

FORWARD TOGETHER

A MORAL MESSAGE FOR THE NATION

REV. DR. WILLIAM J. BARBER II
WITH BARBARA ZELTER



ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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With Mary Evelyn Rider O'Neill (*Phil Fonville photo*)

What Is Life?

What is life? Is it to be lived for or dreamed about? Perhaps both.

Maybe our dreaming determines our living to some degree. Yet so much tries to kill our dreams, snatch our dreams, take away our dreams, defer our dreams, and keep our dreams from reality.

Maybe then, we must fight for, pray for, and ask God to grant us the gift of dreaming afresh and anew. Dreaming *God's Dreams!* Dreaming, hoping, and delighting in the things of God freshly poured out upon our hearts and minds like the morning dew. How we need it so! Then, perhaps if we dream right, we will live right, and then we shall know the answer to the inquirer's quest.

What is life? Is it to be lived or dreamed about, or both?

The Spirit brings the gift of dreaming into the now. What God has hoped, becomes, even if at first just in our thoughts, a new reality. We begin to see and dream in the now what God has always wanted since the beginning.

God's Dreams become our desire when the Spirit is at work.

Men may never understand, but this is what happened deep in the soul place of Sojourner, Mary, Martin, Medgar, Malcolm, Harriet, Fannie Lou, and Mandela. What moved them and so many others?

God's Dreams! By the Spirit, come take a look.

The cow lying down with the bear. Children playing over the hole of a snake. Lion and lamb frolicking together. *God's Dreams!* Humanity redeemed. Grace imparted. Pain pushed away. Tears wiped. Death vanquished. The hungry fed. The hurting healed. Justice ruling. Righteousness prevailing. Deliverance complete. Satan snared.

God's Dreams! What a wonder! What a look!

Our lives are transformed when we dream *God's Dreams!* No longer mere mundane Movement. Away with despair and life without purpose! We now rise, captivated and controlled by *God's Dreams!*

And so, it seems our dreams determine our living, and we live because of our dreams. Oh, Spirit of the living God, invade! Invade! Invade! Invade once again the nightmarish corners of our minds. Loose the prophetic flow into the depths of our being with *God's Dreams*

...so that we might live anew and afresh!

– Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II

Dedicated to the genius of all the justice and freedom devotees since 2006 who embraced the vision, worked to design this movement and gave their souls and time to it. Worthy of note also is the huge collection of brilliant others—lawyers, scholars, clergy/theologians, organizers, administrators, interns, volunteers, allies—who keep this movement on course.

CONTENTS

Welcome:
Preaching in the Public Square
vii

Introduction to the Forward Together
Moral Movement and Moral Monday Rallies
1

CHAPTER 1
Historic Thousands on Jones Street Rally 7:
“The Need to Know Who We Are in Times Like These”
7

CHAPTER 2
Moral Monday Rally 1:
“Witness Against Extremism”
20

CHAPTER 3
Moral Monday Rally 2:
“Healthcare”
26

CHAPTER 4
Moral Monday Rally 4:
“Equal Protection under the Law”
32

CHAPTER 5
Moral Monday Rallies 5 and 12:
“Education, Economic Justice, and Voting Rights”
41

CHAPTER 6
Moral Monday Rally 8:
“Labor, Women, and Economic Justice”
61

CHAPTER 7
Moral Monday Rally 11
(Monday after the Trayvon Martin Case Verdict):
“United for Women”
68

CHAPTER 8
Moral Monday Rally 13:
“This Is the Day”
79

CHAPTER 9
Fiftieth Anniversary of March on Washington Rally:
“Taking the Dream Home”
91

CHAPTER 10
Historic Thousands on Jones Street Rally 8:
“The Call to Higher Ground”
103

CHAPTER 11
Our Alliance with LGBT Rights:
“A Look Back”
120

CHAPTER 12
Our Alliance with Labor Union Rights:
“Coming Together to Go Beyond”
133

CHAPTER 13
Beyond Protest to Voter Mobilization
150

CHAPTER 14
Lessons from the Movement
158

Epilogue
162

Acknowledgments
165

Notes
169

Index
171

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II
177

WELCOME

PREACHING IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE



Moral March on Raleigh 2014 (*Eric Preston photo*)

Moral messages in the pulpit or the public square are designed not just to be spoken and heard, but to shape the prophetic consciousness of a Movement and of society. To paraphrase the Rev. Dr. James Forbes, longtime pastor of the historic Riverside Church in New York: *Prophets believe that what they proclaim on any day can be transformed into real action.*

Words can become flesh. The prophetic voice rises when government systems and sometimes even religious systems abdicate their responsibility to those whom scripture calls the *least of these*. When the forces of extremism become so overwhelming that they depress the hope of the people, the prophetic voice and mission is to connect words and actions in ways that build restorative hope, so a Movement for restorative justice can arise.

This book is an attempt to capture the practice of preaching in the public square, which is where prophetic inquiry must be at work.

Messages built from the perspective of authentic prophetic inquiry will insist that political decisions and public policies—which determine who will be the haves and the have-nots in the realms of wages; healthcare; public education; voting rights; workers’/ immigrants’/ LGBTQ/women’s rights; and criminal and environmental justice—are all deeply moral concerns. The authentic call of the Spirit will not allow pastors and preachers to be satisfied with words quarantined within the walls of the sanctuary. The moment when misery abounds necessitates messages that can move the masses to engage in deeply moral actions that question mean and hurtful public policies.

