

**The Black Church and Economic Empowerment:  
An Ecumenical Collaboration in The Revitalization Of  
West Dayton**

by

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A project thesis

submitted to the faculty of

The Virginia Theological Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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## Introduction

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming “repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”<sup>1</sup> The primary role of the church is to usher in the kingdom in the community by our engagement. Jesus taught and lived the kingdom by what he did in the lives of those he touched. It is incumbent upon us as priests and pastors to have an affinity for the work of God’s kingdom and bring hope to our struggling community.

This thesis is about an Ecumenical Collaboration of the Black Church to address the disparities in the education of Black students in Dayton (Ohio) Public Schools. These disparities include unjust discipline practices, poor academic performance in reading and mathematics, and low graduation rates.

Blacks in West Dayton, Ohio experienced significant gaps in education, economic opportunities, and healthcare services. Education, however, provides a foundation for our growth and is the bedrock upon which much of our economic and social wellbeing is developed.

To build the case for collaboration, I conducted several interviews with a cross-section of community stakeholders. Three questions were asked of each interviewee:

- 1) In your opinion, what do you consider to be the disparities in education?
- 2) What should be done to close the education gap between Blacks and Caucasians?
- 3) Which role should the Black Church play in closing the gap?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:17. *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. (Oxford University Press, New York), 2006

The methodology used was qualitative research into the background or history that attributed to the individual participant's answer to a prescribed set of questions. The analysis of the participants' honest answers and opinions to the questions demonstrated that education is the key to economic empowerment, and the engagement of the Black Church's ministerial organizations in West Dayton is necessary to close the education gap.

In my assessment, the four Black Church organizations capable of closing the education gap are The West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Leadership for Equality and Action in Dayton, the Baptist Pastors, and Ministers Union, and The Miami Valley Pastors and Ministers Association. My insights gleaned from an analysis of the answers, using qualitative research methods, led to a commitment from three Black Church ministerial organizations. Members of those groups signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that invested in a summer education program for Pre-K through 3rd-grade students in West Dayton. The Baptist Pastors and Ministers Union did not participate.

The collaboration of the three Black Church ministerial organizations was a crucial first step in attempting to close the education gap for at-risk Black students in Dayton Public Schools. It should be noted that the Baptist Pastors and Ministers Union did not participate.

## **My Ministry Experience**

During my years as a student at Virginia Theological Seminary, many of my colleagues knew exactly where they wanted to serve after graduation. I, however, was curious as to where I would be called to serve. One day, I committed to following wherever God would lead me and promised to serve the people in that spiritually led community. Therefore, accepting the call to St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Dayton, Ohio, meant seeking the welfare of my congregation and the City of Dayton. From my perspective as a priest and pastor, I committed to serve the parts of the city that are neglected and marginalized.

On a cold January morning in the year 2000, with snow and ice covering the ground, I arrived in the "Gem City," Dayton Ohio. The nickname is derived from the city's prominence as a Midwestern manufacturing center. I was called to serve as Priest-in-charge of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church by the late Rt. Rev. Herbert Thompson, Jr., Bishop of Southern Ohio. St. Margaret's is a historic African American congregation that was on the verge of closing. According to Bishop Thompson, I came highly recommended by Nan Pete, Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Southern Ohio.

The Bishop informed me that church membership had declined, pastoral care was lacking and outreach to the local community was non-existent. He also gave me a clear directive to improve pastoral care and outreach. With that in mind, I considered two major constraints: uncertainty about taking the right path and lack of the stamina needed for the hard parts of the

journey.<sup>2</sup> But after much prayer and discernment, I accepted the call, and on February 11, 2001, I was installed as Rector by The Rt. Rev. Herbert Thompson, Jr.

## **The Early Days**

While there were no specific benchmarks for determining if things had indeed turned around, visiting the sick and shut-in, and community outreach were priorities. The parish secretary was diligent in notifying me of hospitalizations, and requests for home visits for the shut-ins. Each Wednesday at noon, services were at Belmonte Park North, an apartment complex in West Dayton, where many of our elderly members lived. A food pantry was established to serve needy families. Community outreach and evangelism to Hilltop low-to-moderate income (LMI) residents resulted in the baptism and subsequent confirmation of 12 members from three families.

According to Nancy T. Ammerman, as an activity, leadership involves (1) helping the congregation gain a realistic understanding of its particular situation and circumstances (2) assisting members to develop a vision of a corporate life that is faithful to their best understanding of God and God's purposes for the congregation in this time and place and (3) helping members embody that vision in the congregation's corporate life.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, to engage the church leadership in developing a vision and strategy for change, we conducted several small group meetings at church and in homes. Estranged members were visited and invited to return to the

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, (Howard Business Press, Boston, Massachusetts), Page 247

<sup>3</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations, A New Handbook*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1998), Page 17

congregation. Bible study and Sunday school classes were re-established, and a food and clothing bank was opened to serve three local zip codes. Within a year, membership and income increased by 30%.

At the time, one of the challenges we faced as a congregation was accessibility. Elderly members found it difficult to navigate the sanctuary steps or the undercroft and lack of space prohibited the installation of an elevator or ramp. As a remedy, a survey was conducted with members of the congregation. A majority of those surveyed voted to rebuild and relocate the building. Within two months, members contributed \$285,000 to purchase 39 acres of farmland in Trotwood, Ohio for construction. In 2002, a capital campaign began to raise funds for the construction of a 25,000 square-foot building, and on October 3, 2003, The Rt. Rev. Herbert Thompson, Jr., and Bishop Suffragan Kenneth L. Price dedicated the new church.

### **A Parish with A Remarkable History**

Established in 1892 as a Mission of Christ Episcopal Church in Dayton, with a rich history of community involvement, St. Margaret's Episcopal Church is one of four African American parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio. Since its inception, St. Margaret's has been engaged in improving the quality of life for the residents of the greater Dayton community. The late Hon. James H. McGee, former senior warden of St. Margaret's, was not only the first African American to serve as a Dayton mayor, but he was also the city's longest-serving mayor. Drs. Harold Stratton, a general practice physician, and Dwight Pemberton, a dentist at the Dayton VA Medical Center, both life-long members of St. Margaret's, were the authors of a grant to establish the Dr. Charles Drew Health Center located at 1323 W Third Street in Dayton, Ohio.

Charles Drew was an African American surgeon who pioneered the methods of storing blood plasma for transfusion and organized the first blood bank in the United States. The late Lloyd E. Lewis, Jr., was a former member of the Ohio House of Representatives. A native of Dayton, Lewis served as assistant Dayton City Manager and as a member of the City Commission. Lewis died in 2001 and was succeeded by his wife, Edythe, a public health nurse and former Miami Conservancy District administrator.

Margaret's is proud to be the church home of The Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and The Rev. Lynne Eaton Washington, Rector, Church of the Incarnation, Atlanta, GA. Both Kelly and Lynne were born and raised in Dayton, Ohio, and were baptized and confirmed at St. Margaret's by one of my predecessors, the late Reverend M. Bartlett Cochran. Growing up in the church, they were not able to serve as acolytes, but they were not deterred from service. Kelly was an active member of the church school and served as the president of St. Margaret's high school youth group. As a postulant from the Diocese of Southern Ohio, Kelly was ordained to the diaconate on October 9, 1982, by The Right Reverend William Black at St. Margaret's Church and then ordained to the Priesthood by The Right Reverend Walter Dennis at The Church of the Intercession on September 24, 1983. St. Margaret's was the foundation of Lynne's spiritual formation, which led to her call to the priesthood. She served on the staff of the Bishop of Virginia for many years and currently serves as Priest-in-Charge of the Church of the Holy Incarnation, in the Diocese of Atlanta.

In 2017, St. Margaret's purchased an additional 22.7 acres of land adjacent to our property. Now located on 61.7 acres, St. Margaret's owns and operates a 28-acre farm and provides nine



raised-beds for community gardening. The church offers a summer arts camp for children in grades 4-8 to learn tolerance and peace-making skills using art as a medium. The parish also provides monthly health and wellness programs emphasizing diabetes and childhood obesity. There are a few active parish organizations at St. Margaret's such as the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the Episcopal Church Women (ECW), and the Daughters of the King. Each organization plays an active role in the parish mission and ministry.

There are fifteen members on the vestry, charged with parish fiscal responsibility. Each month, the vestry meets on the fourth Saturday at 9:00 am, to conduct church affairs. In 2004, with vestry consent, I proposed the establishment of a nonprofit community development corporation known as the Council for Community Outreach and Development, Inc. (CCOD). With a board of directors composed of members of the congregation and community, the primary focus of CCOD is the future development of senior housing to meet the needs of an aging church and community population.

### **Deep Hunger, Deep Gladness**

Not only am I actively engaged in the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio and the Dayton community, but it is also my privilege to serve as a board member of several community organizations, including Minority Empowerment Initiative Trust (MEIT), the Dayton Council on Health Equity, MLK Dayton, Inc., and Good Samaritan Foundation Dayton, Inc. I also serve as president of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc., an ecumenical collaborative of twenty-five congregations working together to address the issues of racism, injustice, poverty, and

inequality in Dayton. I am committed to use my position as a priest and community leader to foster systemic change by collaborating with the leadership of the Black Church, still one of the most influential institutions in the community.

In summary, accepting the call to St. Margaret's meant accepting a call to be actively engaged in the Dayton community. At first glance, Dayton seemed to be a thriving and prosperous community. However, the more I became entrenched at St. Margaret's, the more I realized the church was positioned in a community struggling for social and economic stability.

## **My Response**

The following six chapters offer my project thesis. Chapter 1. "Why Dayton?" is a description of the city that once took pride in being called the GEM City, the birthplace of aviation, technological innovations, and countless industries. Chapter 2. "Why the Black Church?" shares light on the Black Church and its role in addressing the social and economic disparities with which it is confronted. Chapter 3. deals with a critical component in dealing with the current condition of our community, and that is "Building Collaboration," especially among Black Churches. I learned that getting a group of pastors to collaborate on anything, propelled me in the roles of prophet, as a prophetic voice sounding the alarm of injustice, and as a convener and inspirational leader. I accepted each role with great humility and commitment. Chapter 4, "Identifying Education as an Issue," examines the educational challenges in West Dayton, and a collaborative effort to provide a possible solution to a failing school district, and unjust disparities in education for black children that required an immediate response. Chapter 5. "Leadership in Dayton"

addresses the inability of leadership to deal with the social and economic crises in Dayton, and the public's perception of leadership in the Black Church. Chapter 6. "Dayton Scholars" is my Thesis Project. This is a program designed to provide literacy in reading and math, behavior modification, and enrichment for Pre-K through 3rd grade.

The impetus of the project is the collaboration among the Black Church leadership of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc., Leadership for Equality and Action in Dayton (LEAD), and Miami Valley Baptist Ministers Association. This led to the development of an action plan to positively address the disparities in education. Dayton is known globally for the *Dayton Peace Accords*, the general framework for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Signed 1995 at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, this document is well supported. Today, not a single industry is left, and the predominately Black community of West Dayton has suffered the most. What is needed is revitalized economic empowerment in West Dayton.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Why Dayton?**

My concern and frustration with the condition of West Dayton catapulted me into the role of the unhinged prophetic voice. I could not turn a blind eye as if all were not well in our community, nor to the plight of the poor and marginalized. I had to speak up and sound the alarm of social neglect and economic abandonment.

Dayton is literally and figuratively divided by the Great Miami River. I remember accepting an invitation for a pulpit exchange with a suburban Episcopal parish, St. Paul's, in the community of Oakwood. After the service, a parishioner asked if I were from out of town. I said, "no, I am the rector of St. Margaret's Dayton." She had not ever been west of the Great Miami River, thus never entering West Dayton. When my colleague, Rev. Dr. John Paddock asked if I would be willing to preach at one of the Wednesday noondays services at Christ Church Dayton, I accepted.

Christ Church is the oldest Episcopal Church in Dayton, located at 20 W Frist Street, downtown. This was the platform I needed to begin my prophetic witness. In my weekly homilies, I intended to open the eyes of my audience and paint a graphic picture of the conditions in West Dayton and a failing educational system. I believed their consciences were awakened as I called upon them to speak out against injustice and show compassion for their brothers and sisters on the city's west side.

## Theological Assessment

As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you, and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God. (Luke 19:41-44)

As I mentioned, Blacks in West Dayton experienced significant gaps in education, economic opportunities, and health-care services. Dayton’s social and economic disparities are enough to make Jesus weep. I have lived in Dayton for more than twenty years, serving as rector of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. During this time, I have witnessed the challenges that confront this community. One of the major issues we face in Dayton is how to narrow or, close the gaps in education, health care, and other significant disparities between the African American and Caucasian communities. To provide a quality of life and self-sufficiency for families, we know that quality public education is critical.

Jesus looks over the City of Jerusalem, seeing the buildings on Mt. Zion, the bronze doors of the temple, and the shining dome blazing in the morning sun. He sees the place of Herod. He sees the road to Damascus in the distance – the place where Paul will meet Jesus for himself. He sees the healing pool of Siloam in the valley. When He sees the people in the marketplace, He realizes they are selling in the temple. Through this insight, He realizes the City of Jerusalem is abusing its poor, exploiting them by charging unfair weights and measures. In a city of plenty, they are left to beg for crumbs. In a city with growing housing development, they are abandoned to be homeless and in alleys. Jesus sees a city like Dayton neglecting its children, who, at the point

of their greatest need, are neglected and poorly educated, they are potentially stifled by practices and policies that value things rather than people. Jesus sees a city where the resources that God has provided equally to everyone are hoarded by few to the detriment of many.

## **Social Science Assessment**

Known for aviation and other technological innovations, Dayton is Ohio's sixth-largest city. The area's largest employer, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, is located slightly outside the city limits and is home to the National Aviation Museum. Leading arts and culture, the Benjamin and Marian Schuster Center and the Victoria Theater are venues for the Dayton Philharmonic, Opera, and Ballet. Three institutions of higher learning, Wright State University, the University of Dayton, and Sinclair Community College offer associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees. At the same time, in the past ten years, the city's population has declined from 262,000 to approximately 141,759, with many of its residents moving to southern and northern suburbs. Most of this migration included middle-class Caucasians, a move that resulted in pervasive poverty, particularly on the west side.

The demographics of the City of Dayton were 51.7% White, 42.9% African American, 0.3% Native American, 0.9% Asian, 1.3% from other races, and 2.9% from two or more races.<sup>4</sup> Hispanic or Latino of any race were 3.0% of the population. About 58,000 Dayton residents are Black, which is about 41 percent of the city's population. The risk factor is that many local

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<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau, 2010

Black residents trail far behind their white counterparts in income, wealth, and financial stability, according to the report produced by the Miami Valley Urban League.

I have observed lines of social and economic demarcation in Dayton. In February 2015, an "Opportunity Mapping" study prepared by the Epidemiology Section of Public Health - Dayton and Montgomery County, showed that a disproportionate number of Dayton residents lack basic opportunities. Defined as a situation or condition favorable for attainment of a goal, the opportunity is also accessing a good position, chance, or prospect for advancement or success. Ideally, everyone should have equal opportunity to be successful in life, but research has shown neighborhood conditions and access to opportunities have a profound impact on an individual's chances to succeed.

The Kirwan Institute's Communities of Opportunity framework demonstrates that there are complex and interconnected opportunity structures that have a significant role in shaping an individual's quality of life.<sup>5</sup> These structures include housing, education, health care, employment, transportation, and civic engagement. Communities with high opportunities have quality schools, low crime rates, and affordable housing. Additionally, the environment of these communities promotes healthy lifestyles with advantages such as access to parks and healthy foods. Improving opportunity requires an investment in both the people and the community as well as the supporting linkages between the community and areas of opportunity.

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<sup>5</sup> Kirwan Institute: The Ohio State University. *Communities of Opportunity: A Framework for more Equitable and Sustainable Future for All*. (January 1, 2007)

Opportunities can be brought to neglected communities through strong neighborhood development initiatives, higher quality local services, and infrastructure and public health investments. The growth of human capital can be stimulated by investing in education, developing, and training the labor force, creating asset and wealth-building strategies, and encouraging social and political empowerment within the community. Through the investment in people, places, and linkages, the landscape of low opportunity communities can begin to transform. <sup>6</sup>

Residents of east and West Dayton have moderate to exceptionally low opportunities for health, education, housing, and transportation. The city's east side is primarily composed of Caucasian Appalachians and Hispanics. West Dayton is predominately African American. The poor and working poor live in a state of hopelessness. With thousands of boarded buildings, the housing stock in these communities is dilapidated. Also, most of West Dayton is classified as a "food desert" because there are no grocery stores or markets to purchase fresh produce. Residents must travel for miles because there are few neighboring food markets.

In September 2015, the members of the grassroots organization, Neighborhood Over Politics, and I met with the mayor of Dayton, Nan Whaley, and City Commissioner Jeffery Mims, to discuss the "Opportunity Mapping" Report. In February 2015, this study was prepared by the Epidemiology Section of Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County.<sup>7</sup> showed a disproportionate number of Dayton residents lack basic opportunities. Mapping allows the visualization of varying levels of access to opportunities within a region. Based on a methodology

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<sup>6</sup> Epidemiology Section of Public Health - Dayton and Montgomery County, *Opportunity Mapping*, (February 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, (February 2015).



developed by the Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University.<sup>8</sup> indicators representing the opportunity structures (income and stability, health and safety, and education and life skills) are statistically combined to create an opportunity score. Additional data, such as population and public assistance, are used to highlight differences in opportunity based on race, ethnicity, and poverty.

The data for all indicators were aggregated to the Census tract level. Census tracts were given an opportunity score of extremely high, high, moderate, low, or exceptionally low. To our dismay, we learned city government had no clear strategy to use the Opportunity Mapping data to improve the current social and economic conditions of West Dayton residents. When pushed to explain the city's failure to address the blight in those neighborhoods, the mayor and city commissioner became and defended their inaction. They said the city had limited funds to address the problem.

At one time, African Americans found great opportunities in Dayton. It had been a thriving industrial community that welcomed African Americans to fuel the growing need for workers. But the loss of blue-collar jobs over the years has resulted in the depletion of decent wages and limited opportunities for future generations in the African American community. Faced with significant gaps in education, economic opportunities, and health care, Blacks in West Dayton are faced with troubling and worsening issues that exacerbate efforts to achieve equality and inclusion. This causes me deep concern.

