

# CALVARY BAPTIST, NEW HOPE BAPTIST

Partnership Rooted in  
Relationships and Reconciliation

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## IN

September 2015, just months after a shooter took the lives of nine individuals at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston – two leaders from American Baptist congregations in Denver met by chance at a regional conference.

Rev. Anne Scalfaro, lead pastor of Calvary Baptist, and Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing, Jr., lead pastor of New Hope Baptist, were moved by calls for unity and reconciliation following that tragic event. Following a suggestion from church leaders, the two ministers began to get to know one another personally, professionally and theologically with the end goal of doing something to bring their communities together.

“Our conversations started by meeting for coffee and discussing current events. We talked about what was going on in our country and in our city, as it related to race,” said Rev. Anne. “We had a dream of a partnership, but we began by getting to know one another first.”

Both reverends valued the genuine dialogue they had over coffee with no agenda and no outcomes in mind. They recognized an alignment in both theology and community focus.

“I have really been enriched by our professional acquaintance,” said Rev. Eugene. “I completed my

education at historically black colleges and have led a congregation that was primarily African American. I was never completely sure how someone outside of our community viewed events like Charleston or other inequities in the world. My coffees with Anne have been encouraging in these times when we hear so much about division. We found common ground.”

After several months of casual meetings, the two reverends brought their congregations – one predominantly Caucasian and the other African American – together. The goal was to see if



Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing, Jr. of New Hope Baptist and Rev. Anne Scalfaro of Calvary Baptist.

## MISSION AND VISION

As two congregations that share Baptist heritage, New Hope (NHBC) and Calvary (CBC) partner together:

- to build relationships as we seek to be a part of the work of racial reconciliation in Denver;
- to engage in our community around an area of shared social justice concern; and
- to learn from one another through meal fellowships, panel discussions, educational/artistic events, and shared worship experiences.

Both congregations are committed to this partnership for the long haul. We understand racial reconciliation is hard work and requires trusting relationships that develop over time. Through this partnership, our vision is to help break the silence about racial justice in our country, be a faith-based model of justice for communities within our city, and transform individual lives within our own congregations as we recognize and understand our implicit and explicit biases.

their congregations could benefit from, open, nonjudgmental conversations around community challenges and hopes.

"We dove right in with a joint congregation dinner," said Rev. Eugene. "We didn't have a formal agenda, but facilitated a discussion about what we as two church congregations could do in light of what happened in Charleston."

Approximately 150 members from the churches attended the November 2016 dinner.

"We realized there is so much in our city that can be done," said Rev. Anne. "But the best way to work on racial reconciliation is to build relationships and make an impact together. We didn't want to focus exclusively on getting to know one another – but to build relationships by doing something together."

Following the dinner, the two church leaders coordinated round table conversations on two more narrowly-focused areas: affordable housing and education. They discussed statistics related to race, affordable housing and education, as well as personal stories and experiences from congregation members.

Next, the congregations formed a joint leadership committee to draft a mission and vision.

Another pivotal moment in the partnership was a viewing of the play *Black* produced by Curious Theatre Company followed by a facilitated discussion. The play, written by Laramia Aminah, was born of her involvement with Black Lives Matter 5280 and her desire to articulate a common problem she saw in our country – that we do not know how to talk about race.

"We invited our community into this conversation with us through the play," said Rev. Eugene. "Conversation and connection with our neighbors is undervalued. We have more in common than we think. We have an opportunity to bring our community together and show them how to share personal experiences and perspectives in a nonjudgmental way. We have a lot of work to do around relationship building and issues of race."

The leadership committee eventually narrowed its focus to education and hosted a third joint luncheon



Calvary Baptist and New Hope gather to kick-off their partnership with Denver Public Schools. The churches will host "Power Lunch" in partnership with the district, bringing in congregation members to read to students every other Friday at Stedman Elementary School. They hope to model relationship building and help students learn to read.



