of Jersey City. Ironically, however, in a reverse migration, many of their descendants, are now heading back south empty-handed, the victims of gentrification. In Jersey City, some people are basking in the glow of gentrification. In the black community, we are left in the shadows to fight each other over the “promissory note” that is still marked insufficient funds. I believe deep down in my soul a strong case can be made that gentrification should have been avoided. At the very least, the sting of gentrification does not have to be so bitter in Jersey City if the Disparity/Crosby Study had been handled with care.

### *35 Plus Years of Jobless Development and Economic Injustice for Blacks in Jersey City*

In 1982, the city council of Jersey City passed an ordinance requiring developers receiving tax breaks to give preference to local residents in hiring. In 2015, the city council passed a law to address disparity and inclusion problems in Jersey City. What we have then is a thirty-three-year conversation about how to be economically fair along the Hudson River. As a society, we perfected the world wide web during that period, but in Jersey City, it seems as if officials struggled with the elementary concept of sharing. It does not take multiple complex studies to be fair. All it takes to share is a person in

authority to facilitate the simple process of, “one for you, one for you and one for us.” However, Mayor after Mayor, city council after city council, black leader after black leader, has had an opportunity to enforce studies, recommendations, and or ordinances (PECA/Strategic Plan/ PLA) to improve the lives of their minority constituents. They have utterly failed to do so. The courts ruled in the 1980s that Jersey City labor agreements require developers to make a “good faith” effort to hire local and minority workers. In other words, the fox has been guarding the hen house.

According to Donal Malone of St. Peters University, “good faith efforts” were defined as outreach attempts such as job advertisements in local newspapers or holding a job fair. However, these limited efforts resulted in only a small percentage of residents being hired. Donal Malone goes on to state, “a major study, commissioned by the city, found that for almost a decade, minority contractors, as well as vendors and professional service providers (lawyers, accountants, etc.) received only a tiny fraction of almost a billion dollars in city contracts and purchasing.”<sup>8</sup> Minority residents simply could not resist the tsunami wave of gentrification as it washed over the neighborhoods of Jersey City. Minorities have stood by helpless as they were excluded from a billion dollar economy during a ten year span. In Robert F. Kennedy’s speech, “Mindless Menace of Violence,” he said, “for there is another kind of violence, slower but just as deadly, destructive as the shot or the bomb in the night. This is the violence of institutions; indifference and inaction and slow decay. This is the violence that afflicts the poor, that

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<sup>8</sup> “Croson Study,” City of New Jersey, accessed July 15, 2017, [http://www.cityofjerseycity.com/uploadedFiles/Public\\_Notices/Press\\_Releases/Crosson%20Study.pdf](http://www.cityofjerseycity.com/uploadedFiles/Public_Notices/Press_Releases/Crosson%20Study.pdf).

poisons relations between men because their skin has different colors.”<sup>9</sup> The Jersey City Labor and Industry Committee has requested information for over a year regarding the City’s Croson Study (2011) and the Strategic Plan (2015) to eliminate disparity. City Hall, led by Mayor Steve Fulop, has refused to provide a single piece of paper demonstrating it has followed recommendations of either report.

In my very first meeting with journalist Earl Morgan, who covered Hudson County for forty years said me, “Rev, in Jersey City, water runs uphill.” I had no clue what he meant. After a year of town halls, marches, op-eds, press conferences, open letters representing the NAACP, and submitting 12 open records requests pertaining to the Croson Study and the Strategic Plan, I received many denials and indifference. I understand what he meant now. In Jersey City, water runs uphill, because the complex studies outlining disparity, discrimination, and institutional racism resulted in no action to correct the problems.

During the week near Claremont Avenue and Rose Avenue, there is a constant flow of drug abusers, drug dealers, mentally ill people, and prostitutes coming and going to CLUPC. The project was conducted in a context of extreme poverty. The children grow up in the trash filled streets, filled with litter and garbage. The children are educated in underfunded and underperforming schools. The parents and grandparents of these children are at-risk of violence due to the drug trade and gang violence. There is also a policing issue that is relevant for this project. For the period from 2005 to 2013, Blacks were 4.8 times more likely to be arrested for the same offenses than Whites in Jersey

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<sup>9</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, “Remarks to the Cleveland City Club,” (Cleveland, Ohio, April 5, 1968), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Remarks-of-Senator-Robert-F-Kennedy-to-the-Cleveland-City-Club-Cleveland-Ohio-April-5-1968.aspx>.

City. Hispanics/Latinos were nearly twice as likely as Whites to be charged with an offense for the same offenses during this time. In 2013, Blacks were 9.6 times more likely, and Hispanics/Latinos were three times more likely than Whites to be arrested for the same offenses in Jersey City—some of the highest disparities of all the jurisdictions studied by the ACLU-NJ.<sup>10</sup>

At a campaign rally, ambassador Phil Murphy stated that blacks were twelve times more likely to be incarcerated than whites in New Jersey. He promised to correct this disparity by legalizing marijuana if he was elected governor. According to Professor Donal Malone of St. Peters University,

The systematic exclusion of minority contractors and other service providers has had a ripple effect on minority workers who are most likely to be hired by them. These blocked business and employment opportunities amount to a form of occupational and economic apartheid deepening the racial and class divide in Jersey City and are directly related to family instability, the illegal drug trade and the violence and mass incarceration of black men associated with it.<sup>11</sup>

To achieve the objective of strengthening families in the immediate context of CLUPC, the congregation must find ways to inspire, motivate, and care for returning citizens and their families. The demographics suggest this is non-negotiable. According to a study entitled “I Heart Greenville Community,”

The community has experienced prolonged disinvestment. The area suffers from higher rates of poverty than the city or county. Less buying powers have led to a lack of amenities, homogenized retail mix, and little job opportunities. Also, Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church has historically been a high

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<sup>10</sup> American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, *Selective Policing: Racially Disparate Enforcement of Low-Level Offenses in New Jersey* (Newark, NJ: American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, 2015), 20, accessed July 17, 2017, [https://www.aclu-nj.org/files/7214/5070/6701/2015\\_12\\_21\\_aclunj\\_select\\_enf.pdf](https://www.aclu-nj.org/files/7214/5070/6701/2015_12_21_aclunj_select_enf.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Donal Malone, “Neoliberal Governance and Uneven Development in Jersey City,” *Theory in Action* 10, no. 1 (January 2017): p3.

concentration crime area where undesirables loiter and sell drugs, drink alcohol and prostitute on the steps of the property.<sup>12</sup>

In 2015 there were eighty-six shootings in the Jersey City area and this is the area in which this project was conducted. There were thirty homicides in Hudson County and twenty-five of them were committed in Jersey City.<sup>13</sup>

### **Economic Justice**

Frederick Douglass wrote poignantly about the predicament of people of color in his day:

Hence the convicts are leased out to work for railway contractors, mining companies and those who farm large plantations. These companies assume charge of the convicts, work them as cheap labor and pay the states a handsome revenue for their labor. Nine-tenths of these convicts are negroes.<sup>14</sup>

The Croson Study outlines a history of discriminatory practices and economic injustice against people of color in Jersey City. Between 2002-2008 Jersey City paid 67.3 million dollars in construction services. African Americans, despite 20.2 percent availability was awarded only 0.85 percent. We are waiting for the city to provide data regarding the success or lack thereof in addressing the documented disparity. We recently worked with two St. Peters University students who did their capstone project in Greenville, and after

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<sup>12</sup> Garden State Episcopal Community Development Corporation, *I Love Greenville Community Plan* (Jersey City, NJ, 2012), 9, accessed July 15, 2017, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5138ed87e4b0731209652637/t/534598c0e4b0a363b95a6d76/1397070016691/I+Love+GCP+\\_++Final+Plan+Lowres.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5138ed87e4b0731209652637/t/534598c0e4b0a363b95a6d76/1397070016691/I+Love+GCP+_++Final+Plan+Lowres.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Caitlin Mota, "Jersey City 2016 crime stats: what's up, what's down, and what they're doing about it," NJ.com, updated January 5, 2017, [https://www.nj.com/hudson/index.ssf/2017/01/jersey\\_city\\_year\\_in\\_crime\\_whats\\_up\\_whats\\_down\\_and.html](https://www.nj.com/hudson/index.ssf/2017/01/jersey_city_year_in_crime_whats_up_whats_down_and.html).

<sup>14</sup> Convict Lease System, 1893, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfd.01008>.

one hundred seventy-five surveys completed, over 40% of the people surveyed were unemployed (See Appendix B).

### **The Missed Education of the People of Color<sup>15</sup>**

*Gladys Nunery School<sup>16</sup> located in Ward F*

The school is 68.6 % Black and 19.2 % Hispanic and only 25 % of the students in English Language Arts literacy met or exceeded expectations (bottom ten percentile in the state). In addition, 16% of the students in mathematics met or exceeded expectations (bottom ten percentile in the state).

*Cornelia F. Bradford School located in Ward E*

The school is 10% Hispanic, 10 % Black and 77% of the Students in English language arts literacy met or exceeded expectations (top ten percentile in the state). In addition, 84% of the students - mathematics met or exceeded expectations, (top ten percentile in the state).

### **Selective Policing**

In 2013, Blacks were 9.6 times more likely and Hispanics/Latinos were three times more likely than Whites to be arrested for the same offenses in Jersey City—some of the highest disparities of all the jurisdictions studied by the ACLU-NJ. The neighborhoods in Jersey City are unaffordable, and the families are victim to Economic Injustice. Families are struggling to remain in Jersey City. After attending community meetings and town halls as the areas in Jersey City become unsafe, families with options

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<sup>15</sup> Based on the 2015-2016 New Jersey School Performance Report, <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/SearchForSchool.aspx>.

<sup>16</sup> Gladys Nunery is the name of the daughter of the founder of CLUPC and is across the street from the CLUPC.

consider relocating and the families without options are stuck in frustration. The Greenville section of Jersey City is a neighborhood where a criminal can get a gun quicker than a fresh plum. Therefore, if a child is involved in your decisions regarding the future, parents would want that child to receive a competitive education. So, at some point, households begin to consider other communities to raise a child. If there is an African American young man the age of Trayvon Martin living in the home of a community being overpoliced for minor crimes, the message sent to everyone in the city is evident: it is time to relocate. Voila, gentrification.

Each year, nearly half of the 7,200 inmates within the Hudson County Jail are reincarcerated within three months of their release.<sup>17</sup> The context in which this church exists and which this project is engaging in is a context of historical prejudices, economic injustice, underperforming schools, and selective policing. How does this impact the mission? Outreach to those impacted by incarceration is essential and nonnegotiable to the life and future of CLUPC which has seen its membership rapidly decline as with many Presbyterian Church U.S.A churches. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A as a denomination has issued a statement regarding mass incarceration and the issues of injustice immersed in it (See Appendix E for the denomination statement).

#### *Community Meeting with a Government Official*

On March 9, 2017, I took a meeting with a representative of Community Solutions in a Jersey City Municipal Court conference room. In preparation for the project launch date, the hope was a partnership of some sort. A representative of the court

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<sup>17</sup> J. B. Wogan, "Getting Out of Jail and Back to Work in 'Second Chance City,'" *Governing*, May 2015, <http://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-jersey-city-jim-mcgreevey.html>.



informed me that the Municipal Court Judge Cynthia Jackson would rule over a diversion type program where individuals would have the opportunity to avoid having convictions become a part of their criminal record and hindering progress toward successfully re-entering society.

The issue of partnering has been spoken of recently as a necessity regarding community engagement. The difficulty is navigating through the agendas and the layers of political interest that control grass-roots types of missions. In Jersey City where historically there has been corruption and the “growth-machine politics” dominate the systems and structures of the community, it is difficult, maybe impossible to discover authenticity. Therefore, how can one generate a true partnership if the power structures of the community lack authenticity? This individual was selected to oversee a program, and the issue of cultural competency becomes a question. I met with her March 9, 2017 to discuss the Circle of Inspiration, and six months later she had not followed up with me regarding our mutual interests. So, a fundamental issue here is funding and the allocation of city, county, state, and federal grants which have been created to address what legislators have determined to be the “need” of its constituents. What community-based non-profits must contend with is the fact that politics interfere with the funding potential. Non-profits may identify in a start-up budget government funding as a goal, but there needs to be a serious conversation about how to overcome the “self-interest” in politics. The funding becomes assets to be used to further the local political machine that is in control. Many of the programs or potential partners simply are shells run by the operatives and the strategist of the local politicians who ran successful campaigns. This reality is tragic because the at-risk members of the community remain in harm's way. Is

the pastor savvy enough to understand and sense the political gamesmanship which is embedded in urban communities? If the church will engage the community and further its mission by creating subsidiary non-profits it may do well to hire a consultant who has his or her pulse of the local political landscape. Looking back, this individual appointed to this position simply wanted to “pick my brain” for ideas as she had no original thoughts of her own about addressing the dilemma of recidivism in Jersey City. We were building a network and had raised money. It would have made perfect sense to partner, but the partnership opportunities seemed to have been divvied up in a way that created more control for the political machine in power.

The city has a re-entry program, and during the election season, this program was touted as a program being modeled throughout the country. When I first engaged the community regarding this issue of recidivism and incarceration, I visited the program on three different occasions to discuss partnership and collaboration. I was never given a tour and the directors were not even available for a conversation. The program has received millions of dollars of grant money through the years, and many members of the community have complained to me they were ignored. The program employs political operatives who have been involved in city and state elections.

For this project, as stated before, we completed 175 surveys regarding re-entry in the community where this program exists. There was not a single success story from that million-dollar program changing the world. What does this mean to local churches and pastors sensing a call to engage the community in a more specific way? If your program's existence depends on the funding of the local government, that is a fragile existence. Also, in partnering, local churches must investigate and examine the credentials of the

directors leading the community-based program with whom they are interested in partnering. What are the stories of the potential partner? Most grassroots organizations have a story connected to its birth. Has the organization ventured away from its original mission? Is it possible to review the organizing documents if it is a 501c3? This could identify the authenticity or lack thereof and suggest a strategy going forward.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Theological Foundation**

This project will reflect on the biblical and spiritual formation of those impacted by incarceration. One of many questions before the project is: how does the ministry (pulpit and mercy ministries) name and confront the social barriers and economic injustices, such as mass incarceration and the war on drugs, which prevent some from realizing wholeness and the presence of a loving Lord? Timothy Keller says this regarding a definition of mercy ministry:

Our nation is becoming a mosaic of different groups, each with a unique complex of needs. Most Churches are surrounded by growing numbers of the unemployed and underemployed, new immigrant populations, singles, divorced persons, unwed mothers, the elderly, prisoners, the dying, sick and the disabled. Poverty is on the rise, the percentage of the elderly in our society is exploding, ethics are pouring into our country by the millions, and the federal money for helping agencies, hospitals, and other such institutions are drying up. Do we want to reach these new neighbors with the gospel? Then we must give our faith active expression through deeds of compassion coupled with evangelism and discipleship.<sup>1</sup>

Paul taught the church of Ephesus in Ephesians 6:12 and the church today, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood , but against the rulers, against the authorities,

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), p28

against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” God has called us to “wrestle” with these issues and consider our moral obligation to bear the failings of our weaker brothers and sisters as in Romans 15:1.

### *Love of God*

Love is undoubtedly a critical conversation needed to be engaged in urban communities and a reminder that Jesus is concerned with the lost and so should the church. Therefore, in listing the theological basis, we must begin with the love of God as the driving idea for this project. Discovering a loving God who can look beyond our imperfections and faults and still love us correctly is the purpose of this project. Then the King will say to those on his right as in Matthew 25:34-36:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

The impetus for the project is that the Lord has identified himself with this population. Therefore, the church, the “Bride of Christ” returns to her first love by anointing the feet of the prisoner, the returning citizen. We share our faith, we share our concern, and we share God's love by inviting a community that is currently on the fringes of society to sit with us at the table of fellowship and dialogue. This is very similar to the biblical model presented to us in the synoptic Gospels. The model of Jesus is eating with “sinners and tax collectors.” This model has many contemporary parallels in our society as certain communities are reduced to what has been called second-class citizens. The needs of the community shape the compass by which the church recaptures its mission. Based on the

hurt and pain we must faithfully approach the needs of those impacted by mass incarceration. We must invite victims of mass incarceration to a seat at the table.

### *Justice of God*

The justice of God is also a consideration as the theological basis of this project. In the scriptures, Micah 6:8, declares “Do justice.” The program we are engaging in is missional as we demonstrate the “justice” of which Micah speaks. The goal is for those who feel that bad legislation, unfair police practices, and unfair public policies have oppressed them, their families, and their communities to experience a sweet sense of “justice” as opposed to the “bitterness” of building “bricks with no straw.” Amos 5:24 states, “But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Is also an appropriate text when talking about the historical injustices of incarceration as it inflicted upon African Americans retold by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

### *Mercy of God*

The mercy of God is also a theological construct that is addressed by this project. The Circle of Inspiration will be a “mercy” ministry, showing kindness that in many ways is foreign to the community of returning citizens. Many returning citizens are re-entering a society that has lost a sense of mercy and criminalizes non-violent offenses as opposed to providing treatment for such offenders.

### *Discipleship*

There is a significant amount of un-churched individuals in the inner-city and many of them are recently released from prison. We are seeking to discuss “making disciples” within groups reaching them in unique and distinct ways. This project used a “holistic” approach to providing care-management that leads to discipleship and worship.

The project offered returning citizens the opportunity to attend bible study and a worship service dedicated to “mass incarceration” (See Appendix W). Pastors are now preaching or sowing seeds in a society that has a culture of “incarceration.” Theologian Leonard Sweet explains a metaphor for discipleship:

The great missiologist D.T. Niles gave us a parable of "the seed and the flowerpot" in which he compared the gospel to a seed, which when sown in Palestine, grows up into a plant called Palestinian Christianity. When sown in Roman soil, it germinates into Roman Christianity. When sown in Appalachian soil, the seed grows in Appalachian (or mountain) Christianity. Preachers must break the flowerpot and plant seed organically in the native soil to which we are sent. Thus, Christ can be found in our ground born in our own time.<sup>1</sup>

### *Liberation Theology*

Liberation theology was the framework for how we organized and structured the advocacy mission dynamic of this project. James Cone states in *A Black Theology of Liberation* that “the very character of human existence as defined by His (Jesus) life, is enough to show that we cannot be for Jesus and for the societal humiliation of human beings.”<sup>2</sup> This caste system extends far beyond prison walls and governs millions of people who are on probation and parole, primarily for nonviolent offenses. They have been swept into the systems, branded criminals or felons, and ushered into permanent second-class status, acquiring records that will follow them for life.<sup>3</sup>

### **Definition of Terms**

The project engages in a conversation that may be foreign to some; therefore, before presenting the plan there are some concepts that need to be defined and explained.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), p241.

