

## As I See It - A Forum for Community Issues Unity has only just begun

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With crime rates going up around the city of St. Louis in record numbers, the Rev. Dr. F. James Clark, pastor of Shalom City of Peace, and Eric C. Rhone, entertainment manager and producer, saw the need for African-American men to join together to fight our common enemy: violence. Dr. Clark launched this movement along with Minister Donald Muhammad, of the National of Islam, and Bishop Courtney Jones, pastor of Pleasant Grove M.B. Church, to fight black-on-black crime in the St. Louis area. This is admirable, because they are a part of a new vanguard of St. Louis ministers who have taken up the righteous cause of civil rights and social justice. This new movement is badly needed, because it showcases that civil rights does not begin with the white community, but starts at home in the African-American community. If we, as African Americans, are not respecting each other and taking responsibility for ourselves, then how can we blame other people for not doing the same? Black-on-black crime is not only systemic, but it is also an internal plague. For this reason, I applaud Dr. Clark's efforts to unite the black community for change. The Call To Oneness Movement is an initiative comprised of African-American men from all walks of life who have joined together to reduce crime and violence in the St. Louis area. They are ministers, businessmen, community leaders, professionals, blue-collar workers, students and even unemployed black males who are dedicated to making a difference. In addition, more than 86 churches, civic and community organizations, including the 100 Black Men, Urban League and Better Family Life, have joined the movement. Having gathered together more than 20,000 men to march against violence, the Call To Oneness was deemed successful. However, the celebration quickly ended when 16-year-old Shirlene Raquel Williams was killed merely hours after the march. Unfortunately, over a dozen additional murders have also occurred during the month of June. Thankfully, the Call To Oneness is more than just a onetime event. The movement is now recruiting male volunteers to participate in street teams that will mobilize in high-crime areas. These teams of men will be assigned to a neighborhood to talk with youth about the dangers of gang violence, drugs and teen pregnancy. They will also encourage residents to take responsibility for their neighborhoods by reporting crimes to the police. Another component of the street team strategy is to send groups of at least 100 men into a community recently affected by a violent crime to offer resources and support to its residents. At the time of this writing, approximately 79 murders have been committed in St. Louis city this year. It is up to each and every one of us to get involved with the Call To Oneness movement to stop this crisis. Thousands of young men are needed to man the street team operation, and all of this community is needed to support their efforts. Now is the time for the African-American community to take a stand

against the killings that occur in our neighborhoods, amongst our families and within our circles of friends. We encourage all companies, agencies, churches, men and women to participate in this worthy cause. The real work begins now.