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POVERTY: INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

The National Council of Churches issued the following press release yesterday.

FAITH GROUPS PRESS BUSH, KERRY ON U.S. POVERTY, HEALTH CARE October 4, 2004, Washington, D.C. -- As George W. Bush and John Kerry prepare for their Friday (October 8) debate on domestic issues, more than 20 Jewish, Protestant and Catholic organizations are pressing them on what they plan to do to fight poverty and fix the nation's mounting health care crisis.

The organizations, joined together in the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs, first wrote Mr. Bush and Mr. Kerry on September 8 with a series of questions:

- * How will you reduce poverty, and specifically child poverty, in the next four years?
- * What will you do to reduce the number of people who lack health insurance in the next four years?
- * How will you address the inability of the nation's health care system to provide affordable, quality health care to all?
- * Will you commit to a specific goal to cut poverty in half by 2010?
- * Will you commit to a goal to increase the number of people who are insured (i.e. "In the next four years, due to my policies, xx million more people will be covered by health insurance.")?

The questions were re-sent to the candidates' campaign headquarters on Wednesday, Sept. 29. As of the close of business on October 4, no reply had been received from either candidate.

Pointing to recently released U.S. Census Bureau statistics, the religious groups are asking the presidential candidates how they plan to use the next four years to reduce poverty, particularly for children, and decrease the number of people who do not have health insurance. **The Census Bureau data reported that an additional 1.3 million people fell below the poverty line in 2003, of whom 733,000 were children; and that a record number of people, 45 million, are now without health insurance, an increase of 1.4 million people from the 2002 statistics.**

"As representatives of communities of faith, we are deeply troubled by the recent Census Bureau report that details the increasing number of people in poverty and the increasing number of people without health insurance," stated the letter which was signed by the National Council of Churches USA, Call to Renewal, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Church Women United, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the Presbyterian Church (USA), NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, Union for Reform Judaism and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, among others.

"Our nation is also being destabilized by the growing gap between those with extreme wealth and those living in deep poverty," said the letter.

In addition the letter also asks the Bush and Kerry campaigns how they plan to address the "inability of the nation's health care system to provide affordable, quality health care for all," and whether or not they will commit to specific goals to cut poverty in half by 2010 and increase the number of people who are insured.

The Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs acknowledged the role that communities of faith play in providing services that help reduce the impact of poverty on vulnerable populations, and promised to continue their efforts to advocate for "just policies that will lift all persons out of poverty."

However, the letter also states their belief that government must do its part. "We believe that our society and economy need to be strengthened by providing greater equality of opportunity, just reward for hard work, quality health care for all, and a vision of working together for the common good," said the letter.

Upon receiving a reply from the presidential candidates, the coalition members will post the responses on their Web sites and release the results to the media.

The full text of the coalition's letters to Mr. Kerry and Mr. Bush follows.

* * * *

INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

September 8, 2004

Dear President Bush/Senator Kerry:

As representatives of communities of faith, we are deeply troubled by the recent Census Bureau report that details the increasing number of people in poverty and the increasing number of people without health insurance. Our nation is also being destabilized by the growing gap between those with extreme wealth and those living in deep poverty.

In 2003, an additional 1.3 million people fell below the poverty line, and 733,000 were children. The poverty line for a family of three, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, is \$14,680 (\$18,810 for a family of four).

Currently, 17.6 percent of children in the United States - nearly one in five - are living in poverty. The new data show 35.9 million people living in poverty, with 43 percent (15.3 million) living in deep poverty, meaning they have cash incomes below half of the poverty line. This is the highest percentage on record. As a nation, we are moving backward and losing the positive gains we have recently made toward poverty reduction.

The new Census Bureau data also shows that an additional 1.4 million people entered the ranks of the uninsured, resulting in a record number, 45 million, now uninsured. Because of increased participation in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the proportion of children without health insurance coverage has remained constant at 11.4 percent.

Were it not for those public programs, levels of uninsured children would have increased, as employer-based health care coverage declined in 2003.

As you continue your campaign for President, we urge you to speak out for the needs of those in poverty and those without health insurance. (We are also sending this letter and these questions to Senator Kerry/President Bush.) We urge you to answer these questions - to us and to the public:

- * How will you reduce poverty, and specifically child poverty, in the next four years?
- * What will you do to reduce the number of people who lack health insurance in the next four years?
- * How will you address the inability of the nation's health care system to provide affordable, quality health care to all?
- * Will you commit to a specific goal to cut poverty in half by 2010?
- * Will you commit to a goal to increase the number of people who are insured (i.e. "In the next four years, due to my policies, xx million more people will be covered by health insurance.")?

As communities of faith, we will continue to provide what services we can to reduce the impact of poverty on vulnerable populations, and to advocate for just policies that will lift all persons out of poverty. However, we are deeply concerned that the current economy is not working well for all people and that the opportunity for excellent health care is not accessible for many. We believe that our society and economy need to be strengthened by providing greater equality of opportunity, just reward for hard work, quality health care for all, and a vision of working together for the common good.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns and thank you in advance for your responses to our attached questions. Please send your responses to our questions toCarolynn Race, Chair, Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs, c/o Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office, 110 Maryland Avenue, NE, Suite 104, Washington, DC 20002.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

American Baptist Churches USA

Call to Renewal

The Central Conference of American Rabbis
Christians for Justice Action (United Church of Christ)
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Church Women United
Disciples Advocacy Washington Network
Disciples Justice Action Network
The Episcopal Church, USA
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Lutheran Services in America
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
Women of Reform Judaism
-end-

Editor's Note: For more information contact Leslie Tune, National Council of Churches USA, (202) 544-2350, ext. 11 or Carolyn Race, DHN Chair, (202) 543-1126, ext. 3009.