Education: Dayton Public Schools (DPS) is an urban district of approximately 13,000

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<sup>8</sup> Kirwan Institute: The Ohio State University. *Opportunity Mapping*, (August 26, 2013)

students from pre-school through high school and it is a public-school system in crisis. An alarming number of young Black males are performing below standard in all academic categories. It seems the Board of Education and City Commission operate as representative bodies, voting the interest of their supporters, rather than what is in the best interest of the students or the residents of Dayton. It is very telling when some of these elected officials will not send their children to Dayton Public Schools, but rather, to private or parochial schools. The school district's student population is predominantly Black, with the majority of white teachers, and with one of Ohio's worst educational outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

Economic Opportunities: General Motors, NCR, Mead, Delco, and other major manufacturing jobs have left Dayton. The unemployment rate for Blacks is twice that of whites.<sup>10</sup>The housing stock in West Dayton has the lowest value in the region, often been the victim of redlining (the systemic discrimination against African Americans in the distribution of home loans) by developers and the banking institutions. That deprives residents of the economic development being realized by our neighbors to the north and south.

Healthcare: I serve on the Dayton Montgomery County Advisory Board of Minority Health. The reports on minority health, especially the infant mortality rate of African American babies, are astonishing. In Ohio, the infant mortality rate for Black women is 15.1 deaths per 1,000 live births and has continued to climb over the past several years. Recent studies show that it is nearly three times higher than the rate for white women, which was 5.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015.<sup>11</sup> Health officials point to higher rates of poverty, less access to health care, and higher

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<sup>9</sup> Josh Sweigart, Staff Writer, 'Five Questions about the Future of Dayton Public Schools' Dayton Daily News, August 16, 2018

<sup>10</sup> Randy Tucker, "Blacks twice as likely to be unemployed as whites" *Dayton Daily News*, September 23, 05, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. David McKenna, "Infant Mortality Black Women" *Dayton Daily News*, Tuesday, May 05, 2015.

rates of chronic diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, as reasons for higher infant death rates among Black mothers. But Dr. David McKenna, medical director of the perinatal care center at Miami Valley Hospital said, perhaps the most under-appreciated social determinant leading to premature births and infant deaths among Black women is real and perceived racism. “A lot of these women have stressed throughout their entire life, and a lot of the stress is brought on by racism,” McKenna said. “That’s the reason we see this big disparity between Black women and white women.”<sup>12</sup>

In summary, I felt convicted to speak out against the social and economic disparities in West Dayton. In April of 2015, I was invited to give the invocation at the Miami Valley Urban League’s inaugural luncheon, at Sinclair Community College. The audience was comprised of more than 500 government and business leaders. I used the occasion to identify the unjust disparities in West Dayton and I issued a call to action. Each opportunity I was given to speak was used to raise awareness and concerns about the conditions of West Dayton. At quarterly meetings, I addressed the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation, Inc., Board of Trustees as well as the monthly meetings of the Faith-Based and Law Enforcement. My prophetic witness was foundational, I wanted my audience to be as convicted as I.

Two reasons prompted me to undertake this study. First, is the collaborative work that addressed the growing need for senior housing in the Diocese of Atlanta. Leveraging support from the City of Columbus, GA, and the Bradley Foundation, Inc., St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church, the parish I served for six years, I applied for a housing grant from the US Department of

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. David McKenna, “*Infant Mortality Black Women*” *Dayton Daily News*, Tuesday, May 05, 2015.

Housing Urban Development (HUD). We received 3.5 million dollars from HUD to develop 48 housing units for the elderly (St. Mary's Woods Estates, Columbus, GA). The City of Columbus contributed \$178,000 to install water and sewer lines, and the Bradley Foundation, Inc., contributed \$25,000 for furnishings. The second reason is the impressive work done by the West Dayton of Caravan, Inc. This ecumenical group created opportunities to expand education for young, West Dayton residents. Twenty years ago, the West Dayton Caravan Education Foundation, Inc. was established to provide scholarships for high school graduating seniors to attend college. More specifically, WDCEF, Inc., also provided financial assistance for graduating seniors at Central State University who were in financial trouble. Based on these experiences, I felt encouraged to undertake this study as a ministry for specific demographics in a city desperately in need of hope.

There were several hurdles to overcome in this process. I was certain that some pastors would be protective of their turfs and reluctant to partner with churches outside of their denominations. I intended to show them a larger picture, assuring them that we can accomplish far more together than we will apart. I reminded them there is but one God to serve, a God who calls us to serve a community in peril.

The mayor and commissioners may be defensive when pushed to explain their failure to address the blight in West Dayton, but I will provide them with an opportunity to partner with the Black Church leadership to address the disparities. In the next chapter, I will discuss the role of the Black Church in managing these disparities, especially in education.

## Chapter 2

### Why the Black Church?

My role as the prophetic voice and witness eventually transitioned into my role as a convener. I realized that if any substantive change were to occur in West Dayton, be it social, economic, or in education, the Black Church had to get involved. I first approached the Rev. Dr. Perry E. Henderson, Jr., senior pastor of Corinthian Baptist Church in West Dayton. Dr. Henderson established the oldest and only remaining Black credit union in Dayton and is well known and highly respected in the community. I spoke with him about my doctoral studies at the Virginia Theological Seminary and my project. He was excited to learn more about my work and invited me to meet in his office. When I arrived, the former mayor of Dayton, The Honorable R. Clay Dixon was in his office.

Mayor Dixon is an active member of Phillips Temple CME Church, one of the largest Black churches in Dayton. I asked for his valuable perspective on the Black Church, to which he agreed. After the mayor left, Dr. Henderson and I spoke at great length about the conditions of West Dayton. I expressed my interest in convening a small group of pastors to talk about what we (the *Black Church*) can do to improve the quality of life for our community. He then gave me the names of The Rev. Dr. Rockney Carter, senior pastor of Zion Baptist Church, and Rev. Dr. Tokunbo Adelekan, Senior Pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church. Each church of those churches is in West Dayton.

Dr. Henderson then gave me a local history lesson. He said the Black Church played a pivotal role in the spiritual and economic development of the residents of the city's west side. According to Henderson, in the 1940s, several Black churches created credit unions to provide small loans to individuals and businesses that were denied credit by local banks. <sup>13</sup>I knew I was on the right track when we agreed that the Black Church can once again be a beacon of hope in West Dayton. My next step was to schedule interviews with a cross-section of community leaders. I wanted to get their perspective of the Black Church and the role it should play in the revitalization of West Dayton.

### **Theological Assessment**

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:7)

Jeremiah's word is spoken to the people as a promise that God has a plan and a purpose for them. It is a plan and a purpose that His promises will ultimately be realized, but they had a part to play in the fulfillment of these promises that were not spiritual remedies. In other words, God was not going to do everything for Israel. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us of that when he said, "faith in God does not mean that God will do everything for man. That is not faith, that is superstition."<sup>14</sup> Faith in God trusts the promises and provisions of the divine, but faith in God also needs to be harnessed by believers, the Black Church is engaged and doing its part to walk in the promises. A faith that puts all the effort and energy upon God or the government does the faithful little good in spiritual development and personal responsibility.

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<sup>13</sup> Rev. Dr. Perry E. Henderson, Senior Pastor, Corinthian Baptist Church, Dayton, Ohio, 2018

<sup>14</sup> Grace Norwich, Elizabeth Alba, *I Am #4: Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Published by Scholastic Inc., New York, NY, 2012), Page 110

Dr. King is saying that we have the power and potential to make life better. Dayton's wellbeing, the peace that can exist in this city, the harmony that needs to be in this world, is in our hands. If we look for the answers to come solely from the city or county government, we are going to be looking for a long time. They may offer a small part of the solution, but the real answers come from us.

Too often Black Church leaders in Dayton spend too much time discussing and deliberating. What the community needs are a bold demonstration of people across denominational lines joining hands and hearts, collaborating to make communities better. For instance, Dr. King used this text to challenge us on our responsibilities: "I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger, I was imprisoned, and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release. I was naked, and in your mind, you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you spoke to me of the spiritual shelter of God's love. I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me. You seem so holy, so close to God. But I am still very hungry and lonely and cold."<sup>15</sup>

God has no hands but ours, no feet but ours, no voice but ours. Because the real test of our faith and concern for West Dayton, especially Dayton's challenged education system, is when we can rise above the narrow confines of individual concerns and embrace the broader concerns of the community. We must rise above petty politics, community lines and neighborhoods, conservatives, and liberals, north side and south side, east side and west side, geography and economics, and deal with the systemic racism designed to destroy our inner city.

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<sup>15</sup>Norwich, Grace, Elisabeth Alba, *I Am #4: Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Published by Scholastic Inc. 2012), Page 110

Over the years, systemic racism in Dayton has subjected Black people to hardships and disadvantages. Racism is also responsible for minorities having higher rates of incarceration, homelessness, poor education, and health outcomes.

In June of 2020, I was elated to see the city and the University of Dayton address the sin of racism head-on. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, Dayton declared racism as a public health crisis. The city's decision is part of a growing national trend and comes the same day the Ohio Senate debates legislation to declare bigotry as a health crisis on a state level. “When we have such a large portion of our community that is not healthy, that is not living to its full potential because of the systems set in place,” said Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley. “I think we need to do the work to change that.”<sup>16</sup>

The University of Dayton's top administrators has pledged to accelerate the school's journey to becoming a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable organization by committing to 11 concrete actions that will mark the school as an anti-racist institution.<sup>17</sup> "We recognize that UD is not immune to the kinds of racist systems and behaviors that perpetuate institutional racism. Historically, this has created barriers and persistent disparities on campus and caused pain for our Black students, alumni, faculty, and staff. As a university community, we can — and must — do better." This open letter was read by the 33 administrators to the campus community.

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<sup>16</sup> Mayor Nan Whaley, “*Racism is a Public Health Emergency*” Dayton Daily News, June 18, 2020

<sup>17</sup> [https://udayton.edu/news/articles/2020/06/anti-racism\\_pledge.php](https://udayton.edu/news/articles/2020/06/anti-racism_pledge.php),



According to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, becoming anti-racist is a choice to "become actively conscious about race and racism and take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives."<sup>18</sup> Being anti-racist is believing that racism is everyone's problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it. Anti-racism involves acknowledging and understanding privilege, working to change internalized racism, and interrupting racism when it is encountered. "As a Catholic, Marianist university, we believe every person has innate dignity because all people are made in the image and likeness of God. We are called to embrace human diversity, communicate with respect, and to understand, disrupt, and dismantle systemic racism," the letter continued to read. The University of Dayton's top administrators has pledged to grow from the University's long-standing commitment to justice and human rights and its promise to improve the diversity, equity, and inclusivity of UD.<sup>19</sup>

It appears too often that those who walk in the darkness are more zealous than those who profess to walk in the light. From time to time it seems that those who say that they walk in the light seem to be guided by a different moral compass of our manual of faith. We must do our share collaboratively to see to it that we build a society where no sick person will go unattended, no hungry person, especially children, will go unfed, no one is poorly housed, no able-bodied person will go without adequate employment, and there are equal access and opportunity to quality education for all children "regardless of race". While this is a community problem, with no solution

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<sup>18</sup> [https://udayton.edu/news/articles/2020/06/anti-racism\\_pledge.php](https://udayton.edu/news/articles/2020/06/anti-racism_pledge.php),

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 2020/06

from the community, the Black Church must collaborate to save the community, especially its children.

## **Social Science Assessment**

Obscure in origin, secret in development, rich and complex in its flowering, the oldest and most influential institution in African American life remains the Black Church,<sup>20</sup> and that influence continues today. The Black Church has long been recognized as the most independent, stable, and dominant institution in Black communities. Since its inception, the Black Church has been instrumental in the spiritual, social, and economic wellbeing of the Black community. For example, James W. Hood, an AME Zion Bishop in the mid-1800s, who worked to ensure that the church was successful in both the North and South, wrote:

The Church, having opened the way for the development of the Black man, other means have followed, and still, others will follow, until his opportunities are equal to that of any race... The African Church will then have accomplished its special work... not until then.” (Bishop J. W. Hood of AME Zion Church)<sup>21</sup>

The Black Church has also long functioned as an economic institution. The early history of economic development in the Black community involves the productive interaction among Black Churches, mutual aid societies, and fraternal lodges, all of which concerned themselves with the material as well as moral well-being of the community.

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<sup>20</sup> Anne H. Pinn, Anthony B. *Black Church History*. (Published by Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2002)  
Page VIII

<sup>21</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism. An interpretation of the religious History of Afro-American People*. (Orbis Press, Maryknoll, New York, 1983), Page 74

Founded in 1787 by Absalom Jones, the main goal of the Free African Society was to provide aid to newly freed Blacks so that they could gather strength and develop leaders in the community. In addition to its spiritual and moral focus, the society also quickly became the leader in welfare for all freed Blacks in Philadelphia. Some former slaves legitimized marriages through the society, and a burial plot, often the final resting place for Black Philadelphians at that time, was leased by the society to avoid the use of unmarked graves. In 1790, the Free African Society worked with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to examine the way free Blacks lived in the city.

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*The Black Church in the African American Experience* is the largest nongovernmental study of urban and rural churches ever undertaken and the first major field study on the subject since the 1930s. Drawing on interviews with more than 1,800 Black clergies in both urban and rural settings, combined with a comprehensive historical overview of seven mainline Black denominations, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya present an analysis of the Black Church as it relates to the history of African Americans and contemporary Black culture. “A good way to study a people is to study their religion, for religion is the address to that most sacred schedule of values around which the expression and the meaning of life tend to coalesce.”<sup>23</sup>

In examining both the internal structure of the Church and the reactions of the Church to external, societal changes, the authors provide important insights into the Church’s relationship to politics, economics, women, youth, and music. One relevant train of thought that I gleaned from his study, is that the Black Church is not monolithic, there are elements of misogynistic ethos

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<sup>22</sup>Anne S. Butler. (2005-03-11). "Fraternal and Benevolent Societies in Nineteenth-Century America". In Brown, Tamara L.; Parks, Gordon; Phillips, Clarenda M. (eds.).

<sup>23</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Duke University Press, 1990), Page XI

across denominational lines. There are a few Black Churches in Dayton that refuse to acknowledge women as pastors or women in leadership, especially Black women. On one occasion, a member of the West Dayton Caravan Education Foundation, Inc., scholarship committee was told to not enter the pulpit of Macedonia Baptist Church to give her report because women were not allowed. I left the pulpit in protest and stood beside her as she read her report.

In his book, *Barefoot Church*, Brandon Hatmaker says: “We, as church leaders tell our people to go. We tell them to be good news. We assume they do. We assume they know-how.”<sup>24</sup> While we have charged to equip the saints for service, the truth is the most of us have reduced our expectations of serving to a once-a-month tour of duty as an usher or greeter. There must be more to church than this. People are hungry to make a difference, yet most do not know where to start. In fact, 'serving the least' is often one of the most neglected mandates of Jesus.

Today's church should be a catalyst for individual, collective, and social renewal in any context. Whether pastors or laypeople, readers will discover practical ideas that end up being as much about the Gospel and personal transformation as they are about serving the poor. In reading Hatmaker's *Barefoot Church*, I was encouraged by the possibility that the organizational structure of the Black Church can be created or redesigned for mission in any context. Serving the least in West Dayton is not a trendy act of benevolence but a lifestyle of authentic community and spiritual transformation. By the grace of God, our eyes are opened more and more to the needs of our community. The constant disinvestment in our community has infused the Black Church with a renewed sense of urgency to lead the charge for equity. One of our Caravan churches, Omega

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<sup>24</sup> Brandon Hatmaker, Brandon. *Barefoot Church: Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2011), Page 16

Baptist Church, has been working for years, with little or no support from the city or business community, to develop the Hope Center. This program equips individuals, families, and children with resources, tools, and opportunities to break the cycle of generational poverty and achieve self-sufficiency through education, economic and workforce development, and advocacy.

Dr. Kortright Davis, professor of Theology at Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, DC, in his book, *Serving with Power*, wrote: “There often comes a time in the life of the church when code and customs, values and virtues, even words and symbols, become worn and jaded. They lose much of their force and efficacy and no longer command any authority in people’s lives. Familiar passages of Scripture become less challenging and sermons too boring to be arresting.”<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Davis is concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of the church and calls for a spiritual revival. He explores the power of the Word of God in shaping Christian ministry. He argues that the Word of God creates and re-creates, calls us together, and sends us forth for a more powerful service. The Word destroys that which ought not to exist and generates that which ought to exist. The pertinent question is, what constitutes faithful and obedient service as a ministry? He proposes that those who are called to serve others in the name of Christ are also called to find their nature in Christ.

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<sup>25</sup> Kortright Davis, *Serving with Power: Reviving the Spirit of Christianity*. (WIPF and STOCK Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2012), Page 1

To address the question, “Why the Black Church?” I was privileged to interview a diverse group of community pastors, educators, bankers, and civic leaders.

To respect the anonymity of the participants, the names used in this thesis have been changed. Provided is a framework for qualitative evaluation within which individual participants responded in a way that represents accurately their points of view and experiences with the disparities in West Dayton. The raw data collected from the initial interview questionnaires, my journal entry, and follow-up meetings with the Black Church leaders were evaluated “to determine” how participants feel about what is happening in West Dayton. The outcome will be the creation of an action plan which lays out specifically how each disparity will be addressed.

The methodology for this thesis is a qualitative research conducted through a series of interviews. The questions asked aimed to first, get a sense of how people felt about education, one of many disparities mentioned in “The State of Black Dayton” a report by the Miami Valley Urban League. The second question was intended to gain a clear perspective from a cross-section of community stakeholders on the Black Church, one of the most important institutions in the Black community. Historically, the Black Church has been the go-to institution to solve problems and provide answers to the plight of Black people. The common theme in all the responses was the overwhelming acknowledgment of the disparities in education and a rallying call for the Black Church to come up with a solution.

The interviews and qualitative research began in mid-July 2017 and ended in mid-February 2018. The interviews were a vital part of my project. Three critical questions were asked to get a general sense of everyone’s perspective about the disparities in education, as well as what should

be done to close the gap. The qualitative analysis of these interviews became the impetus of my decision to pursue a collaboration with three Black Church organizations to address the disparities in education. Five individuals, representing the financial, civil rights, education, and social justice organizations were interviewed. My principal, ministerial role in conducting these interviews, was to collect the necessary research data for analysis and interpretation to support my thesis project. I am hopeful that the data will not only shed light on the disparities in education but help me make the case for collaboration with the Black Church. With collaboration, closing the education gap will be a necessity.

