

AMOS meeting focuses on racial profiling

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A campaign to meet with central Iowa residents about social justice issues kicked off Sunday with church and civic leaders hearing stories of racial profiling.

Members of local interfaith group A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy, or AMOS, met at Des Moines' Grace United Methodist Church to organize for a series of house meetings that will help the group focus its agenda ahead of the group's annual issues meeting in October.

AMOS has driven activism in the Des Moines area on such issues as the number of juveniles detained by law enforcement. The group's concern for Polk County juveniles led to the creation of a "court watchers" program to independently observe court proceedings.

The unrest this month in Ferguson, Mo., after a white police officer shot to death an unarmed black 18-year-old helped prompt speeches about racial profiling at Sunday's event. Keynote speaker Tex Sample, a theology professor, blamed protests and rioting in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson on widespread disenfranchisement.

"When you get to a place like Ferguson, if you don't have anything to lose, if you have no stake in the system, what do you do," he said. "I'm not condoning — just saying when you've got people so desperate that they don't have anything to gain, then don't be surprised what you get."

Sample encouraged AMOS members to listen to local residents' stories through house meetings to help give disenfranchised community members tools to improve.

AMOS' efforts have also included a partnership formed last year with the Des Moines chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to document racial profiling by Des Moines-area police officers. Des Moines Police Chief Judy Bradshaw last year told The Des Moines Register that she saw no evidence of racial profiling in her department's ranks.

Dionna Langford of AMOS opened the meeting by telling a story from about a decade ago. Langford said her father was driving a Mercedes-Benz and was stopped at a Des Moines QuikTrip.

Sitting in the car, Langford saw a police officer looking out at her from the store. The officer pulled Langford's father over shortly after they left the parking lot, Langford said.

The officer was investigating a report of a stolen vehicle and seemed to hold the two longer than necessary before letting them leave, she said.

“I looked away, I looked back,” she said. “He hadn’t moved his eyes off of me. ... From the look in his eye, I already knew what was about to happen.”

AMOS said it plans a meeting Oct. 20 to share what it learns from residents at house meetings over the next couple of months.

Link to article: <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2014/08/25/amos-meeting-focuses-racial-profiling/14550499/>