

Dayton Dialogue on Race Relations

Dayton, Ohio

Purpose: The Dayton Dialogue on Race Relations (DDRR) was founded as a forum to improve relations between African-Americans and whites in an historically segregated city. Today, DDRR takes a leadership role in the eradication of racism by building an interdependent community that values racial, religious, and cultural differences.

Background: Because of concerns raised by African-American police officers about working conditions and promotions, city leaders such as Commissioner Dean Lovelace saw a need in 1998 to address racial issues, both in the police department and the entire community. They felt that the community could not flourish without changing the climate of racism.

“We needed to find a forum for people to interact with each other,” says Lovelace, a four-term city commissioner. “We needed to see that city services were being evenly distributed. We needed for people to realize the importance of getting to know one another. This was the basis for starting the dialogues.”

Dayton, with a population of 160,000, is among the most segregated cities in the United States. West Dayton is ninety percent African-American, while East Dayton is largely white.

Fifty individuals from political, educational, business, religious, and civic organizations met over several months in 1999 and decided to launch a community initiative to address race and reconciliation. Chief U.S. District Judge Walter H. Rice and former Montgomery County Commissioner Sarah Harris co-chaired the effort.

That same year, city officials contacted Hope in the Cities (HIC), a Richmond, Virginia program that has perfected a model for interra-



Dayton residents participate in a Dayton Dialogue event, January 2006.

cial dialogue. HIC was launched in 1990 in an effort to bring together political, business, and community leaders in Richmond, Virginia, to address the matter of racial healing. Representatives from HIC were invited to Dayton and gave presentations on their approach to representatives of groups concerned with the city's racial issues. The Dayton Dialogues got underway in 2000.

Description: The Dayton Dialogue on Race Relations is a community initiative whose primary goal is to implement a process of healing race relations by utilizing dialogue to foster reconciliation. This dialogue is an attempt to have an honest conversation among people of all backgrounds on matters of race, reconciliation and responsibility.

This dialogue is intended to provide a non-threatening forum that helps participants move beyond blame, guilt and hatred, to face the past and move forward with new insights.

In a typical dialogue, a dozen men and women – balanced by race and led by a trained facilitator – meet several times, 12 hours total. They meet in homes, churches or other places and talk about issues such as: community, ethnicity, discrimination, diversity, social structures, and reconciliation. Dialogue groups devise action plans to further racial reconciliation. Some may be as simple as getting together once a month and sharing a meal.

“We go from head to heart to action,” says Audrey Norman-Turner, Dialogue Administrator. Norman-Turner hosts a local television program about DDDR and what is happening to improve race relations in Dayton.

The dialogues have extended to Dayton institutions, Wright State University and Sinclair Community College, engaging administrators, faculty and students. Dayton officials also conducted a dialogue with elected officials from the nearby mostly white city of Kettering. DDDR works to bring the dialogue process to business, interfaith, professional, and civic organizations. It conducts approximately 30 dialogues per year.

Funding: The Dayton Dialogue on Race Relations receives annual grants from the City of Dayton and Montgomery County. The Dayton Foundation awarded a \$25,000 grant in 2000 and another in 2002. The Dayton Human Relations Council administers the DDDR process through the services of Norman-Turner.

Accomplishments: Nearly 4,000 individuals have participated in DDDR dialogues. Dialogues have taken place with students at Kiser Middle School and among students, faculty and administrators at two local colleges, Wright State University and Sinclair Community College. Miami Valley Hospital staff members have engaged in dialogues as well.

The organization has trained about 125 people to facilitate dialogues. This requires attending 12 hours of dialogue, plus 12 hours of training in facilitation.

In a 2002 evaluation of DDDR, more than 93 percent of participants responding said the sessions met their expectations, and more than two-thirds called their sessions very positive. Many say the most important result of the dialogues is that people have gotten to know fellow city residents of different racial backgrounds.



As a result of the dialogues, Dayton's Human Relations Council began processing complaints about discrimination in employment and housing. In addition, the dialogues led to the creation of the Summit against Institutionalized Racism, which targets practices, policies and procedures, such as predatory lending to communities of color, that perpetuate racism.

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