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# OPINION

## A Sweet Touch to a Food Justice Project

To grow,  
strengthen and  
produce

BY VIVIAN M. LUCAS

If you've never eaten a sweet scuppernong grape, you have missed an unforgettable treat.

One of my fondest childhood memories is of enjoying the small deliciously juicy bronze globes grown in my grandparents' yard. Under a huge living canopy created by grapevines growing on hidden trellises, my sisters and I would pick grapes and eat to our hearts' content.

It never occurred to me that over 40 years later I'd buy these

wonderful Southern delicacies for a price of almost 10 cents apiece! So when one of the neighbors of the Franklinton

Center at Bricks, a United Church of Christ Center for Education and Social Transformation, recently offered cuttings from her scuppernong grapevines, I

jumped at the chance to add a small vineyard to the center's 5-acre garden and acre-sized orchard that help provide healthy food to families living in the eastern North Carolina area where the center is located.

"A vineyard will put a naturally sweet touch to the food justice project," I thought.

As the gracious neighbor began to clip cuttings from her grapevines, I noticed something

unique. The small branches were cut from the vine, but they remained attached in other areas of the branches. Upon close examination, I saw that young tendrils from one branch had grown long enough to attach themselves and curl around other branches to stay connected to the grapevines.

I learned that what had begun 10 years ago as four small grape plants had grown to become a 20-foot long and 4-foot wide grape arbor by making intricate connections that helped to produce hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of grapes. To help the plants become most fruitful, the owner had cared for the growing grapevines with trellises and had pruned and trained

the branches to reach within their surroundings to help them move themselves upwards.

As the tendrils wrapped themselves around the branches and vines, their grips had become strong enough to support the continual growth process. This reminded me of the way children and youth grow within the context of family, school, community and church.

Young people seek support, training and education to grow, strengthen and produce. It is our responsibility as those who have benefitted from the gifts, leadership, and courage of our foreparents and community institutions, to give our children and youth something they can "wrap their hands and minds around."

We must build upon the work completed by those upon whose shoulders we stand. We must make connections to ensure that our systems are strong. We must repeal unjust laws and enact just legislation that helps us work in unity to build new and exciting infrastructures.

It is our job to set fair policies and lovingly and wisely teach our children and youth how to navigate in ways that successfully help move these young people upward and forward. Are we doing our best to make the future fruit of our youth sweet and just or just bittersweet?

*Vivian M. Lucas is director of the United Church of Christ's Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, N.C.*

## Police, Brutality and the Prevalence of Racial Bias

Increasing trust  
between police  
and the  
community

BY BEN JEALOUS

What is community policing? In the wake of increased shootings

in Ferguson and around the country, there has been a renewed public interest in the role of police, the extent of police brutality, and the prevalence of racial bias.

These are not new issues, and in fact a number of organizations have been working for decades to increase trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Among these is the National Coalition Building Institute, a nonprofit leadership program headquartered in Washington D.C.

Founded in 1984, the institute focuses on eliminating prejudice and resolving intergroup conflict. They work in cities across the U.S. and overseas to build the capacity of local leaders in schools, college campuses, police depart-

ments, and environmental organizations to lead prevention-oriented workshops and to intervene in the face of tough inter group conflict.

One of the group's key programs, the Law Enforcement Community Citizen Project, focuses on building productive relationships between police and the

communities they serve. Initially funded in 2002 by a grant from the COPS office (the office of Community Policing at the US Department of Justice) to work in Bethlehem, Penn. and King County, Wash., the project has since been implemented in numerous communities.

Called on to bridge the divide between community members and police officers, the group leads training, diversity, and inclusion and leadership workshops for officers and community activists to educate them in skills to foster cooperative relationships.

Some communities have contacted the institute when there have been specific difficulties between white police officers and people or neighborhoods of color that have

been singled out by police. From their experience, the coalition has learned that it is best to offer communities a prevention-oriented, trust building approach. This way, they build the ongoing capacity of law enforcement and community activists to work in partnership to increase safety for all citizens in the community.

I spoke with Fabienne Brooks, who along with Guillermo Lopez is co-director of the institute's Law Enforcement Program. Brooks is a retired chief of detectives for the King County Police Department in Seattle. She was the first black female officer in county history to be hired as a deputy, and throughout her career she made a point to immerse herself in the community that she served. The neighborhood she patrolled was the same neighborhood where she attended church and raised her family. After 26 years on the job, she retired and joined the institute so she could continue her passion for community policing.

Ms. Brooks told me that "an important part of community policing occurs when an officer recognizes that they are

part of a community, and the community understands the same about the officer. It includes forming empathetic relationships between law enforcement and community members, which results in increased officer safety and safety for all members of the community."

The partnership project builds trust between law enforcement and community leaders by helping each side to understand the daily realities of the other. Each has a key story to tell. Each deserves respectful listening. By teaching listening skills and conflict resolution practices and by helping each side see the humanity and legitimate concerns of the other, trust and partnership increases.

In addition, the institute teaches specific skill sets that help each side to confront the biases they have learned about each other that get in the way of equitable treatment of the entire community

-- particularly the equitable treatment of people from different racial groups.

In Ferguson, former Chief Brooks sees an opportunity for an effective community-polic-

ing program to emerge from the chaos and violence of the past few weeks. "Now, there is a chance for police and the community to hear each other," she said. "The focus needs to be on how people are treated. If you can train officers how to treat all people with dignity and respect - that is a victory."

Brook's co-director Guillermo Lopez explained that community policing cannot be accomplished with the wave of a wand, "You don't go in trying to change a whole department; you go in trying to change a few people, who eventually come to change the whole department. We can start by focusing attention and financial resources on organizations like NCBI, so they can continue spreading the word that emphasizes the 'serve' aspect of Protect and Serve."

As Brooks told me, "Police officers meet with the community, hear tough things, say tough things and confront their prejudices together - this is how we will move forward."

*Ben Jealous is a partner at Kapor Capital and former president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.*

