

Community-Based Proposal to Increase Dialogue and Achieve Objective Deliverables to Combat Systemic Racism in the Criminal Justice System

Given the recent Black Lives Matter protests and the longstanding body of evidence regarding systemic racism in the American criminal justice system, the conflict and unrest generated by the death of George Floyd and others provides a unique opportunity to establish meaningful dialogue between parties seemingly in conflict. Such dialogue can bring forth interest-based solutions to this deadly deeply-rooted American societal and governmental defect.

According to Kenneth Cloke, Director of the Center for Dispute Resolution in Santa Monica, CA, author of **Mediation Training Manual**, “Conflict is nothing more than an opportunity for conscious change and transformation.”

According to Cloke, conflict can be generated by a variety of circumstances:

“Conflict represents a lack of awareness of the immanence of death or sudden catastrophe. Conflict arises wherever there is a failure of connection, collaboration or community. Conflict reflects our inability to understand our essential inter-connectedness, the universal beauty of the human spirit. Conflict is often a lack of acceptance of ourselves that we have projected onto others, a way of blaming others for what we perceive as failures in our own lives, or of diverting attention from our mistakes. Conflict represents a boundary violation, a failure to value or recognize our own integrity, or the personal space of others. As we recognize and respect each other’s boundaries, we experience fewer conflicts. Conflict reflects a need to support or maintain a false image of who we are, or hide behind a role or mask that does not reflect our authentic feelings. Conflict is a way of getting attention, acknowledgment, sympathy or support by casting ourselves as the victim of some evildoer. Conflict is often simply the continued pursuit of our own false expectations, the desire to hold on to our unrealistic fantasies. Conflict represents a lack of listening, a failure to appreciate the subtlety in what someone else is saying. Conflict is often a result of what we have not communicated, of secrets, concealments, confusions, conflicting messages and cover-ups. Conflict represents a lack of skill, effectiveness or clarity in saying what we feel, think or want. When we are able to tell others clearly and skillfully what we need, we are often able to get our needs met without creating conflicts. Conflict is a way of opposing someone who represents a parent with whom we have not yet resolved our relationships. Conflict is the sound made by the cracks in a system, the manifestation of contradictory forces coexisting in a single space. Conflict is the

voice of a new paradigm, a call for change in a system that has outlived its usefulness. Conflict represents an inability to grieve or say good-bye, a refusal to let go of something that is dead or dying. Conflict is a way of being negatively intimate when positive intimacy becomes impossible. We all prefer anger to indifference until we are genuinely ready for a relationship to be over. Conflict is an argument in favor of half of a paradox, enigma, duality, polarity or contradiction. Conflict is often a fearful interpretation of difference, diversity and opposition, which ignores their essential role in creating unity, balance and symbiosis. Conflict is a result of our inability to learn from our past mistakes, our failure to learn from them, and recognize them as opportunities for growth, learning and improved understanding, or as requests for authenticity, and emotional honesty...” Kenneth Cloke

In view of the nationwide conflict regarding racism and criminal justice, I view this time as an opportunity for the faith community to be a driving force for resolution and reconciliation. I have a simple but what I believe will be an effective proposal for productive dialogue set forth below.

The concept is a mediation model utilizing an Interfaith Task Force (ITF) as the mediator. The ITF would be made up of community faith leaders from different religions and faith traditions. They would hold 4 meetings which could take place in person or via ZOOM over the span of 2-3 days.

1. First the ITF would meet as a leadership body to establish and articulate its core values as the mediating entity. It would then craft the rules for the dialogue and establish a stated desired outcome for the mediation.
2. Second the ITF would meet with the “Community” in order to seek the answers to 2 principal questions regarding racism and the criminal justice system: “What are the problems and what are the solutions?” The responses would be recorded on individual post it notes onto a “white board” visible to the participants. At the end of the meeting a photo of the white board and its post it note contents would be provided to the group as a record of the discussion.
3. Third the ITF would meet with law enforcement, using the same format and asking the same questions. The meeting comments would be recorded in the same fashion.
4. The final meeting would be with the Community and Law Enforcement together. The goal of this meeting would be to examine the two sets of post

it notes generated from the previous meetings to see if there are any points of agreement or near agreement. Using these points to create additional dialogue the goal would be to come away with 3 to 5 points of agreement articulated as action items to be submitted to a local legislative body such as the City Council, County Board of Supervisors, or State Legislators.

If the process is deemed successful these meetings could be held on a periodic basis to solicit action items to reduce and or eliminate systemic racism in the criminal justice system.

Submitted,

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