



W THE WITNESS INC.

Impact Report 2023

A Breaking Point

Introduction





Foreshadowed by political dysfunction, systemic silencing and oppression, the year of 2020 was a pivotal time of reckoning across the country and around the globe. From a January that held a historic Presidential impeachment trial, to missile launches that further tightened diplomatic tensions in the Middle East. From a deadly pandemic that put our global workforce at a standstill and lingers to this day, to a police search of one more Black man that ended in one more death – which is still one too many.

“When you’re driving in the car, and the needle for the gas tank is already on E and you’re just driving, wondering how far you can go on an empty tank”.



Jemar Tisby and Tyler Burns, chop it up in a studio room as they talk about race, Blackness and finding their place in their faith, as they always have since nearly the beginning of their decades long friendship. But this time, there is far more weight to bear. The weight of divine purpose and calling that are finally being answered.

The impetus for a racial awakening in the U.S. came in the collective struggle or death of several Black men, Black women, in traffic stops, drug searches, episodes of mental health, during labor or while giving birth, out jogging, at work, church and in the midst of nonviolent protests.

“We’ve been robbed of the opportunity to experience wholeness as God intended for us to and navigating that reality is something we’ve been doing, not just in 2020 but for probably about a decade. We’ve been slowly trying to figure out ‘What does it mean to be Black and Christian?’”

“We’re pouring out and pouring out, can never catch a break. Never having a moment to fill back up. That’s what it feels like in 2020

In a Christian environment, we’re trying to answer ‘How do we navigate being fully ourselves, to fully flourish, in a context that denies it? How do I navigate in a setting which doesn’t necessarily affirm the dignity that I’ve been created with?’



Brewing nearly since 2016, the plight of the Black experience was stripped down over time to unveil the casual trauma that isn't caught on camera but experienced in micro-moments in places where individuals should be able to find rest and refuge. Across historically evangelical spaces, church leaders were ill-equipped to care for and advocate on behalf of Black members in their community, or they were more focused on politics or pacifying the masses to address the inequalities. With a failure to denounce state-sanctioned violence against Black people, white Christian Nationalism, systemic racism, and everyday bigotry, this sent a message that truly walking in God's love with action and conviction was only done when convenient.



“Being Black and Christian – those two are not mutually exclusive but we live in a society that tells you that in order to be seen, heard and protected, you should separate, divide them or sacrifice one for the other”

Embracing action and armed with conviction, cities across the country began to speak out against racial violence in pursuit of social justice. A modern Civil Rights Movement emerged with energy that our country hadn't seen since the 1960's.

“We are so preoccupied with the latest injustice, with the latest murder, dealing with the latest slight or slur that we're constantly in survival mode and we never have the opportunity to dream

and to imagine
and to envision who we are
and what we could be if we had the space to do so

and so now we're getting to a point where we really need to take stock and have that prophetic imagination to envision a reality that is not here yet, but one that is possible...

Matthew 19:28

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

1 Corinthians 13:7

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Foreword Message

The following document is a living testimony that encompasses what has been and what is currently possible through The Witness Foundation, an entity within The Witness Inc. What was once a vision, became a dream. What was a dream, became a goal. With the power of prayer, committed donors, and a diligent team, this goal was met in 2020 with the pressure that produces diamonds.

Wherever you are, we welcome you into a space where the Christ-centered actions of Black leaders shine.

The Breakdown

Our Mission and Vision.



We envision a future where the concerns of Black Christians are heard, solutions are funded, and leaders are equipped to flourish in their divine brilliance.

The Witness Inc.'s mission is to present the core concerns of Black Christians and to convene, equip, and fund visionary leaders in addressing these concerns through the grace and guidance of our faith.



About The Witness Inc.

The Witness Inc. is comprised by two divisions: The Witness: A Black Christian Collective (The BCC) and The Witness Foundation (TWF). We are Christ-centered and Black-serving. We exist to make sure Black Christian leaders are equipped to flourish. We accomplish this through education and philanthropic endeavors to meet the modern challenges of Black Christians today.

