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**Spirit of the City 2018**  
*Religious Leaders Recommend Policies for Mayor and City Council*

*Introduction*

We, representatives from the religious leaders of New York City, assembled under the banner of the Micah Institute, welcome you to our inaugural address on the Spirit of the City.

**Acknowledgment of God.** It is customary on these occasions to acknowledge and thank elected officials and other public servants who dedicate themselves to the common good through the means of government. We break from this custom to acknowledge and thank God, who is love, mercy, and justice—who is the source of all power and who teaches us how to use power for the benefit of the human family. To God alone belongs all praise, to God alone belongs all glory, to God alone belongs the destiny of the beloved community that is rising from the streets of New York City. We, as ministers and leaders of New York’s faith communities, acknowledge that we are not worthy to speak in God’s name, nor are we fully capable of speaking on behalf of the diverse peoples of this city, of what Mayor David Dinkins called in his inaugural address the “gorgeous mosaic.” But in humility we submit ourselves to the will of the God who brings hope and not despair, peace and not violence, enrichment and not impoverishment, harmony and not discord, welcome and not rejection. And in amity we open our hearts and extend our hands to every person of every race and nation, of every religion, of every class, of every orientation, of every persuasion, without condition and without exception.

**Acknowledgment of religious leaders.** We also wish to recognize the religious leaders of the Micah Institute whose vision and voice have shaped our reflections today. We acknowledge Micah Institute co-conveners Rev. Dr. Raymond Rivera, president and senior pastor, Latino Pastoral Action Center, Bronx, and Rev. Michael Walrond, pastor of First Corinthian Baptist Church, Harlem; and Rev. Dr. Peter Heltzel, New York Theological Seminary, co-founder of the Micah Institute. For their input in this address we are grateful to Rev. Dr. Karyn Carlo, an American Baptist pastor; Rabbi Michael Feinberg, director of the Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition; Rev. Dr. Gwendolyn Hadley-Hall of the roundtable African American Clergy and Elected Officials of Brooklyn; Rev. Clyde Kuemmerle, director of Ecclesia Ministries of New York; Bishop Dr. Raymond H. Rufen-Blanchette, chair of the Clergy Campaign for Social and Economic Justice; and Dr. Diane Steinman, director of the Interfaith Network for Immigration Reform. These are just some of the thought leaders who have informed our work.

**Theme: the inequality crisis continues.** In this address we will advocate for systemic changes in our city without fear or favor—and from a faith-rooted perspective. We believe God walks with all of us in our city. With Jews we believe that love and truth have met, and justice and peace have kissed in our city. With Christians we believe that what you do to the least of your brothers and sisters in our city, you do it to the Holy One who judges the nations. With Muslims we believe that Allah the beneficent and merciful is the nourisher and sustainer of our city, as of all the worlds. With Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs, we stand as one people, one in creation. With all people of good will, we affirm with Martin Luther King Jr. that “We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny, an inescapable network of mutuality. I can never be what I ought to be until you are allowed to be what you ought to be.”

One year ago, at his annual address, the mayor gave us, the residents of New York, a simple message: “This is your city.” We in the faith community received this message more as a declaration of hope than a statement of fact. As a people of hope we can readily embrace the utopian spirit of this message. But as a people called to speak truth to power, we must acknowledge today that this statement is false. It is a promise to every resident, yet to be fulfilled. New York City is still the “tale of two cities” of which the mayor spoke in his first campaign four years ago. For those with the means and the privileges, New York is the city of dreams. For the rest of us, who lack the good fortune of education, health, housing, work, and social acceptance, the city is a dustbin of dreams deferred. The mayor was closer to the mark when in his 2017 address he said the “affordability crisis ... threatens the very soul of the city.” The tale of two cities is about the affordability crisis. It is an economic crisis. But more than this, we declare that the tale of two cities is an inequality crisis. It is about the inferior status of immigrants in our city and their vulnerability to a racist, immoral federal immigration policy. It is about the enduring prejudice that people of color suffer in their encounters with law enforcement, from harassment to deadly escalations, and with the criminal justice system. It is about the scapegoating of homeless people and a never-ending passing of the buck where it concerns responsibility for their well-being. It is about the disdain of developers for the integrity of vibrant communities and the lack of charity from landlords for tenants living on fixed income in substandard housing. The mayor is right to affirm that “We have to fight an inequality that has grown.” We, as members of the religious communities of New York City, vow to fight this fight alongside the mayor and any other public servants who stand in solidarity with the abused, the exploited, and the neglected. Together we shall overcome these inequalities.

