

“BUILDING COMMUNITY: Something Has Begun”

Sunday, December 7 – Monday, December 8, 1997

Charlotte Convention Center

The major event planned and promoted by the Community Building Task Force during 1997 was the community conference, “BUILDING COMMUNITY: Something Has Begun”, held Sunday, December 7, and Monday, December 8, at the Charlotte Convention Center. Participants were invited to focus on issues of race and ethnicity and were provided with opportunities to investigate the many faces of Charlotte/Mecklenburg, to identify challenges facing this community and to begin the process of seeking solutions.

DESIRED OUTCOMES WERE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

- 1. To create a process that keeps a dialogue going and engages the unengaged*
- 2. To identify commonalties while building connections and relationships among participants, particularly among those who do not normally interact*
- 3. To create awareness of the impact of racism on our community life*
- 4. To lay a foundation for ongoing community building through identifying issues and initiating a community-wide process for finding solutions*

Conference photographs provided by Paul Williams, III.

CONFERENCE DESIGN

Preparation

The Conference planning process was driven by the Leadership Team and supported by a conference planner and organizational consultants with experience in planning large group events focused on systems change. The Task Force's Conference Action Team provided valuable input and validation during the planning process which took several months.

The Conference format was intentionally designed to stimulate personal interaction in a mixed small group setting. Attendees were seated at the same pre-assigned table of from eight to ten persons for the two-day event. A trained facilitator was a part of each table group.

Conference Philosophy

The Conference was designed and conducted based on the beliefs listed here:

1. An ongoing process, not a stand-alone event, is essential to addressing issues of race and class.
2. Creating relationships and personal connections among participants is essential to community building.
3. Using personal interaction to share information and perspectives about the challenges we face as a community helps build common understanding of the whole community.
4. Sharpening our focus on current reality and building a common vision for the future creates "positive tension" for our work together.
5. Race can be talked about and addressed as a community.
6. Diversity of race and class brings different and valuable points of view into the room.
7. Information about what other communities are doing is important input for our work together.
8. Keep it simple; don't over promise and under deliver.



While pictures in the background signify much work already accomplished, this group continues to discuss the important issues raised during the conference.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS: RECRUITMENT, ATTENDANCE & ETHNIC INFORMATION

Invitations to the conference were mailed to a database of several thousand names assembled from lists provided by a broad range of community organizations and institutions. Contacts with the local media led to "teaser" stories about the community's opportunity to sign up for the



Jim Ferguson and Thi Lee participate in one of the workshop discussions.

December conference, and a registration form was printed in *The Charlotte Observer*. Approximately 800 people expressed interest in attending the conference by either returning a registration form or calling the Task Force office.

The initial conference design provided for a maximum of 540 attendees to be pre-assigned to 60 tables of nine (9) each. In response to the oversubscription and in a desire to involve as many persons as possible, table size was increased to 10 per table. One additional Sunday only table was added, bring that total to four. Special seating was provided for persons wishing to attend public presentations such as Sunday's "The Face of Mecklenburg County" and Monday's address by Mr. Hugh Price.

Five hundred forty-nine (549) individuals participated in both the Sunday and Monday sessions; fifty-six (56) additional persons attended on Sunday only, nine (9) on Monday.

In all, a total of 614 individuals were active participants in the conference over the two-day period. The ethnic make-up of the group was as follows:

Asian Females	. . . . .	5
Asian Males	. . . . .	4
Black/African American Females	. . . . .	134
Black/African American Males	. . . . .	88
Latin American/Hispanic Females	. . . . .	15
Latin American/Hispanic Males	. . . . .	9
Native American Females	. . . . .	7
Native American Males	. . . . .	2
White Females	. . . . .	173
White Males	. . . . .	171
Others	. . . . .	6

"It was exciting to have over 600 individuals make a commitment to Building Community. We (those present) know there is something seriously wrong with the climate of our community and are willing to do the hard work to help it change."
 ~CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

On the first day of the conference, 27 people were placed on the waiting list because they came to participate and had not pre-registered. All 27 were accommodated and filled spaces made available through cancellations.

Thirteen(13) volunteers were present on both days to assist staff and planners.

See "Appendix C" of this report for a full listing of conference participants.