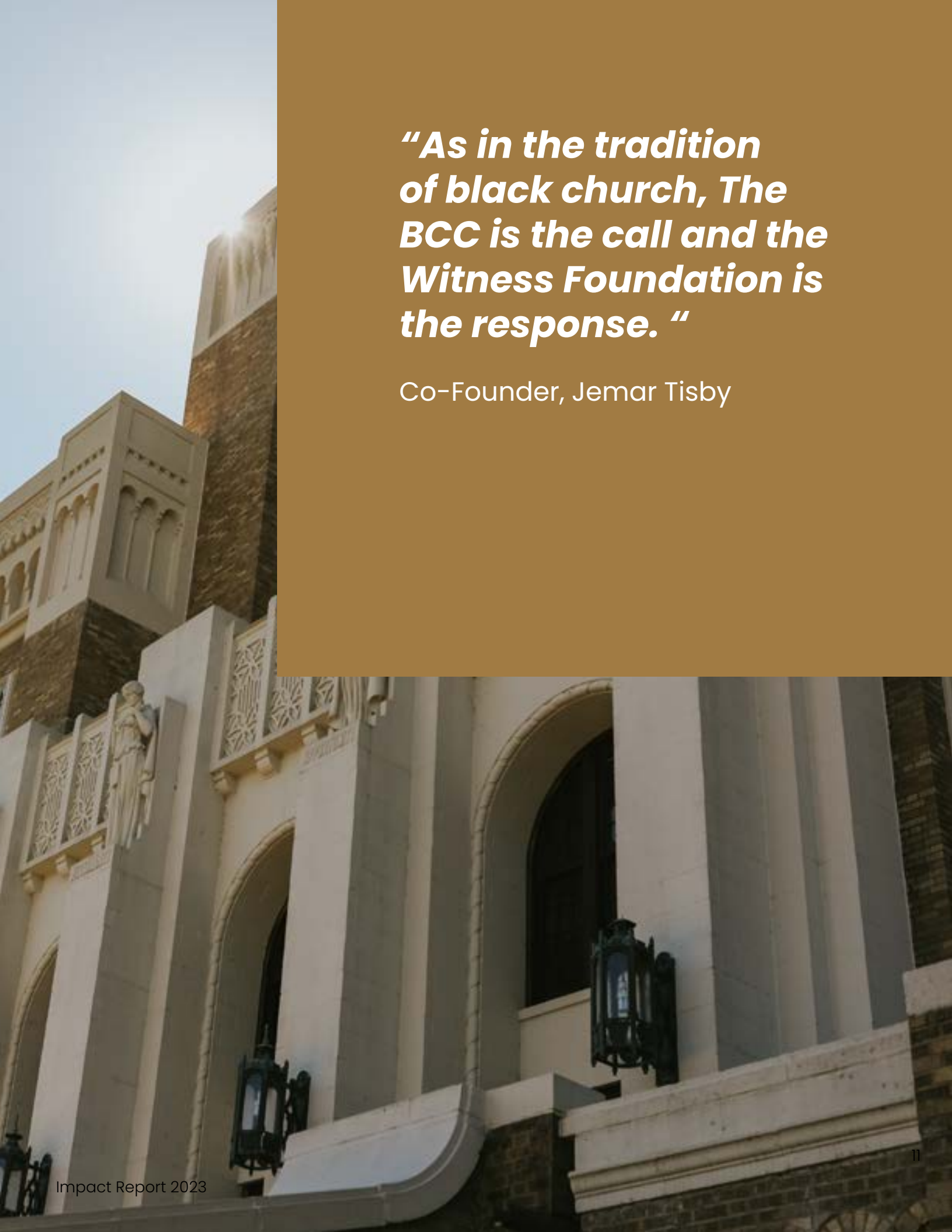


About The Witness: A Black Christian Collective

The Witness: A Black Christian Collective is a faith-based media organization that engages issues of religion, race, justice, and culture from a biblical perspective. The BCC consciously draws on the expansive black church tradition to address matters of personal faith while also speaking to issues of public righteousness through blog posts, feature-length articles, podcasts, and live reporting.

About The Witness Foundation

The Witness Foundation seeks to equip Black Christian leaders to flourish in the face of systemic- racism. Our mission is to continue the movement for racial justice as we identify, train and fund the next generation of Black Christian leaders.



***“As in the tradition
of black church, The
BCC is the call and the
Witness Foundation is
the response. ”***

Co-Founder, Jemar Tisby

About Wealth and Race

Did you know that Black families give 25% more of their income annually than white households? Nearly two-thirds of African-American households donated to organizations and causes, totaling \$11 billion each year.

Our rich history of internal philanthropy is rooted in tithing in churches, supporting elders and raising children as a village. While our giving has been consistent throughout generations, it has been stunted by wealth that couldn't be gained due to limited or denied opportunities from racial oppression.

While many white families generate wealth from passing an inheritance, Black families have a lower expectation of this and at far lower monetary amounts. 30 percent of white households received an inheritance in 2019 at an average level of \$195,500 compared to 10 percent of Black households at an average level of \$100,000. Without an inheritance, owning a home is a traditional way to gain and pass on crucial assets. In 2019 the typical white families' home value was \$230,000 compared to \$150,000 for Black families. This is further aggravated by the fact that Black families are 30% less likely to own a home than white families.

If we imagine that Black families were not redlined, or excluded from ownership in established areas, or that their thriving communities were not ransacked and burned like the Black Wall Street massacre of 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, our current data would tell a different story.

If we imagine that Black folks profited from their centuries of sharecropping and hard-earned agricultural labor, or their creative patents and ideas that were often corrupted or stolen, our current communities would not be in the same condition.

If we imagine that Black students could graduate and fulfill postsecondary credentials after their K12 education instead of pioneering quests for space inside integrated schools and universities, our communities would be more vibrant than they are today.

If we consider the history that followed chattel slavery and led to underemployment, low graduation rates and impeded education attainment, disparate voting, and stagnant business ownership, much of this data and our experiences are not surprising. This history is not one that we hide from, but one that we continue to stand on because of the leaders who did make it through and paved a way to progress.

We stand on Civil Rights leaders like Marian Wright Edelman who founded the Children's Defense Fund and contributed to NAACP, SCLC, and The Poor People's Campaign's organizing efforts. We stand on the shoulders of Medgar Evers who was the first Mississippi field secretary of the NAACP leading up until his death, whose legacy was carried-on by Myrlie Evers, his wife, who later carried the torch as a chairwoman of the organization from 1995-1998. We stand on theologian James H. Cone who advocated for Black liberation within the Gospel to further acknowledge the humanity and dignity that had been denied to Black Christians. We stand on Philadelphia preacher's kid and activist, Prathia Hall, who gave Dr. King permission to use the iconic "I have a dream" line that she said in a speech that he witnessed at a 1962 prayer service at Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Sasser, Georgia.

As we stand on the efforts and legacy of these leaders who were guided by their faith to pursue justice, we strive for the same path in 2023 and beyond. We foresee the limitations and seek to conquer them through networks of connection, through thoughtful allyship and tools to navigate today's executive challenges.



Presenting a world of good reinforced by Black brilliance and divine possibility.

Though many leaders have overcome financial limitations to advance their goals, not all Black Christian leaders have the same pathways or opportunities. Some hindrances manifest in religious limitations for roles of women or in simply not seeing value niche areas that enrich specific populations.

We believe “ministry” expands beyond sharing the gospel, but in meeting the needs of individuals through community-based functions. To meet or draw attention to specific community needs, asset-based community development is not always enough to fill the gaps or scale endeavors that are worth the long-term investment.

The foundation’s signature fellowship program awards unrestricted funds to up to 5 individuals who ethically identify as Black and Christian from any Christ-centered faith tradition. In addition to \$100,000 dollars over 2 years, they receive peer and executive mentorship from seasoned professionals, spiritual development and tactical training related to running their organizations. Through this, Black Christian leaders will be able to do their work without the limitations of a lack of resources while gaining valuable skills and personal networks to support them throughout their lives, beyond the 2-year program.

