

2022-01-06

The Weekly Challenger : 2022 : 01 : 06

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The Weekly Challenger

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO YOUR COMMUNITY

VOL. 53 NO. 10

JANUARY 6 - JANUARY 19, 2022

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Mayor Ken Welch was sworn in as St. Petersburg's 54th and first African-American mayor on Jan. 6 by the Sixth Judicial Circuit Judge Michael J. Andrews. Mayor Welch received tremendous support from his family on the mayoral journey that made history.

'We are St. Pete': Ken Welch is officially St. Pete's mayor

BY FRANK DROUZAS
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Though the inauguration ceremony had to be virtually, it was no less historical as Kenneth T. Welch was officially sworn in on the morning of Jan. 6, becoming the city's first-ever African-American mayor.

The in-person inauguration on the steps of City Hall and ensuing celebration in Williams Park had to be scrapped when Welch tested positive for COVID-19 days before the scheduled ceremony. Sixth Judicial Circuit Judge Michael J. Andrews presided over Welch's swearing-in.

A career politician who grew up in the Gas Plant district, Mayor

Welch served on the county commission for two decades. His father, David Welch, served as the first Black city councilman and unsuccessfully ran for mayor in 1991.

In his first official address, Welch said this is a significant moment, representing the breaking of another barrier.

"As a child of the civil rights era, I grew up in areas of our city where my family lived not by choice, but by sanctioned, discriminatory practices that defined where African Americans could live in our city," he asserted.

Though the election is historic, Welch said, the goal is not just to make history but to work together to make a difference and impact

this generation and generations to come.

"Today, we embrace the peoples' desire for a community where every person is valued, every idea is considered based on its merits, and where a common vision is forged based upon progress that is inclusive, innovative, informed, intentional, and in touch with all," he said.

St. Pete's 54th mayor has already made key staff selections for his new administration, including Stephanie Owens as deputy mayor and chief of policy and Janelle Irwin Taylor as director of communications. Also, Tom Greene will move from assistant city administrator to interim city administrator,

and Doyle Walsh will serve as senior adviser.

In the coming days, Welch plans to announce additional appointments and organizational changes "to address continuity of operations, emerging issues, and to maximize our effectiveness, efficiency and customer focus."

In response to the affordable housing issues and sharp increases in rent in the area over the past year, the mayor said he is creating a high-level position, the assistant administrator for strategic initiatives, whose first area of focus will be the preservation and development of affordable and workforce housing.

See **MAYOR**, page 8

Welch discusses his priorities as he takes office

BY MARK PARKER
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – A once staunch Jim Crow-laden, sun-down town is now led by a Black man. The residents broke a dubious, 130-year-old white-only record.

When Kenneth T. Welch was sworn in as the 54th mayor of St. Petersburg earlier today, he recognized it as a sign of progress. However, he made it clear that his election was not so much about making history but more about creating an impactful change in the city where he was born and raised.

After testing positive for COVID on Monday, Welch will work from home until he is cleared from isolation. Following CDC guidelines, he is expected to begin working from City Hall on Monday, Jan. 10.

"I'm just ready to get to work," Welch said Tuesday during a Zoom call. "You know,



Welch hit the ground running upon taking office and focus on the issues at the center of his campaign — beginning with the affordable housing crisis.

we've partied a lot. There'll be parties in the future, but it's time to get to work."

In November, Welch received a booster shot and said he feels like he has a "regular cold." With

the rise of the Omicron variant, he encourages everyone to get vaccinated and boosted because "it's the safest way for the inevitable."

"Most of us will have to come

in contact with COVID at some point."

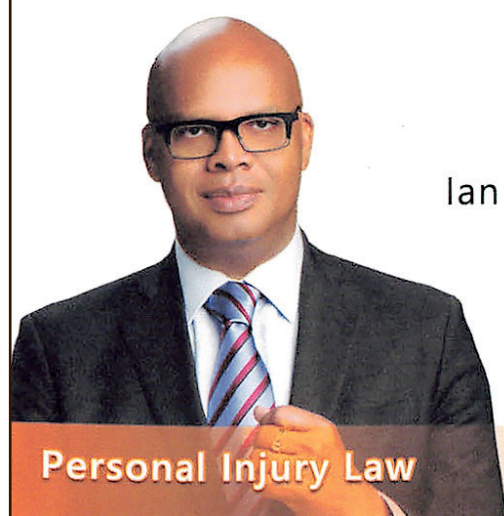
Welch plans to hit the ground running upon taking office and focus on the issues at the center of his campaign — beginning with the affordable housing crisis. He noted recent reports stating that area rental rates have increased by the largest margin in the nation.

"We'll have a strategic, administrative position that will deal with that as a priority," stated Welch.

He also plans to focus on youth and education, neighborhood safety and health, Tangerine Plaza and Tropicana Field in his first 100 days as mayor. He's bringing the city council back into discussions on Tropicana Field, held conversations with Pinellas County Commission Chair Charlie Justice and representatives from the Tampa Bay Rays on the matter.

See **PRIORITIES**, page 3

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Duval Park is an 87-unit apartment community located at 5025 Duval Park Circle in St. Petersburg, Florida. The property has 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom apartments, and it is designed to provide permanent, affordable and supportive housing to U.S. Military Veterans and their families. Preference will be given to U.S. Military veterans and families who reside in, or are transitioning to, permanent housing. To that end, 36 of Duval Park's units (40%) will be set aside for those veterans with a service-connected disabling condition.

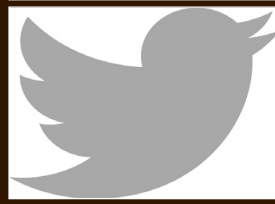
Duval Park is a Section 42 Low Income Housing Tax Credit project with 44 vouchers for HUD Section 8 rental assistance. In order to be eligible for housing in this community, you must meet the income eligibility requirements established by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program. Your gross household income cannot exceed 60% of the Pinellas County area median income (AMI), which is currently set at the following limits:

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7 people: \$54,960 8 people: \$58,500

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Will a Black mayor deliver reparations to the Black community?

BY CHIMURENGA
WALLER
International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement

ST. PETERSBURG – On Nov. 2, 2021, St. Petersburg's residents elected its first Black mayor. Many in the Black community hailed the election of Ken Welch as a historical event of epic proportions. However, as has been proven many times, a Black mayor, city councilperson, or even a Black president will not necessarily deliver justice to our community.

We want to pose the question directly to the Black community: Will a Black mayor deliver reparations to the Black community? After years of lies told by the city gov-

ernment of St. Petersburg claiming to be determined to bring light industry and jobs to the Black community, the question of whether a Black mayor will be the deliverer of reparations is totally relevant.

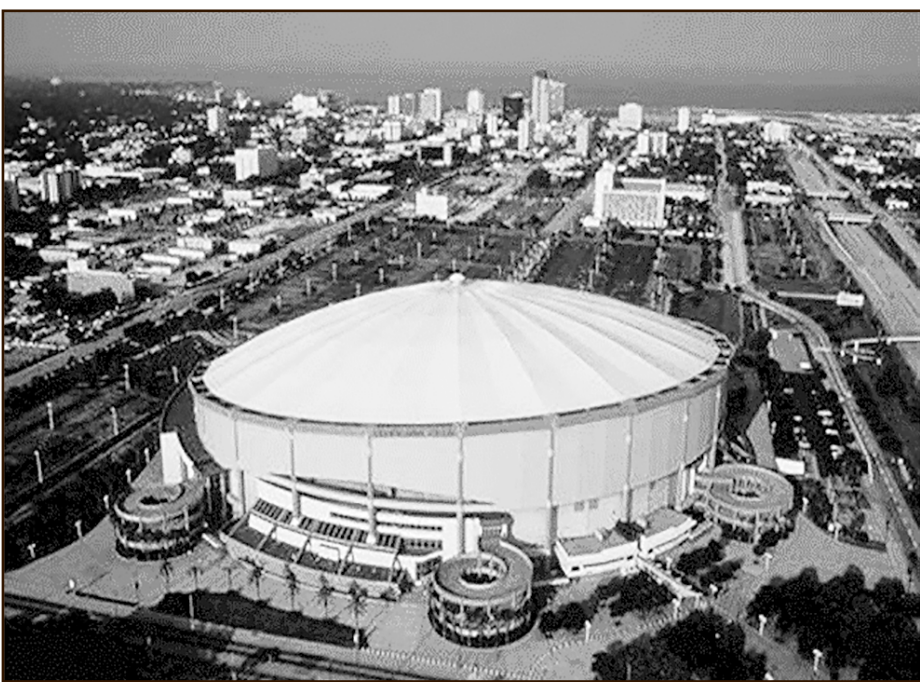
To help contextualize this critical question, we must look at some of the recent political events related to the disparity study done by the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg campus. One of the recommendations put out in the study was reparations to the Black community in the form of affordable housing.

The International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement believes strongly that the

USF study recommendation for reparations serves to create policies that give the impression of reparations as opposed to actual reparations.

For example, would this "affordable housing" be limited to the Black community only? We don't think so. If affordable housing is given to anyone who wants it, it's not reparations! Real reparations would be a start to repairing the damage done to Black people.

Our case for reparations is clear; now, all we must do is get the question of will a Black mayor deliver reparations to the Black community answered. Time will tell.