## ***Policy Recommendations***

Today we wish to speak to several matters of governance. We, the representatives of New York's faith communities, bring a particular focus on five points where we ask the mayor and City Council to covenant with us: economic justice, education, homelessness and housing, immigration, and police reform. With *the fierce urgency of now* we recommend policies for the City Council and mayor to pursue with all deliberate speed, for justice delayed is justice denied.

### ***Economic Justice: A Real Living Wage Commission***

**Affordability for low-income workers.** Fair and just economic relations set the moral as well as the material foundation of civilized society. We the leaders of the Micah Institute have heard the cry of the working people of New York. They have taught us that the affordability crisis must be met on two fronts: the cost of living, and wages. These two fronts meet in every household of the city. We are all too aware that the rent alone busts far too many family budgets. Too many parents struggle to feed, clothe, and educate their children, or nurse their loved ones when they suffer illness. We dream of a city where everyone who is able earns sufficient wages, and all people go home to a hearth where they can love and be loved.

And let us be clear: it is not enough to create high-income jobs for the professional elite when a shocking number of ordinary New Yorkers toil in low-income service jobs. Nor is it acceptable to permit highly profitable businesses to hire more workers under conditions that fall at or below the minimum standards of dignity and self-sufficiency. Job creation is no justification for exploitation of laborers. A plan of economic development must be complemented by a plan of economic resurrection. It is necessary to raise up the incomes of the people paid the least—all across the service economy, from the fast food franchises to the four-star restaurants, from the

airports to the hotels and in the tourist trade, in health care services, in the car washes, in the janitorial and security trades, and in the retail stores and the supermarkets.

Accordingly, Micah has proclaimed the Real Living Wage Campaign as a faith-rooted movement toward economic justice. As the key component of our campaign, we recommend that Mayor de Blasio and the City Council establish a commission that will report what is a realistic and viable living wage for all persons employed in New York City.

**Definition of self-sufficiency wage.** We define a living wage as one that will enable workers and their families to be self-sufficient and fulfill their aspirations. We believe the question of a living wage is best addressed at the municipal level. We deeply appreciated the mayor signing an executive order on Sept. 30, 2014, enacting a sweeping expansion of the Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act that raised the wages for employees in businesses subsidized by the city. The order could not help all workers, of course, and the wage increase was not high enough. More relief came when Governor Cuomo signed an act on April 4, 2016, to increase the minimum wage in New York State to \$15 an hour. We commend the governor for this act. However, this measure will not cover all workers in New York City until the end of 2019. By then, the cost of living in the city is certain to be much higher than it is today.

This is why we seek greater autonomy for the city in the decisions that will enable us to overcome poverty. This is why we call for a City Living Wage Commission to define objectively what a self-sufficiency wage would be for all New Yorkers.

**Membership of commission and timetable for report.** We recommend that the Commission consist of a member of the Office of the Mayor; a City Council member; a representative from the Clergy Advisory Council; a representative from the Economic Development Corporation; a

labor leader; a community activist; and three economists.

We urge the Commission to begin its work by June 1, 2018, and release its report by December 31, 2018, for review by the Mayor's Office, the City Council, the Clergy Advisory Council, and other relevant agencies. The report would include the annual self-sufficiency wage for New Yorkers, which would be adjusted to changes in the cost of living; analysis of economic trends; and policy recommendations.

Such a Commission will meet the need for an accurate and up-to-date analysis of income and wealth disparities in the city with both public and private employees who are salaried, hourly employees, and/or those working for tips. It will also address the need for a true self-sufficiency wage citywide.