In action, this means they can fully work in their vision instead of also having to balance a 9-to-5 job if they choose. They can hire the help they need to execute their mission and work in a holistic way. They will not have to choose between childcare or bills to make ends meet. Most importantly, fellows will not have to sacrifice withholding their identity or Blackness in order to pursue their vision. For this generation of multihyphenates and change-makers, we seek to provide the financial and developmental pathway to fulfill the dreams God has given them.



10 Witness Foundation Values and Principles of our Fellowship

1

We acknowledge the historical lack of resources for Black-led organizations.

2

The ideology of racial justice and freedom for the oppressed are rooted in Biblical truths.

3

As a Christian foundation, we fund Black Christian leaders who we believe will seek the best welfare for all people they touch, not just those who are believers.

4

We acknowledge the American and global history that has led to our current society and believe in evidence-based research to support the need for changes.

5

We believe the Bible speaks to the distribution of reparations for those who have been oppressed, which is why we fund Black folks.

6

We believe in the human dignity, safety and preservation of all Black lives, regardless of what intersection of marginalization they represent.

7

We believe in action based on professional and lived experience, Biblical wisdom, and evidence-based and statistically relevant research.

8

We commit to investing in people, organizations and policy impact that promote the best welfare possible for Black folks, regardless of the political leaning or Biblical scandal that it may present in a modern world.

9

We select our TWF Fellows based on their commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and their ability to lead. We choose to invest in leaders from all walks of Biblical faith and denominations.

10

Black Christians and Black-led organizations embody dignity, are worthy of investment, and hold propensity for excellence.

The Breakdown **Board
Support**





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To those who bear witness with us,

On behalf of the Witness Foundation board members, we are so thankful to be part of this transformational effort of equipping Black Christian leaders and giving them tools to thrive.

When this opportunity first emerged, each of us had in some way or another experienced the feeling of lacking: the struggle to find funds while in law school; the feeling of being the only Black voice in a room of others; or seeing the world with a vastly different perspective than other peers. Within the Black community, we keenly know the struggle that changemakers go through, whether they need to get one rung higher on the ladder or fully accelerate their impact, expand their network, or find the right connection in order to meet the challenge at hand.

The systematic oppression of name discrimination for job screenings, remaining effects of redlining family homes, and or even redistricting to eliminate equal voting representation has long been documented, discussed and laid bare. Yet, there is still a divide in this country for who receives the help they need and how they get it. For even as many organizations receive funds to do meaningful work, they are overly questioned and forced to validate their experience to outsiders and gatekeepers.

“We are capable of bearing a great burden, once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is.” -James Baldwin

This is our burden – knowing that there is not always a seat at the table for us – and we are honored to carry it, making the load lighter, and making space for those after us. The Witness Foundation is positioned to fill the gaps so that there is not only financial support, but freedom. While our intended goal is liberation, we will stand in the gap of support that has long been delayed or denied to our brothers and sisters with vision.

We are privileged to help bring the founders’ collective vision into manifestation for this first cohort of fellows and pray there are more to come. We thank you for joining with us in this glorious celebration of accomplishment for Shelene, Stanley, Tammira, Joi and Monique. Communities from the Bay area, to the South, all the way to Baltimore are elevated and more invested because of your support!

As we stand grateful before you, we still covet your prayers that this work will continue and thrive for the whole of the Witness Inc., both the BCC and the foundation. We believe God has ordained this mission and empowered Christin, Tyler, Ally and Jemar to lead at the helm. Though this fellowship and efforts within this program will evolve, we extend arms to receive your support and engagement for this next chapter. Our team has carried this program in excellence and we’re excited to steer towards what will come next!

Yours faithfully,

The Witness Foundation Board

John C. Richards Jr., Board Chair

www.johncrichardsjr.com

Greater Little Rock, Arkansas

2020-2023

John teaches at a Historically Black College and helps develop future leaders and change agents. He is a licensed attorney and attended Morehouse College for undergrad and Howard University for law school.

Richards received a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary and initially served as managing editor for Reformed African American Network before it became The Witness BCC. He is a self-described "Bible nerd with a heart to change local communities." He loves Jesus and Justice, and works hard daily to leave this world a better place than he found it.



Dr. Christina Edmondson,

Board Member

www.christinaedmondson.com

Greater Nashville, Tennessee

2020-2023

Blessed by an array of academic, professional and lived experiences, Christina is committed to bringing people together to promote personal and team flourishing. For over a decade, Christina has served in a variety of roles including recently as the Dean for Intercultural Student Development at Calvin University.

She holds a PhD in Counseling Psychology from Tennessee State University, a MS degree from the University of Rochester in Family Therapy, and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Hampton University. She also trains congregations and organizations nationally about implicit bias, multicultural accessibility, and leadership development. Christina and her husband, Mika, have two children.



Shannon Polk,

Board Member

www.shannonpolk.com

Greater Ann Arbor, Michigan

2021-2023

Shannon is dedicated to creating systemic change through community engagement and equitable initiatives, as demonstrated by her leadership in the nonprofit sector. As the current President and CEO of the Ann Arbor Community Foundation, Polk has a servant-hearted and philanthropic background. She is and previously consulted for several institutions, including the Community Foundation of Holland/Zeeland, the Bank of America Foundation, the Council of Michigan Foundations, and the CS Mott Foundation. Polk is a graduate of Assemblies of God Theological Seminary and Western Michigan University Law School.



Timothy Welbeck,

Board Member

www.timothywelbeck.com

Greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2022-2023

Timothy Welbeck is the Director of Anti-Racism Research and an Assistant Professor of Instruction at Temple University. A Civil Rights Attorney by training, Timothy is a scholar of law, race, and cultural studies. He earned his J.D. from Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law and his B.A. from Morehouse College. One of Timothy's notable scholarly works focuses on contemporary African and African American cultural transmissions, retentions, expressions and evolutions, and hip-hop as a microcosm of the Black experience. His book "No City for Young Men: Hip-Hop and the Narrative of Marginalization," explores how hip-hop communicates the lived experience of persons who live in urban centers across the nation, particularly Black men living in major cities.



The Breakdown

The Donor Impact





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The movement for racial justice is being accelerated because of you.