Tropicana was built on top of a former Black community

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The Weekly Challenger

is distributed in the following cities:

St. Petersburg • Clearwater • Largo
Tarpon Springs • Dunedin • Safety Harbor

P.O. Box 35130, St. Petersburg, FL 33705
Phone: (727) 896-2922
Fax: (727) 823-2568
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PUBLISHED WEEKLY
on Thursdays

READERSHIP
100,000 monthly

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
\$50 for 1 year (local only)

SINGLE COPY 50 cents

ATTN. POSTMASTER:
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THE BLACK PRESS

believes that America can best lead the world from racial antagonism when it accords to every man, regardless of race, creed or color, his human and legal rights. Hating no man, fearing no man... the Black Press strives to help every man in the firm belief that all men are hurt as long as anyone is held back.



Volume 53 • Number 10
Published Thursday,
January 6, 2022
16 pages • 1 section

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bell hooks: Pathbreaker, humanitarian, author, leader

BY ELYSE VAN BREEMEN
Contributor

bell hooks passed away Dec. 15, 2021, and will be greatly missed. She rose from her early beginnings to a great height.

Born Gloria Jean Watkins Sept. 25, 1952, to a working-class African-American family of six children, her father worked as a janitor, and her mother worked as a maid in the homes of white families. She later chose her maternal great-grandmother’s name as her pen name, as she admired her snappy temper and bold tongue.

She wrote her name in lowercase letters because she wanted people to focus on the substance of her books, not her personal qualities. hooks said of that decision: “When the feminist movement was at its zenith in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, there was a lot of moving away from the idea of the person. It was: ‘Let’s talk about the ideas behind the work, and the people matter less.’ It was kind of a gimmicky thing, but lots of feminist women were doing it.”

hooks was an avid reader and loved poets such as William Wordsworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Educated mainly in racially segregated public schools, she later moved to an integrated school in the late 60s and graduated from Hopkinsville

High School in Hopkinsville, Ky. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Stanford University in 1973, a Master of Arts in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1976.

She began writing “Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism” in 1971 at 19; it was published in 1981. She spent several years teaching and writing, and then in 1983, completed her doctorate in English at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

hooks was a prolific writer, publishing more than 30 books, many receiving awards. “Ain’t I a Woman?” was recognized for its contribution to feminist thought (the belief in the full economic, political, and social equality of the sexes).

In 1992, *Publishers Weekly* called it “One of the twenty most influential women’s books in the last 20 years.” Writing in *The New York Times* in 2019, Min Jin Lee, a recipient of a fellowship in Fiction from the Guggenheim Foundation, said that “Ain’t I a Woman” “remains a radical and relevant work of political theory. hooks lays the groundwork of her feminist theory by giving historical evidence of the specific sexism that black female slaves endured and how that legacy affects black womanhood today.”

“Ain’t I a Woman” explores the historical im-

pact of sexism and racism on Black women, the devaluation of Black womanhood, and how Black women are portrayed in the media. It also examines the education system, the idea of a white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy, and the “marginalizing” of Black women, treating them as if they were insignificant.

In 2004, hooks joined Berea College as a Distinguished Professor in Residence. Berea College is the only one of America’s top colleges where no student pays tuition.

hooks was a scholar in residence at The New School, a private research university in New York City, on three occasions, most recently in 2014. Also, in 2014, the bell hooks Institute was founded at Berea College, where she donated her papers in 2017.

She received many awards throughout her career and was inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame in 2018. *The Atlantic Monthly* called her “One of our nation’s leading public intellectuals,” and *TIME* magazine included her in the “100 Women of the Year” project in 2020.

hooks was creative, dynamic, prolific. She identified and rose above the potential victim and oppressor within. It is a lesson for us all. “There’s no place to go but up,” she told Maya Angelou in a 1998 conversation. “In my work, I constantly say,



Though bell hooks died, age 69, from kidney failure at her home in Berea, Ky., last month, she lives on through messages such as these and her desire to create a better world.

this is how I fell and this is how I was able to rise. It may be important that you fall. Life is not over. Just don’t let defeat defeat you. See where you are, and then forgive yourself, and get up.”

She spoke of feminism in a broad sense in “Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism.”

“It is obvious that many women have appropriated feminism to serve their own ends, especially those white women who have been at the forefront of the movement; but rather than resigning myself to this appropriation, I choose to re-appropriate the term “feminism,” to focus on the fact that to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic sense of the term

is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression.”

She spoke of love in a broad sense as well: “Imagine all that would change for the better if every community in our nation had a center that would focus on the practice of love, of loving-kindness.”

In an interview with *Jet* magazine in 2013, she stated, “We can’t combat white supremacy unless we can teach people to love justice. You have to love justice more than your allegiance to your race, sexuality, and gender. It is about justice.”

In her book, “All About Love: New Vi-

sions,” she wrote, “When angels speak of love, they tell us it is only by loving that we enter an earthly paradise. They tell us paradise is our home and love our true destiny.”

She also wrote: “A generous heart is always open, always ready to receive our going and coming. In the midst of such love, we need never fear abandonment. This is the most precious gift true love offers — the experience of knowing we always belong.”

Though bell hooks died, age 69, from kidney failure at her home in Berea, Ky., last month, she lives on through messages such as these and her desire to create a better world.

WE ENCOURAGE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Welch discusses his priorities as he takes office

PRIORITIES, from front page

“I want to bring that to some level of understanding of which way the Rays want to go,” stated Welch. “So that we can move forward and evaluate the recommendation from Mayor Kriseman and then move forward on that development.

“And of course, housing is a huge part of that Tropicana redevelopment as well.”

St. Petersburg City Council recently voted in favor of exploring the process of declaring a housing state of emergency. Once enacted, a one-year rent freeze would be in the hands of voters. Outgoing Councilmember Amy Foster brought the issue to motion, and Welch said he understands where she is coming from and shares her concerns.

“My focus is on looking at every tool we have,” said Welch. “Whether it’s city-owned land or the Housing Trust Fund we created in the county that is funding units right now ...”

Welch said he heard stories from residents claiming their rent has doubled and believes that is neither sustainable nor justifiable. He plans to look into long-term affordability, something stipulated in the projects funded from the Housing Trust Fund.

He explained that some properties have 99-year agreements with developers, meaning rent would have to stay under the affordable classification for 99 years.

“So, we’ve got some means to have that kind of stabilization that will stand up to legal challenge,” he explained. “But, we’ll look at what Councilmember Foster has recommended

and see if that’s a tool that we can use.”

Welch said he would research Councilmember Robert Blackmon’s city-backed mortgage proposal but said other proven methods include expanding first-time homebuyer programs and Habitat for Humanity. He added that the focus seems to be on acquiring land “because once the land is gone, then the affordable housing calculation becomes really difficult.”

He added that corporate buyers come in and buy “huge chunks” of land, and that is an issue he hopes to address.

City council also recently heard the results of a detailed structural racism study and subsequently voted to approve the study’s recommendations. Welch called the study the painful truth of the history of St. Petersburg. He said the study reinforced stories passed down through generations of residents. He also stated the importance of documenting those stories for all to read and understand.

“We can’t move forward if you don’t really understand where you’re coming from,” he averred. “And the generational impacts of that structural racism – whether it’s poverty ... crime rates, rates of government assistance, or bad health care outcomes – all those things.”

Welch said the South St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Act (CRA) serves as an excellent example of how to address systemic racism. Noting the CRA, which he helped implement as a county commissioner, brings a substantial revenue source

to south St. Pete for things such as housing, education, and workforce development.

Welch said he seeks equitable development that recognizes the city’s history while providing viable funding to programs that uplift the community.

“My approach has always been about repair and uplift to a community that has been harmed by a number of things,” said Welch. “Whether it’s the interstate, Tropicana Field or systemic racism.”

Considering the systemic racism highlighted in the study, Welch said the city electing him to serve as mayor is a sign of the willingness and eagerness of the community to move forward equitably.

Welch reiterated that his campaign centered on inclusive progress and said voters knew he stood for intentional equity. Welch said a decisive victory on election night showed the city has come a long way but added that he also witnesses the long-lasting effects of systemic racism and poverty every day.

“It means we’ve got an opportunity as we come to this nexus about the Gas Plant, Tropicana Field redevelopment,” asserted Welch. “All this discussion about equity and the impact of the disparity study that shows that we’re not utilizing minority businesses, and now the structural racism study.

“I think we’ve got all of the evidence, knowledge and background we need to set an intentional path forward – and that’s what we’ll do.”

Welch said his plans to address the racial equity gap are outlined in the

CRA and include education, workforce opportunities for ex-offenders, and criminal justice reform. He will continue to implement pre-arrest diversion programs and work to improve and expand Pre-K programs to ensure children are prepared for kindergarten.

Welch stressed that his entire administration would fully invest in equity, saying it must be more than just a department or an equity officer — it has to be an administration-wide culture.

“The interim administrator that I select will know that I want that to be something that is like a heartbeat within the organization,” explained Welch. “That equity is important, that it’s not just some office off in the corner – it’s a part of the way we do business in the city.”

Welch is also looking for innovative solutions to address nutritional equity. He recently had a productive conversation with outgoing City Development Administrator Alan DeLisle regarding the area of Midtown that many call a food desert. Welch noted that outgoing Mayor Kriseman is considering a proposal to bring the Taste of the Islands grocer to the Tangerine Plaza.