Once the Commission determines the real living wage for 2019, the City can begin an effort to convince the Governor and state legislators to work with the Mayor to enact the policies necessary to make New York City truly affordable for all its residents.

### **Education: *The Gateway to Escaping Poverty***

**Lift up struggling schools; extend universal pre-K.** The New York City public education system is the largest in America, serving more than 1.25 million students in more than 1,800 separate educational settings to include the expanded Universal Pre-Kindergarten early childhood education programmatic, with an annual budget of \$25 billion. More than 40 percent of the systems students reside in households where either English is not the primary language, or more than one language is spoken, reflecting the demographic reality that more than one-third of all city residents were born in another country. Hispanic students comprise 40 percent of the student population while representing 29 percent of the total population of the city; African-

American students comprise 31 percent of this student population, however representing 25 percent of residents; non-Hispanic whites comprise 14 percent of the student population although this same demographic represents almost 44 percent of the total population of the City. Students of Asian descent comprise 15 percent of the student population while comprising a little more than 13 percent of the total population of the City.

The NYC Department of Education has made notable strides in improving public education for our City's children; however, the DOE is compelled to do more in an effort to fundamentally eradicate systemic inequity, inequality, and pervasive indigence within the school system and the communities that it serves. The struggle to bring children, who hail from every language and culture to functional literacy across the core disciplines of oral and written English, mathematics, science and technology, the arts and humanities continues, and the obstacles of poverty and culture compound this challenge. But these efforts are insufficient at the core of where 21st-century education policy and pedagogy needs to be in NYC. The DOE ranks fifth among the nation's most segregated public school systems, with the greatest segregation in black neighborhoods, and this racial isolation persists even as residential segregation in these communities decline, not because of upward mobility but due mainly to adverse gentrification and the threat of homelessness, housing insufficiency, and inaffordability.

Poverty is violence. Mayor de Blasio has fought for continued mayoral control of the DOE. If the mayor wants control of public education, then he must share that control with parents, and he must be held accountable for the institutional inequity, inequality, and ravages of poverty that pervade the DOE. This Administration, over the next four years, must work to guarantee the right of every child to a sound, fundamental UPre-K through 12 public school education embracing the cultural diversity of the City and rejecting institutional racism. We applaud the

implementation of quality full day UPre-K and kindergarten, but we ask the question: What about the schools that students will encounter in their communities as they emerge from these progressive early childhood education programs? We support hiring more guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers and mental health support staff from UPre-K through 12th grade throughout the system. However, we demand that this Administration and the Panel for Educational Policy comprising the NYC/DOE recognize the violence that is the poverty impacting the lives of the students within this system; and institutionalize a programmatic within DOE addressing the impacts of “the violence of poverty” and the impact of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) on behavior and childhood health.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is childhood exposure to emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse, household dysfunction and trauma, including the trauma and dysfunction of close family member incarceration, housing, and food insecurity; resulting in health risk behavior and the manifestation of fear, anxiety, and coincident depression; leading to severe mental illness and disease in childhood, adolescence, and throughout adulthood. This is the rudimentary core of the school-to-prison pipeline. By addressing this science, we can end the school-to-prison pipeline and its deleterious impacts in New York City. We advocate for an education pedagogy that embraces the diversity of manners in which all children learn and demand that DOE reject draconian programs of standardized testing and rote linear instruction while addressing system-wide the factors that cause ACEs in children, impeding their ability to learn.

