

## **Campaign Strives to Eliminate Poverty,**

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LIVINGSTON – Yolanda Barrios knows what it's like to be homeless. She lived on the streets in 1989 and remembers the powerlessness she felt at her situation.

So she felt empowered Thursday when she listened to speakers participating in the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church.

"When you're attacked they ask you why you were out on the streets. It's because I am homeless," she said.

By the end of the discussion, Barrios and her husband Victor joined the campaign so they could help people who endured what they experienced and show the world how poverty can ruin lives.

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign is a group of nearly 30 homeless individuals, working poor, welfare recipients and other activists who are winding through the state to educate people about urban and rural poverty.

Merced doctor Salvador Sandoval joined the right for part of the 15-day trip.

Campaign participants are riding what they call the Freedom Bus to not only talk about how poverty can harm but also to enlist others in their cause to eliminate poverty.

The campaign calls for creating Poor People's Economic Human Rights Committees at each city they visit.

The Committees will hand out forms to residents of the cities to document abuses they endured because they are poor. Committee members will also teach others about their rights under the Declaration of Human Rights, said Ethel Long-Scott, executive director of the Women's Economic Agenda Project, the Oakland-based organization sponsoring the tour.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted by the United Nations more than 50 years ago. The resolution states that food, clothing, housing, medical care and education are human rights not to be denied by any government, she said.

When testimonies are collected they will be handed to attorneys who will send them to the United Nations to show how the United States abuses the poor, Long-Scott said.

To illustrate how poverty can damage people, campaign members spoke of their own experiences.

Al Walker said he is homeless but by knowing his rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights he can stand up for himself.

"I am homeless myself," Walker said, "but I can stand up and reach out to other people like me."

Blanche Mackey, who describes herself as one of the working poor, said by listening to peoples' stories from all across that state, she learned while the poor may share common experiences they also face problems unique to their region. For example, some poor in the Humboldt County may subsist on income from growing marijuana plants and risk losing their children because of it.

Mackey said by knowing her rights she was able to contend with Stanislaus County authorities when they stopped her fiancé who was driving a moving van through the county. The authorities confiscated the van and Mackey was able to phone the proper channels to have it released.

After campaign participants shared their experiences with the small audience in the church basement, Victor Barrios spoke of his ordeal as an illegal immigrant and how he feared authority because he thought he had no rights.

Victor Barrios was then volunteered to become part of the Livingston committee for poor people's rights along with other church members.

The Freedom Bus started its journey from Oakland on November 8 and will end November 22 at San Ysidro. Then it will turn back to the Bay Area. Along the way the campaign stopped at Turlock, Livingston, Merced, Fresno, Visalia and other Central Valley locations.