The Center for Racial Equity and Justice
Repent – Reform – Refocus

202-262-5053
tcfreaj@gmail.com

"No African Americans take to the streets in protest to demand Whites to love us more. We demand a behavior change!" Rev. George C. Gilbert, Jr.

May 2026 Newsletter

Pastors Meet Concerning Environmental Justice

On May 28, 50 faith leaders gathered at a conference hosted by the Greater Washington Region Clean Cities Coalition, led by Executive Director Antoine Thompson, and "The Center" to discuss urgent environmental justice concerns impacting Black communities.

The meeting brought together religious leaders, community advocates, and sustainability professionals to center a shared belief: clean air, safe transportation, and healthy neighborhoods are moral issues—not just environmental or policy priorities. The convening also highlighted how past and present systems have shaped who experiences pollution first and worst.

Key Environmental Justice Topics Discussed

1) Air Pollution: Diesel Emissions and Community Health

Participants examined how diesel buses, trucks, and other diesel-powered equipment contribute to health harms—especially in communities located near freight corridors, bus depots, highways, and industrial areas. Speakers emphasized that diesel emissions contain harmful pollutants such as fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen oxides (NOx), which are linked to respiratory disease and other long-term health effects.

Why it matters for faith communities: congregations often serve as trusted health partners—offering education, mutual aid,

and a community connection that can help residents understand exposure risks and access resources.

2) Systemic Racism and the Placement of Highways in Black Communities

Faith leaders also discussed how historic, systemic racism influenced where transportation infrastructure was built. Across the United States, highways were frequently placed through or adjacent to Black communities, displacing residents and concentrating pollution burdens where people had the least political leverage to resist.

This pattern has contributed to: - Higher exposure to traffic-related air pollution - Increased asthma and other breathing conditions - Long-term stress from living near persistent environmental hazards - Health inequities that continue across generations

The group underscored that environmental justice requires more than short-term fixes—it requires accountability, investment, and community-led planning.

3) Retrofitting Church Vehicles: Diesel to Electric or Hybrid

A major discussion point focused on the potential to convert existing church vehicles from diesel to electric or hybrid options. Faith communities often maintain fleets for: - community transportation - youth and outreach programs - service and disaster response

Leaders explored how fleet modernization can reduce emissions while supporting cleaner local air—especially for trips through dense neighborhoods.

4) Creating Charging Infrastructure on Church Sites

Participants also examined the possibility of installing electric vehicle (EV) charging stations on church properties. Beyond supporting congregational vehicle needs, charging sites can serve broader community goals by: - improving access to EV infrastructure in underserved areas - enabling cleaner transportation options for residents and local partners - reinforcing churches as community hubs for environmental solutions.

Asthma and Breathing Health Disparities: Why These Issues Are Urgent

Air pollution doesn't affect everyone equally. In many dense African American communities, exposure to traffic-related emissions is higher, and health outcomes reflect these unequal burdens.

For example, public health reporting consistently shows higher asthma prevalence among Black Americans compared with White Americans, and elevated rates of asthma-related emergency care. As one stark indicator:

- Asthma prevalence among Black children is higher than among White children in national surveys (CDC/NCHS estimates show Black children experience higher rates of current asthma than White children).
- Data also show Black communities experience greater asthma morbidity, including higher rates of hospitalization and emergency department visits in many settings.

These disparities are strongly connected to factors such as: - proximity to high-traffic corridors and diesel sources:

- housing conditions (including indoor pollutants and asthma triggers)

- unequal access to preventive care and mitigation resources

In other words, when diesel pollution and highway proximity concentrate in Black neighborhoods, breathing becomes a matter of civil rights.

Looking Ahead: Faith Communities as Environmental Justice Partners

The June convening reaffirmed that faith leaders are ready to move from awareness to action. By pursuing cleaner transportation options, advocating for healthier infrastructure, and exploring EV charging opportunities, churches can help strengthen community resilience while supporting long-term environmental change.

The Center for Racial Equity and Justice remains committed to partnering with faith institutions and community leaders to advance solutions that protect health, dismantle environmental inequities, and expand opportunity.

SPEACIAL THANKS TO ONE OF OUR SPONSORS:

CORE DC

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

ZELLE:

THE CENTER FOR RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE or tcfreaj@gmail.com

NOTHING IS TOO SMALL!!!