Prophetic messages wake people up, not just emotionally but also to the possibility of change and their particular roles in moving **Forward Together** in the push for that change.

When I was a student at Duke Divinity School, Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa once raised a question at Duke Chapel: *Who will join God?* Progressive evangelical activist Rev. Jim Wallis has made the call for us to consider God’s politics. Duke Divinity School professor of homiletics, Dr. William Turner, has suggested that any claim of spirituality is terribly suspect unless that claim is followed by a clear quarrel with the world and its systems of injustice. And my father, a preacher and teacher like Dr. Turner and me, taught me the following principle articulated by British statesman and philosopher Francis Bacon:

Knowledge is not a couch whereon to rest a searching and restless spirit; or a terrace for a wandering mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a sort of commanding ground for strife and contention; or a shop for profit and sale; but a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man’s estate.¹

The role of prophetic moral activity is to awaken people to deep consciousness first, and then to engage them to use this new consciousness as a guidance system for framing a Movement that shifts the center of gravity of political discourse and action away from its accommodation to domination, and back to the deepest moral values of our faith. In essence, the role of prophetic social consciousness is to say to both political systems and to the people:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin,

and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.”

MATTHEW 23:23 ESV

The messages necessary for building Moral Movements must constantly refocus and critique issues around “the weightier matters,” or what matters most.

This book brings you messages spoken within a particular political context and climate—that of an extremist, regressive North Carolina legislation that disenfranchised and harmed multitudes of people in our state. However, the messages speak to universal needs, values, and hopes.

The proclamations recorded in this book employ our deepest prophetic moral framework to address the weightier matters before us all, in North Carolina and everywhere, as we must confront those who vow to act in our names but who act against the common good. Therefore the spirit of these messages is universal and useful to all of you who hope to enliven and strengthen your own efforts to achieve justice where you live.

There can be no Moral Movement or transformational politics without a decisive and deliberate attempt to use moral language and framing in a way that builds a new consciousness among the masses of people, which gives them the kind of critical analysis and charismatic hope to carry on and carry out the Movement.

Under the oppressive forces and pressures of extremism, people tend to *expire*, to give up. The role of prophetic moral messaging is to *inspire* people, to breathe life into the masses who hardly dare to hope for more. It is to give people permission to morally act up! Henry Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience* said: *The only thing I repent of is my good behavior in the face of injustice.* He did not write a book for mere academic purposes or give speeches for mere inspiration. His speeches were a form of his own repentance, as well as a call to action. In this spirit we offer the words you find here.

This book tracks our Forward Together Moral Movement in North Carolina during the key years of 2013 and 2014, as resistance to the hateful and regressive policies enacted by Tea Party extremists since 2010 gathered great force. This Movement did not spring up overnight after the 2010 election and redistricting to stack our state with right-wing leadership. Rather, it was built on the structural bones of long-lived North Carolina NAACP local chapters, and was forged on top of those with intentional alliances across many groups in our state and a vision

that we could assert a united moral vision of political and ethical fusion against all odds. So in addition to the Historic Thousands on Jones Street and Moral Monday speeches, we include those that bound us with two key constituencies: our allies who have championed Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) rights and labor rights. We hope you find our work of use for yours.

William J. Barber, II

Pastor, Greenleaf Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Goldsboro,
North Carolina

President, North Carolina Conference of the NAACP
Architect of the Forward Together Moral Movement

INTRODUCTION

TO THE FORWARD TOGETHER MORAL MOVEMENT AND MORAL MONDAY RALLIES



In the tradition of Dr. King (*Sue Sturgis photo*)

The speeches and scenes in this book focus on North Carolina and our NC NAACP-led Forward Together Moral Movement, which unexpectedly has ignited the interest of people across the nation and beyond. We hope that our experience informs and encourages yours, as you work for the common good in times of globalization and growing inequality everywhere. To

understand the particular American Southern context from which our Movement arose, the following words may be of use. They are adapted and expanded from a narrative of 2013 Forward Together activities that was written by Rob Stephens and attorney Al McSurely.

The forces that profit from racial division and deprivation do not rest. Since the mid-1960s, when the Southern freedom Movement was at its peak, shaking the very structures of Jim Crow, opponents of equal rights have been working on new tricks to divide and conquer the multiracial people's Movement against what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called the Evil Triplets in the United States: racism, poverty, and militarism. They have set up a national network with their own hidden funding and propaganda machines. They have directed billions of dollars to the George Wallace-John Birch base in the South, believing there are millions of whites who are open to racist appeals.

In November 2012, with the help of an unconstitutional racially gerrymandered scheme in North Carolina, these forces hand-picked extremist candidates, slipped them thousands of dollars for their campaigns, and overwhelmed candidates who represented the interests of poor and working people in North Carolina. In that 2012 election, despite the highest turnout in history for black, Latino, and progressive white voters, the extremists won a large majority of the seats in the North Carolina General Assembly.

We were not just in the fight *of* our lives. For many of us, it was a fight *for* our lives. We did not shrink from the challenge.

