

National Black Church Initiative

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For Immediate Release

National Black Church Initiative President Rev. Anthony Evans Sent Letter to Attorney General Lynch Concerning Church Security

Justice Department Must Act to Protect African Americans and Houses of Worship

Washington, DC – The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans sent letter to Attorney General Loretta Lynch raising concerns for church security issues and church burning.

Dear Ms. Lynch:

The tragedy unfolding recently in Charleston, South Carolina has caused the Black church and this nation to pause and reflect on the state of racial relations in America. The tragedy has evoked such painful recollections of a not-so-distant history for which plagued our country and divided our citizens. The tragedy reminds us as Americans the ever-pressing need to be one nation under God, indivisible, and with liberty and justice for all.

To that end, let me thank you and your Department for the diligence demonstrated in response to the Charleston tragedy to ensure our safety and to reaffirm religious liberties within African American religious traditions. Let me also commend Mr. Thomas L. Battles, Regional Director

for the Department of Justice and Mr. Mark Kappelhoff , Deputy Assistant Attorney General, who, too, have responded with a deep concern for these tragic issues as well as their openness toward our organization, the National Black Church Initiative, cultivating a viable partnership with the Department of Justice. This type of collaboration is one that contains the capacity to generate important dialogue as well as provide solutions-oriented approaches to address the severity of these plaguing racially- and religiously-motivated issues.

The National Black Church Initiative, a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches, particularly expresses concerns about the safety of our parishioners and church leadership. In light of this tragic event, two immediate questions remain at the forefront: Did Mr. Roof act alone in his violence against African Americans? Does the act of Mr. Roof serve as precursor for other planned acts against the Black church?

The first question is in response to the existing presence of publically known White supremacist groups that have been consistently monitored by your Department. The National Black Church Initiative wants to be assured that our government is doing everything possible to protect African American congregants and their respective property from these White supremacist organizations (i.e. neo-Nazis, skinheads). The National Black Church Initiative also wants to be involved with receiving updates on a real time basis as to whether or not Mr. Roof was associated with any of the known and unknown, anti-Black organizations. Given the visceral nature of White supremacist groups, we are fearful that African American religious leadership remains a target of assassination of these White supremacist groups.

The second question stems from our unprecedented concern regarding the need to have this tragic act of violence prosecuted as domestic terrorism. As we have witnessed, this act of violence extends beyond a hate crime, particularly given the systematic approach that Mr. Roof displayed toward Emanuel A.M.E. Church. Unbeknownst to these congregants, the unconscionable, yet calculated plan of Mr. Roof to worship with them for an entire hour, prior to their unforeseen annihilation. Another element to further that deeply disturbs us is his racial epithets articulated toward African Americans during the actual annihilation itself. The methodical approach to these killings and other supporting evidence leads us to conclude the heinous actions of Mr. Roof are clearly acts of domestic terrorism.

In light of these two critical questions raised and subsequent perspectives, the National Black Church Initiative and 15 major, African American denominations asks the Justice Department to join with us in support of a comprehensive faith-based safety program. The National Black Church Initiative and these major religious denominational groups are presently working on the development of this comprehensive plan, but we remain particularly interested in partnering with the Department of Justice given the expansive capacity of the Department and the need for a strategic collaboration to address these issues.

This comprehensive faith-based safety program of church parishioner is one purposed to keep our entire membership protected from deliberate, purposed acts of violence. Developing and implementing a systematic plan for protecting lives during the worship experience re-establishes a comfort level for the congregants. This comprehensive faith-based safety program of church parishioners is also important due to the prevailing concern for the safety and well-being of the

most vulnerable congregants--our elderly, our children, and those with disabilities. Our churches cannot risk having those who are most vulnerable and even those who are considered least vulnerable knowingly put in harm's way with no planned recourse of action. The call for this comprehensive faith-based safety program underscores the urgency of the need to be proactive, time-sensitive in our response.

Additionally, although the grieving process for the Charleston families who lost loved ones and our country who lost American citizens has just begun, we have yet to organize any of the funerals of the nine, murdered Americans. The National Black Church Initiative compels the Department of Justice to be responsive and immediately institute safety measures in place for these funerals. We remain unaware of the extent to which this horrendous act spans to silence the Black church and is inclusive of others. The National Black Church Initiative, too, asks the Department of Justice to assemble relevant agencies like the Department of Homeland Security and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to assist in this urgent matter.

Following below are the components of the comprehensive faith-based safety program of church parishioners again for which the National Black Church Initiative and 15 religious denominations are proposing:

Technical Assistance and Training

We plan to immediately train 25 of our congregants, mainly males in basic safety, security techniques and strategies to vanguard against any immediate threat. We have a draft protocol of training and measures to be put in place to safeguard our member congregations. One of the critical elements of this technical assistance and training is that we are asking congregations to reach out to their local law enforcement agencies and to create a safety plan for their faith community. There remains a need to understand those elements needed to implement this type of collaborative task. We have adopted an initiative, "*No Activities Without Security.*" A minimum of three (3) security persons are to be present at all faith-based activities while children and women's activities are to be assigned six (6) security persons. This is a part of our 90-day plan before we are able to formally incorporate the core elements which we are now setting forth.

