

November 2020: Revised City Lifting Up Black Spaces

Revised CITY Lifting Up Black Spaces: For The Good Of The City

In January 2020, this taskforce was commissioned by Greg Lillestrand, the Vice-President of Cru and City's National Executive Director, to evaluate and propose strategies to increase the effectiveness of Cru CITY's competency in reaching, recruiting and resourcing the Black community. The taskforce came together with a common concern regarding Cru's ineffectiveness in meaningfully reaching Black people in cities. The urgency of our charge would intensify over the next several months. Beginning in February, the novel Coronavirus spread uncontrollably and disproportionately killed Black people in major cities in the weeks that followed our first meeting. Ahmaud Arbery was murdered on February 20, in a horrific incident of racialized violence. On March 13, as medical professionals battled COVID-19, Breonna Taylor was shot and killed in her bed by police officers in Louisville, and on Memorial Day, as many reflected on the contributions of those lost on the battlefield, a world watched in horror as George Floyd pled for his life as an officer knelt on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Black America reeled from the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racialized violence. Weeks of sustained protest and unrest dominated the cityscape. Ever since, America has experienced a national reckoning on race. The previous status quo is no longer acceptable. It is a tragedy that it ever was to white America, but now everything is being re-imagined and re-evaluated.

This inflection point in our nation converges with what we as Black staff also believe is a critical juncture for Cru as an organization. We will experience a presidential transition for only the second time in the 69 year existence of the organization. Now more than ever before, Cru must ask itself what kind of organizational culture it will choose to cultivate in this decade.

Over the previous seven decades, God has used Cru to introduce millions to the person of Jesus Christ. When Bill and Vonette Bright pursued their vision of "reaching the campus today to reach the world tomorrow" their dream was met by many with ridicule and skepticism. The dominant assumption among Christians in the 1940's and 1950's was that the college campus, with its anti-religious skepticism and permissive culture, was a spiritual wasteland beyond redemption. Undaunted by this skepticism, the Brights boldly confronted those false assumptions, and challenged them at great risk to themselves. We are all better off that they did. The innovative culture the Brights nurtured did not end with campus ministry, but persisted with reaching athletes, families, skeptics, militaries, the poor and world leaders in closed and open countries. What began on the campus of UCLA is now a movement with ministry around the world. Cru is a leading evangelical organization today because of the willingness of its leadership to confront false assumptions and the practices that are built from them. Today, that call must continue within itself.

In 2013, a brand new approach to planning the staff conference was launched. The team was given a blank slate to re-imagine the seminal event in the ministry rhythms of Cru staff

members. The staff conference is the space where national leadership casts vision, ministry successes are celebrated and “family business” of Cru staff is handled with an eye toward care and support. The result of this approach was a dynamic, bold vision for Cru which expressed aspirations of ethnic inclusion and authentic discourse and deliberations about race and justice. The new direction of Cru15, Cru17, and Cru19 was met by many with great enthusiasm which renewed optimism in the organization. The overwhelming majority of people of color on staff, younger white staff members and those with real investment in diversity were energized and expectant that the ministry expression experienced would be foretastes of what Cru would become. But an undercurrent of opposition also emerged from staff (and ministry partners) who accused the ministry of forsaking the gospel message, being political, and overly influenced by radical social theories antithetical to Christianity. Meanwhile, as the nation became more divided polarizing political debates and political leaders became more explicitly xenophobic and racist, the conversation about race and justice became more fraught and intense. The string of deaths of unarmed black people killed in instances of racialized violence from the Charleston 9 to Rayshard Brooks have engulfed our nation and our ministry in an unavoidable fork-in-the-road.

Every major institution in our nation has had to examine itself. Cru is no exception. Our task force has over 150 years of combined ministry experience in Cru. We have all observed a historic tendency of Cru dismissing racial justice as peripheral to the gospel. While the first great Civil Rights Movement surged, led by the Black Church, in the 1950's-1960's, Cru was growing in the same places where segregation was being protected but silent about the sinful injustices that were facing people of color on the campus, and in the communities Cru served. We are in the midst of another great movement for civil rights, and we must not repeat the errors of history. The question now remains: Will Cru, with a spirit of boldness, confront the beliefs, practices and narratives that prevent it from expressing a holistic ministry approach in its proclamation and demonstration? Will Cru see that the diversity it so desperately seeks is only possible when the injustices of the past and present are named and opposed in Jesus' name? Or will what was once a dynamic and fearless counter-cultural movement become a monument of self-preservation, staying the course of doing ministry as it has always known? Will Cru continue to innovate or become entrenched in its own methods and modes of ministry? Below are several strategies curated from our task force which we believe are essential not only for Black people's survival within the CITY ministry, but for CITY's survival within this world.