Annual Mother's Day Brunch

On Mother's Day, the Center for Racial Equity and Justice gathered to honor the strength, resilience, and enduring love of all mothers but placed special emphasis on mothers who have lost children from encounters with Police. "Whether they are innocent or guilty, these mothers still miss their children, and the Center is a place that provides space for them."

Sister Lahquisha Gilbert stated. Our annual Mother's Day Brunch provided a warm, affirming space for grief, community support, and connection—reminding each of our guests that they are not alone. Through shared meals, compassionate conversation, and community presence, attendees were able to find solidarity in one another and feel truly seen.

We were honored to welcome Dr. Tonya Gipson Miller as our Speaker of the Hour. Dr. Miller offered an inspiring message rooted in dignity, hope, and the importance of collective action. Her remarks reinforced the idea that the work of racial equity and justice must also include deep commitment to healing, safety, and support for mother and their families.

As part of the celebration, more than $5,000 in gifts were presented to mothers in attendance. These gifts reflected our gratitude and recognition for the courage it takes to keep going—especially while navigating loss. Every gift was offered as a small expression of what community support can look like: thoughtful, intentional, and grounded in care.

Advancing Real Reentry Support for DC

The Center for Racial Equity and Justice (CREJ) has long advocated for what truly helps returning citizens thrive: safe, stable, and local reentry housing, along with programming that supports accountability, employment readiness, family reunification, and community reintegration. That commitment is now making a tangible difference for the people impacted by incarceration across Washington, DC.

Right now, Washington, DC does not have a functioning halfway house. As a result, many men who are returning from incarceration are being housed in Baltimore. While that arrangement may have been intended to provide interim housing, in practice it has created serious challenges for returning citizens and their loved ones. For many families, the hardest part is distance. When a loved one is placed across state lines, regular visits become difficult, costly, and inconsistent. Parents, partners, siblings, and children often experience long gaps between in-person contact—gaps that can impact emotional well-being, stability at home, and family reunification during a crucial transition period.

When returning citizens are housed in Baltimore, they do not just navigate their reentry journey—they also must coexist with Baltimore residents, neighbors, and the surrounding community. In many cases, residents have concerns related to safety, presence, and impacts to the neighborhood, and returning citizens may struggle to build trust and consistency without the right supports. These challenges can include:

- Community tension and misunderstanding about reentry needs

- Limited access to family support due to distance

- Strained logistics for visitation, case planning, and healthcare access

- Increased barriers to stable reintegration without strong local coordination

For CREJ, the lesson is clear: reentry support should not be a “relocation solution.” It should be a local stability solution—rooted in DC community partnerships, proximity to families, and

CREJ’s work—along with the efforts of other returning citizen advocates—has helped push DC toward a better outcome. Together, advocates have elevated the urgency of local halfway house capacity and the need for a structured approach to housing and programming, not just temporary placement. Because of this ongoing advocacy, a major milestone has been reached: a brand-new facility is scheduled to open in August.

CREJ is encouraged by the announcement that a new halfway house facility in DC is scheduled to open in August. This is more than a construction project—it represents a shift toward dignity, accountability, and reintegration that supports both returning citizens and the communities they rejoin. This new facility will bring:

- Local housing in DC, reducing the need to send men to Baltimore

- Better access for families, including more consistent visitation and support

- Structured reentry programming designed to strengthen outcomes

- Ongoing oversight and planning to ensure the facility operates effectively and responsibly

The company responsible for building and managing this new facility is CORE DC, an African American–owned organization. CORE DC will be responsible for:

- Housing operations

- Programming and planning

- Overseeing construction

- Working directly with returning citizens to support their transition and growth

CREJ views CORE DC's leadership as an important step forward—not only because of the organization's commitment to reentry, but because the partnership reflects investment in local leadership and community-centered implementation. This matters because a halfway house is not simply a place to stay—it is often the bridge between incarceration and a stable life. When DC lacks that bridge, people are pushed further away from their communities and families, and reentry becomes harder than it should be. CREJ's advocacy is rooted in a belief that reentry is a public safety strategy and a racial equity issue. Ensuring DC has its own facility means fewer barriers for returning citizens, stronger family connections, and better chances for successful reintegration.

Looking Ahead, as CREJ and partner advocates continue monitoring progress, the focus remains on a fair, effective, and transparent reentry approach. With the facility scheduled to open in August, returning citizens and their families may soon have access to the local support they've been denied for too long. This is progress—but CREJ's work doesn't stop here. It continues until housing, programming, and opportunity are treated as essential resources for everyone in DC

.

