



Open Wide Our Hearts

An outdoor spiritual gathering with reflections to support social justice and the Black community.

Speaker Biographies

Rashid Silvera is a Renaissance man and an inspirational educator, who retired in 2017 from Scarsdale High School, after teaching Social Studies classes on Psychology and Race and Ethnicity. For 35 years, his eclectic personality, charisma and "caring before sharing" approach to teaching have enabled him to bring out the best in his students, building lasting confidence and fueling their inspiration beyond high school. He has been a supporter of the Scarsdale Student Transfer Education Plan (STEP), an independent community program that identifies promising students of color and enables them to attend Scarsdale High School for their junior and senior years. He was born in 1947 in Boston, MA and graduated in 1967 from the Williston Academy in Easthampton, MA. He then enrolled at Colgate University, but, in 1969, transferred to Bennington College, where he received his degree in political science and anthropology in 1972. He went on to obtain his Masters in Theological Studies degree from Harvard Divinity School and his Master of Education degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He served as unofficial chaplain to the university football team. An admirer of beauty and a lover of fashion and style, Rashid Silvera has been a pioneer in the world of Black fashion modeling. He was among the first African-American males to appear on the cover of GQ magazine and the first to model for Ralph Lauren.



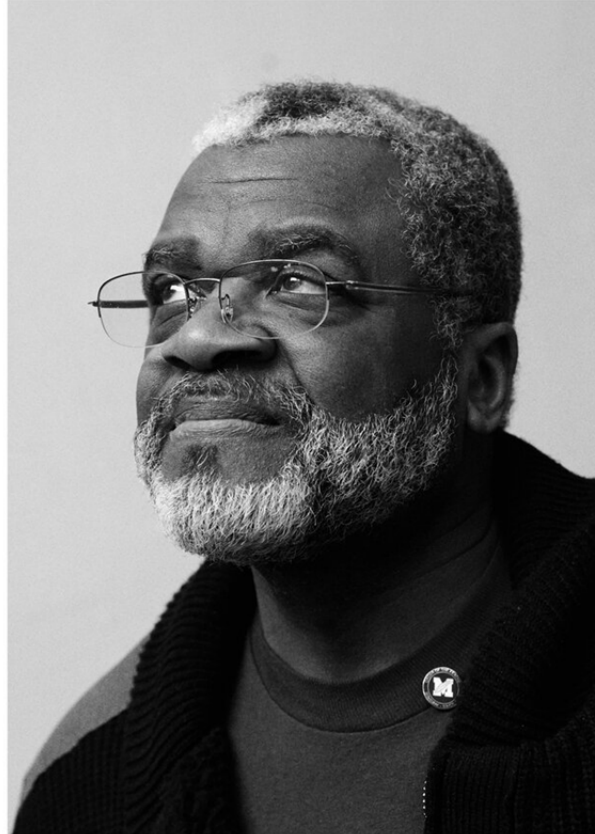


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Deacon Rodney Beckford is the Director of the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Center in Harlem for Catholic Charities of NY Community Services. The Kennedy Center serves over 8,000 community members a month, feeding the hungry, providing housing assistance, and caring for and nurturing families and children. Born at Harlem Hospital in September 1952, Deacon Beckford attended Resurrection Roman Catholic School in Harlem and George Washington High School in Washington Heights in Manhattan. He completed his education at The City University of New York, The College of New Rochelle and St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers while working full time and raising a family in CO-OP City in the Bronx. His experience is derived from a diverse professional and social matrix spanning 42 years in the business world and urban community involvement. Beginning as an office boy, in a law firm on Wall Street, he moved through the ranks to hold positions as an advertising executive, associate director of nutrition, executive chief steward at the United Nations and North East regional manager at an international beverage company. Simultaneously, he served numerous capacities in many community organizations. In 1995 he was accepted at St. Joseph Seminary and was ordained a Permanent Catholic Deacon in 2002 at St. Patrick's Cathedral by Edward Cardinal Egan and assigned to serve at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Harlem.





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Guy Fortt is a seasoned actor with television series, films, and theater credits. Although Fortt enjoys an ever-expanding career in the entertainment industry, his journey to success has not always been smooth. At just 22 years old, he endured one of the most traumatic experiences of his life. As his girlfriend died in his arms, he was shaken to his core and decided to become a firefighter / EMT. He has served in the Greenwich Fire Department for more than 26 years. In 2001, Fortt and several of his colleagues volunteered their time during the Search & Rescue mission in New York City at The World Trade Center. He also was instrumental in helping to raise \$150,000 for the victims' families of 911 by participating in a 350-mile bike ride from Ground Zero to the Pentagon in Washington D.C. As the current President of the NAACP in Stamford, CT, with a reputation for positive spirit, strong communication skills, and ability to produce tangible, collective results, he is tirelessly working to unify common purpose during significant racial discourse.





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Maria and Sitso Bediako have been parishioners at the Church of St. Pius X since 2012. They live in White Plains NY with their three daughters, their parents, and their dog. Sitso works as an attorney at a local law firm and Maria works as an executive at a non-profit that supports adults with developmental disabilities. The Bediako family is active in church ministries: Maria is a Lector, Sitso is a regular member of the St. Pius X Choir, and their two oldest daughters Angela and Elena are Altar Servers at Mass. The couple, along with Maria's parents, will be heading the next Luncheon for Persons with Disabilities, a yearly fall event at the Church of St. Pius X.