We took the struggle straight to our opponents' doors, armed with the best research to wage a well-organized nonviolent policy debate against their cruel policies. Tens of thousands of new friends joined the Forward Together Moral Movement, grasping its principles of grace, courage, and commitment. People all over the world are now looking to us for guidance in building a moral anti-racism, anti-poverty, pro-labor Movement to expose and reverse regressive policies wherever they ascend.

One way to understand the current cultural context is through the language of **Reconstruction**. We have talked with anti-racism forces across the nation in dozens of speeches, internet videos, and private conversations about a prophetic vision of a **Third Reconstruction** in our land. It's a vision based on our faith in the good people of all races, not just in North Carolina, but across the South. We sincerely believe that millions of Southerners are prepared to join the effort to repair the breaches caused by slavery and segregation within our Southern

human family. We have empirical evidence that tens of thousands of white sisters and brothers in North Carolina and beyond are prepared to join in this effort.

What are these three Reconstructions?

After most of our great-great-grandparents were liberated from slavery in 1865, there was a short period of the **First Reconstruction** in the South. A coalition of faith-based progressives and ordinary white tenant farmers and workers joined freed African Americans in a wildly hopeful effort known as the Fusion political movement in late 19th-century North Carolina. They succeeded in a hard-won push to build public schools, roads, and hospitals, and to move talented African American leaders into elected office and leadership positions of all kinds. A white backlash violently ended this period of political and social fusion, and white terrorists roamed freely in the South, enforcing a rigid apartheid system that lasted well past 1954.

The **Second Reconstruction** period began in 1954 with the NAACP's magnificent court victory over segregation in *Brown versus Board of Education*. In the next decade or so, Southern warriors in the NAACP and other organizations made great strides in dismantling the most blatant forms of segregation in schools, employment, and public life. Most people know this Second Reconstruction as the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. However, an insidious backlash developed in the mid-60s. Ironically, the vehicle for the backlash was the party of Lincoln. It now welcomed white extremists and politicians who appeared to have gained control over the once proud anti-slavery party.

We believe we are now in a period of the **Third Reconstruction**, our 21st-century wave of popular revolt against regressive extremism that has squelched economic human rights. The notion of individualism and social Darwinism and disinvestment in the common good has now reached a punitive extreme. People are suffering greatly in this era when jobs disappear to the lowest global bidder and the social safety net is seen as a crutch for the undeserving.

The Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ) movement, led by the NC NAACP in coalition with organizations across the state, took form in 2007. It was an annual protest gathering at our state legislative center to bring people together to stand against our then-Democratic leadership to demand the basic rights guaranteed by our state Constitution. Coalition members developed a 14-Point People's Agenda that articulated common goals.

Although thousands of people have been coming to our annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street People's Assemblies and other protests since 2005, it was not until April of 2013 that our prophetic

vision materialized every Monday. Total attendance at the Raleigh Moral Mondays exceeded thirty-five thousand. People of all races, classes, sexual identities, and political persuasions drove hundreds of miles from the mountains and the coast to Raleigh for 13 Moral Mondays during the 2013 Raleigh legislative session to bear moral witness against the cruel policies of the extremists. Nearly 950 persons were arrested: some in wheelchairs, some with cancer, some unemployed and seeking work, some overwhelmed with college debt, some police officers who understood flaws in our criminal justice system, and regular people who simply knew things were stacked against their hard-working habits as they still suffered from lack of health insurance and other hurdles such as the North Carolina legislative cuts in unemployment insurance. Thousands more came to show solidarity with the witnesses whose conscience drove them to civil disobedience. For both rally participants and those engaging for the first time in civil disobedience, this was a brand new and scary experience. But the moment demanded action, and the Forward Together Moral Movement was a catalyst with an open door for ordinary people to speak their minds.

Beyond all this action in Raleigh in 2013, at least thirty thousand more attended Moral Monday rallies from Sylva in the western North Carolina mountains to the Outer Banks on the state's eastern coast. Many people who attended these rallies returned to Raleigh for later weekly protests, comparing the events to a personal spiritual revival of solidarity and hope. Many thousands of others enthusiastically joined in from afar through Livestream, videos, YouTube, and news media.

The media caught the spirit and spread the word nationally and internationally about our self-described Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina. Our critics also helped the Movement go viral. One North Carolina legislator, desperate to minimize our power and message, called our growing weekly protests Moron Mondays. Opponents also resorted to 1950s McCarthy-era fear tactics and called us *outside agitators*, *leftists*, and *radicals*, because they could not debate the foundations of our claims, the breadth of our coalition, or the faces and pain of the people who kept telling their stories and driving even deeper our moral critique.

Through this Forward Together Moral Movement during our **Third Reconstruction**, the NC NAACP has added many new black, white, and Latino members to our local NAACP branches, strengthening our position as the largest State Conference in the South and the second largest in the nation. We convened 38 separate Moral Monday

Forward Together direct actions (13 in Raleigh; 25 around the state) in 2013, and also led a 26-county Spring 2013 tour.

Through all this organized action against regressive legislation in our state, we have reinvigorated and continued the historically venerable Long Walk to Justice in North Carolina. This work is challenging and demands persistence, strategic action on multiple fronts (the streets, courts, media, and voting booths). It is undergirded with a keen sense of hope and possibility.

