

Date: February 4, 2017

To: Bridging the Divide Supporters

From: Reverend Clyde H. Brooks, Chairman
Illinois Commission on Diversity and Human Relations (ICDHR)

Subject: An Open Letter to Supporters

This e-mail is a followup to my comments at the Black and White Divide session held January 26, 2017. As a part of the meeting, I shared eight suggested actions that I believe could be a start and perhaps make a difference in decreasing the black and white divide. However, let me make it clear. I do not believe that all blacks and whites are divided. We all want the same thing, that is, respect and appreciation based on character ---not skin color. I am always amazed with this "race thing". There is no such thing as a white race or a black race. There is only one race. It is called Homosapien. Within this racial designation are a number of groups, mostly based on geography and nationality rather than skin color. Skin color designations in America started with the founders of this nation and the writers of the constitution. It took amendments to the constitution to try to correct some of these omissions. Our skin color differs because of the amount of melanoma in the blood stream. The array of complexions among homosapiens is clear evidence of the truthfulness of this reality. It was the early American church who introduced some beings as pre-Adamites and therefore, not human, Man, using his limited understanding, placed pre-Adamites and CroMagnon and Neanderthal beings together. That is why the ape and the monkey has been used to degrade blacks. Yes, much of the problem grew out of the early church (not God's church but mans church).

I also believe that there are thousands, perhaps millions of Americans who are good and wish not to discriminate and who believe that those that are referred to as black are equal to them. However, it is just like former President Obama stated: "the elite and powerful are able to get little folks to fight over the crumbs while they take the rest".

I would also like to make it clear that the divide among our people and our institutions goes far beyond race. There are divides in health, employment, education, religion, family and in nearly every facet of our life. For example, many poor black communities are occupied by food deserts, poor health services, inferior teachers and poorly equipped schools (far too many without air conditioning to protect them from hot and blistering weather). Far too many black and white citizens die prematurely only because they are poor. To those of us who appear to be "favored", the Word of God speaks to us, that is: "From he that receives much, much more is expected (paraphrased)". The preamble to the United States Constitution speaks to us when it states "in order to form a more perfect union". The founders realized that much work must be done to perfect the union (United States). This is also a calling and requires us to work together to perfect our community and nation.

Before I move forward, I made a statement at the meeting which I am told was incorrect. I stated that no northwest suburban municipality closed its doors (shut down) in recognition of Dr. King's birthday. I was reminded that the Village of Arlington Heights does so. Therefore, I wish to apologize. I also wish to compliment the Village of Hoffman Estates for its annual recognition breakfast in memory of Dr. King. These are exceptions to my statement.

Now before I move into the eight suggested actions, let me say that we as black Americans have an important role with improving race relations. We must work to help insure that we are not always viewed as a critic. Given our nearly daily interfacing with racism, we have gain considerable information and experience that could help us become effective teachers. For example, whites in the northwest suburbs are not profiled because they are white. Whites are not subject to racial hostility because they are white. Therefore, blacks must find creative ways to teach, not only via example but through reaching out and helping our brothers and sisters to understand what they really do not understand. And now, the eight suggested actions:

1) **PRAY FOR HEALING:** God expects us to Pray and pray earnestly. We must pray for our new President and we must pray for those who abuse, misuse and hurt others. We must pray that God will intervene and deliver justice, liberty and quality life to all of His people.

2) **LOOK INWARD:** Each of us as community leaders and citizens must first look inward. What does your staff makeup look like? Do you use contractors and vendors that do not look like you? We must also look at the municipality in which we live, work and pay taxes. What do you see when you observe passing police cars? What do you see when you visit shopping centers? What is the position of your municipality on Sanctuary protection? What do you see when you go to church? How does your local schools address diversity? Do young people view Dr. King's birthday as a day for blacks or a fallen leader who contributed to American life? Now if we look inward and outward and see nothing wrong, then I would question why one would be interested in attending meetings on the subject. When we find things that are troublesome, we must find the strength and the courage to act.

3) **INVOLVEMENT OF MEN:** White men, as a class, have been blamed for serving as a block to support conservative and anti civil rights legislation. As a leader who has been involved in fighting for civil rights and against racism for fifty years, I must confess that efforts to consider the views of this group and seek to include them are failures that need to be corrected. If necessary, let's talk to husbands, brothers, uncles, sons, cousins and friends about the many challenges before us and seek to gain their understanding and involvement.

4) **WE MUST BE DIRECT BUT LEARN TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH OUR POSITION.** We must teach the importance of learning to disagree agreeably. We must be willing to accept criticism while remembering that there is enough to go around.