This is the response to questions from Adrienne Markey, an executive with a major banking institution and a former elected school board member: According to the Urban League's State of Black Dayton report, there are disparities in health, education, economics, and workforce development opportunities.

**Fr. Ben** - *In your opinion, what do you consider to be the disparities in education?*

**AM:** There are multiple disparities in education. We can start with the *Ohio funding model* which uses a formula based heavily on zip codes. That is inherently unjust. One could say some of those higher socio/economic areas do not spend a lot on education. We have students on IEPs (programs developed for students with special needs) which are costly to school districts. Another disparity is the real lack of engagement and advocacy of the wider community, such as economic development, or lack thereof. When economic development takes place in lower economic areas, developers receive the tax abatement that is not allowed in suburban areas. There is little concern for the social, environmental, mental, economic, and social issues that face poor children. *Social*

*and mental issues* such as poverty, substance abuse, safety, etc., all impact a child's ability to learn.

In impoverished households, there seems to be little or no concern about those factors. Resources and activity are huge disparities. From lack of textbooks to technology, teacher salaries, etc., DPS (Dayton Public School) is one of Ohio's lower-paying school districts. The best and brightest teachers and administrators leave for better pay.<sup>26</sup>

**Fr. Ben** - *What should be done to close the education gap?*

**AM:** First and foremost, we need to get the entire community, parents, and government to see the value of instructing poor children, many of whom are Black and Brown. We have large graduating classes of students that cannot contribute to society because members are not academically prepared. Taking a holistic approach to value our students requires every segment of the community to work together, stacking hands, and reaching across the lines. *Poor children must deal with many insecurities* before they get to school. Safety, food, health, etc., all weigh heavily on children. We must address the systemic problem, brought about by charter schools to compete against the public-school system and drain resources - especially the policies and practices in place that destroy these children. When most of all suspensions are Black students, there is a bias, stereotype.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Adrienne Markey, July 17, 2017

<sup>27</sup> Adrienne Markey, July 17, 2017



**Fr. Ben:** *What role should the Black Church play in closing the gap?*

**AM:** First, the church must understand and become more engaged in the public education system. Parishioners should look for opportunities to volunteer for classrooms and after-school activities. “*Church beyond Sunday*” should become safe places for children.<sup>28</sup>

This is a response from a representative (who will remain anonymous) of the Dayton Board of Education.

**Fr. Ben -** *In your opinion, what do you consider to be the disparities in education?*

*What should be done to close the education gap?*

*What role should the Black Church play in closing the gap?*

**Answer:** This is a twofold problem: (a) African American students do not receive solid academic foundations in preschool and early elementary, resulting in them not having the ability to compete in STEM-based academics later in their education; and (2) many teachers do not have the same levels of expectations for students of color as they have for other students. Note, however, the central problem is a *lack of parental involvement and commitment* to the educational process, i.e., parents who do not have the ability or capacity to reinforce what their children learn in school. In simple terms, “you cannot give what you don’t have.” This is what she recommends addressing these problems:

1. We should provide early education and after-school programming for students to successfully compete for STEM opportunities.

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<sup>28</sup> Adrienne Markey, July 17, 2017

2. Workshops/training for parents to understand the importance of their roles in their child's education i.e., pro-social skills; and
3. Intervention for teachers to ensure they are not biased and have the same expectations for all their students.
4. Churches that have the administrative capacity and facilities should partner with schools in their communities to provide space for supplemental programs for student early education (the schools would provide the space and the school would provide the programming), counseling and tutoring; and (b) churches should re-focus and recommit to the cultural formation of their congregants in order or children to become productive members of society.<sup>29</sup>

This is the response from Kelly Jones, a representative of Neighbor Over Politics (NOP)

**Fr. Ben:** *In your opinion, what do you consider to be the disparities in education?*

**Jones:** What I consider to be disparities in education are *indecisiveness, staff turnover, and state education policy mandates*. Dayton Public Schools (DPS) has proven several things for sure. It has proven its inability to set a plan/goal of its own that is specific for its community, outside of state policy. Then provide processes with standards that incorporate state mandates. Thus, what has occurred is a continuous change in processes, standards directed by the Ohio Department of Education. Also, DPS has not done a great job of advocating for its students and its policies in Columbus, outside the topic of school funding/finance. The absence of clear methods procedures, policies have led the district to play a cat and mouse game with the state, and hide and

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<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, July 18, 2017

seek game with the community, and policies of intolerance with students. All these things coupled are a major part of where the district is currently.<sup>30</sup>

**Fr. Ben:** *What should be done to close the education gap?*

**Jones:** I do not have the perfect answer that will incorporate every indicator that ensures the education gap at Dayton Public Schools lessens. However, as mentioned earlier a comprehensive plan designed specifically for the community is an assured first step. Education scholars recommend numerous ways to close the education gap. Nevertheless, implementing another great idea or another promising program by a billion-dollar education publishing company has proven not to work. Dayton Public Schools must make a conscious choice that it wants to succeed at all costs. Then it must get the community to agree. Whichever tactics Dayton Public implements, DPS must be steadfast and unmoved by staff, income, and population changes. Dayton Public must choose a path and *stay the course*, regardless. The district must recognize there will be adjustments along the way, but the route is still the same. The driver may change, but the destination and the vehicle it uses cannot.<sup>31</sup>

**Fr. Ben:** *What role should the Black Church play in closing the education gap?*

**Jones:** The Black Church has a significant role in aiding in the closing of the education gap. Specifically, the Black Church is a microcosm of the community in which it resides. After slavery, the Black Church was the only place Black Americans could learn the Bible, which is often the first book read by many Black Americans. The Black Church has been and is the leader in minority communities. It has proven to be the family counselor; the spiritual doctor, the birth

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<sup>30</sup> Kelly Jones, July 18, 2017

<sup>31</sup> Kelly Jones, July 18, 2017

and death comforter, as well as the single entity, afforded some semblance of validity and respect within White America. The relationship between the Black Church and a school system is a foundational brick of survival, not only for the student but also for the public-school district itself. Some writers proclaim that we can trace the demise of urban minority communities with the flight of the Black Church to the suburbs. The business of faith is profitable, but perhaps it has cost the soul of its people, and the results are what shows up in classrooms all over America every day.<sup>32</sup> This is the response from Carla Harrell, a community responsibility associate with a banking institution:

**Fr. Ben:** *In your opinion, what do you consider to be the disparities in education?*

**Harrell:** The greatest disparity in the presence of a comprehensive, systemic way to simultaneously address all the causes of an underachieving and under-enrolled school system to result in a steady growth in all areas of need. Other critical priorities also are declining and operating under capacity that directly impacts student enrollment:

- \*effective instructional leadership in every school
- \*knowledgeable, caring teachers in every classroom
- \*efficient communication system between district and community
- \*leadership and teacher professional development programs based on best practices.
- \*results-driven recruitment and retention strategies.
- \*safe learning environments.<sup>33</sup>

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32 Kelly Jones, July 18, 2017.

33 Carla Harrell, July 20, 2017

**Fr. Ben:** *What should be done to close the education gap?*

**Harrell:** Re-channel the school district's efforts, energy, and urgency to implement comprehensive, systemic ways to address all the causes of an underachieving and under-enrolled school system that will result in steady growth in all areas of need instead of employing energy to close or repurpose neighborhood schools.<sup>34</sup>

**Fr. Ben:** *What role should the Black Church play in closing the gap?*

**Harrell:** For the sake of posterity, the church could play a critical role in creating a systemic way of *galvanizing the community* to educate and inform citizens about their roles and responsibilities in creating safe and viable neighborhoods.<sup>35</sup>

Response from Daniel Prince, President of the Dayton Chapter of the NAACP.

**Fr. Ben:** *In your opinion, what do you consider to be the disparities in education?*

**Prince:** We lose educators because we are not teaching them how to connect with the students who are in their classrooms. Teachers need professional development. We lose students because of trauma in their backgrounds, or difficulties that children are going through, such as, the *marginalization and the micro messages* they receive in public...in ways that are presented in the media and how they are spoken about. We disconnect from their intelligence and look at their deficiencies rather than look for an efficient way to process their futures. We must stop putting young people in boxes but need to look for their capabilities. They get bored because teaching has not kept pace with how information is being absorbed. We are too gendered in some education practices. That is why we are a so-called, “drop out” nation. We lose 11 % of our male student

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<sup>34</sup> Carla Harrell, July 20, 2017

<sup>35</sup> Carla Harrell, July 20, 2017

population because they are not rewarded in the classrooms of America. The way males learn, or masculine dominant females, is tactile – they need to have a voice in the classroom and not just sitting – many feel education is punitive. The *natural love of learning* is not stressed. That natural need must be enhanced and deepened. They should have excitement and passion.<sup>36</sup>

**Fr. Ben:** *What should be done to close the education gap?*

**Prince:** Teachers are looking for ways to connect with children. Most teachers need cultural agility and professional development. We are still using the same approaches where cultural agility is missing. College curricula need to change across the nation and experienced teachers need professional development so that they will know the kids who are in front of them and need to learn at their level. We still have the micro-cultural idea that is European based which means we do not look at people and understand the realities of their existence.<sup>37</sup>

**Fr. Ben:** *What role should the Black Church play in closing the gap?*

**Prince:** The church has a wonderful opportunity to align and support school districts. The faith community can align Bible study with state core standards. Create school after church – tutor and work with young people after school and help a district reach its goals – to get kids to their grade levels and beyond. The ways to connect have been lost. At one time, the church was more instructional about what should take place. The Black Church needs to get back to neighborhoods where kids have free range to run safely and freely. The Church should challenge parishioners to help rebuild schools and their curricula and put people at the center of their own culture. The

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Prince, July 20, 2017

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Prince, July 20, 2017

Church should know the district's wish list and ask how it can work with the district in the reinforcement of education.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, the collective responses of each interviewee concerning the disparities in education are compelling. I heard quite frankly that the Ohio school funding model itself is suspect. Ohio uses a formula based heavily on zip codes. That is inherently unjust. Education is the key to economic empowerment. One could say some of those higher socio/economic areas do not spend a lot on education. We have students on IEPs (programs developed for students with special needs) which are costly to school districts. Another disparity is the real lack of engagement and advocacy of the wider community, such as economic development, or lack thereof. The disparities in education are indecisiveness, staff turnover, and state education policy mandates.

Dayton Public Schools has proven its inability to set a plan/goal of its own that is specific for its community, outside of state policy. We lose educators because we are not teaching them to connect with the students in their classrooms. Teachers need professional development. We lose students because of trauma in their backgrounds, the difficulties that children are going through, the marginalization and micro messages they receive in public, the ways they are presented in the media. I heard there is little concern for the social, environmental, mental, economic, and social issues that face poor children. Social and mental issues such as poverty, substance abuse, and safety, all impact a child's ability to learn. It is believed that the presence of a comprehensive, systemic way to address simultaneously all the causes of an underachieving and under-enrolled school system will result in a steady growth in all areas of need.

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Prince, July 20, 2017

All the interviewees thought the Black Church has a significant role in addressing disparities and closing the education gap. For the sake of posterity, the church could play a critical role in creating a systemic way of galvanizing the community to educate and inform citizens about their roles and responsibilities in creating safe and viable neighborhoods. The church has a wonderful opportunity to align and support school districts. The faith community can align Bible study with state core standards. It could create “a school after church” tutor and work with young people after school to help a district reach its goals – to get kids to their grade levels and beyond. Churches that have the administrative capacity and facilities should partner with schools in their communities to provide space for supplemental programs for a student early education (the schools would provide the space and the school would provide the programming), counseling and tutoring; and churches should re-focus and recommit to the cultural formation of their congregants for children to become productive members of society.

After my interviews, it was clear each interviewee touched on some key drivers of disparities in the education system in Ohio. One critical driver is the Ohio Department of Education, *funding model*. Public schools in Ohio are funded from three main sources: a small amount from the federal government; the state gives each school district funds from the Ohio Lottery; and the largest share comes from state income, sales, and property taxes. In 1825, the Ohio government created a common system of schools and financed public education in Ohio with a half-mill property tax. Currently, about 2/3 of all property taxes levied in the state go to fund education. The remainder of property tax money is divided among local governments. The problem with relying heavily on property taxes is that property values vary from district to district, making it exceedingly difficult for the poor school district to catch up. Poor school districts are unable to



attract qualified teachers because they cannot afford to pay them. Many poor districts must rely on long-term substitute teachers to fill those positions. To address this disparity, the State of Ohio must provide additional funding to help poor school districts like Dayton Public Schools meet the challenge of educating their students.

The Black Church, like the Israelites, must endeavor to promote and seek the city's success and prosperity as well as peace among the people. They were to live where God had planted them, knowing that God had a purpose for his people in the place where he had put them (Jeremiah 29:7). The real test of our faith and concerns for others is when we (the Black Church) can rise above the narrow confines of individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all people. Understanding the role, we (the Black Church) must play in addressing the disparities in education, the next chapter will deal with the process of engaging church leaders and subsequently, the collaboration of three Black Church organizations working together to address that focus.

## Chapter 3

### Building Collaboration

As I approached the next phase of my study, it became clear that my role as *convener* will later shift to that of an *inspirational leader*. Finding the right group of people to engage required much prayer and discernment. Following my meeting with The Rev. Dr. Perry Henderson, Jr., I felt led to contact The Rev. Dr. Rockney Carter, The Rev. Dr. Tokunbo Adelekan, and former Dayton Mayor Clay Dixon. I invited them to meet me for coffee at Third Perk, a Black-owned coffee shop at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Ludlow Street in downtown Dayton. Since Monday is an administrative day for most pastors, I suggested we meet on the third Monday in April of 2017.

Our initial meeting was to share my concerns and vision for West Dayton and to hear their points. I told the group I felt Black Churches should consider working together to improve the quality of life for the community through spiritual, social, and economic empowerment. The Rev. Dr. Carter thought we should hold our elected officials accountable. The Rev. Dr. Adelekan expressed his concern for the millennials in his congregation who are so discouraged, they are not likely to return home to Dayton once they have graduated from college. Mayor Dixon informed us the Miami Valley Urban League was scheduled to release its annual “State of Black Dayton” report on May 22, 2017, at Omega Baptist Church in West Dayton, and we all planned to attend. I felt we were off to a good start and was excited to see what God had in store.

## Theological Assessment

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him. Again, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Two are better than one because there is a good reward for their toil. There is value in that statement because it is the truth taught by the Word of God. When this truth is utilized by anyone, especially the Black Church, the possibilities are endless. We often hear of the concepts “Teamwork,” or “Group Effort.” But what is the difference between a team and a group of people? They might both have two or more people, but they are quite different.

Solomon is speaking of that synergy of spirit that happens when people are living with the same purpose. The word ‘synergy’ is made up of two Greek words meaning, ‘work together.’ According to Merriam Webster, synergy is the impact that results when two or more agents work together to achieve something either one could not achieve on its own. It is the concept of the whole being greater than its parts. Everyone should be committed not only to the joint task but also to working with and appreciating the contributions of others. The heave of success sometimes helps people overcome their selfish goals, but the real attitude needed to energize a team is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

God has brought this team concept, the synergy of spirit, into one institution that stands as a foundation for human civilization: The Church. Behind the church concept, we have the “many are one” concept. Paul says in Romans 12:5 (NKJV) “So we, being many, are one body in Christ,

and individually members of one another.” By building collaboration, the Black Church can accomplish a great deal by working interdependently rather than as several uncoordinated and uncommitted mission stations. Taskmasters get this done by authority and threat. How else was the Great Wall of China built? But the church is dependent on volunteers. Each person must be convinced of their part in the whole of the church will be weak. When this perspective of God’s truth becomes established in our lives, then the church is strong. The members sincerely care about the others. If church leaders do not have this concept well defined in their soul, then they will, despite all the team talk, act selfishly, independently, and hurt each other. This synergistic spirit was behind the way Jesus raised a team.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus gave us a model of ministry work. Jesus’ approach to ministry was to select a team of people to work closely together to achieve a common goal. Though Jesus was God in human form, though He had all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, He did not go solo. He was not a one-man-band or a lone ranger. He selected a team to be with Him. The Black Church can learn from Him, collaborate, and then go out to do certain kingdom assignments (Matthew 10:1-16). At various points in Jesus’ ministry, we see that His attitude to ministry or ministry style was that you cannot do it all by yourself, you cannot do it alone, you need people. Jesus knew more could be done with his disciples than without them. The process, the love, the forgiving, the differences would all become something that needed to be endured so that the great love and power of God would be seen. The same is true with the Black Church. Behind great leadership training is the concept that others have an important contribution to the task. We might not know how, but we trust God, to maintain that relationship and continue in hope.

A popular African proverb says if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. Because of situations such as the example just given, most people have concluded that I would rather do it by myself. By the time I involve other people, I slow down. The question to ask is, which is more important, which is more profitable, to go fast or to go far? Which one will pay off in the long run, getting things done fast or going far? There is a common saying with which I believe we are all familiar: it is not how fast, but how well. It is not about how fast you get there; how quickly you are to accomplish things, but whether you can remain there when you get there.

Solomon says, two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor (Ecclesiastes 4:9 NIV). When two or more work together for a common purpose there is a good return for their labor. A good harvest comes from working close together whether it is in the family, the church, or with other churches. This working together is the essence of collaboration.

### **Social Science Assessment**

With collaboration comes a unified front, resources, and the ability to leverage those resources with the appropriate agencies and financial institutions. The Black Church must work together to close the gaps in education, economic, and health care in the Black community. The Black Church is the heart and soul of West Dayton, and if West Dayton is to be revitalized, the Black Church leadership will have to step up and roll-up its sleeves and get to work. Despite the economic disparities for Blacks in West Dayton, the Black community and especially the Black Church, represent registered voters and a significant share of purchasing power in this region. Reshaping the landscape of West Dayton will be required leveraging that power and demanding a

seat at the table where decisions that affect our community are made. The current power brokers in Dayton are the Dayton Foundation, the University of Dayton, the Downtown Dayton Partnership, the Dayton Development Coalition, Premier Health Partners, and Kettering Health Network, all multimillion-dollar corporations. These entities can open doors, provide resources and expertise. With its collective purchasing and voting power, the Black Church can use its spiritual and political currency to demand support from the government, businesses, as well as Dayton's nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

The revitalization of West Dayton is critical to the area's overall economic health. Collaboration and reinvestment stimulate economic growth and development in inner-city neighborhoods. As the Black Church collaborative, we realized we did not have to reinvent the wheel; there were a few models of collaboration and reinvestment to investigate.

