

CHURCH COUNCIL BULLETIN

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North Carolina Council of Churches

Fall Appeal Comes at a Crucial Time

We need your help this year. A serious, well-funded effort is intended to push North Carolina back on many progressive issues on which the NC Council of Churches has been involved and on which many of us have worked.

- We have leaders at the state and national level who **deny climate change** is happening and that human beings are causing it, even though an overwhelming majority of scientists disagree with the deniers.
- We've seen budget cuts produce **serious reductions in education, human services, and environmental protection**. In a time when creating jobs is the most important political issue, North Carolina's legislature has made budget cuts resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs, even overriding the Governor's veto to do so.
- We are seeing a concerted effort to ratify a **constitutional amendment defining marriage** to exclude people who are gay and lesbian. In addition to enshrining discrimination in the constitution, this amendment will discourage companies from adding jobs in our state.
- We've seen an effort – so far unsuccessful – to **repeal the Racial Justice Act**.
- We've seen an effort – so far unsuccessful – to **require the use of photo IDs** in order to vote, something which will make it harder for the young, the elderly, and those with low-wage hourly jobs to vote. Only the Governor's veto, so far upheld by the House of Representatives, has blocked this regressive change.
- We've seen **politically motivated redistricting** which, if upheld through federal challenge, will change the landscape for many years to come.

This effort is unprecedented in my 30+ years in North Carolina. We at the Council are doing all we can to help people of faith resist this move to take our state back to a more conservative era on social justice, civil rights, gender equality, access to the polls, and care of God's creation.

At the same time, the Council is facing serious funding cuts from some of our member denominations. Let me hasten to add that this is because of the impact of the economy and other factors on their own incomes, not because of disagreement with the Council's work. It's an unfortunate combination, though – a serious assault on progressive values at the same time that the state's leading faith-based progressive organization is facing cuts in funding. Rounding out this perfect storm, the economic downturn plus budget cuts at federal and state levels mean more people are in need and more nonprofits are seeking financial support.

So, your help is especially important this fall. **If we are to maintain our programming and staff at current levels – if we are to continue to do what we have been doing to promote prophetic social justice that is unabashedly faith-based – we have to make up lost funding through the support of individual contributors.** That's you.

If you've never given to the Council, but you value our work, now is the time for you to make that first contribution. If you haven't given for a while, but you don't want to see our voice diminished, now is the time for you to renew your support. If you are a regular contributor, bless you! Our continuing viability depends on your continuing generosity. Can we count on you to help sustain our work in these challenging times?



J. George Reed, Executive Director

Donate to the NC Council of Churches online at www.nccouncilofchurches.org or by sending your contribution to NCCC, 27 HORNE St., Raleigh, 27607.

PHW: Current Successes and Future Plans

Success continues to build for the North Carolina Council of Churches' Partners in Health and Wholeness Program.

Since being hired this summer as regional consultant, Joy Williams has coordinated two youth empowerment trainings for clergy and other church staff to help them motivate youth around health advocacy and community change. She also held a free webinar in September for anyone interested in learning more about PHW and opportunities to improve the health of clergy and congregants in our state. Williams oversees program implementation in eight counties from Fayetteville to the South Carolina border.

Meanwhile, PHW Program Coordinator Willona Stallings continues to represent North Carolina's faith community on a number of boards and special committees aimed at improving

the health of all North Carolinians. Her most recent appointments include the NC Food Corps Advisory team, Institute for Emerging Issues' Health Council, and North Carolina Institute of Medicine's Child Obesity Prevention Task Force.

Stallings brings a faith-inspired voice to public health policy development and decision-making in North Carolina, ensuring that all citizens, including people of faith, are supported in their efforts to lead healthier lifestyles.

One key area of PHW's work that continues to expand is its certification program. Currently seventy congregations, from various denominations and geographic areas in North Carolina, are PHW-certified. They are demonstrating their commitment to health as a practice of their faith by serving healthier church meals, planting com-

munity gardens, preaching on health as a faith issue, maintaining tobacco-free buildings, developing parish nursing programs, and participating in other activities that have the potential to improve their health.

Looking ahead, PHW plans to expand its current work and create new partnerships in 2012. Specifically, PHW hopes to work with NC Prevention Partners to improve the health of church staff in select counties; with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina and the American Red Cross to increase the number of automated external defibrillators in congregations across the state; and with housing authorities and agencies to increase access to healthy, affordable foods in low-income areas.

For more about PHW's work or about certification, visit www.healthandwholeness.org.

Council Offers Biblical Companion to Living Wage Report

Offering a biblical perspective to current economics, the North Carolina Council of Churches has released *Workers Are Worth Their Keep*. The Council of Churches' report answers the question, "Why should people of faith care about a living wage?" and is a companion to the North Carolina Budget and Tax Center's new study, *Making Ends Meet After the Great Recession: The 2010 Living Income Standard*.

Workers are Worth Their Keep brings the issue of wages into conversation with theological perspectives of economic justice. It includes numerous passages from the Bible; summaries of the thinking of eight theologians, both Catholic and Protestant; and official statements about wages from many of the denominations represented in the NCCC.