We believe that we cannot do anything apart from God and the community. Our donors have been the lifeblood of The Witness Foundation that funds the next generation of Black Christian leaders and efforts of The Witness BCC.

With your continued prayer, podcast downloads, page views, or attendance at our events, we are able to not only support our philanthropic growth and structure as a new charity, but also our external reach of God's liberation to communities across the country on several platforms.

We launched the foundation in 2020 with a joint campaign goal of \$500,000 for both organizations under The Witness Inc. Our foundation sought out church partners, community groups, religious institutions and all others who were inspired to bear witness and take action within the racial justice movement before us.

As the foundation aimed to build capacity and prepare for the fellowship, the BCC committed to hire more columnists and writers; expand

its signature podcast suite; and create communities of refreshment that would include social groups and leadership cohorts.

In just three months, we raised over \$166,000 dollars toward our goal. This triumph brought fresh momentum into the year of 2021 as we opened our inaugural cohort application and began to recruit our Witness Fellows.

After much discernment and program design work of our new foundation staff members, 5 Witness Fellows



were accepted into the foundation's first cohort in the spring of 2021. They began their 2-year leadership development journey where they exchanged stories of implementing their visions, overcoming legal battles, preventing burnout and conquering imposter syndrome. During this same time, the BCC announced their #LeaveLoud campaign. Being ahead of the curve, the BCC first gave voice to the experience of being othered in white evangelical churches years before it became documented in the New York Times and other mainstream media. After several pastors and leaders failed to denounce state-sanctioned violence against Black people, white Christian Nationalism, systemic racism, the BCC encouraged Black Christians to exit their churches



to find a place where they could lead, worship or simply exist in peace. "To #LeaveLOUD is to tell our stories, to name things for what they are, to take back the dignity we've lost while being in institutions that don't value the fullness of the image of God within us, and to go where we are celebrated and not just tolerated."

At the end of 2021, our collective efforts reached a new peak with an anonymous donor who committed to match any and all gifts up to \$50,000 dollars for the end of that year. With this match and a host of intimate donor gatherings, our Witness work was amplified to produce work that would hold to some of our biggest endeavors.

What can you build together? What institution, black-led, are you building? An organization? A movement?

In this next season, we saw an increase in our staff and capacity for our leadership that centered on soul-care over burning out. Our Witness Fellows continued their work that focused on areas of mental health support for Black mothers, prisoner re-entry and rehabilitation, and youth cultivating their artistic performances on the big stage. Our BCC team continued to project nearly one million downloads of their signature podcast Pass the Mic for the first time ever! We've said several times that 'This is only the beginning,' but the truth is that now, we are in the thick of it, and it is only because of your partnership and investment in the journey toward justice.



***As we have yearned
for a change, the tides
have moved.***

***As we have petitioned
for prayer and support,
the masses have
answered.***

***As we have made
our actions clear, the
resources have then
been provided for us.***

This melodious call and response is not only sacred to Black gospel hymns of old, but it is now embodied in our community that truly bears witness with us. The Witness Inc. has accomplished what was only a whisper or dream decades ago, but these endeavors for the Kingdom are the direct result of your financial gifts of past and present. In a posture of gratitude, we are moved beyond words but still know that the best, or better, is yet to come.

The Witness Foundation Fundraising Principles

We recognize that God cares about our collective healing and liberation; these practically require a commitment to economic justice.

Fundraising must be grounded in racial awareness, equity, and social justice.


All who engage in strengthening the community are equally valued, whether volunteers, staff, donors, or board members.

We foster a sense of belonging, not othering.

We believe God is generous in His love for us; therefore, we are called to be generous in our giving.

Individual organizational missions are not as important as the collective community.

Time is valued equally as money.



We see the work of social justice as holistic and transformative, not transactional.

We believe in stewarding our investments.

Nonprofits are generous with and mutually supportive of one another.

We treat donors as partners, and this means that we are transparent, and occasionally have difficult conversations.

We promote the understanding that everyone (donors, staff, funders, board members, volunteers) personally benefits from engaging in the work of social justice – it's not just charity and compassion.

The following principles were created by Community Centric Fundraising and adapted to the values of The Witness Foundation.

A Regional Proposal

Narrative of Lowell Taylor's donor engagement and the birth of 2 regional fellows for TWF.

While support for The Witness Foundation has come from various groups and donors, one regional standout comes from Northwest Arkansas, locally known as NWA. Reparations Now NWA, initiated by Lowell and Rebecca Taylor, raised \$100,000 for TWF to enable one member of our inaugural fellowship cohort would be a resident of the Northwest Arkansas area.

“...white Christians need to change our perspective: we need to understand that reconciliation is important but insufficient to get us from here to equality. We must widen our view of racism”

--Lowell Taylor

Though the TWF Fellowship is exclusively for Black Christians, it will take all believers in Christ to understand and take action against institutional and individualized racism that inhibits growth and equity for Black leaders. In this effort, the Taylor's created a series of conversations and educational materials that in essence, create a customized 'Case for Reparations', in his own words, an homage to Ta-Nehisi Coates.

Their reading curriculum included *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith; *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* by Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson; *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Vincent Harding with Foreword by Coretta Scott King; and *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* by Jemar Tisby with Foreword by Lecrae Moore, and several more.

This fruitful learning journey in pursuit of racial understanding and deliberate action is just what The Witness hopes to inspire for those who are outside of the Black experience. Without our brothers and sisters from other communities, we will not be able to accomplish a greater mission of overcoming the seeds of white supremacy in our everyday environments, especially the Church.

We are grateful to the Lowell family and the greater NWA area for the opportunity to fund 2 fellows for our inaugural cohort. This bold partnership marched one step further in committing to donate \$25,000 dollars annually and receive on-going resources to support racial justice. Because of the Taylor family, The Witness was able to create a framework for future Church Partnership programs and future collaborations with seminaries, foundations and other institutions to pursue true reparations: financial security for the historically disadvantaged.



