

THE SOUTH ON THE MOVE

States across the South Are Meeting and Working Out Strategies for Faith, Labor and Community Empowerment and Making Plans to Go to the Resurrection in Memphis Faith/Labor/Community Conference in July.

1. **North Carolina:** Over 100 people, including 37 clergy, 23 labor and 35 community leaders from across the state met on January 26th, in Greensboro, NC. Plans were developed for coordinated faith, labor and community work, including six area faith/labor/community meetings across the state. Efforts are also underway to send a powerful delegation to Memphis.
2. **South Carolina:** A statewide faith, labor and community meeting has been scheduled for April 27th in Charleston, SC, at St. James Presbyterian Church, 1314 Secessionville Road. For more information, contact Rev. Charles Haywood at (843) 795-3959.
3. **Tennessee:** A three state area, including Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee, has been scheduled for April 3rd at St. Paul Baptist Church, 114 E. McLemore Ave. For more information, contact Rev. J. Herbert Nelson at (901)678-2789, or at jhnelson@memphis.edu
4. **Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama:** meetings are in the process of being organized.

July 22-29 2006

*A Word and World Labor School
for Those Doing Faith Based Organizing*

Word and World is a mobile Christian school for faith based organizers. Memphis has invited Word and World to host a labor school July 22-29. The school will flow into the national labor conference to follow; so, School attendees should plan to stay through July 29th. The school seeks a diversity of participants and can accommodate about 100 people. The conference is an extension of the School. **For more information, contact the Word and World School at (336) 230-0330 or info@wordandworld.org.**

July 27-29, 2006

*A Major Faith Labor Conference
in Memphis, Tennessee*

The Conference will be sponsored jointly by an alliance of southern clergy, organized labor (unions), community organizations, and the Word and World School. Hundreds are expected from around the country, especially from the south for the powerful two-day faith and labor gathering. The conference is open to all who want to work together for social and economic justice. Elders who helped to fashion the 1968 sanitation/King Movement in Memphis will gather with clergy, workers, church members, and labor leaders in what can be a transforming moment in the movement. Based on state by state work, preceding the conference, we believe that the core of a faith labor southern strategy can emerge from this gathering. **For more information, contact the Beloved Community Center in Greensboro, NC by phone at (336) 230-0001 or by E-mail at nelsonj@belovedcommunitycenter.org.**

The Southern Faith, Labor & Community Alliance

“Towards a Grassroots Southern Strategy”

(In Conjunction with Word and World: A School for Faith-based Organizers)

The Southern Faith, Labor and Community Alliance will convene a major Conference of religious, labor and community leaders July 27-29 in Memphis, Tennessee. If there ever were a time to unite for economic and racial justice, that time is now. Churches, particularly black churches, have an important role to play in the struggle for social transformation. State meetings in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana are in the process of being organized. We must “resurrect” the vision and work of Dr. King.

People are suffering. Millions do not have work. Millions more who do work don't make enough to live on. The environment is being scarred and damaged as nature is being disrespected for short term benefits. Many of our children are being crushed in outdated industrial age schools. Millions are languishing in prisons, while thousands are dying in wars.



Katrina: The Memphis Conference will seek to unite the whole South and Nation around a united voice and reconstruction plan emerging out of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region.



“The two most dynamic and cohesive liberal forces in the country are the labor movement and the Negro freedom movement” — 1961 Speech, “If the Negro Wins, Labor Wins”

We witnessed, with our own eyes, hundreds die as tens of thousands of others lost all they had in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region. So much of this pillage resulted not from the fury of nature but the failure of humans. The people of that region continue to suffer today as our governmental and business leaders demonstrate an amazing ineptness or engage in maneuvering in order to make windfall profits. The dire poverty, racism and human degradation so clearly exposed in New Orleans, are actually a reflection of the plight of nearly every city in the nation. *These are no ordinary times.*

RESURRECTION

“Resurrecting, Reclaiming and Reinvigorating the

IN MEMPHIS!

Vision and Work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”

These are no ordinary times! It is our view that a deeply anchored coalition of faith, labor and community needs to be forged, especially in the south.

