



'Why do you care?'

Three ministerial leaders in Chicago's West Side met with Michael Kelly to discuss how they can come together to create caring church communities that can begin to heal the youth and families they serve.

Last winter I sat down with three of the most energizing and dynamic ministerial leaders I've ever met. The conversation took place on Chicago's West Side, a large African-American region of Chicago that has been battered by many years of neglect, poverty and family breakdown. This conversation came about because the group was interested in sharing their ideas for creating caring church communities for young people, and their efforts were still in the "brainstorming" phase. In this Faith in Action roundtable, I wanted to show how three ministers from a variety of Christian faith traditions could come together to begin healing the youth and families of their communities.

Minister Vivian Gaulding is on the faculty of the San Miguel Schools Comer Campus and grew up on Chicago's West Side.

The Rev. Dale Kelley is the pastor of Clair Christian United Methodist Church on Chicago's West Side. Clair Christian is an historical church, having been the site of several meetings by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts to bring fair housing and civil rights to African-Americans in Chicago. Rev. Kelley has been active in ministry, positive youth development and philanthropy on the West Side for many years. Prior to being ordained in 2001, Rev. Kelley was a senior professional for 30 years in banking, investment and asset management, starting car leasing and rental businesses and also serving as Group Vice-President of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

Carol Turner is the pastor of Kingdom Restoration Christian Center in Chicago's Lawndale community on the West Side. She grew up in the Lawndale area and in addition to her church, is active in prison ministry in the Chicago area.

Michael Kelly: *What were some of your first impressions of “the village” of the West Side that you were going to be ministering to?*

Rev. Dale Kelley: I spent the last five years on the West Side as the education director of the YMCA, so I didn’t come in trying to find out what was going on, I already knew what was going on.

What did you know?

Rev. Kelley: You’re always dealing with the education system and the lack of education. So because of that, I decided I didn’t want to remove myself too far from our kids. I decided I would do some teaching...I wanted to see firsthand what it was like being a teacher of students in the inner city, and I was totally shocked. Our kids lack the basic academic fundamentals and the discipline to be good students. Teachers, as far as I’m concerned aren’t paid enough. Kids bring so many difficult things to the classroom. That’s why we’ve got to feed kids in school. For some of the kids, the meal that they get at school might be the last meal they get for the day. Without those basics, how do you get kids to study? If they didn’t get a good night’s sleep, or if they can’t stop thinking about where they’re going to get their next meal, how can you expect them to focus in the classroom?

I thought I knew a lot of things before I sat down in the classroom – I didn’t know anything. This experience has been mind-boggling, what the kids are going through, what they don’t know, what’s happening to them in general.

Then you take that and you take religion out of the picture. There’s no praying in school, no talking about God. But there’s an interesting thing I’m finding out. I’m coaching basketball at my school and right before the first game, the kids said to me, “Aren’t you gonna pray with us?” I was stunned. Here I am a preacher, I pray myself before I do anything, I’m in a gym with kids running around going crazy and they wanted to pray. The kids wanted it. I’m amazed at what these

kids know about Jesus. A lot of them don’t go to church, but they’ve got grandmas and others who bring them Jesus.

Pastor Carol Turner: I am in agreement with Pastor Kelley. When I came I expected to make a difference. I see the problem with the children and young people and their goals. There’s a scripture, Proverbs 29:18, that says that a people without vision will perish or run wild like horses; when there is no vision to drive them to the place of destiny that God has ordained for their life. And one thing that I’ve seen throughout the years with our young people, with their involvement in gangs, and teenage pregnancy, and now seeing

9, 10 and 11 year olds having babies and leaving them with grandma, or leaving the child in an abandoned building or garbage can.

When we see things of this nature, there is no vision. There are a lot of our young people that have the vision to get out and hit the streets like the older kids are doing. To have the latest slick car with all the gadgets attached, large speakers, telephones, DVD, the latest fashions in gym shoes, jerseys and what not. The type of purchases that do not involve a school education, just the ability

to be trusted to stand on a designated corner, deliver the goods, run the goods, join the right gang family, protect your brother by pulling the trigger on the one that pulled the trigger on your brother.