<sup>2</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1986), p107

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 101.

### *Mass Incarceration*

Christopher Wildeman explain mass incarceration like this:

Whether called mass incarceration, mass imprisonment, the prison boom, the carceral state, or hyper-incarceration, this phenomenon refers to the current American experiment in incarceration, which is defined by comparatively and historically extreme rates of imprisonment and by the concentration of imprisonment among young, African American men living in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. Although there is scholarly consensus about how to define mass incarceration, there is some level of disagreement over its causes and consequences.<sup>4</sup>

### *Recidivism*

According to the National Institute of Justice recidivism is important to criminal justice:

Recidivism is one of the most fundamental concepts in criminal justice. It refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime. Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in re-arrest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release.<sup>5</sup>

In an interview with a Newark attorney, I learned about an individual she represented who was innocent of the crime but spent five years in prison. The individual was eventually cleared by her firm. Four years later he returned for representation about a crime he had committed. During the plea deal process, she asked this person why he committed the new offense. His response was simply he did not know how to live in society as a free man. The attorney also shared how prisons utilize shame as a form of rehabilitation, dehumanize inmates, and make non-violent people become violent after periods of incarceration.

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Wildeman, *Mass Incarceration* Oxford Bibliographies  
<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396607/obo-9780195396607-0033.xml>  
 (Introduction).

<sup>5</sup> National Institute of Justice, "Recidivism," June 14, 2014 accessed July 27, 2017,  
<https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/welcome.aspx>.



### *War on Drugs*

The war on drugs refers to a period during which the eradication of drug abuse became a priority for the United States government. Law enforcement and the courts began to criminalize drug crimes aggressively and disproportionately in African American communities. In 1971 President Richard Nixon declared war on drugs. He proclaimed, “America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse. To fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive.”<sup>6</sup> This declaration of war by the commander and chief on its own citizens marks the beginning of the criminalization of the drug trade and the beginning of the mass incarceration of African Americans in the United States of America. This was the beginning of what Michelle Alexander famously coined “The New Jim Crow.” According to Michelle Alexander,

Crime rates have fluctuated over the last few decades—they are currently at historical lows—but imprisonment rates have consistently soared, quintupled, in fact. And most of that increase is due to the War on Drugs. Drug offenses alone account for about two-thirds of the increase in the federal inmate population, and more than half of the rise in the state prison population. In some states, African Americans comprise 80 percent to 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison.<sup>7</sup>

### *Re-entering Citizen*

In this project, I use the term “re-entering citizen”<sup>8</sup> to describe individuals released from prison. I use this term instead of “convicted felon.” If Michelle Alexander's premise is correct—that the war on drugs and mass incarceration of African Americans reduces a person's status from a first class to a second-class citizen—the term re-entering

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<sup>6</sup>The American Presidency Project, “Richard Nixon-Remarks About an Intensified Program for Drug Abuse Prevention and Control,” accessed July 13, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3047>.

<sup>7</sup>Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 104.

<sup>8</sup> Re-entering citizen is a term created by the former mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter.

citizen seeks a reunification to that which has been subconsciously taken away:  
citizenship.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### **PROJECT TIMELINE MAY 8, 2017—JUNE 16, 2017**

##### *Step 1. Collect Surveys*

It was important to understand the landscape and the needs of the community. Circle of Inspiration utilized the services of two Masters level interns to gather surveys as well as collect more in-depth conversation from individuals impacted by incarceration. A total of 175 surveys were gathered and analyzed.

##### *Step 2. The Lay Advisory Committee*

The Lay Advisory Committee met and discussed the findings and implications of the surveys collected. We then called and followed up with individuals who supplied contact information and invited them to participate in a group meeting with a free dinner.

##### *Step 3. Group Meeting*

We conducted a group meeting with returning citizens and Lay Advisory Committee members to hear a message of Michelle Alexander and to talk to recovering citizens who attended to determine needs going forward. The returning citizens were marketed to, and the doors were open for any and all returning citizens to attend.

##### *Step 4 Coordinate Individual Sessions*

We coordinated individual sessions and began implementing the strategy of care-management working with two individuals, F.W. and H.W.

#### Step 5. Create Digital Footprint

We created a website and a Facebook account that established an online community, providing advocacy, literature, stories, and resources for returning citizens to utilize.

In September 2016, we began offering workshops titled the “Challenges of Re-Entry.” The group also began providing a weekly meeting for those interested in re-entry services. Also, we have also served 142 turkey meals for Thanksgiving for those who are impacted by mass incarceration. During this pre-project action, we gathered 125 surveys, including the surveys of the interns. During the project we utilized 300 complete surveys.

On May 10, 2017, we met to discuss the surveys and to call individuals to personally invite them to the meeting we were having the next day at a local restaurant. We had been promoting the program, but now we decided to call individuals. Key demographics of survey respondents can be found below:

- 94% are residents of Jersey City
- 5% ages 19-24
- 23% ages 25-30,
- 12% ages 31-36
- 10% ages 37-42
- 16% ages 43-48
- 17% ages 49-54
- 10% ages 55-60,
- 2% ages 61-66

- the remaining 66 years old and up
- 77% identified as African American
- 7% White
- 5% Hispanic or Latino
- 11% did other or did not wish to identify.

The largest data uncovered in this survey was the rate of incarceration among the men and women surveyed. Researchers asked, “Have you ever been incarcerated?” and 50% of respondents responded in the affirmative.

### **Methodology**

The goal was to surround each participant with a circle of inspiration and employ a system of care, which was composed of key individuals in the participant’s life. These people were invested in their successful transition and sobriety. Due to the lack of participation, we were not able to accomplish this. I think this points to the time and patience needed to serve the population of those impacted by incarceration.

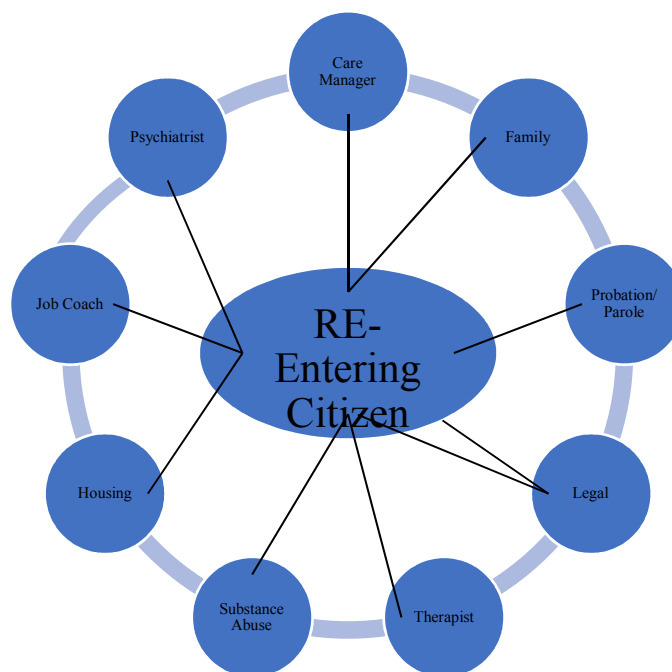


Figure 1. Re-Entering citizen graphic illustration.

### *Re-Entering Citizen*

The participants would have been any individual who agrees to the process of Circle of Inspiration's system of care. For the sake of this project, we had only two participants. Their initials were H.W. and F.W. The process stalled as the participant did not commit to success despite the difficulty that is involved in reintegrating back into society. The participants worked with me. I served as the Care Manager. They signed agreements, promising to communicate with the appropriate team members whenever there were challenges and disappointments. The two participants met with me for a total of six weeks (with a small stipend) after reviewing the surveys and participating in a community meeting.

### *Care Manager*

The system of re-entry needs a paradigm shift; therefore, churches and non-profits need a mentality of a care manager and not a case manager. This project, along with its volunteers, in particular Evangelist Cynthia Matthews embraced to concept of caring above and beyond. The Circle of Inspiration incorporated the role of care manager as the driving source of the inspiration to the system of are employed in the re-entry process for every participant. The utilization of the name care manager as opposed to case manager demonstrates the belief that every returning citizen must be served with care. The use of “care” is intentional. The heart of the program was the care and the compassion in which we worked with all the persons impacted by the mass incarceration of minorities.

Moving forward and during the term of this project, we intentionally shifted the paradigm away from the perception of the “returning citizen” as a “case.” Reintegrating back into society statistically is a difficult transition to make for the returning citizen. Viewing the “returning citizen” as a case speaks to the technical way the person is handled but infusing care into the process implements the adaptive approach the Circle of Inspiration program committed to employ. According to Eric Holder, “This overreliance on incarceration is not just financially unsustainable, it comes with human and moral costs that are impossible to calculate.” Mr. Holder has also described prison overhaul as a matter of civil rights. African Americans are disproportionately represented in prison: They make up 13 % of the nation's population, but 37 % of the federal prison population.

### *Step 1. Interview Returning Citizens*

The returning citizens interviewed with leaders of Circle of Inspiration. We were trying to grasp the temperament and attitude of the participants and both participants

interviewed well. F.W. in particular interviewed well as he was a musician in a church and disarmed us with familiar church vernacular.

*Step 2. Review and the Signing of the Covenant of Care*

The goal here was to reinforce a commitment, the participant's commitment to the program and our commitment to them.

*Step 3. Intake Interview*

Participants discussed in consultation with recommendations of the assessments and evaluations. For example: Name ten people who are involved in your life and who cares about your re-entry? This was a difficult question as both had struggled to maintain health interpersonal relationships.

*Step 4. Assessment Interview with Prison Social Worker, Probation, and Parole*

We did not get far with this step we did have to confirm employment with the probation officer who required that F.W. be employed.

*Step 5. Substance Abuse Assessment and Psychological Assessment. (If Necessary)*

*Psychological and Psychiatric Evaluations (if Necessary)*

The team meeting and the whole process of completing the individual plan of care is thirty days to complete. During the six-week-window of this project, we were not able to perfect an individual plan of care.

*The Stories of the Family Members*

The goal was to have a least one family member participate in the process and be a part of the Circle of Inspiration for the re-entering citizen. With what we had to work with, we were not able to accomplish this reality. The family member should be able to offer relevant history and may be available for inspiration, hope, and encouragement



during severe stages of the re-entry. The care manager should be in touch with the family member, and at some point, introduce the family member to the goals and the priorities of this system of care proposed by the pilot program. One of the project participants had family that was in contact. F.W. lived in an apartment that was impacted by mold, and his child was sick due to this exposure. I was able to make a referral to an attorney who protected the rights of the family against the landlord. Circle of Inspiration was able to provide funding so that the child of F.W. could pay for school pictures. These were all positive developments, and the child signed the back of a photo for me.

H.W. did not have family involved. He was a foster child, and his mother had asked him to leave. He asked me to provide an advance in his pay so he could pay for a room. Eventually, I discovered he had to leave the room because his roommate was addicted to crack. This resulted in his homelessness.

#### *Parole and Probation Officers*

A key team member should be the parole or probation officer of the re-entering citizen. Since the goal is not to offend again, the parole/probation officer can share an aspect of the story. The challenge is for the care manager and director to secure buy-in from the parole/probation officer as it pertains to the goals and priorities of the program. Thirty-five percent of prison admissions result from parole violations, and two-thirds of those are for a technical violation, such as missing appointments with a parole officer, failing to maintain employment, or failing a drug test.<sup>1</sup> We did not have any contact with probation officers of the program participants, but a church member at CLUPC was a

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew R. Durose, Alexia D. Cooper, Ph.D., and Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D., "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (Washington, DC: National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, 2014), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf>.

Senior Probation Officer, so there was an opportunity to build a relationship there going forward.

*Pastor or Religious Representative*

Spirituality is an essential aspect of this system of care. A pastor or religious representative can help the re-entering citizen establish a relationship with a higher power, understanding that in certain situations the re-entering citizen will need assistance from a power greater than themselves not to offend again or relapse. The pastor or religious representative is also the one more likely to have that critical theological conversation needed for re-entering citizens to find hope in their own story. F.W. was the stepson of a famous Bishop in Newark and played the drums at a local church in Jersey City. I invited the young man to the church, but he was not able to attend. H.W. did not participate in church and did not visit the church during the program period.

*Mentor*

In this current day and age, we have forgotten how instrumental mentoring is in the development of people. Each re-entering citizen had the option of inviting a person who would function as a mentor to him or her. The mentor interacted with the young man or young woman and built a relationship that will last past the enrollment in program. Ideally, this mentor would be from the community where the person resides. The program is designed to facilitate the balanced emotional growth of each person we receive as clients. This was done through positive social interaction, prevention, reinforcing strengths, and providing complete care. I was attempting to serve as a mentor to the young men while also supervising the internship. The six-week period was not an adequate amount of time to foster a mentoring relationship and gauge its effectiveness.

There needed to be a person the young men could look to for inspiration and accountability. Incarceration may have eroded the social skills needed to participate in healthy relationships. In prison, people are violated, abused, and in some cases victimized by people they know and see every day. Returning citizens have their guard up and need to re-learn how to love and receive love. I found there was this apprehension to what my motives were. In fact, F.W. would eventually accuse me of exploiting mass incarceration to increase my stature. He visited the church later to apologize, but it was apparent he was institutionalized and was skeptical of my motivations. Mentoring was essential, but there needed to be a commitment from potential mentors that they will not allow the returning citizen to push them away.

### *Legal*

There is a need for assistance from forensic case managers, volunteer teams of specialized lawyers, paralegals, and grass-roots advocacy groups. Another need is to recoup fairness and correct any violations of the rights of the re-entering citizens and their communities. We did not offer any legal advice but sought relationships and made referrals in situations where clients felt treated unjustly. F.W. needed an attorney and I drove him, his wife, and child to an attorney for a legal issue. Approximately 80 percent of criminal dependents are indigent and thus unable to hire a lawyer.<sup>2</sup> F.W. was arrested and his driver's license was revoked for child support. His court order was one hundred forty-four dollars a week, but he was earning nine dollars an hour through a temp agency

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<sup>2</sup> Prison Policy Initiative, "Schools and Prisons: Fifty Years After Brown V. Board of Education," accessed June 15, 2017, <https://static.prisonpolicy.org/scans/sp/brownvboard.pdf>.

in Jersey City. F.W. showed me a pay stub where ninety percent of his check was going to child support.

### *Therapist*

Successful re-entry to the community for re-entering citizens also depends on the quality of therapeutic services they receive while in prison and upon release. According to Nancy G. La Vigne, the men and women who leave prison are woefully unprepared to lead drug-free, law-abiding lives on the outside:

Nationally, about two-thirds of all prisoners have substance abuse histories. Only 40% receive treatment. As per the Advancement Association for the Advancement of Science “poverty in early childhood poisons the brain, therefore therapeutic and psychiatric services become sort of an anecdote reversing the damage of substance abuse and poverty to the brain and thinking of the at-risk. Also, the challenge before this new “System of Care” will be to “mitigate the stigma of criminality.”<sup>3</sup>

It was clear that both project participants could have benefited from therapeutic services. I attempted to provide accountability as an internship supervisor. I figured this was important to provide a realistic work environment and then coach him along the way to prepare him for a real work environment. They did not receive the mentoring well, resulting in several arguments. F.W. was probably suffering with an oppositional defiance type personality disorder. In my experience as a therapeutic case manager, helped me recognize these symptoms. For example, on one occasion I left the participant alone to study the materials relating to mass incarceration. The thinking was as an intern he could review the documents, and this would assist him in communicating with his associates and change his perspective. My administrative assistant told me he fell asleep.

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy G. La Vigne et al., "Examining the Effect of Incarceration and In-Prison Family Contact on Prisoners' Family Relationships." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 21, no. 4 (November 2005): 314-335.

When I confronted him, he began to argue with me. In any other setting, his behavior would have been grounds for termination. When I told him that, he left upset. After speaking with his fiancée, he returned apologetic about his actions.

#### *Psychiatrist and Psychologist*

Every re-entering citizen will undergo a psychological or psychiatric evaluation. The individual plan of care will include input from either the psychiatrist, psychologist, or both. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is more prevalent in violent neighborhoods than in combat zones, but hospitals rarely screen for it.<sup>4</sup> This program screened participants for PTSD and provided treatment. F.W. talked openly about his affiliation with gangs. PTSD could be an issue in his life going forward.

#### *Substance Abuse Counselor*

Alongside the psychotherapy of this program going forward, when appropriate, it utilized the counseling of a trained substance abuse counselor. Many clients will have dual diagnosis, and the psychological evaluation will help determine the necessary treatment responsible for managing meetings and all out-patient related activity. F.W. was participating in a mandatory substance abuse program. I observed H.W. smoking marijuana across the street from the church, and he would benefit from some substance abuse counseling. This occurrence was in the middle of the day across the street from his internship.

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Givens and Chris Glorioso, "I-Team: Few Trauma Centers Screen for PTSD, Despite Urging of Doctors," News 4 NY, updated March 5, 2014, <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/PTSD-Screenings-Traumatic-Injuries-I-Team-248419811.html>.

*Job Coach / Employment Counselor*

The jobless rate for young black male dropouts, including those incarcerated, is a staggering sixty percent.<sup>5</sup> The Circle of Inspiration will have a Resource Coordinator who will organize a support group for the re-entering citizen who is unemployed and looking to identify gainful employment after stretches of unemployment. We utilized the participants to create a job list that included employers who publicly announced its willingness to hire returning citizens.

