

Just Policing: Constitutional Policing and Nonviolence in a Context of Structural Racism

Chet Epperson and Reverend Samuel Sarpiya

March 21, 2016

Chet Epperson is the retired Chief of Police of Rockford Police Department in Rockford, Illinois and a thirty-three-year veteran of the police force. The Reverend Samuel Sarpiya is the pastor of Rockford Community Church and the cofounder of the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation.

Since 2014, Epperson and Sarpiya have worked together to implement Kingian nonviolent community policing processes in Rockford, Illinois. In this panel presentation, the pastor and the retired police chief discuss what it means to practice constitutional policing, their collaborative efforts in building a more-engaged and empowered community, and a police force committed to a hopeful future.

Chet Epperson: We're going to talk about constitutional policing. What part of the Constitution has to do with police departments? How does the Fourth Amendment pertain to police officers? What's the connection, or, as the constitutional law professor would say, what's the nexus? What's the nexus with the Fourth Amendment? It impacts every one of you, young, old, rich, or poor. If I'm a police officer, what part of the Fourth Amendment stops me from illegally going into a person's pockets? Search and seizure laws. Many police departments use force too much. If a police officer were to come up and say to someone, "Hey, you're not supposed to be jaywalking!" and then hit that person over the head with a baton a few times (I'm making this up), that would be excessive force. The law says that's a seizure—I've actually seized him, I've taken him into my custody, and I've used excessive force, force beyond the standard that the law provides. That's what gets police departments in trouble, first and foremost. Whether it's in Ferguson, Baltimore, Oakland, or Albuquerque, constitutional policing is the issue in law enforcement today.

The Constitution goes with policing. In the community that I served (I retired in November), a member of the editorial board of the paper asked, "How does the Constitution have anything to do with policing?" The current mayor got in a debate with one of the senior editors of the paper over this.

Is there any truth to the notion that more people escape the police when the cops are controlled? What do you think? If we see a cop on the front page of the newspaper immobilizing a person, what do we automatically assume? Police brutality. It may not be. Think about when you're sitting and watching the news on TV. If you have no thought process independent of what you see on the television or in the newspaper, you're going through somebody's bias, whether it's slanted pro or con police, against white people, against black people.

Mayors and police chiefs across the country say about body-worn cameras, "This is a simple answer to a complex issue. Just get body-worn cameras and that'll solve the problem." Who believes that? I work with several departments now, one has body cameras now and one doesn't. You can just turn the body camera off. I know of one department that had a dash cam—you can just turn the dash cam off if you want to talk to a suspect about something that you don't want recorded. Body-worn cameras won't solve our constitutional policing problem.

Think about the cities in the United States that have had civil disobedience events. You could take pictures of moments of violence during the civil rights movement and put up Baltimore or Ferguson. We could just take a newspaper article from thirty or forty years ago and just change the dates to today. This is what I see in law enforcement today as an idealistic thirty-three-year career police officer. The good guys are the cops, and the bad people are supposed to be you. This is how we defend ourselves across the United States of America. We put shields up, we put facemasks up, and we really don't want to have conversations. We really don't want to talk about the elephant in the room. We really don't want to talk about what's true. We use force, and I'll be damned if you're going to get by me because if you do, you're probably going to get into some sort of trouble. If we compare pictures of the demonstrators at the Martin Luther King marches in Birmingham, Alabama in the 1960s and at UC Davis in 2011, we have to ask ourselves: How have we, as Americans, improved from the '60s to now? Aren't we still doing the same thing? The police are not allowing people to say what they want to say. As they're not hurting people, what harm are these protestors doing by refusing to move? The police officer using pepper spray in the UC Davis picture made it onto national TV. He got fired. There was a lawsuit. What happened after the Birmingham campaign? This one lingered for years, because predominantly these individuals were African-Americans and never had any sort of truth-telling or reconciliation. The police did all these things to these individuals, and the police never said, "We made a mistake."

Let's talk a bit about what we did in Rockford. Rockford is seventy-five miles northwest of downtown Chicago, and if you looked at social statistics anywhere in the state of Illinois, we're at the top of everything. We hit the top of every list. African-American males have a 46% chance of graduating

high school in Rockford. We have a high population of young single mothers, and we have the highest child abuse and neglect in our city compared to the state of Illinois, so every negative social dynamic you can think of is tops in the city of Rockford, Illinois. But we were able to do a few things with law enforcement that I could be responsible for, because I can't solve all the social ills, but I can at least manage my own house.

