



*United against bigotry.
Ambassadors for equality.
Educating for change.*

P.O. Box 14 - Cathedral Station - New York, NY 10025

LGBT FAITH LEADERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT ANNUAL REPORT 2012

The end of the year is a good opportunity to send an annual report. I did so , in the past, and placed it on the website. The report follows the time period of our first capacity building grant from the New York Foundation.

I see the annual report as a way to give an accounting of the work that we have been charged to do by our funding sources. It also provides a document to be viewed by our community. This past year we were fortunate to receive funding from the New York Foundation, The Sharing Fund of The Riverside Church and a donation from Rev. Linda Terry-Chard of the Ministry for Membership, Care and Parish Life at The Riverside Church. Their charge to us is one that we accept with dedication and commitment.

We have had a productive and successful year. The objectives and programs that we set out to accomplish have been realized. Our feeling of success should never eliminate our assessment of our work. Therefore, this report will also speak to unrealized goals as well as areas that require greater attention. However, it is clear that when we focus our work and pull together as a team that we are a highly productive and effective group.

OUR BEGINNINGS AS AN ORGANIZATION

Our membership started in 2009 as a Roundtable People of Color under Empire State Pride Agenda. After working together for a year and completing a highly successful community forum. The core group discussed our becoming an independent entity of Black gay people centered in the communities where we lived. We made the decision that we should enlarge our base and direct our attention to education and advocacy in the Black community. We would become a membership group of openly gay people of faith, from various denominations, who would promote visibility, create opportunities for dialogue, advocate for civil rights in the Black community and especially in the houses of faith. We identified ourselves as ambassadors of change and part of an emerging social movement to work for and /in behalf of the protections and safety of LGBT people as they live and worship in the Black communities of New York City. From the beginning it was clear that we would not become a service organization but would function as a civil rights organization. In order to change the negative situations that we face, we work directly with the Black LGBT community, organizations within our community and in the larger community, Black clergy and congregation assisting all in creating more welcoming and accepting spaces.

THE NEED AND RATIONALE OF OUR WORK

The needs that we identified in our beginning and through our first grant year continue to exist. Members of the Black community are identified as among the most religious (Pew Institute Report). They are also identified as being affiliated with the religious denominations that tend to be more conservative in their views towards homosexuality. These are the Protestants, Baptists, Holiness, and Church of God. Because their values are basically conservative and the denominations function with a patriarchal organizational structure, deviances from what is considered “normal (heterosexual)” are viewed as being abominations and ungodly. These attitudes are deeply held constructs and tend to cause great pain, anguish and deep personal conflict for the many same gender loving people who attend these churches. We must note the changes that there are changes occurring in the attitudes of many Black voters who are increasingly supportive of same-sex marriage. However, it is not yet clear that

we can conclude that a vote for social justice is consistent with an acceptance of same-gender loving people. Our LGBT community continues to attend churches because it is not easy to leave or disassociate yourself as these churches are often attended by one's family for generations. The messages of hate speech have long enduring consequences for adults but especially for young people in their formative years. The "don't ask, don't tell" policies that define and control social interactions have made it impossible to have open discussions of both sexuality as well as homosexuality. Fortunately, with pressures from the larger white LGBTI community, many clergy understand that it is not wise or politically correct to issue edicts of "fire and brimstone." However, we hear from our members, our friends and others that attend our events that these churches do not feel like safe spaces. This past year, we have accumulated close to 200 names on a petition that ask churches to cease and desist from this hate rhetoric. We have no decision on how to use the petition.

THE GOALS THAT WE SET FOR OURSELVES

(as set forth in our proposal to the New York Foundation)

In our first year application, we required of ourselves to "challenge negative values, hate speech and hostility that Black LGBT people face in faith communities." Our major goals were: 1. to increase our visibility as a membership organization and to gain legitimacy by continuing our educational and advocacy work within the Black LGBT Community and within the larger Black community especially the houses of faith 2. to refine our mission, target populations and strategies and to develop an effective organizational structure for undertaking our programs 3. to complete marketing and branding activities including a bio-video project with members, face book page and website, and 4. to develop a comprehensive evaluation system.