The Witness Fellowship Program





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The action and promise of TWF is to enact a fellowship that would equip leaders with the operational knowledge, financial means and spiritual inspiration so they may accelerate their purpose. After launching the foundation in October of 2020 and building the fundraising campaign, the fellowship application opened with our criteria and curriculum for fellowship program:



Fellowship Criteria

Organizational Alignment: To deliver social impact at scale, we desire leaders who have a mission for the margins. Black communities have historically experienced disparities in healthcare, criminal justice, voting equity, education, and spiritual development. We're looking for clear objectives of improvement where sustainability can thrive for an intended social area.

Readiness for Acceleration: While we are open to some startup organizations, we desire to work with leaders who have already been working to build their organization. If you have not already launched, we aim to bring fellows out of an incubator stage and into a phase of full functionality. For organizations who have been established, we aim to give support for expansion in resources and wisdom that can be implemented from the start of the fellowship.

Capability for growth: Persistence is our intention, never perfection. We desire organizations who know how to pivot when challenges arise and how to go high when resources are presented. We want to see your blue prints so they can be manifested with a solid foundation.

Intended Curriculum Objectives:

- Faith-Based Activism
- Engaging and Measuring Social Impact
- Development and Financial Stewardship
- Marketing and Communications
- Legal Support Spiritual Direction
- Fellowship Capstone

Fellowship Sessions:

- **Session 1** – Date
- Session 2 – Sept 2021 – Being Innovative & Living and Leading with Your Values
- Session 3 – Oct 1-4, 2022 – Retreat in Little Rock, AR

Mentorship and Executive Coaching

Veretta Nix, MA

Greater Detroit Area

Verenetta is the president of Total Talents, a human resources consulting firm specializing in individual, team and organization development, diversity & inclusion, and leadership & executive coaching. She has over 20 years of experience in human resources leadership roles in healthcare, state government, and in the food service industry. She serves as Human Resources Director for Zingerman's Community of Businesses and has served as Director of Organizational Effectiveness & Diversity for Michigan Medicine. Verenetta has held executive level roles of leadership within Henry Ford Health System including Vice President of Human Resources at Henry Ford Hospital. She helps clients identify and clarify key values; develop strategies to authentically drive action planning and behaviors; respect the diversity of their teams, customers and communities; leverage their unique talents and strengths; and commit to continued development. She has experience in leadership development, employee engagement, performance management, organization development and change management.



Veretta has a B.A. in Sociology from Fisk University and a M.A. in Sociology from the University of Chicago. She is certified to administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Hogan Personality Assessments and has completed the Linkage Inc. coaching certification program. She is a Life member of the National Association of African Americans in Human Resources and a member of the Detroit Society for Human Resource Management, serving on their board from 2016-2020 with responsibility for educational programming.

The Witness Foundation

Lynda Jeffries, PhD

Greater Detroit Area

Lynda is a Senior Consultant with The Leadership Group LLC and has an extensive corporate background in human resources and performance assurance. Her expertise includes adult learning, facilitation, organization development, and human performance technology. Lynda consults on diversity inclusion, conflict resolution, team building, performance management, and provides executive coaching. She has a passion for assisting organizations in capacity building and leadership development. She custom-designs and facilitates strategic planning sessions, board retreats, and assessments to guide organizations toward growth and improvement.

Lynda has a PhD in Education from Capella University, a M.B.A. in Management from the University of Detroit Mercy, an Education Specialist Certificate from Wayne State University, and a B.S. in Business Administration from Lawrence Technological University. Lynda is certified in Management Research Group's Leadership Effectiveness Assessment and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. Lynda is actively involved in the community and has served in leadership roles on a variety of nonprofit and faith-based boards and committees including Historic Little Rock Baptist Church, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan and Considine Family Life Center.



Fellowship Capstone

In addition to peer mentorship, the fellows held monthly virtual learning sessions with directed time for several topics, guest speakers, and dedicated training. These conversations held a sacred space for lament, discipleship, growth and Black joy. Drawing from each fellow's experience, the curriculum evolved for a bespoke program designed to uplift and build on their existing strengths that have put transformational plans in motion. Drawing from the VIA Institute on Character, our instructors guided fellows to lean into their strengths focusing on wisdom, courage, humanity, temperance, transcendence and justice.

While each fellow developed their internal leadership style and vision, they were also called to externally showcase their work. The capstone project provided an opportunity for fellows to demonstrate and highlight their unique value proposition, imagination, and impact as a Black Christian leader and a Witness Foundation Fellow. As an essential focus throughout the duration of the program, fellows created independent research on their desired subject area to provide an evidence-based solution for real world problems.

Fellowship Capstone Criteria

- Highlight your work, calling, and impact as a Black Christian and Witness Fellow
- Demonstrate your leadership and vision in your organization or community.
- Focus on specific outcomes for a specific region, community area or unique population



Core Motivation:

How can the fruits of the capstone sustain your organization, raise funding, expand its audience, engage new media or contributors to deepen and extend the impact of your work?

The capstone served as an opportunity to highlight the fellows' impact by developing a campaign or signature initiative that showcased their work, leveraging new partnerships, or conducting original quantitative or qualitative research to demonstrate their organization's value. The capstone project was completed within 12-16 months, allowing time to complete the initiative and submit a report on the final outcomes by April 2023.

As a springboard for each of the fellows' platforms, they were able to present a short presentation at The Witness BCC's signature conference, Joy and Justice: Rise Up and Flourish held in Chicago, Illinois in June 2023.

Shelene Huey Booker

Fellow



Organization: Youth Utilizing Power and Praise
Focus: Youth in Performing Arts
Location: Palo Alto, California

“I might as well think big, why should any thoughts be small? I might as well think big, if I’m gonna think at all” – sung by Shelene Huey-Booker during her virtual presentation at the 2023 Joy and Justice: Rise Up and Flourish Conference held in Chicago, Illinois. The lyrics were originally written by Walt Whitman. ”

Shelene Huey Booker

At the tender age of 5 years-old, the words of this song inspired Shelene Huey-Booker and carried her toward realizing part of life's mission to be the founder and executive director at Youth Utilizing Power and Praise, also known as YUPP. Since its inception, she has served as the program's visionary, overseeing all executive decisions and developing programming for the youth.

