

Summary of our Faith and the Movement to End Poverty Convening

On December 7th, 2004 the Women's Economic Agenda Project (WEAP) and the Community Homeless Alliance Ministry (CHAM) held a "Faith and the Movement to End Poverty" convening to discuss the moral imperative we have today to speak out against poverty, not only as an outrage against our sense of humanity, but as an affront to our spirit. We were joined by affiliates of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, members of the Labor Party, St. Mary's Senior Center, The Dominican Sisters of San Jose, and the Low Income Self-Help Center (LISHC) of San Jose.

Our discussion centered around the aftermath of the 2004 election and what exactly comprises the term "moral values,—the deciding factor for many in voting this year. . . Both the Right and the Left failed to provide an alternative vision for the world. For many, especially those on the Right, moral values were narrowly defined code words for opposition to both abortion and gay marriage. On the Left, moral values fall short of including the role of faith in the battle to eliminate poverty. Absent from both discussions was the right to housing, health care, food, and a living-wage job as moral values. These values were spoken of in The Bible, and guaranteed to us in the United States 1948 signing of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The eradication of poverty is a spiritual issue where both the Left and the Right have failed.

Walter Hudson from CHAM spoke of how our political rhetoric and vision must change. We agreed that we must make a shift in the spiritual basis of society from the "moral" vision of the rich, towards one based on our God-given rights. . . "God is against poverty. We don't seek pity, we seek power," commented Walter Hudson. We know that the distribution, or lack thereof, of resources today is not a reflection of God's Kingdom. The crisis we are in the midst of is both a spiritual and an economic crisis. We must forge ahead on both fronts and demand what is rightfully ours.

DeHab Haile, from LISHC, spoke of her struggles to qualify for government assistance programs because she owns property and works, although she still must collect aluminum cans to make her financial ends meet. You make too much money and your disqualified from assistance, and you make too little, and you're also disqualified, remarked DeHab Haile. The struggles she faces are not uncommon, but completely unnecessary in the richest nation in the world.

Moral values and Jesus are not owned by the Right, and we must take them back. A new vision and movement are needed, and we have them. . . God is not for the impoverishment of any His people, and we must organize, both politically and spiritually, in a manner that affirms this message. We realize that we are on the dawn of a new social movement, one in which solidarity and spirituality are hand-in-hand in our struggle to eradicate poverty.