We are faced by forces extremely hostile to our purposes. Warriors from the 1960s Movement tell us they underestimated the viciousness and the power of their opponents. The right-wing extremists view the emerging new Southern electorate as destructive to their way of life. Their fear about the fundamental change that is happening in the South causes them to view us with suspicion. Our work is dangerous and daunting. We find strength in the words of Paul:

*But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost,
but among those who have faith and so are saved.*

HEBREWS 10:39 NRSV

By staying the course, we know:

...if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

ISAIAH 58:10-12 ESV

My brothers and sisters, we must live into the moral standard for all—individuals and political systems as well—that was proclaimed by the prophet Micah:

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your
God?*

MICAH 6:8 NRSV

We must also stand on the principles embodied by moral leaders like the Rev. J.W. Hood and the Rev. Samuel Ashley, who insisted in 1868 that the following words be inscribed in our North Carolina Constitution:

Section 1. That we hold it to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.

Section. 2. That all political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.

I am comforted in the knowledge that we are gathering a mighty force of people of faith. I am aware there are many different names and beliefs about the nature of the faith we each hold. But I know if we take risks of faith, if we reach across old man-made breaches in our human family, steady in our march toward justice, we may be called repairers of the breach. As we say when groups of protesters leave the North Carolina Legislative Building in buses going to jail:

Thank you. We love you.

Forward Together. Not One Step Back!



Rev. Barber surrounded on stage at Mass Moral March on Raleigh, lifting the message of "Higher Ground."

(Eric Preston photo)

1

“THE NEED TO KNOW WHO WE ARE IN TIMES LIKE THESE”

HISTORIC THOUSANDS ON JONES STREET RALLY 7

February 15, 2013
[No civil disobedience]



The moral fusion across faiths, genders, generations, and ethnicities—Imam Adam Beyah, Rev. Nancy Petty, Rev. Nelson Johnson, Joyce Johnson (*Phil Fonville photo*)

We know who we are.

We know we are called to bear witness at this moment of history.

We have faith there is a better way for North Carolina.

There is a better way for America. There is a better way for our world.

We mobilize for a better way.

BACKGROUND

For the last six years on the Saturday nearest to the date the NAACP was founded (President Lincoln's birth date, February 12), the NC NAACP has organized thousands of diverse and equal people and organizations for an assembly known as "Historic Thousands on Jones Street" (HKonJ). Jones Street in Raleigh is where the North Carolina General Assembly meets and rules. This gathering's purpose has been to remind us and our representatives to whom we have temporarily ceded some of our powers that, as our state Constitution reminds us, *power must be based in the will of the people and used only for the good of the whole.*

Recognizing that the representatives sent by voters to the People's House on Jones Street have life-and-death powers over every man, woman, and child in North Carolina, the NC NAACP began in 2006 to build a diverse and inclusive People's Assembly. The convergence came after Rev. Dr. Barber and his team assumed leadership over the NC NAACP, the most powerful and oldest anti-racism organization in the nation. Starting with 16 partners and about five thousand delegates and individuals who attended the first People's Assembly in February 2007, each year more and more partners, delegates, and ordinary concerned people have joined the Movement.

At the seventh People's Assembly in February of 2013, individuals representing 145 coalition partners and others gathered at historic Shaw University, where the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded in 1960, and walked the mile or so to the People's House on Jones Street. They came from diverse backgrounds, organizations, and regions of the state. They were old, young, middle-aged, gay, straight, black, white, Latino, Asian American, and Native American. They were pro-labor champions and people who had no idea what a labor union was. They were deeply religious people, and people who had given up on organized religion. But they all agreed with the essentials of the 14-Point anti-racist, anti-discrimination, anti-poverty, anti-militarism and pro-justice agenda of the Assembly.

The seventh HKonJ Assembly focused on ending poverty and economic injustice, following the highly successful Truth and Hope Tour of Poverty that the NC NAACP and some of its partners had conducted in 2012. Advocates, scholars, journalists, and students shared a big bus and drove across North Carolina to dozens of impoverished areas, putting a face on poverty.

The General Assembly—as opposed to the People's Assembly—had just arrived in Raleigh. It was dominated by politicians who were recruited

and funded by national right-wing groups determined to consolidate the old conservative and discriminatory folkways of the South, in order to provide a Southern base for a national attack on civil rights advancement and progressive policies.

**NORTH CAROLINA CONSTITUTION, ARTICLE I.
DECLARATION OF RIGHTS**

That the great, general, and essential principles of liberty and free government may be recognized and established, and that the relations of this State to the Union and government of the United States and those of the people of this State to the rest of the American people may be defined and affirmed, we do declare that:

SECTION 1. THE EQUALITY AND RIGHTS OF PERSONS. We hold it to be self-evident that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.

SECTION 2. SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE. All political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.

SECTION 3. INTERNAL GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE. The people of this State have the inherent, sole, and exclusive right of regulating the internal government and police thereof, and of altering or abolishing their Constitution and form of government whenever it may be necessary to their safety and happiness; but every such right shall be exercised in pursuance of law and consistently with the Constitution of the United States.

■ ■ *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.
But we are not of them who draw back unto destruction; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

HEBREWS 10:38-39 KJV

Properly defining oneself, one's nature, and one's calling is a critical philosophical discipline that has penetrating practical implications. This task is particularly compelling when one is in crisis or facing seasons of challenge or confronting threats that seek to take one's identity and/or redefine it. Knowing who you are is critical to your sanity and your ability to sustain yourself when facing what Paul Tillich

called the very threat of non-being and non-existence. This is how the slaves made it through slavery. Yes, they were called everything but children of God by the oppressive slave masters and system of slavery, but somehow deep in their spiritual DNA they were able to yet sing: *Before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free.* They knew they were not slaves.

