

Bishop T.D. Jakes: We Cannot Continue as if We Live in a Post-Racial Society

Bishop T.D. Jakes, *New York Times* best-selling author, leader and speaker, will join Bishop Harry Jackson, one of the nation's most prominent African-American pastors, in hosting the "Healing the Racial Divide" summit Jan. 15 at The Potter's House. The forum, comprised of approximately 75 racially and culturally diverse Christian faith leaders from around the nation, including former Atlanta mayor and U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young, will take practical steps toward racial reconciliation across America.

"Healing the Racial Divide" is strategically scheduled on the actual birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—four days before the annual King Day commemoration and approximately two weeks before the start of Black History Month—in an effort to spark a national dialogue and develop national solutions.

"It was Dr. King who said that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," said Bishop Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter's House, one of the largest congregations in the U.S with more than 30,000 members. "We cannot continue as if we live in a post-racial society, when there is mounting evidence to the contrary. Recent history is loudly telegraphing the need for a meaningful dialogue on race."

The summit will focus on seven "Bridges to Peace" community initiatives including:

- Reconciliation and prayer forums;
- Education policy reform;
- Community engagement forums;
- Community service and compassion outreaches;
- Personal, marriage and family development;

- Engagement with the criminal justice system; and
- Economic development strategies.

Additionally, summit conveners are publicly requesting President Barack Obama to specifically address educational reforms, urban economic development policies and criminal justice reforms that can heal the racial divide during his Jan. 20 State of the Union.

“The recent events in Missouri, New York, and elsewhere were short-term flashpoints to an underlying long-term problem,” said Bishop Jackson. “In a divided society, the church needs to lead the way for societal reform by modeling unity and acting as a force of peace. The polarization of our nation can be shifted by healing racial divisions in the church, where we have a common language and mission.”

The all-day “closed door” leadership summit will begin with a private prayer session followed by four prescriptive panel discussions of best practices around the country and potential solutions to heal racial division. Mid-afternoon, leaders will gather for an interactive session with invited media to summarize their conclusions. A public worship service, commissioning individuals to go out and work for reconciliation, will be held that evening, during which leaders will sign a covenant of reconciliation.

“We must begin the conversation in the church where every significant movement impacting the lives of African-Americans has begun,” said Jakes. “But this is not our fight alone. This is America’s burden as well as her opportunity to rightfully tilt the scales toward justice for all. This is also a tremendous opportunity for the church to be the light in what have been very dark days for our country!”

Organizers noted that although King once said “that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11 o’clock on Sunday morning,” the summit will be racially diverse. In

addition to Bishop Jakes, Young and Bishop Jackson, other conveners include:

- Dr. Alveda King, pastoral associate and director of African-American outreach for Priests for Life and Gospel of Life Ministries and niece of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.;
- Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference/CONELA;
- Dr. Tony Evans, senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and founder and president of The Urban Alternative;
- James Robison, founder and president of LIFE Outreach International and co-host of LIFE Today TV;
- Dr. R.A. Vernon, founder and senior pastor of The Word Church; and
- Dr. Jim Garlow, senior pastor at Skyline Church, among others.

“The Bible declares, ‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,’” said Robison. “America has become a powder keg of division, hostility, anger and hate that can only be calmed through the hope and peace offered by Father God and His Son Jesus.”

Bishop Jackson has worked with Bishop Raphael Green and the Urban Regents Coalition, both in the metropolitan St. Louis area, to develop the seven “Bridges to Peace” community initiatives that will be discussed at the Jan. 15 summit.

“Right now, all we hear is despair, discouragement and hopelessness, which is compounding the problem,” Bishop Jackson concluded. “But if we highlight solutions and get people to work immediately, it will catch on.”