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Research Topic: A Holistic Approach to Dealing with the Street Crime in the Bronx

Bronx is one of the boroughs in New York City (NYC). It is home to multi-racial and multi-ethnic population. As one of the boroughs in NYC, it is noted for a high rate of crime. What are the likely causes for this and what could be done to ameliorate the situation. This paper will therefore focus on how my church, Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry in the Bronx, will adopt a “Holistic Approach to Dealing with the Street Crime in the Bronx”.

Description of Bronx

The Bronx is the northernmost borough of the five New York City Boroughs. The name of this borough originated with a Scandinavian immigrant Jonas Bronck, who established the first settlement in the area as part of the New Netherland colony in 1639. After his death, a stream next to his farm was named the Bronx River, but it wasn't until over 200 years later when the NYC officials named the entire area... after the river.¹ Before the arrival of European settlers the Bronx was called Rananchqua by the native Siwanoy band of Lenape, while other Natives knew the Bronx as Keskeskeck. The Bronx River was then referred to as the “Aquahung” river.²

New York Facts revealed that the Bronx was once a part of Westchester. The Town of Westchester, which was to the East of the Bronx River was the first town established in Westchester County and was its county seat. In 1874, the towns west of the Bronx River

¹www.nyfacts.com

² www.nyfacts.com

became part of New York City and the lands to the east of the Bronx River were annexed to New York City in 1998.

It's interesting to note that the Bronx is the third most densely populated county in the U.S., yet about a quarter of its area is open space, including Woodlawn Cemetery, Van Cortlandt Park, Pelham Bay Park, the New York Botanical Garden and the Bronx Zoo. If the Bronx by itself were a city, it would have been the 9th largest city in the U.S. It is also the home to many universities and colleges, including CUNY – Lehman College, CUNY Bronx Community College, CUNY Hostos Community College, Fordham University, Monroe College and more.³

The United State Census Bureau estimates the population of the Bronx as of July 1st, 2021, as 1,421,089. This includes 52.6% of females, 24.5% of persons under 18years (This is about a quarter of the entire Bronx population), High school graduates or higher of persons aged 25 years plus is 74.1%, Percentage of persons aged 25 years plus with bachelor's degree is 20.9% and median household income, is \$43,726.⁴ All these figures have serious implications for the Bronx. The median household income is low considering the fact that families have to pay monthly rent averaging two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500.00). Healthcare, transportation, feeding, clothing, telephone and all other bills and expenses must come from the remaining amount. The median household income of \$43,726 also suggests that the working parents do not work in high paying jobs. Similarly, the fact that 20.9% of Bronxites aged 25years plus have bachelor's degree is also concerning. This is indicative that many drop out of high school and a high percentage of people in this age category either have low paying jobs or are

³ www.nyfacts.com

⁴ United States Census Bureau Quick Facts Bronx County

unemployed. Department of Labor (DOL) records show that the Bronx has a higher unemployment rate of 7.5 percent as against New York State percentage of 4.6 and New York City's rate of 5.6 percent.⁵

When a city has a large number of people who are unemployed or could barely survive on their income, they may be prone to finding other means of survival which may include theft, robbery, assault and other crimes.

Crime in the Bronx

Neighborhood Scout reported that the crime rate in Bronx is considerably higher than the national average across all communities in America from the largest to the smallest, although at 26 crimes per one thousand residents, it is not among the communities with the very highest crime rate. The chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime in Bronx is high and the Bronx is not one of the safest communities in America. Relative to New York, Bronx has a crime rate that is higher than 95% of the state's cities and towns of all sizes. However, compared to other communities of similar population size, Bronx has a crime rate that is noticeably lower than the average. This means that for comparably sized cities across America, Bronx is safer than most according to Neighborhood Scout's exclusive analysis of FBI crime data. Now, let us turn to look at how Bronx does for violent crimes specifically, and then how it does for property crimes, this is important because the overall crime rate can be further illuminated by understanding if violent crime or property crimes (or both) are the major contributors to the general rate of crime in Bronx. For Bronx, we found that the violent crime rate is one of the highest in the nation, across communities of all sizes (both large and small).