**Stop the undermining of public education for all.** The DOE cannot engage a campaign of school closures, chastising the failures of SURR and Renewal Schools, without fundamentally



addressing the core issues that manifest in failing community institutions. Charter school education has for a decade been used as a political edge weapon to divide communities, undermining community leadership together with society's core commitment to high quality public school education. We hold that charters cannot be expanded at the expense of the over one million children who depend upon our system of public education. We support public charter school programs fought for, supported, and run by the communities within which those institutions serve. Parents of color, in particular, see public schools as failures, which is why they flock to the illusion and panacea of charter school education. So it is time for public schools to stop failing our children, and for politicians to stop using charter education as a wedge issue to polarize community. We do not support and continue our fight against corporate charter school programs, in particular, charters funded by Wall Street hedge fund ideologues using wealth and societal position to leverage public education dollars to the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, undermining public education for all. These institutions threaten civil society's commitment to public education. We further demand that charter programs be held to the same standard of accountability and innovation in policy, pedagogy and financially as all public school programs throughout the DOE. We will no longer allow student behavior to be used as a wedge issue humiliating parents in NYC schools, or for educators to have families believe that there is something wrong with their child when behavioral issues arise. Chronic behavioral issues arise in children as a manifestation of deeper problems of abuse and dysfunction in families and the communities within which they live, of which children have no control.

**School safety and anti-bullying.** We demand that DOE systemically cease and desist from blaming the victims, our children, and provide the innovative progressive policy, pedagogy, and psychosocial support that our children require in order to succeed. School safety is a function of

dysfunctional community, not dysfunctional children. Bullying in schools is a function of children taking out anxieties and aggression on peers that they perceive as vulnerable. We're deeply grieved by the fatal stabbing of Matthew McCree at Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Preservation in the Bronx, the first murder in a city school in 25 years. What's more tragic is that the student who is alleged to have committed the stabbing is alleged to have been bullied by Matthew's taunting. We believe that if an ACE Programmatic had been established within that school that such a tragedy would have been averted. Now that same school has been targeted for closure, and it was never a SURR or Renewal School in the recent past. Now, all of the children served by the vision of that institution will suffer, because the school was not equipped to deal with the impacts of ACEs.

New York City's Department of Education must become the institutional gateway for our City's children to escape poverty. The DOE cannot invest \$20,000 annually per child in a system of over one million students without giving our children the dynamic equipment of emotional and psychosocial support they need to learn and to overcome dysfunction.

### ***Housing and Homelessness: Stop Displacement; Build, Preserve Affordable Housing***

We turn now to one of the gravest inequalities of the hour—housing—and one of the central challenges of the mayoral administration: homelessness. In the last decade more than 10,000 blocks of our neighborhoods have been rezoned, pricing out the very people who created those neighborhoods, making it impossible for them to remain in their homes. And we have lost over 200,000 units of rent-controlled and stabilized housing in the last 20 years. New York City's homeless census reached a new high in 2017, with more than 63,000 persons in shelters, as reported by the Coalition for the Homeless in November. The cost of sheltering a family in a

commercial hotel rose to over \$5,000 per month in some cases. Health and safety conditions in the some of the worst facilities are deplorable.

As people of faith, we believe that all human beings have a right to be adequately and appropriately housed. Our institutions, specifically the City of New York, should be committed to making extraordinary efforts to ensure this outcome. Mayor de Blasio published “Housing New York,” a five-borough, 10-year plan, and “Turning the Tide on Homelessness,” setting forth goals and aspirations for the city and for his administration with regard to these seemingly intractable problems. Though we have taken issue with some elements of these policy statements, we heartily commend our mayor’s foresight and diligence in making these initiatives public and open to critique. He is the first mayor to do so in more than 50 years.

We have supported numerous City Council actions with mayoral approval, as well as actions by the mayor in 2017. At the same time, the righteous needs of our community call us onward to a higher justice, a justice found at the core of all peoples’ faiths.

In “Turning the Tide on Homelessness,” the administration proposes to create 90 community-based facilities, with a much richer offering of services to assist families and individuals striving to get back on their feet. While there have been some incidents of NIMBYism in the face of some of these facility placements, there are also examples of community-based faith-community coalitions who have served as “hospitality congregations” to welcome their new neighbors. The mayor’s Center for Faith and Community Partnerships is exploring ways in which religious coalitions such as the Micah Institute could play a positive role in the effort to welcome and support these new facilities.