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Howdy everyone. A friend from Ft. Worth sent me a link to a good web site with some interesting stats. As a Christian active in your church or chapel, I thought you might want to share these with a class, a friend, or simply for each of us to ponder. God has blessed us with a wonderful time to be here on Earth. There is so much to do. We do not live in a boring age.

Lesley and I are on a break this week and are traveling with John and Hannah to Baton Rouge and Houston.

God bless,
The Paines in San Antonio

Key Statistics on Generous Giving

It has been said that God's people possess God's provision to accomplish and fulfill God's purposes in the world. Indeed, according to Christian financial advisor Ron Blue, "Eighty percent of the world's evangelical wealth is in North America—and the total represents way more than enough to fund the fulfillment of the Great Commission." Think about this statement as you consider the following statistics:

The World's Great Spiritual and Material Poverty

- A majority of people alive today do not know the Savior. This includes 1.19 billion Muslims, 811 million Hindus, 360 million Buddhists, 228 million ethnoreligionists,

23 million Sikhs, 14 million Jews, 768 million agnostics, and 150 million atheists.¹

- Of all the people who have ever lived, it is believed that half of them are living today.²
- About 1.6 billion people have never heard the life-saving good news in this sentence: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).³
- More than 1 billion people live in absolute poverty. This includes 700 million people living in slums, 500 million people on the verge of starvation, 93 million beggars, and 200 million children exploited for labor.²¹

The Church’s Unprecedented Growth

- The church has grown more in the 20th century than in all the previous 19 centuries since the time of Christ combined, with almost 2 billion adherents worldwide.¹⁸
- Every day 166,000 people hear the good news of Jesus Christ for the first time³
- Every year, 27 million people profess faith in Christ as Savior for the first time.³
- The current ranks of 81 million believers in China are expected to swell to 135 million by 2025. The 50 million faithful in India could mushroom to 125 million by 2050. And today’s census of 90 million Christians in Africa is likely to explode to 1 billion in 2050.⁶
- Evangelical Christians comprise an estimated 35 percent of the U.S. population, or about 100 million people.²²

The Church’s Great Storehouse of Wealth

- In 2000, American evangelicals collectively made \$2.66 trillion in income.²³
- Total Christian [including nominal] income in the United States is \$5.2 trillion annually, nearly half of the world’s total Christian income.⁸
- Over the next 50 years, between \$41 trillion and \$136 trillion will pass from older Americans to younger generations, suggesting that roughly \$1 trillion to \$3 trillion in wealth will change hands every year.¹⁰

The Church’s Squandering of Resources

- The average donation by adults who attend U.S. Protestant churches is about \$17 a week.¹¹
- Among church members of 11 primary Protestant denominations (or their historical antecedents) in the United States and Canada, per-member giving as a percentage of income was lower in 2000 than in either 1921 or 1933. In 1921, per-member giving as a percentage of income was 2.9 percent. In 1933, at the depth of the Great Depression, per-member giving grew to 3.3 percent. By 2000,

after a half-century of unprecedented prosperity, giving had fallen to 2.6 percent.¹²

- Overall, only 3 to 5 percent of Americans who donate money to a church tithe (give a tenth of) their incomes though many more claim to do so.¹¹
- Thirty-three percent of U.S. born-again Christians say it is impossible for them to get ahead in life because of the financial debt they have incurred.¹⁴

Faith and Generosity Are Linked

- Among evangelicals, almost 90 cents of every donated dollar goes to their churches. The proportion drops, however, as people's spiritual intensity and commitment to Christ decline.¹⁵
- In 2001 American evangelicals gave a mean of \$3,601 per capita to nonprofit organizations, which is high when compared to other demographic groups.¹⁶
- From 1968 to 2000, members of U.S. evangelical Protestant denominations gave larger dollar amounts and larger portions of income to their churches than did members of mainline Protestant denominations.¹⁹
- In 2001, American evangelicals gave four times as much, per person, to churches as did all other church donors in 2001. Eighty-eight percent of evangelicals and 73 percent of all Protestants donated to churches.¹⁶

The Potential for Funding the Harvest

- If members of historically Christian churches in the United States had raised their giving to the Old Testament's minimum standard of giving (10 percent of income) in 2000, an additional \$139,000,000,000 a year would become available. ¹⁷
- Eighty percent of the world's evangelical wealth is in North America—and the total represents way more than enough to fund the fulfillment of the Great Commission.²

¹ David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, [World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2000: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus](#) (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2001), 551.

² Bill Bright, quoted in Ron Blue with Jodie Berndt, [Generous Living: Finding Contentment through Giving](#) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 201.

³ Barrett, 52.

⁶ Barrett, 405ff.

⁸ Barrett, 400.

⁹ Blue, 201.

¹⁰ John J. Havens and Paul G. Schervish, [Why the \\$41 Trillion Wealth Transfer Estimate Is Still Valid: A Review of Challenges and Questions](#), *The Journal of Gift Planning* 7, no. 1 (January 2003), 11-15, 47-50.

¹¹ George Barna, [How to Increase Giving in Your Church: A Practical Guide to the Sensitive Task of Raising Money for Your Church or Ministry](#) (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1997), 20.

¹² John L. Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, [The State of Church Giving through 2000](#) (Champaign, Ill.: Empty Tomb, 2002), 40.

¹⁴ George Barna, [Barna Research Archives: Money](#), Barna Research Group.

¹⁵ George Barna, quoted in [Survey Finds Americans More Generous Last Year](#), press release by World Vision, July 22, 2002.

¹⁶ George Barna, [Americans Were More Generous in 2001 Than in 2000](#), news release by Barna Research Group, April 9, 2002.

¹⁷ Ronsvalle, 51.

¹⁸ Barrett, 19 and 551.

