

College, Church Together Tackle City Violence

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With The Rev. Marlowe V.N. Washington

of Baber AME Church

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In a three week period spanning the last week of September and the first two weeks of October, four youth were murdered in the City of Rochester. Rochester was on its way to again leading the State of New York in per capita murders. Many feel there is great need in the Greater Rochester Area to redefine this intolerable issue from being a localized urban problem to a broader community concern. A group of faculty from the Nazareth College's social work department reached out to join forces with many others in our community in the spirit of collective action. There is a long history of colleges being involved in their communities and civic engagement is at the core of Nazareth College's mission.

It was no coincidence that Rev. Marlowe V. N. Washington, pastor of Baber African Methodist Episcopal Church, responded immediately to the idea of forming a partnership with Nazareth to address these issues. Baber AME Church had lost a young parishioner, 14-year-old Devon Stott on October 2, 2005 to violence. The church has a long tradition of community outreach and owns a second building intended to be a Center for Social Change on the corner of Clinton & Meigs. Together the two groups planned to hold a town hall meeting to engage the local youth and neighbors in the design and development of a new center to support youth and their families.

On Thursday evening, January 19th, roughly 300 youth, parents and community leaders came together at Baber AME. A dinner was served and followed by open conversation that focused on ways to strengthen our community by supporting our youth. Despite the recent tragic loss of her son; Devon, Shauna Stott, spoke on the need for communities to ban together against violence and argued for more support for families and neighborhoods. Concerned community members and parents spoke as well. Youth, even some who said they were reluctant to talk, got up and spoke about their realities, lack of opportunities, and their eagerness to partner on the initiative. It became clear that there are a number of high quality services in the community (the Monroe YMCA, the Field Street and South Avenue Rec. centers, SEAC, SWPC, The Center for youth, Teen empowerment), but there is need for more and geographically the proposed center will fill a gap in between several of the youth centers. It was also abundantly clear that the youth are articulate and have thoughts about what is happening in the streets. There were several consistent themes heard throughout the evening that suggest there is a need to provide support in a number of areas – educational tutoring, recreation, job development, and issues related to larger systemic issues such as poverty, racism and political engagement. The conversation was recorded by both social work faculty and social work students and laid the groundwork for future directions.

The next steps are for a very concise and planned mapping of the assets and needs of the community to be done by Nazareth's graduate and undergraduate social work students.

This will be closely followed by a number of in-depth small focus groups to gather even more specific information about how to build programming for the center and how to integrate the resources of Nazareth College to meet those programming needs. Another crucial step is to join forces with organizations in the community that support youth development and actively engage in addressing many of the social and economic causes that threaten the healthy development of our youth. Central to this approach is the belief that the community must be engaged and empowered to say what their needs are and how best to meet those needs. The Baber AME Church and Nazareth College see this partnership as a long-term venture and investment in our community. An investment that will enrich the lives of the children, teens and families of the community, and the respective communities of Baber AME and Nazareth College