The civil rights and justice communities know this lesson well. For 104 years, the NAACP and other civil rights organizations have been dismissed, cursed, and feared by those who did not want to deal honestly with issues of racial and class disparities. When whites and blacks put out the call for forming the NAACP on what would have been Lincoln's one-hundredth birthday, February 12, 1909, they were called un-American and disturbers of the peace, even Communists.

Dr. King was called a troublemaker and even a race-baiter 45 years ago as he led the call for a civil rights and economic justice Movement. He called for a Poor People's Movement to address the glaring realities of poverty even as he loved America enough to say: *Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds.*¹ Dr. King loved the world enough to say that the Evil Triplets of poverty, racism, and war are forms of violence that exist in a vicious cycle, interrelated. They stand as barriers to our living in a Beloved Community. Few listened.

Nevertheless, this vision resonated with black and white students from the urban and rural communities of America, who started the sit-in Movement, and SNCC, the Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee that was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, under the tutelage of our own rural scholar and activist, Ella Baker. The young SNCC leaders were maligned and disrespected by those who wanted to maintain the status quo of inequality, but they kept on because they knew who they were.

From Moses to Jesus, the Bible tells us that those who fought for justice—those who spoke truth to power, those who refused to accept that injustice and inequality had to exist and that there was no better way—always found themselves hated, hounded, and heaped upon with false accusations simply because they believed in the necessity of speaking and working for the cause of righteousness and building a more just community. This lack of majority support is why the just must live by faith and must know exactly who we are.

As we gather here on February 9, 2013, some will try to define us in their own ways and will try to obstruct and obfuscate our message. Given that skewing, we must know ourselves. We must know where we stand.

The Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ) People's Coalition is made up of tens of thousands of ordinary North Carolinians: African Americans, Latinos, Americans of European ancestry, Native Americans, Asian Americans, old and young, gay and straight, all of us human beings who share a vision of enough for all.

We stand against systems and policies rooted in systemic classism and racism. The term classism can refer to personal prejudice against so-called lower classes as well as to institutional classism, just as the term racism can refer strictly to personal bigotry or to institutional racism that displays itself in areas of housing, jobs, education, banking, and every other area that shapes work life and opportunities for success in our land.

Our agenda is justice. We believe that when the economic, social, and spiritual life of our state moves toward justice, the circulation of the blood of politics improves, which is a healthy thing.

We mourn the grim realities of so many North Carolinians:

Today, roughly 8–10 percent of our workforce is officially unemployed; the real rate is much higher. Black unemployment is twice as bad. The gap between rich and poor is wider and deeper than during the Great Depression; 1 percent of Americans owns 40 percent of the nation's wealth.

There are 1.7 million North Carolina residents living in poverty, and more than seven hundred thousand of us live in deep poverty. Many of these are the working poor, and six hundred thousand of our suffering impoverished persons are children. More than one hundred thirty thousand of these children are Latino. Children of all races are crippled by poverty in our state: White children: 214,487; African American children: 207,421; Native American children: 11,239. These are real people with faces, hunger, and despair! And they represent well over 20 percent of our population!

Forty-four percent of African American children live in poverty. Ten of our 100 counties have had a poverty rate of over 20 percent for 30 years.²

Last year we visited 27 towns, cities, and counties on our Truth and Hope Poverty Tour, to put a face on these numbers. We cannot ignore this issue of dire poverty in our midst and the suffering of these individuals, our brothers and sisters. We cannot continue the attention-violence we

commit against them in public policy and private activity. We are all tied together.

We know who we are. We know we are called to bear witness at this moment of history. We have faith there is a better way for North Carolina. There is a better way for America. There is a better way for our world. We mobilize for a better way.

We of the Forward Together Moral Movement in North Carolina have no partisan agenda. We do not care about Democrats or Republicans or regular politics. We stand together for five nonpartisan, human values:

1. **Economic sustainability and ending poverty.** We support this value by fighting for full employment, living wages, a green economy, labor rights, affordable housing, targeted empowerment zones, strong safety-net services for the poor, fair policies for immigrants, infrastructure development, and fair tax reform.
2. **Educational equality.** We support this value by pushing to ensure that every child receives a high-quality, well-funded, constitutional, racially diverse public education. We also support equitable funding for historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and funding so that every aspiring child has access to community college and university education that our state Constitution guarantees.
3. **Healthcare for all.** We seek to ensure access to the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security, and the forms of environmental protection that guarantee clean water, air, and lands—our ecological home must be clean.
4. **Fairness in the criminal justice system.** We will continue to challenge inequalities in our legal and court and prison systems, to gain our constitutionally granted equal protection under the law for black, brown, and poor white people.
5. **Voting rights.** We will defend the right to vote by standing against suppression tactics such as Voter ID mandates, restrictions of early voting, race-based redistricting plans, or any other effort that undermines equal protection under the law.

And yet instead of focusing on a progressive agenda, a unifying agenda, the new ultraconservative leadership unleashed a cruel and unusual quadruple attack on labor rights, unemployment benefits, Medicaid

provision, and voting rights that will have devastating impact on all poor and working people in our state.