⁵ www.dol.ny.gov

Violent offenses tracked included rape, murder and non-negligent manslaughter, armed robbery, and aggravated assault, including assault with a deadly weapon. According to Neighborhood Scout's analysis of FBI reported crime data, your chance of becoming a victim of one of these crimes in Bronx is one in 128. Neighborhood Scout's analysis also reveals that Bronx's rate for property crime is 18 per one thousand population. This makes Bronx a place where there is an above average chance of becoming a victim of a property crime, when compared to all other communities in America of all population sizes. Property crimes are motor vehicle theft, arson, larceny, and burglary. Your chance of becoming a victim of any of these crimes in Bronx is one in 56.⁶ Neighborhood Scout recorded that the Annual Crimes in the Bronx include 11,461 of violent crimes and 26,502 of property crimes. The total number of crimes committed yearly is about 37,963.

Theology of Crime

Violent crimes and Property crimes has serious impact on the victims and therefore should not go unpunished by the laws of the land. The Bible does not condone crime but prescribes that crime should be punished. In Deuteronomy 19:21, scripture points out "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."⁷ This scripture suggests that every crime committed should have its corresponding punishment. Scriptures points out again in Deuteronomy 19:11-13 "But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbor, and then flees to one of these cities, the killer shall be sent for by the town elders, be brought back from the city, and be handed over to the avenger of blood to die. Show

⁶ <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com>

⁷ *Life Application Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 276

no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you.”⁸ In Luke 23: 40-41, the author records that “But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”⁹ The point here is that even the criminals acknowledged that crime has consequence and that is punishment.

In Leviticus 6:1-7 The LORD said to Moses: “If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving a neighbor about something entrusted to them or left in their care or about something stolen, or if they cheat their neighbor, or if they find lost property and lie about it, or if they swear falsely about any such sin that people may commit - when they sin in any of these ways and realize their guilt, they must return what they have stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to them, or the lost property they found, or whatever it was they swore falsely about. They must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day they present their guilt offering. And as a penalty they must bring to the priest, that is, to the LORD, their guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for them before the LORD, and they will be forgiven for any of the things they did that made them guilty.”¹⁰

This scripture in Leviticus suggests that God does not take crime lightly at all. Restitution has to be made for every crime committed in the society and the guilt must be dealt with by making

⁸ Ibid., 276

⁹ Ibid., 1725

¹⁰Ibid., 159

an atonement to the LORD.

The last five of God's commanded (the decalogue) in Exodus 20:13-17, states that

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."¹¹

These scriptures suggests that God does not condone crime.

Peter Kuzmic in his article *On the way to peace in the Balkans* quoted Bernard Shaw that "The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that is the essence of inhumanity."¹²

He asserted that we should strive to be creative instruments of reconciliation and courageous defenders of life and family, demonstrating in humble service our love for all persons as our neighbors. God calls all of us to pray for these worthy goals and ministries, and calls many of us to be active participants in this task of rebuilding and renewal.¹³

Scripture reveals that the religious leaders approached Jesus and question Him about the

¹¹ Ibid., 125

¹² Kuzmic, Peter *Christian Century* "On the way to peace in the Balkans" February 21, 1996, 202

¹³ Ibid., 202

Greatest commandment and Jesus replied in Mark 12:29-31 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these”¹⁴ This commandment suggests that as Christians, it is not enough to say we love God if we do not love and help our neighbors in need. In Matthew 25, Jesus disclosed that at the final judgment, He will separate the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left and He will tell those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”¹⁵

This scripture shows that God wants Christians and the Church to demonstrate His love for those in need, afflicted, imprisoned and in bondage of destruction.

As described from the beginning the Bronx is noted for high violent crimes which include rape, murder and non-negligent manslaughter, armed robbery, and aggravated assault, including assault with a deadly weapon. The property crimes include motor vehicle theft, arson, larceny, and burglary.