Conference Agenda

A Narrative Description

Attendees were asked to make a two-day commitment since the conference design called for interactive experiences at pre-assigned, mixed tables. Attendees were assigned to a table for the entire conference, in hopes of establishing a small community in which participants could feel free to talk with others of different backgrounds and experiences.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1997

1:00 – 2:20 Convention Center opens early for registration, entertainment and mingling. One Voice Choir sings as attendees take their seats.

2:20 – 2:30 Welcomes from Charlie Davidson, Chair of the Board of Foundation For The Carolinas, Mayor Pat McCrory, and County Commissioner Parks Helms. Invocation by Reverend David Chadwick, pastor of Forest Hills Presbyterian Church and a Community Building Task Force member.

2:30 – 2:45 James E. Ferguson II, Chair of the Leadership Team, gives an overview of the conference agenda and shares his personal perspective.

“This effort can only succeed if each of you has come to do what we hope. To bare your souls, to talk honestly, to open your minds, to speak your minds and to listen with your mind and your heart... to be open to differences and to understand that no single one of us has an answer to this nagging, sometimes brutal, persistent problem of racial conflict.”

~JAMES FERGUSON

2:45 – 3:00 **What is the shape and scope of our work?**

Mac Everett, President of

First Union North Carolina and Leadership Team member, introduces Elsie Cross, nationally known diversity trainer.

Ms. Cross leads an interactive session to help attendees examine the shape and scope of the conference. This includes a review of the conference purpose and outcomes, a description of what to expect in the next two days, and establishment of group guidelines.

- 3:00 – 3:30 **Why are we here?**
Elsie Cross leads the group through an examination of why we came to the conference. This segment is designed to allow attendees to begin building personal connections across differences through individual reflection, paired discussion, and group dialogue.
- 3:30 – 4:00 **The Dimensions of Diversity**
Elsie Cross leads a Q&A session that looks at the dimensions of diversity to help attendees take a look at the depth and breadth of diversity and prepare them for the information they will receive after the break. *(See Appendix C.)*
- 4:00 – 4:30 Break
- 4:30 – 5:30 **What’s the new face of Charlotte? Who are we?**
This segment combines historical information, data from surveys and focus groups, demographic information, and personal stories in an intensive segment using videos, computer-generated charts, and live presentations on neighborhoods, schools and education issues, economic factors and crime, and police factors. *(See Appendix D.)*
- 5:30 – 6:15 **What are the challenges facing Charlotte?**
Following the presentation, table facilitators lead a discussion that encourages attendees to focus on (1) what in the data confirms their views, (2) what came as a surprise, and (3) given the data, what three key challenges must the community address.
- 6:15 – 6:20 James Ferguson closes the day with words of encouragement and thanks.
- 6:20 – 7:30 Reception and entertainment.



(From left) Speakers Jim Ferguson, Elsie Cross, and Mac Everett gather for a moment during a break.

Conference Record

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1997

7:30 – 8:00 Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 8:10 Welcome by Wanny Hogewood, Board Chair of Mecklenburg Ministries and Task Force member. Invocation by Imam Khalil Akbar of Masjid Ash-Shaheed and member of the Task Force.

8:10 – 8:45 Laura Foxx, President of NationsBank Foundation and Leadership Team member, introduces Hugh Price, President

and CEO of the National Urban League. Presentation by Mr. Price.

8:45 – 8:55

Eastway Middle School Photography Project

Youth and leaders report to the conference on their “Ethnic Identity Project” through which they used portrait photos taken of each student to survey conference attendees about stereotyping that can occur when persons “guess” facts about students based on appearance only.

(See Appendix E for a complete project description.)

8:55 – 9:35

How do we view our challenges?

Elsie Cross asks conference attendees to look at the list of challenges coming from the previous day’s interactive work and gives all tables an opportunity to submit challenges they believe have been overlooked. Each table is assigned one challenge to discuss using these questions:

1. Why is this challenge important?
2. What are its key elements?
3. How is it related to other challenges?
4. What will success look like when this challenge is overcome?
5. What questions need to be answered to overcome this challenge?

(See Appendix C of this report.)

“The work of healing and promoting racial harmony must go on deep in communities. The real glue of racial harmony and racial healing is in homes, in communities and in institutions.”

