

## Interfaith, public officials meet on policy issues

*The Revs. John Henson and Theron Jackson, Op-ed contributors*

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Two hundred leaders of Northern and Central Louisiana Interfaith met April 20 at Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, 5340 Jewella.

Blacks, whites, Hispanics, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Unitarian Universalists, Republicans, Democrats and Independents gathered at the church to celebrate accomplishments and discuss concerns.

Joining us were Caddo Sheriff Steve Prator, City of Shreveport Chief Administrative Officer Brian Crawford, Caddo Commission President Steven Jackson, three city council members and two commissioners. Bossier Parish Sheriff Julian Whittington and Shreveport Police Chief Alan Crump sent representatives from their respective departments.

Interfaith is a coalition of institutions dedicated to providing a way for ordinary residents to have a voice in decisions being made about them and their families. We are a non-partisan political organization, and we do not endorse candidates or a particular political party.

Sheriff Prator, Mr. Crawford and Commissioner Jackson agreed to work with us in our effort to reform the Industrial Tax Exemption and place a cap on requests.

The tax exemption was created to encourage manufacturers to expand their facilities or re-locate to the state, creating new permanent jobs. Interfaith is not opposed to the exemption. However, it has been abused over the years and millions of dollars in local taxes have been lost.

Interfaith/Together Louisiana got Gov. John Bel Edwards to sign an executive order revamping the way exemptions are granted. And, for the first time, local entities have input on the requests.



Rev. John Henson, pastor of the Church for the Highlands, Shreveport. (Photo: Submitted)

We are also concerned about the murder rate and the large number of families living in poverty in Caddo and Bossier parishes.

Interfaith would like to work with the police department and Chief Crump on potential solutions.

Our sister organizations have pioneered efforts to create labor market intermediaries that work with employers to create a skilled labor force. The oldest of its kind, Project QUEST San Antonio, has an 81 percent completion rate and has placed participants in jobs making an average wage of \$40,000 with a career path and benefits. The average annual wage of participants before QUEST was \$9,000, and many were on some form of social services such as food stamps.

Interfaith is working to create Project ACTS (Another Chance to Succeed). ACTS like QUEST would work with employers to create a skilled labor force for this region. We are targeting employers that pay a minimum of \$15 per hour with a career path and benefits.

It is proven that when workers are in jobs paying good wages, crime goes down.

ACTS may not totally solve our crime problem, but we think it is one way to address this issue.

Mr. Crawford has agreed to meet with Interfaith and view both the QUEST video and ACTS power point.

“Where there is no vision the people perish.” Our vision is to address the crime issue by moving poor families out of poverty, upgrading their skills and helping them to make lifestyle changes that break the cycle of poverty.

*The Rev. John Henson is pastor of the Church for the Highlands in Shreveport.*

*The Rev. Theron Jackson is pastor of the Morningstar Missionary Baptist Church in Shreveport.*



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