



*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 2013

1. OUR ORGANIZATION'S HISTORY AND OVERALL FOCUS OF WORK:

Our membership started in 2009 as a People of Color Roundtable under Empire State Pride Agenda. After working together for a year and completing a highly successful community forum, a 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 in the houses of faith. We identify 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.

2. THE NEED OR PROBLEM THAT OUR ORGANIZATION WORKS TO ADDRESS:

The need that we identified in our first year application continues 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 most 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 "top down and male-dominated 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. 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 make it impossible to have open discussions of both sexuality as well as homosexuality.

3. GOALS OUTLINED FOR THE YEAR 2013

Our major goals were: 1. To increase 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 web site; 4. To develop a

comprehensive evaluation system. For the third funding year, we have added: 5. To work deeper within the faith based community. We decided that we needed to address directly and intentionally the basic mission of our organization of working in faith based community particularly since our program activities were now well organized.

4. PROGRESS IN MEETING THE GOALS

(a) Increasing Visibility

We are now at the point of organizational maturity that we understand our place and role within the larger LGBT movement as well as in the Black LGBT community and the Black community. We have now successfully carved out a space where we are legitimated because we have produced in a clear, authentic and consistent messages and work activities. We have a unique voice and message that is delivered and backed up by the competence and professional reputation of our members. We can say that we have not faced open hostility that we expected from the Black community. This may be due to the fact that they do not feel that we are a threat or our visibility is still limited. Besides our effectiveness in working, we believe that other factors (decreasing church attendance, evolving attitudes in the Black community) may be reasons that church consider that they have more pressing problems to face. It is also true that church attendance is decreasing so that the institutions, that may pose the strongest objections, are in fact decreasing in their power and influence in the community.

As difficult as it is to break through into the media, especially the Black media, we have been very successful in getting coverage for our events and articles in the media. All our submissions to media were accepted. The outlets accepting our articles have been Daily News, Beacon, Caribbean Press, and Gay News. One article on “the meaning of pride to me” was published in Huffington Post, Gay News. Another publication, “Evolving Attitudes in the Black Community”, was included in The Positive Community, a Black church based magazine.

Our recognition from National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) gives us a national visibility. We were acknowledged and projected on the national scene by two activities in which we were invited to participate. We were the New York City cosponsors for a documentary, The New Black, that tells the story of Black voters opinions and activities around the passage of marriage equality in Maryland. The film was presented as a part of the Human Watch Film Festival at Lincoln Center, and has received several significant awards. We will remain as on the ground advisors for bringing the film to a larger faith community. Secondly, we are one of the cosponsors for the NBJC’s national entrepreneurial tour to target LGBT people in communities of color. Other cosponsors, who are planning and implementing the tour, are SBA, BLACK ENTERPRISE, HARLEM PRIDE, GLOBAL NETWORK OF BLACK PRIDE AND NATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

We continue to be invited to cosponsor and serve as panelists on documentaries that bring Black LGBT Voices, especially stories dealing with religious beliefs, to the public. These included a Keith Boykin book event and cosponsoring a play, The Anointed. Our invitations also include request to participate in social justice work as panelist, public speakers and the Clergy Roundtable for Mayoral candidates. We carefully select our activities, but we feel that it is our obligation to participate in events that impact our community, the Black community. We worked with Antiviolence Project to plan and implement their first night out in Harlem. Harlem Pride and other non-affiliated persons joined with us. The evening was very productive and we met with no obstructions as we walked 125 St. from Lenox to 8th Avenues. We will bring in

others to conduct the event at least once a month. We handed out condoms and offered education on violence and how to report it. We participated in several demonstrations for Stop and Frisk that took place in NYC and in Harlem, in particular. We pushed forward to cosponsor a workshop on “Women: STOP and Frisk” as we came to realize that women, lesbian, immigrant women and transgender voices were not being heard as loudly as those of males. Our forum was held in cosponsorship with two community groups. Our key speaker was Andrea Ritchie of Streetwise and Safe. Other panelists and key participants were Antiviolence Project and Lambda Legal. Along with Harlem Pride, Faith Leaders has opened up opportunities for these organizations to bring their services to the Harlem community.