YUPP is on a mission to develop cross-cultural networks that enhance the youth and young adults through performing arts, fine arts, public speaking, and sports. Nestled within Silicon Valley, the organization aims to drive youth empowerment and build self-esteem by providing access to supportive activities and services through mentorship and exposure to entrepreneurship, especially for youth of color.

Though Shelene found out about the Witness Foundation Fellowship in a Facebook post in October of 2020, she had been doing the work for over two decades. In 2002, her program originated from the collaboration of two young people who were seeking new platforms to share and grow in their performing arts past the boundaries of culture and religious affiliations. Since then, she and her partner set out to create curriculum for student programs, organize rehearsals, and lead live performances and community engagements. After becoming an official nonprofit in 2009, YUPP has served hundreds of students in this capacity, with many becoming successful creators, musicians, and artists.

Within the years as she developed YUPP, Shelene also worked in ministry where she was 1 of the 2 African American leaders on a multi-campus staff in a church with a population that was 98% white. Yet, as the racial injustices came into the spotlight during the pandemic of 2020, her opinion and thoughts finally had value. Despite this sudden, and positive change, it seemed to come too little, too late for it to be felt as fully authentic or change the relationship to her work environment.

"Coming into this fellowship, I'd become an expert on the degrading arts of code-switching and self sabotage. I had taken on a persona that in order to get into the rooms and have a voice, you must speak like your white counterparts and most importantly leave your 'authenticity' in the car. This [fellowship] opportunity came about at a point in the pandemic where I was having to break through this mindset."

Because of the Witness Fellowship, Shelene was able to take a leap of faith and resign from her vocational ministry job in January 2022. This funding allowed Shelene and her team to focus on building without taking on multiple jobs to make ends meet. YUPP soon found a permanent home where Shelene was able to hire new teachers, consultants and an executive assistant to advance their work.

“Jemar Tisby’s vision opened a world of possibilities for my organization. YUPP was able to invest in staffing, new programs, business infrastructure, board development, professional development services for executive staff and secure a grant writer that led to us receiving our largest grant since our existence! As a result, YUPP has established new partnerships, gained more visibility, received more professional development for all staff members and gained a new sense of hope for greater things to come.”

Learn more about Shelene Huey-Booker’s story and the YUPP impact at yupporg.com.

Social Impact

With these and other programs, YUPP has been able to help approximately 400 youth on an annual basis with the continued goal of expanding their reach.

- Opened the first YUPP activity center for classes, recitals and special events
- Established 10 new partnerships with Organizations which have allowed us to have more resources and goods for the communities we serve
- Enrolled 20 new students
- Hired 5 new instructors
- Facilitated a 2-day retreat for our board which included 2 new members
- Sponsored YUPP's first full length stage play which had over 800 people in attendance
- Helped over 1,000 families during back to school and holiday seasons which included gifting laptops to 3 students
- Offer free programming for our performing and academy students

Stanley Frankart

Fellow



Organization: Young Christian Professionals
Focus: Re-entry from Incarceration
Location: Canton, Ohio

“I’m all about redemptive justice being in action. Young Christian Professionals believes that the bible brings true justice.”

Stanley Frankart

When speaking about justice, Stanley Frankart reaches into his experience in and out of the carceral system that began when he was nearly a teenager. Though he left prison in 2018 after multiple incidents and sentences, he re-entered the world after spending 18 years of his life in the system being seen as a problem to rehabilitate. In his own redemption arc, Stanley found that God's arms hold something that our punitive system does not: grace.

Like many justice-involved citizens, Stanley searched for grace to deal with the repercussions of his actions, rebuild his character and find work upon re-entry. Enrolled in the 90-day, independent living E.X.I.T. program (Ex-Offenders in Transition), Stanley found support and tools to architect a new life. He also leaned on his renewed relationship with Christ to keep him motivated to move forward.

"My go-to strength is the patience that I learned while being incarcerated, myself. This strength has allowed me to wait upon the Lord for things to fall in the appropriate [place], knowing that the Lord has an appointed time for everything under the sun."

Stan eventually found work in construction to make a living – one of the few opportunities afforded to justice-involved citizens due to thousands of restrictive laws and background checks that keep them from other living wage jobs. In addition to this, he also worked for a non-profit that helped returning citizens adjust in society, but this left a deep impression and gave birth to a dream of his own. He soon co-founded his own organization, Young Christian Professionals, also known as Y.C.P., that offers education and professional development to reduce rates of recidivism.

“Our mission is to develop and dispatch Godly leaders back into society infused with the mission to advance God’s kingdom in every sphere of life.”

Knowing that 95% of all justice-involved people leave incarceration and return to society, Stanley wanted to create a pathway and built-in network of support for them to have a helping hand of grace to rebuild their lives with real resources. A majority of returning citizens only make an income of \$10,000 per year after they are released, and much of this group is disproportionately Black and people of color. Changing this statistic and the status quo became Stanley’s focus for Y.C.P. and as an inaugural Witness Fellow.

“Biblical justice places emphasis on the redemption of the accused. Here in America, the judicial system is built upon the punitive theory of justice, creating systems and processes that leave those navigating incarceration psychologically and economically disenfranchised.”

With a firm foundation in Christ, Y.C.P. utilizes the CASEL Framework along with peer recovery to raise up Kingdom Leaders with a holistic understanding of what it takes to overcome the barriers and stigma of being a justice-involved citizen. With Y.C.P., this community affected by the legal system is equipped, trained, and disciplined so they can rise above the stigma and stereotypes that prevent them from flourishing.

“600,000 people are released each year from incarceration, and I just believe...that if each of those individuals were committed to seeing God be glorified...we would have enough people to fill vacancies in the workplace, lead our churches to the next level, and bring solutions to our communities in the biggest challenges they have.”

Stanley encourages anyone who wants to be involved in helping returning citizens to be an advocate and use their influence. To learn more, visit youngchristianprofessionals.org.

Social Impact

Y.C.P. has served over 1200 men, women, youth and families since 2015 and only 15 people involved with YCP have received a new charge after engaging with Y.C.P. During the two-year fellowship, YCP was able to accomplish several transformative changes.