Welch said he awaits Kriseman’s decision on the proposal and said he will “hop right on that once we’re in office.”

“We understand the need for healthy food access in the area,” said Welch. “Whether it’s the Urban Youth Farm right down the street or Enoch, can they be a part of that solution, making fresh produce available? Can we innovate through co-ops?



“Again, it’s almost like housing where we need to look at all available options and find the things that we think will be the best fit and actually address the needs of the community.”

The preponderance of gun violence this year is another issue in the community that Welch will have to address immediately. He recently discussed solutions with community activists at the Kwanzaa Black Male Summit. He plans to utilize those who can connect to the young people that current programs have failed to reach.

Welch said there is no magic solution to gun violence that has plagued the city but believes intentional outreach to the younger generation is an essential first step. He also thinks more job opportunities and access to safe and upgraded community centers will help, and he plans to expand both.

“And then I also have already started speaking with mayors from around the country,” added Welch. “There were several mayors with me in the White House last month and the mayors at the Harvard Kennedy School in

November.

“Sharing best practices of what works in Atlanta or Shreveport or Seattle and seeing if we can use that here; we’re not trying to reinvent the wheel.”

Welch will enlist his administration’s help when addressing those issues, people such as his Deputy Mayor and Chief of Policy Stephanie Owens, Assistant Administrator for Strategic Initiatives Rob Gerdes, and interim City Administrator Tom Greene.

There are no plans for an inauguration gala or ball, but the community celebration will take place when he feels it is safe. He said March and April are possibilities.

Welch thanks the community for its support and wants people to know that his inauguration is just the beginning.

“This is the beginning of the work,” he affirmed. “The goal is making impactful change in our community. We all need to bring that same energy to making that change happen as we did to making this election historical.”

To reach Mark Parker, email mparker@theweekly-challenger.com



Experts In Life-Changing Care

By Karen Davis-Pritchett M.Ed., Empath Health Vice President of Access and Inclusion



Connecting to Community

PINELLAS COUNTY—Providing compassionate, full-life care is an honor we take seriously at Empath Health. Whether it is home health care, sexual

health services, elder care, comfort care during a critical illness, or end-of-life care, everyone should have access to these vital services.



Keosha Simmons, community partnership specialist, is here to answer any questions you may have about Empath Health.

To ensure all members of our community understand the services available to them, we have a team of community partnership specialists dedicated to sharing resources and information. The most recent addition to the team is Keosha Simmons, community partnership specialist serving Pinellas County.

“I’m here to make sure everyone in the community has a clear understanding of the services provided by Empath Health and is able to access those services when needed,” explained Simmons.

Simmons knows the value of Suncoast Hospice services for the patient and the family.

In Aug. 2018, her father was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. It metastasized quickly, and in October of that year,

the decision was made to place him under the care of Suncoast Hospice, a member of Empath Health. He spent the last week of his life in the Suncoast Hospice South Care Center, where he received extraordinary care to manage his pain and other symptoms.

“That was one of the hardest times of my life, but they wrapped us in so much love and care. We’re a large family of singers, and they allowed us to sit with him and sing,” added Simmons. “They were patient and gave us the time we needed.”

During her grief process, Simmons knew she needed to pay it forward. When the opportunity to join Empath Health presented itself, she knew it was the perfect way to give back to her community and the organization that brought

compassionate care to her family.

“My goal is to dispel any misinformation as it relates to the services provided by Empath Health,” she adds. “I hope to bring a positive perspective and solutions while creating long-lasting relationships.”

Empath Health provides many services beyond the care of Suncoast Hospice, including Empath Palliative Care, Empath Home Health, Empath Community Counseling, Suncoast PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly), and Empath Partners in Care (EPIC). All of these services work together to provide support for patients, caregivers, and family members throughout every stage of life.

Through community events, webinars, and partnerships with com-

munity centers, churches, and schools, Simmons wants to create opportunities to share information about the services and programs of Empath Health and continue to foster community engagement. She is available to present on topics such as caregiver support, living wills, grief conversations, an overview of Empath Health, and more.

“There is no question someone can’t ask. I want to hear what people’s concerns are or if they have feedback on previous experiences,” said Simmons. “I would love for people to reach out and take the time to get to know us and our services.”

Visit EmpathHealth.org to learn more about our services or schedule time for Simmons to speak with your group by calling (727) 512-9599.

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Norman Wilfred Lewis, *Untitled (Subway Station)*, 1945, Oil and sand on canvas, 24 x 36 in., Art Bridges.
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My Brother's & Sister's Keeper end of the year celebration

BY FRANK DROUZAS
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – The annual My Brother's & Sister's Keeper (MBSK) Celebration of Champions got underway last month at the historic Coliseum, complete with bounce houses, food galore, entertainment, and heartwarming stories. Honors were given to the Champions, families, coaches, community partners, advisors, and youth development programs for their hard work and commitment. St. Pete's My Brother's and Sister's Keeper (MBSK) initiative addresses persistent opportunity gaps faced by young men and women of color. It aims to connect young people to mentoring, support networks, and workforce development programs. Under the MBSK umbrella are programs such as Cohort of Champions, Not My Son, and Youth Development Grants. Cohort of Champions is a training program that involves educational, entrepreneurial, workforce, and enrichment training

opportunities for young men and women, ages 12 to 24, aiming to prepare African-American young men and women for the future and develop a trained, qualified workforce. During the Cohort of Champions summer program, students had the opportunity to repair and customize a bicycle, participate in robotics and manufacturing activities, and earn incentives. "You guys are the future of this city," said then-Mayor Rick Kriseman in addressing the young people on hand. "We have great confidence in you guys. We know what you're capable of, and we know that the city of St. Petersburg is going to be in good hands." Former Deputy Mayor Dr. Kanika Tomalin said the night's event took her back to the moment the administration decided to go all-in on the My Brother's and Sister's Keeper initiative. "The mayor and I were walking through Jordan Park because there had just been a shooting," she recalled.



"We'd lost another young Black man to senseless violence and decided at that moment that we were going to invest whatever it took to make sure that young, Black men and women in this city understand that our city loves you, will invest in you and do whatever it takes to ensure your future is as bright as any child born in this city." Tomalin remembered that Kriseman agreed to invest \$1 million in the My Brother's and Sister's Keeper initiative right on the spot. He hired Rev.

See **KEEPER**, page 13



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Emancipation Proclamation Service 2022

BY FRANK DROUZAS
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — When President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863, it not only delivered certain enslaved people freedom from bondage but also forever changed the lives of Black Americans for generations to come.

To celebrate the historic event, the St. Petersburg Branch of the NAACP brought the community together for its annual Emancipation Proclamation Service, held at Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church on Jan. 1.

Trenia Cox, first vice president of the St. Pete branch, served as the event's mistress of ceremony.

"It's important that you understand that the responsibility for sharing our history rests with us, our families, our faith-based institutions," she said.

One of the things Esther Matthews, president of the St. Petersburg Branch NAACP, wanted to focus on when taking office last year was connectivity.

"Three hundred sixty-five plus now, days later, we can stand together connected in celebration," she said. "We are truly on the way."

She said that the branch stayed true to the vision of promoting impact and change through intentional collaboration and working hard to increase membership. Other goals of last year the branch accomplished were remaining engaged in racial and equity-focused work, working with Pinellas County School Board to address all disparities, establishing open communication with law enforcement, and ensuring that the branch leadership has the ability to support the community in need.

"We also remained consistent and steadfast in the goals of 2021," she said, "and have stabilized solid organizational relationships. But 2022 is the year of harvest."

For the new year, Matthews said she wants to

focus on three "Ms." She will strive to mobilize the community to feel empowered "and have their voices heard intentionally." She also wants to motivate the community to engage in the local NAACP branch.

"Our ability to enact change comes from the work of the community's involvement in the branch committees," she said.

Finally, the president wants to maximize the effectiveness and stability of the committees as they move to do the branch's work. She urged everyone to remain focused on race and economic equity, public health and safety, environmental resilience, voting rights, political representation, and affordable housing.

"We must move as one to ensure progress," said Matthews, who is beginning her second year as branch president.

Matthews bestowed a special recognition upon Ken Welch in honor of him being the first African American to be elected mayor in the city's history.

Welch, a long-standing member of the St. Pete NAACP, noted that his great-grandfather, Ambrose Welch, was born over a decade after the Emancipation Proclamation.

"We have a legacy to uphold," he said, "from all those who sacrificed before us."

He thanked the NAACP for supporting his youth conferences and underscored his vision of equity for the city.

"Just as hard as we fought to win this election, we're going to have to fight to bring real equity," Welch said.

In delivering his keynote address, Rev. Kenny Irby, senior pastor of Bethel AME Church, extolled the virtues of the power of song, specifically underscoring the historical significance of the African-American anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." The song was written as a poem by the NAACP executive secretary and writer James Weldon Johnson.

"On this journey to freedom and equity ... we've got to sing," he said. "As we battle

against injustice and inequity, we must trust God."

Even as Black Lives Matter protestors marched and chanted "Hands up, don't shoot!" they clapped and did it rhythmically, he said. Irby, who orchestrated the city's Not My Son campaign and launched the Cohort of Champions, said that we must hold leadership accountable and "do mercy in the quest for justice."

Pastor Robert Vinson of Faith Memorial Missionary Baptist Church offered some historical context, explaining that though the overt reasons of the Civil War may have been about the rights of states and their economies, it was really about slavery, and Lincoln sought an end to it.