For example, during my six years of ministry in Columbus, GA, I experienced firsthand what collaboration can accomplish. I participated in the collaborative work the City of Columbus and the residents of Bellwood produced. Bellwood, like West Dayton, was a predominantly Black community that experienced disinvestment, while the surrounding communities were thriving. The Chattahoochee Valley Episcopal Ministry (CVEM) and residents of Bellwood protested at City Hall and demanded a seat at the table. Those efforts resulted in a collaboration that led to the revitalization of the Bellwood community.

When a need for senior housing arose, my former parish, St. Mary Magdalene, Columbus, GA, collaborated with the Bradley Foundation, HUD, and the City of Columbus to develop 48

units of senior housing on five acres of land owned by the church. Such collaboration among the Black Church leadership will ultimately lead to the creation of an action plan to address disparities in Dayton, especially in education. Being a church in a community involves the responsibility and opportunity to be actively engaged in the economic empowerment and revitalization of West Dayton. The responsibility is ours; we must seize this opportunity to make our community viable. Throughout our discussions, in the process, I remained hopeful that collaboration among the Black Churches will lead to the creation of an action plan to revitalize West Dayton. Now, my role of convener and the inspirational leader had to take root. Inspiring a group of Black pastors to work collaboratively was truly a blessing. I believe the mutual respect we have for each other, my credibility in the community, and my compassion for the least among us, played a significant role.

In the late 1970s, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. William A. Jones, Bethany Baptist Church, located in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York, one of the city's most violent and impoverished neighborhoods, operated a child-development center, a senior citizens' housing complex, and a restaurant that employed dozens of local people. In 1984, when the parishioners of St. Paul's Community Baptist Church needed affordable housing, Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood joined forces with the Industrial Areas Foundation and a community organization called East Brooklyn Congregations to develop 2,300 neat, two-story houses amid a former ghetto. St. Paul Community Baptist Church provided \$100,000 in loans to support the controversial project. The story of St. Paul Community Baptist and Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood is beautifully

told in a biography written by Samuel G. Freeman entitled “Upon this Rock”, *The Miracles of the Black Church*.<sup>39</sup>

The Black Church has always been central to the economic development of the African American community for several reasons: politically, it is the most influential institution in the Black community. It is nationally and internationally organized; it is the most independent of Black institutions, supported mainly by the Black community itself, and is the largest socioeconomic institution in the Black community. Today, Corinthian Baptist Church in West Dayton, operates a credit union, providing loans not only to its members but the Black community.

### **Making It Happen**

In its May 2017, *State of Black Dayton* report, the Miami Valley Urban League revealed lost opportunities and promise for families in Dayton.<sup>40</sup> Some key examples of disparities that Black Daytonians experience are: Income, Education, Criminal Justice System, Housing, and Home Ownership. The apathy and despair in the Dayton community, and the level of my frustration with the political and religious leadership’s inability or unwillingness to address the disparities, compelled me to put my faith in action.

In late July of that year, as Rector of St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church, and president of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc., I contacted the presidents of the Dayton Baptist and

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel G. Freedman, *Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Urban League of Southwestern Ohio/Miami Valley Urban League, *State of Black Dayton*, May 2017



Ministers Union of Greater Dayton and the Miami Valley Baptist District Association and invited them to meet with me to discuss the Urban League's State of Black Dayton report. Reaching out to my clergy colleagues in the Black Church was truly inspirational to me. I felt encouraged and hopeful that by working together, we could make a difference.

Our initial discussion centered around Parker Palmer's "Let Your Life Speak," and Edwin Friedman's "Generation to Generation: Family Process in the Church and Synagogue." Parker Palmer's book admonished us to live as witnesses to our deepest truths as pastors. If we are to live our life fully and well, we must learn to live in the creative tension between our limits and our potential. Edwin Friedman's book encouraged us to do more as pastors to help families. In other words, doing more to advocate for a just and equitable education for the children in West Dayton. We shared our thoughts about the MVUL report, the plight of our community, and how we might work together to find solutions. After that initial meeting, we felt motivated to act in the interest of the community.

The next meeting was held at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. This time, we were joined by former Dayton mayor, Clay Dixon (who now serves as president of Miami Valley Organizing Collaborative) and the Rev. Dr. Rockney Carter, the co-president of Leadership for Equality and Action in Dayton (LEAD). Both expressed interest in being part of the collaborative. After an extremely healthy discussion, we decided our next step was to send a letter to local churches, inviting their congregants to a workshop to discuss the disparities in Dayton. This was a significant undertaking. For the first time in the history of Dayton, other than the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), local Black Church organizations agreed to work together.

In August of 2017, we sent letters to the pastors and ministers of seventy-five local churches, inviting them to attend the largest ministers' local luncheon ever assembled in the last twenty years. This group represents the most responsible religious leaders in the greater Dayton area. The communication referenced the deplorable state of our community and how it can be improved with their work and positive impact. We stressed that with their support, we can be greater in our achievements and activities. Now is the time to bring together the power of our congregations in a concerted effort to resolve some of the difficult issues facing us such as low-quality education with inadequate transportation, food insecurities, mental and physical health disparities, drug abuse, and gun violence.

We believe that effective and efficient community and faith-based organizing is the best way to become involved in making a difference and improving lives for the common good of our community. We also agreed to bring in a consultant to facilitate what we envisioned as a working luncheon. The letter was signed by the presidents of the four faith-based organizations. At this juncture, I felt my primary role was much like the prophet Nehemiah, who wept and prayed God when he heard of the crisis condition of Jerusalem. The horrible state of the people and the bad condition of the city walls made them vulnerable to their enemies. Nehemiah was the right person, at the right time for the job, but he could not do it alone. Like Nehemiah, I was deeply saddened by the deplorable condition of West Dayton and decided to do something. Sounding the alarm and drawing attention to the crisis was my first step, convening the clergy and sowing a seed for genuine collaboration that would catapult us into action, was the next step.

On September 21, 2017, more than forty-five church leaders gathered at Central State University's Dayton campus to attend the Congregational Community Organizing Initiative luncheon. This move was organized to address the disparities in Dayton. We brought in The Rev. Dr. Kendell Wright, a renowned consultant from Middletown, Ohio to facilitate our discussion. Through those talks, we identified the most important issues facing our community, including three areas of concern: education (a key to economic empowerment), poverty, and drugs.

On November 15, 2017, at a meeting at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, the presidents of three of the four church organizations signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreeing to work together to address the disparities in education and work with the Dayton Board of Education to close the academic gap between Black and white students. During the meeting, I asked The Rev. Dr. Rockney Carter, Esq., pastor of Zion Baptist Church, to draft a memorandum of understanding for the leadership to review with their respective bodies and give their input. The MOU was an example of doing what Gregory Reed contends: the church is called to be a force for change in the world, especially where the needs are greatest: the inner-city neighborhoods where crime, violence, and unemployment are the order of the day.”

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by three of the four church organizations. We agreed in that document to work collaboratively to address the disparities in education, specifically, with pre-school through third-grade students. Unfortunately, without explanation, the Baptist Ministers Union did not sign the MOU. Our assumption has been they did not sign because of their position against women pastors. Nevertheless, we proceeded. The collaboration among the Black Church leadership of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc.,

Leadership for Equality and Action in Dayton (LEAD), and Miami Valley Baptist Association, would add the development of an action plan that positively addressed the unjust disparities.

I later invited the COO of Miami Valley Child Development Center, Inc., (MVCDC) to a meeting. Ms. Day Chesney and I worked together when I served as treasurer of the MVCDC board of trustees. She informed us that because the greatest disparities that poor and minority families face in Dayton is the lack of quality education for their children, a child born in poverty has fewer chances to move into the middle class given all the disadvantages poverty heaps on a young life, both mentally and physically. Ms. Chesney shared some statistics regarding the challenges with kindergarten readiness.

Ms. Chesney felt strongly that preschoolers in West Dayton, especially Black students, are ill-prepared for kindergarten. She thought the church's resources would have a greater impact if the focus were on pre-school through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Pre-K -3<sup>rd</sup> is a critical time to develop reading and math skills for long-term positive outcomes. Besides, early learning programs aid in fostering learning and social-emotional skills. She stressed the urgency to reach pre-school kids if we intend to have an impact on the next generation because, she said, they are the most vulnerable. We accepted her recommendation and agreed to meet weekly and recruit retired and current educators in our respective organizations to help develop an action plan.

In summary, building collaboration is an essential factor as we tried to realistically address our community problems and the Black Church must come together to be a catalyst for change. The Miami Valley Urban League's "State of Black Dayton" report to the Dayton community

revealed lost opportunities and promise for families in Dayton. But it was the apathy and despair from political and religious leadership that led to my frustration but motivated my faith into action. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

The plight of my community kept me awake at night. I felt minding my own business or tending only to my flock at St. Margaret's would be a betrayal of my call to the priesthood. As a priest, it is my task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion my life following its precepts. I am to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong, and weak, rich, and poor. I am to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing...(BCP) p. 530. Thus, calling on my colleagues in ministry to join in a collaboration that would improve the spiritual, social, and economic life of our community was a necessity. Thanks to Mrs. Chesney for encouraging us to consider investing our time and resources in Pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade education. The next chapter describes how the pastors of the Black Church in West Dayton identified education as an issue that must be addressed.

## Chapter 4

### Identifying Education as the Issue

Every human society educates its children, its new and future members. Education expresses what is perhaps, our deepest wish: to continue, to persist in the face of time. It is a program for social survival.<sup>41</sup> It is also an act of faith in the future of the community. Notwithstanding, schools are important to educate the future members of the Dayton community. State education testing shows Black students in Dayton Public Schools, especially Black boys are behind other students in kindergarten readiness, reading, and mathematics, and only 26 percent of Black third-grade boys are found to be reading proficiently at grade level.<sup>42</sup> These factors, I feel, point to deeper problems of racism and social injustice. The academic achievement gap between Black and white students is a national phenomenon, not unique to Dayton. But it hits particularly hard in Dayton Public Schools, where most of the student body is Black.

### Theological Assessment

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, social justice seeks the equal distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, in *The Politics*, said ‘justice’

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<sup>41</sup> Steven M. Cahn, *Classic and Contemporary Reading in the Philosophy of Education*, (Published by McGraw-Hill, New York, 1997), Page 386

<sup>42</sup> Josh Sweigart, *Dayton Daily News*, August 7, 2018

<sup>43</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. S.V. “*Social Justice*” Accessed 16 Oct. 2020

ensured that individuals fulfilled their societal roles and received what was their due from society.<sup>44</sup> In American society, these benefits include public education, access to health care, social security, and other public services. Progressive tax structures and regulations of markets have been developed to help distribute wealth more *equally* and give more people access to property ownership and job security. Notwithstanding, the injustice and disparities in Dayton education are unconscionable. One of the most compelling passages in scripture promoting justice is Micah 6:1-8. This passage calls the people into a place of self-reflection and repentance, indicting them and the lifestyle they lead.

The answer to Israel's sin was not more sacrifice. It was deeper than any religious observance. God did not want a special kind of sacrifice; God wanted a special kind of person to change the heart of Israel. Without a change of heart, Israel's adherence to the Law would be hypocritical. The Israelites were focused on offerings, small and large. They emphasized sacrificial worship to the exclusion of justice and kindness. The people have rightly considered the nature of their offerings. But God's concern here is to point out that God requires more than sacrifice when entering God's presence. God clarifies what is good. The answer is rather straightforward: Do justice, love, kindness and walk humbly with your God. Micah's challenge is equally relevant in the United States.

The late theologian, James Cone, The Charles Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, said, "it is ironic that America, with its history of injustice to the poor Black man and the Indian, prides itself on being a Christian

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<sup>44</sup> Steven M. Cahn, *Classic and Contemporary Reading in the Philosophy of Education*, (Published by McGraw-Hill, New York, 1997), Page 136

nation.”<sup>45</sup> To enact justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God, are not single acts that can be checked off the list and left behind. On an individual and social scale, in matters large and small, this is a way of life. Periodic nods to equity do not constitute a faithful life, Micah tells us. We cannot only maintain racial membership quotas on committees in place of seeking racial justice. We cannot send checks for disaster relief and avoid examining the lifestyles that contribute, at least in part, to some natural disasters. We cannot do hunger walks and refuse to change our consumer lifestyles.

The problems with injustice in American education are systemic. For example, in 1950, public education was central to America’s culture, vital to the future of her children. Nevertheless, while educational opportunities were expanding, publicly and privately supported schemes to locate the talented burgeoned, and scholarships and loan programs for those students were provided with equal enthusiasm. Minorities knew then as they know now that they were being cheated from access to the new educational opportunities. They were virtually excluded from this important transformation. Such exclusion reflected the larger system of racial discrimination.<sup>46</sup>

It is appalling today to see that Black children in the Dayton metropolitan area are five times likely to attend high-poverty schools than white children. As a result, they continue to struggle with standardized test scores and attendance. Meanwhile, our public discourse around schools in this area seems to account for this theory. These facts are acknowledged by state and local education officials, but there are no public policy remedies for them. The same blueprints

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<sup>45</sup> James Cone, The Charles Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

<sup>46</sup> David Tyack, James D. Anderson, Larry Cuban, Carl F. Kaestle, Diane Ravitch, School. *The Story of American Education*, (Published by Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 2001), Page 126



are debated as if they are passive realities without connection to human action. Deliberate racist policies created social-economic disadvantages for Black families while the status quo continues to perpetuate these inequalities to the advantage of white families. Food deserts, hospital closings, yawning health disparities – all characterize the environment in which Black children are educated.

In April of 1965, Winson Hudson and Minnie Lewis traveled more than 120 miles from Harmony, Mississippi, to the Jackson suburb of Edward, to learn about a new federal program called Head Start.<sup>47</sup> The background of these social activists signaled the connection between the early childhood education program and the Black freedom struggle in Mississippi. A few years earlier Winston and Lewis led the fight to save The Harmony School, an institution built with the Rosenwald Fund (those dollars-built schools and paid teachers in the rural south) and donations from Black residents. Leake County Schools' officials planned to close Harmony and bus students to a new Black school built to defy the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision. with the appearance of separate but equal. School officials failed to realize that the Harmony School was more than brick and mortar. It represented the Black community's independence and resiliency. Harmony parents resolved if they could not keep their school, then they would demand integration of the white school.<sup>48</sup>

The inequalities in Dayton Public Schools cannot be fixed unless this community dares to properly analyze how we got here. Justice transcends a host of negative precepts, such as falsehoods, suppression of facts, the prohibition of oppression and corruption. It also calls for a sense of responsibility towards weaker members of society. It insists on the rights of others and

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<sup>47</sup> Crystal R. Saunders, *A Change for Change: Head Start and Mississippi Black Freedom Struggle*, (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC), 2006, Page 32

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, Page 32

creates the demand for an instinct of social preservation. “Act justly” would have been understood by Micah’s audience as living with a sense of right and wrong. In particular, the federal, state, and local governments have the responsibility to provide a just and equitable education for all children, regardless of race. Another compelling passage is from the prophet Amos. “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24 NRSV). It is difficult to read this passage without hearing the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Religious activities without justice and righteousness are abhorrent to God. The passage speaks of what rolls down like waters, like an ever-flowing stream. For Amos, justice among people must begin with God. Israel has always known that ritual observance and compassion for the powerless should not be separated. The Holiness Code is quite clear about this (see Leviticus 19). God has formed Israel to be both holy and merciful. What God condemns, then, is ritualism without heart. Amos shows the cherished traditions of Israel not to be causes for complacency, but measures of her accountability to God. Amos mocks Israel’s misguided hopes and rejects the liturgical expressions of faithfulness and proclaims the terrifying advent of God’s own justice and righteousness. Individuals must behave in a certain way toward each other. In other words, individuals must be fair and honest in all their dealings with other people. Justice, which is to be exercised towards God and one another, is the real evidence of true religion. Each day, we will be presented with opportunities that tempt us to compromise our character but make every decision based on what is right; not on what is easy.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dave Willis, *5 Things God Wants You to do Today*, Published, Sept. 24, 2015

## Social Science Assessment

Time and time again, I am shaken to my core to hear young Black folks emphatically state, there is no such thing as love. The relationship Black people have with love has been shaped by trauma. For the Blacks who were brought here against their will and enslaved, this is an emotional backdrop filled with loss and abandonment. (bell hooks)<sup>50</sup>

Education continually rises as a key issue for economic empowerment, but the Dayton community is racially and economically divided. The notion of a unified, God-fearing community is hindered by racism. Without solid efforts to close the education gap, African American students will continue to lag behind their white counterparts. The suburbs of Dayton are experiencing unprecedented economic growth and excellence in education, while the predominately African American and marginalized communities of West Dayton are subjected to economic decline and a failing school system. Systemic racism is a cancer that has been metastasizing in the Dayton community for decades. It is no accident that the predominately African American public-school district is on academic watch and the community in which the students and their families live is experiencing consistent disinvestment and neglect.

Education is a crucial component in employment, compensation, and other benefits. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2016, the trend from 2000-2016 was higher median earnings for those who had completed higher education than for those with less education ([www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov)). The NCES reported a median salary of almost \$50,000 for those with a bachelor's degree and an approximately \$25,400 median salary for those without a high school diploma or equivalent. Bachelor's degree holders earned

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<sup>50</sup> bell hooks, *Salvation, Black People and Love*, (Published by HarperCollins, New York, NY, 2001), Page XVIII

57% more than those with a high school diploma. With a master's degree, earnings rose to about \$64,100. Education may also affect the job opportunities open to you, since some jobs may have specific education requirements imposed by regulations or common industry practice. To earn licensure in a field, you may have to meet other requirements as mandated by law.

