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**Rev. Frank D. Tucker**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Leading Black Clergy Meet with Dr. Fauci and Nation's Top Doctors in Historic Summit to Address COVID-19 in the Black Community**

Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Calvin Butts, national co-chairs of the **Choose Healthy Life Black Clergy Action Plan**, convened nation's top Black clergy for historic discussion on COVID-19 and health disparities

Summit featured Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Dr. Tom Frieden, President of Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies

**New York, NY – December 17, 2020:** Choose Healthy Life Black Clergy Action Plan, a group of the nation's leading Black clergy led by Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Calvin O. Butts, III, convened a meeting yesterday with **Dr. Anthony Fauci**, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and other top doctors including the National Medical Association to address racial health disparities, fighting COVID-19 in the Black community and the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Choose Healthy Life Partners**



"It is critical to address the racial disparities of COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations in the United States," said Dr. Fauci. "Reaching out through trusted messengers and advocates like the leaders from the Black Church is critically important as we communicate to the hardest hit communities. We must also remain vigilant as the vaccine is rolled out by continuing to use the tools we currently have at our disposal and that includes testing."

**Choose Healthy Life** is a sustainable, scalable and transferable approach to address public health disparities through the Black Church. The Action Plan, being rolled out in partnership with the **United Way of New York City** and **Quest Diagnostics** [NYSE: DGX] in January, will lead the fight against COVID-19 by providing preventative education, vaccine awareness and greater access to COVID-19 testing.

The meeting included Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC, and former CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden, President of Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies. Now that COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by the FDA and are being administered, the nation's top doctors stressed the importance of communicating that the vaccines are safe, effective and necessary to beat this pandemic.

"We must work together with community leaders like those from the Black Church to provide accurate information, build trust and ensure a successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine." said **Dr. Nancy Messonnier**. "Today's dialogue with the Choose Healthy Life Black Clergy Leadership Council was a critical step in community outreach and engagement between the medical communities and local faith leaders."

"As religious leaders, it is our duty to advocate for the health and survival of our community, provide our congregations with accurate information and guide society at large to a place of moral well-being," said **Rev. Al Sharpton**. "As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, religious leaders should serve as a thermostat that transforms society, not a thermometer that takes the temperature and allows social pressure to influence it."

"Today's summit featured a critical exchange of ideas and emphasized the historic importance of the Black Church in fighting public health crises in the Black community," said **Rev. Calvin O. Butts**. "Following the methods deployed by Debra Fraser-Howze in the 1980s and 1990s, Black religious leaders are now taking the lead in providing testing and critical information to the Black community during the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Today was a landmark moment in our history as faith and science joined together to stand against this deadly plague attacking the Black Community," said **Debra Fraser-Howze**, founder of the Choose Healthy Life Black Clergy Action Plan and advisor to two U.S. Presidents on HIV and AIDS from 1998 to 2003. "Together, with our partners at Quest Diagnostics, the United Way of New York City, and Resolve to Save Lives, we will work to ensure that our communities are informed, our voices are heard and our communities remain safe."

"Today, United Way of New York City participated in a powerful dialogue between leaders of the scientific and faith communities on the urgency of COVID-19 testing, prevention and vaccination," said **Sheena Wright**, President and CEO of United Way of New York City. "Low income Black communities are being disproportionately devastated by COVID-19 and UWNYP is proud to partner with our nation's Black clergy to strengthen community-based efforts for increased COVID-19 public health education, awareness and testing."

"At Quest Diagnostics, the insights from the testing we perform reveal the devastating impacts of COVID-19 in underserved communities," said **Ruth Clements**, Vice President and General Manager of Infectious Diseases & Immunology and leader for Quest for Health Equity at Quest Diagnostics. "We are proud to be part of this important conversation, and proud to team up with Choose Healthy Life and United Way of New York City to address the need in the Black community."