*Jersey City Together (Metro IAF)*

The congregation has been affiliated with Metro Industrial Areas Foundation for twenty years. Recently, the organizing entity emerged under the new name Jersey City Together remaining an affiliate of Metro IAF. The lead organizer, Frank McMillan, agreed to participate in this project as a member of the LAC. From the first meeting with the lead organizer, I voiced my thoughts on the issue of mass incarceration and my belief that this phenomenon was the number one issue crippling urban communities. Although I had just arrived in Jersey City, my experience in Philadelphia and Chester Pennsylvania had convinced me I would also discover victims of mass incarceration in Jersey City. The lead organizer expressed his agreement. However, the organization had completed thousands of surveys, and the three core issues were housing, education, and safety. We continued to talk, and the lead organizer agreed to visit the city's program addressing mass incarceration. He also agreed that the city's plan had challenges. We continued to have conversations up until Metro IAF invited a group from Jersey City Together to Baltimore to discuss criminal justice. Through many conversations, we were finally able

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), p3 (Introduction).

to present a criminal justice action that the entire organization voted to adopt as a core issue at its October 2, 2017 rally with 1000 attendants. Jersey City Together has this initiative published on its most current marketing material.

### *Creating an On-line Media Community*

The mission of Circle of Inspiration is to provide resources, services, and advocacy for those impacted by mass incarceration. To accomplish this mission, we created a Facebook page and a website (circleofinspiration.net). The Facebook page has reached 26,674 people with 50,745 impressions because of seventeen ad campaigns spending \$573.86. The site has 2,661 page views. We post stories that raise consciousness toward justice issues and inspiring stories of people who have overcome and made successful transitions.

### *Biblical Analysis*

#### A New Creation

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” -2 Corinthians 5:17

It may have been necessary to engage in specific teaching focused on the concept and nuances of “new creation” to build a coalition within the congregation to secure the support for Circle of Inspiration going forward. This is grafting as explained by Paul in Romans 11:23-24:

Moreover, even then, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

The Lord has the power to take a nonconventional ministry and graft it into a traditional ministry and make the ministry new” The problem is convincing those committed to “old-time” religion that a new course of action is necessary. “This is the way we have always done it,” is the mantra of many a dying ministry and congregation.

### *Rebuilding Fragmented Communities*

There is something about Nehemiah’s story that hits home. Nehemiah is about restoring, and our society is broken after decades of mass incarceration of people who are poor and of color. As one reads the book of Nehemiah, the reader readily identifies with Nehemiah’s experience of living in a broken society. The aftermath of mass incarceration has left many components of the community broken (homes, families, morality, justice system). During this overwhelming brokenness, Nehemiah has a lot to say to this project. As we took an in-depth review through a year of listening sessions, surveys, interviews, and six weeks of interactions, the themes of Nehemiah became more apparent.

### *People are Living in Shame*

“The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and fire destroys its gates.” -*Nehemiah 1*

Nehemiah’s people were living in shame, and that was the report he received. The young men of Jersey City were hanging out in front CLUPC. The young women were resorting to immoral behavior to feed their families. This communicated a sense of shame that was clear to me. A tremendous amount of shame is a way to describe the aftermath of mass incarceration. While individuals waited for their dinners, we had individuals complete surveys. The number of people was overwhelming, and most were young individuals looking for a helping hand. The shame and guilt of living in sin was palpable.



The church must seek the Lord and discover ways to intervene in addressing the degradation of living with a criminal record. The Spirit of the Lord minimizes the shame. The beloved community is a community of people with nothing, still walking with their heads high, because they have a relationship with Jesus. Think of Peter in Acts 3:6-7, “However, Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!” Taking him by the right hand, Peter helped him up.” Both young participants I worked with were dealing with shame as they struggled to survive with criminal convictions. A powerful message I tried to reinforce was, “God has forgiven you. You do not have to live in shame because there is no condemnation for those that are in Christ.”

#### *What About the Opposition?*

In Nehemiah’s story as soon as the project began to enter moments of momentum, the personalities of Sandbalot and Tobaih came. This Circle of Inspiration faced opposition within the congregation as with most rebuilding projects. As a society, when we address something broken, negativity shows through with comments like, “We tried that before,” “That is not going to work,” “That costs too much!”

#### *You Must Care*

“As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days,”

Circle of Inspiration and this project is built on the premise of developing a system of care. This project reminded me that it is challenging to build or rebuild if one does not care. Nehemiah was not called to a ministry like we are accustomed to seeing prophets called. It did not take a miraculous calling for Nehemiah to do what is right. He did not hear a word from the Lord. His title was not that of a prophet. He did not see a

burning bush or a blinding light. Nehemiah asked a question, and this showed he cared. Nehemiah did not forget his extended family or his roots. Nehemiah remembered where he worshiped. The question before this project and before all outreach programs is, “Can you rebuild something you do not care about?” In the aftermath of mass incarceration we need people, we need congregations, and we need communities that care. This project taught me this tragic reality we struggle with as a society. The people who have the power are the people who care the least. Nehemiah asked questions for the right reasons. He asked and then acted. In developing stories for this narrative based research project, we asked questions and wanted to hear the story. In communities that are suspicious of those asking questions, the people can resist. This project and my time at CLUPC has reinforced the notion that if you want to rebuild, your heart has to be in the right place. Nehemiah’s heart was broken. He had a burden. Does society have a heart and if it does is it broken over the shame communities are living in in the aftermath of mass incarceration? Is there a burden for those impacted by mass incarceration?

***A Celebration of the New: The Prodigal Son and the Returning Citizen.***

Jesus in Luke 15 is surrounded by the marginalized from the community. He is frequently in conversation with the undesirables living on the fringe of his society. This project was attempting to do the same. We kept in mind what Christ had already claimed in Luke 4, “*set the prisoners free.*” Jesus was reaching out to those located outside the camp. He was opening the door to the kingdom, but reaching out to those at the back of the line or the back of the bus. The Circle of Inspiration, from the perspective of this project, was attempting to reach those who were right outside the church and invite them to have a seat at the table. Therefore, it would be appropriate to identify the Circle of

Inspiration as an outreach ministry. It is important to understand this ministry to those impacted by mass Incarceration of African Americans as a biblical ministry.

In Luke 15, the Pharisees see Jesus having a conversation with people they identify as sinners. The Pharisees, those representing the “old-wineskins,” were defensive and oppositional defiant toward the “new wine.” A question we must ask ourselves is, if Jesus was walking around in the flesh today, where would he be? Would he be sitting in a pew, singing the same hymns Sunday after Sunday? Would Jesus be serving on a committee, wasting his perfect time in meetings? I would argue, the sacred scriptures describe, the Savior, as a person who was outside. Therefore, in our contemporary context, he would be outside looking for sinners. Jesus would be involved in the assistance of eliminating mass incarceration and addressing the hurt and pain this has caused in communities of color, speaking in a way that gang-members understand. Having a conversation and speaking in a way that compel ex-offenders to reach out and to touch the “hem of His garment.”

In Luke 15:1-2, the Pharisees say, “this man receives sinners” and “eats with them.” In ministry, this must be the highest compliment. Our project had listening sessions where food and stories were enjoyed. The stories told reflected on the damage committed by mass incarceration. In the culture and context of Christ and the first century, to share a meal was to share social status. To some degree to eat a meal with a person was to authenticate their existence as being worthy. We listened to individuals who felt as though they were not heard. As a society, we need more of this listening dynamic. Our listening sessions did not have the highest turn-out, and I sense was due to apathy.

The parable of the Prodigal Son has a lot to teach our contemporary society about mass incarceration. The Pharisees accuse Jesus as if to say the method of the Messiah disqualifies the Messiah and His message. In response, Jesus tells three stories that exist as one parable. In the first parable, the shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep to find one lost sheep. He sees it, he rejoices, and calls his friends together to join him in delight. In the next story, Jesus tells the story of a lost coin where a woman sweeps her entire house looking for a lost coin. She finds it, and again she invites her friends over to celebrate. These two stories, along with the parable of the Prodigal Son told from different angles and perspectives, highlight the necessity of celebrating over the lost. This is relevant for the project and the themes of this paper.

The parable begins with the younger son at the start, so you expect that he is the negative example. The parable ends with the older brother, outside of the party, refusing to join the celebration. We always judge the younger brother, but I wonder how the older brother treated the younger brother. In the church, I wonder how much work we do to prevent and assist people from going back into the world, engaging in criminal activity. When we see “weaker” people, vulnerable to temptation, making foolish decisions (not following the principals of the proverbs and the law of Christ) we need to do all we can to keep them in the fold.

In relationship to this project, we also need to be understanding when after periods of incarceration, the younger brother returns to the community. The younger brother ends up in a foreign land, and many of our young men are in a foreign land today. I hear stories of how far mothers and wives must travel to see their sons and husbands with children in tow. The text does not say where this land is, but we know it is not home.

Let us say it is the prison industrial complex. He is in a foreign land. A place he should not be. For the sake of this project, let us imagine this foreign land is a private prison that someone's child has been shipped off to, to enrich other communities. What is interesting though is God has often blessed his people in foreign lands. He called Abraham to a foreign land. Moses saw the burning bush in a foreign land, and Joseph rose to the top in a foreign government. The psalmist put it this way in Psalm 139:8, "Where can I go to depart from your presence. If I depart to the heavens you are there. If I descend to the depths of Sheol you are there." The point is that a person may go to prison, but they are not beyond the reach of almighty God; therefore, when this person returns they should not be treated as if they have returned from a place where there was no God.

The Prodigal Son tending pigs is the worst cultural thing a Jew can practice. The Prodigal Son is experiencing a "rock-bottom" event. Prison life has been called rock bottom, and the prison experience has been categorized as a rock bottom experience. The rock-bottom experience can help one begin to think straight. The Prodigal Son requested his inheritance before his father died. He was not thinking straight. The Prodigal Son goes to a foreign land. He is not thinking straight. The Prodigal Son squanders all his money, exposing himself to the unclean lifestyle of a gentile. He was not thinking straight. It was only when the Prodigal Son endured a rock-bottom experience that he comes to his senses. Through a conversation with himself, he comes to his senses. In some cases, prison offers a moment of self-examination. Embedded in the story of the Prodigal Son, is the picture of the back-slider who does not invest or subject themselves to the church, but instead uses their gifts and talents in a worldly and foolish manner. When they come to their senses, will they find grace or a welcoming space at the local

church? In a rush to judgment, it is assumed that the younger brother is the epitome of unrighteousness.

The Prodigal Son makes his way back to his father. We do not know how far he traveled, but his father sees him from a distance and runs to meet him, shedding the cultural expectations. The individuals we worked with were trying to make their way back to civilization, but they had so far to go. The cultural and historical context cannot be overlooked. According to Kenneth E. Bailey,

The word run in Greek (*dramon*) is the technical term used for the foot-races in the stadium. Paul uses this word often in this sense (1 Corinthians 9:24, 26; Galatians 2:2; 5:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Hebrews 12:1). Luke is a well-educated man who chooses his words carefully. Thus, we can translate the phrase, "His father saw him and had compassion and raced." It is not just a slow shuffle or a fast walk- he races! <sup>6</sup>

That is God. He sees us from a distance. Scholars say that he does this to minimize the scorn he would have received from the community. There was a ritual he had to endure when he came back to the community. This is the new mindset needed for the church. A mindset that understands we need to race, to embrace our brothers and sisters returning to the community, assisting them as they wrestle with the scorn and stigma of being branded a criminal or felon. We hesitate. We suffer from the paralysis of analysis, contemplating the "whys and the hows." The reader with historical and cultural understanding must be surprised with the father's response. To do anything other than a walk was not usual and embarrassing for an elder. Such a spectacle would draw a gathering. Scholar Greg Forbes asserts that, "the father was, therefore, prepared to violate custom to reconcile and

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants* (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), p67.

welcome home his lost son.”<sup>7</sup> How far are we willing to go to restore those who have been “away.” We offered listening sessions to the community, but the attendance did not reflect a community ready, willing, and able to invest in the lives of those needing to be restored. In Luke 15:22, “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, strongly speaks of reinstatement of citizenship as the heart of recidivism. In the aftermath of mass incarceration, a plethora of people only need to feel an authentic sense of being reinstated and restored. The father has called for the best robe, and the father says, “put it on him.” Also, he is given a ring and sandals for his feet, which shows that the prodigal son returned bare feet and it demonstrates the new life offered.

The father says, “quickly.” Just as quickly as the son squandered the money, the father restores it. What returning citizens need more than anything is a sense of being restored. However, lengthy parole and probation processes leave them with the sense of being isolated. Kenneth Bailey interprets the first robe as the son’s former robe, which had been stripped off as part of the *Ketsatsah* ceremony. Bailey presents the *Ketsatsah* in this manner:

As soon as they discovered that the money had been lost among the Gentiles the *Ketsatsah* ceremony would be enacted. The son would then be obliged to sit for some time outside the gate of the family home before being allowed even to see his father. Finally, he would be summoned. With the boy already rejected by the village, the father would be angry, and the boy would be obliged to apologize for everything as he pleaded for job training in the next village.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Greg Forbes, “Repentance and Conflict in the Parable of the Lost Son,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (June 1999), 219.

<sup>8</sup> Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 66.

The Prodigal Son did not suffer the usual consequences of *Ketsatsah* just as Christians do not endure the punishment it deserves. With the ring, financial transactions could be authorized. The returning son receives a share in the decision making.<sup>9</sup>

Ex-offenders in our contemporary society never receive the type of reinstatement the Prodigal Son receives. Circle of Inspiration partnered with a freeholder program and assisted those with criminal records who were interested in union jobs. I also transported the two participants F.W. and H.W. to the office of the freeholder, Bill O’Dea. They took a standardized test which they failed significantly. If Circle of Inspiration, would have continued to run this could have been a flourishing partnership.

As a returning citizen, the process was complicated. Many years ago, I had to endure a lengthy process to receive a Real Estate Licensure. Many convicted felons are forbidden from engaging in certain types of professions with financial dealings. The son was rewarded for his return home but not for the foolishness of his past. Jesus, by way of this parable, is reminding his listeners that he was the father, offering restoration for those who return home. How long do we punish an individual for a mistake that was made? If the debt has been paid to society, as a society, we should “run” to provide restoration and reinstatement as this makes our community a perfect union.

*Where is the Older Brother? He is in the Field Working*

The older brother is not greeted with the noise of a ceremony. He did not come to the house himself.

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<sup>9</sup> Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006), 143.



And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

-Luke 15:27

Robert H. Stein claims that “safe and sound” is healthy. More is implied than his physical health. In the picture part of the parable, this would refer to his moral and spiritual health; but in the reality part, it refers to his having received salvation.”<sup>10</sup> The young man has survived the “foreign land” and the penitentiary danger. He has returned “whole.”

However, he became angry and was not willing to go in, and his father came out and began pleading with him.

-Luke 15:8

The father came out to meet the older son just as he had come out to meet the younger son. God is willing to meet His children where they are. Bailey offers this legal description:

Everything left in the house is legally the property of the older son. Although the father still maintains authority, the remaining wealth is pledged to the older son. At the death of the father, the elder son will acquire the right of disposition. The father can spend the usufruct (profits) of the estate as he sees fit. If the profits are not consumed, the profits, are added to the capital that the older son will one day inherit. The older son is not pleased because the profits spent to have a banquet would be added to the capital.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Robert H Stein, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 24, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 407.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, *The Cross & the Prodigal*, 81.

There have probably been many ministries that died and then buried in the treasurer and trustee room because the budget did not have room to cover expenses of an outreach ministry to returning citizens.

The Pharisees, to whom the parable is told, would probably begin to realize that they were the target of the parable and represented the older brother in the story. Jesus was being questioned about his motivation for eating with sinners. In this parable, Jesus is saying the Pharisees should be rejoicing like the father instead of sulking like the older brother.

The elder son has cut himself off from the father and the family. In doing so, he cannot participate in the joy of the father. When we apply the parable to the modern church member rather than to the Pharisee, we can easily see how often the active member is insulted like the elder brother when a new convert is honored, given an office, or praised. The tension escalates even further when the prodigal sons return to church after a stint in prison. Why should one rejoice so much over finding what was lost rather than not missing something?

### **Interpretation**

The Pharisees were no better than the sinners and tax collectors surrounding Jesus. Today, those who claim pews are no more honorable than those who claim prison as their former homes. Members of CLUPC believed in their heart that the church had belonged to them. The historically African American Presbyterian church was rich in history and held a somewhat distinguished place in the community. On several occasions, long time members used the expression, “this is our church.” As we tried to recruit

different classes of society into the church, a territorial disposition was evident. Members talked about liability concerns because we were dealing with returning citizens, but this presented itself as a red herring. Longtime members were uncomfortable sharing the church with new faces with imperfect backgrounds. Both parties needed reconciliation to God.

The older brother was in the presence of his father the entire time but never experienced his affection. This highly religious group, the Pharisees, had been in and out of the synagogue. They celebrated the Passover every year but was never impacted by the ceremony. The God of Israel was all around them ritually, but relationally, they were outside of His presence working. They were trying to earn the fathers love but never celebrating. The highly influential stakeholder who sabotaged the Circle of Inspiration should have honored the opportunity to reach the prodigal sons of Jersey City who return to the community after periods of incarceration. The Pharisees were challenging the method of Jesus and thereby challenging his message. This dynamic was also at play with this project and this local congregation. I shared with members of the session my criminal background to explain why Circle of Inspiration was so meaningful to me. This was a moment of clarity and transparency, and several people shed tears. However, one person abstained during the initial vote, and then used this privileged information to discredit me within the congregation.

The parable of Prodigal Son invites the audience, the Pharisees, to view the situation from a different perspective. This is what is needed, as the minister attempts to graft new ministries into traditional ones. This project was confronted by a congregation not yet ready to sit and share a meal with lawbreakers. We need to view the situation of

conversations with sinners from the angle of celebrating that “which was lost has now been found.” Seeing Jesus engaged with sinners and tax collectors should not be cause for concern and murmuring. It should be an opportunity for celebration. Just because a person has been “in church” all their lives, working hard on committees, this person is no better than the one who “went away” as a young person not thinking straight who has now returned. What is my relationship with the Lord? What is my relationship with my younger brother?