Why is Cru's survival at stake? The US demographic trend is increasingly more diverse and less white. According to a Pew Study in 2018, for example, “whites have become the minority in most urban counties (53% of them are majority nonwhite) since 2000; only about one-in-ten suburban (10%) and rural (11%) counties are majority nonwhite.”¹ Since domestic terrorism at the turn of the twentieth century led to the Great Migration, African Americans have gone from the most rural racial demographic to the most urban with over 80% living in urban areas. Indeed, these realities reflect the stories and the ministries of those of us who have chosen to

¹ Cited on July 9, 2020 from:

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>

respond to the calling to serve with the CITY ministry and leverage our stories, experiences and expertise. Because of the overlapping nature of issues of cultural competency, gospel wholeness and inclusion, some proposals here will outline solutions that are more broad than the Black community, but which include it.

PROPOSAL 1: Complete a Cultural Competency Audit for CITY. We can not know where we're going unless we know where we've been.

- **Action Point:** Commission research to tell the history (good, bad and ugly). Telling the story of the past will give us a consistent narrative for where we're going. What has Been CITY's wins and shortcomings in reaching Black staff. What's the history?
- **Action Point: Do an inventory of what aspects of holistic ministry currently exist within CITY.** Address, what are best practices to expand our words and deeds to incorporate shalom into our gospel proclamation and demonstration. Celebrate those expressions of ministry.
- **Strategic Action Point: Fund A Cultural Competency Audit of CITY By A Third Party.** In addition to learning the individual stories of CITY staff, we need a professional analysis of who we are. CITY has spent thousands of dollars exploring the efficacy of its evangelism strategies in the 21st century. There is no greater factor in CITY's ability to engage in effective evangelism than its ability or inability to effectively minister cross-culturally. In light of this particular moment, this third party should be Black-owned/led entity to best identify the particular issues related to this audit.

PROPOSAL 2: Add Black Leadership To The Leadership Structures Of Cru Utilizing Staff & Non-Staff People.

STAFF: In spite of the collective wisdom and insight current Black CITY staff possess after a combined 150+ years of experience, we are not invited to be part of the initial conceptualization and development of CITY strategies. Organizational leadership opportunities must be created to engage the perspectives of Black CITY staff on current and upcoming initiatives. In our evaluation, one reason current strategies fail to engage Black communities is that they were developed without the input of Black staff.

- **Involve Black CITY staff in the design, ongoing discussion and ultimate decisions regarding key ministry strategies.** Since our numbers are so small within CITY, engagement from other ministry spaces in CRU is critical.

Inner-CITY: The departure of Inner CITY from CITY was difficult and painful in light of overlapping target audiences, differing visions of how to advance both ministries and broken ministry relationships in the process. It raises significant questions regarding the scope and strategy of CITY. Questions include:

What Is CITY's commitment and vision to reaching the poor and underserved within cities?

How does one reach the disproportionately Black Inner CITY without Inner CITY ministry?
How can CITY and Inner CITY work together to accomplish more effective Black outreach?

In exploratory conversation with Milton Massie, the executive director of Inner City, he expressed a willingness for partnership under the appropriate conditions. There is probably no other ministry in CRU that engages with Black leaders in cities more effectively and consistently than Inner City. Any strategy that attempts to increase and enhance CITY's impact in the Black urban community ought to include Inner CITY. This is another space in which we believe Black CITY staff involvement is critical.

- **Action Point: Define CITY's vision and commitment to the poor and underserved.**
In what ways is Inner City valuable to engage in CITY's vision?

NON-STAFF: One of the critical challenges to diversifying our leadership is that CITY typically only looks within CRU for candidates. In light of the reality of staff needing to raise their financial support, it makes sense to engage with people who have already committed to that process. However, if the goal is to increase diversity in leadership, this is a strategy doomed to fail because there are already so few Black staff (we count less than ten in CITY ministry).

Instead, we need leadership to invite non-staff Black Christian leaders to Cru with offers of real influence and leadership within the ministry. Some of the most influential leaders in our ministry are not on staff already. The majority of them volunteer their time because of their commitment. We call them the Board of Directors. They select our organization's president and approve many of the policies that define how we do ministry. And they don't raise support. The Board demonstrates that we have the will and see the value of those not on staff to significantly influence our ministry. We need to systematically increase Black presence on local, national and international leadership teams. We can do that expeditiously by engaging those with no interest in joining staff to still offer leadership in the organization. Additionally, Cru must look to partner with Black ministries and churches as ministry experts who can show us the way forward..

