

LGBT Faith Leaders of African Descent

OUR Annual Report 2015

Our organization's history and overall focus of work

1. Our membership started in 2009 under the Empire State Pride Agenda. After working together for a year, a core group, who had been active, discussed our becoming a community-based group as agents of change for educating in the Black community. We decided that we would become a group of openly gay people of faith, from various denominations actively promoting visibility, opportunities for dialogues, and advocating for the rights of LGBT people in the Black community, especially the churches.

2. The need or problem that your organization works to address: The needs that we described in our first proposal continue to exist. However, we have come to realize that it is the silence among our clergy and leaders that now sustained the hostility against gays. We no longer find the overt hostility and condemnation, as we did several years ago, but we also hear no vocal support when incidents of bullying, harassment and murder take place. These things go unreported or addressed by our local Black Leaders. Now, we more clearly address the silence, the outright religious oppressions and the positions of "evolving." We see them all as means to sustain hate, physical and emotional abuse.

3. Goals outlined in your original proposal to NYF and 4. Progress in Meeting the Goals: Our major goals were: 1. To increase visibility as a membership organization to gain legitimacy for our work in the community. We believe that our visibility, as individuals and as a group, is a basic educational and advocacy statement. Polls confirm that peoples' views about LGBT people are significantly altered as they have closer and more frequent contacts with them. We are a respected organization within our Black community and the LGBT Black community. Our presence and participation at various events/demonstration reinforce our broad commitment to the issues within the community whether it is "stop and frisk", gun control, homeless youth, transgender rights, aging issues, health and violence. We demonstrate with other groups, whether they are gay or not. Our organization has been in leadership in pulling people together for joint efforts. Examples are our work with SAGE to create the first Harlem memorial celebration during Pride week in Harlem. This has been an event unique to our community and the ways in which we celebrate Pride. Several organizations participated in this event (Harlem Pride, Rivers at Rehoboth Church, Kwanzaa celebration, Destination Tomorrow and Trans Women's' of Color Collective and Union Theology where the event was held.)

Our work has also included support and demonstration with gays of Uganda and Jamaica. We feel very proud and humbled that our members are called upon to participate in events. Our administrative coordinator is one of several featured leaders in a video on Uganda prepared by

The Riverside Church. Our work also included joint sponsorship of a two day entrepreneurial workshop held with Harlem Pride, National Black Justice Coalition and Small Business Administration, D.C. We continue to be a significant partner in the movement to advocate for monies for housing by working with both Ali Forney Shelter and the Campaign for Shelter for homeless youth and participated in a meeting of support held in Harlem. We will selectively continue this work.

During this period, we also gave a presentation at the ABSW (Association of Black Social Workers.) We were invited to present on issues affecting the Black LGBT community. This event turned out a full audience and proved to be informative to the organization's members.

Another success was the presentation and acceptance of an elective course for "Black LGBT rights and your ministry" at Union Theological Seminary. This course will be taught by our members and provide credit to students. The course, focusing on the needs of the Black LGBT community is a first effort open for both students and the larger community. Other successes include: our leadership in collecting over 10 Harlem based and other leaders and organizations to promote an ad in our local Black newspaper against the damaging and hateful sign in front of a local church. This community effort, spearheaded by our organization, was the only voice coming from the Black community and its leaders and clergy. We will continue these activities. However, this year we are tooling up to develop and work through a Speakers' Bureau to give program form to our activities. We also expect that this format will allow us to better do outreach work in the community.

2. To refine our mission, target populations and strategies and to develop an effective organizational structure for our organization: We proudly announce that we have received approval for our 501C3. As of this date, we are in the process of closing out our fiscal account with IFCO, our fiscal agent. We will be opening our bank account and establishing an operating fiscal system. . We have completed and approved new bylaws that were submitted with the 501c3 application. In spite of our size, the group decided to retain a structure that gives voting rights to all of our members as directors functioning with a Board of Officers. We have put this structure into operation after the election of officers. This process has been a learning one, but we are moving along with increasing pace as we adjust to new leadership and define roles as we go forward. Based on our discussions with CRE and decisions made, we have accepted, by vote, seven new members who have proven very supportive and productive. A new members' orientation was held for them and they are now integrated into standing committees.

Committees are: Speakers' Bureau, Forums, Public Education, Workshops, Communication/Public Relations. These are the functions around which we will organize our work. Our current members have organized themselves around these functions. Their selections were based on skills and interests. Although we have loss some original members due to competing personal and professional interests, we have no problem in recruiting and attracting potential members. We have established the process of inviting potential members to begin

working with us on our standing committees. The process is listed on our website. We now have a post office account and a pay pal account for selling our DVDs.

2. To complete marketing and branding activities: Our bio-videos were completed into a 70 minute full mini-documentary to include voice over and recognizable scenes from Black Church life. A major event was used to introduce the bio-videos to the public. The bios were classified by topics to be easily separated (if desired.) We are promoting these as educational tools and information; questions for discussion appear on the DVD. DVDs sell for \$10 and can be purchased at our events or on line by PayPal. We also updated our banner, our brochure and developed promotional educational items.