¹⁹ Ronsvalle, 23.

²¹ Barrett, 34.

²² Larry Eskridge, [Defining Evangelicalism](#) (Wheaton, Ill.: Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals,

n.d.).
²³Barrett, 657.

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Speech Reference – Poverty

August 26, 2004

Ranks of Poverty and Uninsured Rose in 2003, Census Reports By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 10:36 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The number of Americans living in poverty increased by 1.3 million last year, while the ranks of the uninsured swelled by 1.4 million, the Census Bureau reported Thursday.

It was the third straight annual increase for both categories. While not unexpected, it was a double dose of bad economic news during a tight re-election campaign for President Bush.

Approximately 35.8 million people lived below the poverty line in 2003, or about 12.5 percent of the population, according to the bureau. That was up from 34.5 million, or 12.1 percent in 2002.

The rise was more dramatic for children. There were 12.9 million living in poverty last year, or 17.6 percent of the under-18 population. That was an increase of about 800,000 from 2002, when 16.7 percent of all children were in poverty.

The Census Bureau's definition of poverty varies by the size of the household. For instance, the threshold for a family of four was \$18,810, while for two people it was \$12,015.

Nearly 45 million people lacked health insurance, or 15.6 percent of the population. That was up from 43.5 million in 2002, or 15.2 percent, but was a smaller increase than in the two previous years.

Meanwhile, the median household income, when adjusted for inflation, remained basically flat last year at \$43,318. Whites, blacks and Asians saw no noticeable change, but income fell 2.6 percent for Hispanics to \$32,997.

Whites had the highest income at \$47,777.

Even before release of the data, some Democrats claimed the Bush administration was trying to play down bad news by releasing the reports about a month earlier than usual. They normally are released separately in late September -- one report on poverty and income, the other on insurance.

Putting out the numbers at the same time and not so close to Election Day ``invite charges of spinning the data for political purposes,'' said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y.

Census Director Louis Kincannon -- a Bush appointee -- denied politics played any role in moving up the release date. The move, announced earlier this year, was done to coordinate the numbers with the release of other data.

``There has been no influence or pressure from the (Bush) campaign,'' Kincannon said Wednesday.

Official national poverty estimates, as well as most government data on income and health insurance, come from the bureau's Current Population Survey.

This year the bureau is simultaneously releasing data from the broader American Community Survey, which also includes income and poverty numbers but cannot be statistically compared with the other survey.

The figures were sure to generate attention regardless of when they were released since they typically serve as a report card of sorts for an administration's socio-economic policies.

Partisan debate figures to be more heated now, when the economy and health care are big issues in the tight presidential election race between Bush and Democratic challenger John Kerry.

Since job growth was slow until the second half of 2003 and wages were relatively stagnant, it was likely the report would show an increase in the number of people in poverty, said Sheldon Danzinger, co-director of the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan.

William O'Hare, a researcher with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private children's advocacy group, expected increases in the number of kids in poverty and without health insurance. He called the changes in the way data is being released ``bothersome.''

``It makes me wonder whether this statistical agency is being politicized in some way,''' said O'Hare, who has studied the poverty and health insurance data for over two decades.

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On the Net:

Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov/>

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The Hebrew word for poor are *ani, anaw, ebyon, dal* and *ras*.

Ani (and anaw) denotes one who is “wrongfully impoverished or dispossessed.”

Ebyon refers to a beggar imploring charity.

Dal connotes a thin, weakly person, that is, an impoverished, deprived peasant.

Ras is a neutral term.

In their persistent polemic against the oppression of the poor, the prophets used terms *ebyon, ani and dal*.

Thus the primary connotation of “*the poor*” in the Scriptures is economic. Usually calamity or some form of oppression is the assumed cause of the poverty.

According to M. Douglas Meeks who says ‘GOD is THE ECONOMIST.

Greek word from which we derive economy, *oikonomia*, is a compound of *Oikos*, household, and *nomos*, law or management. Therefore, economy means literally “the law or the management of the household.”

Household is connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of the necessities of life. Therefore, the word, household means the site of economy, the site of human livelihood.

Economy of God is the distribution of God’s righteousness.

Righteous God is the one who does steadfast love and justice (Jer. 9:24; 23:5; Ps.15:1-2). God’s righteousness is God’s power to create/ liberate out of the power of nothingness.

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America’s Second Harvest, the umbrella organization for most of the

nation’s food banks,

supply 26,000+ local food pantries, nearly 6,000 soup kitchens and 4,000+

emergency shelters witnessed that approximately three-fourths of the

pantries and soup kitchens in the nation

are faith-based. That is absolutely amazing.

With nearly 2 million more unemployed people in the US now than there were a year ago, food banks are running out of food and food and shelter programs are reporting a greatly increased demand for their services.

New York Times - November 26, 2002 States Are Facing Big Fiscal Crises

Plunging tax collections and soaring medical costs have created the worst fiscal problems for states since World War II, the National Governors Association said on Monday

New York Times - November 25, 2002

Problem of Lost Health Benefits Is Reaching Into the Middle Class

Once thought to be a problem of the poor and the unemployed, the health care crisis is spreading to those with full-time jobs.

Throughout the New Testament, there are many texts referring to helping the poor;

in the New Testament, one out of every 16 verses,

in the Gospels, one out of every 10 verses,

in Luke's Gospel one of every 7, and

in the book of James, one of every 5.

From Christian perspective as I have

Poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation to God's good creation.

Bread for the World is concerned that \$752 million intended for U.S. school lunches and other nutritional services for hungry people will be diverted to feed cattle under a Bush administration drought-relief plan for ranchers. Bread for the World raised the story of this kids-versus-cattle plan in the national media. The drought-relief plan would take hundreds of millions of dollars from a U.S. Department of Agriculture

(USDA) fund that feeds people and instead make it available for livestock feed. This is the worst federal decision on nutrition since the Reagan administration proclaimed that “ketchup was a vegetable.”