In 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported the total number of job openings available in the U.S., based upon the amount of education required as of 2016 ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)).<sup>51</sup> More than 37.2 million jobs were available for those with less than a high school education with a median salary of \$24,430. Approximately 61.5 million jobs required at least a high school diploma or equivalent and they earned a median salary of \$37,010. About 3.6 million jobs were available requiring associate degrees earning a median of \$53,700. Bachelor's degrees were required for about 33.4 million jobs and they earned a median salary of \$74,290.

Around 2.7 million jobs typically call for master's degrees, and jobs requiring a doctoral or professional degree numbered a little over 4.2 million jobs. They earn median salaries of \$69,450 and \$105,700, respectively. Education does not just provide you with the chance to earn a higher salary or find a job more easily. It can also provide social benefits. According to The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), higher education correlates with lower crime rates, higher voter participation, and an increase in volunteer work ([www.ihp.org](http://www.ihp.org)).<sup>52</sup> The IHEP also stated that having a higher education could increase life expectancy, leading to better health, and increase your overall quality of life.

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<sup>51</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), December 16, 2016

<sup>52</sup> The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), May 2019

The Ohio Department of Education developed a continuum of supports based on federal and state laws and regulations. Districts are identified for intensive, moderate, and independent status every three years (aligned to the school identification timeline). If Ohio public school districts are subject to an Academic Distress Commission after receiving an overall “F” on the Ohio School Report Cards for three consecutive years. Before the implementation of the overall grade in 2018, having a grade of “F” on the Performance Index measure and a grade of “F” on the Value-Added overall measure for three consecutive years served as the criteria.<sup>53</sup> Because the Dayton Public School District received an “F” in 2017 and 2018, the district was put on academic watch.

Dayton is home to roughly 140,000 people, split evenly between the white and African American communities. Activists say that these closures and disinvestment are part of a strategy to accelerate gentrification and to expel the African American and immigrant populations from their neighborhoods.

In 2018, nine Dayton Public Schools, an ALDI grocery store, and Good Samaritan Hospital were slated to close in communities of color while tax incentives were given to developers to increase investments in downtown Dayton. The Black Church and community protested the closures but could not prevent the closure of the grocery store or hospital. However, the Dayton Board of Education reversed its decision, but the grocery and hospital were closed.

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<sup>53</sup>Ohio Department of Education, School Report Card, 2018

Getting the best education possible for their children motivated ordinary citizens in the late 1960s to show extraordinary grit, courage, and endurance, challenging Jim Crow, and other legal and customary forms of racial, ethnic, gender, and disability subordination. The crusades for an equal educational opportunity that began in Topeka, KS, Farmville, VA, and Little Rock, AK spread across the nation, bringing greater attention to adding various struggles for learning and self-improvement. In 1966, African American students at Northern High in Detroit called a general strike to protest the failure of urban schools and to demand better educational opportunities.<sup>54</sup>

The Ohio Department of Education 2017 K-3 Literacy Data for the City of Dayton presents a grade “D” and the Component grade “F” indicating more work is needed. The 2017 City of Dayton achievement results shows that the state test indicators were not met. The Achievement component of the report card represents the number of students who passed the state tests and how well they performed. A new state test indicator measures the percentage of consistently absent students; the most affected were African American children in West Dayton. “Schools in are segregated because white people want them that way...we won’t fix this problem until we wrestle with that fact.”<sup>55</sup> According to the *Dayton Daily News* in 1972, Oakwood and Kettering parents complained at their school board meetings about the possibility of their children attending Dayton Public Schools as part of planned desegregation litigation.

In a recent newspaper interview, University of Dayton president Dr. Eric Spina said previous poor leadership, failure to attract talent, poor morale, and lack of community confidence

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<sup>54</sup> David Tyack, James D. Anderson, Larry Cuban, Carl F. Kaestle, Diane Ravitch, School. *The Story of American Education*, (Published by Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 2001), Page 127

<sup>55</sup> Nikole Hannah-Jones, Writer, New York Times Magazine, 2017.

were key obstacles facing Dayton Public Schools. However, Dr. Spina does not mention the effects of systemic segregation. UD is a Catholic university with a Black student enrollment of 3 percent, and it is where a majority of Dayton's permanent leaders received their education. Bridging the achievement gap between Black and white students is a crucial element to finding a path forward to improve the performance of Dayton schools.

In 2014, the Montgomery County Commission pushed *Pre-School Promise* as a pilot program in the suburban school district of Kettering, near Dayton. This initiative was created to provide quality, affordable education before kindergarten. Two years later, it was expanded to Northwest Dayton. The commissioners assured the public that, beginning in 2017-18, the pre-school effort would be offered throughout the entire county. The goal was to help every child start school fully ready to learn using three components: educating the community and families about the importance of all children attending a high-quality preschool, expanding the availability of high-quality preschool, and assisting families in finding and paying for high-quality preschool.

In 2016, the *Dayton Daily News* reported that a Montgomery County-wide Preschool Promise program would cost an estimated \$12 million to \$16 million. During the first years, greater emphasis should be on increasing the number of high-quality programs.

The allocation of funds to expense categories will evolve based on the needs of the community. It was recommended that a Demonstration of the Preschool Promise be conducted in 2016, with an estimated cost of \$2 million to \$3 million. In 2016, Dayton voters overwhelmingly passed Issue 9. Those ballots created a 1/4 percent income tax increase to support city services and the Preschool Promise. The goal, as stated by Mayor Nan Whaley and the Dayton commissioners,

was to make the preschool program available to all families in Montgomery County. We want to ensure that every 4-year-old child can attend at least one year of affordable preschool at a Star Rated program.<sup>56</sup>

According to Dr. Thomas Lasley, at that time the CEO of the education advocacy group, Learn to Earn, more than 800 children attended Montgomery County preschools that received support to improve their instruction. Teachers in those schools received more than 2,000 hours of individualized coaching and more than 70 preschool sites joined the Preschool Promise initiative in 2017-2018. Dr. Lasley reported that all unrated Preschool Promise programs were on track to receive a star rating under Ohio's voluntary Step Up to Quality rating system. The report was impressive, but it did not include the very children Issue 9 promised to help.

Poor and minority children in West Dayton have yet to realize the intended purpose and scope of the Pre-School Promise initiative. Preschool sites in West Dayton are still waiting for their share of the tax revenue to improve the quality of their preschools. Preschool Promise was designed to ensure that all children can attend an affordable, Star Rated Preschool for at least one year. The goal is to help every child start school fully ready to learn. While the hope is that the Preschool Promise ultimately will be offered throughout Montgomery County, it currently is available only in Northwest Dayton and Kettering.

Students enrolled in the local Preschool Promise effort made significant gains in school readiness in 2017-18, but a preliminary recap showed the program was still struggling to attract

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<sup>56</sup> Mayor Nan Whaley, Mayor of the City of Dayton, *In Dayton, building a 21st Century Workforce Starts with High-Quality Preschool*, By NLC Staff, National League of Cities, September 5, 2017



more families and close racial achievement gaps. Charmaine Webster, Preschool Promise's director of marketing, said the group is restructuring its outreach team, including the hiring of a full-time director. She cited recent stronger outreach to charter school families, and at underserved apartment complexes, adding the program hopes to see slight growth in participation this year.<sup>57</sup> Teaching young children cannot wait. Ensuring that every child can attend one year of high-quality preschool is an investment in the future of our community.

In his theory on *The Child and the Curriculum*, John Dewey writes, 'The child lives in a somewhat narrow world of personal contacts. Things hardly come within his experience unless they touch, intimately and his well-being or that of this family and friends.'<sup>58</sup> This is the essence of the Preschool Promise initiative. Every child deserves nurturing support and access to the best possible educational environment conducive for learning regardless of their circumstances. Dewey paints a relevant picture of a child's transformation. The child is taken out of his/her familiar physical environment, hardly more than a square mile or so in the area, into the wide world and yes, even to the bounds of the solar system.<sup>59</sup>

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Micah calls the people into a place of self-reflection and repentance, indicting their lifestyle. Israel's sin was deeper than any religious observance and it needed a change of heart. Without that change, Israel's adherence to the Law was simply hypocritical. The same is true with

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<sup>57</sup> By Josh Sweigart, Staff Writer, Dayton Daily News, *Preschool Promise Expanding in Dayton*, June 29, 2018

<sup>58</sup> Steven M. Cahn, *Classic and Contemporary Reading in the Philosophy of Education*, (Published by McGraw-Hill, New York, 1997), Page 276

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, Page 276

education in Dayton. Every child deserves nurturing support and access to the best possible educational environment conducive for learning, regardless of their circumstances.

In summary, Black children in the Dayton metropolitan area are five times more likely to attend high-poverty schools than white children. As a result, they continue to struggle with standardized test scores and attendance. With knowledge of the challenges in education, such as the failure of the government to follow through on the promise of a quality preschool for every child, and a failing public school system, I felt it was time to galvanize my clergy colleagues around a common vision for education. I asked my fellow pastors, (Henderson, Carter, and Adelekan) why minority children, especially Black boys, continue to lag academically in reading and math. I told them we have everything within our power to change the narrative in local public education. Providing a quality education program to benefit poor and minority children will create social and economic empowerment. We should consider implementing a Pre-K through the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade program in at least three of our congregations. However, I also mentioned we needed to put the right team together to forward our common vision. Having the right leadership team in place will ensure success. We agreed to tap into the educational resources within our congregations by asking some retired educators to serve on an education committee. The next chapter will share some light on the leadership challenge in the Dayton community.

## Chapter 5

### Black Leadership in the Dayton Community

From the late 1800s to mid -1980s, Black leadership in Dayton fought for civil rights and economic equality. According to “Dayton’s African American History”, written by Black historian Margaret E. Peters, Dayton’s Black History.<sup>60</sup> The poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, a contemporary and friend of the Wright Brothers, Ohio politician C.J. McLin Jr., The Hon. James H. McGee, former Dayton Mayor Rhine L. McLin, and Olympic gold medalist Edwin C. Moses bring immediate attention. But some lesser-known individuals have made significant contributions. James Wheeler, born into slavery in Halifax County, Virginia in 1795, was emancipated in 1805 and moved to Dayton in 1824. He married Catherine Sells, and their descendants have “played a significant role in Dayton’s history in the areas of law enforcement.

Rev. Desoto Bass was the pastor of First Wesleyan Methodist Church from 1895-1928 and was inducted posthumously into the Dayton Walk of Fame in 2009. Rev. Bass was devoted to his church, his race, and all the people of the community,” according to the Walk of Fame committee. “Each Sunday afternoon for 27 years he led singing parties, bringing groups to sing spirituals in the hallways of Dayton hospitals. He was instrumental in the works of the Dayton International Ministerial Alliance.”<sup>61</sup> A federal housing apartment complex is named after him.

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<sup>60</sup> Amelia Robinson, *A Timeline: Black History in the Miami Valley 1798 to 2001*, Dayton Daily News, Feb. 23, 2013

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, Feb. 23, 2013

Mabel Evans, in 1932, became the first Black woman to serve on the Dayton YWCA Board of Directors, according to Peters. Eleven years later, Leila Francis and her husband, Charles, moved to Dayton from Salt Lick, Kentucky. Four years later in 1947, she became Ohio's first Black realtor and the second in the United States. In the mid-60s, Mrs. Francis was arrested in a demonstration to force the downtown Dayton, Rike-Kumler Department Store to hire Blacks.

J. Russell Carter was the first Black prosecutor and judge in Dayton. According to Peters, he "was instrumental in Dr. Edward Bennett becoming the first Black surgeon and Dr. Roger Taylor the first Black intern at Miami Valley Hospital." Carter also sued the Biltmore Hotel for preventing Federal Judge William Hastie (who later became the first Black to serve as Governor of the United States Virgin Islands) to register as a guest.

After being appointed to an unfinished term vacated by Don Crawford in 1967, James H. McGee served as a Dayton commissioner. Three years later, he was appointed as mayor after Dave Hall retired from the position due to illness. McGee was then elected to the mayoral position in 1973 and re-elected in 1977, serving until 1982. During his tenure as the city's lead political architect, Dayton's overall well-being greatly improved.

Born in 1921 in East St. Louis, Illinois, Clarence Josef (CJ) McLin, Jr., was ten when his family moved to Dayton, where his father began operating a funeral home. Peters' book continues to detail that McLin, Jr. attended public schools, but characterized himself as an average student with a talent for civics. In 1940, he attended Virginia Union University, but it is believed his participation in a lunch counter-protest and lawsuit against the McCrory five and dime store in downtown Dayton led to his being drafted into the Army. During his three-year stint in the military,

McLin said he fought discrimination many times. After changing his major and completing his studies at the Cincinnati College of Embalming, he returned home to the family business in Dayton. But it was his encounters with discrimination during his experience in the U. S. Army during WWII, that sent him into the arena of politics. Years later, reflecting on the importance of protest injustice, McLinn wrote that he admired Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson. He said Jackson accentuated and punctuated our Blackness. Jesse always reminds white people that they must deal with us and that we cannot be ignored.

According to Peters' book, in the late 1950s, McLin founded the Democratic Voter's League, an organization that took an assertive political stand and demanded that the Democratic Party assist Blacks in obtaining quality jobs. In 1966, he was elected an Ohio state representative (36<sup>th</sup> district), a position he held until his death in 1988. Also, in 1966, he founded the Black Elected Democrats of Ohio (BEDO) and served as its first president. Today, the organization is known as the Ohio Black Legislative Caucus and is the nation's oldest Black caucus. It has helped African American legislators gain power in the legislative process. McLin, who said he grew up poor, always demonstrated concern for the plight of the underprivileged. He consistently influenced his colleagues to enact legislation that would enhance the lives of minorities and blue-collar workers. Among his many accomplishments was the development of the Bella Vista Estates in Dayton and the West Carrollton Housing Projects, both of which provide hundreds of modern units to low-income families. He also supported legislation to provide inspections of county-owned nursing and rest homes.

1991 was a historic year for Dayton when Idotha "Bootsie" Neal became the first Black woman elected to the Dayton City Commission. She later focused on redeveloping Dayton's

historic urban neighborhoods. Rhine McLin followed in her father, C. J. Jr.'s civic-minded footsteps when she became the first Black woman elected mayor of Dayton in 2001. She was re-elected in 2005, and then stretched her political wings serving as an Ohio delegate to the 2000 Democratic National Convention. In 2009, she lost her mayoral re-election bid. Peters' book continues to tell us Ms. McLin's political career has been filled with firsts. In 1994, she became the first African American woman elected to the Ohio Senate. And she was the first African American woman to serve as that senate's minority leader. Upon leaving the Senate, she became the first woman to serve as mayor of Dayton. She is the third African American mayor of Dayton. Finally, in late 2005 she was the first African American woman to serve as head of the Ohio Democratic Party.

Today, Dayton leaders are concerned about themselves and not the needs of the collective. Most are terrified of anyone remotely qualified who their place and they will stop at nothing to disparage the 'opposition' at every turn. That creates a fundamental failure in our system: we are failing to raise new leadership, and, when in a position of power leaders feel the need to constantly exert that power, often to the detriment of the people they are intended to serve.

One of many challenges facing Black leaders in Dayton, especially Black Church leaders, is the need to be relevant. That is due in part to the lack of engagement by leaders in West Dayton. Many Black youths, not involved or affiliated with the church, have extremely limited knowledge of the rich history of their Black ancestors and the contributions made to the Dayton community.

One saving grace is the leadership of Black women in Dayton. Black women are in leadership roles in every sector of the Dayton community. Whether bank executives, CEOs and

executive directors of nonprofit organizations, small business owners, mayors, presidents of universities, judges, board presidents, military officers, and funeral directors. However, there are very few Black men in leadership positions in the Dayton community other than pastors of churches.

Unfortunately, the significant leadership role Black women hold in this community goes unnoticed, particularly from the Black community. I have had conversations with several Black women in leadership and their major complaint is the lack of support from their very own community. The days of the Black male civic leaders such as C. J. Mclin, James H. McGee, Lloyd E. Lewis, Jr., and others are no longer. The Black community must rally around courageous and well-educated Black women who have assumed leadership positions and are working tirelessly to improve the conditions of our community.

## **Theological Assessment**

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. (1 John 4:7-9) <sup>62</sup>

Jesus had much to say about leadership. He spent three years in the trenches with his followers doing the work, demonstrating who, what, how, when, and where He wanted things done, three years demonstrating to the Apostles the humility required to be truly effective leaders, three years teaching them how to teach and be leaders. He did that with His example and His teaching. He never asked his followers to do anything that He, Himself would not do. Jesus never

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<sup>62</sup> 1 John 4:7-9 *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. (Oxford University Press, New York), 2006

gave them the feeling that He was above anything, that they were somehow less than He, so they would have to do the dirty work. When they exhibited characteristics that would keep them from being good leaders, He gently instructed and demonstrated his way, so that when they did something “in Jesus’ name” they truly did it the way He would have done it.

This is not the only time in history that people have thought of leadership in this way, nor the only time that the powerful have behaved in such a manner. Jesus’ disciples argued among themselves about who among them would be the greatest. Jesus’ response is revealing, it demonstrates the paradoxical nature of good leadership, and is as counter-intuitive as anything he ever taught.

In Mark 10:35-59 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. He said to them, “what do you want me to do for you?” They said to him, permit one of us to sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory. But Jesus said to them, you do not know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I experience? They said to him, we are able. Then Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I experience, but to sit at my right or my left is not mine to give. It is for those for whom it has been prepared. When the other ten heard this, they became angry with James and John. Jesus called them and said to them, “you know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. But it is not this way among you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Over the last decades, the cities of our nation have experienced a mass migration to the suburbs. There are many reasons behind the exodus: improved mass transportation, fair housing legislation, and the shopping mall phenomenon, to name a few. As the American dream suburbanized, city neighborhoods that were once close, economically viable communities turned into ghettos almost overnight. As homeowners left, real estate values plummeted, and properties



deteriorated. As educated families moved out, the quality of education declined. As the spiritual and moral leadership withdrew, the churches soon followed.<sup>63</sup> One of the driving forces behind the suburban migration in Dayton was white flight, motivated by racism. When Blacks moved in, whites moved out. “In my opinion, the Dayton and Montgomery County area consistently are among the most segregated communities I’ve ever lived in.” In reading about the history of Dayton, I discovered two articles by Josh Sweigart, staff writer for the *Dayton Daily News*, August 30, 2016: “The Legacy of Race-based Redlining” and “Shooting Sparked 1966 Dayton Race Riots.” According to Sweigart, in 1937, the Homeowners’ Loan Corporation rated a Dayton neighborhood just northwest of the confluence of Wolf Creek and the Great Miami River as extremely risky for loans. Agency officials wrote that it had good transportation and schools but listed “detrimental influences.” Those effects were considered as, Negroes moving in older sections of the city. They wrote, “a map was created to help banks figure out which areas were desirable for lending, taking into account factors that included infiltrations of Blacks and foreign-born immigrants.” The lowest-rated areas were outlined in red. The same was done in 239 cities across the US. Thus, the term, redlining was born.