No To Drug Houses (Safe Injection Sites)!

Below is a letter to the Editor of a Washington, D.C. paper who uncovered a Washington, D.C. mayoral candidate support of legalized drug houses.

I write as clergy serving in our city and as someone who has personally seen the damage drugs and addiction can do in the lives of our residents. That experience compels me to say clearly: safe injection sites are a bad idea for Washington, D.C. What is being proposed is not simply medical support—it is the institutionalization of drug use on public streets under supervision. Even if the intent is to reduce overdoses, the message to our neighborhoods matters, and the real-world impact on families and community safety matters just as much.

Time and again, policies like this do not land equally. They are ultimately dumped into the most vulnerable communities—the same wards where residents already carry the heaviest burden of addiction, trauma, and inadequate resources. When leaders float proposals like this, they often talk about "saving lives," but the lived reality for residents is that they are asked to absorb the consequences while others move on. Supporters frequently point to harm reduction as proof of effectiveness. But in practice, the legalization and normalization of drugs and alcohol have repeatedly harmed our people more than they have helped them—in health outcomes, public safety, and family stability. Washington does not need policies that further entrench substance use; we need strategies that prioritize recovery, accountability, and real treatment capacity.

This is especially concerning for D.C. because our city has a long, painful history of addiction being intensified by systems and decisions made at the government level. The crack epidemic—widely recognized as having been driven and exacerbated by government actions—left lasting scars on our neighborhoods. Those scars are not abstract. They show

up in emotional and mental health crises, intergenerational trauma, and the cycle of crisis that families endure.

Adding safe injection sites risks acting as a catalyst for:

- Normalization of drug use in high-need areas
- Increased drug traffic and neighborhood disorder around facilities
- Greater emotional harm and demoralization for residents already living with the fallout of opioid and crack-era trauma
- Pressure on local organizations and faith communities that are already stretched trying to support people toward recovery

Our communities should not be treated as a testing ground.

What We Should Be Funding Instead:

If we truly want to save lives, we should invest in what leads people out of addiction and into stability—not facilities that make using drugs more accessible. That means expanding treatment beds, recovery programs, mental health care, stable housing, and wraparound support with accountability and measurable outcomes.

Statement Concerning Cuba

The Center for Racial Equity & Justice is deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis affecting the people of Cuba. As an organization committed to human dignity, racial equity, social justice, and the protection of vulnerable communities, we recognize that the greatest burden of political and economic conflict is often borne by ordinary citizens—families, children, older adults, workers, and those already living on the margins.

The current crisis, marked by widespread power outages, shortages of food and medicine, disruptions in healthcare services, fuel scarcity, and increasing economic instability, has created significant hardship for millions of Cuban people. Access to basic necessities should not become a casualty of political disputes or geopolitical tensions.

We acknowledge the legitimate concerns surrounding human rights, democratic participation, and governmental accountability.

At the same time, we believe that policies and actions taken by any nation should be evaluated by their impact on human lives. Measures that unintentionally deepen suffering among civilian populations raise serious humanitarian concerns and deserve thoughtful review.

As advocates for justice and equity, we affirm that all people—regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, or political system—deserve access to food, healthcare, medicine, electricity, education, and economic opportunity. Human dignity must remain at the center of all policy decisions and international engagement.

We call upon leaders in both the United States and Cuba, as well as members of the international community, to pursue peaceful dialogue, humanitarian cooperation, and solutions that reduce suffering while promoting human rights, accountability, and stability. We encourage efforts that expand access to humanitarian aid, support vulnerable populations, and create pathways toward long-term economic and social well-being.

The Center for Racial Equity & Justice stands in solidarity with the Cuban people during this challenging time. We reject the notion that civilians should bear the weight of political conflict, and we reaffirm our commitment to justice, compassion, human rights, and the inherent worth of every person.

In moments of crisis, our shared humanity must be greater than our political differences. The pursuit of justice requires not only accountability but also mercy, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to protecting human life.

HAVE YOU PURCHASED REV. GILBERT'S NEW BOOK?

REV.GEORGE C. GILBERT JR.

To Purchase Your Copy:
https://www.lulu.com/shop/george-c-gilbert-jr/faith-and-freedom/paperback/product-w4rqpgg.html?page=1&pageSize=4

A Conversation on Faith and Fredom in the Bronx, New York

Community Cleanup

Recipient of the Dr. Andrew Fowler Community Service Award