One of the things that we did in the department is we implemented an early warning system. I took over as Chief in 2006. A police lieutenant came in one day and he said, "Hey, Chief. I've got to talk to you." I said, "Well, come on in." He said, "We got a problem. So-and-so has a complaint of excessive force and rude behavior. Someone came in and complained against this officer." I said, "Okay, why don't you go back and tell me how many other complaints this officer has received over the years?" A few minutes later, the lieutenant came back in and his head was down. He said, "You're not going to want to hear what I have to tell you. This guy has sixteen complaints of rude behavior and excessive force." And he only had three years on the job! Well, how could that happen? I did the math and said, "I don't believe you." I wanted to find out who all those individuals were that had complained of excessive force and rude behavior. What kind of people were they in terms of gender and race? They were mostly white males under the influence of alcohol. Think about that for a second; you are managing a police organization and you have somebody who has sixteen complaints of rude behavior and excessive force. We had no early warning system. If you wanted to find out about police officers in the old days, you had to go to the library. I know you have the Internet now, but back then we had the Dewey decimal system and you had to go to the card catalogue and pull out this drawer of cards. We still had no system to tell us about officers. It's not that we want to fire anybody, but if an officer gets a complaint of excessive force and the next day we find out he's got problems with his girlfriend and he's often late to work, we probably want to have some sort of intervention. So, we implemented an early warning system in Rockford Police Department. It saves a lot of cops' careers, and it helps out the police department.

In 2009 I met the pastor, who will relate his story soon. It was on August 24, 2009, at about two o'clock in the afternoon. We had an officer-involved shooting—an officer had to shoot somebody that had been in a domestic the night before with his girlfriend. The next day he was fighting with his girlfriend, she called the police and gave a description of what he looked like. Mark Barmore was a young African-American male, possibly armed with a knife, and wanted on a minor warrant. The officers went into the neighborhood to try to find him. At first they couldn't find him, but a few minutes later they spotted him and ran after him. He ran into a church because he had been counseled by the pastor and so he felt comfortable at the church. The church members allowed him into the church and the police

officers tried to get into the church, shaking the door, but the people on the other side wouldn't let the officers into the church. One of the officers ran after Barmore into the church, pointing his gun all over the place, trying to find the guy and shouting, "Where are you?" The other officer came in the other door. They went downstairs, because everyone said Barmore went downstairs. They were in this big room and there were about twenty-five young kids, between the ages of three and eight. The police started engaging with Barmore inside the door. Barmore grabbed one officer's gun and the other officer shot him. When the gun went off, all these young kids witnessed the shooting. They never took the kids out of the basement. We had an uproar. One day I was talking to Louis Farrakhan, the next day Jesse Jackson, the next day Al Sharpton. They were all coming to town. We had CNN. We had Marxists. We had pro-police. We had anti-police. We had people in between.

One of the things we started was an independent shooting investigation, so from that day forward anytime our officers were involved in a shooting, we called in other police departments to put together a neutral and transparent integrity task force so that we weren't investigating our own. We also started the accreditation process. We have to meet 460 standards. There are certain policies and procedures you have to prove that you're doing. One of the big things I am proud of is that we have an open complaint system. When I took over, we had on average eighteen to twenty-two complaints that never got taken care of. If a gentleman came into the station intending to file a complaint for excessive force and we gave him the form but then he ended up not filling it out, we just put that down as "fail to file." If someone came in to get the complaint form but then said, "I want to go home and talk to my boyfriend, my father, my mother, my pastor, my attorney," we never called and followed up. We just let them go. We carried eighteen to twenty-two complaints that we labeled as "fail to file." Before, we never looked into a complaint independently to ask, "Was it valid?" For the last three or four years, however, we have had either zero or one "fail to files." We have checked out every complaint made by everyone who has walked through the front doors of the police department to file a complaint.

We also implemented a program for returning prisoners. If a prisoner had killed, raped, robbed, or shot anybody, they had to come to a forum with law enforcement and social service agencies where we told them, "You're special guests. We welcome you back to the city of Rockford. You're so special that we want to give you a one-time opportunity." The one-time opportunity is that they will never re-offend again. Now, if they do re-offend, here is the US Attorney's Office from the United States Department of Justice and the State's Attorney who will talk to them. If the officials can get them on federal charges, they will put them in some federal penitentiary away from their wife and kids for a minimum of fifteen years. The state can't get that much time, but the feds can. Also, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,

Firearms, and Explosives will have a conversation with them. On the other side, if they have any mental health issues and they can't get along with somebody because they have anger issues, or they have substance abuse issues, we can offer case management to them. Case management is voluntary in Illinois; we can't force anybody into it.