Educational Seminars

Educational seminars around the country and within each of the regions are particularly important toward ensuring as many people are aware of this important plan to educate individuals about safety for parishioners. We will need the support of the aforementioned agencies (i.e. Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) along with the Department of Justice to help us create a seminar that covers all of the necessary safety elements on how to safeguard a group of people during the worship experience and other related church activities such as Bible study on a weekday night. This particular seminar will need to be completed at least twelve times in every region of the country within the next six months. This particular seminar will need to be taken within the next six weeks.

Safety Manual

Having a safety manual is important toward providing guidelines for how people are to conduct themselves in times of crisis. Unfortunately, many of our congregations are unable to secure a paid security apparatus to safeguard them. The manual has to speak directly to the short-term and

long-term needs of what congregations need to do toward enhancing overall security of the church and parishioners. The manual needs to also be inclusive of key community-based organizations and related personnel, emergency phone numbers and websites. The uniqueness of this manual is its transferability as it can be adapted to every city or geographic area or any other religious affiliations in the country so that the information is relevant to that particular entity. The safety manuals will be placed on a website for the public to view. Thus, we are seeking assistance in generating a “how to” safety manual for faith-based parishioners.

Companion Website

We need to create a website to serve as a “one stop safety net.” This website will consist of written, video, graphics and other elements. The website will contain information on technical assistance and training, education, the safety manuals, and other key resources being offered by city, county, state and federal law enforcement authorities. The website will be updated on a daily basis and will send out emergency alerts and other relevant information pertaining to the faith-based community. Thus, we seek support from you toward ensuring the viability of this website in serving as an important tool for ensuring the safety of our parishioners.

Paid Security Apparatus

As we know, some churches will have sufficient resources to hire their own security guards. The vast majority of our churches, however, will not be able to afford them. Depending upon the size of the respective church, there are also unique issues regarding the preparedness and capacity of the security personnel to be responsive to the needs at hand. Thus, we need technical assistance for effectively hiring security personnel for faith communities and the necessary criteria. Issues regarding liability and whether or not the church should hire armed or unarmed guards become critically important points for consideration. Since we are trying to minimize guns in our faith community, we presently have a policy banning any form of fire arms in our congregations from parishioners or security personnel. Yet, with the resurgence of violence throughout the country and more recently with the Charleston tragedy, this is an issue that we must revisit. Along with the input from our coalition membership, we will need adequate consultation from federal or state officials and support in developing alternative or modifying current plans.

Innovative Safety Technologies

Technology is important toward delivery messages in an efficient, effective manner. Up-to-date technology offers more innovative features to ensure safety is achieved at the highest level. We need support from you in identifying the proper and doable safety technologies that churches should consider in safeguarding its environment. There is also a need to understand the pros and cons of the use of technology and subsequent issues around privacy as well as legal and liability issue concerning the proper use of technology in faith based communities. The level of expertise that you might be able to provide for us and the constituents we serve would be paramount.

Grant Assistance Program

Grant assisted programs offer access to earmarked resources for improving the outcomes of targeted issues. Because of the urgency of putting safety measures in place, many congregations will not be able to meet the escalating expense. Many security experts have concluded this new expenditure could constitute over 20% of the church budget. Therefore, we are requesting that a grant program be established for faith-based communities to enhance the safety of not only the church and its members, but also for the community in which that church is located. For

instance, the church may ask for a grant to expand its video surveillance capabilities from all geographic points, thus covering that particular community from every angle. This in turn will enhance the entire community capability of mitigating criminal activities and promoting prevention. The range of the grants is proposed to be \$10,000 to \$25,000. Having a grant assistance program made available to our 34,000 constituents would be significant. With your support, this would allow those congregations to assume their own responsible in ensuring the safety of their churches.

Again, the National Black Church Initiative extends gratitude to you and the Department of Justice for consideration of the opportunity to engage in this important collaborative work with you and your staff as well as other relevant agencies. Having your support and commitment to the development and implementation of this comprehensive safety program for faith-based communities is of great importance. There is resounding need to our constituencies and your Department as well other federal agencies working together to ensure the safety and well-being of African American church goers and congregations. The National Black Church Initiative does understand the depth and breadth of this unusual challenge of safeguarding our parishioners. Yet, with your assistance in this effort, we will continue to remain within the purview of our Pledge of Allegiance as “one nation under God, indivisible, and with liberty and justice for all.”

About NBCI

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI’s mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. Our methodology is utilizing faith and sound health science.

NBCI’s purpose is to partner with major organizations and officials whose main mission is to reduce racial disparities in the variety of areas cited above. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the-box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI’s programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work. Visit our website at www.naltblackchurch.com.