

T.D. Jakes: 'We Cannot Remain Silent on This Issue'

A racially, denominationally, geographically and generationally diverse representation of nearly 100 pastors, civic and faith leaders from across the country gathered for an unprecedented summit on racial reconciliation at The Potter's House in Dallas Thursday. Convened by Bishops Harry Jackson, T.D. Jakes and Pastor James Robison, "The Reconciled Church: Healing the Racial Divide" summit focused on Seven Bridges to Peace and included four panel discussions in which the participants shared practical solutions that they have successfully implemented in their respective communities. They also strategized other initiatives that can be scaled for national roll out.

Host Bishop Jakes welcomed attendees, saying, "The church should lead the way; we can't complain about Congress and community if we don't communicate with one another. We all love our children; let's talk about how we can make our country better for subsequent generations.

"We have one brief shining moment to say, 'Not on my watch,'" Jakes continued. "We cannot remain silent on this issue, because our silence is costing lives. I'm praying that we would care enough to do better with the resources and influence that we have.

"We can't fix the problem today, that's not even the goal," Jakes added. "This is a forum for discussion and debate, but we need to focus on what we will work on, including education and the criminal justice system. We can do better regarding civic engagement in our churches."

Bishop Jackson shared his vision for the summit, to encourage the church to come together to address the three-fold problem

of class, race and poverty. "Church leaders need to go up into the gap and be courageous and catalytic to make a difference," he said. "We want to leave here with a declaration, a challenge and a prescription for our nation.

"The church is divided black and white, and not as connected as we should be," Jackson continued. "The first thing we can do is come together united as the church. A group like this can shake the foundations of the nation—for God and for good."

"With all my heart I believe the purpose of this meeting is to bring together the body of Christ without all of the dissension, strife and division that keeps us apart and from fulfilling the will of God," James Robison said.

Other key participants included Dr. Bernice King, CEO of The King Center in Atlanta and daughter of Martin Luther King Jr.; legendary civil rights leader and former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young; Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference/Conela; and Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, among others.

Several participants admonished the church for not taking action. "Today's complacency is tomorrow's complicity," said Rev. Rodriguez. "There is no such thing as a silent Christianity."

This theme was echoed by Pastor Jack Graham, senior pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. "There are a lot of good people in our churches who are sinfully silent," he said. "It is our responsibility to engage them on what matters most."

The timing of the summit was propitious, occurring on the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s, actual birthday, which was referenced by his daughter. Reminding attendees that her father was a pastor and that the civil rights movement originated in the church, she thought it a fitting tribute to

his legacy that faith leaders were once again taking the lead in the area of racial reconciliation.

“The church was one of the institutions (my father) criticized in his letter from the Birmingham jail,” King reflected. “He was deeply disappointed that there was not more engagement by the church in the issue of segregation in the South at that time. Unfortunately, we have had a stand-off posture since then, and 11 AM on Sunday is still the most segregated hour in America.”

Four panel discussions were led by leaders with experience among the key “Bridges to Peace” and covered such topics as community engagement, education policy, economic development and criminal justice system reform. A summary of the ideas and strategies shared will be distributed in follow-up to all of the participants for adapting in their churches and communities.

Economics was identified as a key factor, which Ambassador Young highlighted in a news conference following the panel sessions. “Poverty is probably worse now than in Dr. King’s time,” he said “It’s not a black and white problem; it’s not a black and blue issue; it’s a green issue,” he said.

“Today we had four ‘Cs’ of Christ, conversation and collaboration that will lead to change,” said African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Vashti McKenzie. “The body of Christ came together in unprecedented conversation. We must be role models for people who look to us for leadership.”

The group also agreed to forward several recommendations to President Obama to address in his State of the Union next week and to members of Congress, asking them to focus on these issues: removing inequity in the allocation of funding for education; redesigning public school funding strategies; removing the disparity between urban and rural areas in education; and expressing support for President Obama’s push

to fully fund early childhood education across the nation. Additionally, criminal justice system reforms, such as the REDEEM Act and the Second Chance Act should be given greater emphasis.

“We want to call upon President Obama to address in his State of the Union how to make a difference in the lives of people who need a little time,” Jackson concluded. “We have to understand that hopeless and helpless people do desperate things. We have to understand that people feel like life just isn’t fair. But I’m here to tell you that there is hope in the gospel. We can turn America around.”

The day’s events concluded with a worship and communion service at The Potter’s House, which was attended by more than 6,000 individuals.