Of all those who said, "Goodbye, I don't want your help," 48% reoffended. Only about 13% of those who said, "Hey, I really need your help," reoffended. It's a very good program, and it's really about touching lives and people. I'll never forget Tristan. He came one day to a parole call-in. He was sitting at this round table at the front. He's sitting there, and he won't look at me. I'm trying to eyeball him, and he won't look at me. Afterwards, I try to go up and shake his hand; he didn't want anything to do with me. He said, "Nah, I don't want your case management." I said, "I don't think that's really right." So, the inquisitive guy that I am, I go back and check his record. This kid is twenty-four years old. He had a record as long as I am tall. It started off with curfew. Then came mouthing back to his mom and dad, and then doing some robberies, and then doing some things in school. Do you know the thing that really triggered me? At eight years old, he was the victim of sexual abuse. No wonder that young man wouldn't look at me. He was probably sexually abused by a male. He probably has no good male relationship. There was another guy who came into the prisoner reentry program, and I looked up his record a couple months later because he wasn't really interacting. Again, he was sexually abused as a young person. Many of them have a lot of baggage that they have not dealt with. I'm not condoning the crime that they committed. The crime is one thing, but there's also something about that person, because at the end of the day he is a human being. Not a piece of livestock. Not some thing. A human being. Somehow, they were impacted. We need to think about race relations, and we need to think about reconciliation, especially for prisoners.

I think we've done a horrible job as a country with our prisons. Prisons don't work. Putting someone in prison is not going to change him. It may be retributive justice—you may all feel better because Johnny went to prison because he committed a crime, but there is no evidence that that prison term is actually going to help that person. There is evidence to show that the longer you keep somebody in jail for a low-level offense, the higher the chances that that person will reoffend. If you arrest me for retail theft and I'm a first-time offender and you leave me in jail for a certain amount of time because I can't get bond, you have increased the likelihood of me staying in the system and recommitting another offense.

Are there any alternatives to what we're doing in the police department? Could we do anything differently? The answer is yes. There is a system out there, a process developed by Bernard LaFayette, Jr.,

David Jehnsen, and Charles Alphin Sr., for law enforcement that is based on Kingian nonviolence. It is an excellent, excellent process. The pastor is going to tell you more about it, but here are its six main principles:

1. It is a way of life for courageous people;
2. Beloved community is the goal;
3. Attack the evil forces, not the people;
4. Suffering for the cause;
5. Avoid internal violence of the spirit;
6. The universe is on the side of justice.

Can you imagine saying all of that in front of a bunch of cops? That went over very well. The way to get them at the table was to buy them food. After about the fourth dinner and the fifth event, their bellies were full and they were starting to talk about this stuff, which is really great. We did some really good things in Rockford last year with this. I encourage every one of you to challenge law enforcement in your community where you live either now or in the future to learn this system. All of you can be civilly disobedient. You never thought you'd hear that from a chief of police, did you? Every one of you can challenge government. You can do it in a respectful way. You don't have to get arrested. You don't have to call anybody names.

Here's a way you can challenge law enforcement and government. Are your police department's records available? Does it give out information about crimes in your community? Does it give out operational information that says, "We have 350 officers and 20% of them are people of color and 10% are female"? There is not one unified system for use of force data in the United States of America. There is not one unified system of use of force data, let alone definitions, in the State of Illinois. If I look at departments in Chicago, Rockford, Springfield—big departments, small departments—I might find that one has twenty definitions, one might have five definitions, and one might have two. We have no unified definition or use of force policy in the United States of America. You have probably heard this conversation taking place somewhere. Every department across the United States should be able to tell you how many people have filed complaints, what they complained about, and what the complaint outcome was, without giving names. Every department should be able to give that information.

In my department, I did not allow anybody to carry a Taser unless they were supervisors and had gone through forty hours of mental health training certified by the State of Illinois. People look at me and say, "Are you crazy? They don't have time for that." If they don't, they don't carry Tasers. I heard the other day on NPR that one-third of the homeless population has mental health issues. Who do you think

the police come in contact with? Corporate executives? On a daily basis we come in contact with people who have mental illnesses, are not taking their medicine, are overmedicated, or are under-medicated. That's what cops deal with. Why would I ever want a law enforcement officer who doesn't have mental health training to carry a Taser? I took that class two years ago. Have you ever worn hallucination earphones? Try it sometime. I had to take them off. I couldn't stand it. Guess what? There are people in the United States who can't turn it off; the only way they can control it is with medicine.