USDA uses the fund to purchase surplus foods and make them available to school lunch and breakfast programs, food banks, emergency food pantries, and other nutrition services for low-income families. America’s Second Harvest, the nation’s largest network of food banks, estimates that a decision to spend this money elsewhere could cost hungry people more than 347 million meals

40 million Americans without medical insurance as Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reported.

According to Call to Renewal report poverty is rising - 33 million people, including 12 million children, live below the poverty line. The unemployment rate has jumped to 6 percent - 11% among African-Americans. Ten percent of America's households experience hunger or the risk of hunger. The U.S. Conference of Mayors annual survey of hunger and homelessness in America's cities found that requests for emergency food and shelter assistance rose 19% last year - a very big jump.

Why People Are Poor?

because they are too old or too young have a job.

because their poor health or poor education limits their work or poor education limits their work and their earnings.

They are poor because they lack transportation, child care or the skills to get a decent job and jobs do not pay a living wage.

Unfortunately, most new jobs in the economy are minimum wage and part time. In fact, at this moment, there is no county in the United States where a minimum-wage worker can afford to rent an apartment.

Inequality is always a relationship, and so the poor and the nonpoor are linked. There are several ways that poverty works in favor of the nonpoor. First, the existence of poverty creates a wide range of service jobs for the nonpoor. The poor also subsidize the lifestyle of the nonpoor through their low-wage work to create inexpensive goods and services.

The poor also take the brunt of socio-economic change and thus reduce the effects of change on the non-poor. The poor also buy substandard goods that would otherwise become a drag on the producer's profit lines.

Lastly, the poor provide an outlet for our altruism. So, the nonpoor do benefit from the existence of poverty, whether they realize it or not.

On the other hand, poverty also has negative consequences for the nonpoor. For example, diseases like tuberculosis are on the rise due to the increase in extreme poverty. These diseases, which we thought had been eradicated, can strike the nonpoor as well as the poor.

Crime is also a problem for the nonpoor, a risk that could be reduced if only we could solve the problem of poverty. Many of the nonpoor opt for gated communities where they assume that the low-paid rent-a-cop will protect them from burglars.

The nonpoor are linked to the poor in yet another way:

Our salaries and wages are tied to what the worst-paid worker will bear.

So, the lower "the least of these" are paid, the lower the wages and salaries are for the rest of us.

Last, the nonpoor are harmed spiritually and intellectually by the existence of poverty. To the extent we learn to think of the poor as causing their own difficulties, we decide there is nothing we can do to end poverty, and we do nothing. This runs counter to the teachings of most faiths.

For example, poverty and our responsibility toward the poor are the second-most frequent topic in the Bible; yet most of us do not know it, nor do we live those Scriptures. If you raise the topic of poverty with someone, you can watch the average person's heart and speech harden as they recite the mean-spirited politics of poverty and welfare that have dominated public discourse in the past 20 years. Spiritual damage, you might call it.

Poverty is also a limiting force on the intellects of the nonpoor. Consider this: If we believed that we ought to do something about poverty, and we tried to end it, what wonderful things might we learn? What skills might we acquire? What loving communities might we create in the process of fighting to end poverty?

Like it or not, the fortunes of the poor and the nonpoor are linked. The nonpoor both benefit from and harmed by their relationship to the poor.

Confronting poverty

So, the real question becomes: How do you want your life to be linked to the poor? Responsibility can prevent poverty – if we all take more responsibility for eradicating poverty in our city, state, country and world.

We blame the poor

for being so, yet depend on them to take jobs most of us don't want. We don't put people in mental institutions anymore, because the asylums were inhumane; we simply put them on the street and avoid the alleys they sleep in.

We want quality education, but how can you have quality education when children are unhealthy and fail to learn? Are we willing to build more and more jails to house children who become crooks because we never invested in them when they were young?

Jurgen Moltmann, German theologian wrote in his book "the Way of Jesus Christ"

"the collective term "the poor" covers the hungry, the unemployed, the sick, the discouraged and humiliated people.

The poor are sick, crippled, homeless.

They are beggars in the streets and on the country roads.

They are held liable for their debts to the extent of their own bodies and their families.

Often enough they have to accept slavery and prostitution which means total loss of their rights.

The poor are non-persons, sub human, and dehumanized, human fodder.

The Counter-term for the poor is "the man of violence, who makes someone else poor

and enrich himself at the other's expense.

The God of rich is Mammon, and he is an unjust god.

The rich therefore have to be exposed as the unjust and the men of violence.

When Jesus and his disciples proclaim the gospel to the poor, they are explicitly or implicitly proclaiming to the rich God's judgment (Luke 6:24).

*This is not the slave's dream of revenge.
It is the announcement of God's coming justice and righteousness.*

*He further states that
sociologically speaking, the Jesus movement in Galilee was a movement of
the poor.
the disciples were to go out barefoot, as homeless, and as beggars and
were to proclaim the gospel to the poor (Matt. 6:25-33).
Their master himself lived as one of the poor,
without protection of a family, without a home country, without any income
or
provision for the future (Luke 9:58).
They shared with the people the little they had, and
as the poor they satisfied a great multitude (Luke 9:10).
The first Christian community in Jerusalem was still living so that they
had
everything in common and there was not a needy person among them
(Acts 4:34-35).*

*The movement of the poor which Jesus' gospel called into being in Galilee
undoubtedly became a danger to the Jewish upper class and to the Roman
occupying power with which that class collaborated.
Jesus' execution on the Roman cross was apparently meant as a deterrent
to social
and political unrest of this kind.*