"Technically, the Emancipation was not a force of law; it was really a moral direction. A military, moral direction that was given," he explained.

Due to a dearth of volunteer soldiers, abolitionists like Frederick Douglass urged Lincoln to deploy Black men to fight for the Union, despite a 1792 law that prohibited Black people from bearing arms. But Vinson pointed out that the enslaved were forced to fight on behalf of the Confederacy in the South.

"The Confederates, they forced Black people to fight against the North," he said. "They forced us to fight to keep ourselves enslaved!"

After the bloody Battle of Antietam in Sept. 1862, Lincoln warned the South: either stop the rebellion against the Union or all the slaves will have their freedom. The war waged on, and the signing of the emancipation Proclamation inevitably ensued. Though most of the enslaved were officially freed on that first day of the new year, the border states were allowed to keep human bondage, as those states were loyal to the Union.

"Only the states that had to be brought back to the Union through military conquest needed to free their slaves," the pastor explained.

The Union recruited groups of escaped slaves to fight against the Confeder-

acy, and such "self-liberated Black people" helped win the fight against the South and preserve the Union.

"There were reports of over 30,000 Black volunteers but over 130,000 self-liberated Black people from the southern states that were determined to help this victory over the South," he said.

Following emancipation, Black people in the South remained extremely poor and labored in appalling conditions on land they rented. They were technically free, but their environment was indistinguishable from slavery.

"The residue from slavery remained as we were imprisoned psychologically," he said.

Pastor Jana Hall-Perkins of McCabe United Methodist Church talked about the variety of emotions that the enslaved must have experienced when finally granted their long-sought-after freedom. Anger that it took so long, frustrated at the seeming "impression" of freedom — "but would freedom be the actual reality?"

Some were terrified at not knowing what the future held for them and feared that they would go from one place of bondage to another.

Yet many rejoiced — former slaves interviewed almost a century ago recalled that they rang bells, blew horns, and "shouted like they were crazy," Hall Perkins said. One formerly enslaved individual recalled buying a rope, tearing it into little segments before distributing the pieces to others, saying, "When you look at this rope, I want you to remember that you were once in bondage, but now you are free!"

Rev. Louis Murphy, senior pastor of Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church, talked about the history of racism that's "embedded in this nation" and the work that is yet to be done.

"Even though we can sit on green benches and go to water fountains and baseball parks and all of that," he said, "but it is woven in the fabric to exclude us and to continue



Pastor Robert Vinson
of Faith Memorial Missionary Baptist Church



Greg Porter led the crowd with the
Negro National Anthem



to use our natural resources, our intellectual resources, our physical resources for their gain."

Murphy recollected a recent trip to Ghana where he visited Cape Coast Castle, a structure where they housed the enslaved before they were to be shipped across the Atlantic. He said the white Christian men were on the top floor, singing praises to God while their captives were suffering in the holds beneath them, shackled together in deplorable conditions. People must perceive what it means to be a Christian.

"How are you looking at these scriptures? What lenses are you looking at these scriptures through?" he said. "It's critical."

Murphy cautioned against people standing at opposite sides politically these days and urged them to open up and communicate, as the NAACP will line up with all organizations.

"Quit being so divisive!" he said. "We're all in this together! And we may not agree on everything, but we can air out our differences."

To reach Frank Drouzas, email fdrouzas@theweekly-challenger.com



Rev. Kenny Irby, senior pastor of Bethel AME Church



Mt. Zion Progressive Pure Expressions



Rev. Louis Murphy, senior pastor of Mt. Zion
Progressive Missionary Baptist Church



Dream Defenders: The Freedom Column

Transformative justice as a way around police abuse

George Floyd was murdered by Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer, after paying for cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill at Cup Foods, a store in the Minneapolis area. A clerk at the store told his manager about the counterfeit money and the manager confronted Floyd, who refused to return to the store to pay for his items. It was at this time that the police were called.

This incident and many other police-involved situations that end in death or police brutality are reasons why people and communities of color do not trust the police nor want

to call them in times of need. According to a poll conducted by PBS, in the days following George Floyd's murder, nearly half of all Black Americans had very little or no confidence that police officers in their community treat people of color fairly.

Marginalized people do not generally trust law enforcement. The number of police-involved killings of Black and Brown people videotaped and gained national attention has exacerbated the matter.

Police are supposed to protect and serve the communities they patrol. Every day citizens should be able to dial 9-1-

1 for help with confidence that they will be safe. Many people of color fear dialing the number in situations involving their spouses, mentally ill family members, neighbors, friends, and children.

So many people experiencing violence or other emergencies don't want to call the police — or, in some cases, understand that they should not — but have no idea what to do instead. Now, citizens are taking things into their own hands through a process called transformative justice (TJ).

TJ is a political framework and approach that responds to violence,

harm, and abuse without creating more violence, harm, and abuse. People use this tool to avoid the violence of prisons, jails, and the police.

For example, the TJ approach would be helpful to undocumented immigrant women in domestic violence relationships, disabled people who are being abused by their caretakers and attendants, sex workers who experience sexual assault or abuse, or poor children and youth of color who are surviving child sexual abuse.

TJ is a process where all individuals affected by injustice are allowed to address and repair the

harm. Those affected consider and account how an act has affected them and what can be done to repair the damage.

The perpetrator is then held accountable to the individual by way of restitution. In cases involving sexual violence, TJ may prove particularly healing. So often, the criminal justice system re-traumatizes the victim if the act is even reported and does not provide them the remedy they seek.

Alternatives to the criminal justice system can sound scary in the context of sexual violence, but there is a long lineage of BIPOC (Black,



Jessika Ward

Indigenous, and People of Color) folks practicing alternative systems of accountability and community safety in cases of sexual violence. Some of the key components of TJ are healing, collective action, and recognizing cultural differences.

For folks looking to practice Transformative Justice, seek organizations like Dream Defenders, the Audre Lorde Project, Vision Change Win Consulting, Project Nia, Just Practice Collaborative, and more.



Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs, have played an important role in enriching the lives of not just African Americans but our entire country. Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, Jr., Vice President Kamala Harris, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Jesse Jackson, Langston Hughes, Andrew Young, and Congressman John Lewis are all graduates of HBCUs.

HBCUs opened in churches across the nation in the late 1800s to educate newly freed Black people after slavery. For centuries, these historic colleges and universities have served as a central force in the transformation of America and the fight for equality.

These colleges and universities have educated attorneys, doctors, teachers, ministers, therapists, engineers, architects, filmmakers, actors, authors, and journalists who are lead professionals in their respective careers and, in turn, they often use their degrees to abolish systems that oppress those who are marginalized.

In 1956, two Florida A&M students in Tallahassee — Wilhelmina Jakes and Carrie Patterson — sat down in the “whites only” section of a city bus and spearheaded the organizing of the Tallahassee Bus Boycott. In 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Dream Defenders: The Freedom Column

Honoring the past and present work of HBCU students who are leading the fight to obtain civil rights

Committee (SNCC) — a student-led organization that conducted sit-ins, freedom rides, and freedom summer — got its start on Shaw University’s campus.

The Atlanta Student Movement was also formed in the 60s by the Atlanta University Center Consortium: Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Clark Atlanta University. In the early 1960s, Howard students, including Stokely Carmichael, participated in civil rights protests sweeping across the South.

The history of these campuses is the reason people continue to enroll. Rev. James Woodall earned his undergraduate degree in political science from Georgia Southern University and is now studying to earn his master’s degree in divinity at Morehouse School of Religion because of its rich history.

Woodall is an author, activist, an American Baptist minister at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., the former state president of the Georgia NAACP, and a former intelligence analyst for the United States Army.

“I wanted to go to a religious institution where I was not only challenged but prepared to lead in social justice spaces and to become a prophetic problem solver,” said Woodall. “Morehouse is the center of Black reli-

gious thought as it relates to Black theology. So, I wanted to go to what we call the school of the prophets to be able to know how to lead my people and to be able to speak the language of prophetic problem-solving.”

Phil Agnew, the co-founder of The Dream Defenders — a Black and Brown youth-led organization formed after the murder of Trayvon Martin — decided to attend FAMU because all his friends were going to the school. Little did he know, he would become an activist and leader because of what he would soon learn as a student at the school.

With no knowledge about Tallahassee or the state of Florida, he left the Westside of Chicago to attend “the college on the highest of seven hills” to embark on what he thought would just be “debauchery and fun.” Agnew stepped foot on the campus for the first time in 2003, not having done a college visit.

He began organizing right away, becoming student government freshman class president. Agnew would also later become student body president and vice president. However, it was the year 2005 that Agnew truly became an activist.

“It was around Martin Lee Anderson. He was a 14-year-old boy who was murdered at a boot camp in

Dade County, and I was really a follower in a lot of ways to a lot of people at Florida State, FAMU, and to older folks like Ben Crump and Daryl Parks — attorneys who recruited us,” said Agnew. “Hurricane Katrina was also in 2005, so we did a lot of organizing with Katrina victims to get them to campus to make sure they were OK and had housing.”

Agnew graduated in the spring of 2008 from FAMU’s School of Business. After graduating, he began working in pharmaceutical sales in Charlotte, N.C., but he knew he wasn’t working in his purpose. In 2012, at age 27, Agnew stopped being a “money-hungry spectator” and started focusing on his purpose when he spoke to his fraternity brothers after hearing about Trayvon Martin.

