

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Clergy Join With Office Of The Governor In Fight Against Gun Violence

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ST. THOMAS -- More than 50 members of the Virgin Islands clergy met this week to create an organized coalition to combat gun violence in the territory. The effort is being led by the Office of the Governor and its Faith-Based Programs Coordinator Pastor Samuel Carrion, Government House has made known via press release.

Meetings with clergy members were held on St. Thomas Thursday and on St. Croix Friday.

"Engaging our churches on a more proactive level is critical," Mr. Carrion said. "We have a very strong faith-based community here in the territory and there is much more that we

can do by working together. However, the time for simply talking about our violent crime problem is over. For this reason we called our Gun Violence Clergy Summit – *Praying with Our Feet*.”

Pastor Gilford Monroe, who helped lead this week’s summit, agreed it was time to move the message from words to action and is in the territory to assist local clergy in formulating tangible plans to address gun violence in the territory.

Mr. Monroe, director of the Brooklyn Borough’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, said he was working to help clergy members organize and form partnerships with government and nonprofit agencies. Mr. Monroe, who was born and raised in the Virgin Islands, said that in many ways the faith-based community has been left out of the conversation when it comes to intervention. Religious leaders are often involved after the fact in consoling loved ones or praying for victims, but there is much more that can be done to help prevent tragedies linked to gun violence.

“We must take a systematic approach to addressing these issues,” Mr. Monroe said. “And we have to engage clergy on a whole other level – including fostering their better understanding of law enforcement and developing a closer relationship with the police.”

He said that the clergy council can work to support training and other programs that are aimed at assisting young men, lobby for legislation and serve as a voice for their various communities. His Brooklyn office also runs a rehabilitation program, Begin Again, to assist young people convicted of minor offenses in getting a fresh start.

Mr. Carrion said he was very pleased by the response of the community’s religious leaders.

“Many realize the churches have been too insular – they are literally preaching to the choir,” he said. “The clergy are ready to be more involved and to take concrete steps to help prevent gun violence. On behalf of the Office of the Governor I would like to thank all those who attended this week’s summit, to include Pastor Monroe, Lt. Governor Osbert Potter and Police Commissioner Delroy Richards.”

The Inter-Faith Anti-Violence Council will convene again next month. For more information contact Pastor Carrion at 340 227-2266.