

HIGHER GROUND MORAL DECLARATION

CALL TO ACTION FOR A MORAL AGENDA

IT IS TIME TO MOVE BEYOND LEFT AND RIGHT, LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE, AND UPHOLD HIGHER GROUND MORAL VALUES!

On April 4, 1967, just one year before his assassination, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called for a time to break the silence about the injustices in society. At the historic Riverside Church, he preached, “we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.” He proclaimed that silence was betrayal – the truth must be told.

Rev. Dr. King’s charge for a revolution of values echoes the cries of the prophets to stand up for justice, righteousness, and the dignity of all throughout the ages.

“If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. 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 live in.” (Isaiah 58)

“The believers, both men and women are in charge of and responsible for one another; they all join in the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong.” (Qu’ran 9:71)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

We declare that if silence was betrayal then, revival is necessary today.

Nearly 50 years after Rev. Dr. King’s call to break the silence, poverty, inequality, and systemic racism are rampant, voting rights and democracy are being trampled, millions of people lack the health care, living wage jobs, and quality education they need, and racism, hatred, and bigotry are disintegrating any possibility for life, liberty and a pursuit of happiness for everyone in these United States.

Following moral traditions rooted in our faith and the Constitution, we are called to stand up for justice and tell the truth. We challenge the position that the preeminent moral issues today are about prayer in public schools, abortion, and property rights. Instead, we declare the deepest public concerns of our faith traditions are how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, women, children, workers, immigrants and the sick; equality and representation under the law; and the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.

Together, we lift up and defend the most sacred moral principles of our faith and constitutional values, which are:

1. Pro-labor, anti-poverty, anti-racist policies that build up economic democracy through employment, living wages, the alleviation of disparate unemployment, a just transition away from fossil fuels, labor rights, affordable housing, direct cash transfers and other support for all families struggling to get by, and fair policies for immigrants; and by critiquing policies around warmongering that undermine our moral standing and ability to address domestic issues;
2. Equality in education by ensuring every child receives a high quality, well-funded, constitutionally diverse public education, as well as access to community colleges and universities and by securing equitable funding for people of color colleges and universities;
3. Healthcare for all by expanding Medicaid in every state, ensuring access to Medicare and Social Security, moving decisively towards a universal, transparent, and equitable healthcare system, and by providing environmental protection and protecting women's health;
4. Fairness in the criminal justice system by addressing the continuing inequalities in the system for black, brown and poor white people and fighting the proliferation of guns;
5. Voting rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, labor rights, religious freedom rights, immigrant rights and the fundamental principle of equal protection under the law.

We believe our moral traditions have a firm foundation upon which to stand against the divide-and-conquer strategies of extremists. We believe in a moral agenda that stands against systemic racism, classism, poverty, xenophobia, and any attempt to promote hate towards any members of the human family. We claim a higher ground in partisan debate by returning public discourse to our deepest moral and constitutional values.

The Higher Ground Moral Declaration provides a moral agenda for our nation. To affirm your agreement with this declaration, we invite you to do three things:

- Join community leaders, pastors, and scholars in declaring inequality, poverty, voter suppression, environmental abuse, racism and xenophobia immoral and unacceptable
- Take this moral declaration to every candidate and elected official in federal, state, and local governments

- Pray for the Moral Movement

We are seeking a revolution of moral values. We declare yes to justice and equality.

A Moral Grounding in Scripture and Our Founding Creed

“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

Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs 31:9

Declaration of Independence. We hold these truths 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 and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Constitution of the United States, 14 Amendment, Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws

Preamble of the Constitution of the United States. We the People of the United States, in Order to promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

A National Revival and a Moral Revolution of Values

The Higher Ground Moral Declaration coincided with the launch of a 2016 National Moral Revival Tour to Redefine Morality in American Politics. Bishop William Barber, II, President and Senior Lecturer of Repairers of the Breach, architect of the Forward Together Moral Mondays Movement, and pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church and the Rev. Dr. James Forbes Jr., National Minister of the Drum Major Institute, President of Healing of the Nations Ministries, and Senior Minister Emeritus of the Riverside Church were invited to travel throughout the nation to lead *The Revival: Time for a Moral Revolution of Values*. Throughout the tour they were joined by the Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon, Executive Director of the UCC Justice and Witness Ministry and

Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director of NETWORK, as well as other Jewish, Muslim and moral leaders.

The Revival was a catalyst for renewed moral activism among faith and community leaders. The first leg of the tour covered 15 states and the District of Columbia, including North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, Texas, Oklahoma, and New York, from April 2016 through January 2017.

“In reference to the Vietnam War in his 1967 sermon, Dr. King told the nation that ‘silence was betrayal,’” Bishop Barber said. “If silence was betrayal in the 1960s, revival is a necessity in 2016. Way too much of our national discourse has been poisoned by hateful language and policies. The extremists see nothing wrong with insulting the poor, the sick, our children, immigrants, communities of color, voting rights, women, LGBTQ people, the environment and religious minorities with their language and their policies. True faith and true evangelicalism place *love, justice, and compassion* at the center of our public life.”