"Clearly, the Bible speaks directly to the question of living wages," said George Reed, the Council's Executive Director. "I hope that *Workers Are Worth Their Keep* will help people of faith to focus on fair wages as an issue of faith, an issue addressed by our scriptures, by our theologians, and by our denominations. May it lead us to get involved and to make a difference."

The companion is divided into three main sections. The first highlights passages from the Bible that speak directly

about economic justice, fair pay for workers, and the call of God to treat workers with dignity.

The second section examines the perspectives of several major figures from Christian traditions. While their contexts vary greatly, their voices converge around the calling to pay workers wages that are fair and just. For these theologians, to rob workers of living wages is to sin against God.

The third and final section of this resource quotes from official statements from many of the denominations represented in the NC Council of Churches. Nearly all denominations across the theological spectrum agree that wages are a moral issue and that workers should be treated with dignity and respect. In particular, many statements highlight the need for families to be able to support themselves through their work – a need that is not always met by today's low-wage industries.

Workers are Worth Their Keep is available as a free download at www.nccouncilofchurches.org.

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NC IPL Focuses Work; Hires Volunteer Coordinator

As its 11th anniversary approaches this November, North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light is focusing its congregational work in four key areas:

Energy Efficiency Audits. NC IPL is continuing to offer energy audits of houses of worship. These identify the low- or no-cost ways a congregation can save energy, reduce utility bills, and lower the carbon footprint of their buildings and grounds simultaneously. The audits often provide an appealing way to begin or strengthen a faith community's care of creation program and actions.

Cool Harvest. This program makes the connections between food, faith and climate change. Faith communities often eat together in fellowship and many seek to feed the hungry and disadvantaged in their communities. Through education and support materials, NC IPL identifies how faith communities can eat and cook in a way that reduces their collective carbon footprint and also improves health and supports just, sustainable and local agriculture.

Earth Sabbath Celebrations. The Raleigh-based Steering Committee members and staff are developing interfaith resources and services to nurture and support activists and others who love and honor God's creation. The Earth Sabbath Celebrations are hour-long, contemplative and experiential services which utilize readings from many faith tradi-

tions, music, video, ritual, movement, chant, and other modalities to reach deep into the grief and love felt for the Earth and help both salve and energize the spirits of those who continue the work of restoration and repair.

Energy Clearing House. As nonprofits, houses of worship cannot benefit from the tax credits and tax reductions that make renewable energy affordable for householders, so NC IPL is collecting success stories and resources from congregations who have been able to fund solar energy. This web-based clearing house details what is possible in North Carolina and can help interested congregations network with other congregations.

In addition, NC IPL has recently hired Allison Scherberger, a graduate of Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment, as volunteer coordinator. Her new role will include recruiting, training, and coordinating activities of NC IPL's volunteers. She will also perform outreach and serve as liaison to new and engaged congregations.

For more information on any of these free programs, visit www.ncipl.org. NC IPL is a program of the Council.

Council Welcomes Three Interns

Interns from the North Carolina State University graduate program in social work and from Duke Divinity School have joined the NCCC for the academic year.

Leslie Forrest is a Georgia native who is pursuing her MSW at State. During her time with the Council, she will be focusing on the importance of food to the environment, public health, immigrant and farmworker populations, and other areas of social justice.

Tyler Mahoney is a graduate student at Duke Div, a co-founder of Churchrater.com, and a writer for The Huffington Post. A native of Alaska, his work will include expanding the Council's social networking capabilities and helping coordinate its opposition to the marriage amendment.

And Lisa Talbott is also a Duke Div graduate student and Alaska native. A former classroom teacher with experience writing curriculum, she is pursuing ordination as a Methodist elder. Her primary focus will be on the Council's work with food, specifically in developing a curriculum around food and social justice.

Rural Life Committee Supports Fracking Ban

The NC Council of Churches' Rural Life Committee has issued a statement supporting the ban on hydraulic drilling in the state. Citing the lack of research on horizontal hydraulic fracturing, the experiences of rural landowners affected by gas drilling, and the potential impacts on rural communities, the committee warned that the risk posed by "fracking" is unacceptably high. The committee also warned about the dangers of exploitation.

"With this statement, the Rural Life Committee recognizes all of the gifts that rural communities bring to the table," said Council Program Associate Chris Liu-Beers. "Every day, we're learning more about how rural communities' health and well-being could be jeopardized by fracking. It's critical that we maintain North Carolina's current ban on fracking until we really understand all the implications for our land, water and health. In the meantime, we advise all landowners to speak with a lawyer and take time to explore all the options before signing any mineral rights leases with energy companies."

The arrival of natural gas companies seeking mineral rights leasing for future natural gas drilling in rural North Carolina communities has raised concerns about predatory contracts, landowner rights, and potential impacts to citizens' quality of life in counties believed to have natural gas reserves. Learn more by visiting the Council's website, www.nccouncilofchurches.org.

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On the Web at:
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Abraham Jam



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