And beyond attacks on unemployment benefits, Medicaid, and voting rights, they are considering tax “reform” which would cut corporate income tax and force North Carolinians in these difficult economic times to pay higher sales tax on many everyday services like haircuts, so they can cut taxes on their corporate friends.

Seemingly insensitive to the lives of everyday people, these legislators speak in a strange tongue. Despite their constitutional charge to work for the good of the whole, they have suggested, for example, that the poor don’t need healthcare, that every county’s charities should take care of their own, that the federal government giving back billions of taxpayer dollars to help the poor is a violation of states’ rights, and that lazy unemployed people will go out and find jobs if we take their unemployment insurance safety nets away.

They speak of the necessary evil of cutting benefits for the poor and the unemployed. But this is not necessary evil; it’s unnecessary injustice! It is unnecessary meanness! It’s wrong! It’s hurtful! It’s Robin Hood in reverse! It is morally unconscionable, constitutionally inconsistent, and economically insane public policy! It’s sinful, and it’s NOT a necessary evil.

The decisions being made in this legislative house may be a game for some, adhering to the partisan line for others, intoxication with power for a few, and payback to their wealthy donors. They say they won the election and that the state’s people are on their side. But which people?

We are witnessing a revival and renewed commitment to implement policy rooted in the regressive policies of states’ rights, classism, racial discrimination, and economic injustice. They may have the votes but we have the voice! And we must dramatize these shameful actions for all North Carolinians and even the nation to see, in hopes that they will change. And if they do not change, we must mobilize in hope that the people and voters will challenge them in their home districts and become educated for when they have to judge these elected leaders later at the ballot box.

We call on the leaders of North Carolina to reject efforts by extremists on the far right to govern for the good of a few. We call on you to remain moderate, to do what the North Carolina Constitution requires, and to govern for the good of the whole. We are here to call on elected leaders to remember who they are and why they were elected. You did not swear to be Democrats or Republicans, but to do

what is best for the good of the whole. You swore to uphold our state Constitution and here is what it says in Article 1, the Declaration of Rights, Section 1. The equality and rights of persons:

We hold it to be self-evident that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.

Section 2 of our state Constitution concerns the sovereignty of the people, and it says that:

All political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.

Section 12 of our state Constitution speaks to our right of assembly and petition:

The people have a right to assemble together to consult for their common good, to instruct their representatives, and to apply to the General Assembly for redress of grievances; but secret political societies are dangerous to the liberties of a free people and shall not be tolerated.

So governor and state legislators, let us instruct you!

*We assemble here for hope.
We love this state and country and all people, even those we criticize.
We just want to see this state do God's will.
And don't mistake our gathering as just a moment!
We will bring the plight of the poor to the agenda again and again.
We will march in your community and educate voters and hold forums,
and we will not rest!*

Because we know there is a better way. You didn't just swear to uphold the Constitution; you put your hand on a Bible. That Bible says your private failings are, like for all of us, between you and God, but your public actions and your use of public power must be measured by the mandates of God's standard of justice. So if you are going to claim a commitment to morality and if you are going to keep having chaplains

open your legislative sessions with prayer, then be it known unto you and all of us that the same Bible you swore on says:

*Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees
to deprive the poor of their rights
and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
making widows their prey
and robbing the fatherless.
What will you do on the day of reckoning,
when disaster comes from afar?
To whom will you run for help?
Where will you leave your riches?
Nothing will remain but for you to cringe among the captives
or fall among the slain.*

ISAIAH 10:1-4 NIV

It also declares in Isaiah 58:9-12 (NIV):

*If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend
yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.
The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

The prophet Jeremiah in chapter 5, verse 28 (NET) rebuked those who win at the expense of the poor:

*[The wicked] have grown fat and sleek.
There is no limit to the evil things they do.*

*They do not plead the cause of the fatherless in such a way as to win it.
They do not defend the rights of the poor.*

And Jeremiah in chapter 22, verse 3 (NIV), interpreted the justice mandate of the divine:

This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.

The prophet Micah in chapter 6, verse 8 (NKJV), gave three simple rules of the Lord for each of us to honor:

*And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?*

Moving to the gospels, from Matthew 25:42-45 (NABRE) we learn how Jesus critiqued those who thought they were righteous in their adherence to the temple rules, even as they ignored real pain in the streets:

“For I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you gave me no welcome; naked and you gave me no clothing; ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’ Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’ He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’”

Now some commentators have said: *Talk all you want, march all you want, organize all you want, even pray and say what the Bible says, but they have a supermajority in the General Assembly, so they can do all they want, and you cannot stop them.* And that’s true, they do have a supermajority, due to the gerrymandering of our state House and Senate districts after the 2010 census. But the 170 legislators inside those buildings on Jones Street don’t have the last word! They have some power, but not all power. And so we move with hope and with joy.

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

But we are not of them who draw back unto destruction; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

HEBREWS 10:38-39 KJV

By faith we warn those who pass policies that hurt the least of these and the sick:

Watch out; God might fix it!

And...you may one day need the very healthcare you try to take from others! Your money might get funny and you have to experience the poverty you ignore!