“My frat brothers called me and said, ‘you’re not supposed to be doing this. You’re supposed to be doing more,’ and they told me about Trayvon Martin,” recalled Agnew.

He had already heard a little about it, but it was 2012 before social media started taking off. He immediately logged on to Facebook, sent a message to some of his college friends and from there they got on a call.

College students from campuses across the state were on this call that is now known as the beginning of

the Dream Defenders. The Dream Defenders marched for 40 days from Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Fla., to Sanford, where Trayvon Martin was killed.

“That movement changed my life and a lot of our lives, so we began to form this organization,” asserted Agnew. “A lot of groups that formed in 2012 when the Dream Defenders did, don’t even exist anymore, so the fact that the Dream Defenders does exist means something to me.”

Attorney Parks is someone Agnew looked up to as a student because Parks is a former SGA student body president who served twice while at FAMU. As a student at FAMU, Agnew watched Parks’ advocacy and his work as an attorney when he represented Martin Lee Anderson and Trayvon Martin.

Parks also served as an attorney for the family of Michael Brown. He said as an HBCU student, he learned that it was necessary to serve his community from his professors and other graduates of the university.

“The number of professors who are involved in and encouraging students to have a voice is far greater on a historically Black campus,” said Parks. “You may on a PWI [predominantly



Jessika Ward

white institution] have a few professors who encourage students to speak up.”

As HBCUs continue their rich history as safe intellectual spaces for African Americans and institutions that help create change in this country, young people will continue to get together to talk about the past, the present, and the way forward. With that, students should do as Parks, Agnew, and Woodall have: learn from the students who came before them.

“Leaderships styles should transcend, and they should never stay the same,” said Parks.

“Study the previous organizations. Don’t start something trying to reinvent the wheel. There are a number of people and groups internationally and in the U.S. who have built probably or tried to build what you’re building now. So, study and look at other organizations and people who have built strong organizations,” explained Agnew.

“Keep love and connection at the center of what you’re building because there’s going to be a lot of hard times and if you lose the love that you have for one another, it can destroy everything.”

Goodwill Job Connection hosting Jan. 20 event to recruit security officers

ST. PETERSBURG – Goodwill’s St. Petersburg Job Connection Center is hosting a recruitment event on Jan. 20 to hire security officers for Allied Universal security services.

The recruitment will occur from 10 a.m. to noon at the Job Connection Center inside the Goodwill store at 2550

34th St. N. in St. Petersburg. Allied Universal is looking to fill armed and unarmed security positions at a pay rate of \$10 - \$19 per hour, based on location and license level.

Applicants should sign in at the Job Connection Center. Interviews will be conducted on-site. Masks are required and social

distancing measures will be observed. For more information, call 727-321-7337.

In addition to hosting recruitment events for businesses, Job Connection Centers offer free services to help individuals with career exploration and job search and access community resources.



Welch took the oath of office at home Thursday after testing positive for COVID-19 on Monday.

MAYOR, from front page

Former Neighborhood Affairs Administrator Rob Gerdes will step into this role, as “his record of collaboration, cross-functional project management, policy development, and community engagement will serve us well in this important work,” Welch stated.

More initiatives and organizational changes will follow, including business process improvement and implementing an effective diversity, equity and inclusion program, Welch noted.

In response to the disparity study results and the findings of the structural racism report, the administration will move intentionally on minority contracting and supplier diversity. The mayor will also incorporate the feedback from the Community Conversations held last month with nearly 500 residents and stakeholders.

“I’m excited to work again with our friends on the county commission, including St. Pete’s own, Commissioner Rene Flowers, and incoming Chair Charlie Justice,” Welch said. “The city’s relationship with our county commission is vitally important and greatly valued.”

Pinellas County provided funding for the Pier and the new police department headquarters, tourist tax dollars to support cultural institutions, a partner in the South St. Petersburg Community Redevelop-



Deputy Mayor Stephanie Owens

ment Area, and will continue to work closely with the city in the science-based response to the COVID pandemic, he said.

“As a step toward building a stronger working relationship, I have asked County Commission Chair Justice and City Council Chair [Gina] Driscoll for a joint meeting of the County Commission, the city council, and the mayor’s office to discuss items of mutual interest, including our partnership with the Tampa Bay Rays,” averred Welch.

Welch also thanked congressional and state legislative leaders for their support and partnership, from the federal American Rescue Plan and Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, to state partnership on the Gateway Express, the SunRunner Bus Rapid Transit, the first BRT in Tampa Bay, and the impactful decision to bring the new courthouse for the 2nd District Court of

Appeal to St. Petersburg.

“When we can work together for these kinds of impactful initiatives, the positive impact on jobs and quality of life for our community is substantial,” he said.

The mayor recognized our business and arts community for their investment in St. Pete.

“Your voice matters and I look forward to working with you to support a culture and environment where business and the arts thrive,” he said. “The arts is a vital part of our culture and economy, and I remain committed to supporting the arts, moving with purpose to support the planned expansion of the Woodson African American History Museum, and to advocate for an adequate and consistent level of funding support for the arts — a level of support that lives up to the moniker of ‘city of arts.’”

Welch pointed out that last week was Kwanzaa and Umoja, the first principle of Kwanza, is reflected in the African proverb: “I AM because WE ARE.” The mayor then his delivered his own personal take on this wise proverb.

“I, for example, am a child of the Gas Plant, where Tropicana Field now stands,” he said. “I am a product of the last segregated schools in Pinellas County and the first truly integrated schools.

“I am the son of Dr. David T. Welch, who served 12 years as a councilmember, and my mother Alletha, our queen, a pillar of wisdom, love, and quiet strength. I am husband to Donna, father to Keonna and Kenya, and our new and rowdy family member, Sunni the rescue pup. And I have a huge and loving human family, including my sister Katrina, my nieces Keina and Andresa, my nephew Tre, and many family members who are watching virtually today.”

When we listen to each other and work to truly understand our viewpoints, Welch said, we grow stronger collectively by building on our individual knowledge and strengths.

“When we do that, we will move past silos, prejudices, and petty politics, and we will be able to build an inclusive path forward,” he asserted.

Welch warned that the conversations may not be comfortable or easy, but it can and must be done because “we are in this together.”

“We are the young person searching for an apartment that doesn’t consume half their salary,” he declared. We are the senior looking for security in their retirement, as the cost of living continues to increase. We are the small business owner struggling to keep the family business

open in the second year of a global pandemic. We are the young people who attended our youth summit in June and spoke to the mental trauma of living with the epidemic of senseless gun violence which plagues some of our neighborhoods.

“We are the LGBTQ student looking for acceptance instead of hostility and prejudice. We are the sons and daughters of the Deuces and the Gas Plant still waiting for the promises of equitable economic development made more than three decades ago.

“We are those hard-working citizens who want their neighborhoods to be safe and healthy places to raise their families — not racetracks or firing ranges or dumping grounds for litter. We are a community that must make responsible decisions on infrastructure, environmental policy, and resiliency to mitigate impacts and adapt to the reality of sea-level rise and climate change.”

We are all of those things and more, Welch said.

“The power of our partnership is in our collective capacity for progress,” he said. “And working together, we will move our city forward, every day. We are St. Pete, and as my father would say, ‘It’s time to get to work.’”

The pre-recorded pro-

gram included local saxophonist Jordan Bolts performing the national anthem, poet Giovanni Cerro reading his work “Ode to St. Pete,” and the new mayor’s sister, Katrina Welch, singing “Order My Steps” accompanied by Jamal Dorsey.

Local writer and director Erica Sutherlin performed the poem “We are St. Petersburg,” written by St. Petersburg’s Terri Lipsey Scott.

Also, the pre-recorded program included the Pledge of Allegiance on the steps of City Hall by 11-year-old Francesca Ramaeka of Lakeview Fundamental, 10-year-old Caleb Nissen, and 8-year-old Liana Nissen, both from Shorecrest Preparatory, and 14-year-old Santana Holt from Bay Point Middle School.

Representing the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths, Pastor Clarence Williams of Greater Mt. Zion AME Church gave the invocation, and the benediction was given by Imam Abdul Karim Ali, president of the Tampa Bay Area Muslim Association, Rabbi Phillip Weintraub, Congregation B’nai Israel of St. Petersburg, and Pastor Renae Phillips, King of Peace Metropolitan Community Church.

To reach Frank Drouzas, email fdrouzas@theweekly-challenger.com

Tampa Bay area faith and community leaders take health to wealth pledge

ST. PETERSBURG – A group of pastors, faith leaders, community influencers, and business owners gathered with great hope and high expectations at the historic Manhattan Casino to recommit to their communities’ physical and economic health.

The invocation for the Collective Empowerment Group of the Tampa Bay Area (CEGTBA) Pre-Summit Strength In Growing Numbers Luncheon was delivered by Pastor Louis Murphy, Sr., CEGTBA vice-chair for Pinellas County and senior pastor at Mt. Zion Progressive.

The I Took the Shot (ITTS) COVID-19 vaccination education and messaging campaign team offered the luncheon that took place on Dec. 30. It was the third of three events offered since November to remind adults and youth of all ages that

our health is our most valuable wealth.

The reason for the sense of urgency is the anticipation of the winter surge in COVID-19 infections and positivity rates due to Omicron, Delta, and other potential new variants!