Action Points:

- **Create Black Advisory Boards To Shape Strategy And Invite Investment.**
- **Identify Individuals with expertise who can be recruited to offer leadership.** Jeremy White, for example, launched Christian Young Adults, a ministry that effectively reaches Black millennials and Gen Z. He could be offered legitimate leadership influence and budget without needing to commit to being on staff.
- **Hire A Black Executive Director with institutional influence (budget, ability to shape hiring and firing) who would give leadership to the immense task of engaging Black communities in cities across the nation. We believe the most effective way to do that is the creation of Black Executive Director(s) roles which are salaried.** These directors would be responsible for facilitating the organizational culture within CITY as well as cultivating resources external to the organization to

effectively engage the Black community. They would be empowered with a budget and influence in HR decisions commiserate with the task of improving CITY's cross-cultural competency. Within CRU, there are staff positions we deem so essential to the whole of the organization that we set aside funding for in order to empower them to serve throughout the year. This model is the way forward for overcoming the institutional legacy of racism in this country which manifests itself in economic outcomes that are directly related to the funding challenges of Black staff which prevent our voices from being heard in the very conversations that could advance CITY's effectiveness in reaching and empowering our community.

Note: We recognize that traditional application of the RMO designation avoids such a role, yet based on the legal feasibility, we believe this cultural paradigm shift must be explored.

Proposal 3: Define, Articulate And Live Out "For The Good Of The CITY."

Reflecting Jesus together for the good of the CITY is an inspiring vision for what CITY ministry should be.

"Reflecting Jesus" creatively references our call to proclaim Jesus with our good words and good deeds. We reflect Jesus when we say the same things He did about how one comes into relationship with the Father (John 3:16) and when we love our neighbors as ourselves. This aspect of the mission is clear and compelling. But, how much is Jesus being reflected in Black spaces through CITY? With less than 10 full time Black staff and few Black leaders engaged in outreaches like the "Roadshow," we see a need to expand on our ability to reflect Jesus to wider swaths of the city.

"Together" - This aspect of the vision invokes the reality that Cru can not engage in robust CITY ministry alone, and that "partnership" must be an essential aspect of the work of CITY. Organizationally, Cru has had the tendency to celebrate "charging into Hell with a squirt gun" and emphasize accomplishing mission without much engagement with the wider Body of Christ. That has been especially true in relation to Black leadership and communities. In the early days of efforts to engage the CITY, "Here's Life Black America" functioned as a mobilizer and catalyzer, platforming some of the most significant of Black leaders in the 1980's. Ministers like Pastor E.K. Bailey, Pastor Haman Cross, Bishop Kenneth Ulmer, and others were platform, but much of that synergy has been lost in the decades which followed. What does it look like for CITY to reflect Jesus "together" with Black churches and ministries which are doing significant work in our communities?

"For the Good of the City": This phrase of the vision statement has the most unfulfilled potential. What does "good of the city" look like? For many in Cru, it may simply mean a vague, positive outcome of people meeting more people who look like Jesus. But the full sense of what this "phrase" means biblically must be explored. Jeremiah 29:7 is perhaps the most cited verse to believers point to as a starting point of what it means to be "for the good of the city." It reads:

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.

The Hebrew words translated “peace and prosperity” is shalom. There is no English word that fully describes it adequately. Shalom means “completeness, peace, prosperity with God and with people.” In a statement which must have been shocking to its original hearers, Jeremiah instructs the Jews who have been exiled to Babylon to pursue the city’s good though the circumstances of their exile are quite bad. Instead of the false prophets who promised that their tribalistic separation would save them, or the opportunists who simply assimilated into Babylonian culture even when it meant rejecting God and his laws, Jeremiah tells the faithful to seek the city’s *shalom*. The previous verses expound on the comprehensive nature of shalom. Part of their divine mandate includes the economic uplift of the city (build homes, plant gardens) as well as participation in social life of the city “take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage.” The command evokes the holistic nature of the gospel. Jesus Christ, in his inaugural sermon, expresses this same holistic gospel:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19a)**

The vision for the “good” we see here is profound and dynamic. It centers the marginalized. We must “proclaim good news to the poor.” This is a clear mandate to share the gospel particularly with the vulnerable. The next command “proclaim freedom for the prisoners.” Why? Jesus, consistent with the entirety of Scripture rightfully anticipated oppressive, state sanctioned violence against the marginalized. It’s why he also described his mission “to set the oppressed free.” Good news to the poor is not only that their sins are forgiven, but that Jesus announced the arrival of a new and greater kingdom that is manifested in the words and actions of his followers to dismantle the current kingdom in favor of God’s kingdom, His city. That’s why Jesus also announced “recovery of sight to the blind” delivering physical and spiritual sight to the blind. Lastly, Jesus declared “the year of the Lord’s favor.” This is the Jubilee which forgave financial debts, and overturned injustice. It set things right. This is the good of the city that Jesus announced at the start of his ministry. But we also must demonstrate it. After this announcement, we read about Jesus’ own CITY ministry:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. (Matthew 9:35)

The way Jesus lived out his mission was by going throughout the cities. He demonstrated the good news of the kingdom which, in Luke 4, he announced was spiritual, physical and systemic. He then explicitly instructs the disciples to do the same:

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (Matthew 10:7-8).