Wrong and evil have inbred the seeds of *can't*. Those who use their power *can't* stand, because God is not mocked! Remember there is a power higher than us all, and so by faith we will demand economic justice and address poverty. We will:

Stand courageously
Organize successfully
Mobilize consistently
Speak the truth relentlessly
Pray fervently
Preach prophetically
Sue legally
Vote massively

And we will not go away quietly or back down submissively. We will meet this challenge faithfully.

Even if we don't have political votes, by faith we know that wrong and meanness only have temporary victories. We serve a supernatural God who super-rules the world.

Why do we have hope? There was a time men had a supermajority over women, but the sisters didn't give up! They won the right to vote! A women named Myrlie Evers led women in the South, and my own mother helped her children to integrate schools, and a whole new group of young women are here today to lead the way.

At one time business had monopolies, and there were no labor laws, but workers organized! How do you think we got minimum wages, the

40-hour work week, and the right to express work grievances under Title 7 of the Civil Rights law? Somebody pushed against the odds and won!

In the 1960s the Dixiecrats thought they had a supermajority. Don't you remember that boastful line expressed by Alabama governor George Wallace: *Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!* But when people by faith pushed back, they made that governor out to be a liar.

Apartheid had a supermajority in South Africa, but it came down, and Nelson Mandela was elected up!

Meanness, money, hate, racism, and the deep dark vein of intolerance thought it had a supermajority, but on the MLK national holiday in 2013, for the second time the world heard:

I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

If we do our part, God can still change hearts. And so we are not discouraged by one election. We are not dismantled or discombobulated. We stand on truth and justice and on the power of God and the power of the people. We the people still have a say.

Yes, these are tough times, but faith says there's still a God who can bless and keep us anyhow. Faith doesn't give in to evil. Faith stands up to Pharaoh. Faith speaks truth to power. Faith takes on Goliath. Faith refuses to accept sinister situations. Refuses to be a slave to other folks' oppression. Refuses to be chattel property of injustice.

Faith, and moving Forward Together, is the only way to save our souls and the soul of this nation. Faith is believing in spite of the obstacles. Faith is knowing that when God helps you, there is no challenge that can't be met, no mountain that can't be climbed, no valley that can't be crossed, no enemy that can't be defeated. No darkness that can't be overcome. No pressure that can't be pushed through. No political power that can't be overturned. No challenge that can't be survived. No war of the spirit that can't be subdued. Faith is believing despite the evidence. Believing despite the odds against us. The truth of the matter is we've come this far by faith.

We have got to hold on. Too many challenges abound. Too many injustices are real. Too much inequality still exists. Too much racism, too much meanness. But we are not those who fall back unto destruction.

We persevere. We must hold on to our faith and declare before God to this nation called America that when it comes to our rights ordained by God and guaranteed by the Constitution, we will never lose the faith, and we will never, ever, ever turn back!

Our faith might get bruised and battered. Our hope for this nation to live out its highest principles might get challenged. We might get discouraged. But we'll never lose our faith. Weeping may endure for a night, mean politicians may endure for a night, tea parties may endure for a night, but we still believe joy comes in the morning. Dry bones in the valley can come together. We will never lose our faith that the poor can be lifted, the sick can be healed, our children can be educated, and the falsely accused and imprisoned can be vindicated. We know and trust that our communities can come together. Our rights can be protected.

We will never lose our faith. We might have some dark Fridays. But we will not lose our faith, because we know that dark Fridays have to give way to bright Sunday morning resurrections. We shall overcome. We shall survive. Justice will win. Truth will live. We will never lose our faith!

2

“WITNESS AGAINST EXTREMISM”

MORAL MONDAY RALLY 1

April 29, 2013

Arrestees: 17



With Barbara Zelter, marching into the first witness
action on April 29, 2013 (*Phil Fonville photo*)

*We call on all people of goodwill to join us, that we might build
the bridges of understanding, not the walls of division.*

BACKGROUND

On April 29, 2013, 17 people and some of their friends and allies gathered at Rev. Byron Wade’s historic Davie Street Presbyterian Church in Raleigh



Clergy prayer on April 29, 2013, in the North Carolina Legislative Building (*Phil Fonville photo*)

to prepare for the moral witness they had decided to make that evening at the People's House on Jones Street.

The North Carolina General Assembly routinely held a short session on Monday evenings, and we knew that 5:00 p.m., right after work, would be the best time for working people to show their support for the witness. Holding the witness action on Monday also symbolized our belief that the moral call for justice goes hand-in-hand with the constitutional call for the common good, on any day of the week.

That evening the 17 clergy, activists, and students walked up the stairs of the People's House and began praying and singing outside the golden doors of the North Carolina Senate and House. The message was simple. They said they opposed the extremist policies coming out of the People's House. They believed people had the right to instruct their representatives in their House to pass laws for the good of the whole. They had read the North Carolina Constitution.

After a short while, the 17 were arrested, handcuffed, and bused to jail. In an impromptu rally, supporters outside tracked down the prison transport bus in the back of the building and cheered the moral witnesses as they were carried off in handcuffs and loaded onto the bus. They repeated over and over again: *Thank you. We love you.*

ON APRIL 29, 2013, BEFORE THEIR WITNESS ACTION, THE FORWARD TOGETHER MORAL MOVEMENT PUBLISHED AN OPEN

LETTER CALLED “WHY WE ARE HERE.” THE LETTER INCLUDED THESE WORDS:

From the moral framework of the Scriptures and our Constitution, we are calling together a coalition of goodwill—a nonviolent volunteer army of love to oppose this legislature’s heartless, ideologically driven agenda. We call on all the people of goodwill to join us, that we might build the bridges of understanding, not the walls of division. We call on all residents of North Carolina who believe in the common good to pray and partner with us as we use the tools of protest and the tactics of nonviolent moral suasion to illuminate for the nation the shameful acts taking place here. We are not alone. We shall speak and we shall act. We will become “the trumpet of conscience” and “the beloved community” that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called upon us to be, echoing the God of our mothers and fathers in the faith.