“In working toward a spiritual and political renewal of the nation, our multi-state tour focused on a revolution of moral values,” said Rev. Forbes. “By morality, we mean governing for the good of the whole, not for the good of a destructive few. In the tradition of the great prophets, a revival is about stirring up the faithful; restoring believers to a place of maximum impact. Our tour was about preparing leaders of faith to go to the public square and provide a strong moral voice and witness against the extremists’ rhetoric and policies.”

This Higher Ground Moral Declaration provides a moral agenda for our nation on issues including: democracy and voting rights; poverty and economic justice; workers’ rights; education; healthcare; environmental justice; immigrant rights and challenging xenophobia; criminal justice; LGBTQ rights; and war-mongering and the military. For each issue area, an individual moral and constitutional foundation is established. The positions are neither left nor right, nor conservative or liberal. Rather, they are morally defensible, constitutionally consistent, and economically sound. Most importantly, they represent, as Dr. King urged, a revolution in values.

VOTING RIGHTS

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Constitution of the United States, Article 4. The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican [representative] Form of Government . . .

15th Amendment. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) is widely considered to be the most important achievement of the civil rights movement, yet in recent years it has been gutted by the U.S. Supreme Court. All federal and state elected officials should support the immediate restoration of the preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Advancement Act that was struck down by the Court, including a revised preclearance formula that would protect against contemporary voter suppression efforts.

Laws that create photo ID requirements and that roll back early voting and other measures to make the right to vote more accessible suppress individuals' right to vote, especially youth, people of color, women, and the elderly. All elected officials should oppose such laws.

The 2010 Citizens United decision has enhanced the role of corporate money in elections, thereby distorting our representative democracy. All elected officials should support legislation to overturn the Citizens United decision.

Racial and partisan gerrymandering do not allow people of color to elect candidates of their choice. Moreover, it turns democracy on its head by allowing election officials to select their voters instead of the reverse. All elected officials should support ending race- and partisan-based gerrymandering of voting districts.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Isaiah 10:1-2 Doom to you who legislate evil, who make laws that make victims—laws that make misery for the poor, that rob my destitute people of dignity, exploiting defenseless widows, taking advantage of homeless children.

Micah 2:1-3 Doom to those who plot evil, who go to bed dreaming up crimes! As soon as it's morning, they're off, full of energy, doing what they've planned. They covet fields and grab them, find homes and take them. They bully the neighbor and his family, see people only for what they can get out of them. God has had enough.

Declaration of Independence. We hold these truths 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 and the pursuit of Happiness.

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Insuring economic democracy requires a comprehensive public policy approach. This includes fighting for employment, living wages, the alleviation of disparate unemployment, a green economy, labor rights, affordable housing, targeted empowerment zones, direct cash transfers and other support for all families struggling to get by, fair policies for immigrants, critiquing war policies that further disable our ability to have a real war on poverty, infrastructure development and fair tax reform. All elected officials should support a comprehensive approach to economic democracy.

Nearly 1 in 3 Native Americans (29.2%), over 1 in 4 African Americans (27.2%), 1 in 4 Hispanic/Latinos (23.5%), 1 in 10 Asians (10.5%) and 1 in 10 non-Hispanic whites (9.6%) live below the federal poverty line. More than 1 in 5 children in America (21.8%) are living under the official poverty line. Half of all children will be on food stamps before they turn 20, including 9 out of 10 African American children. More than half of all children below the poverty line live in families headed by women.

Unemployment and underemployment are very real issues in the United States, especially with the technological advances that allow for automation across every sector of the economy, from industry and manufacturing to services and even creative sectors. All elected officials should support a guaranteed annual income for those who are not working or underemployed.

The infrastructure of the country—roads, bridges, sanitation systems, public libraries, etc.—is crumbling and dangerously close to literal collapse. Decaying water and sewer systems such as in Flint, Michigan, and communities that never had sanitation services established such as Lowndes County, Alabama, imperil our children and poor communities. All elected officials should support robust public investments that will create jobs, and that will address these critical infrastructure needs.

There is a housing crisis still going on in the United States with homelessness spreading like an epidemic. All elected officials should oppose the criminalization of poverty and homelessness and attacks to demolish homeless encampments. They should support programs that provide affordable housing to anyone who needs it.

ON LABOR RIGHTS

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

James 5:4 All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of God.

Allah's Apostle said, "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one. People asked, "O Allah's Apostle! It is all right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?" The Prophet said, "By preventing him from oppressing others." Hadith Source: Bukhari, Volume 3, Book 43, Number 624.

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Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "If a man doesn't have a job or an income, he has neither life nor liberty nor the possibility for the pursuit of happiness. He merely exists."

Real wages have fallen steadily since the 1970s, leading to the greatest economic inequality in America since at least the Great Depression. All elected officials should support the Fight for \$15 and a living minimum wage, indexed to inflation.

There is a direct relationship between the decline of unionization and declining real wages. All federal and local elected officials should support the right of workers to collectively bargain, including public employees.

Medium wages for workers of color are slightly more than half that of white workers. In addition, the unemployment rate for these workers is consistently more than double that of white workers. All elected officials must support targeted worker training programs, as well as targeted economic development programs for poor communities and communities of color.