You should be able to go into any police department in the United States of America and talk to their chief. Here's the biggest problem in law enforcement today: leaders, chiefs, and sheriffs are not willing to make mistakes. I've gone in front of my community and said, "I'm sorry. We should not have done that. I am so sorry that we acted the way we did." I have to tell you something—if you can go in front of a crowd as a chief of a police or a law enforcement officer and admit that you made a mistake, it takes everything out of the room. But pride gets involved in that. People just don't want to admit that they made a mistake.

Samuel Sarpiya: My portion of this is more like storytelling, telling you the journey that Chief Epperson and I have been on. Despite the fact that Chief Epperson is no longer the police chief of Rockford, the foundation that he helped lay continues to be built upon. You know a great leader only after they've gone, because when they are gone and everything is swept clean and we start all over again, we need to ask, "Was there really leadership and vision communicated?" If there was, at least some of the programs or some of the visions will linger on. They might change direction slightly, but they will still carry on. Most of the story I am telling you now is a living document. We're not yet finished telling the story; we're still unraveling the story as we go.

My part of this will cover a non-violence approach to community and police partnership, and it's all hinged on using the Kingian nonviolence conflict transformation and leadership development process. Some of you may wonder, "So, where do I get this leadership training? Where do I get this certification?" I have been privileged to be able to be mentored by David Jehnsen, who was mentored by Dr. King. Jehnsen is a member of the Church of the Brethren. He lives in Galena, Ohio. In 2009, I came into contact with Jehnsen, and in the last seven years I've intentionally done some close work with him. Right now, he and I, along with a group of Dr. King's protégés, are developing the Advanced Training Manual. The Church of the Brethren's annual conference paper of 1963 (revised in 1985) says, "the deepening crisis in race relations all across the land confronts the Christian churches with its sharpest challenges to integrity and discipleship in this century."¹ To that, I would add "and Christian colleges, and liberal arts colleges."

I am convinced that the Church and our colleges can become the beacon of hope for the future through dialogues and workshops like this. I am personally convinced of this because we can move further when we work as a community, when there is no “us” and “them,” when the police become the community and the community becomes the police. I will cover these two basic points: the historical background of our community organizing around an issue in West Middle School and the development of a partnership with Rockford Police Department. I moved from Hawaii to Rockford in February 2, 2009 to plant a church. We were on the beach on Saturday, and on Sunday night we were in Rockford, Illinois. We were thinking, “What did we just do? Are we crazy? Is God up to something?” I think it was the latter because I can see it now, that God was really stirring.

In getting to know my community at this point I had gotten to know quite a lot of pastors, quite a few city officials, because one of the key drivers for a pastor or church planter or a leader in the community is getting to know who the power makers are and who the people left behind are. How can you bring those two into conversation? Right as I was doing this, this particular incident, the Mark Barmore shooting, happened. Immediately, I had knee-jerk reaction of “Let’s do something.” That’s when we gathered the community to do Kingian nonviolence training for two days. And those two days ran from at eight in the morning until eight at night for two days. I tell you, in those two days we wrestled through and over myriad issues that have formed the base of Rockford.

During this process, we adopted one of the public schools in the school district because we had to go to the underlying issue. Mark Barmore had been a high school dropout. He was one of the 54% that come in the front door and leaves out the back door. How do we prevent things like that? West Middle School is a school in Rockford that at that point was considered one of the most dangerous middle schools to work at. The turnover rate of teachers at that school was almost at 100%, with six principals over a five-year period. That’s a recipe for disaster. The kids are already at a loss with the change in administration. A teacher will walk in on the first day of school and by the end of class she’s gone, because she’s just finished college at a suburban college and they put her in the midst of these kids. A few more statistics about this school: It’s 98% minority, with 98% white teachers. That’s a total disconnect. When we got into the school, we realized that the school district was unintentionally creating gang violence in the school simply because Illinois state policy is that children who live one mile or more away from the school will be bussed, and students who live less than a mile away will not be bussed. There’s a housing project that 70% of these kids come from, and there’s a street that divides the housing project. Half the kids in that housing project are bussed; half in the housing project are not bussed. That’s a recipe

for disaster. This is apart from the revolving doors of teachers. (Six months after we started this, the acting principal was moved out of the district).

