

Putting solutions in place: Leaders will meet at CTS to address poverty

By BRANDON A. PERRY | Posted: Thursday, March 2, 2017 12:08 pm

Most people would describe poverty as being poor or not having much money.

However, for Rev. Gregory C. Ellison II, Ph.D., there are different types of poverty.

“There’s also a poverty of worth in our country,” said Ellison, who is associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Emory University in Atlanta. “That is why we see crime and young men who don’t care about anybody else, because they feel like their own lives are not valued. So life becomes a survival mechanism where they get what they can as soon as they can. That’s poverty.”

In other words, Ellison told the Recorder, the best way to reduce poverty is to not only address the economic and social causes of it, but also to look at its psychological impact.

Ellison will be among more than 350 leaders from nonprofit organizations, faith institutions and government who will gather at Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) in Indianapolis on Tuesday, March 14, for the Faith & Action Project’s spring conference.

National experts, local activists and community leaders will discuss poverty in America and solutions for alleviating it.

CTS says the event, which is open to the public and includes lunch at \$20 per person, is “designed to inspire, equip and provide a forum” to come up with effective ways to actually reduce poverty.

Matt Boulton, Ph.D, president of CTS, said the seminary is honored to host the conference, because it is needed now more than ever.

“Indianapolis’ general poverty rate is 22 percent, and its child poverty rate is 33 percent; both are above national averages. That’s unacceptable,” Boulton said. “Extraordinary work by many organizations is already underway. We are committed to helping highlight and accelerate that work and encouraging others to get involved.”

The itinerary for the Faith & Action Project’s conference includes what some may describe as an “all-star” list of leaders from academia, the faith community, the nonprofit sector and local government.

Among those scheduled to participate include veteran urban activist Robert Lupton, author of the bestselling book *Toxic Charity*; Rev. David Hampton, Ph.D., deputy mayor of Indianapolis and senior pastor of Light of



Gregory Ellison

the World Christian Church; and Jodi Pfarr, whom CTS describes as “an entertaining diversity trainer who’s lived and worked in rural and urban settings.”

In addition to teaching at Emory, Ellison also works as founder of Fearless Dialogues, a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for people who would not typically interact with each other to have dialogue about important issues.

Ellison's appearance at the conference this month is highly anticipated in part because of his ties to the Indianapolis community. Not only does he have relatives who live here, but he also considers nationally renowned activist, poet and writer Mari Evans, an Indianapolis resident, to be one of his mentors. Ellison has also worked with community and faith organizations in the area on previous projects.

“Indiana, in some regards, is a muse for me,” Ellison said. “Through the conversations I’ve experienced there, it provides inspiration to do good work beyond your great state. I’m looking forward to the opportunity to come and meet additional creative activists who are committed to the bettering life in their community.”

Ellison is also the author of *Cut Dead But Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men*. In the book and while speaking across the country, he frequently mentions the concept of being “cut dead,” which emerged from a phrase coined by philosopher and psychologist William James in 1899.

“That literally means to be snubbed completely, or deliberately ignored,” Ellison said.

He added that in his experience, he has met people of different races, backgrounds and economic classes who often feel like they are being unseen and unheard, or judged with stereotypes. These people, he said, have hopes and dreams for their lives, even though other people may perceive their lives as meaningless.

“That’s the kind of tension I have found in working with young men who are African-American, some of whom have been incarcerated, and some of whom have been in some of our nation’s most prestigious insinuations,” Ellison said. “However, I’ve also seen it in the elderly, disabled people and white businessmen who are prominent in their industry.”

Ellison's point is that some people feel “cut dead” because they are seen only in a stereotypical way, and not in the fullness of their humanity. He believes this social challenge must be addressed in order to fully deal with the negative affects of poverty.

“What we’re seeking to do is to say you can change your society by the way that you treat the people that are in closest proximity to you,” he stated.

Ellison added that through the work of his organization, he has also discovered that poverty can best be fought when diverse groups of people from all walks of life come together and solve problems with respect.

“One way that I think the church can address poverty is to bring people together who don’t ordinarily sit together,” he said. “That’s a Christian vision, and it is what people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi were trying to do — bring people together in meaningful ways. Not just to say, ‘OK, we’re going to address the problem,’ but also see how we can be enriched by the presence of someone who is different from us.”

The Faith & Action Project Spring Conference will take place March 14 from 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. at Christian Theological Seminary, 1000 W. 42nd St. The \$20 admission price includes lunch, and scholarships are available. For more information, visit www.cts.edu.