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in October 2017 entitled *Getting Educated about Education in Colorado ... and working together to make a difference for Colorado kids!*

The luncheon included educators from Aurora and Denver Public Schools, as well as national experts in the field. The panel shared experiences and challenges around closing the achievement gap and ensuring all children receive a quality education in Colorado, particularly as it relates to the hurdles and challenges that children from rural areas and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face in our Colorado public schools.

"We began to discern how our two churches can make a difference around supporting students, families and educators," shared Rev. Anne.

In April 2018, the churches invited Denver Public Schools (DPS) to discuss opportunities for the congregations to do something to support the schools together.

For Denver Public Schools' Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE), partnering with faith-based communities is one way to reach families in a place they feel safe.

"In the current political climate, many of our families are facing fears of deportation, retaliation and other uncertainties," said Theresa Becker, executive director of FACE. "As a result, many of our parents are less open to participation in public events. We need to shift the way we think about building relationships with families."

DPS knows many families are more comfortable meeting with teachers outside of schools, but many are not comfortable inviting outsiders into their home. Churches provide a place where students and families feel safe.

The parent/teacher "home visit" program is a vital way for teachers to build relationships with families,



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ultimately contributing to student success. As of the start of the 2018 school year, both New Hope and Calvary have offered their buildings to DPS for use as a safe meeting space for these essential meetings.

"We are always searching for new ways to reach families and provide support for teachers who are already doing great work for our students," said Ilesha Mitchell who runs the parent/teacher home visit program for DPS. "This is just one way we can provide the best resource for our educators as they work to build relationships with families."

The congregations are also exploring other partnership opportunities that support DPS students. This includes one-on-one tutoring for K-4th graders through Reading Partners Colorado. The program pairs a volunteer from each church together with a student to provide tutoring twice a week. In addition, the congregations are working with DPS to identify opportunities that require larger groups of volunteers like staffing a field day, cleaning up a playground or painting a classroom.

"Our long-term goal is for CBC and NHBC to adopt a school together," said Rev. Anne.

"The work these two congregations are doing to bridge the racial divide aligns with our work," said Becker. "We hope at the end of this school year we can share successes with other groups across Denver and recruit more partners that can support us in similar ways."

While this partnership is still in its infancy, both Rev. Eugene and Rev. Anne hope to find more opportunities to discuss race, faith and reconciliation. They have also fielded calls from other faith communities asking for advice as they seek to build similar partnerships.

"Two years in, we have seen relationships start to form," said Rev. Eugene. "They don't always agree, but they are willing to listen and try to understand. It is so encouraging."

## WORDS OF WISDOM FROM FAITH-BASED NONPROFITS

"Put together an advisory panel of supporters who align with your faith and your mission. You need them to connect you with influencers in the faith community. You cannot do it alone."

"If you are starting from ground zero, expect it to be harder, better, slower and faster than you expect. Make sure you exist with excellence in everything you do before you look at scaling or expansion."

- Brandon Appelhans,  
Executive Director |  
My Quiet Cave

"Focus on being visible in the community and build partnerships with other groups with whom you share common ground. Continually challenge yourself to work with other sectors like government, business and other nonprofits. Be the light and lead in this way."

"If anyone can work with others, faith-based organizations may have the greatest opportunity. We often face misconceptions that our faith means we are exclusionary when in reality it often means we are the first to meet people where they are."

- Travis Williams, Chief  
Development Officer |  
Springs Rescue Mission

"Look to fill the gap rather than duplicating services. We did a feasibility study and determined there was no place for homeless women and children during the day. We provide services and partner with others to meet other needs for our families."

- Mona Highline, Executive  
Director | Western  
Community Foundation

"We understand people's questions about how faith plays a role in what we do. We do our best to navigate these in a respectful manner in a world that doesn't always align with our beliefs. We also train staff on our statement of faith and how this will help them more clearly understand it and explain it to others."

- Alexxa Gagner,  
Director of Marketing  
Communications | D  
Rescue Mission