The drive-by shooting of a Black man in front of his home kicked off one of the city’s worst race riots on September 1, 1966. The killing was the final spark for West Dayton, which was seething with frustration over issues of race and segregation. Just four months before the shooting, *Dayton Daily News* reporter Dave Allbaugh spoke to two dozen Black leaders and found West Dayton with anger brimming under the surface. “Just don’t let the temperature get above 95 degrees,” civic leader Lloyd Lewis, Jr. was quoted as saying in May of 1966.

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<sup>63</sup> John M. Perkins, *Restoring at Risk Communities. Doing It Together & Doing It Right*. (Published by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995), Page 76

Today, Dayton remains one of the country's most segregated metro areas. The Great Miami River still serves as a boundary that divides along racial and economic lines. "We are exploring the legacy of the 1966 riots and examining how far we have or haven't come in addressing the issues that fueled them."<sup>64</sup> Blacks makeup about 9 percent of the Dayton police force but are approximately 43 percent of the population. There are major gaps in income, education, housing, and health care. Driving through the streets of West Dayton one cannot help but notice that every other house is boarded, the grass is uncut, and the streets are littered. Predatory mortgages, payday lending, and foreclosures are contributing factors to the creation of abandoned Black neighborhoods. Although the recession officially ended in 2009, many of Dayton's Black neighborhoods remain blighted by vacant structures eleven years later.

The current economic condition of West Dayton and the failing education system is evident that Dayton's civic, religious and community leaders have abdicated their responsibilities by silence or inaction. The local influential leaders such as Montgomery County and Dayton City Commissions, the Downtown Dayton Partnership, the University of Dayton, Dayton Business Development Corporation, Kettering Health Network, and Premier Health Network, in my opinion, have demonstrated insufficient humility and compassion toward the poor. There seems to be a reluctance to tackle the problems of systemic racism. The leadership of these institutions is investing millions in Clayton, Centerville, Kettering, and downtown Dayton, but not a single investment in West Dayton.

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<sup>64</sup> Josh Sweigart, reporter, Dayton Daily News. August 20, 2016.

The problem of racism is as old as the history of humanity. In Exodus 1, the Egyptians feared the Israelites were becoming numerous and would take over, so they enslaved them. In Numbers 12, Moses married an Ethiopian woman who was more than likely Black, and Miriam and Aaron opposed the marriage, so Miriam was stricken by God with leprosy. When we come to the New Testament, we see that racism still existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. John 4:4 says, “Now he had to go through Samaria.” Now most Jews would have avoided Samaria at any cost. But Jesus had to go there. The Samaritans were a mixed race, part Jew and part Gentile, that grew from Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes in about 727 B.C. So intense was the Jewish dislike of the Samaritans that some of the Pharisees prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the Resurrection.

The Samaritans were a distinct ethnic group whose religious practices were viewed as infidels to the covenant established by the God of Israel “This type of thinking and name-calling is the beginning of the dehumanization of a person or ethnic group. We objectify and project negative qualities onto those we fear or despise. It is difficult to discriminate against and mistreat a person when we identify with them or think of them as being “like us.”<sup>65</sup>

To call someone a Samaritan was to hurl an extreme insult. In John 8:48 when His enemies wanted to insult Jesus, they called Him a Samaritan. People today are leery about the church in general. If we, the Black Church intend to reach people with the gospel today we must take seriously the social, underlying, and macro realities that they face. The desperate conditions that face the poor call for a revolution in our attempts to find a solution. Through years of experience among the

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<sup>65</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil, *A credible Waitness: Reflection on Power, Evangelism And Race*, InterVarsity Press, 2008.

poor, I understand these desperate problems cannot be solved without strong commitment and risky actions from ordinary Christians with heroic faith. The most creative long-term solutions to the problems of the poor are coming from grassroots and church-based efforts, by people who see themselves as the agents of Jesus here on earth in their neighborhoods and communities.<sup>66</sup> Dayton and its educational system are not the diseases, rather, they are symptoms of cancer called systemic racism. Black Church leaders in Dayton have been given the responsibility to boldly trumpet God's truth so that the Dayton community understands the disparate impact of racial discrimination toward the residents of West Dayton. There is no life that is not in a community. And no community not lived in the praise of God.<sup>67</sup>

Paul D. Hanson in his book, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*.<sup>68</sup> says that a life-sustaining community is not self-generating but arises as a gracious gift from God.... God the Creator and Liberator is the source of the moral structures that preserve life from chaos and assure that every human, regardless of accidents of birth or subsequent fortune, is entitled to equal protection of his or her dignity and worth. The people gathered by God in grace are people with a vocation, that of being agents of righteousness in all aspects of life.

One of the reasons we have such moral chaos in our society today is because the Church has muted its trumpet, primarily because the Black Church leaders have no credibility within the Black community. After all, we are not continuing the fight for Civil Rights. Too many millennial

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<sup>66</sup> John M. Perkins, *Restoring at Risk Communities. Doing It Together & Doing It Right*. (Published by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995), Page 17

<sup>67</sup> Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*. (Harper and Row Publishers, 1986), Page.1.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, Page 1,

pastors have refused to take a stand on controversial issues and have neglected to proclaim God's truth as revealed in His word. According to one senior pastor of a local Baptist Church, they have aligned themselves with politicians and corporations that support their programs at the expense of the Black community. They are referenced as prima donnas. In other words, they do not want to get their hands dirty by engaging in any organized protest that will speak truth to power, challenging the unjust decisions of city government or corporations.

Most pastors live in the suburbs and are far removed from the day-to-day challenges of the inner city. Sometimes the truth is not popular, and sometimes the truth hurts, but the church needs to stand and speak on these issues of systemic racism and injustice, especially around the disparities in education.

### **Social Science Assessment.**

As with the Bible, so too, in Dayton. Today, there are disproportionately fewer Black-owned businesses in the Dayton area and most do not provide the array of goods and services Black consumers purchase. We cannot overlook the fact that while there is significant Black buying power, Black selling power is very minimal. Redlining and lack of access to capital make it almost impossible for Black businesses to expand or improve their facilities. The CEO and president of the largest and most permanent Black construction company in Dayton, Wise Construction, consistently complained about being denied contracts by the University of Dayton and Dayton Public Schools. Black-owned businesses will continue to be challenged in Dayton

unless opportunities for financing, bonding, training, contracting, and other support are made available.

Our communities are abundant with the resources we need for the future.<sup>69</sup> The failure of Dayton’s influential leaders to include West Dayton in the economic growth of the region and invest in the education of the poor Black children must be called exactly what it is, “overt racism.” In the main time, while the growing concerns around education, economic opportunity, and health care are ongoing, the Black Church leadership has a tremendous opportunity to change the troubling narratives of West Dayton. Collaborative and active engagement in ensuring a just education for our children and community development will lead to economic empowerment. Working for a just and equitable community for our children is our responsibility.

In his book, *Leading Change*, Harvard business professor John Kotter discusses eight steps involved in successfully transforming organizations. One of his recommendations is that the change leader needs to build a powerful guiding coalition to ensure the success of whatever change and transition needs to take place. Effective leaders excel in bringing people together to achieve something they determine is worth doing.<sup>70</sup>

The Black Church and community leaders must affirm the dignity of the people, motivate them, and help them to take responsibility for their own lives by advocating for adequate educational tools and creating a future that works. The climate is right for a powerful and

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<sup>69</sup> John McKnight, Peter Block, *The Abundant Community. Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, (Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 2010), Page 18

<sup>70</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators. Eight Signature Practices of Leaders Who Turn the World Upside Down*. (Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2018), Page 42

committed coalition of Black Church leaders who are determined to challenge the unjust disparities in our community. Ultimately, my goal is to now collaborate with the Black Church to create an action plan for education through the signing of an MOU. The MOU signifies a statement of trust and demonstrates a willingness to work collaboratively.

In summary, gleaned from Hanson's *The People Called*, I believe our (Dayton) community is a gracious gift from God, and people are entitled to equal protection of their dignity and worth. Being a change leader, as John Kotter recommends, meant collaborating with the right group of pastors or Black Church leaders and was a positive step toward laying the foundation for my thesis project, creating a summer education program for Pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. This program is a necessary action or solution that addresses the critical educational needs of our young children. I assembled a few teachers and principals from various participating ministerium to serve on a design team/education committee to develop a summer program. The next chapter will describe my thesis: the step-by-step process in the creation of the Dayton Scholars Project.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Dayton Scholars Project**

Research has shown that early learning has profound importance on a child's lifelong learning abilities. Children who are behind when they enter kindergarten will most likely remain behind the rest of their educational careers.<sup>71</sup> It is well known that poor mathematics and literacy skills produce poor outcomes. Pre - K-Kindergarten -3rd grade is a critical time to develop reading and mathematics skills for long-term positive outcomes. Dayton Scholars early learning programs will aid in fostering learning and social-emotional skills that are at the very center of our mission, to have all children have a helping start for the beginning stages of their lives.

### **Theological Assessment**

Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So, they said, "Let us arise and build." Then they set their hands to this good work. (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Nehemiah prayed fervently to God for His strength and His wisdom to help him in doing His work. Like Nehemiah, we needed to overcome discouragement by "being watchful and praying" to God as well as carefully and faithfully working out our plans. Carefully expressing deep respect ("May the king live forever"), Nehemiah tells the king of the unguarded condition of Jerusalem. What good was it for the Jews to be allowed back to their homeland if it was left vulnerable to attack? Not that Artaxerxes was responsible for correcting this; he was being

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<sup>71</sup> New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, February 7, 2018



generous by allowing the captives to simply return home. Moreover, Nehemiah was asking the king to reverse his policy, which is spelled out in the previous book of Ezra. Nehemiah diplomatically presents his concern as a personal matter, not a political one. He also responds in what a classical rabbinical tradition of answering a question with a question! Nehemiah is grieved over the condition of his ancestral home. Moved by compassion, the king asks Nehemiah what he might wish to do about this matter. The king rightly assumes that Nehemiah has a specific proposal. In the months that Nehemiah had been praying, he also was considering how to fix this problem and was ready with a plan.

At this critical juncture, Nehemiah “gasps a prayer and braces himself to reply.” Prayer is where planning starts. He had been praying for this moment for over four months, but now that it is here, he quickly adds one more quick prayer. Nehemiah understood that God--not the king--was in control. We should “remember to visit with the Lord before facing the world” (Anon). Prayer is acting. God would answer Nehemiah’s prayer through the assistance of the king.” He was wise and humble enough to recognize that his reliance on help from above, not his political connection, was going to bring about success. As Thomas Merton points out:

“We do not pray to receive just any answer: it must be God’s answer; and  
There is no such thing as prayer in which nothing is done or ‘nothing happens.’”<sup>72</sup>

We must work together. Nehemiah and the people were able to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem in 52 days because Nehemiah did the following: He knew what needed to be done. He saw the need. The wall had to be rebuilt. He saw the urgency of the work. It must be done now. He prayed for 4 months. He sought the king’s permission. He presented his plans to the people and

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Merton, An American born Roman Catholic Monk, writer, poet, theologian and scholar of comparative religion.

sought the co-operation of everyone. They worked together: *Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.* (Nehemiah 5:16). He was courageous and strong, not fearful of his enemies. He had great faith in God. “So, I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3 NKJV:” The work cannot cease. For the workers of the Lord, there is no retirement. We must be revived spiritually. “Now all the people gathered as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.” The Black Church must do the work to build up the formal faith-based education program for our children so that we can all be strengthened to keep on serving the Lord faithfully. Nehemiah led the people to pledge their loyalty and commitment to God: “Now those who placed their seal on the document were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hachaliah, and Zedekiah. (Nehemiah 10:1 NKJV)

The Kingdom of God is not only spiritual -- it is intensely practical. The Church today must move beyond its traditional role if it is to truly fulfill its mission. It can no longer respond only to spiritual needs or speak only to people's hearts. The Church is called to be a force for change in the world, especially where the needs are greatest: the inner-city neighborhoods where crime, violence, and unemployment are the order of the day. In his book, *Economic Empowerment Through the Church*, Gregory Reed shows churches how to become a force for revitalization in their communities utilizing economic empowerment - becoming involved in the everyday, economic lives of their communities. Economic empowerment is a reasonable response to the fact

that we are presently in the world, if not of it, and being in the world requires the full armor of the faith to survive. The auxiliaries of the spiritual quest: schools, retirement homes are the business of the church because the business of the church remains what it always was, ministering to the whole person and the whole community.<sup>73</sup>

## Social Science Assessment

“Sometimes we do not have any bread for a whole week, but I mean to educate my children if I must work for my hands off. (*Mississippi freedom, 1869*)<sup>74</sup> Black Mississippians’ enthusiasm for education intensified with the outbreak of the Civil War. Even before a Freedom’s Bureau existed, African Americans tried to shape their destinies by using their meager resources to set up schools. In some parts of Mississippi, the formally enslaved acquired Bibles or primers and transformed parts of the ‘big house’ into classrooms with semiliterate teachers.<sup>75</sup>

Early learning has profound importance to health. It is well known that poor mathematics and literacy skills produce poor outcomes. Pre-K -3<sup>rd</sup> is a critical time to develop reading and mathematics skills for long-term positive outcomes. Early learning programs help foster learning and social-emotional skills that are at the very center of our mission, to have all children have a helping start for the beginning stages of their lives. Children’s experiences before kindergarten are highly diverse, therefore the use of kindergarten-readiness screeners provides an important

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<sup>73</sup> Gregory J. Reed, *Economic Empowerment Through the Church*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994), Page 14

<sup>74</sup> Crystal R. Saunders, *A Change for Change: Head Start and Mississippi Black Freedom Struggle*, (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), Page 10

<sup>75</sup>ibid Page 11

mechanism in determining a child's academic strengths and needs so that teachers can provide differentiated instruction during the kindergarten year to get all children on track for longer-term academic success.

In 2014, Ohio's schools implemented a new kindergarten-readiness screener – the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). The KRA provides a broadened representation of children's readiness relative to the prior assessment, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L), which focused only on language and literacy skills. In this paper, we examined the predictive relations between children's KRA scores at kindergarten entry and their future reading achievement in third grade. Our particular interest was determining whether children who had limited readiness at kindergarten entry were at heightened risk for reading difficulties, as would be suggested in the available research, or whether Ohio's educational system was able to 'respond' to limited readiness and support children's achievement of reading proficiency by third grade. In so doing, the papers offer important considerations for policymakers, administrators, teachers, and others concerning the use of kindergarten-readiness assessments for enhancing children's future educational outcomes.<sup>76</sup>

Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee is a program that identifies students from kindergarten through grade 3 who are behind in reading. Schools are expected to provide help and support to make sure students are on track for reading success by the end of third grade. The Ohio Department of Education provides policy guidance, instructional tools, and resources on the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

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<sup>76</sup> The Ohio State University, College of Education and Human Ecology, 2014

The Dayton Scholars project focuses on West Dayton: an area suffering from the loss of long-standing businesses like grocery stores, some schools, and most recently an announcement of a hospital closure. The West Dayton community is distraught over long stints of being in survival mode. Doing nothing for this predominately African American community is not an option. Our children and community will benefit from a formal faith-based education program.

### **The Dayton Scholars Project**

Dayton Scholars was developed from a vision that addressed the poor academic performances of young Black males in reading and mathematics. My vision was a result of reading, the *Math Achievement Trajectories Among Black Male Students in Elementary through Middle School*.<sup>77</sup> According to the article, Black men are underrepresented in most categories associated with academic success and overrepresented in categories associated with failure. On standardized measures of achievement, Black students score below white students in all core academic areas, including science, mathematics, reading, and writing.<sup>78</sup> This was not the first time I heard about the low academic performance of Black males, but this time it struck a nerve. First, there was the Miami Valley Urban League's report about the disparities in education in Dayton. To make matters worse, Dayton Public Schools received an "F" grade from the Ohio Department of Education. Also, education was one of three areas identified at our clergy leadership workshop held at the Central State University Dayton Campus. I felt there must be something we, the Black Church can do to reverse these outcomes for our children, especially young Black males.

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<sup>77</sup> Afshin Zilanawala, Margary Martin, Pedro A. Noguera & Ronald B. Mincy (2018) *Math Achievement Trajectories Among Black Male Students in the Elementary- and Middle-School Years*, Educational Studies, 54:2, 143-164, DOI:

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 54:2, 143-164, DOI:

In 2018, as President of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc. I was asked to intervene on behalf of a well-known Black civil servant who was being mistreated and was threatened with job loss by two government officials who rescinded their threats. I immediately summoned five renowned Caravan pastors and invited the two elected officials involved to meet at my office at St. Margaret's that Wednesday at noon. All parties invited were present. After long deliberation, my colleagues and I pledged our support for the civil servant who represented our community. The two government officials were rescinded from their threats. The civil servant did not lose her job, instead, she was reappointed to her position and still serves as head of that department.

Having had some success in bringing people together to solve a problem, I was confident that my vision to address the disparities in education would not fall on deaf ears. The first opportunity I had to share my vision was at a regular monthly meeting of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc. I wanted to establish a summer tutoring program for children who were struggling in reading and mathematics. To my amazement, the idea was well-received by my colleagues of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc., who unanimously pledged their full support.

Developing the Dayton Scholars Project meant putting the right team/education committee in place to help me craft the best possible program (to improve the academic performance of struggling Pre-K through 3rd Grade students in reading and mathematics), adopting the right curriculum, finding suitable sites to house the program, researching, and applying for adequate

funding, hiring the right staff, and recruiting low-to-moderate income students (LMI) who will benefit from the program.

The next step in my quest to establish the Dayton Scholars Project was to reach individuals with a passion for education. I approached my wife Stacy, Vice President for Corporate Responsibility at KeyBank, and a multi-year former member of the Dayton Board of Education. Although she often comments that I am always trying to save the world, she proved to be invaluable in this process. She then recommended Ms. Yvette Kelly Fields, CEO of the Wesley Community Center, a West Dayton nonprofit, social service center, as a possible partner.