So when we read the Great Commission's instruction: "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." How could that mandate not also include Luke 4:18, Matthew 9:35 and Matthew 10:7? CITY's commitment to be for the "good of the city," then, must include advocacy and activism for holistic ministry that announces that Jesus cares about the city's brokenness and injustice within it. Especially when Black people disproportionately represent the marginalized in cities, effective ministry to the Black community must include good words and deeds which address these inequalities or else our gospel is not really the good news Jesus announced.

Action Points:

- **Add & Share The Theology of Shalom when describing the CITY vision statement.**
- ***Promote the recognition of key Black History dates on the calendar such as Juneteenth Day in all CITY locations. Explore ways to sponsor (from a national level) and partner with local Juneteenth celebrations (on a local level) in order to identify the ways Good News needs to be proclaimed and demonstrated in the Black Community.***
- ***Strategic Action Point: Create A Rubric, That Encourages each CITY location to do an assessment of local socio-economic brokenness and plans to address that brokenness as part of ministry scope. Partner with another ministry experienced in working with the marginalized (like Inner City, for example) to develop this rubric.***
- ***Complete an assessment in each location of the CITY ministry and identify key ethnic minority gatekeepers (Inner-City is an ideal strategic partner here).***

Proposal 4: Acknowledge & Confess CITY's shortcoming in serving Black communities.

According to the SLI6 report in June 2016, of 343 supported staff in CITY, only 32 or 9% were ethnic minorities. The cities of America in which the authors of this report reside are extremely different from our 91% white staff. While 2.5% of CITY staff are black, conversely the black population in Orlando is 25%, 26% in New York City, 47% in Washington DC, and 52% in Atlanta. CITY offers at least 10 times less representation of our community than the city with the least amount of black people among our team. Do these numbers challenge you? Convict you? The current reality shows that CITY is significantly, and disproportionately understaffed if its goal is to reach the entire city, especially African Americans. CITY is currently ill-equipped to engage the largest minority group in the nation. In the past, CRU mobilized global missions when we

realized that the ministry was designed to reach primarily American campuses. Similar to the moment read in Acts 6, when the Hellenistic Jewish widows were neglected from the daily distribution, CITY needs to acknowledge, confess and reorganize to meet the needs it is currently neglecting. As a movement committed to reaching everyone with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the urgency of this challenge is mission-critical. As we often teach, confession (agreeing with God there is a problem) and repentance (turning away from indifference or active disobedience) are critical steps to experiencing God's restoration. The historical factors within Cru, cultural, economic, and theological, have contributed to this woefully inadequate representation.

- **Action Point: A time for CITY leadership to acknowledge and personally and publicly confess the organizational failings of CITY in loving and serving the Black communities in our scope. Specifically, the failure to honor and reach out to Black leadership, address racism in our ministry efforts and cultivate a culture in CITY conducive to the flourishing of Black people. For the movement to begin to build trust and respect in the Black community, this is the first step.**
- **Commit to leveraging leadership, organizational will and financials to support solutions to the problem.**
- **Set aside time to hear from and lament with Black staff who serve in CITY and serve to change these realities.**

Note: The scope of our analysis was restricted to the Black community, yet we recognize the value this approach may have for other people of color as well.

PROPOSAL 5: Hear from our staff of color to understand their experiences. We can not do shalom in the CITY if there is significant brokenness within our staff family. Based on our own experiences within Cru, there is much healing that is needed among our staff of color. What we measure matters. Therefore, we must complete an inventory of how CITY staff are currently experiencing ministry across racial and ethnic lines.

- ***Systemic Action Points: Survey CITY Staff To Review MPD, Perspectives on advancement, organizational culture, and statistics.*** Power To Change in Canada completed a thorough survey which has been instrumental in helping them identify the racial disparities that exist across economic lines, and the differences ethnic minority staff felt in terms of how they were perceived and their own perceived opportunities for leadership advancement.
- ***Survey staff to explore demographic differences consistently. This should occur bi-annually.***

Proposal 6: Evaluate The Cross-Cultural Effectiveness Of Current Resources.

