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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY HOLD INTERFAITH
DIALOGUE ON THE COVID-19 VACCINE**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much, Jennifer. I'm really, really appreciative of the opportunity to be with everyone. And, Jennifer, thank you for all that you're doing for New York City and working with us to make sure that we have a recovery that is just and equitable. Everyone, Chirlan and I are here with you, we sure would prefer to be in person. I heard the Cardinal mentioning he misses our baked goods at our breakfast. And we all do the breakfast each year, it's one of the most joyous events, honestly from the heart. Every year, Chirlane and I have loved gathering together with all of you. It's one of the most optimistic moments as we start each year. It's one of the moments of fellowship and strength. A special thanks, Pastor A.R. Bernard actually said to me years ago that it had been a tradition that we should bring it back, and when we did, and I'm so glad we did, it's painful to not be together in person this time. But I'll tell you one thing I'm absolutely convinced of that even though Chirlane and I won't be in the roles we're playing now, next year I look forward to the next Mayor gathering with all of you in January of 2022 in-person because the vaccine is here and we're getting so much help from Washington and the tide is turning rapidly. So, this is the last time I think we'll ever have to do our annual faith gathering remotely.

Let me be quick, but to the point about where we are going next in the course of 2021 and how crucial all of you are to the year ahead and also the entire future of the city. But first I want to do some thank you's, because we heard in the opening prayers so much of the good of New York City, a real deep thank you to Cardinal Dolan who every step of the way has always said to me, what more can he do to help and bring the city together? He's played a crucial role. To Pastor Kansfield, thank you for what you do for the fire department, Detective Amen, thank you for what you do for the police department, your extraordinary public servants, and you really give us hope in how you offer the word as well. And a special deep thank you to Reverend Dominique Atchison who's done a remarkable job leading our community and faith efforts, building a deeper connection between faith communities and clergy members and City Hall and all our city agencies and, Dominique, you did not know that you're going to have a little pandemic thrown in the middle of your work, but you've really excelled with your team, and I've talked to so many clergy members who have said they've been able to do a lot more good, get masks to people, food to people, reach the folks in need and their congregations because of the partnership with you and your team. I will tell everyone, this is Dominique's Swan Song today as she has done a remarkable job, but she'll be going on to other good work in the administration and there'll be new leadership coming, but I really wanted to take a moment just to praise and thank Dominique for her extraordinary efforts and you will be missed in this role, but you're going into another role. So, you won't be far, you know, so thank you. And you know, everyone you're going to

hear in the course of the day, of course, Pastor Michael Walrond, who's done so much leading our Faith Council and getting the voices of clergy front and center in all we do and helping us figure out how we can do the work of justice more deeply. Pastor Mike, I am eternally grateful. And a guy every time everyone looks forward to them every year, let's face it, Rabbi Joe Potasnik, you are a gifted man, and the way you bring across your message is something that just is joyous and powerful. So, thank you to all of you and everyone who's participating.

Let me say this real quick, we need you. You thought your work was crucial before the pandemic then you learned just how vital you are to the city during the pandemic. You have helped to save lives. It's not an overstatement. So many of you have done the things, whether it's the masks, the food, the real work from the heart to convince people to follow those smart, healthy habits, getting people vaccinated, I'm going to talk about that, we're going to need you because you've saved lives and help people keep going during the pandemic, but you're going to be in the leading edge of getting us out of the pandemic and into recovery. And it has to be a recovery for all of us. Why emphasize this? I'm going to be talking about this a lot in the next few weeks, the only kind of recovery that makes sense for New York City is not replace the status quo, but to build something new. Answer the disparities of the COVID crisis by changing the reality on the ground, creating more fairness and equality, putting our resources where our values are, redistributing some of the wealth of this city to the communities hardest hit. That's what we intend to do, but to get there, we need everyone vaccinated, and I'm going to deputize everyone to this tough mission. And I wish I could tell you, hey, no problem, just point people towards the vaccination center, everything's going to be great. Well, everyone knows, right now, we're just trying to get the supply we need for vaccine, but even when we have that supply, and I am convinced the Biden administration will get it for us.

The hesitancy, the fear, the mistrust is palpable. It may be 20 percent of the population or 30 percent of the population. It's not the majority, but we must reach those who are fearful or doubting, and no one can do that more effectively than you. Many of the folks who are hesitant to take the vaccine are reflecting honestly, the residue, the painful carry over of decades and centuries of institutional racism. Someone who feels the government might not be telling them the truth, well, that could be anyone in our society, but let's face it, folks who have felt the pervasive sting of racism are going to feel that that much more. Folks who know the history of the medical community, very, very noble in many ways, but there were ignoble chapters as well that have left a doubt in the minds of so many people of color. The way to answer this as head-on, to listen to the concerns or questions, answer them with science and fact and compassion, but also your voices. If you will take the vaccine, if your family will take the vaccine, everyone in your congregation will believe. If you say, I'm going to be there at the site to give people hope and heart, people engage. We cannot recover without vaccination. Let's be clear, we cannot fully recover without vaccination reaching a huge percentage of the people in the city. So, we need you. And we want to help you, because you're going to have some of the best ideas of how to give people faith and comfort in the process, how to answer their questions, how to make vaccine something that's really about neighborhood and community.