“We know that quality preschool education, developmentally oriented, makes an enormous difference. The Carnegie Corporation has issued report after report on the importance of early childhood education, setting the stage for making sure that all children achieve. Does Charlotte have all of the children who need it engaged in quality preschool education? Charlotte needs to ask: Is every child taking the critical courses from teachers who are fully prepared to teach and who believe in the young people?”

~HUGH PRICE

9:35 – 10:10

What is happening where?

Emily Zimmern, Director of The Museum of the New South and Vice-Chair of the CBTF Leadership Team, introduces Paul Du Bois, Co-Director of the Center for Living Democracy.

Mr. Du Bois presents information about efforts in other cities to combat racism and shares information from the Center for Living Democracy’s recently published examination of 85 programs operating in 30 U.S. states.

10:10 – 10:40

Break

10:40 – 11:00

A Vision for Charlotte

Shirley Fulton, Superior Court Judge and CBTF Leadership Team member, introduces Joe Martin, Principal Corporate Affairs officer for NationsBank.

Mr. Martin provides a witty and moving address on who we are, how we see one another and who we can become. Through a series of thought-provoking questions, he challenges us to examine our vision for Charlotte’s future.

“By the year 2002, you will value all of your ancestors, not just the ones that most nearly explain your skin tone or the ones that suit somebody else. ‘Other’ is a great race.”

“We will discover that our racial classifications are only an artificial excuse for treating some people better or worse than others. I have no idea what role ancestors play in the things that make us different. But I know every time we quickly accept race as the only reason, we reach the wrong conclusion. It’s usually because it’s the only data we collect. Because we expect that to be the answer, it becomes the answer.... an answer that keeps bringing us back to the same question. Maybe our artificial racial classifications are just a con-job on ourselves to give the impression of logic and reason for irrational beliefs that keep us from solving the real problems.”

~JOE MARTIN

11:00 – 12:45

Vision Charlotte 2002: What are the images that will define Charlotte?

Participants are asked to reflect on what’s important to them about Charlotte’s future in light of the challenges we have identified, and to put that image on a piece of paper — either in words, pictures or symbols. These images are pinned on the curtains for all to see and examine. Table discussion focuses on (1) personal vision, (2) what images stand out, and (3) what individual perceptions have shifted since Sunday.

Conference Record

12:45 – 1:00 **Will Charlotte accept the challenge?**

Claude Alexander and Mac Everett bring the conference to a close with personal words of challenge to the community.

“We have to have hope. We believe to have hope there has to be trust. And that’s our number one challenge in this community. How do we address the distrust that now exists?”

“I really like the time we spent developing a vision for Charlotte’s future. It’s exciting to me to think about what’s possible in our community, but it won’t be easy. We have a huge task ahead of us in building bridges of trust among different races and ethnic groups. And we’ll have to learn how to resolve conflict and include many more people from throughout our community. Then and only then can we achieve real consensus around what we want to be.”

~MAC EVERETT

“We have gathered out of a recognition that it’s not enough to be the envy of the nation as being the number one pro-business community, the second largest banking center, of being a community whose creativity has produced the world of oz. We must also become the envy of the nation as the community who lives up to the demands of democracy. Aristotle suggested it this way, ‘Democracy arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects and that because persons are equally free they claim to be absolutely equal.’ That equality must be seen in access and in opportunity.”

“Over 500 persons have come together out of a sense of ownership and partnership. One of the things I hope we will all work on is the development of new mechanisms for problem solving which includes all segments of our community: business, government, education, neighborhoods, religious, and civic.”

~CLAUDE ALEXANDER

1:00 – 2:00 **Lunch**

Attendees are encouraged to continue table conversation over lunch.

CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP

Presenters

Claude R. Alexander Jr. serves as pastor of the University Park Baptist Church in Charlotte and serves on several community boards, including the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League and the Arts & Science Council.

Elsie Y. Cross is the founder and president of Elsie Y. Cross Associates, Inc., an organizational development consulting firm. Her work in managing diversity is widely recognized; her firm consults with Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and universities on issues of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination.

"It's not enough to have Charlotte's upper-crust and socio-economically successful citizens. In order to help bridge the gap between people, all must have a chance to voice their opinions and concerns."

~CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

Paul Martin Du Bois is co-director of the Center for Living Democracy, a national organization working to transform democracy from formal, political institutions to a way of life that actively engages citizens in solving public problems. He co-authored his most recent book, *The Quickening of America: Rebuilding our Nation, Remaking our Lives*, with his wife, Frances Moore Lappé.