*According to Philippians 2:, Jesus died in the form of slave.
He suffered the fate of many enslaved poor in the Roman empire,
especially in Palestine.*

*He further states that
the gospel is therefore one-sided and partisan in its commitment to the
poor, and
in the blessings it promises them;
If these are the least of the brothers and sisters of the Son of Man who is
also the judge of the world (Matt. 25). It is only in community with the poor
that the kingdom of God is thrown open to the others.
Gospel has two faces, according to the group to which it turns.
Jesus proclaims to the poor the kingdom of God without any conditions,
and
calls them blessed because the kingdom is already theirs.
But the gospel of the kingdom meets the rich with the call to conversion
(Mk 1:15).
Conversion means turning around, the turn from violence to justice, from
isolation to community, from death to life.*

In This Issue:

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"Rolling to Overcome Poverty" Bus Tour

**October 6-17, 2004
Bus Tour Cities:**

Minneapolis, MN

Madison, WI

Milwaukee, WI

Chicago, IL

The Call
July 27, 2004

Movement Update



Michael Norman

"They shall build houses and inhabit them: they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit: they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen will long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear their children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord...." (Isaiah 65:21-23)

Call to Renewal has a new tool you can use to deepen your involvement on behalf of poor people. It's called [The Isaiah Platform](#), it's based on the prophetic passage quoted above, and it comes complete with suggestions and guidelines for how to use it most effectively. Please read on to find out more.

What would it be like if everyone who did the building and the planting actually enjoyed the benefits of the completed buildings and the harvested crops? What if all those who did the house cleaning could live in a clean, comfortable home? What if the families of migrant farm workers and food preparation workers could enjoy a healthy diet at home and the occasional restaurant meal? What if all the sanitation workers could live in homes and neighborhoods free from cockroaches, abandoned cars and trash in the streets? What if all the parking attendants and transit workers could have safe, clean and convenient transportation to get where they needed to go?

In other words, what would it be like if those who worked full time could have the means to live decently? Many people in America today think that here in the U.S. anyone who works full time probably has the wherewithal to afford basic necessities. But there are 20 million people in the U.S. who work full time but live in poverty, unable to afford basic housing, health care, clothing, transportation and even food. They build, but others inhabit. They plant, but others eat the fruit. They do the cleaning and the farm work and the food preparation, they collect the trash, park the cars and drive the buses but they still live without the basics of a decent life.

Isaiah definitely wouldn't like it. His vision of a just society promises that those who labor "shall not labor in

Grand Rapids, MI

Detroit, MI

Cincinnati, OH

Cleveland, OH

Pittsburgh, PA

Philadelphia, PA

[Tell-a-Friend](#), about **The Call!**



Last Month's Question of the Month Results:

Do you think Ronald Reagan's controversial tax policies outweigh his contribution to the end of the Cold War?

1) **61%** - Yes

2) **31%** - No

3) **8%** - Not sure

Question of the Month:

vain" ... "they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord".

So what's wrong with this picture? Is there a fundamental flaw in the make-up of these 20 million people? Or, rather, is there something wrong with an economic system that requires and compels the people who do these jobs to live in poverty? Is this system, in at least some important ways, unjust, broken, sinful, evil? And what can we of the faith community do about it?

Especially in an election year, we can publicize and promote the fact that poverty is a moral and religious issue and that budgets are moral documents. We can find ways to raise awareness of the needs of poor people, and challenge candidates to say how they will meet those needs. We can encourage voter participation and responsible, discerning citizenship, especially among people of faith.

And we can use Call to Renewal's Isaiah Platform to do all of these things. The Isaiah Platform is a three-point policy commitment designed as a tool for interacting with legislators and candidates on issues related to poverty. Based on the portion of Isaiah 65 quoted above, this one page document is a great way to start a conversation on poverty policy with a candidate, congressperson, senator, local legislator or media representative. The intent is that you will use the platform to engage these people on poverty issues, challenging them to address specifically the three key points of the platform.

If you can make a trip to Washington, DC, you can use the Isaiah Platform on a visit to Capitol Hill. You can use it at home when your candidates ask for your vote. You can send it to representatives and ask them to respond. You can use it at church to convene a discussion group or education forum on poverty advocacy. You can work with local media to publicize the platform. The platform comes complete with a [full page](#) of suggested action steps built around commitment, education, advocacy and publicity.

So please make good use of the [Isaiah Platform](#) in the days and weeks to come - please do your part for poverty reduction today. Call to Renewal thanks you!

PS - Click [here](#) to view the cover letter Call to Renewal sent, along with the Isaiah Platform, to Senators and Representatives on July 12, 2004.

[Michael Norman](#)
Managing Director
Call to Renewal

Legislative Update

Budget and Tax Decisions May Continue to Affect Low-Income People

Which do you think better helps the U.S. economy: tax cuts, job programs or neither?

1) Tax Cuts

2) Job Programs

3) Neither

Submit

As the time that Congress is in session this year gets shorter, and pressure builds to pass funding bills and claim victory on legislative priorities, the federal budget picture may have a significant impact on low-income people in several ways.

A plan to renew some expiring tax breaks before Congress' August recess has been shelved until September. At issue is whether the extension of tax breaks should be for two or five years. The extensions include the "middle class" tax cuts: marriage penalty relief, expansion of the 10 percent income tax bracket, and the \$1,000 child tax credit. If not extended, the standard deduction for married couples would decrease by 25%, incomes in the 10 percent tax bracket would decrease, and the child tax credit would be cut from \$1000 to \$700 (although it is scheduled to increase some in 2005).

