

Chapter 6

Project 4: Examples of Public Policy Advocacy Ministries

The followings are the five examples of public policy advocacy programs among many such missions in the nation. The Christians Churches or other faith groups can use them as models in affecting the change of public policies for the poor in our country:

- 1) Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, New York City, NY.
- 2) New Mexico Conf. of Churches - Public Policy Positions – Albuquerque, NM.
- 3) Washington Association of Churches -Public Policy Positions- in Seattle, WA.
- 4) Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State.
- 5) The Presbyterian Church (USA) Policies on Homelessness (PC. U.S.A.).

1) **Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, New York City, NY.**¹

Interfaith Assembly is an inter-religious public policy advocacy group for the homeless and housing in New York City. They adopted a project, “Building City Together -New York.”

Their objective is:

To expand and strengthen the faith community to be actively involved in advocating for the establishment of public policies that will address the needs of those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness in New York City. To develop active cooperative relationships with other interfaith coalitions and organizations working on housing, homelessness and hunger issues and public policy analysis and also elected officials who are committed to positive public policy change.

Organizing Philosophy

- 1) Most elected officials have very little contact with faith based service providers in their districts.
- 2) Therefore, identify potential leaders who are motivated and inspired by the cause.
- 3) Help congregants to re-envision their mission as a continuum which includes direct service, advocacy, education and training and provide tools to help recruit and inspire other members of their community in the work.
- 4) Engage people of faith in the work of creating a more equitable public policy on behalf of those who are and have been homeless and to provide congregations an opportunity to hear their voices.
- 5) The meeting will take place at the site of a large service program and the meeting will begin with a tour of the program in operation.
- 6) A number of local leaders will present information on key public policy issues to the elected officials expecting responses from them.
- 7) Those faith community representatives who have attended the legislators meeting will be recruited as leaders to motivate and train additional members of their congregations.
- 8) The local coalition will be assisted in organizing training workshops in which these leaders will be educated about specific public policies and provided with resources in a Blessed City “Tool Kit.”
- 9) The Assembly will offer congregations “educational events and forums” to help the congregation to become active participants in Building the Blessed City.

Public Policy Priorities 2004

¹ Source: *Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing*. 1047 Amsterdam Ave. New York, NY. 10025. (212) 316-3171. It is an interfaith public policy advocacy group in New York. Ex. Dir: Marc Greenberg. www.info-iahnyc.org

The following eight Public Policy Initiatives have been determined by the organizers of “Building the Blessed City Together” to be the most timely for concerted action in 2004. Blessed City “Partners” and all others committed to ending Chronic Homelessness in NYC are encouraged to select one (or more) of these and work with the organizers to move the effort towards ending chronic homelessness in New York City.

1. Enact NY/NY III to Build 9000 Housing for those with mental illness who are at risk of Homelessness. Mayor Bloomberg has made a commitment to build 4,500 units as part of this plan. The state has yet to make such a commitment. - **Website:** www.shnny.org
2. Establish inclusionary zoning regulations to maximize Affordable Housing Development. Website at www.izny.org
3. Enact effective Housing Code enforcement to keep apartments habitable through “Right to Repair” N Y City Council Intro #31– **Contact:** adrian.d@anhd.org
4. Restore funding for legal counseling and anti-eviction assistance to prevent unwarranted evictions. To take action: laurenbp@verizon.net
5. Increase funding for emergency "one shot" grants & rental assistance to enable people to stay in their homes by supporting the “Rental Assistance Program for Working Homeless Adults” (RAP) – **To take action:** laurenbp@verizon.net
6. Raise the NY State minimum wage to lift working New Yorkers out of poverty – **To take action** visit the “515 is not enough” website at www.515isnotenough.org
7. Ensure access to the 750,000 food stamp eligible New Yorkers not receiving food Stamps – **To take action:** www.nyccah.org
8. Restore funding of Federal Section 8 Vouchers to provide affordable housing to those most in need – **To take action** contact the national Low-Income Housing Coalition at www.nlihc.org

UPDATE – The Bush administration is proposing to alter the formula through which section 8 funds are disbursed – which would result in massive losses of housing units. Ultimately on a change in the federal administration will remedy the situation but in the short run there are some legal efforts underway to obstruct the presidents plans.