The Wesley Center once ran a successful after-school program at Westwood Elementary School in West Dayton. With Stacy's suggestion, I immediately reached out to Ms. Kelly Fields who willingly accepted my request to serve on the design team. With Stacy and Yvette on board, I invited the Rev. Dr. Karen Young of College Hill Community Church (PCUSA), to serve on the creative team. I also asked her to share her knowledge of the curriculum used by Scholars Unlimited, an after-school program for at-risk youth in Denver, Colorado. Dr. Young agreed to serve and thought the Denver curriculum would be ideal for Dayton.

The final person I contacted was Mrs. Mozelle Garcia, a retired teacher and outreach director at Corinthian Baptist Church in West Dayton. Mrs. Garcia ran a successful after-school program for disadvantaged children in conjunction with Wright State University. That program ended when it was not refunded. Mrs. Garcia was excited to be a part of what she described as a much-needed program for our youth. With a design team in place, I scheduled our first meeting

for Wednesday at noon, March 7, 2018, at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. Also, I invited The Rev. Dr. Perry E. Henderson, Senior Pastor of Corinthian Baptist Church, and The Rev. Dr. Rockney Carter, JD, senior pastor of Zion Baptist Church.

The design team met in the conference room at St. Margaret's to craft what would become The Dayton Scholars project. I created an agenda to address the purpose, curriculum, project sites, funding, staffing, and student recruitment. After a brief introduction, I told the group we were to design a Pre-K through the 3rd-grade program for children in West Dayton. Kindergarten is an important academic milestone in a child's life, and many parents are concerned about their child's readiness. It is common for parents to wonder how they will know if their children are ready. Parents who live in West Dayton value the role of education in their children's lives. However, poverty, multiple jobs, and lack of childcare limit their engagement, and as a result, children are not prepared in the core academic areas, such as science, mathematics, reading, and writing.

The task of the Dayton Scholars is to design a program that will help students, Pre-K through 3rd grade, increase their academic performance. I wanted parents who feel anxious or uncertain about what is best for children to know that they are not alone and that we are here to help. So, I asked each member to share their roles in this project. My wife, Stacy offered to provide us with a contact list of possible funders and suggested we set up a meeting with the superintendent of Dayton Public Schools to discuss Title 1 funding. Those federal dollars provide federal help to schools with high percentages of low-income students. Ms. Kelly Fields said the Wesley Center will provide first aid training, mental health workshops, and background checks for the staff. I asked Mrs. Patricia Dungy, St. Margaret's parish administrator and retired Dayton Public Schools



principal, to create the necessary application forms for prospective students, teachers, and parents who wanted to participate in the project.

1. Young offered to acquire the curriculum used in Denver, including the, ‘Don’t Pop Your Cork’ series for behavior modification. She told the group the Denver program was successful because it ran for six weeks to prevent the summer slide (the slide backward that many children make in reading and mathematics skills over the summer) and provided teachers with the tools for pre, mid, and post-assessments of each student.

Next on the agenda was to find a location. My goal was to invite Black Churches with adequate classroom space for Pre-k through 3rd-grade students to be host sites. Three West Dayton churches came to mind, each strategically located in areas populated with low-to-moderate income (LMI) families; Corinthian Baptist to the south, Zion Baptist to the east, and St. Margaret’s Episcopal to the north. With those areas in mind, I called Reverends Henderson and Carter and asked if they would be willing to open their churches for the Dayton Scholars Project. Each agreed to be on board. However, Rev. Henderson expressed concerns about adequate funding until I assured him, we were applying for grants.

The next agenda item was recruitment: Where will we get our students, and which schools will benefit? I suggested we target Pre-K through 3rd-grade students in Dayton Public and Trotwood – Madison School Districts. Both districts were at the bottom of the State of Ohio’s academic performance list. The team agreed but suggested we open the project to any student in Pre-K through 3rd grade who was struggling with reading and math. With three sites on board, I

suggested we accept no fewer than 200 students and enroll them at a location of their choice: 70 each at Corinthian and Zion and 60 at St. Margaret's.

The team supported the idea, but Mrs. Garcia recommended we increase the number of students each year and add more sites because the need is so great. Dr. Young and I planned to visit the superintendents of Dayton and Trotwood – Madison School Districts to get their support. The final agenda item was staffing: Dr. Henderson thought the design team should start right-away approaching mathematics and reading teachers within our congregations and ask about their availability to work with the Dayton Scholars Project. Mrs. Garcia offered to ask retired teachers she knew and report the results at our next meeting. Drs. Carter, Young, and I offered to do likewise. Our first meeting adjourned with a prayer from Dr. Henderson and those with action items went to work.

The next meeting was held Wednesday, March 14, 2018, at noon. Before the meeting, with the assistance of Dr. Robert L. Walker, Sr., past president of the Dayton Board of Education, Dr. Young and I were able to meet with Dr. Elizabeth J. Lolli, superintendent of Dayton Public Schools on Friday, March 9, 2018, at 10:30 am. She was incredibly supportive of the concept of the program concept and asked us to submit a grant request for Title 1 funding. She also permitted to recruit students from six Dayton Public Pre-K through 8th-grade schools. Suggesting we consider starting the project in early June, of 2018, she also offered to publicize the project throughout the district.

Stacy contacted her colleagues at PNC (PNC Foundation support only pre-school programs), Fifth Third, and US Banks who asked us to submit grant applications. Dr. Young got needed permission from Scholars Unlimited in Denver to use the Curriculum: Dolch 220 and Reading Readiness and Mathematics 123. The Do not Pop Your Cork series for behavior modification to decrease time out of classroom or suspension and the DIBLES Data System (procedures and measurements for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills) were added, and the curriculum was on its way.

1. Dungy brought sample copies of application forms for students/parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, site coordinators, enrichment specialist assistants, and volunteers. To my surprise, Mrs. Dungy and St. Margaret's parish treasurer and retired math teacher, Mrs. Joyce Stone, offered to work with the Dayton Scholars Project. Also, Mrs. Garcia contacted three teachers and two college students from Corinthian Baptist Church to work with the project.

Poverty creates broad areas of challenges for student success; however, we were confident with high expectations, Dayton Scholars students would succeed. The success of our children will depend on the investment we make in their education.

The design team/education committee met weekly at noon at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church from March to June 2018 to design an education program. Three site-coordinators, six teachers, and six paraprofessionals were hired. Besides, six volunteers assisted with enrichment. Stacy and I applied for and received grants for \$47,000 in 2018 and \$87,000 in 2019 from Dayton Public Schools (Title 1 Funding), Kettering Health Network, Fifth Third Bank, PNC Bank

Foundation, Diocese of Southern Ohio, and Learn-To-Earn (part of a national network of organizations dedicated to creating a more educated workforce).

In the summer of 2018, two hundred Pre-K through 3rd-grade students enrolled in Dayton Scholars for six weeks - June 11-July 20, 2018. The next session, June 10 to July 19, 2019, enrolled two hundred fifty students. 2018, 2019 pre, mid, and post-assessments of all Pre-K through 3rd-grade students enrolled showed significant improvements in mathematics and reading. It was encouraging to hear parents talk about the positive impact Dayton Scholars have had on the academic and social/emotional behavior of their children. The education planning team recommended that the Dayton Scholars summer program be held at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, Corinthian Baptist Church, and College Hill Community Church. Zion Baptist Church, initially interested, was not able to participate.

The team also suggested that we recruit a minimum of 200 students for Dayton Public Schools and Trotwood-Madison Schools. Together, the team overwhelmingly agreed to encourage families to participate throughout the program in the growth and development of their children. The strength of Dayton Scholars is to support and encourage academically struggling, low-income children by providing intense math and literacy instruction and enrichment programs to achieve measurable success and life-long learning. Dayton Scholars provides intense reading, mathematics, and positive social/emotional techniques to decrease negative behavior. Our teachers and paraprofessionals are committed to carrying out the following goals:

- 1: Intense instruction to stimulate intellectual activity.
- 2: Improve student outcomes; passing exams by creating a positive learning environment.

that provides instructional and social-emotional support to encourage student goals.

3: Increase attendance; students completing the day with direction, focus, rational problem solving, responsibility, and appropriate discipline.

We recognized there would be challenges and hurdles. Funding, for one, is critical. Dayton Scholars cannot survive as a sustainable summer education program without adequate dollars. Public and corporate grants are sometimes awarded on a biannual or triannual basis, or as a one-time grant. We applied for and received some Title One funds through Dayton Public Schools. However, Title One payment of services is based solely on reimbursement of services rendered, as an after-fact. To meet our weekly obligations to our employees, soliciting private donations and applying for lines of credit with our banks is necessary.

Dayton Scholars has an MOU with Dayton Public Schools for Title 1 funding to cover all DPS students enrolled in the program, which accounts for 50% of the program budget. The other 50% is generated through grants from, the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio, Westminster Presbyterian Church, the Frank M. Tait Foundation, and KeyBank Foundation.

Another problem we faced was transportation. Our plan to use Dayton Public School buses to pick-up students from a designated location and drop them off at one of our three sites was derailed. The buses were never on time, and in some cases, the driver showed up at the wrong location. Moving forward, we decided to use our church vans, asking parents to drop their children off at one of the three Dayton Scholars locations within walking distance of their home.

Despite these challenges, I am incredibly pleased with the progress we have made. Our teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff have done a remarkable job improving the academic performances of our students in reading and math. Parents and the superintendent of Dayton Public Schools speak highly of Dayton Scholars and students' achievements. Dayton Scholars will continue its mission to serve the poor and marginalized students of West Dayton. We will work tirelessly to transform the life of every child that was entrusted to us.

## Conclusion

Blacks in West Dayton, Ohio experienced significant gaps in education, economic opportunities, and health-care services. I strongly believed and was confident that collaboration with the Black Church leadership was possible. In that pursuit, I knew if the opportunity arose, collaboration among West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc., Leadership for Equality and Action in Dayton (LEAD), and Miami Valley Baptist Ministers Association, would lead to the development of an action plan that would positively address the unjust disparities in education. I recognized my multiple roles proved essential in this process: The prophetic voice sounding the alarm of injustice, the convener, and the inspirational leader.

My role as a prophetic voice sounding the alarm was born from God. I look at the staggering Dayton society and failing school system right at my front door and witness the pain and trauma on the faces of so many who, for no acceptable reason, in the sight of God, have been abandoned and neglected. I see children whom I know will not escape the harshness and rawness of their communities, often wasting their lives in prison, never again to be the same person. I then offer the question, “who will dare to stand up and speak up for God?”

Too often, on the major issues of the world and even in our local communities, the sacred space that we call a sanctuary is conspicuously silent outside the doors of our churches, where we need to be heard most. Where is the church when young men are dying on our streets every week? Where is the church when politicians misappropriate resources or police officers abuse their authority? Where is the voice of God’s people? The fire burning deep within me could not stand

the silence. I had to speak out and sound the alarm of injustice in Dayton, especially in education where my priority was to call the church to action through a clear, single action to close the gap. Such a commitment from the church to invest time, talent and resources in a program will enhance our children's educational levels. It has been the enemy's strategy from the beginning of time, to neutralize the power of God's people by causing them to remain silent instead of speaking out. As a leader, I knew to affect change, I had to communicate my colleagues' worth and potential. What seemed obvious to me, was oblivious to them, and it had to be conveyed so that they would begin to see their value.

My role as a convener and inspirational leader was the most challenging. While I could bring people together to solve a problem, recruiting an ecumenical group of pastors required patience and determination. Not only did I have to convince my fellow pastors to gather for a spirited conversation about our community, but I also had to humble myself in the process and could not approach them arrogantly. Although the Episcopal Church in Dayton is held in high esteem, it carries a negative stereotype, perceived as elite, arrogant, and unapproachable. It was clear to gain the trust of my colleagues, my approach had to be genuine and respectful.

I realized that inspiration is the impact you have on others. The Rev. Dr. Robert E. Jones, pastor emeritus of College Hill Community Church in Dayton, once introduced me as the Moses of the West Dayton Caravan of Churches. At the time I did not quite understand what he meant by that statement. I thought to myself, "the Israelites grumbled against Moses, and Moses never entered to Promise Land." Out of curiosity, I jokingly asked Dr. Jones why he called me the Moses of the Caravan He said, "Moses led his people to freedom and pleaded to God on behalf of the



people. You are an inspirational leader! You are doing a good job keeping us (pastors) together.” I was very humbled by his words which became noticeably clear and well understood.

Being an inspirational leader is a gift from God. It comes only through the love I have for my colleagues in ministry. I remembered as a young child a good friend of my grandmother (Etta) named Mother Bishop, said to me one day, “young man, someday you will be a leader!” Those words stuck with me and propelled me into many leadership roles throughout my life. As an inspirational leader, it was important for me to attract and engage my colleagues through my words, action, and beliefs and they needed to see that was passionate, trustworthy and had a clear vision for the future our community. They did know I was grateful for their presence and their ministries.

I was hopeful that my fellow pastors would agree to meet with me because they realized that I love my community and I desired to see it improve. I wanted them to realize that together we can achieve a common vision to improve the lives of our people. Love is the motivation that leads us to become people of influence. As an inspirational leader, it would bring me great joy to see us succeed together.

As to be expected, there were several hurdles. I was certain that some pastors would be protective of their turf and reluctant to partner with churches outside of their denomination. With that in mind, I sought to present to the leaders the big picture, assuring them we can accomplish far more together than apart. I reminded them that we have no turf to protect, only one God to serve, a God who calls us to serve a community in peril.

The disparities in West Dayton were documented in the research, “*Opportunity Mapping*”, conducted by the Ohio State University.<sup>79</sup> I provided a framework for qualitative evaluation for individual participants to respond in a way that accurately represents their points of view and experiences concerning disparities in West Dayton. The raw data collected from the initial interview questionnaires, my journal entry, and follow-up meetings with the Black Church leaders were evaluated to determine how each participant felt about the deplorable conditions in West Dayton, and what they perceived as viable solutions. The outcome will be the creation of an action plan that specifically presents how each disparity will be addressed. My experience and qualitative analysis of my research data validate that economic empowerment is possible through an ecumenical collaboration of the Black Church.

Though there are still theological and sociological challenges to overcome with some Black Church leaders, such as, the presence of women in the pulpit, those who participated broadened their perspectives to cover the spiritual, social, and economic needs of people within and beyond their membership. I demonstrated how the Black Church responded to the issue of education by signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU), agreeing to work together to address the problem. Agreeing that education is a fundamental factor in the economic empowerment of disadvantaged Black children in West Dayton, we identified the issue and worked collaboratively toward a solution.

I was overwhelmed with emotion in this process. First, the signing of the MOU demonstrated that I was correct in my assessment that an ecumenical collaboration of the Black Church was indeed possible and attainable. Second, the development of the “Dayton Scholars” or

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<sup>79</sup> Kirwan Institute: The Ohio State University. *Opportunity Mapping*, August 26, 2013

thesis project meant, understanding the issue of education at an early age is paramount to the long-term sustainability of the Black community. I am passionate about Dayton Scholars because it addresses two fundamental issues in education, 1. Kindergarten Readiness and, 2. Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is a tool used by teachers to measure the academic readiness of children entering kindergarten. The Third Grade Reading Guarantee is a program that identifies students from kindergarten through 3rd grade who are behind in reading. Dayton Scholars will provide help and support to make sure students are on track for reading success by the end of third grade. For many children, kindergarten marks their first entrance into formal schooling.

One of my reasons for conducting this study is not only the collaborative experiences I had in Columbus, GA but rather to demonstrate the distinct character and competencies of Black Church leaders to work collaboratively to achieve a common goal. Thus, the development of the Dayton Scholars Program was an ecumenical collaboration of pastors, retired school principals, and teachers.

The Dayton Scholars Project is a six-week community faith-based mathematics and literacy summer program designed to serve low and moderate-income (LMI) elementary Pre-K-3rd grade students who need mathematics and reading instruction. The West Dayton Caravan of Churches, Inc., an ecumenical partnership of more than 25 Dayton based churches, established a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Leadership for Equality and Action in Dayton, (LEAD) and the Miami Valley Baptist Ministers Association, to focus on uplifting and promoting families to foster the learning and development of low-income children, primarily African

American children in the West Dayton and surrounding communities. Dayton Scholars is culturally connected and invested in the West Dayton community and wants to help get kids back in school with parental support.

During the summers of 2018 and 2019, Dayton Scholars successfully served more than 400 Pre-K -3rd-grade students who benefited greatly from summer mathematics, reading, and the inclusion of an enrichment program. The program exceeded its goal to increase readiness for school, built confidence and worked to decrease problematic behavior. The *Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA)* was used to *assess* social foundations that included social and emotional development and approaches toward learning. A third-grade *reading assessment* was conducted to identify students from kindergarten through *grade 3* who are behind in *reading*. Dayton Scholars provides help and support to make sure students are on track for *reading* success by the end of *third grade*.

The overwhelming response of the Black Church for Dayton Scholars is remarkable. The participating West Dayton churches (St. Margaret's Episcopal, Corinthian Baptist, Zion Baptist, and College Hill Presbyterian) providing classroom space for six weeks is a tremendous investment in the education and economic empowerment of our children. The success of Dayton Scholars has created a demand to increase enrollment in the summer of 2020. This collaborative ministry with the Black Church is accomplishing what was intended from its inception; that is, to be a force for change, especially in West Dayton where the needs are greatest. Providing literacy in reading and mathematics, behavior modification, and enrichment for Pre-K through 3rd-grade

low-to-moderate income children is proven to closing the education gap. I hope that Dayton Scholars becomes the model for any struggling or poor community.

Here are a few steps for an organization or individual to consider when allowed to transform the lives of individuals in a poor community.

1. Assess the problem by talking directly to individuals and families impacted.

Do not assume to know or have the solution to the problems and challenges the marginalized and disenfranchised are experiencing. Show them respect by listening to what they have to say about their situation.

2. Investigate the local government's plan if any, to respond to the problems.

Attend the city commission meetings and find out where your tax dollars are being spent, and what plans they have on the drawing board to address blighted communities.