Today's virtual discussion, held over Zoom, included more than 50 Black clergy leaders from across the country who are stepping up to unite with the scientific community during this unprecedented time.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black people are hospitalized from COVID-19 at a rate approximately five (5) times that of non-Hispanic white persons and, according to a recent Johns Hopkins University study, Black individuals in some communities are dying at a rate nearly seven (7) times higher than other population groups.

This initiative is being led by the Choose Healthy Life National Black Clergy Health Leadership Council, which is chaired by Rev. Sharpton (National Action Network, New York, N.Y.) and Rev. Butts (Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York, N.Y.) and includes council members Rev. David Jefferson (Metropolitan Baptist Church, Newark, N.J.); Reverend Jacques DeGraff (Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, New York, N.Y.); Rev. Horace Sheffield (New Destiny Christian Fellowship, Detroit, Mich.); Rev. Frank Tucker (First Baptist Church, Washington D.C.); and Rev. Raphael Warnock (Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.).

Funding support for this initiative has been made possible through grants from founding sponsor Quest Diagnostics, the Quest Diagnostics Foundation and from Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies.

**To learn more about Choose Healthy Life, please click [here](#).**

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### **About Choose Healthy Life**

[Choose Healthy Life](#) Black Clergy Action Plan is a program developed by [D. Fraser Associates](#) (DFA) based on the DFA Choose Healthy Life Standard – a sustainable, scalable and transferable approach to public health. The highly successful Standard was created by Debra Fraser-Howze, principal at DFA and founder of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, to address the AIDS epidemic. It is centered around the Black church – the oldest and most trusted institutions in the Black community. Partnering with the United Way agencies, local health departments and community-based organizations, churches receive the necessary resources, training and support to make available health services to the region's most vulnerable individuals. The Choose Healthy Life Black Clergy Action Plan has been made possible through the support of founding partner [Quest Diagnostics](#), the [Quest Diagnostics Foundation](#) and from [Resolve to Save Lives](#), a global health initiative focused on helping advance scalable, proven strategies to prevent and address epidemics. To learn more, visit: [www.ChooseHealthyLife.org](http://www.ChooseHealthyLife.org)

### **About United Way of New York City**

[United Way of New York City](#) (UWNYC) fights for the self-sufficiency of every low-income New Yorker by taking on the toughest challenges and creating new solutions to old problems. We win by helping families shift from barely surviving to thriving. We unite by mobilizing the best ideas, relevant data, internal and external experts, and resources—from money to manpower. UWNYC maximizes impact by coordinating and aligning organizations, companies, local government, and New Yorkers to help families eliminate tough choices and live better while making ends meet. To learn more, visit: [www.unitedwaynyc.org](http://www.unitedwaynyc.org).

### **About Quest Diagnostics**

[Quest Diagnostics](#) empowers people to take action to improve health outcomes. Derived from the world's largest database of clinical lab results, our diagnostic insights reveal new avenues to identify and treat disease, inspire healthy behaviors and improve health care management. Quest Diagnostics annually serves one in three adult Americans and half the physicians and hospitals in the United States, and our 47,000 employees understand that, in the right hands and with the right context, our diagnostic insights can inspire actions that transform lives. [www.QuestDiagnostics.com](http://www.QuestDiagnostics.com).

### **About Resolve to Save Lives**

[Resolve to Save Lives](#), an initiative of [Vital Strategies](#), aims to prevent at least 100 million deaths from cardiovascular disease and epidemics. Through its Prevent Epidemics program, Resolve to Save Lives has rapidly leveraged existing networks to partner with countries throughout Africa and beyond to combat COVID-19. Resolve is led by Dr. Tom Frieden, former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and is part of the global health organization Vital Strategies. To find out more visit: <https://www.resolvetosavelives.org> or Twitter @ResolveTSL.

Resolve to Save Lives created a website called [PreventEpidemics.org](#) that shows how prepared each country is for an epidemic, including COVID-19. This site is also a [resource](#) for current coronavirus statistics and resources.