# A Brief History and Statement of the Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition, Inc. A Community Services - Not-For-Profit Organization – A State of Georgia Corporation "Theology is not just about God. It is also about us. We live out of our understanding of who we are in relationship to God, to one another, and to the world" by the <u>Growing in Faith.</u>

# The Founders, The Intention and Strategies

In 1998, The Reverend Christopher G. Johnson, the Reverend Doctor C. William Joyner, Jr., and Brother William (Gil) Gilyard gave birth to what became the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition (AIC). These founders agreed that the intent of AIC would be to serve as a powerful tool and a pragmatic or practical approach that would provide technical assistance and information to the religious community. Therefore, they decided to use these practices to make the sociology of religions, not just an academic endeavor, but a moving force to engender positive constructs that foster a clear understanding of the intricate and delicate link between the religious community and the environmental societies that it resides. Initially, the founders only concerned themselves with understanding and teaching voters the importance and significance of the Augusta-Richmond County Mayoral Position and Responsibility. Then, they began promoting and working on strategies to achieve

100% Voters' participation in the elections and involvement in the Office of Mayor and its responsibilities under the new charter of the Consolidated Augusta-Richmond County, Georgia Government.

The moving force materialized itself in strategies that included the following: \*Voters Registration, \*Absentee Voting , \*Forums, \*Telephone Operations, \*ROBO Calling, \*Mailing Campaigns, \*Flyers and Poster Boards, \*Printing and Distribution, \*Transportation to the polls on early voting and Election Days, \*Poll and Precinct Workers, \*Radio and TV Advertisements-Public Service Announcements (PSA's), \*Neighborhood Canvassing, \*Motorcade - Rallies – Celebrations, \*Get-Out-To Vote Luncheons and Rallies, and \*Social Media Communications.

# The Initiatives

After the United States 2000 Census began its initiative to identify and document the existence of persons in every household in America, the AIC members saw a need and developed a strategy to spread its ministry of community involvement and helped to document the existence of residents in the Augusta, Richmond County area.

Under the continued leadership of the Reverend Christopher G. Johnson, Retired Pastor, of the Christian Methodist Episcopal

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Church, AIC filled a significant void by helping the religious community engage the socio-political entity to achieve Voters Activism and Participation. Therefore, the Coalition started having its Pre-Election Luncheons at the Broadway Missionary Baptist Church, a venue where candidates would come and meet the religious leaders of the community. The attendees included all candidates, partisan, and non-partisan, regardless of political affiliations, a practice that is continued today!

#### The Membership

In 2002, The Augusta's Interfaith Coalition founders thought it was necessary to define what membership and participation would mean. They decided that membership into the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition should be open to all individuals who subscribed to the mission and purpose. A person - a member might subscribe to only one issue and may not agree with any other projects or positions of the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition. In essence, the founders of the Coalition believe, "It's the cause, not the organization that is paramount" and their task is to inform, educate, and motivate citizens to vote and get involve! As a result of this belief, they loosely defined membership because it is not expected that every member has one set of involvement nor one agreeable position. Instead, the challenge for membership is to uphold a theological perspective that anything affecting humanity and society - whether religious,

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legal, political, social, psychological, economic, financial, discriminatory, medical, or other entities - is an interest of the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition. Therefore, the founders structured the work of the Coalition to be carried out through Assignments, Committees, Projects, Study Groups, Fellowships, Consortiums, and Panels.