Following CDC safety precautions, the room buzzed with excitement as the mask-wearing audience of about 50 interfaith and community leaders from throughout the Bay area sent warm acknowledgments to each other and greeted each other with fist bumps and broad covered smiles.

The highlights of the luncheon included a spirited word from Ret. Brigadier General (US Army) Dr. Carrie Nero, former head of the office of minority health division of the Pinellas County Health Department, reminded the audience to take care of our commu-

nity’s health with a military general’s authority.

Rev. Kenny Irby, senior pastor of the 127-year-old Historic Bethel AME Church in St. Pete, taught the history and meaning of Kwanzaa. He emphasized the importance of UMOJA (unity), UJAMA (cooperative economics), and NIA (purpose.)

The keynote speaker, Rev. Dr. R. Joaquin Willis, was introduced by Pastor Clarence Williams, CEGTBA treasurer and senior pastor of Greater Mt. Zion AME. Dr. Willis is vice president of the National Collective Empowerment Group, the retired senior pastor of The Church of the Open Door located in Liberty City, and president and CEO of the Collective Empowerment Group of South Florida, Inc. Miami.

Willis gave a powerfully inspiring message and shared information

regarding his experience collaborating with local governments, lenders, churches, and the Enterprise Foundation to return wealth to the Black community by engaging churches that own properties and leveraging resources for designing and building affordable housing.

For the culminating activity, Dr. Chloe Coney led the audience in reviewing and signing a “Health to Wealth Pledge,” with which attendees reaffirmed their commitment to continue to follow basic health precautions for COVID and promote good health wholistically while working collectively towards the economic empowerment of our communities.

Coney asked leaders and influencers to use their positions to teach and mentor others into generational wealth. Coney is the former dis-

trict director for U. S. Representative Kathy Castor and the founder of the seasoned and highly successful nonprofit Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa, Inc.

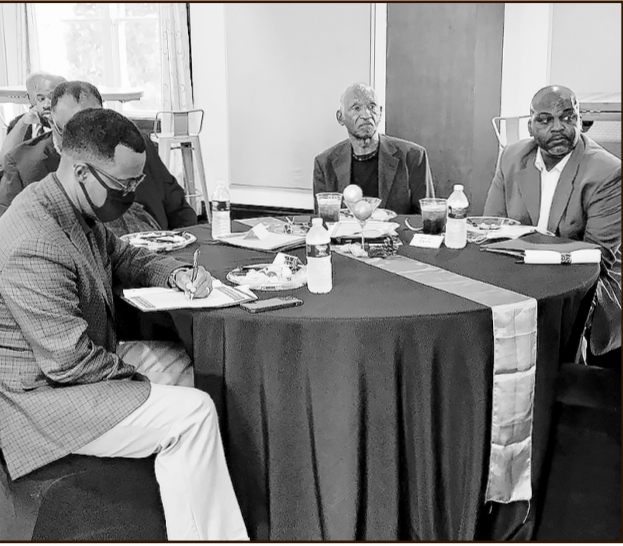
The benediction was delivered by Rev. Watson Haynes II, president of the Pinellas County Urban League. Members of the ITTS Team include Vannetti Carter, Mamie Slaughter, volunteer consultant Rev. Dr. Katurah Jenkins-Hall, and Imam Askia Muhammad Aquil.

“There is indeed strength in growing numbers (SIGN),” said CEGTBA Board Chair and luncheon coordinator Imam Aquil. “This luncheon is a precursor to a larger summit that will serve as a SIGN of collective forward movement towards health and economic empowerment for this community and the Tampa Bay area.

“If influencers work together — regardless of faith, denominations, and creeds around messages and modeling of good health and unity — we can make a lasting difference,” he stated.

Aquil announced that, like many other groups and agencies, CEGTBA had pivoted to community health because of the COVID crisis, but ultimately its mission of it is buying, building, and banking collectively to achieve economic empowerment and to build community wealth.

“However, we must never neglect the health of our community beyond the unanticipated global Covid pandemic. Before COVID, and to this day, there is still high blood pressure, still diabetes, still heart disease, still strokes, and HIV/AIDS, etc. Without question, our health is our wealth,” finished Aquil.



WE ENCOURAGE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Santa Claus & Hope Alive Outreach bring joy to Jordan Park

ST. PETERSBURG – What better time to bring joy to Jordan Park than while the residents are in the middle of moving, preparing for the renovation of 206 units and the building of 60 new units than on Christmas Eve?

Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, and Santa’s elves blessed children in Jordan Park with toys and staple items for the seventh year in a row. Dr. Basha P. Jordan, Jr., CEO of Hope Alive Outreach, enjoys playing Santa ac-

companyed by his wife, Pia, and bringing hope to children through giving.

Pastor Jordan believes in giving back to the community so they’ll know that somebody loves them as Christ has loved us.

The mission of the Hope Alive Outreach is to give hope to all God’s people, especially those who suffer from the disease of addiction to drugs and alcohol. During this COVID-19 pandemic, there is an epidemic of

drug overdoses due to isolation, and many parents cannot provide for their children during Christmas.

This is where the church steps in to sow seeds of love and hope for families, especially the children.

“I love playing Santa, listening to the children tell me what they want for Christmas, and allowing them to experience compassion from a Black Santa Claus,” said Rev. Jordan, better known on

social media as The Hope Dr.

Not only did Santa give out toys, blankets, socks, and winter caps, but he also sang Christmas carols under the direction of Paul Williams. Dr. Jordan also spoke to the crowd about drug prevention and where to get help for recovery.

He prayed for everyone present, asking for God’s divine protection from all harm and danger. Parents and children waited with bated breath

as they won door prizes for bicycles and scooters. At the end of the event, everyone stood in a circle, while Chief Apostle Everette closed with prayer.

The Hope Dr. may be contacted confidentially by calling 443-250-9635 or www.HopeAlive-Outreach.org if you know of someone needing help for addiction to drugs or alcohol.

The afternoon was made possible with partners such as Attorney

Shannon Ligon, Roy Binger, Norm and Judy Hill, Nancy McCann, Stephanie Henningsen, Mt. Zion Progressive Outreach, Crown Mercedes, Marc Lichtenberg, Chief Apostle Dorothy Everette, Pastor Camelia Webster, Rev. Robert Coleman, Paul Jones, Amber Woods, Daniel Henson, Medford Campbell, Glendy Goodsell, Robert Dobbin, Danielle Thomas, COO, & Michael Lundy, CEO, St. Pete Housing Authority.



Wanda's Wish helps comfort the infirmed

BY KARIN DAVIS-THOMPSON
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Aleisha Frazier and Kay-Kay Smith knew they wanted to find a way to honor their mother. The pair said she was a driving force in their lives, but she suffered from various health conditions that often impacted her quality of life and ultimately led to her death.

“From an early age, she suffered from childhood trauma, and later on in life, she was diagnosed with high blood pressure,” Smith said. “Ultimately, she received a diagnosis of

cancer, which led to kidney failure.”

They said seeing their mom so sick was heart-breaking and near impossible to find a way to deal with the different gaps in care they experienced while seeking treatment for her.

In 2018, after she died, they decided to start Wanda's Wish in honor of their mother, Wanda Simpson. The non-profit's mission is to decrease health disparities among the minority population in Pinellas County.

“It was our way of honoring her memory and a way to channel our grief,” Frazier said. “It was also a

way to fulfill her wish that people on dialysis and going through cancer treatment have blankets and things that help them and bring a little comfort.”

They started with their first event on Nov. 16, 2018, their mom's birthday. It has become an annual comfort drive providing items for patients dealing with cancer and or dialysis. Last month, they held their fourth annual drive. The event provided blankets, socks, pill organizers, and essentials for treatment days for patients. Dozens of supplies were given out to participants in need.

Frazier, a licensed

practical nurse for the past 26 years, said starting the non-profit was also a way to give back to communities that don't always get the medical attention they need.

“Over the course of my career, I have seen the consequences of not having adequate health care,” said the 51-year-old. “It is especially prevalent in underserved communities. Those are the communities where I think our organization will make the biggest impact.”

Smith, 49, agrees and said she is looking forward to broadening the non-profit's reach in the community.

“I know we can do so much more,” the podcaster said. “We plan to expand and have more programs that come alongside and help support the patients and promote prevention so that we reduce life and health disparities.”

Both women said they know their mom would be proud of what they are doing.

“My mom was pretty amazing,” Smith said. “She was the kind of person where anybody could come to her home and get a meal, even strangers. She was never afraid to talk to them and encourage them. The last three years of her life were very

hard going through breast cancer treatment and then with her kidneys failing, but she always kept a smile, and she was always encouraging others.”

The sisters are committed to ensuring that their mother's wish to comfort patients in need of support continues to flourish and that Wanda's Wish symbolizes what they want people to remember most about their mom.

“I want my mother's legacy to be one of healing and hope for generations to come,” Smith stated.

For more information about Wanda's Wish, go to www.wandaswishnon-profit.com



Dream Defenders:
The Freedom Column

Read these “freedom books” in 2022

A strong interest in books on race and racism has increased in recent years. After the murder of George Floyd, the country saw tons of protests demanding racial justice across the country. With this increased activism, certain books – “White Fragility” and “The New Jim Crow”

being amongst them — were constantly being sold to readers.