We decided as a group that we would do something that is not ordinary. Instead of taking out rocks and going to demonstrate in front of the police department or against those that are in front of the police, we would see how we could get the community together. We gathered the community and began to work in West Middle School. We didn't just jump into the school. We did a lot of social science research. We asked basic questions like, "How do you feel about the condition of the school?" We asked the administrators, the police officers on the street, the kids, the teachers, residents of the school district, and we did all of this in a nonviolent way through various types of information gathering. You might ask, "Why are you going to a public school when you're trying to address a racial problem as a result of a shooting?" We realized that to be able to address the systemic issue, we wanted to address one issue that had the potential to become contagious, to affect every sphere of the city of Rockford. We decided to follow these steps to community organizing. We gathered information, and it never stopped. We thought we had gathered enough and we found out there was another layer.

This school had been involved in a lawsuit way before I came to Rockford. At one point, the school was being run by the Department of Education for racism and racial issues that nobody would believe were happening in the twenty-first century. As we gathered this information, we educated ourselves and we educated the community about what was going on. As we educated the community, we asked them, "Are you willing to be an ally?" You see, I like the fact that a police chief is willing to tell us to do civil disobedience. It's so cool to hear that coming from a police chief, because he's calling us to do direct action. When we gathered that information, we said, "Are you willing to join this movement so that we can change our community?" We wanted to see a reconciled community. As we gathered information, we went to the powers that be. Because we were addressing school problems, we went to the school district, the superintendent, and said, "This is the situation." Using the bus example, we said, "This unintentional gang violence that you are causing in the school has to stop, and this is our community's approach." If the superintendent had said, 'No,' we were going to boycott the entire bus system because we had the parents on our side, and we had a lot of churches and community leaders on our side. We interviewed the police officers on the street and asked them, "Do you think this is unjust?" Can you imagine this happening in northern Illinois, where the temperature dips to below 30, and here is a middle-schooler walking almost a mile to school, and the lawmakers have their covered parking in Springfield? The superintendent eventually agreed to bus everybody. That alone began to address a very systemic problem in that school.

You see, we don't all have to go demonstrate against the police. I'm not saying, "Do not demonstrate." Look for an issue that is really key in your own community. What is the key issue that you can all work towards addressing? It doesn't have to be what they're doing in Missouri—they will have a different way of addressing it. There's no cookie-cutter formula. But we can see the injustice and say, "How do we contextualize the injustice and address the issues we are facing right here?" When we follow all of these steps to community organizing, our goal is to reconcile the community so that the police and the community no longer see each other as enemies.

How did we develop a partnership with the Rockford police department? West Middle School used to have a couple of police officers there on the school property, just to keep the peace. How many of you know that you cannot force peace on people? You can police as much as you can, but it will not change the system. I remember having a conversation with the school superintendent and we asked her, "Is it possible to take those officers and bring in Officer Friendly, the community officers in the school?" Because she had already seen the changes, despite the fact that she was interim, she agreed to what we were saying and she brought in the community officers.

At that point, I was still working behind the scenes with Chief Epperson, trying to get nonviolence training going. We used the manual for Kingian nonviolence leadership development for law enforcement training. As Chet said, "Feed them and they will come." The first day we had the law enforcement workshop with all the command staff and management. It happened to be in my church. They showed up, and my neighbors were all wondering, "What are all the squad cars doing here? Is the pastor doing dope?" At first, the officers, the command staff, the deputy chiefs, and everyone in management were all saying, "We don't want to be here. I don't know why the Chief is making us talk about nonviolence. We are men. We are macho. We are police. How can we talk about nonviolence?" But the principle of community leadership is not how many guns and bullets you have on you, it's about how much you engage with the community. By the fourth session, these officers couldn't stop asking questions. The fourth session was supposed to end at two o'clock, but we didn't leave until an hour later, and the questions kept coming. The interesting thing is the change in attitude, the change in perspective and the officers' realization that nonviolent community policing does not necessarily take the uniform and the guns away from them, but rather gives them the tools to empower the community as a partner in solving crime.