We commend Mayor de Blasio’s use of eminent domain to allow the city to acquire 1,100 “cluster

sites” that consigned thousands of residents to substandard shelter and bled New York financially. The plan is to rehabilitate these sites and put them into the hands of responsible overseers. This will provide permanent housing for thousands of people currently in the shelter system.

**Anti-displacement victories and proposals.** One of the best ways to fight homelessness is to prevent displacement. Two recent victories at the city level—the Right to Counsel and the Certificate of No Harassment—are very important advances, but each will require significant outreach and education to make them as effective as possible. The Right to Counsel will guarantee certain low-income tenants free legal representation in eviction court. But the roll-out will take five years, with residents of only three ZIP codes per borough per year becoming eligible. The Certificate of No Harassment requires tenant vigilance to be most effective, as the onus lies with tenants to report violations. We believe there is role for the faith community in educating tenants through campaigns of congregational outreach.

Going forward, we call upon the City Council and the mayor to initiate and approve legislation that would require reasonable anti-displacement measures in all pending zoning changes and future zoning plans. This protection would also cover small neighborhood businesses. We seek these laws because developers have a moral obligation to communities to keep current residents and business owners in place. In the meantime, it’s crucial that faith communities continue to work with tenant rights organizations in monitoring the rezoning plans that have been approved as well as those being proposed—as in Inwood, for example—to ensure the highest percentage of low-income housing possible.

**Redefine criteria for affordability.** In addition to preserving the affordable housing that already exists, we seek the construction of new affordable housing units. We approve the Housing Not

Warehousing Act, which mandates a continuing census of all vacant property based on city data and identifies city-owned vacant properties appropriate for development. And Mayor de Blasio revised his housing plan, raising the goal to 300,000 affordable housing units, while also increasing the number of lower-income units in that figure. But the affordability crisis remains severe. Too many city residents are forced to pay 50 to 65 percent of their income toward housing. Our goal is to achieve a reduction to the humane standard of 33 percent. Therefore, we ask the mayor to lobby the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for a more localized, rational Area Median Income, the statistic that determines the threshold of affordability for local development purposes. Factoring Long Island and Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester Counties into the NYC Area Median Income badly skews the numbers and sets an unrealistic standard of affordability that our poorest working citizens cannot meet.

**Supportive housing; home stability support.** We also need to bring the state government to a more reasonable understanding of the city's needs with regard to affordable housing for low-wage workers and the elderly who are being forced out. Fortunately, there is progress on a few fronts.

Supportive housing provides homes for individuals with special needs who would otherwise be homeless. With recent commitments from the city and state to construct 35,000 units of supportive housing over the next 15 years, significant new funds will be available to build supportive and affordable housing. There are efforts to assist faith communities in exploring the utilization of their properties to stabilize their finances and sponsor this housing. Albany's commitment to 20,000 units over 15 years is allocated statewide to various special needs populations. The city commitment is restricted to units for individuals with mental disabilities, but they can be used in facilities where 50 percent of the units are "affordable" for low-income people.

Another effort just getting underway aims to sustain the operations of 40,000 supportive housing units statewide. The operating costs for supportive housing and associated programs for its residents are increasing significantly. A new campaign, called “Bring It Home: Better Funding for Better Care,” is seeking additional funding in the state budget to increase reimbursement rates so supportive housing programs can keep up with rising costs. We hope the mayor and City Council will be advocates for this funding, as a plurality of these supportive housing units are located here in the city.

In addition, we recommend income support for those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. Home Stability Support is a state initiative that would authorize the use of “shelter funds” for rental subsidies for persons who reside in shelters, or for households on the brink of homelessness. Home Stability Support would provide funds to pay up to 85 percent of the prevailing rents statewide for all who qualify. City Comptroller Scott Stringer has estimated that if Home Stability Support were implemented, family homelessness could be reduced by 80 percent here within 10 years. We ask for the mayor and City Council to get behind this initiative and work with Albany to make it a reality.