### *The Younger Brother and the Returning Citizen*

Imagine if a person released from prison and an associate minister learns the church is throwing a party to honor this recently released individual. There is a big banner on the church with the name of the recently released written on it. There is music, line-dancing, and an elaborate barbecue all on the church’s expense. The associate minister has been serving the church faithfully and proclaims that the person is not worthy of such a scene and decides to confront the Pastor.

The incarcerated population of America is growing and continues to be a bad example to the rest of the world. This situation is disastrous because of how we treat returning citizens. Can the Prodigal story teach us anything? Overcoming the tragedy of being born into poverty will take public policy creativity, but it will also receive a spiritual awakening that would allow returning citizens to dream about a life outside of the ghetto and prison. In fact, studies show that returning citizens who are involved in religion at some point in the process have a better chance of success. A study conducted by Byron Johnson of the University of Pennsylvania Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society found that graduates of Prison Fellowships are less likely than non-

graduates to return to a life of crime. Prison Fellowship is an organization founded by Chuck Colson, an ex-convict and Richard Nixon aide. The program provides spiritual counseling, job training and mentoring to prisoners nearing the end of their sentences.<sup>12</sup>

Byron Johnson stated that:

Religion targets antisocial values emphasizes accountability and responsibility change cognitive approaches to conflict and provides social support skills through interaction with religious people and communities. Such emphases seem to be consistent with what many rehabilitation workers would call principals for effective treatment.<sup>13</sup>

On a podcast presented by the Washington D.C. Office of Public Safety, Paul Tranthan had this to say about his success after being released from prison (at the time he had been successful reintegrated back into society for three years):

While living in this room and working-I have been a member of my church, Allen AME Chapel and I have great support from the ministerial staff all the way down to the congregation. I know that had a lot to do with my success because as I was going to the church you know, staying under the refuge-under God, so many people came to me with open arms.<sup>14</sup>

Faith-based organizations will play a significant role in reducing the alarming numbers of recidivism. The Circle of Inspiration project is a crucial project, but it merely represents a position alongside the part of the parish ministry. It is apparent that the crisis is unsolvable from a governmental perspective. The problem is multi-faceted, so the

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<sup>12</sup> “Study Touts Faith-Based Prison Rehabilitation Program,” *Religion News Service*, January 1, 2003, <https://religionnews.com/2003/01/01/news-story-study-touts-faith-based-prison-rehabilitation-program/>.

<sup>13</sup> Byron R. Johnson, David B. Larson, and Timothy C. Pitts, “Religious Programs, Institutional Adjustment, and Recidivism among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs,” *Justice Quarterly* 14, no. 1, (March 1997):

<sup>14</sup> Yvonne Cooper and Paul Tranthan, “Mentoring Offenders Released From Prison: A Faith-Based Program,” March 7, 2007, Welcome to DC Public Safety radio show, podcast, MP3 audio, <https://media.csosa.gov/podcast/audio/category/faith-based-initiatives/page/6/>.

solution must be multi-faceted. Faith plays a significant role in replacing a faulty belief system that precipitated a life of crime. Faith can supplant it with a new perspective that will generate success upon being released from prison.

Projects like Circle of Inspiration are needed to address the psychological and sociological needs of an individual struggling under the pressure of recidivism. Also, the faith-based organizations are crucial in supplying support for the offenders after release. Still, religious institutions have had to confront the limits of their prison ministries. Spirituality may help people survive the hardships and absurdities of incarceration, but life on the outside poses a radically different existential challenge. Meanwhile, local courts and churches realize that freed prisoners need jobs, homes, and unwavering support—emotional and otherwise.<sup>15</sup>

This idea of the church as community support or mechanism for the black community is reiterated by Andrew Billingsley in his book *Black Families and the Struggle for Survival*:

When we think of institutions in the Black community which have helped the family in carrying out its functions, none looms more extensive than the Black church. For it is here, in the close interaction between the family and the church, where the Black community has experienced its most robust mechanisms for survival. Moreover, if we were to single out three institutions paramount to the Black experience, they would be family, the church, and the school.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Omar M. McRoberts, “Religion, Reform, Community: Examining the Idea of Church-based Prisoner Reentry,” (Working Discussion Paper for the Urban Institute’s Reentry Roundtable, The Urban Institute, March 20-21, 2002), accessed June 29, 2018, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/60756/410802-Religion-Reform-Community.PDF>.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families and the Struggle for Survival* (New York: Friendship Press, 1974), 19.

The story or parable of the Prodigal Son as told by Jesus in the gospel of Luke is a story that has many different applications, interpretations, and observations many of which relate to the themes of this project and the mission of Circle Inspiration.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT RESULTS AND EVALUATION

#### **Analysis: Grafting, Wineskins, and New Creation**

This project found that grafting an affiliate ministry into an existing department was difficult. I use the term grafting here because this term best describes starting a new ministry inside a preexisting traditional ministry. CLUPC is a traditional church stuck in many ways to the patterns of “old time religion.” As I reflect and process the situation two years later, I realize that the trust had not been there to accomplish the goals and vision of Circle of Inspiration. I was a new pastor, starting September 1, 2015. During the process of building the program, we may have neglected the system building that is necessary to produce the desired effect. According to James Clear,

We fall in love with systems. None of this is to say that goals are useless. However, I have found that intentions are useful for planning your progress and systems are useful for making progress. Goals can provide direction and even push you forward in the short-term, but eventually, a well-designed system will always win.<sup>1</sup>

How could we have built the system? Would the project have had different results had we started with someone who is trained in systems building? These are all questions I pondered months after the conclusion of the project. We eventually had to halt the program as the conflict intensified, culminating in my resignation on December 8, 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> James Clear, “Forget About Setting Goals. Focus on This Instead,” James Clear (blog), accessed June 29, 2018, <https://jamesclear.com/goals-systems>.



As a pastor and organizer, I had the passion, platform, and message to grab attention, but the sustainability and success depended on a system based approach. This approach grows organically and intentionally from a mind driven by foresight and grounded in the appropriate subject matter.

Mass incarceration is tragic and immoral but how does one combat a system that has been groomed for generations and fertilized to the point that its roots become deeply embedded into the core of this county? It takes a system to confront a system. It appears that we jumped in and began to engage a system and a machine that we were not ready to fight. The problem of mass incarceration and the damage this phenomenon has done to urban communities may have been more profound and broader than we anticipated. It was crucial for there to be planning and “buy-in” from the city and the congregation as both were needed if the program was to be sustainable with quantifiable results and impact on the community.

Members of the congregation appeared to support the project. A power analysis should have been part of the pre-planning and pre-strategy process. The church vote to proceed with the process was eight affirmative votes and one abstention vote. The church also voted on whether to create a separate board subject to the session of our church. This was an affiliate ministry. The one vote of abstention was from an individual who was a key stakeholder in the church and a business owner in the community. In the meeting, this person stated she had an issue with convicted felons and the potential liability issues for the congregation. Upon reflection, I could have provided more education on the issues and how it was an inescapable reality to address the impact of the mass incarceration of African Americans for the life of that congregation. The church

was leasing space to a program addressing homelessness, and most of the clients were homeless due to the residual effect of a criminal record. CLUPC was in an area where drugs were sold by returning citizens, but these drug dealers had souls too. They needed to be reached. The key stakeholder who was against the program had grown up in Jersey City but had moved out to a suburban town. Like many other congregants, she was disconnected from the everyday challenges of living in the Greenville section of Jersey City.

I later learned that she was actively campaigning against the program among the congregation. This was the complication and complexity of grafting a new entity into an old mindset. The words of Christ in Matthew 9:17 are appropriate here: “Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined, but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” The program I was suggesting was new wine. the mindset of old-time religion was the old wineskins.

A ministry that focuses on the contemporary, contextual challenges our congregations face may not coincide with the priorities of church leaders stuck in an old-time religion wineskin. From my understanding, old wineskins cannot handle the stretching of the fermentation process of the new wine.

From this, I propose the critical stakeholder who abstained at the table but freely shared thoughts to all who would listen among the congregation neglecting the solidarity principles of the session did so because "stretching" was not an option. The critical stakeholder became stuck in a ministry model that expired along with the hymnals we were using every Sunday morning. What does stretching look like in this context? The

injury is possible when there is no stretching. The damage, in this case, was to all those who could have benefited in the community from a program service assisting individuals returning to the city after having been incarcerated. The injury was to the congregation that desperately needs a life. Stretching is the willingness and open-mindedness necessary to ascertain growth. Stretching is “walking by faith and not by sight.” Stretching believes and confirms not by might not by power, but by my, Spirit says the Lord. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

The program organized an event with speaker Dr. Jamal Bryant who came to speak about mass incarceration. The key stakeholder voiced her firm opinion that we had spent too much money in securing the speaker. The community was blessed by the event, but the congregation missed an opportunity to be stretched.

#### **Self-Analysis: Was I too close to the issue?**

The issue of mass incarceration is an important issue and a personal issue to me. As a survivor of the historical tragedy called mass incarceration of African Americans, the issue is intensely personal. I know what it is like to have the iron doors slide closed behind you. I know what it is like to have to speak to correction officers through thick plexiglass and iron bars. I remember how hard it was to transition back into the community after being in the county jail for nine months. The memories are fresh. My heart still races as I recall filling out job applications and having to “check the box,” disclosing mistakes I made when I was a twenty-year-old. How does my background impact the project? Maybe I come to the table knowing and believing that I could have avoided being a homeless returning citizen if I had a support system greeting me upon release.

There should have been more listening sessions. We had several listening sessions, and perhaps we should have been intentional in scheduling more. A few added listening sessions with careful intentionality would have been good for building a new brand with the affiliated ministry grafted into the old.

*Stability is Essential*

Organizationally, the church did not have a stable infrastructure. The church did not have an audit in the prior twenty years, and the stakeholder (who campaigned against all my ideas) was a former treasurer. Her husband was the controlling force behind the trustee board. We were trying to accomplish an audit and build this outreach project simultaneously. This appears to have been too much trauma for the congregation to handle. As a new pastor, it may have been more practical first to rebuild a healthy infrastructure. The church was a bi-cameral church, so the incorporation was in tatters. Malfeasance may have been an issue. The religious entity of the church was constructed with conflicts of interest, so the context was not a healthy one. To complicate matters, the presbytery overseeing the church was being critiqued by the synod overseeing the churches in the northeast region. To graft an outreach ministry to a church in this dysfunction was a challenge. Maybe it was too early in my tenure, and the trust level was not where it needed to be to navigate through all these complexities.

***Recommendation: Pastoral Care to the Recently Released African American Male***

African Americans are a specific group experiencing a unique set of circumstances, which are inherently different from the trials and tribulations facing other ethnic groups:

Reformers of drug sentencing laws are closing in on a goal that was unthinkable even a few years ago: scrapping the federal sentencing structure established in

1986 that gives far harsher penalties for crack cocaine than for powder cocaine, resulting in prisons packed with low-level, predominantly African American offenders. About 77,000 people have been sentenced for crack-related federal crimes since 1992, according to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, which sets federal sentencing guidelines. In 2008, over 80% of offenders convicted that year were black, and 10% were white.<sup>44</sup>

There needs to be a platform where African American men can tell their stories and gain strength from the similarities embedded in their heritage, culture, and community. For churches in inner cities with demographics like that of CLUC, the ministry to African-Americans is vital and very complex. There is a concern in our society, and it is the long-term health and stability of the African American community. From experience, I understand and believe that part of the solution to the African American community lies within the state of the African American man. Pastoral care has not been a consistent part of the strategy to treat the dysfunction associated with African American males. In fact, Michelle Alexander indicts the church and its failings in helping those incarcerated:

The church was the last place where they would go for help or support or understanding when they got out of prison. It was the place where they felt the most condemned and unwelcome. Pastors would be quick to wave a finger at black men for the way they dressed or for their conduct as fathers. The church was the place where they felt the most shame for their circumstances. As a result, I viewed faith leaders as a substantial audience for this book. I wanted those people to have a broader understanding of the system and to realize that it was not all about individual choices.<sup>45</sup>

Again, from my experience, the issues are so systemic and multi-faceted, that most untrained pastors are not equipped to provide the pastoral care African American males need to stay out of prison and in school.

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<sup>44</sup> Theo Emery, "Will Crack-Cocaine Sentencing Reform Help Current Cons?" *Time*, August 7, 2009, accessed July 13, 2017, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1915131,00.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Amy Frykholm, "Criminal Injustice: Michelle Alexander on Racism and Incarceration," *The Christian Century*, April 30, 2012, p#.

In Jersey City, it was an apparent disconnect between returning citizens, the congregations, and the pastors. The congregations are then left feeling uncomfortable because of the stereotypes about returning citizens. One can argue that pastors are not trained to keep troubled black children out of gangs and away from drug dealers. Pastors also seem to struggle to preach a message that resonates with convicted felons. The families of these returning citizens are cloaked in shame, wounded, and discouraged as they strive to support family members, reduced to second-class citizens.

For churches in the inner city, the ministry to African Americans is a crucial one and a very complicated situation. Pastoral care has not been a consistent part of the strategy to treat the dysfunction associated with African American males. Pastoral care to African American males provides a unique spiritual direction. The pastor looking to care for African American males must specialize in at-risk youth and the dysfunction surrounding their families before tragedy strikes the life of the young man. This is preventive, proactive pastoral care. The services to at-risk youth and their families need to be available every day and open on Sundays for counseling and mentoring. For the pastoral care to be a success, the pastor has to offer professional services to at-risk youth and their families that are spiritually sensitive, culturally competent, and results driven. The pastor must be able to provide the care considering the context in which African-American men live. Spiritual direction should focus on educational stability, economic opportunities, prison prevention, and recidivism reduction.

### *Education*

If the quality of education could increase in inner-city neighborhoods the number of incarcerated African Americans would decrease. Those that slip through the cracks of

the educational system are at-risk of entering the judicial system as offenders. African Americans are significantly underrepresented among children who are the highest achievers in reading, mathematics, science, and writing. They are disproportionately represented among the lowest achievers in those areas. The implication of such underachievement is troublesome because of what it portends for the future, particularly the future of the African American community.<sup>46</sup> The pastor must understand that for the most part, young African American males most likely did not get the preparation needed to be successful in life. This means that the care provided by the pastor should include encouragement that is educationally focused. If the young man is educated and competitive, this may boost his morale and self-worth.

#### *Prison and Recidivism Prevention*

In discussing the future of African American males and how pastoral care can be influential regarding growth and change, one must address imprisonment and recidivism prevention. Princeton sociology professor Bruce Western and Stanford law professor Robert Weisberg presented a sober picture of incarceration in the United States:

Although only 0.5 percent of the U.S. population is in prison, the figure affects African Americans disproportionately because young, poorly educated black men are incarcerated more frequently than any other social group, Western said. For example, about a third of black male high school dropouts aged 22 to 30 years were in prison or jail in 2000. In contrast, only 3.3 percent of white male dropouts the same age was behind bars. Prison time has now become a thoroughly normative life event" for black male dropouts.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jacob U. Gordon, ed., *The Black Male in White America* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2002), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Lisa Trei, "Higher Incarceration Rates Harm Social Stability, Scholars Claim," *Stanford Report*, May 25, 2005, accessed June 29, 2018, <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/may25/inequality-052505.html>.

The mass incarceration of African American men has not made African American communities safer. There is an indication that populations may be unstable because of incarceration policies and practices. According to the U.S. Justice Department, 95 % of those incarcerated return to the community and upwards of 60 % of those recidivate because of either a new crime or violation of parole.<sup>48</sup>

Pastoral care is needed for African Americans who are in danger of going to prison and those recently released from incarceration. The purpose of this pastoral care is to reduce recidivism by addressing the social and economic dynamics, which surround the client and the dysfunction surrounding their families. The pastor should analyze the dynamics which foster incarceration as well as the future problem of recidivism. The pastor should offer pastoral care strategies to combat the crisis of incarceration and recidivism, which oppresses African Americans. If the issue of recidivism can be addressed, society will be healthier and African American communities can become functional, reaching its full potential. It is important to note that I am an African American and a re-entry success story. I will implement pastoral care strategies in my ministry context which are predominately and the African American community.

Overcoming the tragedy of being born into poverty will take public policy creativity, but it will also need a spiritual awakening that will allow ex-offenders to dream about a life outside of the ghetto and prison. Religion targets antisocial values, emphasizes accountability and responsibility, and change cognitive approaches to conflict. It also provides social support skills through interaction with religious people and communities. Pastoral care can be a useful approach to assisting an African

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<sup>48</sup> Gordon, *The Black Male in White America*, 151.



American as he attempts to reintegrate into society after being released from prison. Such emphases seem to be consistent with what many rehabilitation workers would call principles for effective treatment.<sup>49</sup>

### *Pastoral Care and Therapeutic Services*

As per the Advancement Association for the Advancement of Science, “poverty in early childhood poisons the brain.”<sup>50</sup> If this assertion is true, therapeutic services must be administered early to address the effects of the “poison of poverty.” More than half of the nation’s 5.6 million black boys live in fatherless households, forty percent of which are impoverished.<sup>51</sup> These young African American boys will need therapy at a young age as they struggle with issues regarding identity and poverty. To reduce the number of Black men that are eventually incarcerated, society will have to provide counseling and therapy to offset the negative isolation and stigmatization African American men endure. The pastor can counsel and establish a plan focused on this approach. The goal of the pastoral care is to help offenders and ex-offenders process the chain of events that landed them in prison. With an understanding that the process starts all over upon release. A cognitive psychoanalytical approach can help establish a new belief system and thought process as the therapist helps the ex-offender process old events and emotions. Pastoral care and pastoral counseling allow an environment whereby the spirit of God can

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<sup>49</sup> Johnson et al., *Religious Programs*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Krugman, “Poverty is Poison,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2007, accessed June 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/opinion/18krugman.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Herb Boyd, “It’s Hard Out Here for a Black Man,” *The Black Scholar* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 2-9.

supernaturally change a young man's life through renewal of the mind and social advocacy.