# A Collaborate Relationship

To provide technical assistance and information to the religious community, the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition encompasses a collaborate relationship with the following religions and religious systems:

\*Baha'i,\*Buddhism,\*Christianity,\*Confucianism,\*Hinduism, \*Islam, \*Jainism, \*Jehovah Witness,\*the Unitarian Universalist Church, \*Judaism, \*Shinto, \*Sikhism, \*Taoism, \*Wicca and some other Neopagan religions, \*Zoroastrianism, and \*Druidism. Because of the Coalition's geographical location, a large number of Christian Churches help make up 90% of Augusta's Interfaith Coalition base operations: \*African Methodist Episcopal Church, \*African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, \*Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, \*Church of God in Christ, \*Greek Orthodox, \*Lutheran Church, \*The Deliverance Church, \*Church of Christ, \*Church of God, \*Assembly of God, \*United House of Prayer for All People, \*Seventh Day Adventist, \*United Methodist,\* National Baptist Church, \*Progressive Baptist, \*Southern Baptist, \*Presbyterian Church, \*USA and non-denominational ministries.

Finally, the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition includes personsmembers who do not belong to either of the religious affiliations, but they identify and unite with the Coalition's cause. This collaborative relationship with religions and religious systems provide technical assistance and information to the religious community throughout Georgia, South Carolina, and portions of Florida.

In addition, the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition currently has groups and committees working on several, vital Fellowships and Study Groups. These are \*Faith and Humanity \* Immigration and Citizenship\*Americans with Disabilities and Senior Services \*Women of Faith At Work\* Women of Excellence\* Healthcare and Medicine\* Poverty and Homelessness\* Religion and Society \* Ethics and Morality \* Civic and Community Relations \* Spirituality and Psychology \* Politics and Government \* Economics and Financial \* Law and Penalty \* Education and Technology \* Transportation\* Get-Out-To-Vote GOTV and \*Communications and Media.

The members of the Coalition also collaborate with organizations such as: \*the National Interfaith Alliance, \*the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P), \*GLAHR, NOT1MORE, \*Area Agency on Aging,

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\*Black Against Blacks Crime Prevention, \*Georgia Legal Council, \*United Labor Council, \*National Get-Out-To-Vote, \*East Central Regional Hospital (Gracewood) Georgia Family Council, \*Augusta H.O.P.E., \*League of Women's Voters, and the Democratic and Republican Parties. These collaborative efforts help to impact and celebrate religious freedom by championing individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism and complacency in the Central Savannah Regional Area and beyond.

Because of AIC's monumental strides in providing information to the religious community, PROCTECTDID, an organization whose mission is to preserve choice and quality care for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities and their families, reached out to the Director of the Coalition in 2015. Called a year of change and challenge by a few of its members, the executive body of the East Central Georgia Family Council came together and formed what is now known as PROTECTDID, after meeting with the Rev. Christopher Johnson for several months. These members included the following: Theresa Senior, Koala Balakrishnan, Harvey "Brandon" Batchelor and Ann S. Knighton.

After several months of meeting, this committee which also included the officers: President- Ann S. Knighton, Vice

President- Rev. Unisah Conteh, Secretary-H. Brandon Batchelor,

Treasurer-Komala Balakrishnan, Executive Director-Rev. Christopher Johnson, Director of Communications/Executive Vice President-Theresa Senior recommended to the members of the Family Council at a June 2016 meeting that Rev. Johnson has the authority to speak and advocate for the cause of the organization.

# Recognition

To become more informed and to provide the citizens with the information obtained, the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition started sponsoring its Pre-Legislative and Post Legislative Luncheons with the Augusta Area Delegation to the Georgia General Assembly in 2010.

As in prior years, AIC continued its visits to the Georgia State Capitol in 2015. Two years later, the Coalition was recognized on the floor of the Senate by Legislators Senator Harold Jones II (D-Augusta), Senator Jesse Stone (R-Waynesboro), and Senator Lester Jackson (D-Savannah). These senators observed Augusta's Interfaith Coalition's Annual Day at the Georgia Capitol on February 7th, in 2017. Executive Director, Reverend Johnson and members were presented a proclamation during the assembly (Figures 1,2,3). The citation stated,

"A RESOLUTION recognizing February 7, 2017, as Augusta's Interfaith Coalition Day at the capitol; and for other purposes." 17LC 113 0025S. R. 100- 1 -Senate Resolution 100 By: Senators Jones II of the 22nd, Stone of the 23rd, Anderson of the 24th, Rhett of the