A major factor influencing how Congress will act is how the tax cuts will be paid for ("offset") for example, by closing corporate tax loopholes or cutting other taxes. A five-year extension could cost \$120 billion; a two-year extension \$75 billion. Many members of Congress, as well as advocates, point out that extension of the tax cuts without revenue offsets will add to the increasing budget deficit, placing more strain on funding for social programs which assist low-income taxpayers. Moreover, one proposal to extend the child tax credit would increase income limits to make families earning around \$300,000 eligible for the credit, while those making less than \$26,000 have yet to receive it. For information on Call to Renewal's efforts last year to secure the child tax credit for low-income people, see

www.calltorenewal.org/public_policy/index.cfm/action/child_tax_credit_room.html.

On a positive and related note, Congress rejected a bill that would have set spending restrictions on programs such as education, housing, child welfare, child care, and Head Start. The budget bill would have allowed Congress to pass more tax cuts that are not paid for. Congress also rejected a proposal to cut spending on Medicaid, veteran's benefits, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Food Stamps and other entitlement programs by more than \$445 billion.

[Yonce Shelton](#)

National Coordinator and Policy Director
Call to Renewal

Tales from a Christian Activist

Islands of Hope



Jim Wallis

"Those who say the world cannot be changed are mistaken. At a dinner I attended with several former members of Congress, governors, and mayors, a statement was made: 'Nobody has answers anymore in America.' I disagreed. I invited the politicians to name the social problems they were most concerned about, and then gave them the names of people and projects that are finding solutions to each one (sometimes naming efforts in their own states and cities). They were amazed to learn that the 'answers' to some of our most difficult problems are already out there.

I suggested these efforts were like islands in a vast and threatening sea. If you can swim to an island, you will probably be all right. But if you can't get there, or don't even know in which direction to swim, you will be in real trouble. Today, our islands are still too few and far between, but they are out there. Our task must be to connect the islands, create the resources to greatly expand their territory, and, finally, take what we can learn from the islands to forge new social policy. But first, we have to get the word out that changing our communities is not an impossible task.

I don't mean changing everything, especially all at once, or in a way that will last forever. We don't need any more utopian visions. Those have led to some of our worst problems. But we do need change, and most of us feel it. We need change in our neighborhoods, our schools, our congregations, our workplaces, our cities, our country, and, certainly, around our world. We don't need things to be perfect (they never will be); we do need a world that's more fair, more safe, more honest, and more just."

An excerpt from Faith Works, a book written by [Jim Wallis](#)

Campus Corner

Created By and For Students Involved in Overcoming Poverty

Does Your College, Seminary or University Have a Story, Information or News that Call to Renewal Partners Should Know About? If So, Click [Here](#).

Several summers ago as a high school student, I went with my mom to volunteer at our city's community soup kitchen. High school students have become familiar faces among the crew of volunteers that spend their mornings at the Onslow Community Ministries Soup Kitchen. Most of these students do community service as part of their scholarship requirements, which was the case for me that summer.

Although community service is no longer a requisite in my situation, I am drawn back to the community soup kitchen every summer. I am compelled to return because I have found it to be a place of community, a place of friendship and teamwork. The soup kitchen has been a place of growth for me, because it has placed me among people I am unfamiliar with and different from racially, culturally, and economically. When

Send technical questions

to:

[Clayton W. Smith](#)

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Webmaster

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I feel uncomfortable around the poor of my community, I have to ask myself why I feel this way and how I might work to remove barriers that hinder the flow of love, trust, and justice between me and my neighbors. The more I am around the poor, the more I want to connect with them by hearing their stories and spending time with them.

The community kitchen is also refreshing-a place often filled laughter and joy, where humans can serve each other and practice love. My fellow volunteers are as diverse as their backgrounds. High school students of different races and socio-economic backgrounds work alongside retired men and women, parents, and church members. The soup kitchen is a unique place where we each, as different as we may be, join together with a common purpose and task.

One of the best things about the community kitchen is that I have a multitude of individuals around me who exemplify love and faithful service. Recently I went out on the kitchen truck to deliver food to people who lived in the rural areas surrounding my town. The man on the truck with me had been driving this route every Wednesday for eight years. He knew the people we were serving, and they knew him. Their mutual friendship and trust made an impression on me.

Students on my college campus are generally insulated from "the real world" where bills must be paid and poverty is a condition of life; my experiences have taught me that connecting with my neighbors and witnessing their hardships is also an instrumental part of my education.

Jeanne Kearney

University of Maryland

Poverty Headline News

Read the Latest National Poverty News

Recovering a hijacked faith

Boston Globe, July 13, 2004

By Jim Wallis

MANY OF US feel that our faith has been stolen, and it's time to take it back. A misrepresentation of Christianity has taken place. Many people around the world now think Christian faith stands for political commitments that are almost the opposite of its true meaning. How did the faith of Jesus come to be known as pro-rich, pro-war, and pro-American? What has happened? How do we get back to a historic, biblical, and genuinely evangelical faith rescued from its contemporary distortions?

www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2004/07/13/recovering_a_hijacked_faith/

Welfare reform worked - don't fix it

Christian Science Monitor, July 21, 2004

By Scott Winship and Christopher Jencks

Our research cannot prove that welfare reform was solely responsible for the improvement in living standards. But it does reveal an important lesson for Congress as it seeks to reauthorize federal welfare reform legislation: Don't fix what ain't broke.

www.csmonitor.com/2004/0721/p09s02-coop.html

Values Become Key Campaign Issue

Kerry, Bush Show Their Differences

Washington Post, July 9, 2004

By Jim VandeHei

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., July 8 -- Sen. John F. Kerry and President Bush escalated a fight Thursday over values that is increasingly coloring the election-year debate heading into the national conventions.