"As a high school student, this experience helped me realize that there are more racial problems in school than I was aware of. I had attended a conference for high school students two weeks before this, and together with another representative from my school, we decided to form a forum to address such problems."

~CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

Mac Everett is president of First Union – North Carolina and immediate past chair of the Charlotte Chamber.

James E. Ferguson, II is the founding partner of the law firm of Ferguson, Stein, Watt, Adkins, Gresham & Sumter, P.A.

Joe Martin is Principal Corporate Affairs Officer for NationsBank and has been the recipient of numerous community awards, most recently the Whitney Young Award from the Urban League.

Hugh B. Price is president and CEO of the National Urban League, a non-profit, non-partisan community-based organization with 114 affiliates nationally. Mr. Price has served as a member of the Editorial Board of *The New York Times* and for six years as senior vice president of WNET/13, the public television station in New York City.

"The interaction between different cultures and walks of life was exceptional. A great variety helped to make the conference a success."

~CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

Conference Record

Consultants & Specialists

Conference Design & Implementation

John Bradberry
Cyndee Patterson
Tina Price
Octavia Seawell

Educational & Video Presentations

Cyndee Patterson,
Executive Producer
Rick Fitts, Producer
Jane Duckwall, Scriptwriter
Sonja Gantt, Narrator
Brad Schulz, Research
Cheryl Roberts &
Urban Institute, Research

Eighty (80) individuals attended one of two training sessions held in weeks prior to the conference. Elsie Cross, conference con-



The success of the Conference to raise the level of awareness concerning the ethnic issues that must be addressed in Charlotte-Mecklenburg was achieved by bringing ethnic populations together in "round tables" such as this.

Facilitators

An essential element of the conference design was the placement of a trained facilitator at each table to guide the interactive exercises and the establishment of an environment in which connections among conference participants could be made.

A cadre of facilitators was recruited from among those who had expressed an interest or had experience in facilitation, and from the staff and programs of community organizations, notably the American Society of Training & Development, the Community Relations Committee, Mecklenburg Ministries, the National Conference, the Police Department, as well as trainers and personnel from local corporations.

sultants, and CBTF staff led the sessions, which involved small group discussion and a modeling of conference interactives. Trained facilitators were provided for 61 tables, and six facilitators served as "rovers" during the conference itself. Facilitators assembled prior to the beginning of the conference on Sunday, December 7 for final instructions and reconvened that evening to debrief and process the community challenges interactive. Facilitators also gathered immediately following the close of the conference on Monday to process their experience.

Information on the facilitator training is available through the Task Force office.

CONFERENCE OUTPUT

Community Challenges

Following the one hour presentation on community data, the facilitators led a discussion that focused on (1) what participants had seen or heard, how they made meaning of it, and what the differences were in how people received the data and (2) what were three key challenges the community must address.

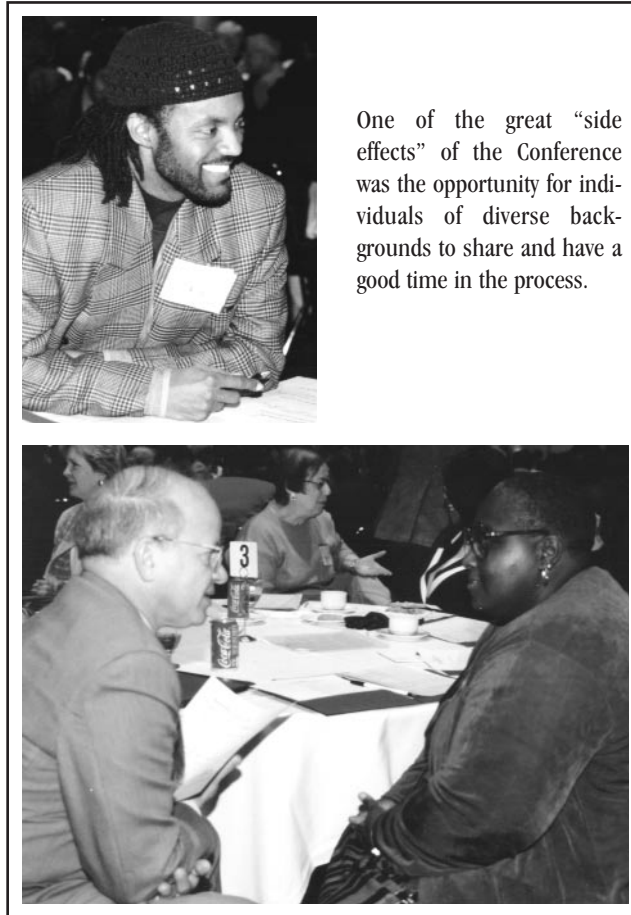
Facilitators brought this information to a post-conference session on Sunday evening and helped condense the information from 60 tables to a shorter list. Conference planners then summarized this list into one containing 17 challenges.

