

From Poverty to Opportunity

A Covenant for a New America

ORGANIZER'S TOOLKIT

*Simple things people of faith
can do to overcome poverty.*

*“Speak out, judge
righteously, defend
the rights of the poor
and needy.”*

—Proverbs 31:9

Sojourners • Call to Renewal



From Poverty to Opportunity

A COVENANT FOR A NEW AMERICA

Summer 2006

Dear Friend,

This June at our Pentecost 2006 mobilization, we, along with more than 30 major Christian denominations, organizations, and leaders, launched *From Poverty to Opportunity: A Covenant for a New America*. The urgency behind this campaign was clear: Poor people in America and throughout the world are getting trapped in an ideological debate between right and left and are often invisible in the political priorities of political parties. As Christians who are consistently commanded by God to stand with the “least of these,” we are called to lift a prophetic voice to advance a solutions-based anti-poverty agenda that takes societal and personal responsibility seriously. The Covenant has three broad goals:

- 1) **Work must work and provide for family economic success and security.**
- 2) **Children should not be poor.**
- 3) **Extreme global poverty (individuals living on less than \$1 a day) must end.**

The goal of the Covenant is nothing short of putting poverty onto the national agenda through elections and legislation, and to build the political will to overcome poverty. We live in an age where we have the knowledge, resources, and capacity to end poverty; we simply lack the moral and political will to do so.

The goal of this toolkit is to empower you and others to build the political will—and to put poverty on the national agenda.

An ambitious goal? Certainly. But we believe *A Covenant for a New America* is a powerful vision and tool that you can use to educate and persuade civic leaders and people of faith that overcoming poverty is not only a moral imperative, but is an achievable goal that makes good political sense. This toolkit gives concrete ways for you to start—from educating your faith community, to generating media, to pressing elected officials to take action.

We do not expect that our efforts will bear fruit overnight, but the Covenant Campaign is already gaining momentum. At our Pentecost 2006 conference in Washington, D.C., more than 600 people from 40 states took the Covenant to Capitol Hill to demand that legislators take action to overcome poverty. We reached out to both sides of the aisle, proclaiming that poverty must be a nonpartisan issue and a bipartisan cause. Republicans and Democrats alike embraced the ideals of the Covenant. We are winning hearts and minds and must continue this momentum.

We thank you for downloading this toolkit and for your passion for restoring hope for our poorest families. We look forward to working with you to play a role in mobilizing people of faith, prompting better political leadership, and renewing society. To download or order copies of the Covenant, or to find updates, please visit our Web site often at www.covenantforanewamerica.org.

Blessings,

Yonce, Adam, Duane, Matt, Amy, Kevin, Nadia, Laurna, and Lou
The Policy and Organizing Team at Sojourners/Call to Renewal



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Sign Up!

Why and How Do I Sign Up?

As people of faith, we have a unique role to play in generating the **personal, congregational, and societal renewal** necessary to put poverty at the top of our nation's agenda. The vision of *A Covenant for a New America*—making work work, ending child poverty, and ending extreme global poverty—will only be realized with the active support and engagement of individuals, local churches, and organizations across the country. **We need you to covenant with us and spread the word!**

The first thing to do, if you haven't already done so, is to **join** the campaign and work with us to realize this vision of a new America. You can do this online by signing up at www.covenantforanewamerica.org or by mailing your completed sign-in sheet, located on the next page.

Signing up means that you make commitments to pray and act to overcome poverty. It also means that you will receive updates and action alerts about specific things we can do together to advocate for the ideals and policies embraced in the Covenant.

Recruiting Others

Once you've signed on, it's time to encourage friends, family, and your local congregations to join with you and others across the nation.

1. Recruit others by directing them to the Covenant Campaign Web site (www.covenantforanewamerica.org) or by gaining signatures on the enclosed sign-up sheets.
2. Spread the vision of the Covenant. Order **free** copies for distribution of the Covenant on our Web site at www.covenantforanewamerica.org (shipping not included). Pass along e-mail updates and alerts to recruit friends, family, coworkers, and other members of your congregation to sign on to the Covenant.
3. Work to get your elected officials to endorse the Covenant's goals and to advocate on timely Covenant-related legislation. Take a copy of the Covenant to your elected officials' offices and ask them to covenant with you and thousands of others across the country (for more on this, see the "Advocate!" section).

Talk with your pastor and fellow congregants about your church becoming a church partner of the Covenant Campaign. Provide your church leadership with a copy of the Covenant and ask them to join a movement of faith. If you have an outreach ministry or social ministry team, meet with them to see if they will be involved in the Covenant Campaign. If your church is involved in direct service work, talk to church members about how policy changes can help those that the church serves. Churches can sign on using our online form at www.covenantforanewamerica.org.



Join the Covenant For a New America Campaign

By signing onto the Covenant Campaign, I commit to pray for God's people living in poverty, spread the vision of the covenant, recruit others to join the covenant campaign and be involved in my local community by raising awareness and contacting elected officials on issues of poverty. Once you sign up, we'll help you along the way with action alerts, toolkits, and more!

