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The Black Church Can Help Prevent Teen And Unplanned Pregnancies

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In the 1940s and 50’s, leaders in the Black church decided that they had had enough of Jim Crow and discrimination throughout the south. Some folks said that these warriors for justice should stick to just preaching the Bible—but they responded that it was in fact the Bible that called them to fight for change. So these clergy, lay leaders, and everyday believers—from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to Rosa Parks, to Fannie Lou Hamer, and many more—used church sanctuaries and fellowship halls as the convening ground for the fight for civil rights.

In the 1980s, Black church leaders once again broke the mold and were at the forefront of organizing the American people—and the African American community in particular—to oppose the apartheid regime in South Africa. There were those who said the church should “mind its business” and focus on domestic concerns. But these efforts continued and strengthened, and Black church leaders were a critical component of Apartheid’s eventual collapse.

Today, around the country, we and other leaders in the Black church are raising our voices on so many issues, from criminal justice reform to climate change and many more in between. The church is combining prophetic preaching and discipleship with powerful advocacy. And we are seeing results in arenas from small communities to states and federal agencies.

Rates of teen and unplanned pregnancy have declined in recent years—especially among Black teens and young adults—but there is more work to do. Teen pregnancy among African-American teen girls has fallen 49% in the past decade and 73% since peaking in 1991, but there are still 32 births per 1,000 teen girls, which is still far too high.

As church leaders, we have an important role to play in creating welcoming spaces for people to discuss these challenging issues; for too long teen and unplanned pregnancy were considered taboo topics in the church. Today, we are joining together with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and Values Partnerships to announce new resources to help church leaders engage in these conversations and impact teen and unplanned pregnancy in their communities.

We are releasing a powerful video with personal testimonials about the Black church and teen and unplanned pregnancy. The National Campaign and Values Partnerships have also produced fact sheets for church leaders explaining the moral and biblical framework of this work, what the facts are and why it matters, and 7 Keys to Success for churches that want to impact this issue.

The Black church can have a huge impact on removing the shame that some young people feel when addressing teen and unplanned pregnancy, the services we provide to teens and young adults, and ultimately on rates of teen and unplanned pregnancy in our community. We hope our fellow leaders will use these resources, ask questions, and engage with The National Campaign further. And we look forward to joining with others in the Black church community in this new, critically important, movement for change.

—Joshua DuBois, Founder/CEO, Values Partnerships

Signed by Rev. W. Antoni Sinkfield and First Lady Kristy Sinkfield of Payne Chapel AME Church in Nashville, TN Rev. Que English of the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church in New York City Dr. Yvonne Bennett of Hallelujah Christian Fellowship Ministries in Union, NJ Rev. Kip Bernard Banks, Sr. of East Washington Heights Baptist Church in Washington, DC Bishop Darren Ferguson of Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Arverne (Far Rockaway), NY Rev. Derrick Harkins of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City Rev. Tony Lee of Community of Hope AME Church in Hillcrest Heights, MD