2) New Mexico Conf. of Churches - Public Policy Positions on Welfare Reform²

² New Mexico Conference of Churches. 720 Vassar Dr. NE • Albuquerque, NM 87106-2724
505-255-1509 • Fax: 505-256-0071. Email: nmcc@nmchurches.org Website: www.nmchurches.org

The New Mexico Conference of Churches is ecumenical Christian Church organization. Its Board of Directors feels a sense of responsibility to participate in shaping public policies which will directly impact the lives of so many persons in New Mexico and will also reveal what kind of communities and society we are choosing to become. The Fundamental Framework of the New Mexico Conference of Churches stated:

Representing both the historical traditions of our member churches of almost 100 years of ecumenical cooperation in ethical discernment, the NMCC places this position statement within the following framework: 'We believe that we are called to stand with and seek justice for people who are in poverty. We feel compelled in this belief by the teachings of both Old Testament and New Testament, perhaps illustrated adequately in the admonition of Proverbs 31.8-9 "You must defend those who are helpless and have no hope. Be fair and give justice to the poor and homeless." We therefore join with a much larger circle of religious leaders who have said collectively, "*We share a conviction, therefore, that welfare reform must not focus on eliminating programs but eliminating poverty, and especially the damage poverty inflicts on children (who are 2/3 of all welfare recipients).*" Each of the member denominations of the NMCC have stated this commitment in one way or another in their most authoritative statements; perhaps the US Catholic Bishops 1986 pastoral letter captures this consensus when it states, "*Dealing with poverty is not a luxury to which our nation can attend when it finds the time and resources. Rather, it is a moral imperative of the highest order.*'

Policy Issues

The NM Conference of Churches will advocate for proposals about welfare reform which includes the following elements:

- A. Policies which build hope and lead to self-sufficiency, eliminating the root causes of poverty for children, adults and families. The New Mexico Conference of Churches supports abolishing stated and implied policies which sustain the current levels of poverty in the U.S. and in New Mexico.
- B. Insistence that individuals and all sectors of society share in the responsibility for reducing poverty. It is not enough for individuals, faith communities, the state, the business community each to say "It's someone else's responsibility."
- C. Assurance that especially children already victimized will not be further penalized by any changes in welfare policies.
- D. Insistence that there are societal responsibilities for the vulnerable within our communities..
- E. Assurance that the state of New Mexico, not just the welfare recipient, and the business community share responsibilities for job development, training and assistance in returning persons to independent living.

The NM Conference of Churches' Board of Directors has developed position statements on public policies on AIDS, Capital punishment, Children's issues, Campaign contributions, Disabilities legislation, Environment, Family life, Hate crimes, Health care, Housing, Lottery/Gambling, Mental Health care, Penal reform, Pornography, Public education, Rights to work, Senior issues, Substance abuse, Welfare reform.

F. Continuing the due process rights of individuals to fair and impartial hearings concerning access to benefits.

G. Stabilizing the rights of legal immigrants to access resources without stigma or stereotyping.

H. Eliminating arbitrary time limits and generalized program requirements which prevent individual situations to be carefully analyzed so that a long-range program for independence can be developed.

3) **Washington Association of Churches**³

The Washington Association of Churches (WAC) is an association of 10 Christian denominations, 11 ecumenical organizations, and members of approximately 1,600 congregations and parishes in the State of Washington. ... WAC's Faith Advocacy Network is actively engaged in.....Education about the public policy alternatives before the community; Advocacy to elected state officials on the following 2005 legislative agenda; Mobilization to bring public witness and direct action to the public arena. Since 1975, WAC has served as a focal point for dialogue, advocacy, action and reflection. WAC's work is rooted in the conviction that Christian faith calls us to act with compassion for people and respect the sacredness of life. We feel called to the challenge of unity in our society by addressing the needs of community in our world. WAC's 2005 State Public Policy Agenda that is related to poverty and homelessness.

Fair & Equitable Tax System: We call for a fair and equitable tax system that provides sufficient revenues to meet the needs of our state including funding for human services, education, and livable wages for state workers and the protection of our natural resources. Our tax system should reduce the gap between the rich and poor promote economic security and protect our state's most vulnerable residents.

Human Services: We call for a budget that adequately funds services that meet the basic needs of our most vulnerable residents, especially low-income children and their families, the elderly and disabled.

Welfare: We support welfare reform that treats people with dignity and provides equal access to benefits for all people based upon need. We recognize that successful welfare reform must provide each person with the supports necessary to transition from welfare to work, and adequate support for those unable to work.

Economic Justice: We recognize the responsibility of government to develop and implement sound legislative and fiscal policies that provide for the economic well being of all and that provide for economic development benefiting all sectors of society including, livable wages, equal access to benefits (including health and childcare) and decent working conditions.

³ *Washington Association of Churches.* John C. Boonstra, Executive Minister. Public Policy: Ms. Alice Woldt. 419 Occidental Avenue South, Suite 201 Seattle, Washington 98104-2886. voice 206.625.9790 : fax 206.625.9791: E-mail: wac@thewac.org ; Website: www.thewac.org

Health Care: We believe all residents should have access to quality and affordable health care. We support state subsidized health care programs and advocate adequate state funding to ensure that health care is available for those who need it.

Voter Disparities; we are committed to confront racism as it effects our political democracy. We support legislation that would ameliorate Washington States' high rate of former felony disenfranchisement.

4) Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State⁴

This is a legislative advocacy ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (An individual Christian Church denomination), using the power of the pen (letter or e-mail), or using the power of the spoken word (phone call or visit) to communicate with a local, state, federal, or international official who makes decisions that impact the lives of the poor and oppressed – “the least of these” in our midst.” ELCA’s Constitutional Mandate states:

This Church shall advocate dignity and justice for all people ---and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their need” (ELCA Constitution: Chapter 4.02c).” “This Church shall study social issues and trends, work to discover the causes of oppression and injustice, and develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice, and peace in the world” (ELCA Constitution: Chapter 4.031)”. “This Church shall work with and on behalf of the poor, powerless, and those who suffer, using its power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace and care of creation (The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective; An ELCA Social Statement, 1991).

Of many of four major advocacy programs of ELCA, the State Public Policy Program is emphasized here because it is involved faithfully for the policy change for economic justice. 2004 Legislative Priorities of Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State include:

1. Maintain Current Funding Levels for Human Services Programs.
2. Reduce Washington’s High Rate of Hunger
3. Improve Healthcare Accessibility and Affordability.
4. Economic Justice including a more Equitable Tax Structure.

The program’s full time staff works diligently in coordination with other advocacy groups by constantly lobbying to policy makers at the state government in Olympia on the above policy issues.

5) The Presbyterian Church (USA) Policies on Homelessness⁵

⁴ Source: *Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State*. Rev. Paul B. Benz, Director. 433 Minor Ave. N. Seattle, WA. 98109. (206) 694-5772. Fax: (206) 694-5777. E-mail: pbenz@lcsnw.org

As early as 1936 the Presbyterian Church in the United States through its General Assembly began speaking out against the injustice of the disparity between the rich and the poor in the United States.

The General Assemblies of Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.) of 1948, 1949, 1950, 1953, 1954, 1960, 1968, 1976, 1977, 1989, 1997 and 1998 responded to the biblical command to shelter homeless people by calling for measures designed to assure adequate living conditions for all Americans and addressing the wide range of issues facing people who struggle to obtain affordable, suitable housing, with particular attention to the needs of poor people. The Assemblies also declared “ministry to homeless people and requested the General Assembly Council to develop and implement a long-range strategy for both meeting the immediate needs of those caught in homelessness and for developing programs for confronting and alleviating homelessness.” For example,

The overtures 97-51 (1997) and 98-55 (1998) that were adopted as a denominational policy deserve a special emphasis here:

The 1997 overtures 97-51, “End Homelessness for Women and Children” urged the appropriate program areas to continue their work to combat homelessness and produce resources that outline successful models used by congregations that have sponsored ministries for homeless women and homeless women with children; make these resources available to local congregations; called upon and challenge all presbyteries and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to promote awareness and education about ways to alleviate the homelessness of women; call attention to the impacts of the recent changes in welfare reform, especially on women, and how these changes may increase homelessness; work cooperatively with other churches, religious groups, and charitable or governmental entities to help provide safe and secure shelter for homeless women in times of crisis; urge members of the church and the Presbyterian Washington Office to continue working toward the enactment of public policies that have the stated goal of eradicating the conditions that lead to homelessness.⁶

Overture 98-55, was passed "as a concrete process of moving one step forward to achieving the goal of ending homelessness for all women and children."⁷

1) “Open One Room” was approved as our national campaign and urge all Presbyterian churches to open at least one room for ministry to the poor and *homeless* [and to further ask all Presbyterian churches to encourage other denominations or churches in their own communities to do likewise or to partner together for this ministry, to magnify the results of such a campaign throughout the United States.

2) Approve: the "Shirts Drive" with the message "End Homelessness for All Women" or "All People" printed on them as our national campaign and encourage Presbyterians to

⁵ *Washington Office*, PC (U.S.A.). 100 Maryland Avenue, NE, Ste. 410 Washington, DC 20002. Contact: Carolyn Race. 202-543-1126 ext. 230: Fax: 202-543-7755: Email: crace@ctr.pcusa.org . www.pcusa.org/washington. Public Policy Witness Program of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

⁶ Overture 97-51, adopted by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at 1997 General Assembly.

⁷ Overture 98-55 was approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) as a supplemental overture to 97-51 passed by the 209th GA.

wear them and spread the message to end homelessness for all women and children throughout the nation.

- 3) Call upon Presbyterian churches to work with policy makers to create fair and just economic and housing policies, and to create funding to implement those policies, which will benefit every citizen of this nation, including the poor and homeless.

As result of these policies Women's Ministries Program Area and the Hunger Program hired me to travel around the whole nation for 6 years to carry out the demands of the overture. After 6 years of educational and motivational mission, this Initiative gave birth to the Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness and will commit to the mission of ending homelessness.

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been actively involved in public policy issues on federal government budget process, lobbying, and continue to educate congregations with necessary policy sources and action alert.