And I'll wrap it together with this – the vaccination effort has to exemplify our values. We have to oversubscribe the areas the bore of the brunt, and the places that didn't have enough health care historically, and the folks that suffered the most. We have to be there even more intensely

than in other communities. We have to show our hearts in what we do and we have to get right down to the grass roots. Vaccination won't work unless it's really neighborhood by neighborhood, and deeply in the neighborhood, working with faith communities, neighborhood-based organizations, leaders who people trust. So, this is the mission for 2021 – vaccinate the people, protect the people, bring the city back, bring us back fairly and equitably – a recovery for all of us.

And I'll leave you with a simple thought – the last day Chirlane and I get to serve you, December 31st, 2021, I hope on that day, as you're thinking of your reflections and prayers at the end of the year, you can say – wow, this city transformed in 2021, we're on our way to something better. That's what we need to do together. That's our hope and aspiration and we only get there with you. And I say, as always, thank you. Thank you for all you do, and God bless you.

Jennifer Jones Austin: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you for leading and encouraging us by example. I'm honored, again, to present to you our First Lady of New York City. She's been great. She's redefined the role of First Lady, managing a robust portfolio. Nationally recognized as a powerful champion for mental health reform and named a World Health Organization Champion. Ms. McCray created ThriveNYC, we all know it to be the most comprehensive mental health plan of any city or state in the nation. She leads the Cities Thrive Coalition, chairs the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, and she co-chairs both the NYC Commission on Gender Equity and the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity.

I present to you, First Lady McCray.

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Jennifer, for hosting today and for all you've done to support our city. You really are one of our city's treasures and I can't tell you how much we appreciate everything that you've done throughout the years. It's so good to see everyone, to see you on the screens. It's not the same as being in person. I miss the warmth of all those bodies packed into one room. But I'm grateful that we are able to gather, even if it means doing it virtually. I've always looked forward to these gatherings.

I want, everyone – please look around at the communities represented on our screens today. This is New York City. We are a gorgeous mosaic and have so much to be proud of that we gather this way. You know, I've had the opportunity to travel to so many communities and they don't do this. We do. And I think it's important that you recognize that we have something very special. And each one of you, although, you know, may have a different culture, a different tradition, different beliefs, has something important in common. You have been there for your people through the good, the bad, the ugly, and, of course, the unknown. And you've proven that over and over again throughout this crisis.

I've been thinking about the words of the late Congressman, and civil rights leader, John Lewis, who spoke often of his faith, especially in his final days. And he said, "Democracy is not a state, it is an act. And each generation must do its part to build what we call the beloved community, a nation and society at peace with itself." Each one of you has built community in so many different ways this year with virtual gatherings, with your congregants, setting up testing sites, serving as first responders as so many New Yorkers struggle with their mental health. I have to

tell you, I spoke with a faith leader last month – not last month, last year, and she had lost 30 members of her flock to COVID-19 – 30. I don't know how anyone can even begin to address that kind of pain. And you have all been carrying such a great weight and it's a weight that has made me consider, again, the lyrics of an old song, which goes something like this. You may remember – I'm not going to sing, don't worry. “And the load doesn't weigh me down at all. He ain't heavy. He's my brother.” While, Bill and I are so grateful for your strength, your generosity, your compassion, you must take time to care for yourselves. You must nourish yourselves as you nourish others, because you cannot pour from an empty cup. You cannot give of yourself if you don't replenish your reserves. And just as you've been there for New Yorkers, we are here for you.

Now, as Bill just spoke about, we have a big hurdle in front of us – the vaccines. Every vaccine is a shot of hope for New York City. It's a step towards ending this crisis, but it only works if New Yorkers buy-in. If we answer the questions that people have, if we ease their concerns and let them know this is effective, it's easy and it's safe. And the trust you have with your community, the powerful example you can provide, that will be the difference between someone getting this lifesaving shot or staying home. So, this vaccine effort really is how we get our communities back, how we get back to the days of worshipping together, of filling our mosques, our temples, our churches, and all houses of worship. Across every faith, there is a belief in the sanctity of human life and wellness of all people, the fact that we have to protect the wellness of all people, and ending the suffering that is faced by so many of our most vulnerable. So, as we all gather together for this last January Interfaith gathering in our administration, I can't think of a more fitting mission to embark on. And I also want to thank you for supporting and protecting our people. Thank you for your partnership and so many endeavors over the past seven years. And I mean that from the depths of my heart, you have – I cannot think of anyone, any group that has been more helpful than all of you. And with that, I will turn the mic back over to Jennifer.

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