33rdand Anderson of the 43rd A RESOLUTION Recognizing February 7, 2017, as Augusta's Interfaith Coalition Day at the capitol; and for 1. other purposes. 2. WHEREAS, the mission for Augusta's Interfaith Coalition is "To Strive for 100% Citizen. 3. and Voter Participation in the democratic system of informed voting and activism as a 4 community service organization"; and 5 WHEREAS, Augusta's Interfaith Coalition celebrates religious freedom by championing 6 individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting 7 diverse voices to challenge extremism and complacency in Augusta-Richmond County and 8 surrounding areas; and9WHEREAS, Augusta's Interfaith Coalition takes pride in the following beliefs: (1) religious 10 freedom is a foundation for American democracy, (2) individual rights and political 11 extremists are a threat to individual liberty and democracy, (3) anything affecting humanity 12 and society, whether religious, legal, political, social, psychological, economic, financial,13discriminatory, medical or other entity is an interest of the Augusta Interfaith Coalition,14and (4) celebrating religious and cultural difference is the way to achieve a vibrant15community. 16 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body 17 recognize February 7, 2017, as Augusta's Interfaith Coalition Day at the capitol. 18, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed 19 to make an appropriate copy of this resolution available for distribution to Augusta's 20 Interfaith Coalition." - www.legis.ga.gov

# On the same day at the Capitol, Executive Director Johnson circulated a petition that read:

We the undersigned members of the Augusta Interfaith Coalition, hereby respectfully request that the teaching of cursive writing be reinstated as a part of the core curriculum in Georgia's public schools at the elementary, middle and high schools levels in order to expand mutual understanding of historic, personal and business communications.

All twenty members (See Fig. 4) of the Coalition signed the petition. Several of them represented other organizations such as: Progressive Religious Coalition, ECR Family Council, and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated.

#### A Better Representation

In 2020, the Augusta's Interfaith Coalition became the Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition (GAIC) in order to better represent the 12 county operations which included Burke, Columbia, Hancock, Jenkins, and Richmond. Continuing its commitment to provide technical assistance and information to the religious community, the members of the Coalition worked with the United States 2020 Census initiative. The strategy helped to document the existence of persons of every household in the Augusta, Richmond County and the other counties as well (See Fig 5,6,7,8). Other initiatives including Food Giveaways and Voters Registration were ones that offered members of GAIC opportunities to make the most impact to the citizens that it served.

The year 2020 was not only the year that reflected the change of the name for the Coalition, but it was the year that will be remembered thusly,

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced on January 9, the existence of a mysterious Coronavirus-Related Pneumonia in Wuhan, China. its spokesperson had doubts about the roots of what would become the COVID-19 pandemic. The person also reported that the disease <u>could have stemmed</u> from a new coronavirus and that travel precautions were already at the forefront of experts' concerns. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) dominated 2020. As the year ended, the United States surpassed 20 million infections from SARS-CoV-2, and more than 346,000 deaths. Globally, cases rose to 83,832,334 and 1,824,590 deaths.

# In addition, the below information was just as startling:

Cases in some parts of the country began surging again in the weeks after Thanksgiving; the same effect may be seen in January as health officials are gravely concerned about the extent of travel for the Christmas and winter holidays. The Transportation Security Administration said it <u>screened the most passengers</u> (1.3 million) on the Sunday before Christmas, the most since March 15.

Although the above quoted information was very alarming, the members of GAIC continued their work in the counties that they had promised to serve. To encourage citizen participation in the 2020 Census and provide sustenance to persons affected by the pandemic, GAIC held a *Census and Milk Giveaway* at Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Augusta (See Fig. 9, 10). Executive Director Johnson made the statement about the importance of this initiative. He said that historically undercounted populations include ethnic minorities, infants and small children, migrant workers, and African American men. He also stated that a study completed by the Urban Institute estimated that 67, 000 Black men in Georgia could be missed in the 2020 Census and that Georgia could lose \$154 million in federal funding annually for a decade.

