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Summit on race ends with proposals for solutions

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Marsha Foster Boyd moved to Detroit three months ago to become president of the Ecumenical Theological Seminary and was shocked at how negatively people portrayed Detroit, even Detroiters.

But after participating in the 2006 Leadership Summit on Race organized by New Detroit, she came away feeling better about the city's and region's future in dealing with race.

"Coming to this showed me there are people who are willing and able to make a difference," she said during a luncheon this afternoon that ended the three-day conference at the Marriott Hotel in the Renaissance Center. "I am very encouraged that people in power know the issues."

The summit's goal was to find ways to bridge Metro Detroit's racial divide. Participants today broke into groups that used hand-held electronic voting devices to vote on solutions. The recommendations will be collated and distributed as soon as this week, officials said.

A thrust of the conference was not to lay blame for problems, but to assume the responsibility for fixing them, said Roberta Sanders, CEO of New Center Community Mental Health, and a summit participant. She found the approach refreshing.

"It was very energizing," she said. "This conference was about action."

Some of the suggestions participants offered include opening dialogues that can be painful, accepting responsibility for fixing problems without assessing blame and benchmarking what has worked in other communities.

Organizers said these types of recommendations are different from ones in the past, something that is needed to move forward.

"We didn't invent the racial legacy," said David Campt, the summit's lead facilitator. "The question becomes what do we do with it? It is not about blame, it is about accepting responsibility as a whole."

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Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, the keynote speaker at today's luncheon, said Metro Detroiters and others across the nation are up to the task. Romney's father George Romney is a former Michigan governor and a co-founder of New Detroit.

"America will always solve the problems it faces if it owns up to them," he said. "You can work as I will on the answers."

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