Jobs are being replaced by technology, placing workers in a precarious position of being unemployed, underemployed, redundant or exploited and causing everyone to navigate global economic forces. All elected officials should support a fair trade policy that will end the global "race to the bottom" for workers, promote employment and high wages at home and abroad, and share the great wealth of our global economy fairly.

ON EDUCATION

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

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Public money to pay for private schools, including voucher or tax credit programs, drain much needed resources from public education. All elected officials should support quality, well-funded public education and the protection and improvement of public schools rather than the unlimited replacement of traditional public schools with charter schools.

Early education programs like Head Start have played a key role in educating our youngest members of society and connecting poor and vulnerable families to needed services and resources. All elected officials should support the full funding and support for Head Start and other early education programs.

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) continue to educate an extraordinary number of African American professionals and intellectuals; yet they continue to endure resource deprivation that threatens their ability to continue this extraordinary work. Moreover, HBCUs are threatened with closure and the consequences of the corporatization of higher education. All elected officials should support more targeted resources to support HBCUs.

Higher education is increasingly important in an ever changing economy. As costs continue to soar, more and more students are burdened with excessive student loans and debt. All elected officials should support programs to help all students regardless of financial need, race/ethnicity, immigration status, to access quality higher education. All elected officials should support programs that forgive loans and eliminate student debt.

ON HEALTHCARE

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Matthew 8: 1-4. Jesus came down the mountain with the cheers of the crowd still ringing in his ears. Then a leper appeared and went to his knees before Jesus, praying, "Master, if you want

to, you can heal my body.” Jesus reached out and touched him, saying, “I want to. Be clean.” Then and there, all signs of the leprosy were gone.

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Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane.”

The refusal of many state legislatures to expand Medicaid has left millions of the poorest Americans without health insurance. This deprives many of preventative care and causes thousands every year to die unnecessarily. All elected officials should support the expansion of Medicaid.

The Affordable Care Act has put our country on a path toward access to universal healthcare. All elected officials should support a healthcare system that is affordable and accessible for everyone, as well as transparent and accountable to the communities who use it.

Hospitals are being closed in rural and urban areas across the country at an alarming rate. All elected officials should support the funding of rural and urban hospitals so as to prevent their closure and the devastation of communities across the country.

A woman’s right to control her own healthcare decisions are being threatened throughout the country. All elected officials should support the right of women to determine their own healthcare options.

ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Genesis 1:1-2, 29-31. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Pope Francis. Laudato Si, 139. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature.

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Climate change, ecological issues, pollution are wreaking havoc on communities, displacing people because of super-storms and “man-made” disasters. All elected officials should support policies that protect the environment and the people living in it. All elected officials should support programs that provide adequate resources for vulnerable communities to be able to prepare for and rebuild after crises caused by natural and man-made ecological disasters. All elected officials should support a just transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy, including providing employment and re-training for workers who currently rely on the fossil fuel industry.

Communities of color and poor communities bear a disproportionate environmental burden - forced to live closer to toxic dumping grounds and the pollution from fossil fuel extraction, trash-burning incinerators, and other heavy industries. All elected officials should support policies that will hold companies accountable for the damage they've caused, require them to clean up their messes, and prevent the pollution of communities in the future.

ON IMMIGRANTS RIGHTS

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Leviticus 19:33-34 and 24:22 – When the alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

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of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Immigrants play a vital role in the economic, cultural, and intellectual life of this country. Indeed this is a nation of immigrants. All elected officials should support the immediate moratorium on deportation, harassment, discrimination, criminalization and incarceration against immigrants.

All elected officials should support the rights of immigrants to attain legal driver's licenses and higher education to support the flourishing of immigrant families.

All elected officials should stand up against Islamophobia and other forms of religious and racial/ethnic discrimination/xenophobia.

ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Matthew 6:14-15. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

James 2:6. But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

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Mass incarcerations are devastating to the poor and communities of color. All elected officials should support policies that would end mass incarcerations.

Police abuse, misconduct, and killing continues to terrorize communities of color. All elected officials should support policies that will keep law enforcement accountable to the communities that they are supposed to serve, including the revised training on the use of non-lethal force and the demilitarization of police departments.

ON LGBTQ RIGHTS

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Galatians 3:28. Here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

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Although marriage equality is the law of the land, LGBTQ citizens continue to face discrimination in many spheres of social life. All elected officials should stand to safeguard the rights of LGBTQ citizens to be free of discrimination or attack because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

ON WAR MONGERING AND THE MILITARY

Moral and Constitutional Foundation

Isaiah 2:4. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

John 10:10. I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly

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ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

The United States spends more money on war than on programs to house, feed, or provide health care for the people. All elected officials should support programs that combat this resource inequality and promote the life and livelihood of all human beings.

Although we call our veterans the nation's heroes, we fail to provide them and their families with adequate pay, quality health care, and other needed supports to prepare and return from war. All elected officials should support our troops by ensuring that we adequately provide for them and their families, and denounce war-mongering and efforts to create more conflict and division within and between nations.