

A short summary of Welcome Home Sunday...May 31, 2015

Despite the pouring rain, more than 230 folks from turning out at Welcome Home Sunday. Moments before the doors opened at Dillard University yesterday at 3 pm, so did the skies. Sponsors for the event included The Micah Project, the Louisiana Interchurch Conference, Catholic Charities, Capital ReEntry Coalition and the Louisiana Coalition for Offender Resources.

The event was emceed by Tom Costanza, director of the office of Justice and Peace for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Keynote speaker, Archbishop Gregory Aymond laid out his recommendation for a 10-point plan for faith communities who seek to make a real difference in the lives of formerly incarcerated.

Reverend Dan Krutz of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference set the tone for the afternoon when he opened by stating, "We need to do some 'de-incarcerating.'" Louisiana incarcerates more people than anywhere in the world and certainly New Orleans is a major contributor to that.

But as guest speaker, Sheriff Marlon Gusman pointed out, if we incarcerate so many folks "Crime should be down," but it's not. Gusman was accompanied at the event by two of the men currently in the city's reentry program, awaiting release and being prepared for life on the outside.

Although these men and women are 'being prepared' through job skills training, the community has to be willing to hire them. Assistant Secretary of the Department of Corrections, Rhett Covington made the point, "We can give them a PHD in prison, but if no one is going to hire them when they get out, we've wasted our time."

U.S. Attorney Kenneth Polite, who also spoke during the afternoon program shared on his 30-2-2 hiring initiative which seeks 30 businesses to hire two formerly incarcerated individuals for two years for which he already has some participation. Both Polite and Gusman confirmed that they too, hire returning citizens.

In a moving and courageous testimony at the event, DolfINETTE Martin, said, "I did 7 years, 4 months and 26 days for shoplifting! There weren't any programs in my community when I went to jail, reaching out to me." Martin admitted that selling drugs was the only option she thought she had to alleviate the extreme poverty she was experiencing at the time.

Welcome Home Sunday was born out of the need for communities of faith to reach out to people like Martin as a resource and refuge, especially when they come out of prison and are most vulnerable for returning.

Checo W. Yancy
God Bless