On Monday morning each table was given one of the challenges for further work. Some challenges were assigned to as many as three tables. After the 17 challenges were presented, the entire group of 600 tables was given the opportunity to submit challenges they believed were not represented among the 17.

The complete listing of the Condensed Challenges is included in Appendix C of this report.

Vision Statements

The purpose of the final table interactive,



One of the great “side effects” of the Conference was the opportunity for individuals of diverse backgrounds to share and have a good time in the process.

“Vision Charlotte 2002”, was to encourage attendees to develop a picture of the possibilities for a preferred future with regard to race, class, and diversity issues in the Charlotte community. Activities included a personal reflection and a guided imagery experience followed by the practical opportunity to put images on paper using words, pictures or symbols. Each person was then asked to post the image in a common area and take in the images created by others.

Silence was encouraged during this activity.

Table discussion following this experience allowed participants to speak about their personal vision and their impressions of the collective vision, as well as what had shifted since yesterday in how they saw the community.

Conference Record

Call-To-Action

At the end of the Conference on Monday, each participant was asked to complete a Call-To-Action form (see Appendix C) indicating an intent to stay involved in the community building effort through ongoing programs offered by local groups and organizations or through opportunities planned for Phase II.

Of the 392 Call-To-Action forms that were returned:

- 250 Individuals expressed an interest in being a part of an Issue Action Team;
- 235 Individuals said they would like to participate in community dialogues;
- 91 Individuals said they would be interested in facilitating dialogues.

Task Force staff copied Call-To-Action forms of persons wishing to volunteer or participate with one or more of the 15 organizations listed on the form and forwarded these names to the appropriate organizations. Referrals ranged in number from six names for one group to 87 names for another organization.

Since the conference, approximately 25 additional individuals have expressed inter-

est in being involved in Task Force activities and have been included in the conference database.

CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UP

Conference Evaluations

In an effort to stay connected with conference attendees and to hear from them about their conference experience, especially after a period of reflection, a letter and an evaluation form were sent to each participant.

Of the 614 letters mailed, 104 evaluations were returned to the CBTF office.

Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What was most valuable about the experience for you?
2. What was least valuable?
3. What additions or changes would you recommend?

Major themes are captured in the following selected quotes, as well as in the quotes found throughout this section. These themes will be incorporated into the planning for Phase II.

“At the end of the conference, true feelings and questionable attitudes were surfacing.”

"I was fascinated by the educational data, but it was presented too quickly to be absorbed. It would have been helpful to have had handouts."

"Less speakers, some informational presentations, and more time for interaction with participants."

"The subtitle 'Something Has Begun' gave me some degree of hope for my three grandchildren."

Conference Videos

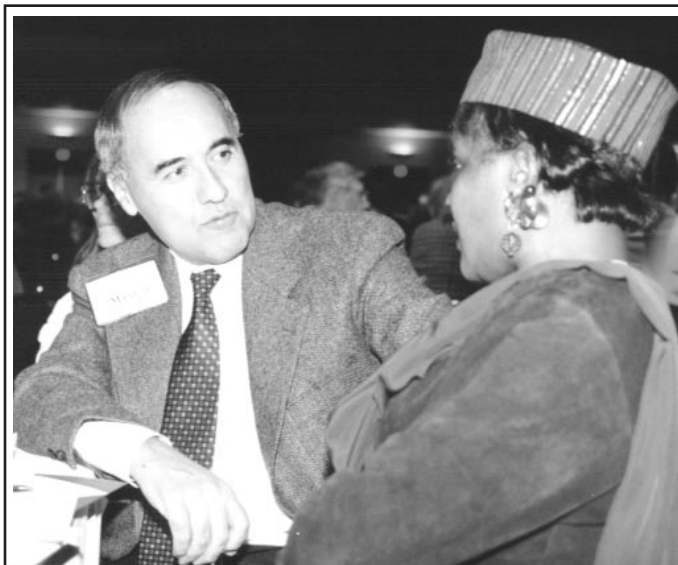
An order form for videos of selected conference presentations was also included in the mailing. More than 100 videos have been requested by individuals, community groups, and institutions. Hard copies of the statistical data have been provided for use in conjunction with each educational

presentation (neighborhoods, education, economics, crime and public safety).