### **Conclusion**

This project, although rewarding, was a struggle to implement in Jersey City. Jersey City is currently undergoing an immense transformation and gentrification is the best way to describe the dynamics taking place in the city. On numerous occasions as we listened to the stories of the life-long residents, we heard about the systematic removal of the poor in Jersey City, specifically Ward F. This had deep implications for this project because we were focused on what it takes to assist returning citizens in the community after periods of incarceration. We discovered that we were organizing against a system that was organizing the very removal of those we were trying to serve. For this type of project to be successful, there had to be participation, collaboration, and partnership with local government agencies. However, Jersey City has a historical issue with race and providing authentic services to black and brown constituents. The people of Ward F had expressed an overwhelming sentiment of being displaced and this created issues for transition programs.

The programs and meetings were publicized, but the participation was weak as the political establishment did not publicly support the program. The perception was that we were competing against well-funded existing programs supported by the former Governor, Jim McGreevy. The program, Martin's Place, although funded in the millions has a terrible reputation of not providing the promoted services and utilizing unsubstantiated statistics. LAC Member, Frank McMillian and I visited the facility,

pursuing a partnership but was not able to have a conversation with the leadership and the program came across as a shell program with no-show jobs.

## APPENDIX A

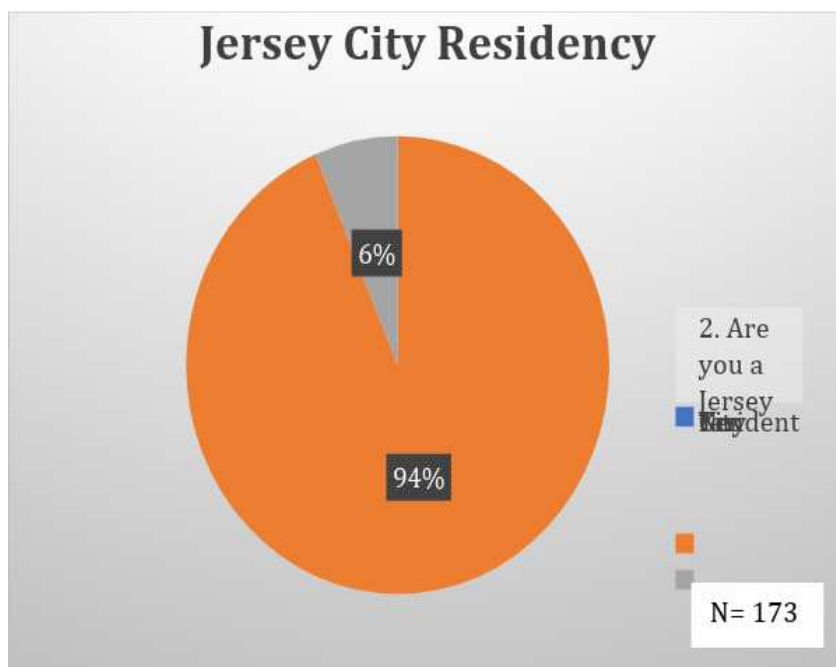
### **Pre-Project Actions**

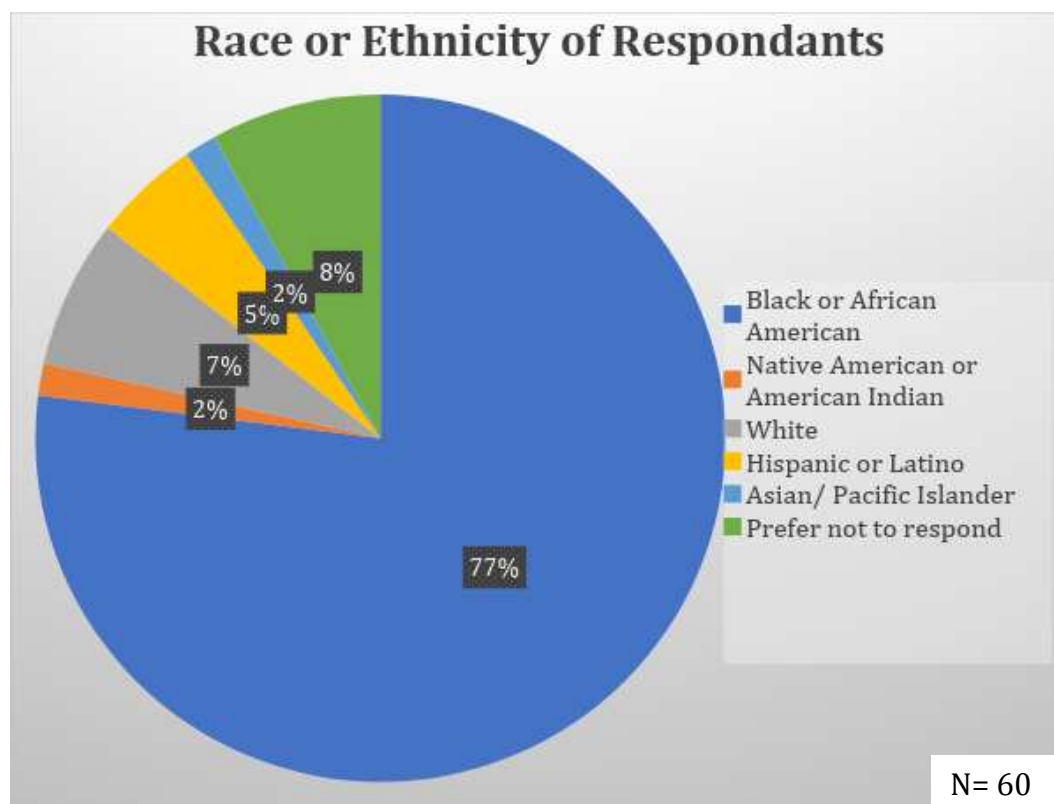
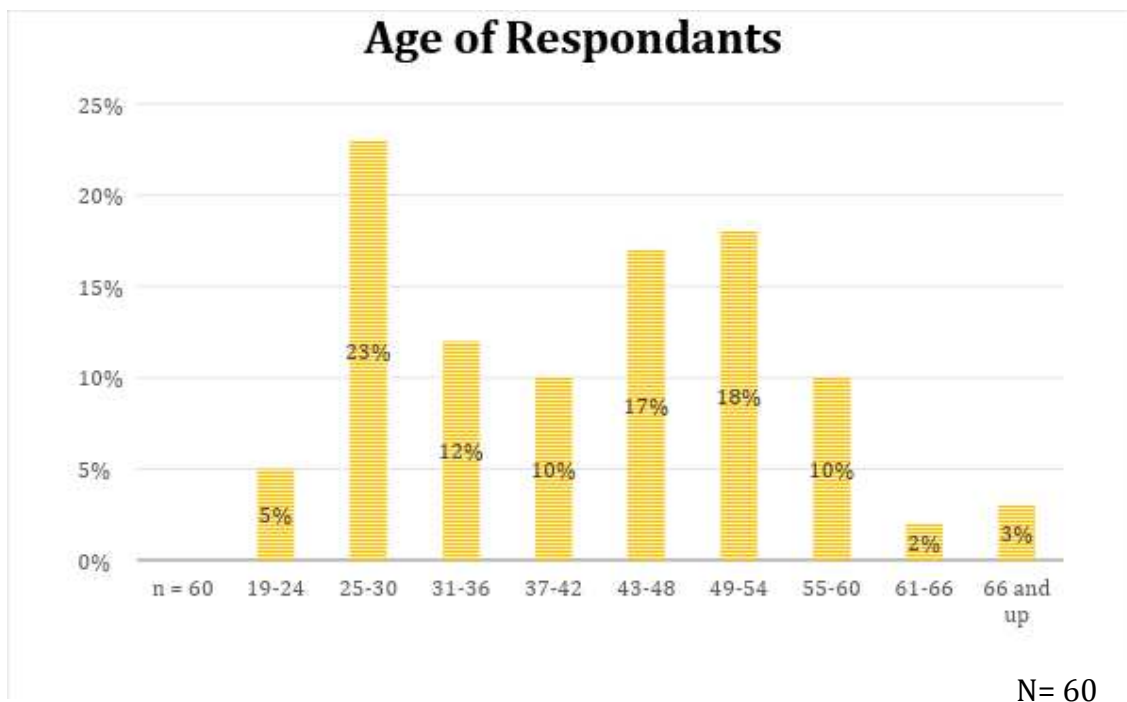
- 04/11/16 CLUPC session (its ecclesiastical board of elders) vote to create Circle of Inspiration as a subsidiary of the Church.
- 9/29/16 Circle of Inspiration signs incorporation papers.
- 10/15/16 Challenges to Re-Entry Listening Sessions in partnership with Jersey City Together
- 11/29/16 Weekly Group Meetings offered to the community free dinner
- 12/3/16 Listening Session with Tracy Fisher (Face of Re-entry) from Philadelphia.
- 12/14/16 Awarded \$5,000 from “Changing Landscape Grant” Presbyterian Mission Agency
- 03/13/17 Weekly group meetings offered to the community free dinner.
- 03/16/17 Pursuing the Power of God conference with Jamal Bryant.
- 05/10/17 Members of Lay Advisory Committee meet to review surveys and call survey participants.
- 05/11/17 Circle of Inspiration group meeting commencing the six-week project.
- 05/08/17 - 06/15/17 Project Term and Engagement with two Returning Citizens.

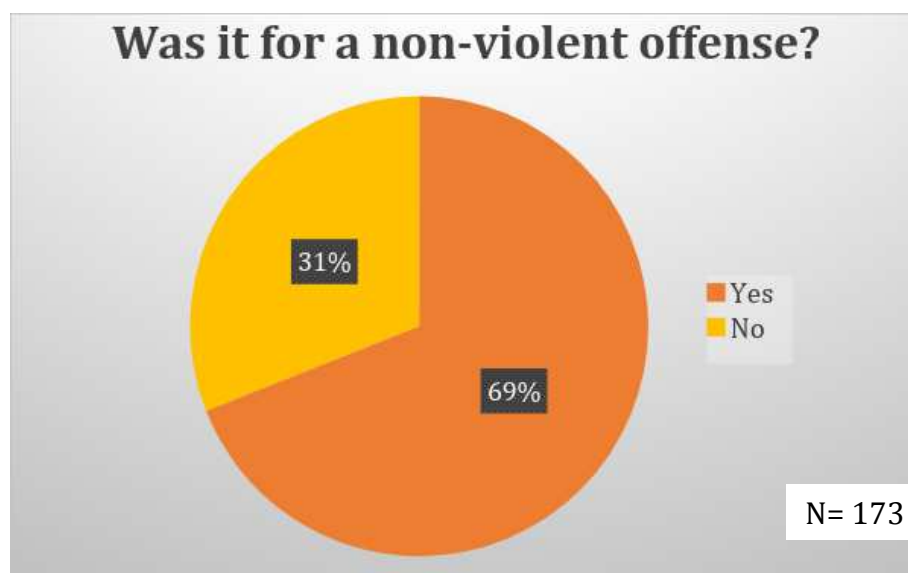
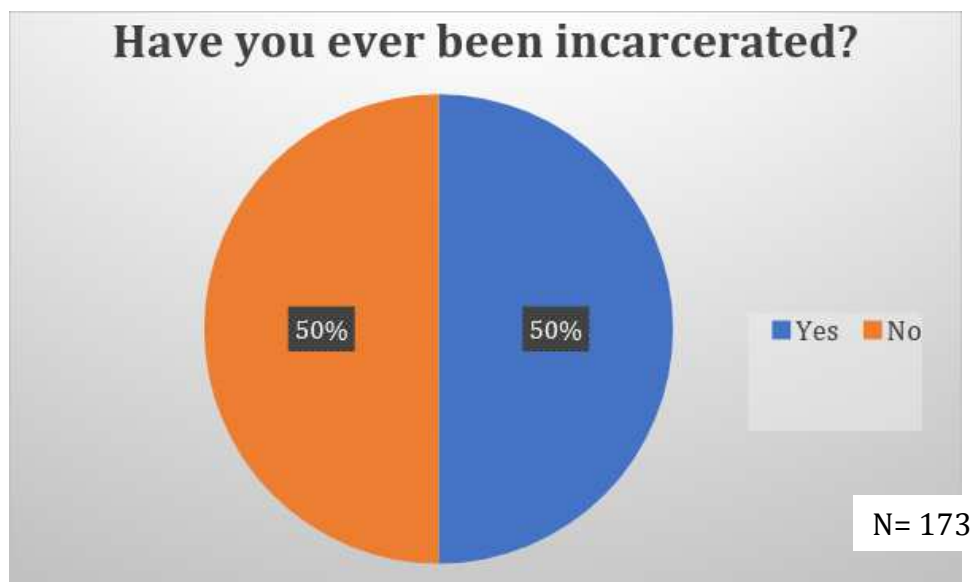
## APPENDIX B

### Survey Data

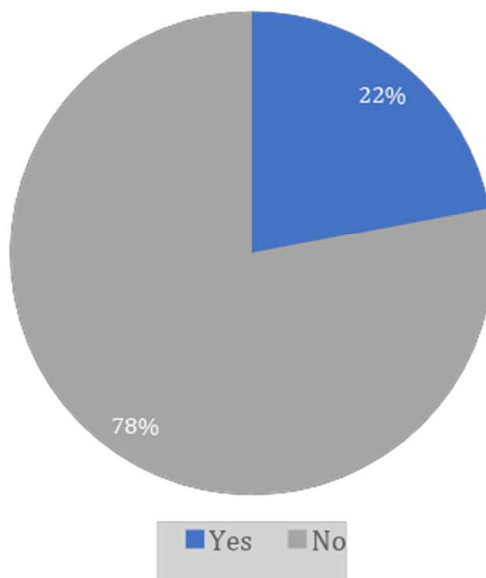
Surveys completed in partnership with *The Journey Home: Prison Re-entry in Lower Jersey City Final Capstone Report* Saint Peter's University by Claire Corea and Cesar Aguirre





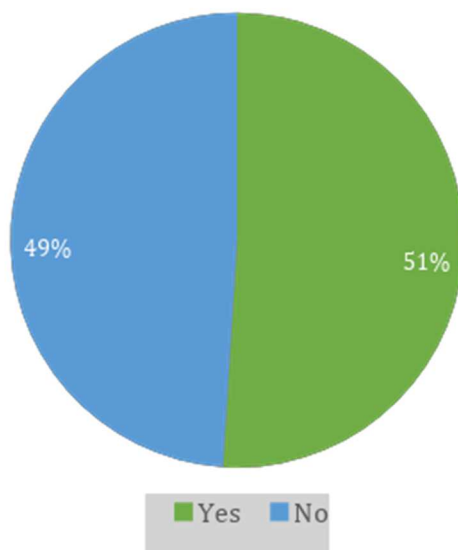


### Did you receive services for the formerly incarcerated upon release?



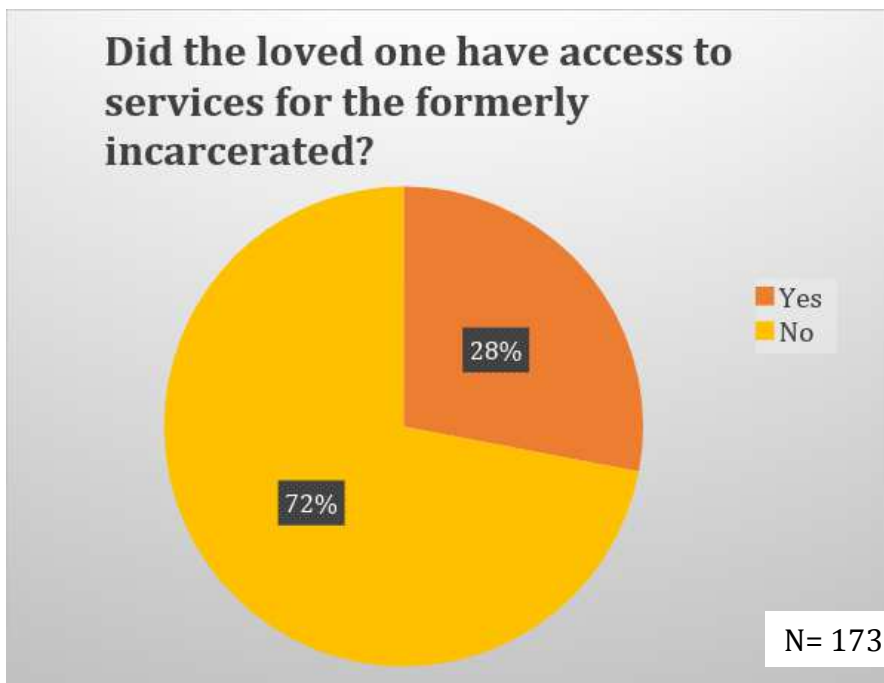
N= 173

### Has a loved one of yours been incarcerated?

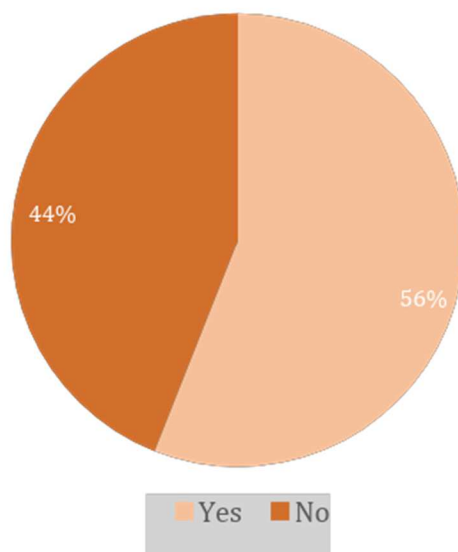


N= 173





**Are you currently employed?**



N= 45

## APPENDIX C

**Circle of Inspiration Incorporation**

1

**NON-PROFIT BYLAWS OF CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION***A Jersey City Organization***PREAMBLE**

The following Bylaws shall be subject to, and governed by, the Non-Profit Corporation Act of New Jersey and the Articles of Incorporation of "Circle of Inspiration (hereinafter C.O.I.)" This Non-Profit Corporation, as a subsidiary of Claremont-Lafayette United Presbyterian Church shall also be subject to the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church United States of America. In the event of a direct conflict between the herein contained provisions of these Bylaws and the mandatory provisions of the Non-Profit Corporation Act of New Jersey, said Non-Profit Corporation Act shall be the prevailing controlling law. In the event of a direct conflict between the provisions of these Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation of Corporation/Organization, it shall then be these Bylaws which shall be controlling. The Board of Directors of C.O.I, shall provide a quarterly report to the Session of Claremont-Lafayette United Presbyterian Church.