OUR PROGRESS IN MEETING OUR STATED GOALS

Visibility, Legitimacy and Community Education/Advocacy

As difficult as it is to break through to the media, especially the Black media, we were successful in getting coverage of activities and articles. Dr. Wilhelmina Perry, our Administrative Coordinator published four major articles on gay homeless youth, hate speech following the President Obama's affirmation of

marriage equality, young people coming out and children in same-sex partner families. Items were accepted in The Amsterdam News, Caribbean Life, Beacon and The Daily News. These efforts were supported by our member who is a journalist and GLAAD.

We completed our calendar of events including three book signing events for ally – authors, participation in community events (stop and frisk events, workshop at Albany Equality Day, Shelter of Peace Campaign for Homeless Youth, Harlem PRIDE, anti-violence demonstrations, Bed-Stuy PRIDE to name a few.) We engaged in these activities not only for visibility of the organization but also because we are members of the Black community, and we share common issues and concerns.

We also used a public media campaign to project our mission and visibility as an organization. For the month of June 2012, we negotiated with CEMUSA, Inc. to place ten bus stop posters in the most concentrated Black census zones of (Harlem) Manhattan and Brooklyn for four weeks. By far, this has been one of our most successful projects for the year. The feedback was tremendous and the company reported, through their statistical and marketing data collection systems, that the ads were viewed by close to five million people. Together with their art person we developed a design that looked “heavenly” in color, spirit and tone and carried a message to LGBT people who may live in conflict with their faith or their religious community. Our name, face book page and website were prominently identified and our website was modified to give information to any persons looking for a “welcoming place of worship.” CEMUSA, Inc, the ownership company reported that there were no complaints, and comments on our internet sites, through emails, personal messages all indicated that people were “both astonished and excited “ that such a message could appear “in Harlem and/or in their neighborhood.” People actually took photos next to the posters and posted them on our face book page. The company continues to work with us to provide a more detailed demographic of who actually viewed the posters. In the second year of funding, we hope to continue the public education and media campaign but to reduce the size of the campaign by using fewer bus stops and concentrating instead on particular areas of the City.

During this year, we also launched our website and face book pages. These sites have been invaluable in reaching an audience of interested people. When people have been asked, “how did you learn about our event?” the answers have been overwhelming “word of mouth” and “face book.” Our readers have grown significantly over the last year, and the website is monitored for readers’ interest and attention. Our guest column, added this year, features Darnell Moore, a young faith-based activist-intellectual has brought attention and interests to the site. The space on open and affirming churches is also viewed as a second priority for viewers. Another great attraction is our newly added bio-videos of eight members telling their stories of the connection of their sexuality and faith. This summer we introduced an additional eight bios from LGBT young people as they tell their stories of “growing up and coming out.” Because of the popularity of the site, we were asked by a second person, Dr. Philip Spivey, if he could write a column. This request was reviewed and accepted creating a second column, “A Readers’ Column.” One member has been asked to form a committee to develop criteria and procedures for soliciting material to be posted. Our face book page is now linked to many friends and organizations having similar missions. We have regular viewers to the site who indicate the postings that they like. Our website manager and two members oversee both sites. The face book page reaches close to 2500 to 3000 weekly whose demographics range from 13 to 65+ years of age. The largest ages are 25 to 44 years. Our “likes” consistently grow as do our postings by other organizations with similar missions. We have viewers from around the world who speak several languages. We have learned how to create traffic to keep our page vital and responsive to crucial events in the community, news related to the LGBT community as well as to the Black community in general. We are linked with other faith-based entities, LGBT entities, and community groups and organizations.

During this past year, we also changed our logo to one that we believe to be more representative of our mission. We redesigned our banner, palm cards, stationery and other public materials using the new logo.

Duing this past year, we held one clergy meeting with Moriah Institute where we participated as one of several sponsors. We also held a focus group at Auburn

Seminary lead by several of their faculty to discuss how we would be most effective in reaching out and engaging with Black clergy. One additional clergy workshop, in which we appeared prominently as a cosponsor with Moriah Institute, took place in September at Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church. Our targeted population was Black clergy in the City of New York. Council persons for the Brooklyn area were invited. Councilman Henry Adams attended the event and acknowledged the importance of education with clergy on areas of sexuality and homosexuality, the topics for the workshops. Clergy were invited by special invitation and required to RSVP and to pay an enrollment fee for the ½ day event. We targeted clergy known (or whom we believe) to be welcoming and provided a safe and comfortable space where honest discussion could take place. Although we aimed to have at least 20 clergy as indicated by attention at previous events, we were not successful. We targeted clergy in the “moveable middle” as description used by GLAAD. While we continued to carefully consider the reason for the reduced attendance, we continued with the second workshop, held on November 27, 201. Again the attendance was low. Going forward it is our intention to reach out directly to members of congregations as we continue to work towards our objectives.