On October 1, 2020, the local newspaper, *Augusta Chronicle*, ran an article entitled, "Group Still Chasing Census Responses." "The Greater Augusta Interfaith Coalition is continuing its push to increase area participation in the 2020 Census to the bitter end. GAIC set up outreach sites at the Augusta Municipal Building, the Augusta-Richmond County Judicial Center, in front of big-box stores and other frequented places, did phone banking and distributed milk and food to entice people to come out and sign up. The Coalition focused on several counties with lower than average self-response rates, including Richmond, Burke, Hancock, and Jenkins Counties." The GAIC members continued their work even with the fear of death of people from "Covid-19" being announced on all the major networks. Some of these activities included the 2020 Census Days Kickoff which began Monday June 15, 2020 at the Mushroom Factory in Hancock, Sparta, Georgia as the Coalition members gave Care Packages to the first 100 people who completed their 2020 census Forms. In August 2020, the Coalition also sponsored "A Change Is Going To Come, An Interfaith Virtual Census Experience on FACEBOOK Live for all organizations and institutions. On November 25, 2020, Black Voters Matter and GAIC sponsored a Thanksgiving Food Giveaway Voters Day at Historic Antioch Baptist Church Absentee Ballots Applications and Live Music Voters Registration.

When vaccines began to roll out in the last month of the year, distribution challenges became evident, and the United States fell short of its goal of providing an initial dose to 20 million people by December 31. Therefore, the Executive Director made the decision that GAIC should play an especially important and vital role in providing services in the Augusta, Richmond County as well as the other counties it served. So, the Coalition partnered with Black Voters Matter and provided the volunteers from the Devine Nine (Alpha Kappa Alpha Fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority) to pack and distribute boxes of food to people in the underserved areas in the Augusta, Richmond County areas. To bring awareness to the people in the communities of Burke, Columbia, Hancock and Richmond Counties, GAIC organized and sponsored the following events:

\*Parades - POWERUP – VOTE Census 2020 and Election 2020 October 10, 17, 24 and 31<sup>st</sup> respectively. This awareness initiative also included PSAs such as

 - - BARBER & BEAUTY FUN DAY at the Old YMCA Soccer Field in South Augusta; the proceeds (\$2 Entry Donation) would benefit HIV Education and awareness in the CSRA.

October 12 -30, GAIC sponsored Your Vote! Your Choice! Election 2020 Advanced Voting at the Bell Auditorium sponsored by the Richmond County Board of Election.

The services provided to the communities are just as expansive in 2021 and even more so than they were in 2020. Although the Coalition is continuing to provide the many services it provided to the communities over the last 22 years, it has embarked on a new much needed journey.

# A New 2021 Initiative - Embracing Young People

The Executive Director announced to the Executive Board a new initiative that would be coordinated by Miss Jamelda A. Campbell. The initiative, the Clean Air and Environmentally Responsive Young Voters (V.E.G.I.E) is a non-partisan, nonprofit community service organization. It is committed to educating and empowering young voters between the ages of 18 to 40 who are ambivalent about voting but interested in finding ways to create positive change in their local communities. The Executive Director noted that although these ambivalent voters have mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone, they see clean air and environmentally friendly issues not as red, white, or blue but as universal issues.

In addition, he states that the outreach effort will provide serious and critical information regarding the environment for young people to ensure they are well-informed on ways to properly advocate for clean water and air along with other issues that directly impact them. Therefore, the Coordinator, Miss Campbell, has posted information that invites persons to "follow us on Tik Tok, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram." Also, she states that she is looking for members between the ages of 18 to 40 to join this group to help support the cause, and she invites interested persons to please email her at <u>vegie@greateraic.org</u> and check out the links listed below.

Included in this history of GAIC is the important document listed below.