The church was planted here in this Lawn-dale neighborhood to change the vision that our young people have. Where are their role models?

Your role model helps determine the vision you eventually live out. Lord help us to be the examples that our children and young people see, help us to reach the parents, to build another image of themselves by loving through teaching, mentoring, interacting, beautifying the community, starting block clubs, communicating with our young people.

Right outside our church a few weeks ago young women were turning tricks on the block, drug deals happening in broad daylight, girls as

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Rev. Dale Kelley
Clair Christian United
Methodist Church



Pastor Carol Turner
Kingdom Restoration
Christian Center



Minister Vivian Gaulding
San Miguel Schools
Comer Campus

young as 14 at 8 a.m. on a Sunday, getting out of cars, looking like they were coming in from a night of partying, and reveling. . . Youth hide out and sleep during the day and at night the streets are crowded with our youth and the night life. I realized looking at this that it was going to take a lot of time, energy, and most of all some love to do what God has summoned us to do.

And that's my heart – to see our young people develop the vision that God wants them to have. The answer is love. The God kind of love. The love that prompts you to start a youth basketball team, mentor a child, start teaching that class, start a block club, give of your time, talents, finances, and go a little bit further than you intended to.

Let love be your driving force. I have been told by some of my friends and pastor colleagues that my love is going to get me in trouble when I knock on doors in my neighborhood and reach out. They say, "What are you thinking? You shouldn't do that! You don't know who's behind that door."

It's a risk taking – it's not passive. You're saying to the young people, "I'm going to seek you out."

I also think the issue of depression is huge in our community in and out of the church building, as is the issue of trauma for kids in low-income areas, particularly as related to violence: the experience of it, the witnessing of it in their neighborhood and families, and the fear of it. Hurt is manifested in a lot of ways in our communities. Again, we are the planting of the Lord, God has planted his church in whatever commu-

nity to let our light so shine before men that they might see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. That's why we're here.

Rev. Kelley: Bill Cosby said it best: "Hurt people hurt people."

If you had to take what Cosby said, where would you say the major "hurts" are in this village?

Minister Vivian Gaulding: I think it's in our children. Because honestly, where I come from, where I was raised, my greatest gift was my parents. I had so many great experiences with them, their smiling at me, taking me off to school, being able to have a parent at home that would say after school, "What did you do today?" That was not just for me; I had eight siblings. My mother was an only child and said, "That's not going to happen."

She made sure of that!

Minister Gaulding: There was nine of us, and we felt unlimited love. And my parents had so much love that they shared it with others in the community. We never understood what limited love would feel like. We never understood materialism, that we were poor, because we felt so loved. I had to get to my 20s to find out that I was poor. Somebody asked me, "Where'd you grow up?" I said, "Lawndale, in the heart of K-Town."

A group of Jesuit volunteers once asked me to speak to them about what it was like for me, growing up here, being poor. I told them I didn't

think I could answer them.

Are you poor because you don't have money? I didn't have money. Are you poor because you don't have love? I had unlimited love. Or are you poor because you don't have a purpose? My father gave me my purpose. He said you are good at math, you will use it to become an engineer or a teacher, and I never forgot that. I could say to the bigger world, that's not me. Don't label me!

But given the changes in our society in general and in the black community of the West Side specifically there are fewer two-parent families, so how do you minister to kids who don't have those home relationships?

Rev. Kelley: The first thing you've got to do, whether you're an individual or a church, is develop trust. Kids have been through too much just to automatically trust you; you have to give it time and show them that it's from the bottom of your heart. And then you've got to follow through, because they know how to be abandoned. I'm teaching this math class and this young man in my class finally came up to me and said, "Why do you always ask me how I'm doing? Why do you care?"

He really said that? Why was he asking you that?

Rev. Kelley: He said, "Nobody cares about me." He thought I might want something from him, or have some other agenda. That's where trust is with our kids today. It's the biggest issue with them. But really it's the same overall issue with the adults in our congregations and ministries, too. We're all new in our positions, and when I'm in my pulpit, they are testing me and evaluating whether my word is gold and whether I'll be there.