**Check box
for free
TRIAL issue of
Sojourners
magazine***

(See below for cancellation details.)

Clergy? <small>Circle one</small>	Name	Address	City/State/Zip	E-mail	
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr. Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr. Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rev. Sr. Br. Fr. Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Rev. Sr. Br. Fr. Rabbi Imam Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Will include invoice for a year's subscription at SPECIAL \$29.95 rate. If dissatisfied for any reason, just write "cancel" on invoice.

SOJOURNERS/CALL to RENEWAL

www.sojo.net

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— Please fax this sheet to Sojourners/Call to Renewal at 202-328-8757 —



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Educate!

Preparing Sermons and Lesson Plans

The two best ways in which you can present the theological and political positions in *A Covenant for a New America* are in the form of sermons and a Sunday School or study group lesson. The approach you might take for either is very similar.

The first step to successful sermon or lesson preparation is prayerful reflection aimed at discerning how God might speak to and through us on the subject at hand. We can tend to see this as an “inefficient” use of time, but nothing is more important than being open to the leading of God’s Spirit during the preparation process.

Once you have engaged in the discernment process, the next step is to identify the material to be communicated and to structure it for effective presentation. A critical—and complicated—step is drawing the connections between Christian faith and its contemporary policy implications. *A Covenant for a New America* provides a good deal of detail as to the different kinds of policy positions that might be embraced by Christians in order to pursue what might broadly be considered a kingdom agenda.

The breadth of material in this document lends itself either to a sermon series or a multi-week lesson plan. Many of the highlighted section titles could easily be used for sermon or lesson titles, and the scriptural references are a good starting place for forging the connections between the biblical stories and contemporary policies around poverty. In order to grasp the fullness of the biblical material, be sure to read not only the excerpted passages, but also the surrounding context. By developing your lesson or sermon from not just the individual passages, but also from the broader context, you can significantly deepen your audience’s grasp of how God’s vision of society and public life can be applied to specific policy issues.

Resources from Sojourners/Call to Renewal

In addition to *A Covenant for a New America*, Sojourners/Call to Renewal provides other resources that can add depth to your presentation or lesson.

Christians and Poverty (www.sojo.net)

The *Christians and Poverty* four-session discussion guide offers Bible study, social and economic analysis, stories of real people, and ideas for further study based on a collection of *Sojourners* articles. It is part of a new series, “Sojourners on the issues,” designed to spark discussion, thought, and action on how to live out God’s call for justice in the world. This guide is perfect for small groups, classrooms, or anyone interested in deepening their understanding of the relationship of Christians to “the least of these.”

Christians and the Global Economy (www.sojo.net)

The *Christians and the Global Economy* four-session discussion guide offers Bible study, social and economic analysis, stories of real people, and ideas for further study based on a collection of *Sojourners* articles. We live in an unprecedented time where we have the knowledge, technical ability, and expertise to end extreme poverty. What we do not have is the political and moral will. How can Christians lead in this important struggle?



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Living God's Politics (coming Aug. 9 at www.sojo.net)

With the publication of the paperback version of Jim Wallis' *God's Politics* on Aug. 9, 2006, Sojourners/Call to Renewal will also release a companion, *Living God's Politics*. This book is structured to deal with the major themes of *God's Politics* in an eight-week study format, including two weeks that deal with poverty and economic justice. Each week includes an in-depth look at the relevance of scripture, how the early church viewed these issues, and conversation topics for your congregation.

Additional resources:

Making Work Work

Our partners at the Let Justice Roll Coalition have put together a host of resources that individuals and churches can use to educate and empower their faith communities to take action to promote a living family income. <http://www.letjusticeroll.org/publications.html>

Child Poverty

The Children's Defense Fund's "Faithful Action" Web page offers faith communities resources to educate and organize on issues affecting child poverty in the United States. They offer good interfaith resources as well. http://cdf.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=Programs_Faithful_Action

Ending Global Poverty

Our partners at the Micah Challenge have put together sample prayers, resources for sermons and bible studies, PowerPoints, and more on the Millennium Development Goals (eight goals to overcome extreme global poverty and promote sustainable development) and how to build the political will to overcome global poverty. http://www.micahchallenge.org/global/education_resources/index.html

Bible References

Though there are thousands of references to God's love for the poor, here are a few that stand out:

Micah 6:6-8: "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 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?"

Isaiah 58:3-7: "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice? Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"



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James 2:15-17: “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

Matthew 25: 31-46: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Luke 18:1-8: “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’”



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Advocate!

The primary tool of the Covenant is to prompt elected officials to make commitments to overcoming poverty. The religious community can provide leadership by asking for support for policies that reduce poverty and calling on elected officials to prioritize this agenda.

We can accomplish this by networking, educating others, and advocating on legislative issues to raise attention for our vision and goals. That requires establishing and building relationships with your senators and representatives, as well as local and state officials. Such relationships provide an opportunity to gain attention for the Covenant—to make legislators and staff aware of its vision, your commitment, and the expectation that they will address the concerns of those in poverty.

