



## NEW PSALMIST BAPTIST CHURCH

BALTIMORE, USA

*Ten-Year Plan in connection with the UN Bristol Meeting on Faiths and the Sustainable Development Goals*

### INTRODUCTION

The New Psalmist Baptist Church (“NPBC”) is a 116-year old, predominately African-American congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. On behalf of our eight thousand five hundred (8,500+) member church family, and the networks of which New Psalmist is a part, we are pleased to submit this Ten-Year Plan and honored to participate in the historic United Nations Bristol Meeting on Faiths and the Sustainable Development Goals. This Plan recalls elements of our Seven-Year Plan, which was submitted at Windsor Castle in November 2009. As was our belief when we crafted our Plan for Windsor, our Ten-Year Plan will be a living, ever expanding documentation of ideas, actions, and results. It will be dynamic, and not static. It represents our commitment to care for God’s magnificent creation while supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, with a particular focus on poverty reduction, water, sanitation and hygiene, and education. Every action that we take is directed towards our people, our planet and our partnerships towards strengthened global solidarity.

### BACKGROUND

For approximately the last third of its life as a church, NPBC has undertaken to empower disciples. That is, NPBC has sought to help guide each individual touched by its ministries to a deeper understanding of God’s individual calling in his or her life, and, moreover, to help each one chart a course to that calling (i.e. taking care of our people). More recently, NPBC has expanded its understanding of that mission to encompass greater care for our physical environment, and to harness the enormous capacity of our growing church towards the nexus between environmental protection, conservation of

natural resources (i.e. taking care of our planet) and the need to balance these with a care for the “least of these”. We realized that empowerment of disciples could be undermined by the degradation of the physical environment, and the challenges that such degradation presented to our daily lives. Thus, our commission to spread the gospel had to be animated by partnerships that seek to build individual and institutional capacity, ensure safeguards for human dignity, give a voice for empowerment to the disenfranchised, alleviate poverty, and maintain good stewardship of God’s resources. It is against this backdrop that NPBC continues its work towards protection of the environment, conservation of natural resources, and in this context that we have prepared this New Psalmist Baptist Church Ten- Year Plan (the “Plan”).

This Plan builds on our original Seven-Year Plan, many elements of which are ongoing, and embedded as part of our regular church administration (e.g. use of assets, media and advocacy, celebration). In addition, the Plan speaks in general terms to a future that NPBC envisions. It echoes the vision of our Bishop, Walter Scott Thomas Sr., who has indicated “Our faith is not exercised merely in our utterance of platitudes, but in our striving to reflect the characteristics of Christ in our living and in our works. In practice, this compels us to preach, teach and live the gospel in such a way as to grow each hearer according to each of his needs and capacities. Our Divine assignment is to lift those around us and to help them to get to the next place to which God calls them”. Ultimately, this Plan echoes his words, and represents our understanding of new experiences and revelations of how God is calling us to live out our charge, especially in areas of poverty alleviation, water, sanitation and hygiene management, and a willingness to partner with a diverse set of stakeholders.

## NPBC TEN-YEAR PLAN

### **The Setting**

Our church was forced to move to a new physical location in order to make way for urban redevelopment in Baltimore. This relocation established us in a new community, with new congregants, new methods for spreading the gospel, and new opportunities and challenges. Although we have been successful in addressing many of the elements of our earlier Plan, we have had to be strategic in when and where we have engaged with our congregation members, our local community, and our global outreach. This brought forth unexpected outcomes in several areas, as follows:

- *We had to inspire, motivate and educate existing and new congregation members.*  
Our new location was in an area which was underserved by churches of our size, diversity and complexity. Approximately 3,400 new members have joined since we

arrived at our current 27 acre site, and with this growth came new opportunities and new challenges. We have sought to establish an environmental and conservation ethos as we have demonstrated the values of energy conservation, environmental management and increased focus on poverty reduction strategies.

- *We made decisions to increase our emphasis and attention on the needs for access to water, improved sanitation and hygiene management.*

We were asked to join an inaugural meeting of interested organizations and stakeholders as the United Nations sought to address issues of water, sanitation and hygiene in schools in the developing world. This came about in the latter part of 2010, after development of our 7 Year Plan, but it set in motion a large scale focus on partnerships, education, and outreach to youth, especially as gender issues became prominent. These areas of focus have guided a large portion of our work, culminating in a first-ever "benchmarking" program to map water, sanitation and hygiene related policies and activities in developing countries. These efforts have been closely coordinated through the auspices of financial and "in-kind" partnerships with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), and many other entities.

- *Increased attention has been paid to poverty alleviation and sustainable development because of our Christian mandate and values, and our understanding of the linkages between resource allocation and use (as in water), and other social issues (such as health, education and gender).*

Our Plan notes financial empowerment, menstrual hygiene management, development of faith-based technical assistance (i.e. creation of a reference document called "Putting Clean Hands Together"), work with education institutions, and strong action on values and cooperative efforts amongst the faith based community as key components of a our transition from our Seven Year Plan to a Ten Year Plan.

In summary, the unexpected has become our norm, and our next 10 years will draw upon the dynamic nature of our ever-expanding congregation in fulfillment of our charge to care for "the least of these". We will serve as sentinels for future progress in our community and the world. Our congregation will be more attuned to the aspects of climate change on our environmental resources. Our young people will increase their knowledge and application of environmental stewardship, and we will promote an attitude of gratitude for the many opportunities and blessings that present themselves in caring for God's creation.