### **Police Reform: *Transparency and Accountability***

Nowhere does the persistence of unequal treatment have greater ramifications for the life, liberty, and welfare of our neighbors than in the area of public safety. The New York Police Department commands a power that is idolized in some communities but is feared in many others. It is a power that needs to be monitored constantly. On the front of police reform, there is both good news and bad news. On the positive side, the NYPD has begun quantifying and documenting the level of community satisfaction with the police on a precinct-by-precinct basis. We hope this information

will be taken seriously when it comes to the performance evaluations of precinct commanders and will become more widely publicized to the public. Community policing is up, with precinct patrols reorganized so that there are more foot patrols, and fewer transitions between precincts, so officers get to know the communities they patrol. We are also pleased to know that, in this era of increasing bias against immigrants, New York City strives to be a sanctuary city and, with some notable exceptions, mandates that the NYPD does not cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the unjust deportation of immigrants. Additionally, the city seems to be making good on its promise to close Rikers Island as quickly as possible and move remaining prisoners to borough-based facilities. One facility is already closed. We look forward to seeing the rest follow suit. We will work with the mayor to ensure that Rikers closes with all deliberate speed—not in 10 years—and that all prisoners are treated humanely and with dignity. Also on the positive side is the City Council approval of at least part of the Right to Know Act, which requires officers to explicitly convey a person's right to refuse a search.

**Training and cultural sensitivity.** However, many problematic aspects of law enforcement in New York City remain, particularly in the areas of *transparency and accountability*. Although part of the Right to Know Act was approved, another section of the original bill, which would require officers to identify themselves in non-emergency encounters and explain the reason for the interaction, did not pass. This is a significant setback to positive police-community relations. In addition, while there has been progress, such as a reorganization of the training program to include anti-bias awareness, there still needs to be more improvement in police training. Specifically, more needs to be done in both the academy and in service training in the area of working with emotionally disturbed individuals and cultural and multi-faith competency, as well as more

accurate information about contemporary social justice movements such as the movement for black lives. Rampant misinformation is still circulating about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Another concern is possible internal bias within the department. Although it was requested, we still have not received any solid assurance that internal discipline in the NYPD is not biased and that all police personnel are treated fairly in disciplinary proceedings, promotions, and so forth, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, or personal political views. We also still need a more rigorous and transparent process regarding discipline of members of the service suspected of brutality, corruption, or other forms of misconduct, including making public the guidelines used to substantiate findings of criminality, excessive force, abuse, and discourtesy.

**Response to persons with mental illness.** We have grave concerns about police murders of innocent civilians. We are especially concerned about the way police respond to persons experiencing emotional distress. Mohamed Bah, a West African immigrant suffering from mental illness, died in his Harlem apartment in September 2012, gunned down by police responding to his mother's call for an ambulance. The Bah family waited five years for a criminal prosecution that never came. The restitution finally awarded to the Bah family last November, after a civil trial of the officers who caused his death, fell far short of justice. We can't help but feel that if Bah had not been an immigrant, a person of color, or struggling with mental illness, he would have been treated differently. He would still be alive. We also mourn the death of Deborah Danner, a mentally ill woman who was shot to death in her Bronx home by an NYPD sergeant in October 2016. The sergeant was indicted for murder, and his trial is underway, and we pray that justice will be done.



**Eric Garner case.** Lastly, we cannot remain silent about Eric Garner. More than three and a half years after his death, his family has not seen justice. Garner's killer, Police Officer Daniel Pantaleo, is still on the job. This total lack of accountability, despite many promises to the contrary, continues to undermine whatever trust there may be between the police and the communities they are sworn to serve. It must change now.

**Immigration: *Resist Immoral, Unjust Federal Policy***

The final inequality we wish to address is the inequality between citizens and immigrants who lack the legal status to reside lawfully in the United States.

Our city is a city of immigrants. They have built and re-built the city many times over since its founding. Immigrants have always been and always will be the backbone of our neighborhoods and the source of their renewal in every generation. Without the cultural, economic, social, and spiritual contributions of our newest New Yorkers who revitalize our communities, there is no future for our city. Beyond their many gifts, immigrants bear an inherent dignity and possess a right to live in peace and security that no authority has any right to deprive.

