

# Newsletter of the LCHR and BRCHR

Louisiana Council on Human Relations  
and  
Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations

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## Two Organizations in Baton Rouge Engaged In Commendable Humanitarian Activities

There are several organizations in Baton Rouge that are engaged in commendable humanitarian activities. Two of these are Together Baton Rouge and WIN (Working Interface Network). We wish to encourage and commend them for their work. Some highlights of these two organizations will be given.

### Together Baton Rouge

Together Baton Rouge is a recently formed faith-based organization that is becoming well known in Baton Rouge. On its website at <http://www.togetherbr.org>, the description of the organization is given as follows: “Together Baton Rouge is a broad-based coalition of institutions in the Greater Baton Rouge area. We have three basic goals: to build relationships across our community based on trust and a willingness to listen to each other; to equip our members and leadership with skills and practices to get results; to achieve change on concrete issues as part of our common call to justice. The will to deliberately cross the lines of race, religion, neighborhood and political affiliation. It will take a strong stand on issues affecting families and communities, but will remain politically non-partisan. **Together Baton Rouge is part of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation’s oldest and largest broad-based organizing network. There are more than 65 IAF organizations around the**

**country, including projects in New Orleans, Monroe, Shreveport-Bossier, Alexandria and the Louisiana Delta.”**

The national IAF states that throughout the country, its organizations have established a powerful track record for citizen-driven community change. As examples, it gives its community policing project in Houston; a neighborhood investment and street and drainage improvement project in San Antonio; assisting Shreveport in securing significant federal and local funding to create after-hours bus service; in Texas created the Alliance Schools Strategy getting parents involved to improve public education and increasing the funding across Texas for schools for and after-school programs; built more than 4000 homes in blighted areas in New York, all affordable, all for lower-income families; implemented workforce development programs in San Antonio, and in Baltimore; assisted during the wake of the Hurricane Katrina with the efforts resulting in fundamental reform of the Road Home program and winning \$75 million for a strategy to transform flooded and blighted properties into affordable home ownership.

Together Baton Rouge has received very favorable press coverage from the Advocate News Paper, from Business Report.com, and as posted on the Web page of Together Baton Rouge and the Web sites of various churches.

Some excerpts from the press coverage will be given.

1. From Business Report.comL:  
November 9, 2010

More than 75 representatives from dozens of local churches and faith-based organizations gathered this afternoon for the kickoff of Together Baton Rouge, a citizens-based coalition that intends to address community problems such as crime, blighted housing, and workforce development by building trust and relationships across racial and economic lines. At their inaugural press conference, organizers of the group said many of the issues they want to focus on were iterated in the Louisiana Human Development Report in 2009, which ranked East Baton Rouge Parish both first and last in Louisiana in terms of key quality-of-life indicators.

2. The Advocate: November 10, 2010

A coalition of more than 100 faith and civic groups announced Tuesday that their group, Together Baton Rouge, plans to change the community by unifying races, ridding the parish of crime and blight while improving the educational system, infrastructure and economy. The group has been working for two years, crossing racial, geo-graphic, economic and denominational lines, the Rev. Lee Wesley, pastor of Community Bible Baptist Church said during a news conference at Mount Zion First Baptist Church on Tuesday. "This is the largest group of its kind I have ever seen in the city-parish," Mayor-President Kip Holden said after the news briefing. "This will make my job easier with all these people working together to make our community a better place." Wesley said the idea of forming the group came from black pastors who wanted to address the community's problems. Wesley outlined the group's three main

goals: Build trust and relationships across lines that usually divide us; Identify and train community leaders so problems can be solved from the inside out instead of the outside in; and Build a lasting organization.

3. The Advocate: March 1, 2011

James Bowers didn't speak first while sitting at a table of strangers who were sharing personal stories about their lives. The 69-year-old white man listened intently as three people before him, members of the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, a black church on Eddie Robinson Sr. Drive, shared stories about lessons learned from difficult childhoods marked by poverty and discrimination. When it was his turn, Bowers spoke almost apologetically to the group: "There's nothing I can say that's in your league." He told them he came to the Together Baton Rouge event Monday night at Shiloh church because of an experience he had just six hours earlier while reading to a first-grader as part of a "reading buddy" program. During a reading session, he said, the first-grader told him plainly that his father was going to jail because his father attacked his mother and stabbed his uncle when he tried to protect her. "I realized I have no skills to react to that. What do I do? I had no guidelines or instincts of what to do or say," Bowers admitted to the group. Bowers said he wanted to help people like that little boy. Leaders from Together Baton Rouge, a recently formed citizens group made up of more than 100 religious and civic organizations, say that it's conversations like these, ones that happen across racial and socioeconomic lines, that will eventually make Baton Rouge a better, safer place to live.

The Rev. Mark Holland, rector of St. James church, said bringing together different demographics of people helps spread

understanding. "We're making the human connection. It makes it personal," Hol-land said. "Look at the folks that are here, they have the same dreams — a safe place to live and work. It,s not a black thing, or a white thing, or a north or south thing." The Rev. Charles Smith, pastor of Shiloh church, said it's important for churches and religious groups to step into a leadership role in Baton Rouge.

4. From Together Baton Rouge Website:  
*October 20th, 2011*

### **COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP at Gilbert Memorial Park Cemetery**

[Download the flier & sign-up sheet HERE](#)

Saturday, November 5th, 7am, 5600  
Greenwell Springs Road

Conditions at Gilbert Memorial Park Cemetery have been unacceptable for too long. The LA Attorney General has filed suit to remove the current operators. As a community, we must do our part to bring beauty and honor to our historic cemetery. The Press conference will begin a selection process for a receiver to take over the cemetery. The Clean-up will make sure that receiver starts off with a clean slate!