Mission: We believe that anything affecting the young and young adults in humanity and society, whether educational,

developmental, criminal and juvenile justice, legal, political, social, environmental, disability, illnesses, housing, psychological, economic, financial, discriminatory, medical, vocational or another human factor is an interest of the Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition Youth and Young Adult Coalition.

The Clean Air and Environmentally Responsive Young Voters Initiative is a program of education and outreach to young voters between the ages of 18 to 40 who are ambivalent about voting! The attempt for this outreach initiative presents a serious and critically needed argument for young citizens to identify gain a credible reason to get involved in their civic responsibility of informed voting. The Clean Air and Environmentally Responsive Young Voters Initiative will attempt the following:

- 1. Reach young voters between 18–40,
- 2. Educate young voters about Clean Air and Quality Environment,
- 3. Provide Training Sessions on Air and Environmental Matters
- 4. Develop a core understanding that Voters are responsible for

the government

- 5. Build awareness that Young Voters are Voters
- 6. Empower Young Voters to Voter with the conscientiousness

that tomorrow is dependent on the way we take care of mother earth TODAY!

Methods of Outreach:

1. Promote and Broadcast Young Voters are the Clean Air and Quality Environmental Best Solution,

2. Setup a Young Voters Clean Air and Environmentally Responsive teams throughout the 17 counties of the Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition Service Area,

3. Conduct Virtual Training to Young Voters Grass root Operations,

4. Host, where applicable person to person seminars and workshops for the Young, Environmentally– Friendly, Voters,

5. Send representatives to appear on local broadcasting media to spread the message,

6. Print signs and other materials to distribute,

7. Provide for Volunteers and Stipends Support for Young Voters to spread the information to all,

8. Collaborate with colleges, schools, places of worship, universities, Leagues, Sporting Events, and others to encourage Young Voters,

9. Setup phone banking and election day opportunities to

spread the message,

10. We are non-partisan, Young Voters who see Clean Air and Environmentally-friendly position are neither red nor white nor blue, rather it's America! We are a nonprofit community services organization!

In addition, on April 23, 2021, GAIC held a Community Development Initiative Town Hall Meeting with the Dr. Cheryl Evans Jones, President of Paine College.

Our Philosophy

# What We Believe?

- We believe that religious freedom is a foundation for American democracy.
- We believe that individual rights and matters of personal conscience must be held sacred.
- We believe that religious and political extremists are a threat to individual liberty and democracy.

- We believe that anything affecting humanity and society, whether religious, legal, political, social, psychological, economic, financial, discriminatory, medical, or other entity is an interest of the Augusta Interfaith Coalition.
- We believe that celebrating religious and cultural difference is the way to achieve a vibrant1 community.

**Our objective:** is to present an academic, intentional, pragmatic, reflective, scholarly, and theological discourse of religion and its influence, implication, and involvement in society as *a community service organization*.

# The Pictorial History of The Coalition







Fig. 3

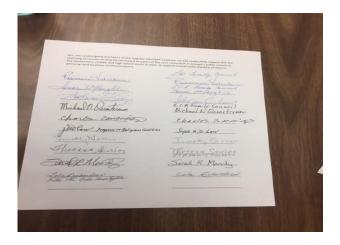






Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 11

Fig.12





Fig. 13

#### **Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition**

Join Omeeka Loggins Live On Facebook To Discuss Her Priorities as Richmond County's Newly Re-elected Solicitor General.

#### THURSDAY - MARCH 25 @7PM EST



# **Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition**

"To strive for 100% Citizen Participation in the democratic system of informed voting, support for the disabled, care for the earth, and social activism as a community service organization"



Fig. 15



Fig. 17

#### GREATER AUGUSTA'S INTERFAITH COALITION **GET OUT TO COUNT \* GET OUT TO VOTE**

The Rev. Christopher G. Johnson, M.Div., Executive Director 2807 Washington Road, Suite B-259 \* Augusta, GA 30909 \* (706) 832-4995 Programs Office: 821 12th Street \* Augusta, GA 30901 \* (706) 707-9500

#### www.greateraic.org

Mission: "To strive for 100% Citizen Participation in the democratic system of informed voting and activism as a community service organization"

#### Black Voters Matter and the Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition PRESENT





We are non-partisan and non-profit organizations who seek 100% Voters Participation!