3. Do not blame the victims or tell the disadvantaged what they need to do.

Systemic racism is prevalent in every sector of our society. Instead of blaming the poor for the condition in which they find themselves, spend some time asking what they would like to see happen and how you can partner with them to achieve their objectives.

4. Solicit the help of compassionate stakeholders with resources to join the effort.

There are many private sector organizations and foundations looking to invest in low to moderate-income (LMI) communities. A well-developed plan with community input will bring the right stakeholders to the table.

5. Bring all parties together on regular basis at a local church or school to put together an action plan.

It is important to meet people where they are. Find a local church or school in the impacted community where the work will be done and hold regular planning meetings with all stakeholders until the work is done.

6. Execute your plan when it is both feasible and sustainable.

Do not execute your plan or begin a project until funding is secured, it will ensure a smooth operation. Make sure that all interested stakeholders sign-off on the project and are fully committed to seeing it through completion.

## **Appendix A**

### **The following is the Action Plan for the Dayton Scholars Project**

#### **Targeted Population**

The targeted community is West Dayton, Ohio where academic test scores, low attendance, low enrollment of Pre-K through 3rd-grade students are declining the most.

The enrolled students will benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from the Dayton Scholars Project.

#### **The DS Program will:**

- Seek out children who need extra support in math and reading.
- Provide enrichment programs with a licensed childcare framework to increase positive behavior: mathematics, reading, sports, and arts and crafts.
- Narrow the education gap and empower children with tools for long-term academic success that will lead to better choices and options for their future endeavors.
- Realign parents' attitudes with the positive effects of early education for the future of their children.
- Reach out to the entire family, inspiring them to build supportive relationships, to encourage their children beyond their circumstances.
- Support and encourage academically struggling, low-income children by providing formalized mathematics and literacy instruction and recreation programs to achieve measurable success and life-long learning.

- Host the program at three West Dayton Church sites: Corinthian Baptist Church, College Hill Community Church (PCUSA), and St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church.
- Hire a staff of certified site coordinators and teachers, paraprofessionals, and volunteers.
- Follow a formalized education program focused on producing measurable results in reading and math progression over time.
- Begin the school day at 8:15 am and end at 3:00 pm. Free breakfasts and lunches will be provided by the Trotwood and Dayton School Districts.
- Children engage in a half-day of instruction and a half-day of recreational activities.
- Implement the Dolce 220 and Reading Readiness and Mathematics 123 Academic programs. Both programs are designed for PreK-3 grade students based on meeting students at their academic levels and helping them achieve measurable progression in reading and mathematics.

Implement behavior modification to decrease time out of the classroom or suspension.

- Staff will work to engage children in positive behavior changes using the “Don’t Pop Your Cork” series, along with positive reinforcement.



## Appendix B

### Program Goals

· **Goal 1:** Intensive Literacy and Math instruction: to achieve measurable success and foster life-long learning experiences. This will encourage and restore hope in children and reduce absenteeism and negative behavior, through the building of oral language, vocabulary, and abstract concepts, and simple elementary math.

**Goal 2:** Narrow the gap of disadvantaged children. Dayton children deserve “better.”

**Goal 3:** Increase pre-school enrollment and attendance and behavior modification to decrease absenteeism due to behavior. Help improve math and reading for the success of the future.

**Goal 4:** Target Pre-K-3rd through math and literacy. Attended various school board meetings to understand the geographic areas impacted. Dayton Schools currently at “F” grade level, decrease abandonment of DPS schools ...help parents reconnect.

**Goal 5:** Create the proverbial “village” by reconnecting families to each other and the community by using a holistic approach to uplift children and families. Parents must be part of the entire process for the child to fully benefit.

**Goal 6:** Increase families reading together and encourage family fun times and put emphasis on the value of education: decided to develop weekly invites for parents and provide the resource.

## **Appendix C**

### **Dayton Scholars Program Structure**

#### **Description of Work**

##### **Initial Start:**

Convene clergy meeting(s) to discuss the state of our children and learning, the problems arising from a low enrollment of 4-year-olds, low attendance, absenteeism, and the need to assist in getting children back on track. Because education is essential to economic empowerment, stress the importance of education and the effect it has on children at an especially important stage (Pre-K to 3rd grade). To have productive adults, we must invest in helping the less fortunate; in this case, the majority are African American children.

##### **Phase One**

###### **COMMUNICATION /DISCUSSION:**

Meet with clergy in the community to push forward in the various communities where African Americans are suffering the most and show how the many losses and changes in the communities have directly affected the schools with low enrollment and attendance.

##### **Phase Two**

###### **MAPPING**

1. West Dayton: target area
2. Pre-K - 3rd grade

3. Establish Partners (Churches) for Collaboration (St. Margaret's Episcopal, Corinthian Baptist, and College Hill Community Church (PCUSA)) three points in the community.

4. 3/23 Breakfasts & Lunches finalized but will need to provide snacks.

1. Establish dates, times and finalize partners.

2. Select teachers: retired teachers who are certified, paraprofessionals, students, and volunteers.

3. Review the Ohio report card on Dayton Schools' "Grade "F" for the school system.

4. Review areas to improve.

a. Increase reading with new words and math proficiency to achieve school readiness.

b. Decrease negative behavior using materials that address academic and social/emotional needs.

5. **Type of program model:**

2-hour math and literacy 9-11 am

Breakfast 8:15-8:50 bathroom

9:00 to 9:50 Mathematics

9:50 -10:00 snack

10:00-11: Reading

11:00-quiet/reading on own/quiet time/teacher designated/review.

11:30 -12:30 lunch

12:30 –2:30 Enrichment: sports, recreation and activities and field trips

2:30: bathroom time, review of the day

3:00 dismissal

6. Program: **Dayton Scholars** will target 200 students. Approximately 66 per church site

## **Appendix D**

### **Phase Three**

#### **The Program: set up requirements/schedule.**

- Food Service: 8:15 – 8:45 Parents and guardians will present children by 8:15 am
- Snack: 1 hour to 45 min after starts of class (per class)
- Lunch: 11:30 am; staff supervises lunch
- Snack: afternoon program

#### **Afternoon Enrichment Transition:**

- Afternoon staff changes
- Morning staff reports morning to afternoon staff: injuries, absent children, and upcoming events.
- Site coordinators will supervise and serve as liaisons between the morning and afternoon programs.

#### **Building and Grounds Management:**

- Each site will plan before the program begins.
  - Each facility will explain operations for the use of their church with any changes to be agreed upon by each site.
- The building must be open 1 hour before the start of the program and remain open during the duration of the program.

**Supplies:**

- Each instructional group will receive supplies. If more are needed a site coordinator must be consulted.
- Enrichment/recreation programs should also receive supplies.
- All supplies must be returned to their storage bins and cleaned daily.

**Day's End:**

- Site coordinator will see that procedures are carried out daily to ensure that children are picked up.
- Prepare the classroom for the next day. Each site will have a dismissal plan.
- To learn responsibility, children will daily participate in the clean-up of their space.

**Medical Emergencies:**

- Serious injury: call 911.
- Evaluate injury and administer first aid.
- Notify site coordinator and complete incident report.
- Notify parents.

**Staffing: 4 to a classroom****Each class will have 25/26 students.**

- 1 teacher per class
- 2 paraprofessionals

- 2 assistants per class
- 3 site coordinators to work each site.

#### **Phase four**

**Teacher(s)** and all staff must complete the following:

- Ohio and School Districts' criminal background checks
- Teacher certifications

Training: to include First aid/CPR

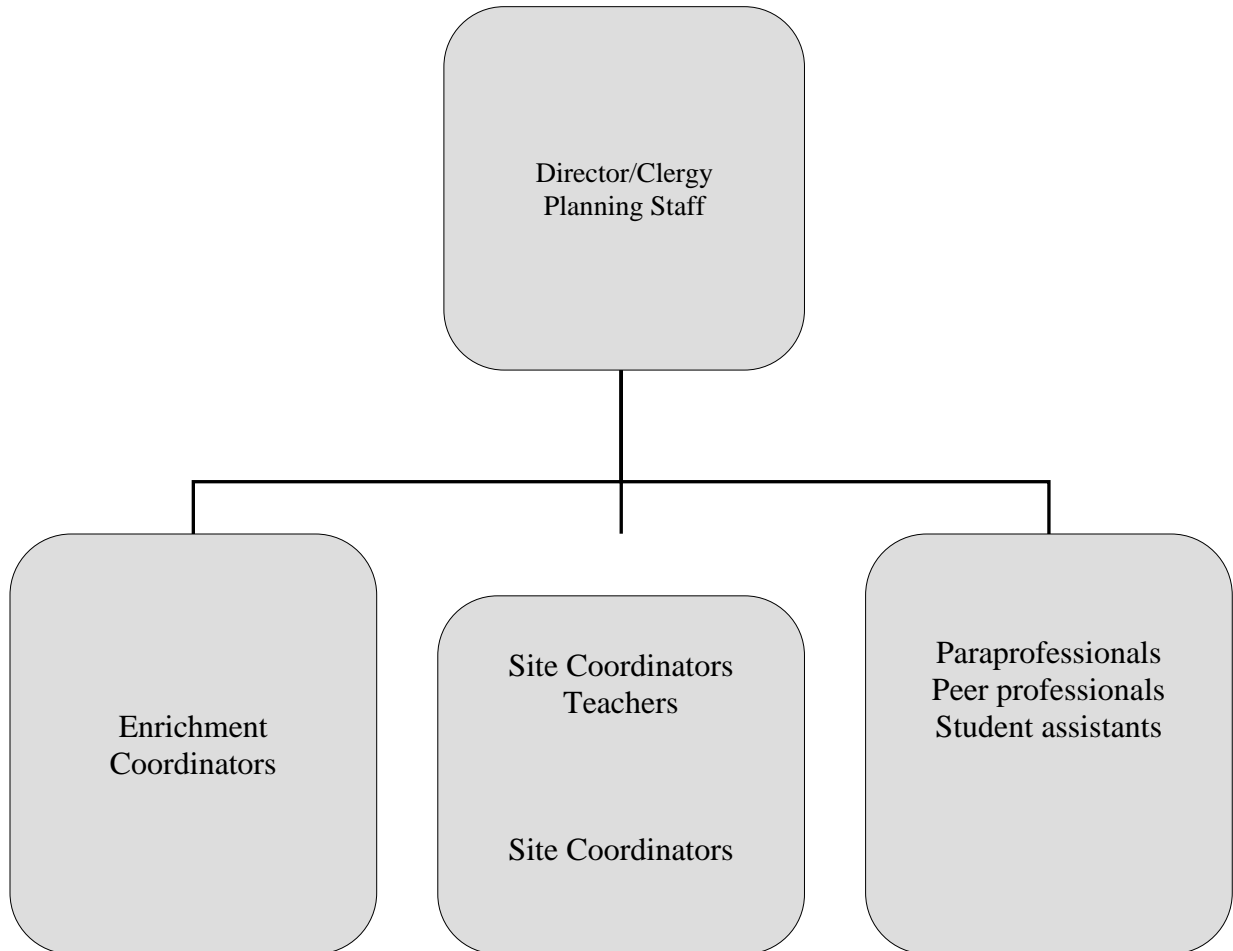
#### **Phase five**

**FORMS FOR PROGRAM: must be on file.**

- Teacher applications
- Student enrollment
- Evaluation process
- Employment applications
- Job announcements
- Criminal background check certifications
- Confidentiality agreements
- Safety policies
- Employment agreements
- Daycare licensing health history form
- Abuse reporting forms
- Behavior management policies and responses to behavior problems
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## Appendix E

### I. Staff:



## Appendix F

### II. Projected Budget:

	<b>Description of Work</b>	<b>Anticipated Costs</b>
Phase One	Site coordinators: manage/coordinate. (3 @ 25 per hour)	\$15,750.00
Phase Two	Teachers (10 @ 25 per hour)	\$33,750.00
Phase Three	Paraprofessionals (10 @ 15.00 per hour)	\$31,500.00
Phase Four	Classroom Assistants (8 @ 12.00 per hour)	\$20,160.00
Phase Five	Enrichment Coordinator (1 @ 20 per hour)	\$4,200.00
Phase Six	Enrichment Assistants (3 @ 15.00 per hour)	\$9,450.00
Phase Seven	Books	\$5000.00
Phase Eight	Supplies-Materials to teach/Training	\$5000.00
Phase Nine	Adm. Assistant (1 @ 20 per hour)	\$4,200.00
<b>Total Cost</b>		<b>\$129,010.00</b>



## **Evaluation**

- Daily morning and measurement met by goals achieved in class. Assessment tests will be administered and retested at the end of the program to determine growth.
- Measure improved social-emotional development by daily goals set.
- Weekly evaluations to measure group success to the target for each week.
- Attendance: measured per student, then class, all sites

## **Funding**

Contact Dayton and Trotwood Madison School Districts for Title One funding. Research the names and addresses of foundations and companies that will support and endorse the project.

## Appendix G



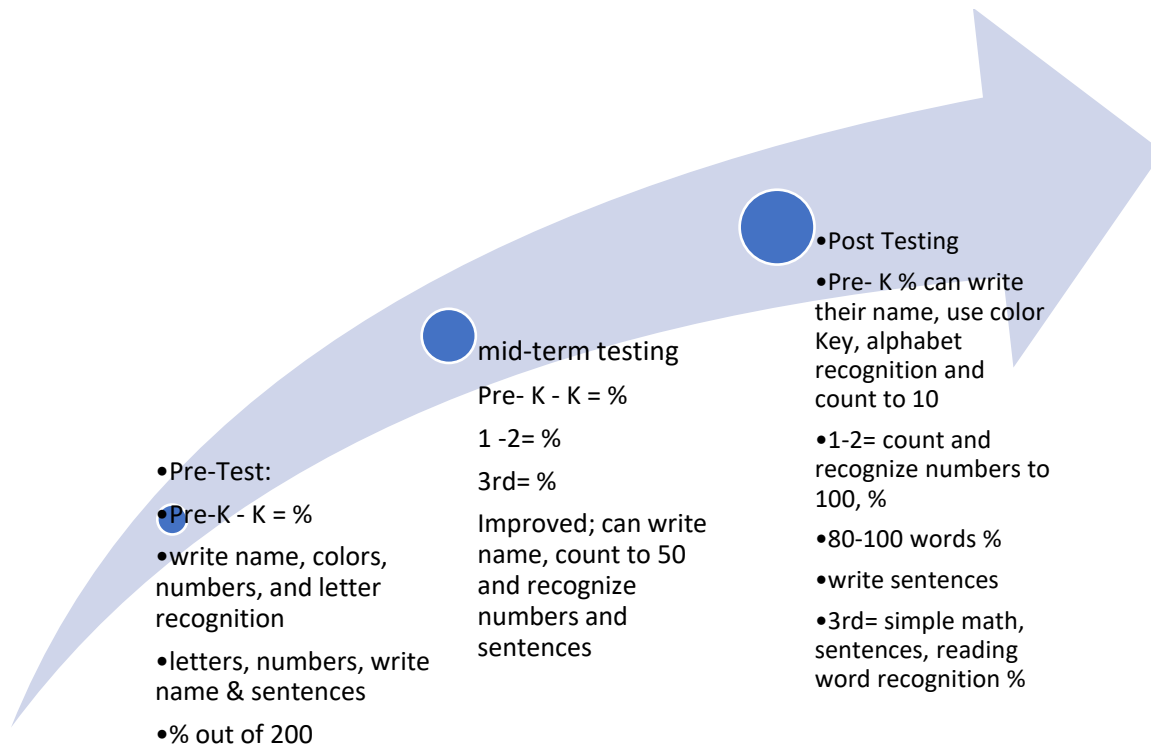
### Scholars

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Dayton Scholars Pre and Post Assessments

Pre and Post assessment: Dolch Site Word and Number recognition

- Pre-K to 3<sup>rd</sup> grades up to 200 students.



90% of Dayton Scholars below grade level in the following areas:

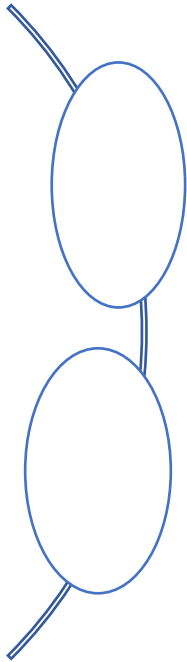
- Number recognition 1-100
- Alphabet recognition A-Z
- Could not write their names, did not know the address or telephone numbers in all grades,

Pre-K-3rd

- 0% Pre-K – K knew how to use a pencil or write their names or identify colors:
- 15% of 1st - 3rd graders were at or below 1st grade level in math and literacy.



## **Dayton Scholars**



• **Don't Pop your Cork Series books:** and other books Social-Emotional outlook to increase positive interactions with others and self.

• stress, grief, lying, listening to anger, having friends, and more.

**Recreation:** learning to get along with others and problem solve disagreements making positive choices; no hitting, time out to think: finishing the Day in the classroom

## **CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE**

- Storytelling Dayton Public Library
- Storytime: every day before lunch
- Team building water play, kickball, basketball, planting plants, large puzzles, movies (learning to sit and finish a movie, singing, arts & crafts)
- Sitting at the table for meals
- Positive communication with peers
- Learning school and home are different: the importance of learning and growing
- Finishing the day: not being sent home and how to use time out
- Getting back on track after a time out
- Rest /nap time
- Manners

## **DAYTON SCHOLARS: GOALS AND EVALUATIONS**

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### **GOALS**

**Dolch Pre-Primer Sight Word Assessment** for 200 children Pre-K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to Increase math and literacy for school readiness increase.

- Literacy: To increase word recognition: 52 words - Pre and Post assessments to measure site word comprehension
- Math: Increase number recognition and verbally count to 100
- Write the name (85% of children in Dayton cannot spell or write their names)
- Social-Emotional Care: “Don’t Pop Your Cork Series” to decrease acting out and removed from the classroom and increase classroom learning time.
- Recreation: Team building and positive interactions

### **EVALUATION:**

- Rated on assessments from pre-and post-testing.
- Weekly evaluations to measure group success to weekly targets per class.
- Measure improved social-emotional skills development by daily goals set and staying in the classroom and program each week.

### **OUTCOMES:**

#### **100 Sight words and Numbers recognition**

- % increased from zero to \_\_\_ words
- % of 200 increased from 0-10 numbers up to 100
- % learned to write their names and write sentences

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