Our major event this year was our fall forum held on October 20, 2012. The event was held at the Harlem State Office building. Two national speakers were invited, Rev. Yvette Flunder, head of the Fellowship Churches (a large gay and inclusive network) who spoke to using our faith as an anchor for social action. The second speaker was Sharon Lettman-Hicks, CEO of The National Black Justice Coalition. Ms. Lettman-Hicks directed participants to consider how they can become engaged around major civil rights issues affecting our community. The day was divided into an opening speaker, four workshops, lunch and a closing speaker. The day can only be described as “highly successful.” Publicity began a month in advance and included flyers around the City, web site and face book page notifications and a news ad in The Amsterdam News. People interested were asked to RSVP. On the day of the event, we had over 100 in attendance with people staying throughout the day. We collected evaluations and are now in the process of studying them. We know from the initial reviews, as well as face book postings that participants rated the event at the highest levels of success. People expressed that they left feeling “empowered and moved to work more in their communities.” A full report is forth

coming as to the demographics of those attending events, their faith based affiliations, their assessment of the workshops and the outcomes for them as LGBT people. We received three news articles including one from GLAAD, who had two representatives as presenters in a workshop.

Our yearly calendar for 2012 included almost monthly activities and we have concluded that we must concentrate and focus energy and resources more judiciously for our second year of functioning.

LAUNCHING OUR MARKETING AND BRANDING WITH OUR BIO-VIDEO PROJECT

Our bio-video project was one of our major efforts to brand and market ourselves. The obvious reason for undertaking this project was to address the minimal number of available faces and voices of Blacks and other people of color in the LGBT movement. We completed nine audio-videos although only eight appear on the web page. One person, in transition for employment did not sign the consent form since access to the videos would be out of our control once posted. The videos were completed at St. Philips Episcopal Church, one of the oldest churches in Harlem with a rich historical background. A one day shooting was preceded by several days of rehearsal and coaching to maximize vocal and audio presentations.

To introduce the videos to the public, a major community event was held at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Harlem State Building. Our key speaker was the Rev. James A. Forbes, Emeritus Clergy of The Riverside Church in June. The event was attended by over 70 persons on a Saturday afternoon. Rev. Forbes and the audience found the presentations impactful and offering a valuable contribution to the movement. He urged the participants to find their “calling” and move forward with courage and conviction. The feedback on the website and the face book page has been overwhelming positive echoing the feedback in the evaluation forms. We have added more faces and voices of Blacks who are now added to the lexicon of the “gay rights “movement. The bios-videos will remain public on our web page and are disseminated now on U Tube. This event yielded several new members. For an example of impact, one bio, within two or three weeks, had received 186 hits. Others had similar viewings.

In working with the company, responsible for the contract, we learned a lot. We wish to continue the bio-videos and we will create a more unified product by add an introduction. We still have eight core members who were not included in the original work.

The summer project that ended in bio-videos of eight LGBT young people of color has been added to our collection. Monies for this program have come from a NYF Small Grant Project. The young people were taught the technical, personal and professional skills of how to make a video. By writing their own stories and filming each other they worked closely with Robert Penn Productions to make the young peoples' videos of the quality that they could be placed on the website. As with the videos of FLAD member, the youth project ended with a public event of over 30 people who were friends, relatives and colleagues of the youth. From the evaluations of the participants and the audience, both judged the experience to be satisfying in presenting their voices in an authentic and profound way. It is clear that the young participants completed the experience feeling their own power and strength with a stronger and greater commitment to helping other LGBT young people.

REFINING OUR MISSION, TARGET POPULATIONS, STRATERGIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Our strategic planning work with Community Resource Exchange (CRE) has been exciting, challenging and productive. We were able to have a majority of our members present at all of the sessions. A report has been forwarded to us by CRE that chronologically takes us through the steps of the strategic planning process through to the identification of priority program activities for our second year. We have refined values, mission, target populations, strategies and programmatic priorities. Internal structure and evaluation will be tasks for the second year. We hope that this will be a consultant opportunity that we will receive in the second year of funding. Although we are adding new members and will be deciding upon a plan for entering members, we do not think that this will alter our decision to pull back on so many activities. We believe that maintaining a monthly activities calendar is considerable work for a group with no staff. It is clear from our strategic planning process that we need to prioritize and consider more carefully how we will allocate time and resources (money and people.) We continue to

