



March 14, 2017

## **Do All Lives Matter?**

It was great to see such a large turnout last Sunday at Lawndale Christian Health Center and Lawndale Community Church for the book release party for the new book recently written by Coach Wayne Gordon and John M. Perkins, entitled Do All Lives Matter?

This slim 90 page volume, which could be read in one sitting, is very current with the times we are now living in, and it resonates with how people live in many parts of America, including the West Side of Chicago. Coach Gordon and his wife Anne have lived in North Lawndale for the last 40 years, and Coach listens and learns from people in his community as he pastors Lawndale Community Church. John Perkins lives in Jackson, Mississippi and is a pioneer in Christian social justice and reconciliation in Mississippi, and his non-violent reaction to extreme racism and even torture reminds me of how Nelson Mandela reacted to his captors and how Dr. Martin Luther King taught that more is to be gained by loving than by hating.

The major theme of the book is that “all lives can’t matter until black lives matter”. As stated in the Introduction, “The time for proclaiming and living the truth that *all* lives matter is now. The time for building a culture of peace and respect to replace a culture of violence and hatred is now. In short, now is the time for becoming the ‘beloved community’ “. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described the goal of the “beloved community” as a global vision, but also one that could be aspired to within local communities. As Dr. King said in a speech at a victory rally following the announcement of a favorable U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery’s buses, “the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.”

In the book, Coach Gordon and John Perkins describe very personal experiences that many can identify with if you live on the West Side of Chicago or if you have ever experienced racism, discrimination, or violence. They concisely describe how black people can feel invisible to whites, and that most white people have no idea or understanding of how black people feel toward the police. The book notes that “Centuries of discrimination continue to shape the lives and limit the choices of African American people in our country today.”

But, there is hope. Coach and John Perkins go on to say that “the overwhelming majority of people in this country – including law enforcement officials and leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement – want the same thing: peace and justice in our communities and in our nation.” They also say that “this is not to say that people

who are being oppressed or treated as if their lives don't matter should be passive..but when we take our stand, we must do so peacefully. Otherwise we risk becoming the enemy.”

The book concludes with eleven suggestions for action, and I would like to underline the suggestion that we support restorative justice policies and efforts. Our current system of emphasizing punishment has indeed been extreme, taking people away from their families and communities and then burdening them with the stigma of a felony when they return to our communities, greatly restricting their ability to get a job to support their families. These problems are very common in our community, and as Chair and founder of the Illinois House Restorative Justice Committee, I invite others to join in to work on these issues. As noted in the book, correctly applied restorative justice methods restore both the victim and the offender, creating even more accountability than our current system which emphasizes incarceration.

Congratulations to Coach Gordon and John Perkins for a book that should be read by everyone interested in learning more about how all lives really do matter, knowing that true understanding about how black lives matter is key to having us all come to greater community and social harmony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District