

Governor proposes investing \$11.5M in gang prevention

By **SCOTT BRINTON**
sbrinton@lherald.com

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Sunday that he is seeking \$11.5 million to provide a greater number of after-school and vocational training programs for young people in "high-risk" communities to prevent them from joining the notorious El Salvadoran gang MS-13.

The gang is responsible for a recent killing spree, with victims murdered in Suffolk and Nassau counties, and their bodies buried in wooded areas in the Roosevelt-Baldwin and Freeport-Merrick areas, according to FBI agents, state troopers and Nassau County police.

The Herald has reported extensively on those killings, and in the Nov. 9-16 editorial, "It will take all of us working together to defeat MS-13," called on state and local officials to provide more after-school programs to keep young children away from MS-13 and other gangs.

"The trouble is," the editorial read in part, "at least some school districts, particularly in high-risk areas, are cutting the after-school programs that young people so desperately need. Now, more than ever, kids need art, music and sports so they stay busy and off the streets. Members of MS-13 don't start out as drug dealers and killers. They begin by committing

petty crimes in their local neighborhoods at early ages."

"MS-13 and the senseless violence it trades in have made New York communities fearful and recruited too many youth to a dead-end path of violence and crime, and we refuse to let this continue," Cuomo said. "The key to our comprehensive plan to change that is to target gang activity by attacking the root cause — youth recruitment — through programs and outreach to protect vulnerable students from being preyed on, and stop the scourge of MS-13 once and for all."

MS-13 is an international criminal gang that emerged in the United States in the 1980s, according to Cuomo.

According to the National Institute of Justice, the vast majority of gang members join between the ages of 11 and 15. A study in Fairfax, Va., showed that when the state implemented a strategy focusing on after-school prevention, serious gang activity decreased by 39 percent. Additionally, a study of after-school programs in 12 high-risk California communities found that, among participating youth, vandalism and stealing dropped by two-thirds; violent acts and carrying a concealed weapon fell by more than half; and arrests were cut in half. School discipline, deten-

tion, suspensions and expulsions also dropped by a third.

Cuomo is proposing:

■ To expand after-school programs in at-risk areas by investing \$2 million to extend the Empire State After School Program to schools and non-profit organizations in at-risk areas on Long Island, which will be identified by the State Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Criminal Justice Services, Division of State Police, county executives and local law enforcement officials.

■ To increase job and vocational training opportunities for at-risk young people by creating a special \$5 million program within the state's New York Youth Jobs voucher program to provide individualized job training to young people who are the most at risk of being recruited into gangs.

■ To provide gang-prevention education programming to at-risk students with a \$1.5 million investment over three years in locally run programs targeted at middle and high school students focused on early intervention and violence prevention.

■ To expand comprehensive support services for at-risk young people, especially immigrant children because, Cuomo said, MS-13 "is infa-

mous for its efforts targeting vulnerable young people, especially immigrant youth without strong family ties and social support." The governor proposes investing \$3 million over three years to support comprehensive case management for at-risk young people.

■ To deploy a Community Assistance Team comprised of six state troopers, three investigators, one senior investigator and one supervisor. The team will partner with local law enforcement and use intelligence derived from the Computer Aided Dispatching Program, New York State Intelligence Center and Regional Crime Analysis Centers to identify and engage gang activity hot spots or respond to departmental and community requests for increased service.

Cuomo also recently announced the deployment of a new Gang Violence Prevention Unit, consisting of 10 state troopers. The unit will work to identify early warning signs of gang activity and coordinate closely with the Suffolk County Police Department on an "Educate the Educators" program to help teachers and faculty members recognize the early warning signs of gang involvement and recruitment and provide training to students on the dangers of street gangs.

The Truth of Christmas: The Joy of Bethlehem

By **PASTOR FRANK ANTHON WHITE**

The story is told of a notable journalist who traveled a great distance to interview a distinguished scholar. Upon arrival at his home, he was taken into the man's study, where he said, "Doctor, I notice the scores of books that line the walls of your office and I know you have read and even written many of them. You have been blessed to have traveled extensively and shared a powerful insightful discussion with some of the most profound intellects in the world. Tell me, sir, of all the academic and intellectual acquisitions you've learned, what is the one thing most worth knowing?"

The scholar replied with emotion in his voice, "My dear friend, of all the things I have learned, only two are really worth knowing. The first is, I am a great sinner, and the second is, Jesus Christ, is a great Savior."

My friends, if you know those two things, you know the best news of all: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Just for clarity, the City of David is not Jerusalem—the City of David is Bethlehem, which is about seven miles south of Jerusa-

lem.

In 1865, a man named Phillips Brooks visited the Holy Land Bethlehem and wrote a song:

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth, The everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years, Are met in thee tonight."

He wrote it that way because 140 years ago Bethlehem was still a tiny and quiet village. Bethlehem is called the "City of David" because David grew up here along with his father Jesse

and his seven brothers. In fact, David tended sheep in the fields outside the village just as the shepherds were doing the night the angel appeared to them.

Seven hundred years earlier the Lord had spoken through the prophet Micah and declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting," (Micah 5:2, NKJV).

Note the significance of the words: "Unto you is born this day in the City



PASTOR
FRANK ANTHON
WHITE

of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Each word is vitally important: Savior is actually an Old Testament word that means "One who delivers his people." Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah, which means "the Anointed One." Lord is a term for Deity. It's a synonym for God.

When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to Joseph, he said: "And she shall bring forth a son and thou shall call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins," (Matthew 1:21). He is the Savior, He is the Lord, and He is the Christ. When

God got ready to save the world, He gave the best that He had: God loved us enough to give us His only begotten Son. And in sending Jesus, He was really sending Himself. This is the truth of Christmas—Immanuel—God with us.

May the love, joy and peace that comes from a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father be with you. Merry Christmas and may 2018 be filled with the realization of your dreams.

Pastor Frank Anthone White is the pastor at Zion Cathedral.



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