. We also conducted a faith panel, using our bio-videos, with Harlem Pride and participated with a table in the Annual Pride in the Park in Harlem. We supported the vigil that was held in Harlem for a murdered transgender female and we have continued to support and work with a newly organized task force of transgender people of color.

(b) Refining our mission, target population and organizational structure

Using the services of Community Resource Exchange, we have worked through decisions re: our structure and organizational functioning as well as clarifying our mission and work goals. We have had several sessions of hammering out mission, values and procedure that clearly express who we are and keep us within our mission and values. Our completed bylaws have been reviewed and processed by a lawyer. We wanted to create a functioning legal structure while maintaining our sense of mission and non-exclusivity. We have done this. We completed our application for 501c3 and that is also being submitted to the IRS for review.

One important decision making process revolved around if and how we would add membership. After much discussion, we have established the avenue for doing so. While not codifying a second class citizenship into our bylaws, we have agreed that potential members will come through way of working committees of the organization. This process allows us to view their work as they test their interest in membership. Thus far, this practice has worked. We added a survey to our web site and face book page that went to all persons on our accumulated mailing list. The survey was sent to over 400 people, and it was completed by 34 people electronically. This is our first “opening of the doors” to new people. We believe that we are ready emotionally and organizationally to begin this “entrance route.” Twenty four respondents indicated that they wanted membership. We held our first orientation for new people on September 25, 2013.

(c) Completion of marketing and branding.

Our bio-video project was one of our major efforts to brand and market ourselves. The reasons for undertaking this project were because of the lack of available faces and voices of Blacks and other people of color in the LGBT movement. During our first year, we completed nine audio-videos although only eight appear on the web page. One person, in transition for employment, decided not to sign the consent form since access to the videos would be out of our control once posted. A one day shooting was preceded by several days of rehearsal and coaching to maximize vocal and audio presence. Our feedback on the website and the face book page has been overwhelmingly positive. The faces and voices of Blacks are now added to the lexicon of the movement. The bios-videos will remain public and are disseminated now on our web site and YouTube. Other groups such as GLAAD and More Light Presbyterians have posted and given visibility to the videos. This year, six additional videos were added to the collection and we have arranged to create a more comprehensive product that can stand alone as a documentary styled-video project. The videos were taped at another historical church, The Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn. This year’s opening event will feature author, educator and clergy, Dr. Rev. Cari Jackson of The Center of Spiritual Life. The event took place on September 28, 2013

Two of our members were asked to participate in a more extended video interview that became the awarded masters’ thesis of a graduating student from Union Theological Seminary. The video was completed by Min.

Romall Small, This video of four seniors will become part of the resources for a required course given by the distinguished professor of theology, Dr. James Cone who is recognized as the author of Black liberation theology. The video may be seen on U Tube.

Our educational public campaign was renegotiated with CEMUSA, Inc. and posters appeared for a month and longer at ten selected bus stops in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The company has allowed several locations to remain until September, 2013 without additional costs to us. Viewers of 18 year old Black males totaled approximately 4 million (feedback from company.) We are investigating how we might reduce the cost of this project in order to sustain it beyond the funding period. This year we used face book to encourage our face book viewers to let us know if they had seen the posters and to photo and post. This was a successful project that involved more people in the activity with us.

The web site and face book page continue to be active ways to connect with the public. Our web site has been redesigned and has been made more interactive. We have received compliments from various people about the attractiveness, informative nature and interactive quality of the web site.

(D) EVALUATION

Our efforts at a more impactful evaluation can now be completed as we have sharply focused in on our work in our sessions with Community Resource Exchange. . We continue to use a program/event evaluation, but we will plan and organize for an internet evaluation survey this year from our mailing list of over 400 people who have signed as they attended events. From our last forum, we collected information from participants that indicated that they felt empowered and more equipped to work in their communities now that they had attended the seminar , “Empowering Ourselves: Using Faith as our Anchor: Spirituality and Sexuality: Bridging the Gap for Social Change.” Over 100 people attended this forum held at the Harlem State Office Building on October 20, 2012.