In such a coalition, the rootedness, love and persistence of faith must be merged with the urgency, energy and practical needs of poor and working people.



Ella Baker, a native of Littleton, NC, was a powerful leader in the civil rights movement. She was particularly helpful in challenging Dr. King to more fully appreciate the role of youth and women in the movement.

If we are to have a future, we, especially faith and labor, must unite around a transforming vision, nurtured by creative love and anchored in a stand for comprehensive justice. If clergy and people of faith, labor and workers can unite around a 2006 version of Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign, we can become a catalyst to unite the many strata and fragments of our society to change the direction of the nation. Dr. King was in the process of leading a bold Poor People’s Campaign for race equality, economic justice and peace when he was struck down in Memphis.

It is clear that nothing short of the resurrection and expansion of the movement that Dr. King was leading — a poor people’s movement for justice and righteousness — can save the nation from its own blindness, greed and structural flaws. We are committed to forging a powerful southern-based alliance of faith, labor and community as a center piece of such a movement. *In the aftermath of Katrina and Rita it is clear that a great effort must be made in the South and the nation to support the movement for reconstruction, equity and justice for all in rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.*

While we are focused on key southern states, other states in the south, north, east and west are included. What is required is to believe deeply and work together as never before. History pushes us; the future pulls us. Now is the time!

As we set out on this momentous task, there are powerful lessons to be learned from our past. Dr. King spent the last three years of his life rallying and unifying the American people around a vision and plan to re-direct a nation that was divided by race, crippled by economic injustice and robbed of its material resources by the scourge of war. Dr. King boldly declared that *“the problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation and the problem of war are all tied together. These are the triple evils that are interrelated.”*

With the view that all our problems are interrelated and drawing from Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, Dr. King stressed the importance of a united movement. Dr. King said, *“so instead of just getting bogged down in one thing, Jesus looked at him (Nicodemus) and said, ‘you must be born again,’ your whole structure must be changed.”*

Dr. King continued drawing out the implications of what he called the triple evils declaring that, *“a nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will ‘thingify’ them, make them things. Therefore they will exploit them and poor people generally, economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and will have to use its*

military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together. What I am saying today is that we must go from this convention and say, ‘America, You must be born again’”.

CRISIS IN CHRISTENDOM

There is a crisis within the Christian faith. Jesus opened his ministry, declaring *“the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor..”* Far from preaching good news, much of Christendom is silent on the question of the poor and some have even become hostile. Christianity is increasingly becoming the faith of the empire, an empire that proclaims freedom and democracy on the one hand while enforcing economic tyranny within this country and abroad on the other.

The world reacts to the massive system of international “poverty making” through random acts of desperate violence. The spirit of the empire is to crush this desperate violence with even greater violence. Each act of violence escalates another round of desperate violence. Thus, the world is plunged into a permanent war culture. In the face of this situation, the church, including the black church, is increasingly acquiring a kind of mega-church, material riches, empire theology while the poor are left wounded and bleeding beside “the Samaritan Road.” In this tragic situation, our faith calls us to identify with the poor — “the least, the lost, the lame and the lepers” of the world. And, together with them create a great non-violent, transforming movement of creative love. Genuine love seeks new alternative and creative ways of life in community. The challenge of the church today is to rediscover, through a repentant spirit, the fullness of its faith. Faith in God through Jesus Christ humbly commits us to be with the poorest among us, as we together seek the Kingdom of God. The Memphis faith labor conference has not only the possibility of resurrecting the movement, but also contributing to the important task of renewing the church.

Brothers and Sisters, these are no ordinary times. Dr. King was part of a great work forty years ago. Faith and circumstances call us to continue that work. Anchored by the overflowing love of our gracious God, challenged and humbled by the magnitude of the task to which we are called, strengthened by those who have suffered for us, we urge all to develop a grounded unity plan and begin the work in your city and state with plans to gather in Memphis, joining in the great work of helping “America be born again.”



Rosa Parks is broadly recognized as the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement. Her courage and faith are both urgently needed to rebuild the movement today.