Now is the time. Here is the place. We are the people. And we will be heard.

“Today, in North Carolina’s General Assembly, we will engage in an act of conscience—praying and protesting and violating with good conscience the rules of our legislature concerning our gathering. But we do it in love, and we do it in the spirit of justice. Forty-five years ago today, after Dr. King had been assassinated, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy and other ministers led our delegation to Washington, D.C., to meet with Cabinet members and congresspeople to challenge them regarding the ugly legacy of poverty and injustice. They continued the Movement then; we continue it now.

The greatest of all of the righteous principles in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures have one common theme regarding matters of private failure: We are to go to our priests and be forgiven.

But in the public square, the constant refrain is: *Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, mind, and soul, and then love your neighbor as yourself.* In the public square, the constant call is to *preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the prisoner, to heal the sick, and to set your prisoners free.* The constant refrain is: *Let justice roll down like water.* The constant refrain is: *Learn to do right. Care for the children. Lift up the widows and the vulnerable, and then you shall be called repairers of the breach.*

I could not help but think as we come here today that one of the signs in this Legislative Building includes the name of James Harris. Mr. Harris was a part of that early group of black and white Fusion politicians in 1868 who said we must move out of the past of slavery and racial division to a new land, and we must start with the writing of a fresh Constitution. James Harris, J.W. Hood, and ministers helped

write the words that every legislator in North Carolina swears on a Bible to uphold, words that declare that everything legislators do must be done solely for the good of the whole of the people in our state. These North Carolina constitutional principles fit with the ethics of the federal Declaration of Independence when it declared that: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [persons] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.

Our own North Carolina Constitution lists that our unalienable rights are *life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruit of their own labor, the pursuit of happiness*. And listen—this is where we must hold them accountable. Section 2 of our state Constitution, regarding the sovereignty of the people, states that: *All political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.*

Love and justice for the good of the whole demands a witness. There must be a witness in the face of extremism and regressive public policy, when politicians in the 21st century decide they want to be like the George Wallaces of the 20th century. They are pushing a new Southern strategy here when they want to deny people fundamental rights.

It's one of the most well-known essentials of our federal Constitution that we have a right to bear witness. And so we here today are going to witness with love and justice because anything less would be an indictment upon our faith, an indictment upon whom we are called to be as human beings of conscience. Today we will read a document together. We want to make it clear why we are here today in this church. We are North Carolinians who today choose nonviolent civil disobedience in the face of an avalanche of extremist policies that threaten healthcare, that threaten education, that threaten the poor, that threaten creation of jobs, that threaten voting rights.

Micah 6:8 (NRSV) asks us our public policy question: *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* It is in the spirit of openness to the prophet's question that we gather here as people of faith and citizens of North Carolina.

We have written letters to our governor. We have written letters to our state House and Senate representatives in the General Assembly. We have brought thousands of people to the People's House. Now we once again, by putting our bodies on the line, are asking our representatives to reconsider their assault on the poor, on the unemployed, on our many citizens without healthcare, and on our embattled public schools and public education. We're asking them to reconsider and to get on the right side of history.



The original 17 arrested on April 29, 2013, outside the “golden doors” of the North Carolina Legislative Building chambers (*Eric Etheridge photo*)

They’ve already voted and passed legislation to deny federal funds for Medicaid to five hundred thousand poor North Carolinians. That’s shameful.

They’ve already voted to take unemployment benefits from one hundred sixty five thousand North Carolinians. They’ve already raised taxes on nine hundred thousand of North Carolina’s poor and working people, by ending the state-earned income tax credit, so they could pay for a tax break for 23 multimillionaire families.

They’ve already voted to take over 1.6 billion dollars from public education. And now they’re trying to pass a voucher plan to pass out public money to private schools.

They want to restart death penalty executions, even though North Carolina has had the largest number of people exonerated from the death penalty. They want to repeal the North Carolina Racial Justice Act that was proven in court to be both constitutional and necessary.

And they want to codify anti-labor language in our North Carolina Constitution. When that Constitution was written by blacks and whites 145 years ago, it asserted that every person has the right to the enjoyment of the fruit of their own labor. The current legislature’s anti-labor proposals are therefore unconstitutional.

And then they want to do the greatest harm, which is to roll back voting rights. They want to pass a 21st-century version of the poll tax, as their voter suppression bill rolls back early voting, bans Sunday

voting, and ends same-day registration. These regressive changes will cost us millions and deny so many the right to vote.

You only push these voter-suppression policies when you can't afford a big turnout because you're scared that if you don't rig the election, then a brand-new electorate will evolve. And that electorate will continue to open the cracks in the solid South and elect in a new light of justice and diversity.

*We put our bodies on the line today
because we believe this is the wrong direction.
We should be going forward and not one step back!*