This is why we are alarmed by the increasingly aggressive enforcement of a racist, immoral immigration policy by the U.S. government. We are appalled by the restrictions on travel for residents of targeted Muslim-majority nations, the sharp reduction in number of refugees we welcome, new limits on asylum eligibility, drastic cuts on visas to unskilled workers, and the threat to end family-based immigrant visas for all but spouses and children. Above all, we deplore President Trump's decision last September to revoke DACA for the Dreamers and the termination of temporary protected status for migrants from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Sudan, rendering over a million residents vulnerable to deportation. Taken

together, these cruel and merciless actions signal not only a war on immigrants and refugees, but also a war on our city.

We do not think it is extreme to say that the Administration is waging a war on our city. The U.S. government has taken what we consider retaliatory actions against the leadership of the immigrant movement in New York. On Jan. 3, Immigration and Customs Enforcement detained Jean Montrevil, a founder of the New Sanctuary Coalition, snatching him outside his home on his way to work. Despite pending legal challenges, ICE deported Jean to Haiti on Jan. 16 and separated him from his family. And on Jan. 11, after a routine check-in with ICE, Ravi Ragbir, executive director of New Sanctuary Coalition, was wrenched from his family and community in New York and detained for 18 days before a federal judge ordered his release. Judge Katherine Forrest said in her Jan. 29 decision:

It ought not to be—and never has been before—that those who have lived without incident in this country for years are subjected to the treatment of regimes we revile as unjust, regimes where those who have long lived in a country may be taken without notice from streets, home, and work. And sent away. We are not that country.

In the face of systematic oppression and overwhelming abuse of power, we call on the city to stand strong against the immoral and unjust policies of the Trump Administration. We call on the mayor and City Council, in alliance with the governor and our state and federal lawmakers, to covenant with immigrant communities and leaders in faith-based communities in efforts to promote just and humane immigration and refugee policies at the federal, state, and city levels.

**Comprehensive immigration reform.** In spite of all the harmful actions of the Trump Administration and harmful inaction of a divided Congress, we continue to demand comprehensive immigration reform, with a path to citizenship for millions of undocumented people. This path must be open to all undocumented people who are not a threat to public safety, and it must not lay

heavy burdens on them. While we acknowledge the attractiveness of “earned citizenship” as a political solution, we oppose the imposition of heavy duties, fines, or taxes as a penalty for entering without documents. Such a system would punish immigrants who already pay taxes working in the underground economy. A merit-based immigration system is neither equal nor equitable.

For the present, the city should counsel any immigrant who qualifies for citizenship under current laws and policies to obtain it with all deliberate speed. Increasing funding for free legal aid for potential citizens is one of the best things the city administration can do. We recommend a significant expansion of the ActionNYC program, which provides free, safe legal assistance to immigrants. We encourage the city to fund a public awareness campaign to promote citizenship.

**Full access to city services; protect confidentiality.** We are proud that New York is a sanctuary city whose public officials promote sanctuary policies both locally and nationally. We applaud the fact that at every city institution, especially its schools, hospitals, and medical centers, immigrants are treated with courtesy, compassion, and competence, without discrimination on the basis of language, nationality, race, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, orientation, and, above all, legal status. We stand with the city in its commitment to litigating punitive federal financial and legal challenges.

A critical priority of the sanctuary movement is family unification. We pray constantly for Amanda Morales, a woman from Guatemala who has taken refuge at Holyrood Episcopal Church in Washington Heights so she can continue to care for her three children. Cases like Amanda’s remind us how important it is to increase funding for free legal services to families struggling to stay together. We also invite the city to partner with its colleges and universities to create incentives for law students to enter the field of immigration law.