(E) WORK IN FAITH BASED COMMUNITY

This is the goal that we added during this funding year as we felt that we needed to work more intentionally and directly in this area. During this year, we have continued our work with CRE as our guide. We have been connecting with distinguished Black clergy (gay and allies) to discuss our work and request their guidance and cooperation. . We were advised that we should organize an advisory team and we are doing this. We are naming this our clergy advisory board. We are also interested in organizing a team of allies from faith communities. There are now several national organizations developing materials for working in faith communities and one, Many Voices, is specifically for working in Black Churches. We have had one meeting with their director and co director. We have linked our web sites and agreed to work together. They are a national organization, based in D.C., seeking local affiliations in New York.

Within the last year, we have added several new members who are academically prepared clergy (masters and doctorate degrees) who bring a respect and resource to our work with clergy as they are technically part of the “clergy brotherhood/sisterhood.” Among the new group of members are lawyers, administrators, retired professionals, and many others who all bring much needed energy, skills and resources.

One of our new members, now a graduate of Union Theology Seminary, is working with us in convening a group of former students of the three major divinity students who will work together to prepare and present a curriculum unit in LGBT issues for their educational programs. We understand that Union is the most advanced and liberal in this area, but still there are no substantive comprehensive curriculum units for students. This process has begun and we will start electives in early 2014.

One of our members visited the distinguished annual Samuel Proctor National Conference. This conference brings together Black clergy, theologians, faculty and lay people from around the nation. It is considered the “whos who” of

Black religion. While the conference has been moving slowly towards seminars and discussion around sexuality, LGBT issues remains less present. Three of our members will be attending the conference in Dallas in February 2014, We will be sharing an exhibitors 'table with one other group, Many Voices, a DC organization working and assisting churches and clergy to become more accepting and inclusive of same-gender loving people and families in their congregations.

We have also followed up on our interests to have more information on the expressed opinions of Blacks living in New York City. re: LGBT rights. It is very interesting to us that we have found no study specific to this population although New York City has one of the highest populations of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people. After conversations with several distinguished faculty who are knowledgeable in the area of our interests, we have accepted advice to avoid conducting a full comprehensive research project in favor of analyzing the raw data of available studies to see if we can compile a profile of the NYC Black communities. We have identified several major research projects and surveys, and we have engaged a research person (PhD candidate) who will research and analyze the existing data from Pew and Gallup studies. If the data is available from the national studies, we will obtain it. The person that we have engaged comes with an impeccable research background in quantitative and qualitative statistical work. The process is almost complete.

We have developed a library of major research reports, organizational statements and papers regarding Black and LGBT issues. We are more than adequately knowledgeable of the literature and thinking in the field. We have also collected the rules and regulations of all the denominations re: LGBT inclusion. These documents have allowed us to understand the positions of denominations and the degree to which local churches have freedom in decision making. As we presumed, it is the traditional denominations that are attended by Blacks that have the most exclusionary policies.

5. OUR GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR.

The next year is about deciding and building internal organizational resources to sustain us beyond the New York Foundation funding period. The organization consists of working members, but a decision will need to be made as to the staffing need. Do we need a part time staff person? A full time staff person? Can program activities stand discretely as special projects for which funds are requested? The analysis of the convener's job has been completed so that we know the scope of the work currently being done by our convener who is a volunteer. If the organization is to function as a volunteer membership, what paid staff will be needed? What does this decision mean in terms of fundraising for the coming year and for the future of the organization? We now have a sense of organizational and program expenses for three years so we can use this information to determine what future fundraising needs are.

This coming funded year, we will also focus on deepening the work within the faith based community. We expect that this work will result in a more targeted and focused work for the upcoming year. Several possibilities have already been discussed: requesting meetings with clergy; using our relationship to work with ministry leaders; implement intentional organizing to mobilize allies and LGBT faith based people: visiting morning services and announcing ourselves; standing outside churches on Sunday mornings and distributing our information