

Micah Institute Spirit of the City 2018 Address: Summary and Outline

Summary

Religious leaders of New York City have “assembled under the banner of the Micah Institute” (p. 1) to offer Mayor Bill de Blasio and the City Council their reflections on the state of the city in light of their encounters with people living on the margins. Informed by these encounters and their prophetic faith, they present policy recommendations to the City.

Our view is that “New York City is still the ‘tale of two cities’ of which the mayor spoke in his first campaign four years ago” (p. 3). This tale is an inequality crisis that goes beyond low wages and a high cost of living. It affects undocumented immigrants in their encounters with the city, state, and federal government; people of color in their encounters with law enforcement; children in underperforming schools; and the homeless and low-income tenants in our neighborhoods.

Therefore, we call on Mayor de Blasio and the City Council “to covenant with us” (p. 4) and heed our advice on policies affecting economic justice, education, homelessness and housing, immigration, and police reform.

We make the following recommendations.

Economic Justice (pp. 4-6). We ask Mayor de Blasio and the City Council to establish a commission that will define a realistic and viable living wage for all persons employed in New York City. We define a living wage as one that will enable workers and their families to be self-sufficient. 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. The Commission should issue its report by the end of 2018. In 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 (pp. 6-10). Public education is the gateway out of poverty. We seek to overcome obstacles to equality in educational opportunities so that all children can achieve proficiency in core subjects, whether parents choose traditional public schools or charter schools. We want to see more resources put into schools that are failing. We support universal pre-kindergarten and all-day kindergarten but also ask the city to address the effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences on behavior, health, and ability to learn. We insist that the majority of financial resources should go to the Department of Education and traditional public schools. Charter schools and regular public schools should be held to the same level of accountability. School safety and anti-bullying measures need to be expanded and intensified.

Homelessness and Housing (pp. 10-14). We must prevent the further loss of rent-stabilized housing and build new, deeply affordable housing. 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. We seek anti-displacement measures in all pending zoning changes and future zoning plans. We ask the mayor to lobby the federal government for a more localized, rational Area Median Income that resets the threshold of affordability for local development. We endorse building and preserving supportive housing, and we recommend income support for those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.

Police Reform (pp. 14-17). We desire greater transparency and accountability from law enforcement. We seek passage of the full Right to Know Act to require officers to identify themselves in non-emergency encounters. We ask for better training of officers in cultural competency and sensitivity to social justice movements. The deaths of Mohamed Bah and Deborah Danner move us to great concern about the way police respond to persons experiencing emotional distress. We call on the mayor to close Rikers with all deliberate speed—not in 10 years—and ensure that all prisoners are treated with dignity. We demand justice for Eric Garner’s family.

Immigration (pp. 17-21). The Trump Administration’s enforcement of a racist, immoral immigration policy is a grave threat to immigrants and refugees and to our city. These policies must be resisted. 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. 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.

Outline of Address

- I. Introduction
 - A. Acknowledgment of God
 - B. Acknowledgment of Religious Leaders
 - C. Theme: *The Inequality Crisis Continues*

- II. Policy Recommendations
 - A. Economic Justice: *A City Living Wage Commission*
 1. Affordability for Low-Income Workers
 2. Definition of Self-Sufficiency Wage
 3. Membership of Commission and Timetable for Report
 - B. Education: *The Gateway to Escaping Poverty*
 1. Lift Up Struggling Schools; Extend Universal Pre-K
 2. Stop the Undermining of Public Education for All
 3. School Safety and Anti-Bullying
 - C. Housing and Homelessness: *Stop Displacement; Build, Preserve Affordable Housing*
 1. Anti-Displacement Victories and Proposals
 2. Redefine Criteria for Affordability
 3. Supportive Housing; Home Stability Support
 - D. Police Reform: *More Transparency and Accountability*
 1. Training and Cultural Sensitivity
 2. Response to Persons With Mental Illness
 3. Eric Garner Case
 - E. Immigration: *Resist Immoral, Unjust Federal Policy*
 1. Comprehensive Immigration Reform
 2. Full Access to City Services; Protect Confidentiality
 3. Pushback Against Enforcement Operations

- III. Charge and Conclusion
 - A. Puerto Rico and Voices on the Margins
 - B. The Power of Religious Leaders
 - C. The Spirit We Follow