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A37646-2004Jul8.html

Kerry Lays Out Faith-Based Platform

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, July 06, 2004

By: Anne Farris, Roundtable Washington Correspondent

Speaking before a gathering of 3,000 African-American pastors, Democratic Presidential candidate Senator John Kerry called for more support for faith-based organizations to work with government to in aiding America's needy, while ensuring constitutional protections of separation of church and state.

www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/news/article.cfm?id=1687

Conference Corner

For the next few months we will highlight some of the local events being planned by our partners across the country in conjunction with the "Rolling to Overcome Poverty Bus Tour. Been to a Great Conference, Seminar or Workshop? [Tell Us About It!](#)

Conference Name: "Rolling to Overcome Poverty" Bus Tour (Grand Rapids Stop)

Organization/Church: West Michigan Call to Renewal

Web site: www.calltorenewal.org

Ever since the early days of the Call to Renewal, West Michigan has had its own chapter working on renewing our commitment to local justice and poverty issues. We're excited about the "Rolling to Overcome Poverty" tour and are planning to get the most from it.

The scenario:

The Call to Renewal "Rolling to Overcome Poverty" bus tour rolls into Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Monday, October 11. Late in the afternoon Jim Wallis, Call to Renewal's Board President Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell, US Representative Vern Ehlers, and Senator Debbie Stabenow gather to meet the press. Using the Isaiah Platform, these key public leaders - all of them people of deep faith - speak to the media about the urgent necessity of cutting poverty and the critical need for political leadership willing to act boldly and effectively.

At 7:00 PM our "Rolling to Overcome Poverty Rally" begins at First United Methodist Church with music, energy, and Jim Wallis. We hope that people of faith from all walks of life and at all stages of awareness will leave inspired, encouraged, motivated, and engaged in a renewed commitment to seek justice.

The next morning 60 - 100 area pastors and lay leaders, invited for their ability to amplify and sustain this "Call to Renewal", meet for breakfast and brief examples of justice in action through communities of faith. We end with an opportunity for pastors to step up to leadership as we renew our commitments to the poor and to justice in the coming year.

Why are we doing this?

First, we need political leaders to see that social justice has a growing constituency, and that we will vote our convictions.

Second, we hope our larger community sees the community of faith as salt and light in its midst -- helping folks consider the kind of city and region we want to become.

Third, we hope to use this high profile tour to reinvigorate our own West Michigan Call to Renewal with new membership and new energy.

Peter Vander Meulen
Coordinator for Social Justice and Hunger Action
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616 224 0807
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Mark Your Calendar

What's Going On In and Around The Movement?

Does Your Church, Organization, College, Seminary or University Have an Event/Activity that Call to

Renewal Partners Should Know About? If So, Click [Here](#).

National Save Section 8 Coalition Planning Meeting, August 3rd, 2004

On September 8th the National Save Section 8 Coalition is planning a series of joint actions across the country to raise awareness about the crisis involving Section 8 funding. There will be a meeting on August 3rd at 3:00 PM held at the National Coalition for the Homeless office at 1012 14th St. Suite 600 to discuss plans. For more information contact Donald Whitehead by phone at (202) 737-6444 or via email at dwhitehead@nationalhomeless.org.

2004 "No Room for Poverty" National Rally, September 4, 2004

The national Community Action Partnership, along with its 1,000-member network of Community Action Agencies, is holding the "No Room for Poverty" National Rally September 4, 2004, on the Ellipse in Washington, DC. This nonpartisan effort will seek to unify the nation around the need to end poverty and will focus on five key areas: health care, jobs, housing, education, and the Digital Divide. The "No Room for Poverty" National Rally is being held as a part of the Community Action Partnership's 2004 Annual Convention and will mark the 40th anniversary of Community Action. For more information, please visit www.povertyrally.org.

CCDA Annual Rural Conference Targeting Hope, September 24-25, 2004

Christian Community Development Association's third annual rural community and small cities development conference will be held September 24 and 25 in Chestnut Ridge, West Virginia. This event will provide a learning event for churches, organizations and individuals involved with or interested in Christian community development. It will examine the role of the church and personal faith in the community development process and it will celebrate successes and share best practices related to Christian community development. For more information e-mail CCDAHOPE@aol.com or call 304-457-4575 Ext. 49.

2004 CCDA Annual Conference, October 27-31, 2004

Thousands of people from all over the U.S. and abroad will converge on Atlanta, GA for the 16th Annual Christian Community Development Association Conference. The theme of the conference is "Living the Kingdom Now- Restoring Communities in the Name of Christ." Confirmed speakers include: Dr. Andrea Barthwell - Office of National Drug Control Policy, Dr. Sam Chand - Beulah Heights Bible College, Dr. Raymond Rivera - Latino Pastoral Action Center, Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil - Overflow Ministries, Dr. Wayne Gordon - Lawndale Community Church, and CCDA Chairman and Dr. Bob Lupton - FCS Urban Ministries. For more information visit www.cdda.org.

54th Convention and Training Conference of the National Association of Christian Social Workers (NACSW), October 28-31, 2004

"Social Work on a Global Scale: He's Got the Whole World in His Hands"

Recognizing God's love for the whole world and each person in it, the 2004 conference in Reston, VA, embraces the global context of Christians in social work and acknowledges the impact of globalization on

[Call to Renewal](#) is a national network of churches, faith-based organizations, and

individuals working to overcome poverty in America.

2401 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20009
202.328.8745

practice. To find out more about this year's exciting plenary speakers (including David Beckmann, Tony Campolo, and Jim Wallis), pre-convention institutes, and program schedule, or if you or your colleagues would like to share valuable insights related to the integration of faith and practice, present model integration practices, or report on valuable research on the following topics: Social Work Direct Practice, Faith of Social Workers, Community Organizing and Development, Social Work Administration and Policy, Social Work Education, and International Social Work in Faith-based Settings, please visit: www.nacsw.org/conv_head_text.html.