5. Business Report.com: March 24, 2011

### **Commission forms to implement FuturEBR transit goals**

A 17-member commission charged with implementing transit goals outlined in the 30-year FuturEBR master plan was announced this morning by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Together Baton Rouge and Mayor Kip Holden. "This group has the

critical task of building the roadmap to implement the transit initiatives of the FuturEBR plan, as well as laying out the business plan to make it a reality," says BRAC President/CEO Adam Knapp. "Real metropolitan mass transit is a big, bold idea, and we're confident of the capabilities of this group to lay out a plan to get there." Holden says he expects the commission to bring him options for addressing the parish's transit challenges by June. The commission will hold public meetings to get community input, estimate costs of FuturEBR transit projects and study the sustainability of various options, as well as analyze and determine the best mechanism to present another transit-related ballot initiative to EBR voters. Meanwhile, the Capital Area Transit System is still trying to find funds to fill a \$1.2 million budget shortfall, which CATS executives say could bankrupt the system by October. Last fall, voters rejected a 3.5-mill property tax increase for dedicated CATS funding. If it had passed, the tax would have generated about \$11.5 million annually and doubled the system's current budget. The first commission meeting was held this morning at Wesley United Methodist Church. Future meetings are to be announced later.

### **WIN (Working Interface Network)**

The WIN home page is <http://www.win-works.org/history.html>. Information about the organization is given on the home page as follows:

**History:** Founded in 1992 by Sr. Mary Jordan Langenhennig, O.P., WIN has won victories in the public arena regarding public safety, education reform, employment, affordable housing, neighborhood revitalization, youth empowerment,

healthcare and environmental improvements. WIN is a member organization of the PICO National Network (People Improving Community Through Organizing) and PICO Louisiana, together we are creating a new vision in Louisiana and throughout the country that unites people across region, race, class, and religion.

**Staff:** Rev. Alvin Herring is the newly appointed Executive Director of the Working Interfaith Network (WIN) Alvin is the former lead community organizer in West Contra Costa County for CCISCO (the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization). CCISCO, like WIN, is a member of the PICO National Network. Previously, Alvin was the Executive Director of the Muhammad Ali Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. While there he also served as the Dean of Students and Assistant Vice President of CampusLife. For many years Alvin traveled across the country as CEO and lead facilitator of *Side By Side*, bringing innovative diversity and community building consulting and training to high school, college and university campuses. Alvin has over 20 years of experience as a trainer and consultant in the areas of leadership development; community building and community organizing, social justice activism, executive coaching, and strategic planning. Alvin is the former Chief Operating Officer of the National Coalition Building Institute, Washington D.C., where he led diversity, leadership development and affinity group training programs for thousands of participants across the country and internationally. Alvin brings a long

career as an activist pastor and grass-roots leader to the work here in Baton Rouge. He sees his work as a ministry that allows him to turn his faith into the kind of action that will help build Baton Rouge into a community of justice and opportunity.

**WIN Clergy Works for a Safer Community:** Beginning in May of this year, a group of local, WIN trained clergy, began meeting to learn about the PICO Lifelines Campaign and Operation Ceasefire and how their leadership could make Baton Rouge a safer community. In the last few years, Baton Rouge has been ranked in the top 10 of cities on the FBI's most violent cities list. Worries about violent crime and homicide continue to be at the forefront of public concern and there is a growing outcry in many quarters of the city that drastic action is needed. WIN clergy are responding to that concern and have committed themselves to become better equipped to take on the issue.

### **Southern University (Baton Rouge) Annual Homecoming Ecumenical Service**

By James E. Cross

The Advocate Newspaper advertised this event as follows: "The annual Homecoming Convocation/Ecumenical Services, Challenging All to be One in Christ," will be held at 11 a.m. Monday in the Royal Cotillion Ballroom of the Smith-Brown Memorial Union. The Rev. Jesse Bilberry Jr., pastor of Mount Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church, will be the guest speaker. The Southern University Gospel Choir and the Mount Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church Choir will perform." The event was held on October 24, 2011.

Rev. Bilberry did an artful job in his ecumenical approach to the theme. As a background, he merged two incidents from the Bible, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The Old Testament incident came from the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of II Kings. The New Testament incident came from The Gospel According to St. John 4:1:23. The familiar story of the Samaritan woman at the well, found in the Book of John, was used to demonstrate how the concept of “Oneness” can be achieved. Rev. Bilberry said it is important to start with and build upon those things that we have in common. The common history of the Jews and the Samaritans was seen in the Book of II Kings. The Jews from the Northern Kingdom of Isreal, known as Samaria, had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Some of the poorer Jews had been left as a remnant. People from Babylon and the surrounding areas were brought into Samaria to repopulate it. These people intermarried with the Jews that were left in the land. When lions began to slay the people, it was surmised that it was because they were not worshipping the God of the land. As a result, Jewish priest were brought back into Samaria to teach the new comers how to worship God. Rev. Bilberry then pointed out that the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well was based on a common religious background. Even the well served this common cause in that it was the well dugged by Jacob.

Using this as his point of departure, Rev. Bilberry emphasised that we can have different cultures and still come to points of agreement or develop “Oneness”. We can be of different races and different nationalities but still have mutual respect for each other. Rev. Bilberry stated that it is only when we let our cultures take precedence over religious values that we error. The way to achieve “Oneness” was taught by Jesus. Jesus taught that we should love one another.

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