As we enter a new year, it is crucial to continue to educate ourselves on the issues that impact us as Black and Brown people. While educating ourselves, we are also supporting writers from our communities.

Here are 10 of the Dream Defenders' favorite “freedom books” from 2021:

1. “We Do This Til We Free Us” by Mariame Kaba
2. “The 1619 Project” by Nikole Hannah-Jones
3. “Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Free-

dom” by Derecka Purnell

4. “Remake the World” by Astra Taylor
5. “The Other Black Girl” by Zakiya Dalila Harris
6. “While Justice Sleeps” by Stacey Abrams
7. “Me and White Supremacy” by Layla F. Saad

8. “Black Futures” by Kimberly Drew & Jenna Wortham
9. “Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates
10. “The Warmth of Other Suns” by Isabel Wilkerson

2022 reading list

1. “Bitter” by Akwaeke Emezi

2. “Call us What We Carry” by Amanda Gorman
3. “Recitatif: A Story” by Toni Morrison & Zadie Smith
4. “Breath Better Spent: Living Black Girlhood” by DaMaris B. Hill
5. “The Love Songs of W.E.B DuBois” by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers



Jessika Ward



Dream Defenders:
The Freedom Column
The Freedom Papers

Some will tell you that corporations magically make this world go round. They'll tell you that businessmen and women keep the lights on and have the power to call on the sun and send it home at night.

They'll tell you that developers bring life into this world, that their buildings can revive the

blighted and make slums walk again. They'll tell you that bankers and investors are great angels from on high that descend from heavenly penthouses with messages from the Bank of God.

They'll tell you that hell on earth is just a temporary pain to be eased in the bosom of their credit, cars, clothes, and customs. They'll tell you that they saved the day.

They'll tell you that the

real problem ain't them, the REAL problem is your man or your woman, or that Haitian or that nigger or that illegal or that redneck, and if we could just do away with them, we could all do big business better together.

We know better.

We know about their eviction letters and rent hikes. We know about the cut hours, the unpaid overtime, the no insurance. We know about the

crumbling schools, their police and prisons, and our empty wallets, stomachs, and refrigerators.

We can build a state that gives raises to all public-school teachers and bus passes to all our children. We can create a state that refuses to arrest our kids and provides healthcare to us all. If there's a police department, a liquor store, and a check cashing place on every block, why can't

there be a public community center?

We know who really saves our days. Why don't we praise the cook, the cleaner, and the cashier? Why don't we praise the busboy, barback, burger broiler, and bus driver? Why don't we praise the waiter, the welder, and the dishwasher? Why don't we praise the maid or nanny mothering our children and theirs? Why don't we praise the trash men, the last men

to stand with King before he became a holiday?

This state doesn't run on DeSantis, Rubio, Nelson or Rick Scott. It runs on us. We built this brick by brick with our bare hands. Not Tony Goldman, not Ron Book, or Norman Braman. WE DID. We, the forgotten, the trafficked, the disposed of. We are Florida's true power and light, and it's time we got our Freedom Papers.



Jessika Ward



Let's be honest, it's hard out here for a parent!

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The heart to serve

BY DEXTER MCCREE
Feature Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Now that we have come to the close of the holiday season, we can focus again on the increasing number of struggling residents. The year 2021 was challenging for many people. Affordable housing has diminished, while rental rates have skyrocketed. Many families had to decide between household necessities and feeding the children.

Least of all, the COVID-19 pandemic struck pain and fear in families. 'Tis the season was challenging to be jolly.

For the last six years, the St. Petersburg Police department has provided fresh vegetables and other food items to community residents every second Tuesday of the month in the Tangerine Plaza parking lot on 22nd Street and 18th Avenue south.



Joven 'Jo' Jocelyn, an admissions recruiter for St. Petersburg College, served as a vendor fair.

Starting Jan. 11, the new location will be St. Petersburg College, Midtown campus at 1300 22nd St. S, from 4-5:30 p.m.

The outreach effort is one of the many community intervention efforts coordinated by Rev. Kenny Irby, community intervention director with the St. Pete Police Department, to serve the residents of St. Pete in

need and to build positive relationships.

“Responding to the food desert dynamic in the southern region of our city has been a prime opportunity to serve and to help meet an essential need,” explained Irby.

Before COVID-19, the partnership expanded to a full-blown quarterly resource and health fair,

See **HEARTS**, page 12



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COMMUNITY NEWS

12 THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022

www.theweeklychallenger.com

The Weekly Challenger

The heart to serve

HEARTS, from page 11

providing additional needed resources and health care support. Sherri Hoover of Simply Heath Care initially managed it but is now managed by Dedicated Senior Medical Center.

"In the end, the SPPD partners with multiple community service agencies in meeting basic needs of at-risk residents

and creating positive non-enforcement experiences in safe places," said Irby.

Joven "Jo" Jocelyn, an admissions recruiter for St. Petersburg College, served as a vendor fair.

"I enjoy attending the resource and health fairs," he said. "It gives me an opportunity to provide information about starting or continuing education at

SPC. We also hand out a lot of SPC swag and engage in some great conversations that lead to the exchange of contact information for further discussion. Nelson Mandela said, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'"

In December, FIS donated 44 turkeys, which

officers handed out at the Feeding Tampa Bay resource fair.

"It is a fresh force to get people out of hungry lines," said Kim Rainey, Feeding Tampa Bay staff mobile pantry coordinator. "We typically bring 6,000 to 8,000 pounds of fresh food including fruits, vegetables, bread, and meats to distribute to residents.

It is a tremendous help when we partner with other community groups who share the same goal of combating hunger. We are consistently here to serve our neighbors and help always with nutritional food and lots of hope."

St. Petersburg Police Community Service Officers Tan Blackshear and

Carla Ramos enjoy working the health fair because of the interaction with the citizens. Officer Blackshear, who has been involved since its inception in 2016, feels that it is vital for residents to see police officers in a positive light and as regular people rather than the other job duties that sometimes appear unfavorable.



Tan Blackshear, Luis Martinez and Carla Ramos



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My Brother's & Sister's Keeper end of the year celebration

KEEPER, from page 6



Kenny Irby as community intervention director with the St. Pete Police Department, who continues to “make a difference every day,” she said. Kriseman charged Nikki Gaskin-Capehart, then-director of Urban Affairs, with a huge vision: “to breathe life and love and light into our children in a way that ensures their future is as bright as possible.”

Irby pointed out that though St. Pete has distinguished itself in many ways, the My Brother's and Sister's Keeper initiative is unique to the city, unlike any other program in the country. “We in the city of St. Petersburg said that girls are equally at risk and should have the same opportunities as boys,” he said. “We created this unique collabo-

ration in our city.”

Speaking about the Not My Son campaign, Irby said it has been “a celebration of safe activity and outreach programs” for six years. And with the federal government giving the city more funds for such programs, he said the city will be able to take its work “to another level.”



WE ENCOURAGE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR!

JOB FAIR
PINELLAS HEAD START
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10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

WHERE:
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The Community Is Invited

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 2022 Interfaith Memorial Service

REACHING FOR HUMAN EXCELLENCE

Keynote Speaker:
Board of County
Commissioner
Ms. René Flowers

JANUARY 16
3:30 p.m.

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**Sponsored by Interfaith Tampa Bay
and Hillsborough County Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
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stjudesp.org | For more information, call Abdul Karim Ali at 727-560-2567

IT'S ALL ABOUT SUMMER THE DONNA SUMMER MUSICAL

JAN 11-16
MORSANI HALL



Say those words, and you'll immediately feel the beat, the spirit, the heat of the legendary Donna Summer. Her songs smashed every record. Her story shattered every barrier. Now, the queen arrives direct from Broadway.

After a twice extended, sold-out run at San Diego's celebrated La Jolla Playhouse, *SUMMER, The Donna Summer Musical*, partied on Broadway at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre and is now strutting its way across North America on a National Tour.

“Toot toot, hey, beep beep!”

She was a girl from Boston with a voice from heaven, who shot through the stars from gospel choir to dance floor diva. But what the world didn't know was how Donna Summer risked it all to break through every barrier, becoming the icon of an era and the inspiration for every music diva who followed. From Janet Jackson to Beyonce, they all began with Donna.

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Sunday Worship Services.....7:45 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.
Sunday School.....9:00 a.m.
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Wednesday Prayer Service6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study6:30 p.m.
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Sunday Worship Service10:15 a.m.
 Sunday School9:00 a.m.
 Teen Summit (Wednesday)7:00 p.m.
 Bible Study (Wednesday)7:00 p.m.



Rev. Rickey L. Houston,
Pastor

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 MATTHEW 28:18-20, JOHN 15:4-5



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 Sunday Church School: 9:15 a.m.
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 Tuesday Bible Study: 7:00 p.m.

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(727) 327-8708

Sunday Worship Services 8:00 and 11:00 a.m.
 Sunday School.....9:30 a.m.
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 Bible Study (Tuesday)7:00 p.m.
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 Sunday School 9:30 am • Worship Service 11:00 am
 Prayer Meeting (Wednesday) 7 pm
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 (727) 321-0911
www.victorychristiancenterchurch.org

Schedule of Services
 Sunday Worship*
 10:30 a.m.
 Wednesday Bible Study* -7:00 p.m.
 Friday Prayer -7:00 p.m.
 Intercessory Prayer - 9:00 a.m.
 (except Wednesdays)



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INSPIRATIONS
 BY DIERDRE DOWNING-JACKSON

Blessed New Year

As we celebrate the birth of JESUS CHRIST and enter into a brand New Year; May our hearts be thankful and rejoice in GOD's promises we hold so very dear.

