

Washington Association of Churches

2009 Legislative Priorities

The Washington Association of Churches calls upon its member denominations, organizations, institutions and their churches and ministries to work in partnership with the Religious Coalition for the Common Good (RCCG), other faith communities and community allies to advocate for the public policies and related legislation identified below.

Budget:

Who would Jesus rescue? "Woe to you rich!...Blessed are you poor!". The Prophets warn against favoring the rich over the widows, aliens, orphans and the poor. The state and federal budgets should reflect stewardship of God's abundance and God's preferential option for the poor and vulnerable; therefore,

We call for a budget that adequately funds services that meet the basic needs of our most vulnerable residents, especially low-income children and their families, the elderly and disabled..(Adopted 2001)

We will work to -

- Prevent cuts to vital housing and survival services.
- Seek new revenue solutions for a fair and adequate budget
- Provide local governments with tools needed to meet human services obligations in their communities.
- Support an economic stimulus package that includes funding of Green Jobs for low-income people.

Hunger and Poverty:

Old Testament Prophets and Jesus declared God's outrage at the plight of those living in poverty and suffering from hunger. As followers of Jesus, we are challenged to respond to economic disparities and oppression in our world. We have an obligation to work for the common good so that all people can experience God's abundance and live with dignity; therefore,

We recognize the responsibility of government to develop and implement sound legislative and fiscal policies that provide for the economic well being of all (Adopted 1983) We support welfare reform that treats people with dignity and provides equal access to benefits for all people based upon need. (Adopted 1998) We will fight hunger in Washington. (Adopted 1999)

We will work to –

- Maintain General Assistance Unemployable (GAU) funding.
- Increase funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).
- Pass the Feeding Hungry Kids Bill to eliminate co-pays on school breakfasts and lunches for K-6 children.
- End predatory payday lending
- **Federal:** Support U.S. commitments to reduce poverty, improve health and education and protect the environment as agreed to in the Millennium Development Goals while addressing global challenges of energy and food crises, climate change and health emergencies

Housing and Homelessness:

The Bible teaches us the importance of having a place to call home. God makes a place for all at the table and all are invited to share in God's abundance. Likewise, Jesus ministry emulated God's hospitality. As Christians, we are called to do no less; therefore,

We support legislation that helps create and preserve safe, affordable permanent housing to address the basic need and right of every person to safe shelter. (Adopted 2006)

We will work to -

- Maintain the Housing Trust Fund at the current level of funding.
- Protect housing programs for people coming out of prison, mental health institutions and the foster care system.
- Protect rental assistance, support services and emergency shelter funds. (Transitional Housing, Operating and Rent (THOR) and Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP).
- Increase the time for no cause evictions to take place from the current 20 days to 30 and up to 60 depending upon length of rental time in a dwelling unit.
- Promote transit oriented communities while ensuring preservation and development of affordable housing for low-income residents

- **Federal:** Support additional emergency assistance for people who are homeless due to foreclosures, whether former owners or renters.
- Support economic stimulus funding that helps individuals and families maintain their housing, especially low-income people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Healthcare

God's love extends to health and healing. Jesus modeled God's love in his caring for and healing the sick and infirm regardless of whom they were – rich or poor. As Christians, we are called to promote the health and healing of all, therefore,

We believe all residents should have access to quality and affordable health care. We support state and federally subsidized health care programs and advocate for adequate funding to ensure that health care is available for those who need it. (Adopted 1999) We recognize that the environment is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of future generations.... (Adopted 2002)

We will work to -

- Maintain the Health Insurance Partnership (HIP) Program that subsidizes health-insurance for low-income employees of small businesses
- Maintain the current funding levels for "Cover All Kids" Law (Apple Health) insuring all children on a sliding scale up to 300% of poverty
- Maintain current funding for the Basic Health Plan (BHP)
- Invest in clean water and cleaning up our waterways by requiring polluters to pay for the pollution they cause.
- **Federal:** Support HR 676 - Single Payer Health Care: Universal access to health care funded and administered by publicly accessible agencies. (Recommended in 2004 WAC federal priorities).

Criminal Justice Reform - Restorative Justice:

Christians value life because we believe that everyone is created in the image of God, therefore the value of human life can not be measured by human beings or human institutions. As followers of Jesus Christ, we understand that justice is created through reconciliation and restitution not through revenge and retribution. We are called to proclaim and demonstrate the message of respect for human rights and dignity, mercy and compassion, forgiveness of those who offend and harm others and acceptance in a loving and healing community. Therefore,

We support legislation to improve the availability and use of sentencing alternatives..., to strengthen relations between inmates and their families..., to improve the effectiveness and availability of offender work and education programs..., to use incarceration only as a last resort. Adopted 1983, 1987, 1999. The death penalty is inconsistent with our efforts to promote respect for human life, to stem the tide of violence in our society, and to embody the message of God's redemptive love. Adopted 1983

We will work to -

- Support job training and access to higher education in prisons.
- Support restored voting rights for those who are no longer in state correction institutions
- Reform the three-strikes law
- Abolish the Death penalty

Immigration:

The Bible tells us that the entire earth belongs to God and therefore we should not artificially put manmade boundaries on justice towards other people just because they are from foreign nations (Ps. 24). Also, we are specifically to guard the human rights of those who are from foreign lands who are more vulnerable to oppression.

We support the longstanding American ideal of welcoming immigrants and refugees to our nation and are committed to honoring the human rights of all who enter our country. (1975)

We will work to -

- Pass comprehensive immigration reform calls for legalization and removal of roadblocks to the citizenship process; family reunification; protection of rights of immigrant workers in the workplace; and full protection of the civil rights and civil liberties of immigrants.