Since the Bronx is populated and has over ten zip codes, the focus of my church, Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry (CEM) will be on how to affect the neighborhood of the

¹⁴ *Life Application Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 1638

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1586-1587

church which has the zip code of 10457 in East Tremont Webster and Crotona neighborhood.

This neighborhood has a police precinct to deal with crime rates almost 200% above the national average. This neighborhood has always been known for crime and is considered one of the bad parts of New York for that very reason. One's chance of becoming a victim in Tremont is about 1 in 35.¹⁶ It is vital for the church (CEM) to start from this neighborhood, assess the success of our intervention and replicate it in other zip codes in the Bronx.

The Church's Resources

CEM is graciously endowed with five seasoned teachers, three counselors, six nurses and members who have strong advocacy skills. To embark upon a holistic approach in dealing with Street Crime, the church will set up an annual budget of about \$36,000 which will be subject to review every year depending on the needs and the programs for the year.

In addition, the church will liaise with the Police Community Affairs Unit to have town hall meetings with community members and create platforms for them to talk while we listen. It is important to first listen to them talk about their needs, challenges, difficulties and problems so that together we can work out some interventions that could ameliorate their plights and living conditions. It is important again to have such discussion because that will give them a sense of ownership that they are part of the decision-making process. The church would not like to take that control away from them but encourage the community members to partner with the church to address their concerns. The counselors in CEM could be of tremendous help in this regard.

Similarly, since unemployment is high in this area of the Bronx, the teachers/counselors in the church would assist the unemployed with resume writing and preparation for job

¹⁶ www.propertyclub.nyc

interviews.

The church will also assist the unemployed with job search. They must survive and if they do not have money, it makes them vulnerable to theft, stealing, extortion or burglary. It is believed that when people can make money, they will not go out and rob others. At least earning money will not only go a long way to reduce the crime rate but it will boost their self-esteem.

Again, the fact that 20.9% of Bronxites aged 25years plus have bachelor's degree has serious implications for the community. It means about 70.1% of this population does not have bachelor's degree. This might be a contributing factor to the low median household income of \$43,726. To ameliorate their condition the church will organize after school programs for children in elementary and Junior High school in the Church's facility to help them build a stronger foundation and boost their chances of qualifying for college. Further, the church will encourage the community members who are high school graduates to pursue degree courses in Bronx Community College and Hostos Community College where tuition is free for New Yorkers or subsidized. Moreover, members of the church who are skilled in advocacy would take up the challenge and advocate for well resourced schools for the neighborhood at the community level, city, and state. These interventions could be assessed after every two years and when they become successful in this zip code, we could replicate in another zip code in the Bronx until crime is eradicated in the Bronx or reduced drastically. All these will be done in the spirit of prayer and intercession for the Bronx.

Stark in his book *The Rise of Christianity* mentioned that the Christians touched their communities such that by Governor Julian's day in the fourth century, it was too late to overtake this colossal result, the seeds for which had been planted in such teachings as "I am my brother's

keeper.” “Do unto others as you would have them do onto you,” and “It is more blessed to give than to receive. The Christians in those days gave to their communities and demonstrated the love of Christ.¹⁷

In similar fashion, Stark stated that Christianity greatly mitigated relations among social classes- at the very time when the gap between rich and poor was growing. It did not preach that everyone could or should become equal in terms of wealth and power in this life. But it did preach that all were equal in the eyes of God and that the more fortunate had a God-given responsibility to help those in need.¹⁸ It is for this course that as Christians, we feel responsible to give to the needy and the less fortunate in our communities.

In conclusion, street crime in the Bronx is higher than the average rate in New York City and New York State and one of the highest in the nation. However, the church can physically and spiritually turn things around by meeting with the community and agreeing on ways crime could be reduced or eradicated with the church utilizing her resources to bring about change.

¹⁷ Stark, Rodney *The Rise of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), 84

¹⁸ Ibid., 188-189

References

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4. Stark, Rodney *The Rise of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996)
5. United States Census Bureau Quick Facts Bronx County
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