function as a body of the whole with consensus decision making. Task oriented committees and members with special assignments have reduced the load on our volunteer administrator. Because of the increased workload, we have added to our regularly scheduled monthly meeting one conference call a month and special meetings when needed. The chair is also rotated to divide the work load and to give others the opportunity to exercise their leadership and skills. From our last CRE meeting, members agreed to discuss our 501c3 status, that was not resolved this funding year, and to consider options for organizations that have founding members who wish not to relinquish policy and decision making to a board. There have been no changes in the leadership of our organization as presented to our funding source. We continue to have no staff and a volunteer administrative coordinator. However, responsibilities are more regularly shared as we delegate tasks for chairing special projects and/or assignments.

We have learned that we have to be less ambitious in our activities and to focus more directly on our targeted audiences and our objectives. Through the CRE process, we have become clearer as to these matters and have a full realization that we must prioritize and discard those requests and desires (to act) that are not directly related to our targeted population and objectives. We have confirmed our commitments to education and advocacy as compared to service delivery. This is a hard lesson to learn since we are all so committed and see clearly the nature and scope of the problems of homophobia and denial of the LGBT people in our Black community. Because we desire to work, understanding that this is for the long haul, we will feel more confident in rejecting some requests and other things outside our focus of work. We now have a clear and well thought out CRE document in which our members have engaged and enunciated our values and personal reasons for being in the organization; we have reaffirmed to one another our pledge as we move forward. We have identified our targeted populations and set priorities for the kind of activities (for the year 2013) that are consistent with our mission and objectives.

AN EVALUATION OF OURSELVES

For this past year, we have evaluated ourselves after each event. We have collected evaluation forms and feedback from participants. We are recognized by the National Black Justice Coalition, the leading Black LGBT civil rights organization,

as one of the only grass-roots projects such as ours in the country where LGBT faith leaders are using their collective resources, in a Black based organization, to advocate for civil rights. These accolades cause us to feel proud of our work, but we want to demand more of ourselves and determine how to measure the impact of our work within the community. We will continue to address our evaluation system in the second year. We do not want to do singular evaluations event by event, as important as this may be; we want to measure impact and effectiveness of our work. We have begun to set up a computer program system to code our evaluations so that we have a better picture demographically of who we are serving and how effective they judge our services to be. We will continue to refine the process of developing, distributing, retrieving evaluation from participants in public events and through internet feedback.

GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR, 2013

Our primary goals for the coming year are to come to a conclusion regarding the organizational legal structure that we will use going forward. We want to explore various options for a membership under the legal status of 501c3. Our second primary goal is to explore various options of evaluation or research models that we can use to evaluate the impact of our work on our targeted populations and the congregations of houses of faith. Additionally, we will continue to engage in those activities that are targeted to our basic populations with the major objectives of building strong resource action-coalitions within the Black faith communities that assist us in furthering our work. These coalitions would be made up of both LGBT people and allies within faith communities. We are particularly interested in developing leadership among faith based youth and young people as social justice activists. Our fall forum on October 20 included a youth panel to explore these possibilities and a working group will begin to meet in the beginning of 2013.

We want to continue the bio-videos as an important contribution to address the paucity of materials by Blacks about Black LGBT people and especially those of faith. This contribution is timeless and enduring. We hope for the coming year that we can “package” them in such a way that they can stand as a major contribution. To our knowledge, the last similar piece of work was made in 1986 and it did not

deal specifically with people of faith. We will expand the use of the bios with a speakers' bureau. We have many members who are public speakers and we know that people want to use the bios for teaching purposes.

The web site and face book page are essential to keeping our movement alive and moving. This is an easy way to connect with people with messaging and we have learned what type of postings brings people to the site. We will continue to post news and commentary, stories on LGBT rights, items related to the general Black community that have relevance for social justice work, personal commentary and posting from organization with whom we are allied. The current web master has shown great connectivity in working with us to monitor and advise us of how to "work" the site more effectively. We will continue with her services.

The forum and clergy workshops are the foundation of our work. We will continue with no less than one annual forum and two clergy workshops. In both cases, the activities will directly target Black LGBT people in faith communities and clergy who can become potential allies and supporters of our mission. We would like to expand these activities to divinity students by direct contracts with local divinity schools.