Copies of each video are available for pre-view purposes through the Task Force office, as is the statistical information.

Table Groups Follow-up

At conference end it was apparent from the lively discussions taking place throughout the room that several table groups would attempt to continue the dialogue begun at the conference. In an effort to support these groups, a letter was mailed to each table facilitator with suggested group activities. These suggestions included books or movies to stimulate discussion and information on dialogue models that could help structure further conversation.



Manuel Zapata and Betty Tucker discuss the issues one-on-one.

Task Force staff tried to contact facilitators by phone to confirm the status of each table group. Of 58 phone calls placed, 42 were returned. From the 42 facilitators that responded, we learned that 10 groups are continuing to meet. The gatherings range from sharing a meal to arranging a regular meeting time to discuss topics of group interest. Of the 32 facilitators who have not scheduled a meeting with their table groups, 14 have taken the initiative to send a table roster to their group in case someone might want to arrange a get-together in the future.

CONFERENCE PROMOTION:

PUBLIC RELATIONS & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Task Force and Conference Communication Plan

A comprehensive communications strategy was designed to focus attention on the activities of the Task Force and the conference and to encourage participation in the work to follow.

The plan communicated several key messages:

- The Task Force and planners reflected a broad cross-section of people, races and ethnicities and political persuasions.
- While much research preceded the December 7–8 sessions, the conference would include time for additional input.



Community activists (from left) Annelle Houk and Carrie Graves chat about the topics raised during a break at the Conference.

- As daunting as the task appeared, the Community Building Task Force was serious about producing positive results on the issue of race relations.
- The conference would kick off follow-up activities focused on study and action.

Media Focus

The communications plan targeted local print, regional print, wire services, local TV, radio and specialized print media (African American, Asian, and Hispanic), as well as national outlets, including the Wall Street Journal and USA Today. In October, contacts with each of the media outlets began with news releases, public service announcements to encourage conference participation, and initial efforts to see how each outlet might cover the Task Force and the conference.

Task Force Support

Talking points for Task Force members were developed. Topics included why the work was important, the history of the effort and its corporate and governmental support, why a Task Force member and community citizens should care about improving race relations in Charlotte, and what the conference with its specialized format would accomplish. Members were also given basic tips on dealing with the media, how the media could be important to the conference's success, and what resources were available.

Community Education and Conference Promotion

In addition to making media contacts and providing Task Force support, a fact sheet of “Frequently Asked Questions” about the Community Building Task Force was produced, as were two reports on the results coming from community focus groups. These reports detailed the ethnic makeup of the focus groups, provided insight into themes emerging from the dialogues and included actual quotes from focus group participants.

Faith Community Support of the Community Conference

In an effort to encourage persons within the faith community to support and attend the conference, Mecklenburg Ministries sent a letter to hundreds of area congregations asking them to publicize the conference and to include the theme of racial reconciliation in their worship experience during the conference weekend. The letter was signed by the twelve clergy persons serving on the Community Building Task Force. Congregations could request a Worship Resource Packet prepared by

“Many of the white participants haven’t a clue as to what other ethnic groups live through on a daily basis.”
~CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT



Members of this work group continue to meet monthly to follow-up on the topics they raised during the conference, and to discuss further issues that arise.

Mecklenburg Ministries, and over 20 packets were distributed in response to the letter and follow-up phone calls.

Conference Coordination

Media participants during the two-day conference were given an extensive information packet and press kit, including a history of race relations in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and a synopsis of information to be included in educational presentations. The communications team helped coordinate interviews with participants and provided press space for filing stories. Local and national media outlets were contacted to provide articles and stories for the Task Force “clip file”.

Selected articles are included in the “Media Coverage” Section of this report. A complete file of articles about task force activities is available through the Task Force office.