- Served approximately 730 people within 13 counties in the state of Ohio
- Provided more than 400 people with food, clothing, housing, hygiene, gas cards, legal counsel, family support (diapers, strollers, etc.)
- Secured 1 Physical building
- Established 2 discipleship houses
- Added 3 staff on payroll
- Hosted 23 trainings
- Expanded from 1 to 7 prisons
- Secured 15 new partnerships
- Confirmed additional grants to provide more financial security for the next 2 years
- Added 7 certifications from evidence-based program to further staff professional development

Joi McGowan

Regional Fellow

Regional Fellow



Organization: Resilient Black Women
Focus: Mental Health
Location: Fayetteville, AR

“Don’t let them see you cry. Be strong. This is when I realized, that’s the Black woman’s experience.”

Joi McGowan

One of Joi McGowan's spiritual gifts is to lead with vulnerability. Yet, as a Black woman from the suburbs of Chicago who recently landed in rural Arkansas, it has not been an easy road. To strengthen herself and other women, she pursued work in mental health and wanted to share her resources to others, especially Black women who have been strong for too long.

"Securing the funding from the Witness has allowed us actually to birth our nonprofit business. We started the non-profit [and] provided counseling vouchers to 21 Black women and youth."

Joi co-founded Resilient Black Women (RBW) through her journey as a Witness Fellow. Starting as a podcast with the same title, its greater mission is to fill the gap in providing education to help Black women and women of color identify what they need to heal, find rest, be vulnerable and lay down their armor. RBW hosts an educational podcast about mental health and culture; provides assistance to help find and pay for counseling; and shares resources to clinicians and organizations about having a culture that acknowledges taking active care of one's mental health.

"Through our therapy fund and vouchers, we've been able to fund therapy for women and youth of color. Market rate is around \$200 an hour and meeting a deductible can be around \$3,000 dollars!"

Despite the financial barriers, Black women are more likely to suffer with depression for the longest and not seek help. Some other obstacles include racism or discrimination, the stigma of mental health in BIPOC communities, limited access to mental health, and a lack of providers who can identify or create a safe space within the Black community or other minority populations

As Joi and her team have focused on providing tangible counseling resources for their community in Northwest Arkansas, some of their conversations have traveled the globe. One of RBW's significant accomplishments is a partnership with the local NPR affiliate station, KUAF 91.3 who has fully sponsored the Resilient Black Women podcast. Their 2022 episode on grief was selected in the Editors Pick lineup and promoted just before Mother's Day which grew their platform and became the most shared podcast on Spotify within the mental health category. This gave way to a surge in community support that included food vendors, donations, and speaking engagements.

"I started off very timid about growth in my nonprofit, but being connected to the fellows and getting the technical information from the workshops have given me a boldness. This experience has reminded me of my own personal strengths."

Several episodes and education from RBW focus on grief, being a "strong woman," vulnerability and rest. In spiritual alignment, much of the same content was discussed during the Witness Fellowship from peers and leaders who Joi connected with in mentorship.

"Every Black female leader the witness has introduced to us has been phenomenal and grounded, showing up in their full self, but also have not shown us that they are burnt out or overworked. Living in Northwest Arkansas, I don't have access to a lot of older Black Women in the faith. So I have gleaned so much from my coach, from the books that have been suggested. My soul has been deeply encouraged by everyone."

To learn more about Joi's work with Resilient Black Women, visit resilientblackwomen.org.

Social Impact

- Provided therapy funds to 21 women and youth in Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, Arizona, and Oklahoma
- Speaking engagements to over 100 people within the last 2 years through in-person and virtual events
- Held 10 private workshops for local organizations
- Worked with local news media as subject matter expert to discuss current events and the effect on mental health in Black community



Min. Monique Jones

Regional Fellow



Organization: CPR NWA
Focus: Entrepreneurship & Community
Location: Fayetteville, AR

**“I advocate no matter
how you come to me –
just as Jesus wants us to”**

Monique Jones

Coming out of the 2020 pandemic, Monique Jones had significant family hardships. As a caregiver for her partner who experienced health issues, she was pressed for time and resources to provide for her family. Seeing that she wasn't alone, she chose to pursue breaking down barriers to resources so other families can have their basic needs met.

"I founded an organization to create a space to connect community members...with resources that should have been more easily accessible, but it's not always that way. Completing a SNAP application is 34 pages long."

As the founder and director of Connecting People to Resources in Northwest Arkansas (CPR NWA), Monique is often focused on food insecurity which affects 17% of people throughout the state. The national average of food insecurity is 11% which ranks Arkansas at 50th in the nation.

"We feed 600-700 families each week, twice a week. I've been trying to remove barriers so we partner with United Way, DoorDash, 211 and other organizations to deliver food boxes to individuals who have mobilization issues."

Before she founded CPR, Monique served her community as a minister and the Director of Outreach for the Historic St. James Missionary Baptist Church which has existed for 157 years. Leading community outreach, Monique has been an advocate for those who experience homelessness and works to enrich the lives of people who are trying to move above the poverty line.

In a rural area, Monique aims to protect and provide for seniors, veterans, working mothers, people with disabilities and those who experience homelessness. In her advocacy, she developed several strategic partnerships to fill the gaps in between community nonprofit and government programs that seek to help the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

“We’re preparing to open the state’s first food storage locker. This will provide food for the working poor, people who are working low wage jobs and can’t get off in time. This is a dignified way that they can access healthy and nutritious options.”

With support from the Witness Fellowship, Monique made critical investments in CPR so she could offer real case management support. CPR was able to hire contract positions who gathered survey data and developed new marketing and branding materials. More importantly, the funding allowed Monique to enroll in training courses that led her to new projects including running for a seat in the House of Representatives for the state of Arkansas.

“I’m thankful for the Witness that aligned me with funds to do the work. They got behind me and I stood on their shoulders. The training projected me. It allowed me to rise up and flourish. I was able to put my name on the ticket and run for office in my state!”

To learn more about Monique’s work with CPR NWA, visit www.cprnwa.org.

