

To those of our fellow Christians concerned about the building of Kawaida Towers:

Dear fellow Christians:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

"The love of Christ constraineth us" to listen intently to the concerns of all and to take them seriously. Those living immediately in the North Newark situation and affected most directly by it have perceptions of Kawaida Towers that must be respected and taken seriously. Likewise, there are other and sometimes conflicting concerns that must be respected.

In putting a picture on the wall, we need to stand back in order to determine whether or not it hangs straight. Similarly, we believe there is need for all of us to stand back from the present controversy in order to focus more clearly upon what is involved. As members of the wider Christian community, we are called upon to "to speak the truth in love" to one another as we direct our faith to the issue before us.

What is the basic issue?

As we see it, the issue is not whether a religious or ideological group (in this case the Temple of Kawaida) has a right to sponsor a publicly financed housing development. Any religious group has this right under the housing statutes. The Methodists in nearby Wesley Towers exercised this right, as have many other Newark groups - both black and white.

The issue is not whether there is a need for housing in Newark. Obviously there is such a need; at least a third of the housing is sub-standard.

The issue is not whether a group can sponsor racially segregated housing. In accordance with New Jersey's civil rights laws, occupancy at Kawaida Towers must be open to all races and ethnic groups.

The issue in this instance is not whether to have high rise housing. Regardless of its wisdom, the high rise policy is a present reality. The neighborhood is zoned for and located near high rises.

The issue is not that of one group displacing another. The immediate neighborhood is already racially mixed, including large numbers of black, white, and Spanish-speaking people.

The main issue is not parking lot size, school crowding, sewage disposal, tax abatement, or the approval process. Although such concerns are important and in some cases should be explored further, they do not go to the heart of the matter.

And finally, dear brothers and sisters, we must especially emphasize that the issue is not Imamu Baraka or his teachings. We know that some persons feel threatened by the Kawaida movement. We share a deep concern about these fears. We affirm our oneness with you, our fellow Christians, as you grapple with these complexities. Nevertheless, we must all stand for the basic rights of all - even those with whom we might disagree or by whom we might feel threatened. Our American constitutional system affirms pluralism and guarantees certain basic freedoms and rights. Many of our forefathers suffered and died as Christians and as noble Americans to win and preserve these freedoms and rights.



The basic issue then is: Does any sponsor which has gone through the legal steps to build housing have the right to build without reference to the sponsor's color, creed, or ideology? When thus stated, the answer which must be given by fair-minded Christians or Americans is obviously "yes". To answer otherwise would be not only a denial of the basic American principle of liberty and justice for all, but more fundamentally a retreat from Christian commitment - a retreat from the biblical call "to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Seeking to speak in the Spirit of Christ, we urge you our fellow Christians not to allow secondary concerns - however important they may seem - to pull you away from the clear issue. We further urge the Christian community to move beyond remaining neutral. It is not enough to await a final word from the courts, which is no substitute for the expression of conscience from the community of faith. It is time for good and decent people to take a positive stand. It is time for Christians to stand for justice. Affirming the rights of all must include affirming the right of Kawaide Towers Inc. to build at the Lincoln Avenue site. Not only as a matter of principle but also as a matter of self-interest we must affirm the rights of all. If the rights of any are taken away the rights of all are threatened.

May the Spirit of Christ illumine us and sustain us all. Amen.