Our face book and web site continue to be instruments for promoting our work and providing visibility for the organizations. Our website is actively kept up to date by our website manager. We continue to highlight articles by our guests and members, updated calendar, listing of affirming churches and bibliography, photos and stories of our events, videos and articles related to our work. Our face book page remains active attracting people from the United States and the world. We are translated into over 15 languages and can easily reach a weekly audience of from 2500 to 3000 people. Our viewers are from the ages of 13 to 65 plus. Face book reports that we are performing "95% better than other posts on the page." We link with other similar gay and non-gay organizations on the site. These linkages include denominational sites, social justice sites, LGBT Rights organizations, progressive and LGBT media outlets.

Our educational bus stop campaign continues to be a major project in our work. We had the opportunity to analyze the "views" with the company and we determine that we would continue with five in Harlem and five in Brooklyn. We changed two locations, one in each borough. We also added this year additional information about our DVDs that are for sale. Feedback from viewing continues to be praised and widely received. We have never received any negative responses from the community or from the company. We do not yet have the final number of viewings since several had remained up even after the contracted 30 day period. Last year, the

3. To develop a comprehensive evaluation system: We have streamlined and refined our evaluation through a study of the nature and frequency of responses. We use long form questionnaire, collecting primarily qualitative responses, for large events (forum, panels). For other events (performance events, book readings) we use a simple, three to four question format. We always collect demographic information. Responses are shared with our members after tallying responses. We maintain this report in our program files so that we sustain a history of assessments of our work. This information is used to plan future events. One member is responsible for the overall work of developing and collecting evaluations

4. To work deeper within the faith based communities: This goal has been paramount in our minds throughout this period. Although the most difficult of our mission, we continue to explore ways in which we can achieve our identified goals and expected outcomes. We have had

several expectations and held activities under this goal, but out of our work with CRE, we have decided to organize our activities around the functional area of Speakers' Bureau. Although the structure, policies and procedures for the Speakers' Bureau have not been finalized, we continue to work towards reaching clergy and congregations in both the LGBT and non-gay communities. This formulation process should be ended and ready for implementation within the month. Several of our clergy have been able to gain greater opportunities within their home-based congregations as they have emerged as stronger and more focused in their own purpose and visibility. Two members are now in a process for ordination. It is in this area of work that personal on-the-ground contacts that we can make a difference. We took several major steps towards this end. The most significant was our attendance and table presentations at the largest Black progressive clergy conference in Dallas Texas. Three members attended rotating staffing our informational table. The table was also staffed by Many Voices, a national advocacy organization in behalf of LGBT Black people (based in D.C.0) but working on the national level. They have no relationships with clergy in the City. We will continue to find ways to work with them. The conference is named after a leading distinguished progressive clergy person, Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor. We mingled and spoke with clergy from around the United States, other representatives from progressive denominations and divinity students. We were well received and welcomed as the only and first LGBT organization to be present and participating. We reaffirmed that we are one of the only (perhaps, the only) community based Black faith advocacy organization working on the ground in the City. Our uniqueness is noticeable and respected by others in the field. Our annual forum continues to be our major event to reach people of faith who are members of the gay community. During this last event, we added significant populations of transgender and straight people.

This year's forum had such topics as: abuse in your relationship, meeting with members of the transgender community, reading the scriptures and ball room scene and homeless gay youth. Two key speakers were presenters: Dr. Rev. Irene Monroe, distinguished professor, writer and public theologian. The second speaker was Min. Kevin E. Taylor, co-pastor at Unity Church of NewArk, N.J. All 100 people who attended reported that they were "empowered, motivated to work more in their church and community, gained information and skills."

Other accomplishments with regard to this goal are: our participation in StoryCorps , editorial pieces that are picked up by local media , our participation in special LGBT Black leaders 'private meeting with congressional candidates, our members' participation in two bio-videos that will be used as reference materials in courses on Black theology, meetings with staff in the new administration and with national heads of HIV/Aids organization, workshop for ABSW (Association of Black Social Workers) and the Mayor's and Council's Pride events. We were also invited to present our bio-videos to members of The Riverside Church in an event sponsored by their LGBT ministry.

6. We have not faced any usual challenges. We have been able to use the planning that was developed under consultation of CRE. We are hopeful that we can continue with this service. We are now functioning with a board of directors and voting members.

7. The volunteer work that was being done by Dr. Wilhelmina Perry, cofounder and convener has been reduced as the board of officers functioned in their respective roles as president, treasurer, secretary.

8. Goals for the coming year: The third year will be used to focus and plan to realize the above stated goals especially the work within faith communities. We want to develop a plan for moving from volunteer staffing to paid staff. What will this new arrangement look like? We will also give ourselves the task to explore and develop plans to move the organization towards greater economic self-sufficiency. We will be exploring the following questions: What is the most effective staffing plan? Has the board of officers functioned effectively? What will we require in skills and qualifications for future members and officers? What will be the working relationships for officers, board and staff? What will be the actual budget requirements to sustain the five functional areas? Can this work be funded (and how) without the Foundation funding? What is our fundraising plan for the future?