5) **CRITICISM:** We live at a time when criticism has become the norm; and that is not necessarily wrong as long as he/she who does the criticizing stands on solid ground. For me, I am tired of terms like "white privilege". Anyone who is white who cannot accept or understand American history and the events of today, it is rather unlikely they will change. It has been said that "White Privilege" is one of the greatest affirmative action program that ever existed. Let me be clear. There are millions of persons who have a complexion lighter than mine who are in a worst condition than I am, however, it is not because they are white. It is true that many did not help create the racism that affects folks with darker skin. However, they must understand that whether black or white, to see or hear evil, to know that something is wrong and yet, do or say nothing, makes them accessories to the evil they see and/or hear. For example, when the State of Illinois executes someone, it does so in our names. So when a municipality fails to treat everyone the same, it does so in the name of the citizens who reside in and pay taxes. If silence remains, it may be assumed by our municipal leaders that we approve.

Another example is Black Lives Matter. This is a phrase that is greatly misunderstood. I happen to believe that the word “also” following the word Matter would promote greater understanding and acceptability. However, I cannot imagine any reasonable person upon learning that unarmed youth were shot in the back 7-9-16- times would not better understand the intent of the phrase.

6) THE CHURCH: As a child, I was made to understand that the role of God’s church was to bring sinners to Jesus the Christ. I was also taught that the role of God’s church is to address immorality. I am absolutely amazed by the silence of our churches in these times of great turmoil and where immorality has nearly become the norm. The church must become involve and speak out. Yes, it will take pastors willing to take risks –just like Jesus. So to say that we are seeking to be Christlike requires that we as pastors take risks for the sake of right and because that is what God expects us to do. Pastors should seek to “march by the beat of a different drummer”. When necessary, it may be necessary to go your pastor and raise questions and seek answers. For example, when he says “Love thy neighbor as thyself”, then ask, “Pastor, who is our neighbor? This should trigger discussion and thinking. The Work of God demands questioning, thinking and action.

7) SCHOOLS: Participating in school activities provides an opportunity to learn how people who do not look like you are treated (curriculum). It is also an opportunity to meet other parents who do not look like you. I shared with you the time when I served as Principle of the Day at a local elementary school in the northwest suburbs and found what some young white children were being taught about blacks. School books only showing black people sitting around a camp fire with a pot being warmed over an open fire –dressed in tribal clothing is not a fair picture or understanding that young whites should have of African Americans.

8) MUNICIPALITIES: Your government is a taxing body. Members are elected by you. They act for you. They normally assume that if they do not hear anything from the electorate contrary to actions taken, that you probably agreed with actions taken. Permit me to raise several questions:

Is your village a Sanctuary Village? Are you familiar with recent actions of the Village of Oak Park on this subject? What is the position of your local government on this? Does your police department have African Americans as technicians, dispatchers, chaplains, community service officers, sworn police officers, members of the Fire and Police Commission and/or citizens police advisory groups, especially if they have no recruitment boundaries? Are there policies that inhibit the involvement of people of color? Is there a reason why your municipality does not formally recognize Dr. King’s birthday as does the County of Cook, State of Illinois, Federal Government, Village of Arlington Heights governments do --just to name a few? Given the threat to deport illegal immigrants, does your village have a policy on such? NOTE: It is important to find positive things that the municipality is doing to promote racial harmony, especially as such relates to African Americans.

EXAMPLES OF ACTION WHEN AND WHERE NEEDED

- 1) Attend village board meetings. Ask to speak. Raise questions (no criticism – gather facts)
Let the board know that you are concern and you would like answers. Try to take as many citizens of the municipality with you. The more the better. You do not want to be dismissed as a critic with a “personal hangup”.
- 2) Go to your Pastor and raise questions. Let him know that you are concerned.
If necessary, go to the church board. Remember, we need friends – we do not want to turn

folks off.

Page 4 of 4 Pages

- 3) Talk to the men in your life. Try to involve them.
- 4) Read the local newspaper. Are there articles that relate to your concern. Maintain a file.
- 5) Don't walk on shells around people of color. They can tell. Be concern and direct.
- 6) African Americans need to be proactive –not always criticizing. Look for positive things that can be used to salute a municipality, organization or a person.
- 7) Become familiar with your community. Be deliberate in looking for weaknesses and positive things relating to race relations.
- 8) Praise others who stand out as models for others to follow across racial lines.
- 9) Invite African Americans to attend your church service, even if they belong to another church.
- 10) Urge your pastor to add “a little color “to the pulpit and in leadership positions.

When African Americans see other African Americans in positions and active in the community, it helps change the face of the community. Are you satisfy with the face of your community? This does not mean that the current face is wrong –however, it is because you believe in diversity inclusion that you are concern and seek answers.

CALL TO ORDER:

For persons who would like to become active in these and other actions to decrease the divide and build bridges of understanding, please send an e-mail cbrooks@icdhr.org prior to March 1, 2017. This is the beginning.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Reverend Clyde H. Brooks