GOD has blessed us with His grace, His love and His strength to carry on; Let us honor Him with faith and trust as we 'press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of GOD in CHRIST JESUS' with peace and steadfast calm.

The Holy Spirit will guide and direct us if we just hold on to GOD's extended arm; JESUS is always the truth and the way, and protects us from all harm.

Remember in this season of His birth and the reason JESUS came down to the earth;

Our Heavenly Father sent His only Son to live and die and to give our lives peace on this earth.

May this New Year find you walking by faith, blessed with joy, peace, courage and

love;
 Have a Blessed New Year and always know that our GOD is watching from Heaven above.

Amazing grace will follow you from now until eternity;
 A Blessed New Year, in the presence of GOD, will provide you with great certainty.

Remember to love JESUS CHRIST and with each New Year;
 He will bless your heart with strength and courage so you'll have nothing to fear.

Have a Blessed New Year holding on to your faith;
 Always trust in JESUS, He will forever keep you safe."

AMEN

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."



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Prayer Meeting and Bible Study
Wednesday 7:00 p.m.



Rev. Brian K. Brown

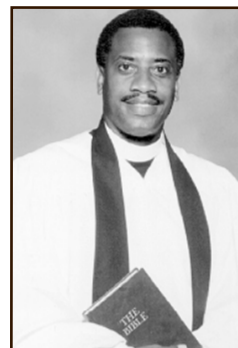
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9:30 a.m. Sunday School (First Sunday Only)
Sunday School 9:15 a.m. / Devotion 10:15 a.m.
Praise & Worship 10:20 a.m. / Worship Services 10:30 a.m.
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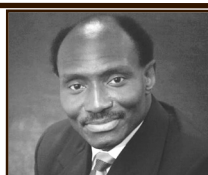
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WORSHIP EXPERIENCES

Sunday Worship8:45 a.m. "The Hour of Power"
Sunday School.....8:00 a.m.
Wednesday in the Word.....
12:30 p.m. via ZOOM - ACCESS CODE: 599-819-6863 PASSWORD: 778769
7:00 p.m. via ZOOM - ACCESS CODE: 509-102-8823 PASSWORD: THESHIP

Our Mission: Friendship Missionary Baptist Church is a family of believers in Christ, reaching out to the world, preaching the gospel to the unsaved and teaching the saved to serve by demonstrating the Love of Christ.

St. Mark M.B. Church

Continuing Christmas – Luke 2:21-31

For most of us Christmas is over but for others they are setting their eyes on what will be done in 2022. Christmas is not about an event but a lifestyle. Every-day God gives us is Christmas. For the believer, we know the greatest gift given is Christ. So, we can't relegate only one day for him. Mary and Joseph do not send Jesus away or put him in a box. They realized the gift of Jesus is a gift of a lifetime.

Are we still continuing Christmas or think it was just a day that has come and gone? What did Mary and Joseph do to continue Christmas? What's expected of us as we continue Christmas? The first point from Pastor Brown from verses 21 through 24 was if we are to continue we are expected to show others our gift as Mary and Joseph did. Mary and Joseph took their gift to the public where he was named and circumstances. They wanted the world to know the gift God had given to them. As we show the world what we got under the tree are we showing the one who died on a tree? We are expected to show our gift.

The second point from

verses 25 through 28 was we are expected to share with others our gift. Are we sharing Jesus with others or denying him until our reasoning says they are worthy to share in knowing Jesus. We shouldn't label people as good or bad but share Jesus with those we know and don't know. Mary and Joseph allowed Jesus to be shared with others because they knew he didn't belong to them. The Spirit of God revealed to Simeon that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died. Simeon, Mary, and Joseph went into the temple, and they allowed Simeon to take Jesus into his arms. Mary and Joseph not only knew that Jesus was their gift, they knew he was also the gift to the world. It was their job to share Jesus with others. Have we shared Jesus with others? We shouldn't put restrictions on who we share Jesus with.

The final point from verses 29 through 31 was we are expected to service others with our gift. We are to step back and let Jesus do the work. Simeon was an old man whose days would be ending soon, but he knew he wouldn't die until he had seen Jesus and after seeing him he spoke to God know-



Rev. Brian K. Brown,
Pastor

ing he could die in peace because he had seen Jesus and he knew by Jesus Israel could be saved. It does not matter how we find others; we can leave them better than how we found them when they are serviced by the Lord. Real peace isn't found in things but knowing that the Lord will make a way.

St. Mark will have its annual Watch Night Service on December 31, 2021, beginning at 10:30 p.m. in the sanctuary. The service will also be live streamed. We will also begin the new year on the first Sunday, January 2, 2022, with our Parking Lot Communion Service beginning at 9:00 a.m. You're invited to join us for these services as well as each Sunday morning in the sanctuary or via live-stream on YouTube @ St Mark MBC at 10:20 for Sunday School, worship service at 10:45 a.m., and bible study on Wednesdays @ 7:00 p.m.

Him. When we are in fellowship with God, we should be careful to affirm our appreciation for what God has done in our lives and never promote ourselves or enter into fellowship with a boastful heart.

Equally important to the concept of Facing Forward, is point three: "Don't Face What's Forward Without Faith in God." Let's examine what faith is, faith is a confident expectation that God will make good on every promise. Moreover, faith is being sure of what we hoped for and certain of what we do not see; without faith it is impossible to please God. As believers, we must patiently wait for God as He reveals every hour, day, and month to us. In God's world, we can exchange what we have and believe in faith for what God has for us, as a "better deal." In other words, if we have right facts with God, have been in right fellowship with God, and have right faith in God then, whatever we have now is inferior to what we will have with God. Letting go of what we currently have so that God can give us something greater to hold on to is the connection that allows us to move forward in God and with God!

connected to God and discover what He has for each us through destiny and deliverance.

To begin, moving forward with intention, and going forward with God shows us what we need to know. "Facing What's Forward," this growth mindset allows us to know God better, an opportunity to realize where we can serve God bigger, and ultimately the opportunity to shine for God brighter. First, let us consider three points to review as we face what's forward. (Verse 3) highlights that we should ensure we "Don't Face What's Forward Without Facts about GOD!" Realizing we can do all things through Christ Jesus, but nothing without HIM. It is imperative that you and I are cautious in our thinking, and we do not allow any door to open in our lives thinking we can handle it on our own. We cannot!

The second consideration, is developed through the understanding presented in verse 4, "...by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain..." Point two Christian friends, "Don't Face What's Forward Without Fellowship with God." Fellowship with God requires using the time to learn more about



Pastor's Corner

BY REV. DR. DORAL R. PULLEY,
SPIRITUAL LEADER
TODAY'S CHURCH Tampa Bay

Way of Speaking

"...If anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them (Mark 11:23)."

Prayer is two-way communication between you and God. Prayer impacts what you say to yourself about yourself. Instead of putting yourself down, calling yourself names, or being overly critical of yourself, prayer inspires you to love yourself, to speak positive words of affirmation to yourself, and to be patient

with yourself.

Not only does prayer impact your "self-talk," prayer effects what you say to others and how you say it. Talking to God empowers you to boldly speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Your communication with God reflects itself in your communication with others (Colossians 4:6). If your prayers are one-way where you talk, and God listens, then you may struggle to listen to others and allow them to speak without interruption. The continual practice of listening, not just

talking, to God strengthens your ability to listen to others.

After teaching his disciples about prayer, Jesus, the perfect pattern, taught his disciples to speak in faith to the situations in their lives, which appeared to be mountains. He reminded them of the power of their words and the ability that they had to create the lives that they desired and deserved. You have that same authority to drown the mountains of your life in the sea of God's presence.

Praying with others

"If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 18:19)."

One of the most powerful things you can do as a human being is to pray for yourself. One of the greatest accomplishments of this life is developing a consistent, open, and honest dialogue with your Creator, God. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much (James 5:16)." Although it may seem like a play on words, there is a major difference in praying with someone and praying for someone.

Your prayer life may begin with someone praying

for you because you do not know how to pray or be knowledgeable of the truth that you can talk directly to God for yourself or even that there is a God in which to pray. Maybe you asked someone to pray for you because you were angry with God or disenchanted by those who represent God. Someone may have jumped started your prayer experience by sharing with you their testimony of the power of prayer. Nevertheless, the goal is for you to learn to pray for yourself and to pray with others when necessary.

Jesus gave his disciples a structure to use for prayer until they were comfortable to

develop their style and format of prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Once you learn to pray, you can empower people to establish and maintain a relationship with God through their own prayer lives. You can support people in prayer and pray with them, but people mustn't become dependent on you to pray for them. You can provide people with prayer tools and, at the same time, tell them that your prayers are no more powerful than theirs. It may appear that way because you have more experience with prayer or do it more often; nevertheless, prayer is a tool, and the more you use it, the more proficient you become.



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INSTRUCTOR & SPIRITUAL LEADER

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PART 2

TO LIFE MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION
THURSDAYS AT 7PM

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Forward together.

Our community's voices guide us to a world of compassion, understanding, and equality. This Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we honor how his lessons and legacy continue to pave the way forward.

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