In the Campus Ministry, the need for culturally contextualized resources is well established and its effectiveness proven. The necessity of such tools doesn't end when we step outside of the college campus. They are just as necessary in the CITY context. Resources like discipleship materials, and culturally relevant spaces will accelerate the ability of CITY to engage in a multitude of audiences. Current offerings have been found to disconnect with Black communities who are desperate for ministry resources that address unique apologetic and social and cultural challenges. Does God have something to say about justice? Is Christianity a White Man's Religion? Is there A Black Presence In The Bible? These questions are very meaningful to large swaths of the Black community, yet our resources don't address them. We need to create such materials and implement them in spaces like Church Engagement, and Embark, to name a few. We also need to do an assessment of our current resources to explore where they hit and miss the mark.

- **Action Point: Do an assessment of our current resources to explore if they are contextualized or relevant to the Black communities.**

PROPOSAL 7: Make Financial Investments To Engage Black Inclusion. Every entity in America knows one thing when it comes to inclusion: it needs financial investment to work. Corporate America, governments, academia, non-profits, and other organizations know the truth Jesus articulated long ago "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." One must invest financial resources into the goal of inclusion. The racial wealth gap (white families possess over ten times the wealth as black families) is a direct result of institutional racism in this nation.² Therefore, financial compensation systems which don't address this fact are in fact by definition; systemically racist because they maintain an unjust status quo. For progress, we need to explore multiple models of funding that are flexible, honor our legacy of ministry partner development, but are not bound by it as the sole system for generating funding. Strategies some of which are used in East Asia and in other parts of the world offer instructive re-imaginings necessary for "head hunting" and funding Black Inclusion. This initiative needs to be sponsored, not simply accommodated.

Action Point:

- **Hire A Black CITY Fund Development Leader. COVID has significantly altered the landscape of the Black community and giving.** We need new insight and perspective about how historic unemployment and economic challenges have increased an already significant wealth gap. African American Christians are perhaps the most untapped recruiting field in the United States when you compare the amount of active Christians with who is actually involved in Cru. Hiring a fund development leader will allow CRU to learn how to best mobilize itself to engage the Black community.

² Brookings Institute. Cited July 8, 2020 from:
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>

- **Review and Implement the MPD insights learned from the SLI 6 Action Learning Project on MPD and Diversity.**
- **In addition, there need to be alternative funding sources to more quickly increase the number of African Americans on staff.** A grant account needs to be explored to help fund Black staff.

PROPOSAL 8: Institute Mandatory Cross-Cultural Training For CITY Staff. We must diagnose, prevent and cure cultural biases.

In the last few months, we have seen with tragic consequences, of what occurs when an unseen virus roams unchecked by changed human behavior. It inevitably continues to spread, risking the lives of more people. Institutional racism is also endemic in America. Though we can't see it, we must believe that it is in the air, needing a cure and established best practices to reduce its spread and promote a healthy community. What is institutional racism? "The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour that amount to discrimination through prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people."³ Contrary to misconceptions, institutional racism does not require actions by bigots or racists to flourish. All it takes is inactivity because the assumptions, behaviors and policies that function outside the organization will impose its will internally. The best way to find institutional racism is by examining outcomes. What are the reported experiences of people of color within the organization? What type of ethnic representation is reflected in the organization's leadership? What is the impact of the organization among communities of color? Similar to how a physician looks at the symptoms as a first step of diagnosing an illness, we must explore the symptoms of institutional racism within our organization in order to detect and defeat it. Racism has had a 400 year head start on our efforts to end it, and it continues to spread undetected. We need training to be a vaccine and best practices to teach us how to socially distance from racism. The Ministry in the CITY context demands training and we have two world-class training opportunities with Cru. Racism is a problem in CRU and therefore in CITY. We know this not only in theory, but from lived experiences.

- **Action Point: The Lenses Institute training on culture should be implemented throughout CITY.** This training should begin with the leaders of CITY and continue to be rolled out with staff with them being given a window of time to complete or experience consequences (i.e., losing MHA). This training should be an ongoing staff development strategy within CITY and include specific deadlines when all staff must complete it. (Consult with Athletes In Action rollout of Lenses training with their staff). Assessments

³ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Sir William McPherson, Cited July 8, 2020 from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf

like Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) used by Lenses, as well as, the Relational Wisdom 360 must be commonly used tools in CITY.

- Provide training for supervisors, CITY leaders, so they can competently guide and review the cross-cultural ministry growth of CITY staff in their PFS.
- Implement regular training, not just “one and done.”