I remember saying this to them: "The job of the police officer is not to police and solve crime. The job of the police officer is to maintain law and order." They looked at me and said, "Who, then, will solve crime?" I said, "The community. You and I have the answer to the change we want to see in the

community.” When we hold our elected officials accountable to what the law says, all of a sudden the power is reversed. It’s not a question of power over, but all of a sudden we are collaborators, co-creators in building this beloved community that we all hoped to see achieved. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. Because I have worked a lot with the police department, I can tell you, their work is hard. Because they are moms and dads, they have kids. Can you imagine an officer leaving their house every morning and not knowing, in this day and age, if he or she will come back home? There are bad cops out there. I’m not saying they’re all angels, but the media intensifies this negative image, because a videotape was shot and you keep watching it over and over. I’m not against awareness, but I’m saying to always remember that the officers, too, are human, and it takes courage to dress up in that uniform. It takes courage to knock on that door without drawing your gun. It takes courage to pull somebody over for breaking the law and to remain disciplined while talking to him or her when he or she might be responding harshly.

There was an incident that happened in Rockford. A member of my church lives on the west side, on South Day Street. His adopted father is Caucasian, and the boy was adopted from Saint Kitts Island, so he is black and his mother had just passed away. Under the stress of everything going on, he took a gun and wanted to shoot his father. It was an old World War II rifle. We don’t know where it came from. Finally, Pat Hoey, the interim police chief of the Rockford Police Department, went in the home. They started negotiating with him throughout the night. At four in the morning, I got a phone call. Pat said, “Pastor, there is a member of your church that says his son will respond to you if you come to this incident. We really don’t want to use force against him.” He was pointing the rifle at them. He was upstairs, and they could see him through the window. Can you imagine the result if the officers had used force? What do you think would have happened? We would have been counting Junior as a statistic. The case of Junior was resolved so peacefully. When they told him his father’s pastor was coming, he came out. By the time I showed up, it had been resolved peacefully. This was the sign that the town needed that Rockford Police Department has some sense of willingness to engage with the community. It takes courage. The Rockford Police Department had been drilling the value of community. The community now has access to the department without fear of being targeted. If I want to file a complaint against an officer in the department, I can go to Rockford Police Department. There are also different avenues to do so. I can also go to a community center or an assigned gas station and file a complaint and it will get heard. That’s community engagement.

Nonviolence looks at the beloved community as the framework for the future. When you imagine the future, you want to have a good future. You want to make a better life for yourself and for people out

there. Can you imagine what happens when, as a law enforcement officer, as a community member, your framework for everything you look at is through the prism of creating a hopeful future? You will do everything possible to seek reconciliation. Without reconciliation, the tension will just keep growing. Community policing in Rockford is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systemic use of partnership and problem-solving techniques. The police don't have all the answers. The community and the police working together find the answers to solving our community issues, because the challenge that we face in Rockford is different from what other communities face. But we can learn from each other's experiences. So the community of Rockford is intentionally working towards these three components of policing.

We know that organizational transformation is an ongoing process. As a member of the community, I hear more about what Chief Epperson's legacy is than will ever get told to him. At his farewell when he retired, the minority community of Rockford said, "We pray that whoever comes will continue the legacy he left behind." The racial barrier between the police, command staff, and management in Rockford is almost nonexistent now because of his intentional leadership. I know of so many cities that want to get rid of their police chief. If they could run him or her out of town, they would do it immediately. But here's a police chief retiring and the community saying, "Oh, is there a way we can keep you?" That means a lot. This organizational transformation continues. We are continuing to work on the command staff training that I've done with the department and we are trying to enshrine nonviolent community policing as part of the ethos of the department.

I am going to introduce to you the latest project that we are working on. We are working on something called the mobile lab. The mobile lab is a twenty-six-foot trailer that was given to the police department by FEMA. One-third of it has been converted into a computer lab, and the rest of it is a music-recording studio. This is what it is going to look like:





Figures 1-3: Images from the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation’s Mobile Lab.

The computer lab will have twelve workstations. On April 5, we will have a grand community celebration and pop the champagne and commission it. Some of these kids are bubbling over with so much creativity that the regular walls of a classroom cannot give them enough, but you give some of these sixteen-year-olds a computer and they will do some amazing stuff. We all know the new industrial movement is going to be computer programming. In this lab, we are going to be teaching computer programming to kids in the minority community, and to anyone that is economically disadvantaged. The goal is to use this mobile lab as a tool to teach nonviolence in the community.

NOTES

1. “The Time is Now to Heal Our Racial Brokenness.” Church of the Brethren Resolutions & Statements, Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. Accessed September 15, 2016. <http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1963-time-is-now.html>.