**ARTICLE 1 - NAME**

The legal name of the Non-Profit Corporation/Organization shall be known as Circle of Inspiration, and shall herein be referred to as the "Corporation/Organization."

**ARTICLE 2 - PURPOSE**

The general purposes for which this Corporation/Organization has been established are as follows:

Assisting individuals and their families who are re-entering Society after a period on incarceration.

The strategy will be:

- Educational
- Human/Social Services
- Religious
- Advocacy
- Community Development

The purpose for which the Non-Profit Corporation is formed is set forth in the attached Articles of Incorporation.

The Corporation/Organization is established within the meaning of IRS Publication 557 Section 501(c)(3) Organization of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the "Code") or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code and shall be operated exclusively for non-profit.

In addition, this Corporation/Organization has been formed for the purpose of performing all things incidental to, or appropriate in, the foregoing specific and primary purposes. However, the

CERTIFICATE OF SECRETARY

I, Ralph Green, certify that I am the current elected and acting Secretary of the benefit Corporation/Organization, and the above bylaws are the bylaws of this Corporation/Organization as adopted by the Board of Directors on September 29, 2016 and that they have not been amended or modified since the above.

TRACEY J. CALLENDER  
NOTARY PUBLIC OF NEW JERSEY  
EXPIRES APRIL 19, 2018  
EX 1642432077  
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES APRIL 19, 2018  
Sept 29, 2016 in the County of Hudson in the State of

*Tracey J. Calender*

Acting Secretary Ralph Green (Duly Elected Secretary) *Ralph W. Green*

Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Office Rev. Willie J. Keaton *W.J. Keaton*

Vice-President, Cynthia Matthews *Cynthia Matthews*

## APPENDIX D

## Board Minutes

**Circle of Inspiration**  
**September 29, 2016 - Meeting Minutes**

**Members of the Board in Attendance:**

1. Pastor Willie Keaton – **President**
2. Evang. Cynthia Matthews – **Vice President**
3. Ralph Green – **Secretary**

**Board Members Not in Attendance:**

4. James Mitchell - **Political Liaison**
5. Stella O. – **Clinical Director**
6. Open - **Treasurer**

The following agenda subjects were discussed and recorded:

**Fatherhood initiative; Partnering**

Introduced to program manager Mr. Rick Johnson, who gave summary of purpose and goals of program initiative which includes families of inmates coming to meet father, brother, husband in sessions established to reconnect family members, build new relations and renew family bonds.

- Program presentation was well-received by members, motion approved to partner with pre-release program

**Confirm Board Positions**

- Board positions were defined and reconfirmed.

**Discuss the October 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

- Scheduled event for addressing and exposing the current challenges of re-entry
- Extend an invitation to guest speaker: Sen. Sandra Cunningham – Oct. 4th
- Listening Session to increase public awareness for our non-profit and set goals
- Jersey City Together as a community-partner on this event

**Discuss Conference Fundraiser for Spring 2017**

- Fundraiser planning and theme
- Extend invitation to guest speaker: Pastor Jamal Bryant
- Discuss ticket sales and the overhead
- Find a venue for event

**Specialization of each Board Position**

- Clearly define new job descriptions and duties for said board members
- Lifetime membership to Circle Founders

- Discuss non-profit organization taboos to avoid conflict of interest such as misappropriation

### **Discuss partnership- Michelle Massey**

- Schedule a meeting for future agenda and community outreach

### **Get Out-the-Vote Community Campaign**

- Campaign every Saturday to educate the vote in Jersey City Ward F
- Discuss non-partisan views, state the issues for reentry & coming elections.
- Discuss partnering with JC-Together & Love, Hope & Charity, Pastor Legay of Metropolitan AME Zion, NAACP

### **Also discussed this meeting:**

#### **Hired new Accountant, is Mr. Craig R. Bolotsky: Certified CPA**

- Discussed fees for the following items: Non-profit state registration, Federal 501c3, Power of Attorney, and Accountant fees. (\$2200)
- Urban Suburban Partnership priority

#### **Hired new artist, O. Gordon = \$75**

- Design logo for Circle
- Print T-shirts for special events + business cards, event flyers

#### **Introduction of Social Media platforms**

- Circle website – (\$800).
- Facebook, Twitter, Snap Chat

### **Program Related Distributions /Handouts**

- Circle by Laws, Dream Grant Application
- Presbytery of the Palisades – Ethics Policy
- Circle Program Mission and Summary Outline
- NJ Dept. of Treasury – EIN#
- Circle October 15<sup>th</sup> event flyer
- “Caught Up, the Musical” flyers

Relevant Articles: non-profit governance, reentry news in Hudson, NJ addiction treatment program, Michelle Alexander article

### **Next Meeting Agenda – October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Meeting with all volunteers; Love, Hope & Charity Organization, Gail Matthews, Viola Richardson & Deborah Fleming

## APPENDIX E

### Denomination Statement

April 16, 2014

As faith organizations and religious leaders, we are committed to bettering the lives and realizing the human potential of society's most vulnerable individuals and communities. More and more, this means addressing the consequences of mass incarceration and preventing those to come – and thus healing the many wounds of our nation's misguided war on drugs.

When it comes to drugs, we should focus on the goals we agree on: protecting our kids, protecting public safety, and preventing and treating drug abuse and addiction. We join together to ask you to repeal policies that unnecessarily criminalize millions of people and place a vastly disproportionate burden on poor and black communities – and to replace those policies with just, effective and evidence-based approaches.

The United States imprisons more people than any other nation in the world – thanks in large part to the war on drugs. In 2012, there were more than 1.5 million drug arrests in the U.S., the vast majority for mere possession. The destructive effects of mass criminalization on communities across the country – particularly communities of color – cannot be overstated.

Approximately 2.7 million children are growing up in American homes where one or more parents are incarcerated. One in nine black children has a parent behind bars. Two-thirds of these parents are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses, primarily drug law violations.

And the cycle of punishment does not stop after incarceration ends. The effects of a conviction roll on and on – including the denial of child custody, voting rights, employment, business loans, trade licensing, student aid and other forms of public assistance. Criminal records are also used as a basis to deport legal residents and to bar other noncitizens from visiting the U.S. Through these draconian policies, we have created a permanent under-class of millions of Americans – with major implications for American democracy. More than 5.5 million people are disenfranchised due to a criminal record – including nearly 1 in 13 black people of voting age.

We urge you to re-evaluate our current policies and call for the repeal of these counterproductive laws. Guided by principles of compassion, justice and fairness, we make the following recommendations:

1. Repeal laws that criminalize drug possession and replace them with policies that expand access to effective health approaches to drug use, including evidence-based drug treatment.
2. Eliminate policies that result in racially disproportionate arrest and incarceration rates.
3. End policies that unjustly exclude people with a record of arrest or conviction from key rights and opportunities.

Despite our diversity, we are guided by our religious principles to serve those in need and give voice to those who have been marginalized and stigmatized by unjust policies. We cannot sit silently while a misguided war is waged on entire communities, ostensibly under the guise of combating the very real harms of drug abuse. The war on drugs has become a costly, ineffective and unjust failure. Our people deserve better.

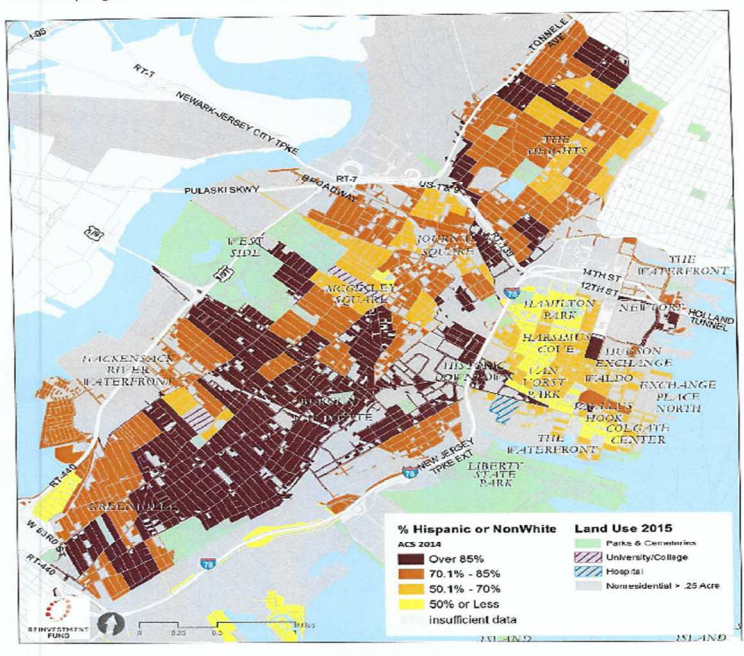
We urge, in the strongest terms, a complete rethinking of U.S. drug policies – and we believe the recommendations outlined in this letter are a good place to start the conversation.

This Easter Sunday, and in light of our current realities, we, leaders of faith call for a rebirth and resurrection of communities burdened by the harms of injustice oftentimes masquerading under of the guise of law and order and criminal justice.

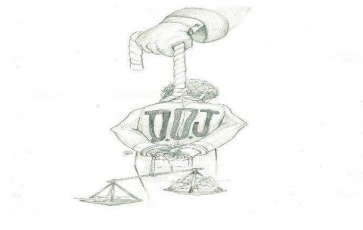
### APPENDIX F

## Population Break-Down of Jersey City

The map below is a map of Jersey City with census block groups shaded by % white non-Hispanic. Darker areas have a higher percentage of people of color (including African-American, Hispanic, and Asian). Lighter areas have a higher percentage of people who are white non-Hispanic.



## APPENDIX G

**Challenges of Re-Entry**THE CHALLENGES OF RE-ENTRY

October 15, 2016

## AGENDA

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION: Pastor Willie J. Keaton Jr.

ECUMENICAL MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PURPOSE

GATHER IN SMALL GROUPS DISCUSS WITH GUIDING QUESTION VOICES:

Mr. Marc Jackson, Mr. Willie Chisholm, Pastor Cleo Santiago

KEYNOTE: Rev. G C Barnes, Founder of Powerhouse Men's Outreach Ministries

NEXT STEPS, VOTER REGISTRATION & CLOSING REMARKS

Pastor Willie J. Keaton Jr., Evangelist Cynthia Matthews

NEXT CHALLENGES OF RE-ENTRY MEETING NOVEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup>

CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION AND JERSEY CITY TOGETHER

For Jersey City to reach its full potential as a community, every single individual should be given an opportunity to reach his or her full potential and that includes citizens returning to community after incarceration. We want to hear the stories of individuals who have had a difficult time re-entering society so that we can know where to advocate with and for them. Please come out because what impacts one single person impacts us all.

(For more information 267-333-7643, [williejkeaton@yahoo.com](mailto:williejkeaton@yahoo.com))



## APPENDIX H

## Grant Letters



## RACIAL ETHNIC &amp; WOMEN MINISTRIES

December 14, 2016

Rev. Willie Keaton, Jr.  
 Circle of Inspiration  
 A Ministry of Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church  
 124 Claremont Ave  
 Jersey City, NJ 07305

Dear Willie Keaton, Jr.:

I am happy to inform you that the Presbyterian Mission Agency has approved your 2016 African American Changing Landscapes Grant in the amount of \$5,000. To accept this grant, simply sign the acknowledgement at the bottom of the page and return. Distribution will be made upon receipt of this grant agreement.

Blessings,  
 Sterling Morse  
 Office for African American Intercultural Congregational Support  
 Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries  
 Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.)  
[Sterling.morse@pcusa.org](mailto:Sterling.morse@pcusa.org)  
 800-728-7228 ext. 5114

\*\*\*

We hereby accept the terms and conditions of the grant for its intended use. The person signing this agreement on behalf of Circle of Inspiration certifies that he or she has the authority to execute this agreement. Please return this document at your earliest convenience by e-mail as an Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Authorized Representative Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Print Name



December 4, 2017

Rev. Willie J. Keaton  
Circle of Inspiration  
417 Rose Avenue  
Jersey City, NJ 07305

Dear Rev. Keaton,

I am pleased to inform you that Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries & the African American Intercultural Congregational Support of the Presbyterian Mission Agency has approved awarding a one-time grant to Circle of Inspiration in the amount of \$5,000. Use of this grant is designated to support programs for African American Male Initiatives.

We are pleased to support the Circle of Inspiration and are grateful to God to be in covenant relationship with you. Please be aware that this is a one-time grant to address a 2016-2017 Presbyterian Church General Assembly initiative and funding will not continue for this initiative after December 2017.

Attached is a PC(USA) grant agreement form that will need to be completed.

Please return the agreement either via email to me at [Vaughn.ratliff@pcusa.org](mailto:Vaughn.ratliff@pcusa.org) or you may mail it to Vaughn Ratliff at the address below.

May God continue to bless you in this ministry!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rhashell D. Hunter".

Rev. Dr. Rhashell D. Hunter  
Director

cc: Sterling Morse, Associate  
African American Intercultural Congregational Support

enc. Grant Agreement

## APPENDIX I

## Program Director Application

# “Circle of Inspiration”

## PROGRAM DIRECTOR APPLICATION (INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR)

LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 HOME ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_  
 HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_  
 SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

**MISCELLANEOUS DESIRED RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. I HAVE RECEIVED A JOB DESCRIPTION      YES              NO
2. ARE YOU ABLE TO PERFORM THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE JOB  
FOR WHICH YOU ARE APPLYING?              YES              NO
3. IS THERE ANY REASON WHY YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO FULLY  
CONFORM TO ALL ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS? YES              NO
4. DO YOU AGREE TO COMPLY WITH THE RULES, REGULATIONS AND  
PROCEDURES OF THE CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION? YES              NO
5. I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS A ONE YEAR AGREEMENT. HOWEVER, THIS  
AGREEMENT IS GOVERNED AS AN AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP  
AND EITHER PARTY CAN TERMINATE THIS EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP  
AT ANY MOMENT.
6. THE COMPENSATION WILL BE FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS (MONTHLY)  
WITH A CONTINUING EDUCATION OF ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS (PER  
YEAR).
7. THIS EMPLOYMENT IS SUBJECT TO THE RULES REGULATIONS  
PROCEDURES OF PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A AS A MISSION OF  
CLAREMONT LAFAYETTE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SIGNATURE AND DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J

**Community Liaison Job Description****“Circle of Inspiration”**COMMUNITY LIASON JOB DESCRIPTION

We, THE CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION, are looking for COMMUNITY LIASONS to enhance the agency profile in the community and recruit individuals seeking to re-integrate back into society in a successful manner that have fallen through the cracks. The successful candidate will assist the Director and the Care Manager in identifying possible candidates for the Care-Management program. The COMMUNITY LIASON duties include assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating actions required to meet the goal of recruiting and sharing the message of Mass Incarceration and the “War on Drugs” and its negative impact on society.

Responsibilities

Coordinate along with Director a plan of recruitment that is safe, timely, organized, effective, efficient, equitable, and results-centered.

Carry themselves in a professional manner protecting the image and the brand that is The Circle of Inspiration.

When needed work with Director and Care managers to facilitate multiple care aspects (substance abuse referrals, etc.)

Develop effective working relations and cooperate with members of the Individual Care Team throughout the entire Care Management Process.

Arrange mutual beneficial relationships with social services, health and governmental agencies.

Promote quality interventions and outcomes

Assess and address motivational and psychosocial issues

Requirements

Effective communication skills

Excellent organizational and time management skills

Problem solving skills and ability to multi-task

Compassionate with teamwork skills

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX K

## Intake Sheet

CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION  
INTAKE FACE SHEET

DATE OF INTAKE: \_\_\_\_\_ FIRST DATE OF SERVICE: \_\_\_\_\_

REFERRAL SOURCE: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

REASON FOR REFERRAL:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_ AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

S.S.#: xxx-xx-\_\_\_\_\_ SEX: \_\_\_ RACE/ETHNICITY: \_\_\_ PRIMARY

LANGUAGE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

PRIMARY FAMILY CONTACT PERSON: \_\_\_\_\_ ALT. PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

AVAILABILITY FOR MEETINGS: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

EMERGENCY CONTACT: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

## FAMILY COMPOSITION

NAME	AGE	RELATIONSHIP

**MEDICAL ASSISTANCE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **HMO NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PRIVATE INSURANCE (LIST NAME & MEMBER ID#):** \_\_\_\_\_

**PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ANY KNOWN ALLERGIES OR MEDICAL CONDITIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PSYCHIATRIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_

**CARE MANAGER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_

**MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_

**CURRENT MEDICATIONS (IF APPLICABLE) USE SEPARATE MEDICAL CHANGE FORM IF NEEDED:**

MEDICATION	DOSE	FREQUENCY	PURPOSE

**IF APPLICABLE:**

**HOUSING SPECIALIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE SPECIALIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**LEGAL SPECIALIST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PAST TREATMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**CLIENT STRENGTHS:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**BARRIERS TO TREATMENT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILIES EXPECTATIONS OF TREATMENT:**

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**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TREATMENT:**

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**DSM V DIAGNOSIS:**

**AXIS I**

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**CARE MANAGER SIGNATURE, DEGREE AND TITLE**

**PRINTED NAME**

**DATE**

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**DIRECTOR**

**PRINTED NAME**

**DATE**

## APPENDIX L

## Referral and Service Request Form


 “Circle of Inspiration”

## REFERRAL AND SERVICE REQUEST FORM

OFFICE PHONE: 1 (201) 333-3516

FAX 1 (800) 870-8781

EMAIL: williejkeaton@yahoo.com

417 Rose Ave. Jersey City N.J. 07305

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

LAST FOUR SSN \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Referral or Service Requested:**

DISCRIMINATION ADVOCACY

EMPLOYMENT COACHING AND JOB READINESS

FAMILY RE-UNIFICATION

CARE-MANAGEMENT

GROUP THERAPY

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

INTENSIVE SUPERVISION

THE REFERAL HAS A HISTORY OF VIOLENT OFFENSES YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

THE REFERAL HAS A HISTORY OF MENTAL ILLNESS YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

THE REFERAL HAS A HISTORY OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

Referring Provider: \_\_\_\_\_ Office Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (ext.): \_\_\_\_\_

**Determination will be based on eligibility and FUNDING at the time services are rendered.**



## APPENDIX M

**Benefits Statement***Circle of Inspiration*Benefits Statement*What's in It for Me?*

Circle of Inspiration is first and foremost a service to those in need. For those in need of Inspiration, we are here, and we commit to trying everything we can to inspire you. Why is inspiration so important? To overcome the barriers, you may face as an ex-offender this will take an enormous amount of inspiration. We agree that the “stack has been decked” against you. We agree that in a high percentage of arrest and convictions, race, class and privilege has been the driving motivating factor. If you commit to this program, and sign the *Covenant of Care* we will stand beside you and work with you and your family so that you will never have to wear handcuffs again.