## THE PLAN

### **Poverty Reduction**

This section most closely aligns with Sustainable Development Goal # 1 – “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”

Baltimore City faces a poverty rate of almost 25%, with reports of more than 30% of its children living in poverty. What is our responsibility in that context? Our Plan is to redouble our individual efforts, as well as the collective efforts of our church (and our network of affiliated churches under the Kingdom Association of Covenant Pastors) in reducing poverty. We intend to establish an ongoing program of applying faith principles to poverty alleviation. Over the next ten years, we will conduct five seminars regarding poverty alleviation. NPBC has sought, and received special tax exempt status to establish a Community Development Corporation. Community development corporations (CDCs) are non-profit organizations that are created to support and revitalize communities, especially those that are impoverished or struggling. CDCs often deal with the development of affordable housing. They can also be involved in a wide range of community services that meet local needs such as education, job training, healthcare, commercial development, and other social programs, such as environmental management and conservation. While CDCs may work closely with a representative from the local government, they are not a government entity. This will be one of the major strategic vehicles by which NPBC will initiate and fund poverty reduction strategies and action. CDCs follow a bottom-up approach; they are set up and run by community members or local groups like churches and civic associations. In fact, a key feature of CDCs is the inclusion of community representatives in their governing/advisory boards. We will use our CDC to establish programs on individual member debt reduction, and on capital campaigns to improve the physical church structure and community development in an environmentally sensitive manner. Proposed activities include, a “Lessons Learned” series on poverty eradication, outreach to colleges and universities on business formation and monitoring/evaluation, and a youth education program called the “Ending Poverty” initiative.

### **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene**

This section most closely aligns to Sustainable Development Goal # 6 – “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”

NPBC has engaged in a robust effort to provide information on water, sanitation and hygiene in schools via its very active collaborations with the United Nations

International Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, and over 70 other stakeholders who have been engaged in establishing programs to benefit school age children in developing countries. We have become a repository of benchmark information for over 50 countries under aegis of The Mapping Project, which we developed over the last two years. This is unique and seminal information on water access, availability, and use, coupled with information on school policies and actions. This portion of the Plan anticipates a phased approach for Mapping Project improvements via “listening sessions” with our youth (called Generation X group), and subsequent outreach to a larger cohort of church and community leaders. Our Plan includes a minimum of 10 Listening Sessions.

Our plan anticipates the addition of more countries to the WASH database, an evaluation process to enhance the information, and the creation of a partnership with local universities for research, monitoring and evaluation.

It is further intended that we will create a Mapping program to analyze the progress of menstrual hygiene management in WASH countries. This is an extremely important element of our Plan. First, its initiation has energized a core group of women in our congregation who have organized efforts to supply menstrual hygiene products to our school in Kenya, and this has provided the impetus to establish a Five Year sub-plan for the empowerment of women. This activity will involve the women of our congregation in local and global efforts to define and address the problems of safety, security, education, and environmental issues regarding menstruation. Important issues of use and disposal, options for educational success, and the role of faith traditions will be explored and addressed. From Years 5 through 10, we will create an ongoing program of global consultation and mission trips to identify and educate young women on faith-based options regarding menstruation, in close coordination with the UN and other stakeholders in the US and sub Saharan Africa (which will be our geographic focus).

## **Partnerships**

This section most closely aligns with Sustainable Development Goal # 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”. The most important aspects of NPBC involvement will be related to subsections 17.14, on policy coherence, 17.18, on capacity building, and 17.19, which promote evaluation and outcome measures.

One of the cornerstones of our recent work has been our ability to establish partnerships with relevant and like-minded stakeholders. We have found that

leveraging resources, sharing expertise, and engaging in joint projects of mutual interest and benefit has been very valuable, and this will continue. For example, we are continuing to demonstrate the value of faith traditions to the process of cooperation and collaboration. We engaged with many faiths in Ise, Japan early in 2015, and reviewed our impacts on the discussions of climate change. We came to understand the unique roles that we play in establishing action plans for mitigating the effects, and for marshalling resources to effectively combat the devastating conditions which have existed, and will exist. We further engaged with the UN in creating a reference document to assist the faith community in spearheading actions to address problems of water, sanitation and hygiene. This work is found in an upcoming reference document called *Putting Clean Hands Together*, due for release in early 2016. Our Ten Year Plan will include participation in the World Water Forum in 2018 and the World Water Week in 2020. We will create a technical assistance tool describing our information collection efforts, our partnership experiences, and our field experiences, including establishment of initiatives under our CDC. We have amassed a working knowledge of the operation of many of our stakeholders and partners, and we will insure that we can form additional concrete activities in support of our initial work since 2009. One final element of our partnership is involvement of our church congregation in managing this process. As we discussed earlier, it has been a tremendous undertaking to set forth the frameworks for progress in an organization of our size and diversity. Key actors in our Ten Year Plan effort will be our Generation X group, our Board of Deacons, Global Policy Ministry, and Community Development Corporation. It will take a period of time to structure and assign work and develop a smooth feedback/improvement linkage. We believe that our Partnership Program can be established and operational within the next year, with reassessment and adjustments on a biannual basis.

One annual partnership event that promotes environmental conservation and poverty alleviation is the Choose to be G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) Summer Camp for children ages 5-15. This collaboration between the church and local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies help youth develop their environmental consciousness by campers participating in harvesting fruit and vegetables at local farms for families in need. As youth attend the summer camp and engage in interactive learning experiences over the next 10 years, officers encourage them to pursue trainings, internships, and careers in law enforcement and conservation. This positive engagement strengthens environmental, cultural, and community relationships, and attributes to poverty alleviation and a healthier world.