

## SPIRITHIT NEWS

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# People of Faith Demanding 'Let Justice Roll!' Rally, Form 'Ring of Hope' in New York City

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By NCC News Service

New York City—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and other people of faith—all carrying flashlights—poured into the streets of New York City on Tuesday evening (August 31) to “shine a light” on their demand for social justice and an end to poverty.

More than 50 congregations throughout the city participated in the “Ring of Hope,” purposely held concurrent with the Republican National Convention, to reclaim democracy for all Americans—including the poor, the sick, the unemployed and the disenfranchised.

The demonstration was organized by the Mobilization 2004 program of The Riverside Church, which joined forces with the “Let Justice Roll: Faith and Community Voices Against Poverty” national campaign to co-sponsor an interfaith service that drew between 1,200-1,400 people to the church Tuesday night and was broadcast live on WBAI radio. A similar service was held in Boston concurrent with the Democratic National Convention.

After the service, congregants lined Broadway - knowing that other people of faith were lining up in other parts of the city at the same time.

“Let Justice Roll” is co-sponsored by the National Council of Churches USA and the Center for Community Change, and the campaign’s coordinator, the Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry, said the goal is “to put the ugliness of poverty on the nation’s radar screen and to challenge our nation even as we challenge ourselves, ‘What will we do to end poverty?’”

“Let Justice Roll,” which by year’s end will hold 17 to 20 events in cities across the nation, is building an ongoing network of “thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations to address poverty and injustice with strength,” he said.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported in late August that in 2003, the percentage of Americans in poverty and without health insurance grew for the third straight year - to 35.9 million people (one out of every eight people) in poverty and 45 million (15.6 percent) without health insurance. The official poverty threshold is \$18,660 for a family

of four.

Even those stark numbers don't tell the whole story, said the Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Hough, Jr., President of Union Theological Seminary, New York City. Of all Americans 55 years of age and older, 61 percent have lived in or near poverty at some time in their lives, and 68 percent of every American 65 years of age and older "needs public help at some time."

The faith perspective of "Let Justice Roll" and "Mobilization 2004" demands "good news for the poor," said the Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., Senior Minister of The Riverside Church, in his message there Tuesday night. This is "an interfaith movement dedicated to the elimination of poverty."

Dr. Forbes quoted former U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who recognized that to deny millions of citizens the necessities of life is a challenge to our democracy. The test of a great nation, Dr. Forbes agreed, "is not whether we can add more abundance to those who have too much, but whether we can be sure those who have too little have enough."

"If we believe God has given the world enough resources to feed, educate and provide health care for everyone, then we know what to do," he concluded.

The Riverside Church service included special music by Peter Yarrow and others and prayers and litanies led by leaders of a diversity of denominations and faiths. Declared the Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, President of The Interfaith Alliance, "All the religions of this nation speak as with one voice and the subject is justice."

Human rights activist Bianca Jagger asked all present to search their souls as to which U. S. policies truly represent the common good. "There is a lot of darkness in this country and despair throughout the world," she said. "In your hands is the solution to poverty and hunger."

Representatives of several community groups offered their "Testimonies to the Reality We Face." Poverty is a human rights violation, declared Ethel Long-Scott, Director of the Poor People's Economics Human Rights Campaign. "The war on the poor is killing our people," she said, calling on the United States to commit resources to end the scourge of poverty.

Karen Washington, Vice President of the North West Bronx Clergy Coalition, said, "The real war on terror isn't in Iraq or Afghanistan, it is in our neighborhoods, which are riddled by assault weapons, drive-by shootings, drugs and gang wars."

Community organizations are working hard to save their neighborhoods, “but we need reinforcements,” Washington said: effective policing, a renewal of the federal ban on assault weapons, paying jobs and “programs that educate, not incarcerate.”

Wanda Imasuen described her struggle to survive after she lost her job as a result of the September 11, 2001, attacks - and the strength she has found through her membership in Families United for Racial & Economic Equality. A member of the New York City AIDS Housing Network told a similar story of struggle to recover from drug use and incarceration and to get the care she needs to live with HIV infection.

More information about “Let Justice Roll” is available on the Web at <http://www.nccusa.org> and about Mobilization 2004 at <http://www.mobilization2004.org> Besides the Boston and New York events, the two campaigns have collaborated with other partners on events in Seattle, Wash.; Portland and Eugene, Ore.; Rochester, N.Y., and Minneapolis, Minn., with Dr. Forbes preaching at all those events.

Dr. Forbes continues with his own cross-country speaking engagements even as “Let Justice Roll” goes next to Milwaukee, Wis.; Albuquerque, N.M., and Wilson, N.C. (all on Sept. 18); Philadelphia, Pa. (Sept. 23); Miami, Fla. (Sept. 25-26); Chicago, Ill. (Oct. 9-10, with Dr. Forbes); Columbus, Ohio (Oct. 11); Louden County, Va. (Oct. 27), and to New Jersey, Colorado and Des Moines, Iowa (dates TBA).

**Source:** <http://www.nccusa.org/>

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