INITIALS \_\_\_\_\_

INTAKE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX N

**Budget**

## Circle of Inspiration

## Start-Up Proposed Budget

Fiscal Year October 1, 2016- September 31, 2017

<i>Income</i>	<b>\$110,000.00</b>
Claremont-Lafayette United Presbyterian Church	\$20,000.00
Fundraising	\$11,000.00
Partnership Congregations	\$12,000.00
Jersey City Funding	\$15,000.00
Hudson County	\$15,000.00
Presbytery of Palisades	\$12,000.00
Synod of the Presbytery	\$15,000.00
General Assembly (Dream Team Grant)	\$10,000.00
 <i>Expenditures</i>	 <b>\$110,000.00</b>
Part-Time Director	\$25,000.00
Two Part-Time Care-Managers	\$35,000.00
Administrative Fees	\$10,000.00
Legal & Insurance	\$3,000.00
Mailing and Marketing	\$10,000.00
Identification Program	\$5,000.00
Contracted Services	\$10,000.00
Office Lease	\$12,000.00

## APPENDIX O

**Criminal Justice Organizing Plan***DRAFT***Jersey City Together – Criminal Justice Organizing Plan, March 29, 2017**

In early 2017, Jersey City Together clergy leaders discussed other potential issue areas we should begin to engage, and the clergy caucus ratified criminal justice as an issue to engage and add to our plate. The below offers an initial plan, put together by Rev. Willie Keaton, Rev. Alonzo Perry & Prof. Jyl Josephson, to begin strategic engagement around this issue that should generate a series of actions.

This will not only build off the national interest of Metro IAF organizations who are engaging in national work and learning (across our affiliates) to create regional and national change around this issue, but it will also engage in some of the root causes of the violence and hopelessness we see in some parts of Jersey City.

**Key Elements:****1) Data Gathering & Investigation**

This will include putting together basic data about this issue as we have done around housing, education, and safety. Specifically, we hope it will include:

- Data around education, jobs/joblessness, youth involved in the criminal justice system, housing need for these individuals, and more;
- Understanding resources currently available to & the process for those coming home from prison/jail;
- Power analysis of how money is currently flowing through this system: public entities, non-profits, private corporations, for-profit prisons & halfway houses, and more;
- Identifying specific places where there may be a lack of services or opportunities.

**2) Base Building**

We will engage with individuals who are directly affected by the criminal justice system. While we may identify other individuals, we hope this will include:

- Engaging / Meeting with 100+ young people connected in some way to the drug trade in Jersey City
- Engaging / Meeting with 200+ people who are formerly incarcerated;
- Meeting with the parents of those who are incarcerated or impacted by violence in our communities.

As we begin to create a vision of what this will look like, we will invite some of these individuals into relationship with us.

### **3) Initial Engagement on Expungement**

Based on our experience in Baltimore and what we have heard from others about the importance of expungement and eliminating outstanding warrants, we hope to engage the organizers and leaders from EBC to understand what they learned, how to improve upon it, and how it may be possible to do something similar in NJ.

We will then engage the Hudson County prosecutor, judges, and others about how to make this happen in the context of New Jersey.

### **4) Learning from our Sister Organizations**

At the Metro IAF leaders meeting, we heard about a program started by BUILD called “Turnaround Tuesday.” This work has resulted in 300+ formerly incarcerated individuals getting Living Wage jobs through partnerships with Johns Hopkins University and other anchor institutions around Baltimore. It has created a pipeline of jobs as well as specific, numerical commitments to hire these individuals.

As mentioned above, we also plan to reach out to our colleagues in East Brooklyn (EBC) to hear how they have run mass expungement workshops in their congregations working with district attorneys, judges, and defense attorneys.

### **5) Relationship Building with Anchor Institutions that may create a pipeline of jobs**

We cannot wait on public officials to create jobs for our communities. We must go directly to the anchor institutions and employers in our neighborhoods and cities to demand a pipeline of jobs for people who are returning from prison and those who are unemployed and under-employed.

This means beginning to build relationships with top leaders of these anchor institutions now. An initial list of these include:

- Healthcare
  - CarePoint Healthcare Systems
  - RWJBarnabas
- Universities
  - NJCU
  - St Peter’s University
  - Rutgers University
- Developers
  - LeFrak
  - Kushner / KABR
  - Others
- Financial Institutions
  - JPMorgan
  - Goldman Sachs
  - UBS

## APPENDIX P

**Financial Note****Circle of Inspiration Financial Note****November 6, 2016**

## Income

\$12,000 CLUPC (\$7,000 Benevolence \$5,000)

\$10,000 PCUSA General Assembly Dream Grant

---

\$22,000 Total

## EXPENSES

-\$800.00- WEBSITE

-\$300.00- Listening Session

-\$550.00- Craig Bolotsky Accountant

-\$74.84- P.O. Box (Check Payable to Cynthia Matthews).

-\$93.00- P.O. Box Renewal (Check Payable to Cynthia Matthews)

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\$1,817.84 Total    Current \$20,182.16

\$1,000 deposit for our March 17th Fundraiser (Jamaal Bryant)

Make check payable to: AMERICAN PROGRAM BUREAU One Gateway Center  
Suite 751

Newton, MA 02458

Federal Tax ID # 04-2371423

\$500 December 3<sup>rd</sup> Speaker (Listening Session Tracy E Fisher)

Circle of Inspiration will be pursuing grants, foundation giving, and personal donations and has already received \$10,000 donation and has applied for \$45,000 more. The recommendation from the accountant is that there be no co-mingling of funds (although the 501c3 is the same) so we will need a new bank account. The Bank book will be kept in the Church, with financial reports offered to Congregation Meeting and to the Session at least quarterly. We can open with an initial deposit of \$1,000 and then work to transfer the \$10,000 from the Dream Grant as soon as possible with the remaining \$7,682.16 by December 31, 2016.

Craig Bolotsky----- Accountant

Cynthia Matthews-----Initial Signors

Ralph Green-----Initial Signors.

Pastor Willie J. Keaton Jr.

APPENDIX Q

**May 11 Meeting Agenda**

**“Circle of Inspiration”**

MAY 11, 2017  
AGENDA

1. WELCOME
2. OPENING PRAYER
3. MISSION STATEMENT
4. BENNEFITS STATEMENTS
5. FAMILY RE-UNIFICATION
6. TESTIMONY -FABIAN WILEY
7. ENCOURAGEMENT- BERNICE GASS
8. FAMILY RE-UNIFICATION
9. REFERRAL PROGRAM AND SURVEY

## APPENDIX R

**Reducing Low-Level Non-Violent Felonies****REDUCING LOW LEVEL NON-VIOLENT FELONY OFFENSES**

GREATER CLEVELAND CONGREGATIONS (GCC)

SUMMARY OF POINTS

- *“Though it is not widely known, the prosecutor is the most powerful law enforcement official in the criminal justice system. One might think that judges are the most powerful, or even the police, but in reality the prosecutor holds the cards. It is the prosecutor, far more than any other criminal justice official, who holds the keys to the jailhouse door.”*

-Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

- Arguably the largest central driver of mass incarceration is when citizens are charged and convicted with a felony. Once you have a felony conviction on your record, it is incredibly difficult to eliminate. It makes it virtually impossible to find a job and secure housing.
- Poor communities are policed fundamentally differently than wealthier communities, meaning that low-level crimes committed in white communities go undetected, while they are often brutally enforced in communities of color, resulting in far more poor people of color entering the system in the first place. As we know, reforming police behavior from the ground up is incredibly difficult.
- In places like Cuyahoga County, most charging starts at the local, municipal level where prosecutors decide whether to charge someone with a felony or lower level misdemeanor. If they recommend charging someone with a felony, the case is passed up to common pleas court, which is across the whole county. Ultimately, the County Prosecutor has sole discretion about whether or not to charge someone with a felony.
- Over the past 4+ years has GCC put tremendous pressure on the County Prosecutor with four 1,000-person actions to bring down the numbers of low-level offenders being sentenced with felonies. The previous prosecutor did so with great gusto, informing the municipal prosecutors not to send low-level cases to the common pleas level and sending back thousands of cases sent his way. Though non-partisan, GCC is often credited with knocking off the previous County Prosecutor in the wake of the Tamir Rice decision.
- *Overall, the Prosecutor's Office indicted 21 percent fewer defendants in 2015 than in 2011, reducing the volume by nearly 3,000 cases a year. Low-level indictments are down even more precipitously because we have encouraged municipal courts not to bind over minor offenses as felonies. That is what happens when you ask the question: Does this need to be a felony? (Tim McGinty's written protocol to GCC)*
- *Although felony cases are declining across all levels, the biggest reductions have been on low-level defendants and in drug cases. Low-level defendants have declined by 25 percent since 2011, a 50 percent faster rate of decline than for higher level defendants. (Tim McGinty's written protocol to GCC).*

## APPENDIX S

**Individual Plan of Care**

 “Circle of Inspiration”
*INDIVIDUAL PLAN OF CARE*

NAME OF RE-ENTERING CITIZEN \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT OR LAST KNOWN  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CARE MANAGER \_\_\_\_\_

HAS COVENANT OF CARE BEEN SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF INTERVIEW \_\_\_\_\_

RE-ENTERING CITIZEN HAS NEVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A SEXUAL  
OFFENSE

NO \_\_\_ INITIAL

HAS CONSENT FORM BEEN SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

**Prior to Release from Incarceration:**

Care-Manager will identify family members, friends and clergy and discuss the Individual Plan of Care with them (with consent).

**MEDICAL**Problems

1. Re-entering Citizen currently is re-entering society after 6 months of incarceration and Client has had a mental health diagnosis in the past.
2. Re-entering Citizen currently suffers from diabetes and hypertension.

Goals

Re-Entering Citizen will receive regular, adequate medical care that addresses his/her health-related issues and other health concerns.

Re-Entering Citizen will be adherent to medication regimen that client and MD have agreed to.



Tasks (Re-Entering Citizen)

Re-Entering Citizen will make appointment with medical provider.

Re-Entering Citizen will attend medical appointments

Re-Entering Citizen will report symptoms to medical provider.

Re-Entering Citizen will adhere to medication regimen.

Care Manager

Provide Re-Entering Citizen with referrals to medical providers in area.

Assist client in making medical appointment and application process.

Determine barriers to appointment adherence (i.e. transportation, dementia, substance abuse, lack of insurance) and address these issues.

Confer with medical provider regarding Re-Entering Citizen medical issues.

Continue to monitor medication adherence.

**MENTAL HEALTH**

---

Problems

Re-Entering Citizen isolated, anxious, depressed, fearful and angry.

Re-Entering Citizen exhibits poor impulse control (specify if violent or abusive)

Re-Entering Citizen experiencing memory problems, problems with concentration.

Re-Entering Citizen does not show emotion.

Re-Entering Citizen seems to lack motivation.

Re-Entering Citizen experiencing problems with sleep or appetite.

Re-Entering Citizen experiencing suicidal thoughts

Goals

Stabilize immediate crisis. Re-Entering Citizen will receive regular, adequate medical care that addresses both health concerns and mental illness symptoms.

Re-Entering Citizen 's mental health symptoms will be controlled/have minimal impact on functioning.

Re-Entering Citizen will receive necessary social, psychological, and emotional supports.

Re-Entering Citizen will not be a danger to self or others.

Re-Entering Citizen will be adherent to psychotropic medication regimen

Tasks (Re-Entering Citizen)

Contract with case manager not to harm self or others, and to call crisis numbers if crisis arises. Re-Entering Citizen agrees to meet (for initial visit, weekly, twice a week face to face or buy phone with) Mental Health provider. Re-Entering Citizen agrees to adhere to psychotropic medication regimen (antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs, antipsychotic, etc.) as prescribed.

Care Manager

Refer for Psychiatric evaluation.

Refer for Psychological evaluation.

Refer to Mental Health Specialist.

Re-Entering Citizen to share problem issues, provide emotional support and inspiration to Re-Entering Citizen.

Help Re-Entering Citizen to make connections between thoughts, feelings, impulses, behaviors, and consequences.

Discuss alternative coping strategies with Re-Entering Citizen.

Determine the degree to which Re-Entering Citizen is an imminent danger to self or others. Make contract with Re-Entering Citizen that client will not harm self or others.

Provide client with Crisis/Suicide Hotline, and other after-hours services.

### **SUBSTANCE USE**

*Based on file reports, and interviews describe drug history.*

#### **Goals (Re-Entering Citizen)**

Re-Entering Citizen will make and keep appointment with Substance Abuse Coordinator for evaluation. Re-Entering Citizen will participate in substance abuse treatment which may include individual and group meetings.

Re-Entering Citizen will participate in risk reduction skills sessions. Re-Entering Citizen will become familiar and use needle exchange or syringe purchase sites.

Tasks (Re-Entering Citizen) will meet Substance Abuse Referrals, make and keep appointment for evaluation. Re-Entering Citizen will get schedule for NA/AA groups. Re-Entering Citizen will attend NA/AA groups. Re-Entering Citizen will define objectives and goals with a Substance Abuse Specialist.

#### **Care Manager:**

Will refer Re-Entering Citizen to a Substance Abuse Specialist and assist Re-Entering Citizen in identifying NA/AA and other support groups.

### **FINANCIAL**

Problems Re-Entering Citizen lacks adequate income to purchase medical services, medications, food, housing, etc. Re-Entering Citizen, has difficulty traveling and has not applied for/received all benefits for which he/she might be entitled to.

#### *Goals*

Promote a stable environment through stable housing. Re-Entering Citizen able to purchase adequate, nutritious food.

Promote a stable environment through the Re-Entering Citizen ability to meet expenses.

Re-Entering Citizen has adequate medical insurance to cover needs.

Re-Entering Citizen has court mandated fines.

Re-Entering Citizen has outstanding child support issues.

Re-Entering Citizen receiving all benefits to which she/he is entitled, ensuring access to resources that support the Re-Entering Citizen receipt of needed health care. A stable environment with financial affairs managed responsibly

#### *Tasks (Re-entering Citizen)*

Re-Entering Citizen will make and keep appointments with Social Services, Social Security, etc., and apply for all benefits to which he/she is entitled.

#### *Care Manager*

Refer Re-Entering Citizen to food banks.

Refer Re-Entering Citizen to Housing Specialist for low-income housing.

Refer Re-Entering Citizen to “public assistance” for assistance with prescription coverage.

Assist Re-Entering Citizen in applications for benefits.

Provide Re-Entering Citizen with Emergency Funds including food, gas, and other vouchers

Refer Re-entering Citizen to Employment Specialist

### **HOUSING**

#### *Problems*

Re-Entering Citizen is homeless and unsafely housed.

Re-Entering Citizen in temporary housing/ in need of permanent housing.

Re-Entering Citizen is a threat to re-offend in current housing situation.

Goals

Re-Entering Citizen benefits from a stable environment that is as unrestrictive as possible through the securing of stable, safe and affordable housing.

Tasks (Re-Entering Citizen)

Look for affordable housing Identify any family/friends with whom client may be able to live. Meet with Housing Specialist, sign up for Section 8 when list is open and adhere to requirements for housing program applicants.

Provide care manager/housing specialist with necessary documentation.

Care Manager

Refer to Housing Specialist. Advocate for Re-Entering Citizen with Housing Authority/other agencies.

Create a housing plan with Re-Entering Citizen and Housing Specialist.

Assist Re-Entering Citizen, in locating a shelter bed.

Refer Re-Entering Citizen to transitional housing programs.

Discuss with Re-Entering Citizen barriers to permanent housing/conditions that led to homelessness or risk of eviction, and address these issues.

**LEGAL**

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Re-Entering Citizen in need of assistance with divorce, custody, child support, discrimination.

Re-Entering Citizen, has a probation officer and parole officer.

Re-Entering Citizen has court mandated fines.

Re-Entering Citizen has outstanding child support issues.

Goals

Re-Entering Citizen legal affairs being in order.

Re-Entering Citizen ability to redress discrimination issues. Re-Entering Citizen's awareness of his/her legal rights and that these rights are protected.

Tasks (Re-Entering Citizen)

Re-Entering Citizen will call/meet with attorney or public defender.

Re-Entering Citizen, will execute necessary documents with attorney.

Re-Entering Citizen will keep his/her appointments with Parole and Probation and satisfy all court orders.

Re-Entering Citizen will keep scheduled appointments with paralegals.

Care Manager

Refer client to pro bono legal services Refer client to public defender Confer with legal services or public defender as necessary Advocate for client as necessary

Care Manager will coordinate team meetings and team conferences with probation and parole officers regarding housing options; source of housing funds.

## APPENDIX T

## Tax Re-Evaluation Article



## NEW JERSEY OPINION

## In Jersey City, poor blacks subsidize rich whites | Moran

996

Posted on April 17, 2016 at 8:00 AM

1.4k  
shares

Tom Moran  
[tmoran@starledger.com](mailto:tmoran@starledger.com)

It was Monday night, and the crowd of 900 that packed into Old Bergen Church in Jersey City to grill Mayor Steve Fulop was fed up.

