Keep the housing coming

By THE REV. JOHNNY RAY YOUNGBLOOD
and SISTER MARVELLENE KANE

Mayor Bloomberg is scheduled to deliver a major
speech on Tuesday on a number of important
matters, including housing. We are eager to hear
what he will say. But we also are concerned because in a
time of budget cuts, conventional wisdom might insist
that little or nothing should be done for housing.

Had groups like East Brooklyn Congregations and
South Bronx Churches bought this line in the
70s and early 80s, thousands of new home-
owners wouldn't be reviving streets in Brook-
yln and the South Bronx today. If the Commu-
nity Preservation Corp. had waited back then,
thousands of renovated apartments all around
the city would still be vacant.

So what can the mayor do?

Preserve and protect the greatest single
source of affordable housing in the city — the
170,000 apartments of the Housing Authority.
The mayor should bring to the authority the
same intensity and focus he has brought to the
schools: Recruit top-flight managers, init-
iate an NYPD-like Compstat system, protect
children and seniors from the plague of respira-
tory illnesses caused by rodent and pest in-
festations, make the authority a national mod-
el of housing management and maintenance.

Investigate the mismanagement of as many as 40,000
apartments by the U.S. Department of Housing and Ur-
ban Development and pry them away from the feds.
HUD developments like Brooklyn's Noble Drew Ali and
Fulton Park Plaza are notorious for crime, drugs and
high vacancy rates. HUD has proven that it cannot man-
age these developments. It should transfer them to the
city, along with the funds to upgrade and maintain them.

Continue to support the creation of minimally subsi-
dized, affordable housing that lets the best and brightest
of our working families — cops, firefighters, nurses,
bank employees, factory workers, teachers — stay in
New York City.

In addition to continuing to build Nehemiah homes
(thanks to Bloomberg's strong support, we're going into
Brooklyn's Spring Creek area in 2004), our affiliate orga-
nizations have worked with the Community
Preservation Corp. to design four-story, eight-
unit apartment houses with one-bedroom
apartments renting for about $850 a month
and two-bedroom units for about $900. To
make this work, the city needs to provide free
land and a per-unit subsidy of $35,000 to re-
duce costs to tenants.

How can the mayor do that during a budget crisis? If our idea moved at a breakneck pace,
we could begin building the first 200 units one
year from today. The first subsidy, not a huge
sum by any measure, wouldn't be needed until
18 months from now.

The city must not forget to play offense as it
mounts its aggressive defense against budget
threats. Families come here from all over the
globe not to participate in an Olympics extrava-
ganza, but to earn gold medals in the really im-
portant events — family formation, neighborhood restora-
tion, city and community renewal. They need the mayor
to support their efforts to make this city great.

Youngblood and Kane are leaders of the Metro Industrial Areas Foundation.