DETAILS **Collard Greens and Can Goods for 400 Families** December 31, 2020 \* 12:00 Noon **Henry Brigham Community Center** 2463 Golden Camp Road, Augusta, GA 30906

If you have any concerns, please contact us at: 706-707-9500 or at: cgjohnson@augustavote.com The General Public is invited

The Rev. Christopher G. Johnson, M.Div., Executive Director

cgjohnson@augustavote.com \* greateraic.org 2807 Washington Road, Suite B-259 \* Augusta, GA 30909 \* (706) 707-9500 821 12th Street, Augusta, GA 30901

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July-August 2021

Annual Campaign and Capital Campaign 2021

The Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition (GAIC) is a 501c3, nonpartisan, nonpolitical community services organization, serving twenty-three (23) counties since 1998. GAIC performs a myriad of community services to all citizens, and statewide supporting the East Central State Hospital, formally known as Gracewood State School and Hospital.

AUGUST: Chicken Dinners, Fish Fry, William (Bill) Fennoy Barbeque



<u>Mission:</u> "To strive for 100% Citizen Participation in the democratic system of informed voting and activism as a community service organization"

#### Black Voters Matter, the Georgia Alliance, and the Greater Augusta's Interfaith Coalition PRESENT

#### Voters' Day III – From Emancipation Proclamation to Election Runoff 2021 Concert January 2, 2021 12:00pm - From Emancipation Proclamation to Election Runoff 2021



We are non-partisan and non-profit organizations who seek 100% Voters Participation!

FREE RIDES TO POLLS	
FREE TV	1
GIVEAWAY	
NATIONAL	
GUEST	
RECORDING	
ARTISTS	
Margare barres and	

DETAILS Motivational Speakers, Singers, Rappers, Dancers, and Voting Enthusiasts Food, Drinks, and Ice Cream COME EARLY, FREE ENTRANCE January 2, 2021 \* 12:00 Noon – 6:00pm

#### James Brown Arena 601 7th St, Augusta, GA 30901



If you have any concerns, please contact us at: 706-707-9500 or at: cgjohnson@augustavote.com The General Public is invited

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#### **EDUCATE TO VACCINATE**

# A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MEDICAL COLLEGE OF GEORGIA

The Vaccine Community Education (VCE) Project at the Medical College of Georgia (MCG)/ Augusta University was developed to address concerns that individuals have about taking the COVID-19 vaccine. The purpose for this project is to help ease these concerns. Formed by a group of MCG medical students and faculty, the VCE project provides community sessions that focus on:

- · Clarifying confusing and sometimes misleading information about the vaccine
- · Providing credible and unbiased information from good resources
- Helping individuals make the best decision for themselves and their families.
- Outlining the health and other benefits of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine

Date: April 15, 2021

Place:	Williams Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Address:	1230 15th Street, Augusta, GA 30901
RSVP:	(706) 707-9500 OR EMAIL AT: COVID19@AUGUSTAVOTE.COM



freedomrides@greateraic.org \* www.greateraic.org

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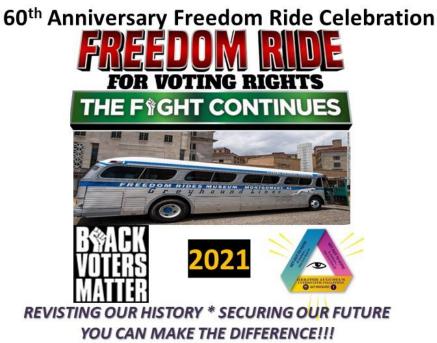


Fig. 23