We applaud the increasing attention to health care for immigrant communities. We commend the administration, and First Lady Chirlane McCray and ThriveNYC in particular, for ensuring the availability of mental health services for all New Yorkers, regardless of status. We suggest a special focus on youth and young adults who have been traumatized by the revocation of DACA and the uncertainty of their future in the United States. Finally, we urge all residents to obtain the municipal identification card through the IDNYC program. We appreciate the recent expansion of benefits the ID card affords. And we applaud the mayor for vowing not only never to share personal information with immigration authorities but also to dispose of all records pertaining to IDNYC program applications.

**Pushback against enforcement operations.** Moreover, we call for enhanced pushback against immigration enforcement operations on the grounds of their violation of human rights and their unconstitutionality. The city administration has promised not to interfere with ICE operations. But this does not prevent the city from monitoring federal activity and intervening at the slightest sign of human rights violations.

We are not satisfied that immigrants have reason to trust the NYPD. We have referred already to the Mohamed Bah case. Many other unresolved incidents of police brutality have left families of immigrant victims without justice. Non-cooperation of police with federal immigration enforcement, the cornerstone of sanctuary city policy, must be complemented by police building relationships with immigrant communities to re-establish trust.

To summarize: It is necessary to strengthen the wall of separation between city government and the federal government on immigration enforcement. It is vital to protect and extend confidentiality in every interaction an immigrant has with city agencies and public authorities. It is crucial to allot all

the financial resources the city can summon to the fulfillment of its current commitments to the welfare of its immigrant residents and expand them as recommended above. Finally, it is critical for the city to apply the legal tools at its disposal to impede the enforcement of immoral and unconstitutional immigration policies and dismantle the structures that support them.

### *Charge and Conclusion*

**Puerto Rico and voices on the margins.** Before concluding, we feel called to offer a prophetic word of hope to our Puerto Rican sisters and brothers. As one of the world's oldest colonies, Puerto Rico finds itself ravaged by the destructive forces of vulture capitalism, climate change, and a hostile federal government. Hurricane Maria exposed the second-class status it occupies in the eyes of the United States, and this status has led to the needless and avoidable suffering of our sisters and brothers on the island. Since the federal government has abandoned Puerto Ricans, the City and State governments must step up and commit resources for the families that are displaced. These resources must include housing services, job training and placement services, mental health and counseling services, and assistance with educational resources.

We call on the mayor and the City Council to put the common good above the good of narrow self-interest. We ask you to look at the faces on the margins of the city and listen most carefully to the voices not being heard in the places where decisions are being made. We ask you to hear the inconvenient truths and attend to the vision of community that comes from the souls of poor folk. We ask you to reflect on their experience. Then we ask you to work with them to create a city shaped in every way by the faith they share. We ask you to do good and great things, not because they are politically expedient, but because it is always the right time and season to do right for the people who have been excluded and oppressed.

**The power of religious leaders.** We ask you not to take for granted the blessings of God or the benedictions of the ministers and leaders of the city's communities of faith. We can forgive mistakes and failures of public administration. We can forgive the wrongs done to our beloved people when committed out of ignorance. We can reconcile with our enemies. But we cannot bless indifference to the suffering of others once an injustice is brought to light. We cannot bless the hesitation or caution that prevents us from righting the wrongs in our city, once a better way forward has been found.

We are here to remind the city leaders that our power is not like the power of the world. We are familiar with the ways things get done in the world. We understand the domain of strategy and calculation. But we also believe in a higher and deeper power for change. We believe in nonviolent, revolutionary love and the transforming power of the Spirit. Jesus told his followers to be wise as serpents and innocent and doves. We the faith leaders of New York City will mobilize both the serpent-power and the dove-power and never stop working for change until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

**The Spirit we follow.** We remind our elected leaders and public officials that the state of the city depends on what kind of force, or soul, is animating its activity. And the soul of the city depends on which spirit we will follow: the spirit of mindless greed and competition, or the spirit of compassionate collaboration. We hope our leaders will take our counsel and follow the second spirit. Thank you for attending to our words. We close with the inspired words of the Psalmist: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor; if the Lord does not watch over the city, in vain does the watcher keep vigil." May we the people of New York City seek always to build what God builds and to watch over what God watches. May God hear our prayers. Amen.