Money & Faith Retreat, October 29-31, 2004

Ministry of Money is a loving, prophetic Christian ministry, which encourages all persons to become free from their attachment to cultural values regarding money and to live out joyfully God's call for their lives and resources. Join them in Germantown, MD at their Money & Faith Retreat, with guest speaker Arthur Simon (author and founder of Bread for the World). For more information, contact Rosemary Diehl at 301-428-9560 or email rosemary@ministryofmoney.org.

Roundtable 2004 Annual Fall Conference, December 9, 2004

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy/ Rockefeller Institute of Government has set the date and location for its Annual Fall Conference. Plan now to join us for a comprehensive look at the status of faith-based social service in America -- and the outlook for its future following the fall elections. The conference will be held at the Wyndham Hotel in Washington, D.C. For more information or to register please visit: www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/events/12-09-annual_conference_action_success.cfm.

From the Ground

Voices of Morality is Something We All Should Have

When people hear the word "Hit" they may think of a popular song or a vehicular accident. When I think of a "Hit" I think of showing up to protest unfair and unjust practices. Over the last year I have supported and worked with Voices of Morality (V.O.M.), a group established in January 2002 by a body of concerned, courageous and insightful young adults and individuals desiring to right the wrongs of systemic injustice and its' aftermath. As a unified voice, V.O.M. speaks for those who do not have a voice due to lack of knowledge and/or fear of the oppressive and unethical systems existing in American society. This group was formed from the vision of Bishop Lance L. Davis, Pastor of New Zion Christian Fellowship located in Dolton, Illinois.

In two years time, V.O.M. has successfully gone up against systemic injustices within the Chicago Transit Authority, and the Illinois Legislature. They worked with the Illinois Legislature to put an end to the unequal practice of funding education through property taxes.

In its short time V.O. M. has accomplished the following:

- March on the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) - two demonstrations were waged at the offices of the CTA because of unfair treatment of its employees. CTA Management was forced to hear concerns of their employee's and riders which led them to make necessary adjustments to their work environment. Members of New Zion who worked for CTA informed V.O.M. of their work experience which led to these demonstrations.
- Developed a Comparative Study of School Curriculum - Declared real-estate taxed based funding for education is unconstitutional and shed light on the fact that the education of our children should not suffer because of the neighborhood they live in. Through research they found the current educational systems to be unequal, unjust and inadequate. Members of V.O.M. travel to the state capital on a regular basis to fight for equal funding for all children. Because of their efforts many groups and elected officials are now joining in the fight to change the way education is funded in Illinois.
- Assisted School District 152.5 in keeping their doors open. V.O.M. took members and parents on a special trip to ask for emergency funding for a bankrupt school district. The Legislature voted for emergency funds to keep the school district open until the end of the school year. The agency overseeing education in Illinois is monitoring this school district.
- New Mayor in Harvey, IL - V.O. M. believes good leadership should reflect the heart and best interest of the people. V.O.M. challenged and exposed the racially unjust leadership of Nick Graves in the Harvey community, and was instrumental in his removal from the mayoral position.
- National Boycott of Daimler Chrysler Corporation - Injustice anywhere affects justice everywhere. V.O.M. was instrumental in exposing the unjust & immoral business ethics of Daimler Chrysler in the areas of racial discrimination, predatory lending practices and redlining. V.O.M. marched with presidential candidate Rev. Al Sharpton to call attention to the racist practices of The Chrysler Company.

Currently, V.O.M. is joining with the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN) and other community groups to stop Brown and Williamson Company (B&W) maker of Kool cigarettes from exploiting our children through their Kool Mixx campaign. Both the Ill. Secretary of State Jesse White and Attorney General Lisa Madigan have also joined in this fight. This campaign uses flavored cigarettes, lighted displays with hip hop "DJ's" spinning records, dancers and graffiti artists. The packaging of the cigarettes is arranged to create the incentive to buy four - not one pack of cigarettes and they are discounted to make them more affordable. For more information you can go to www.NAATPN.org.

We the members of V.O.M. have no problem with speaking "Truth to Power" and will go up against any thing or any one who does not have the best interest of our community at heart. We believe that the best way to end the problems that exist in our society is to go against the systemic evils that cause the problems in the first place.

Rev. Cheryl Cornelius
Director of Operations
CCDA
708-849-6904
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In My Opinion

Words from the Heart

Listening

A small part of each of us yearns to aid the poor. However, in our haste to offer solutions, we often fail to listen to the voices of the millions of families in America who each year have need of financial assistance. Our conscience beckons us to help those in need but unfortunately our overbooked schedules limit the time we have to reach out and listen to their concerns. Instead, we satisfy ourselves with the notion that those in need must be shiftless, products of dysfunctional families or government problems that we can afford to toss aside for the moment in favor of those who better fit into our current economical and socially acceptable class.

"The Psalms imply quite clearly that though you and I may not hear the poor, God will, and you and I who do not hear them and stoop down to them, and reach out to them, and stand up for them, will ourselves go unheard" - Joan Chittister

Instead of supporting their basic human dignity and asking them what their needs might be, we offer them what we think they ought to have. We do this assuming that we know what it's like to walk in their shoes or live their lives. Purely showing concern for the poor is not enough. We need to re-invest our time to listening to the poor so that we can together faithfully extend the riches of God's grace with the timelessness of Christ's wisdom in considering real and available solutions to long-standing educational, economic and moral dilemmas. Further, it is time for us to take a step back, to re-evaluate our commitments and change our priorities, remembering, *"In listening to the needy, we listen to Christ..."* - Sheila Cameron

[Clayton Smith](#)
Technology Coordinator
Call to Renewal

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