I think that our kids today don't have someone they can consistently come to when they're in a difficult situation. I had this young man in our congregation, straight-A student, helped him get a job in the stock room of a store. I told him, "You're representing me there, not

just you." He did so well they promoted him to cashier, but soon after, he stole money out of the register and got fired.

I asked him why he took the money and he told me it was for clothes for him to take his girlfriend to prom. He didn't think he had anybody to go to for help. I told him, "I'm disappointed in you, but I understand. Next time, you need to know that I'll help."

I've got 15 men in the community and the church that I can call on and they'll do anything for any kid I have that needs help. The kids know all these men, and know that I can call them and that these men will help. Now he knows that. He went back and apologized, worked it out, got his job back. But those are the dynamics we're working with.

The kids say, "Why do you care about me? Nobody does." That's where the spiritual part comes in, because if you can get these kids into church, where they can see other kids, and the pastor and other adults that love them, it starts to sink in and then they want more.

And all of this takes time. And the problem is, we don't have much time. We're getting ready to lose another generation of kids. So I tell Minister Vivian when she calls me to send me some people who want to get things done. Don't have me sitting in 15 meetings and nothing gets done. I don't have time for that. We can raise money. We can do it. The problem is too deep and too serious. We've got a big vision.

I see not just these 15 men, but 10,000. And not just men and women. Young people, taking care of each other. And we're getting started on doing this.

I was invited to a youth summit by 20 young people I knew. I asked them why they had organized this summit to talk about how young people need to solve their own problems. You know what they told me? "We're tired of waiting for someone to help us."

They had a prophetic voice.

Since we've been
there, we have
seen the community
watching us and
waiting to see if we
are your status quo
church, or a church
that will reach out and
make a difference.

Rev. Kelley: Isn't it? What they are saying is they know that we adults are all busy, so you got to go beyond your boundaries. Jesus went beyond his boundaries. It can't be every so often, it's got to be 24/7. We can't *not* do it. I tell those 15 men I told you about – we're doing a mentoring program with them and kids at my church – I told those men, don't even think about saying yes to this, unless you're ready to go all the way for these kids. These kids will adopt you into their family for the rest of their lives. I know, I was adopted. That's how this will go. You can't afford to abandon these kids. They've got enough losses. Fortunately, these men were all ready, they all said yes.

Pastor Turner: I think one of the major hurts in our community is undiscovered purpose or identity, which brings about depression, despair and hopelessness. Minister Vivian and myself started a class that began January of this year "Where Do I Fit?" This class was open to all, where we are endeavoring to help people discover and develop the gift God gave them that will join them together with the part they are destined to be with. In the spring and summer months, I'm walking the community to get a feel for what's out there. We have to build trust in the community. We're starting a city block club in March 2008 inviting the people out.

Since we've been there (April 2007), we have seen the community watching us and waiting to see if we are your status quo church – or a

church that will reach out and make a difference. A church that will change the atmosphere for the sake of the kingdom. But, to date, the majority of our congregation is still from outside the community. My prayer is for that to change this year.

Rev. Kelley: But here's the thing we've all learned: You can't get parents in the inner city to come to a parent group if you call it that. I tried that at the Y. You've got to call it something about understanding their teenager or their child. We're finding that one thing parents need is information on how to be financially sound, to save, to write a will, to make sure they understand how to save for a house.

See, you've got three doers here. I've already adopted her school (Minister Vivian's Catalyst Elementary). We're going to do whatever that school needs. We can't take the church into the school, but we are going to bring the life of that school into our church. What I love about this is that the Lord is going to send us more people with that vision, who want to work, don't want to just talk.

Minister Vivian: No time for talk

Pastor Turner: Yes, yes.

Rev. Kelley: But want to work. Help a child. That's what we're going to do. It's a done deal, we're just putting the people together.

What are you doing for the youth in your community?

Whether they are inner city, rural or suburban, caring communities of faith often struggle with how to keep their teens engaged and excited about embracing and living out their faith.

Tell us how churches and agencies are working together in your community to address the economic, educational and social challenges of youth. Tell us what one person is doing, or one church, or a collaboration. As Rev. Dale Kelley says, how are you "putting the people together?"

E-mail Michael Kelly with your story at mkell17@luc.edu.

Let's learn from one another.