Social Impact

- Served over 36,000 households in a year with St. James Baptist Church
- Recognized as the non-profit of the year by the NWA MLK Council
- Provide food in partnership the United Way and DoorDash
- Held car repair clinic minor issues fixed at no cost through a partnership with CPR NWA
- Finalizing installation the first Food Storage lockers in the state where users will be allowed to order ahead with their preferences
- Held a fundraiser to pay off all the lunch debt of the graduating seniors impacting more than 170 families (The school policy would allow the district to hold the diplomas of anyone with lunch debt)

Dr. Tammira Lucas

Fellow



Organization: National Association of Mom Entrepreneurs (Formerly Moms as Entrepreneurs)
Focus: Entrepreneurship
Location: Baltimore, MD.

“I’m Black. I’m a mom. And I’m from West Baltimore. The odds of me being anything were against me every single day that I walked out that door.”

Dr. Tammira Lucas

Tammira encountered her first sustainable hustle while enrolled in college, but that was all she needed to confirm her long-term ambitions. Years later, when she had her first child, she also birthed an idea to fill a niche market space that would blaze a pathway for others to manifest their own visions.

“At the time, the moms around me were interested in how I started my business. While my background was in business, I just thought it was just easy for you to start a business because that was the gift that God gave me.” Tammira co-founded Mom Entrepreneurs in 2016 to address the intersectional challenges that make it difficult for mothers to be successful entrepreneurs. As her work grew, the organization transformed into the National Association of Mom Entrepreneurs brand that provides education on entrepreneurship so that mothers can increase their household incomes. NAME decreases barriers to generational wealth creation and increases business sustainability and growth by connecting mothers to financial literacy resources and funding. While Black mothers have long been a symbol of nurturing while leading households, they are often overlooked in being able to fill multiple roles such as entrepreneurs or leaders of scalable, dynamic businesses. According to research, only 3% of venture capital investments go to women and this is even less for Black women.

“Because of support from The Witness Foundation, 200 moms have obtained living wage jobs or created their own business since 2016. Our data shows that our mom entrepreneurs have increased their family incomes by at least 31%.”

Single parents, overwhelmingly women, led almost 60% of Baltimore's households in 2018 and just under 30% of female-led households live below the poverty line (\$24,300 for a family of four in 2016). Mothers of young children who work outside of the home are more likely to work in low-wage jobs than non-mothers or fathers.

"The funding from the Witness Fellowship was extremely critical to the growth of Tammira because it also provided the finances needed for me to compensate for my time for the work that needed to be done. It allowed me to focus on critical activities for the growth of the organization."

Tammira's efforts have invested \$102,000 in moms, and helped to build a platform that empowers mothers to enter (or re-enter) the economy on their own terms. Tamira now plays a significant role in Baltimore's entrepreneurship and nonprofit ecosystem as the only organization focused on mom entrepreneurs, reinforcing the benefits and financial stability that mom entrepreneurs bring to Baltimore's communities.

"In my neighborhood, at least 80% of households are ran by single mothers living below the poverty line. Investing in a mom is investing in at least three generations. How can you support? It's very simple: open up your network."

If you're able to open your network or if you're interested in learning more about Tammira's academies and training for Baltimore moms, visit www.maeentrepreneur.com.

Social Impact

The financial investment over the last two years in NAME has accomplished several endeavors.

- Served 800 women and moms
- Hosted 16 workshops
- Facilitated 4 academy cohorts that served 50 moms
- \$20k in funding deployed to mom-owned businesses
- Brought on a part time program director
- Created an online curriculum with video
- Refined our evidence based curriculum
- Began trademark process
- A new website
- Monthly events on various topics for women/mom entrepreneur.
- Improved academy through restructure
- Fully developed a working board of directors

Fellowship Matters



Gratitude





7

If I Can Help Somebody by Alma Andruzzo

Written in 1945, this song was revived from Dorothy Love Coates and the Gospel Harmonettes and later Mahalia Jackson

[Verse 1]

*If I can help somebody as I travel along
If I can help somebody in a word or a song
If I can help somebody from doing wrong
No, my living shall not be in vain*

[Verse 2]

*No, my living shall not be in vain
No, my living shall not be in vain
If I can help somebody while I'm singing this song
You know my living shall not be in vain*

Within the Black church traditions, there is loud and boisterous celebration for wondrous works of all kinds. Honoring this history, we share a hymn to commemorate this season of helping others, just as Christ Jesus has been our present help.

By answering this call, we recognize that the Witness Fellowship has accomplished mighty acts within the last two years:

- Strategic community empowerment through public and private, Christ-led partnerships in Northwest Arkansas
- Mental health awareness and accessible support for women of color and the growing the field of counselors
- Faith-fueled transformative life skills and job training, new housing, and entrepreneurial development for returning citizens in Ohio
- A national membership organization built to break cycles of poverty by investing in Black moms who are creative entrepreneurs
- A faith-based arts center focused on training and enriching youth in Northern California

This is the work of restorative justice, putting tangible resources freely into the hands of Black Christian leaders. This is the impact of donors, grant writers, program leaders, mentors, partners, speakers, coaches, and a dynamic team within the Witness Inc.



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Danielle Wilson, Director of Fund Development and Strategic Initiatives

Konyka Dunson, Fellowship Program Director

Patrice Gopo, Interim Fellowship Program Director

Natasha Sistrunk Robinson, Interim Executive Director



Chellese Grove, Writer

We sit in gratitude that we have helped several communities and enriched the lives of 5 fellows for years to come.

We sit in gratitude for the Theology of Liberation and Resistance that compels us to enact God's version of justice and not our own.

In our gratitude, we call for more action to rectify acts that have historically disenfranchised Black communities and others in the name of a God who calls us all as one.

We sit in gratitude and still petition for more proactive and intentional measures within both Black and white Christian communities to address inequities.

We pray for more advocacy, education, open dialogue, and structural changes within churches and religious institutions.

We are thankful for genuine reconciliation and healing within diverse Christians communities, and the commitment to build inclusive and just communities of faith.

In our gratitude, we pray and believe that it is so. And it is well. Amen.



Support our work

W THE WITNESS INC.

communications@thewitnessfoundation.co

302 273-8967

The Witness Inc.
2093 Philadelphia Pike
#1031 CLAYMONT, DE 19703