"It seems to me that people in one part of the city pay more than people in the other part of the city," the Rev. Alonzo Perry told the mayor, to huge applause. "This is a matter of social justice!"

The mayor's turn came, and he took his place at the podium like a condemned man. He dodged questions, and the crowd shouted for him to answer. His eyes darted. His tie was too tight, pinching his neck. (For a video, click [here](#).)

"I think about this every night before I go to sleep," he said, helplessly.

More boos, and more hissing. "It's the truth," the mayor mumbled.

By Friday, Fulop had sounded a full retreat, giving the crowd exactly what it had asked for, a full revaluation of properties across the city.

Jersey City hasn't done that for 27 years, when Fulop was 11 years old. That means that wealthier whiter neighborhoods where home values have skyrocketed during the boom are getting away with murder: They are paying taxes on the value of their property *before* the boom.

And that shifts the burden to poorer neighborhoods with a larger share of African-Americans and Latinos, where values have not risen as fast.

## APPENDIX U

## Group Meeting Flyer



**Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church**  
**417 Rose Ave. Jersey City NJ. 07305**  
**267-333-7643      williejkeaton@yahoo.com**

*The Circle of Inspiration Presents:*

The Challenges of Re-Entry Weekly Group Sessions

*Beginning March 13th 2017, 6:00pm-7:30pm*

Light Refreshments Provided

Inspiration  
 Job Referrals  
 Mentoring  
 Case Management  
 Anger-Management  
 Counseling  
 Referrals:  
 • Substance Abuse  
 • Housing  
 Self Development  
 Economic Tutoring



**CIRCLE OF  
 INSPIRATION**

## APPENDIX V

### Intern Description of Jamal Bryant

#### IV. FOREWORD

The jovial chatter and the musician's warm-up went silent and the room became still. On March 17th, Saint Patrick's Day Eve, at the Claremont-Bergen Lafayette Presbyterian Church, the group did not gather to eat corned beef and cabbage or to drink and be merry, but rather to mourn the death of the urban black community of faith and to surmise its rejoiceful resurrection. Enter Dr. Jamal Bryant, Pastor of Baltimore African Methodist Episcopal (AME) mega-church, Empowerment Temple. The church has grown to 10,000 parishioners since its founding under Bryant's leadership, and Bryant's Twitter account alone boasts a whopping 255,000 followers. Dr. Jamal Bryant is a high-school drop-out, a teenage father, a graduate of Duke University, a Ph.D. from Oxford University, and a self-proclaimed sinner.

"Our hands are dirty," he began. With crisp and biting intonation, Dr. Jamal Bryant stood at the podium and delivered his powerful sermon, beginning with his own surprising backstory.

Entering adolescence, Dr. Jamal Bryant went down the wonton path; he failed from high-school and dropped out of school when he impregnated a young woman. His guidance counselor advised him to quit school and obtain his GED, stating that it was impossible for Bryant to attend a college or a university. Upon obtaining his GED, Bryant applied to Howard University, a prestigious historically black college and was accepted on a provisional basis. Bryant went on to obtain his Masters in Divinity at Duke University, where his own grandfather once worked as Head Cook, before people of color were permitted to attend the elite institution. Further, he went to obtain his Ph.D. from Oxford University, and became the first person to obtain his doctorate degree before obtaining his high-school diploma.

Bryant credited his fortuitous successes to God Almighty, asserting that had his family not believed in him fervently and pushed him closer to the Church, he would have fallen victim to the "school-to-prison pipeline" alluded to so prolifically in communities of color. According to Bryant, communities of color, and specifically young men, were guilty for abdicating the structure of the Church. It was within the "thinking" Church that Bryant developed his public speaking skills and his confidence to achieve; it was within the Church that Bryant discovered his sense of direction and averted the school-to-prison pipeline. Further, Bryant pressed, "Did you really think we would have a better path for returning convicts than we do for returning veterans?" Rather than discussing the inequitable system of mass incarceration that inordinately imprisons communities of color, Bryant promoted both responsibility and empowerment from within. In an atmosphere of such regressive leadership at the federal level, urban communities must

embrace the “thinking” Church, promote home-grown leadership, and will a solution from within rather than waiting indefinitely for institutional systemic reform.

There we sat, two clear outsiders that had never attended a church service that went beyond the liturgical processes of sitting and standing. We were welcomed openly by all parishioners, and felt the pain of this community brought upon by mass incarceration and the hopefulness of redemption course through our spirits in visceral emotion. It was there that we came to understand that the Church’s compelling message was about accepting all members of the community regardless of status or race, collective salvation, and above all else, self-acceptance.

## APPENDIX W

### **Race and Bail in New Jersey**

The New Jersey bail reform bill, largely drafted by the New Jersey office of the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) is one of the most significant bail reform victories in the country to date. The new law will prevent thousands of people from languishing behind bars simply because they cannot afford the cost of bail. In March 2013, the Drug Policy Alliance commissioned a **study** of the New Jersey jail population which was completed by Marie VanNostrand Ph.D. of Luminosity. The findings of this study provided the data needed to document and fully understand the major problems with the existing bail system. Its findings showed that 71% of the population in New Jersey jails were blacks and Latinos. Of the total population, 38% were held solely due to their inability to meet the conditions of the bail set for them. And 12% of the population was held because of their inability to pay \$2,500 or less. The average length of stay in jail pending trial was about 10 months. These data made a compelling case for reform, and DPA enlisted a wide array of supporters.

The legislation was in two parts. The first part implements wide-ranging reforms including non-monetary release options for low-risk individuals; a system under which pretrial release decisions are based on risk rather than resources; the use of risk assessments for suspects enabling courts to make individualized determinations of what conditions of release are appropriate; and establishment of a pretrial services unit within the court system that will provide appropriate levels of monitoring and counseling for those awaiting trial. It also protects the rights of those denied bail by requiring prosecutors to prove the case for pretrial detention by clear and convincing evidence and mandating clear timelines for speedy trial. The second part is an amendment to the state constitution to allow judges to hold the most dangerous defendants without bail, discretion that federal judges, as well as judges in many other states, have.

While representatives from the bail bonds industry opposed the bail reform legislation, at one Assembly Judiciary Committee hearing, Dr. Charles Steele, the head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, flew in and **testified** in favor of monetary bail, claiming that “because of the apparent disparate impact that the proposed bail reform package will have upon men and women of color and the poor, it is the duty of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to **OPPOSE** this initiative”. Steele also proclaimed that bail reform was “a conspiracy against poor people,” as well as “racism” and “classism.” Dr. Steele’s testimony was widely criticized by the media and local activists.



## APPENDIX X

## Sample Survey

# “Circle of Inspiration”

*“Providing Advocacy, Research and Resources to reduce Recidivism”*

## Survey

1. **Name (Optional)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Contact information (Phone or Email)** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Are you a Jersey City Resident?**      \_\_\_\_\_ **YES**      \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**

3. **Have you ever been Incarcerated?**      \_\_\_\_\_ **YES**      \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**

\_\_\_\_\_ **State**    \_\_\_\_\_ **County**

4. **The Date of Release** \_\_\_\_\_

5. **The Length of Your Incarceration** \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Was it a Non-Violent Offense?**      \_\_\_\_\_ **YES**      \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**

7. **Did you receive services upon Release?**      \_\_\_\_\_ **YES**      \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**

If yes, please describe the services \_\_\_\_\_

If no, what services would you have liked to receive? \_\_\_\_\_

8. **Has a loved one of yours been incarcerated?**      \_\_\_\_\_ **YES**      \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**

Did they have access to Services?      \_\_\_\_\_ **YES**      \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**

9. Are you willing to be an Advocate/ Leader in this movement? \_\_\_YES \_\_\_NO

***Please share any thoughts on how the city, county state could improve the services for those recently released from incarceration or who have been convicted of a felony. For Research purposes (Please use back if necessary).***

The groups are personal and private by signing I agree to refrain from repeating the private and personal information of someone else and understand I may be liable for not abiding by this privacy statement.

## APPENDIX Y

**Flyers for Listening Campaign**THE CHALLENGES OF RE-ENTRY

A Listening Session

SPONSORED BY

*The Circle of Inspiration & Jersey City Together**October 15, 2016, 10:30 am*

Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church  
417 Rose Ave  
Jersey City N.J. 07305

For Jersey City to reach its full potential as a community, every single individual should be given an opportunity to reach his or her full potential and that includes citizens returning to community after incarceration. We want to hear the stories of individuals who have had a difficult time re-entering society so that we can know where to advocate with and for them. Please come out because what impacts one single person impacts us all.

(For more information 267-333-7643, [williejkeaton@yahoo.com](mailto:williejkeaton@yahoo.com))



Continental Breakfast Provided

*The Circle of Inspiration  
Presents:  
“The Challenges of  
Re-Entry”*

*The 2nd Installment*

*Keynote Speaker: Tracey L. Fisher, CEO - Gateway to Re-Entry*



Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church

December 3rd, 2016

10:00am-11:30am

Continental Breakfast Provided

*Tracey L. Fisher with Governor of Pennsylvania*

## APPENDIX Z

## Group Sessions

*The Circle of Inspiration*  
*Presents:*  
The Challenges of Re-Entry Weekly  
Group Sessions

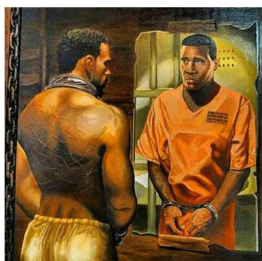
*Beginning March 13th, 2017, 6:00pm-7:30pm*

*Light Refreshments Provided*

Inspiration  
Job Referrals  
Mentoring  
Case Management  
Anger-Management  
Counseling  
Referrals:  
Substance Abuse Housing  
Self-Development  
Economic Tutoring

Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church  
417 Rose Ave. Jersey City NJ. 07305  
267-333-7643 williejkeaton@yahoo.com

## APPENDIX AA

**Transition and Transformation Thursday****TRANSITION & TRANSFORMATION THURSDAYS****FREE DINNER**

**SHACKLES TO SUITS THE EXODUS  
PROGRAM  
& THE CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION  
AN INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION COMMUNITY**

- SPIRITUALITY
- RESOURCES
- SUPPORT
- REFERRALS:
- HOUSING
- IDENTIFICATION
- DRUG & ALCOHOL
- EMPLOYMENT READINESS
- EDUCATION AND TRAINING COUNSELING
- VETERAN SUPPORT

**EVERY THURSDAY****LOCATION: LARSEN'S RESTAURANT****BERGEN AVE. JERSEY CITY N.J. 07304 -RSVP-267-  
333-7643**

## APPENDIX BB

**Group Agenda**

## “The Circle of Inspiration”

Providing Resources, Research & Advocacy to Reduce Recidivism.

### Weekly Group Schedule

*Two Locations*

**Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church**

124 Claremont Ave, Jersey City NJ 07305

**Mideast Evangelical Presbyterian Church**

241 Sip Ave Jersey City, NJ 07306-5613

**Greeter**

10 Minutes Sign in Sheet, Benefits Statement, Survey, Schedule

**Intake**

Beverage- Water, Coffee, Tea, Juice

**Group Starts**

5 Minutes Introductions- First Name Only

5 Minutes Ice Breaker

**Group Session**

45 Minutes

**Refreshments**

15 Minutes

**Individual Conversation**

15 Minutes (Flexible)

*Closing Serenity Prayer*

**Claremont Lafayette United Presbyterian Church**



**Call 201-706-2119, For More Information**

APPENDIX CC

Listening Session

*The Circle of Inspiration  
Presents:*

**The Challenges of Re-Entry Weekly Group  
Sessions**

*Beginning November 29th, 2016, 6:00pm-7:30pm*

*Spaghetti Dinner Provided*

Inspiration

Job Referrals

Mentoring

Case Management

Anger-Management

Counseling Referrals:

- Substance Abuse
- Housing

Self-Development

Economic Tutoring



APPENDIX DD

**Meeting Agenda**

# The Circle of Inspiration

BI-Weekly Meeting

November 7, 2016

AGENDA

Prayer

SUMMARY

FLYERS TO DISTRIBUTE

Weekly Group Flyer

The Challenges of Re-entry

The Benefits Statement

Survey

Weekly Group Schedule

The Two Sites

Grants

Advertising

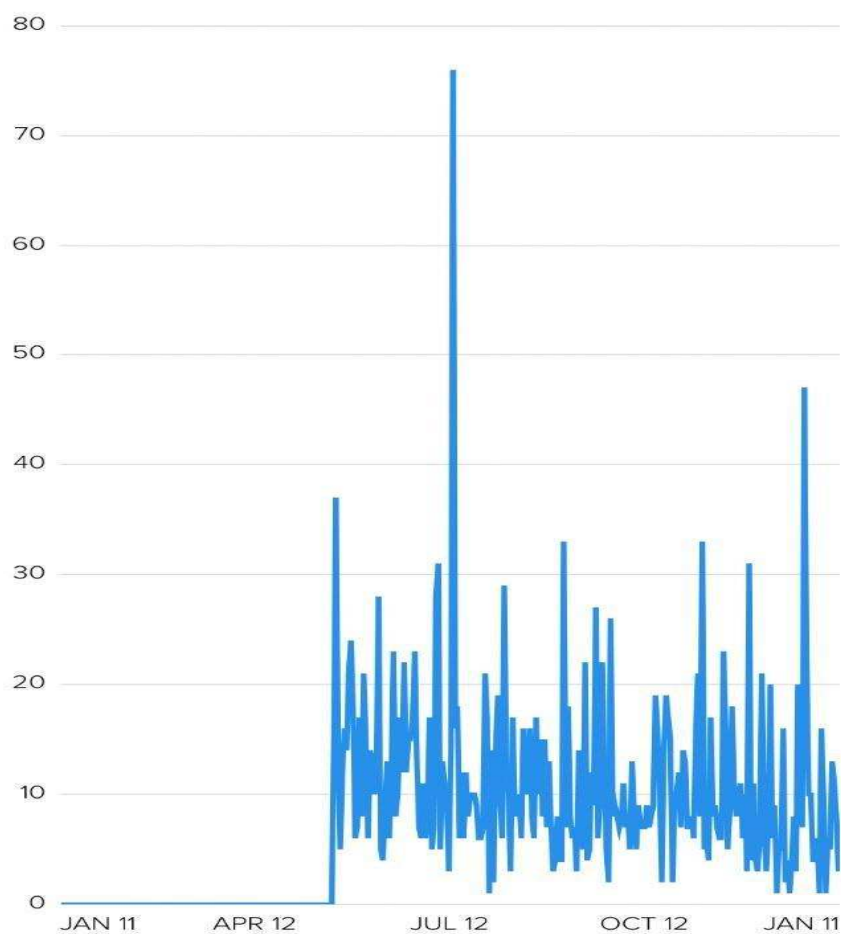
Closing Prayer

APPENDIX EE

Circle of Inspiration.Net Website Traffic

PAGEVIEWS ▾ 1 YEAR ▾

2,661



## APPENDIX FF

**Frank McMillan Letter**

Jersey City Together  
P.O. Box 136, Jersey City, NJ 07303  
[www.njtogether.org](http://www.njtogether.org)

December 1, 2017

Dear Sir or Madam:

Over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to work with Rev. Willie Keaton, Jr. as a leader in Jersey City Together, a non-partisan coalition of more than 32 religious congregations and non-profits here in Jersey City. Rev. Keaton's commitment to social justice and his deep personal commitment to those who have been impacted negatively by the criminal justice system are clear in his daily work and in his interactions with me and with everyone he meets. Rev. Keaton asked that I write a brief letter detailing some of his work with Jersey City Together and the impact this work has had both inside our organization and in Jersey City as a whole. His work and his leadership have had (and will continue to have) a direct impact on the lives of individuals across our city, particularly on some of the most vulnerable who live here.

- When Rev. Keaton arrived at Claremont-Lafayette United Presbyterian Church, I had the opportunity to sit with him for coffee. CLUPC has a long history of leadership in areas of justice in Jersey City, and he shared with me some of his past work in Pennsylvania as well as his passion for young people and for addressing the problems in the criminal justice system. This was clear not just in his conversations but in his doctoral work and in the research I saw him conduct (and learned from him about) here in Jersey City. He wanted to continue the church's tradition of leadership in this arena and quickly stepped forward in our organizing.
- As part of his work with Jersey City Together's youth & education team, Rev. Keaton played a key role in building relationships with parents, leaders from other churches, school board members/candidates, and with – for example – the principal of PS 22 across the street from the church. From this foundation, he and other Jersey City Together leaders worked closely with Dr. Marcia Lyles to take concrete steps & increasing programming at some of the city's highest needs schools – creating the first community school in Jersey City (at PS 15) and temporarily increasing after-school programming at PS 22.
- Rev. Keaton's passion around criminal justice and to address the root causes of gun violence has also had a marked impact on our organization's work on safety and criminal justice as well. Earlier this year, when Jersey City had seen 40+ shootings in a very short

time – including many within a few blocks of CLUPC – Rev. Keaton helped ensure that Jersey City Together took a stand with city officials, forcing movement & concrete steps, as well as internal clarity for our organization about the steps we needed to take to continue to address these issues.

- Out of this work, Jersey City Together began more focused work around criminal justice and jobs, with Rev. Keaton and other leaders visiting Baltimore to identify best practices, and – in the spring and summer – initiating a relationship with Hudson County Prosecutor Esther Suarez to share what we were learning & identify potential joint steps.
- This relationship & the conversations with Prosecutor Suarez (conversations that Rev. Keaton participated in and helped drive) resulted in commitments from the Prosecutor’s office, from the county, from the city, and from the state court system to take steps that will help hundreds of individuals with outstanding warrants in Jersey City and Hudson County in 2018. Rev. Keaton has played a key role in leading each of the actions detailed above (and following up to make sure they are successful), actions that have improved and will continue to improve the lives of hundreds across our city. And – perhaps most importantly – he has led this work in a way that is linked not only to his passions, but to the concrete stories he hears on a daily basis from individuals and families who live and work around his church. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions about any of the above via phone (773.412.2797) or email ([frank@njtogether.org](mailto:frank@njtogether.org)).

Yours sincerely,

Frank McMillan  
Lead Organizer, Jersey City Together

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