What You Want From Your Elected Officials

- Familiarity with the Covenant. At Pentecost 2006, hundreds of constituents from around the country canvassed offices on Capitol Hill to introduce the Covenant to their congressional representatives. But don't assume that every member of Congress will be familiar with it! So the first thing to do is to introduce (or reintroduce as the case may be) the Covenant—this can be a good foot in the door, as well as a great way to build relationships with your elected officials and their staff.
- Support for the Covenant. Public statements of support for the vision of the Covenant, as well as its three major goals (making work work, reducing child poverty, and ending extreme global poverty), are a good first step. Some legislators may like the vision of the Covenant and some, but not all, of its ideas. In this case, we still want whatever support is possible! This might entail support for a section(s) of the Covenant of primary concern given a legislator's background or area of expertise. You can build on such interest in the coming years as the Covenant Campaign continues to educate elected officials about poverty as a multifaceted challenge.
- Feedback on the Covenant. Whether you gain support for the entire Covenant, just part of it, or receive total disagreement, it's important to *listen* to what your elected officials say about your proposals. We need you to help us understand concerns so we can address them. You want them to listen to you, so be prepared to reciprocate. Ideally, feedback will include examples of how they are already supporting the three broad goals or specific goals (such as specific policy recommendations in the Covenant), efforts they are making, challenges they face, help they need from you or others, and the like. You may also learn why they do not agree with the Covenant, what keeps them from wanting to engage with it and you, what they would add, or what is unclear to them. Take careful notes so that you can return over time with more information to address their concerns.

Meeting With Elected Officials

Meeting with your elected official and/or staff is not only a great way to educate them about ways we can overcome poverty, but it is also a great way to forge relationships built on trust. The goal is to educate them—and their staff—about your group's identity and credibility, perspective, ability to influence others, and concerns and “asks.” This education can lead to a deeper relationship, which makes getting your message across easier.



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A letter of introduction asking to begin a dialogue with the elected official and his or her office is a great first step. A letter from you and others should provide information on who you are, your concerns about poverty, how you are acting to address poverty, that you think good public policy can help, and that you want to learn more about his or her views on low-income challenges and policies. Do your homework! If you know of good things she or he has done to reduce poverty, make sure to call attention to those. And, don't forget to *ask* for something! A good way to start or deepen the relationship is to meet with the official, invite them to visit your church or organization, and ask for a reaction to the Covenant. (See the next page for a letter template.)

After you establish contact and get a meeting, you want to become a "go to" resource for them. In your meeting, phone conversations, or interactions at public events, you should listen to their reactions to the Covenant and your vision. Think about those and what actions they should prompt from you. Did they indicate they need more information? That you should be in touch with someone in their office? You can keep the conversation going by helping to meet their needs and establishing yourself as a credible source. In addition to answering questions they have, keep them informed of Covenant Campaign efforts, action alerts, and media stories. Make sure they know we are gaining momentum! *And let us know what you are hearing so we can help!*

How Elected Officials Can Show Support

There are a range of ways for elected officials to show support for the Covenant. For 2006, ideal ways include:

- Expressing support in a letter on their Web site or to your faith community
- Sending Sojourners/Call to Renewal a letter of support
- Making supporting statements at public gatherings
- Making supporting statements on the House or Senate floor, or in committee hearings
- Authoring op-eds in local papers that support the Covenant and its three goals
- Supporting legislation consistent with advancing the three Covenant goals

And don't forget to tell us if any of these happen! E-mail us at covenant@sojo.net with your stories and results.

Sample Letter to Your Senator/Representative

NOTES: The template on the following page uses the organization-church model of requesting a meeting. However, individuals are just as powerful! Feel free to alter as needed. You should FAX the letter to the representative's Washington, D.C. office and also fax and mail it to his or her closest district office.



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July XX, 2006

The Honorable Josiah Bartlet
ATTN: Scheduler
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20010
Fax: 202-555-1212

Dear Senator Bartlet:

On behalf of XXX, I would like to start a conversation with you about overcoming poverty in America and ending extreme global poverty. XXX is comprised of 20 of your constituents who are committed to uniting the church around poverty reduction, as well as helping political leaders understand our vision.

Our experiences and local efforts with poverty include _____. This work is crucial to helping low-income families escape poverty. So is good public policy. Our desire is for political leaders to bring a new moral and political will to policy discussions about poverty—just as the church has an increased emphasis on working together across the theological spectrum to help “the least of these” in our community and nation. There is a growing movement focused on working together in new ways—getting beyond ideology and divisions of Left/Right, liberal/conservative—to truly overcome poverty.

This “grand alliance” that acknowledges valid concerns of both sides in the political debate was represented in June in Washington, D.C., at the Sojourners/Call to Renewal “Pentecost 2006” national mobilization (www.sojo.net). The focus of the Pentecost 2006 event was the launching of *From Poverty to Opportunity: A Covenant for a New America* (www.covenantforanewamerica.org). This faith-based vision and platform asks political leaders to be leaders in overcoming poverty by supporting policies that foster both social and personal responsibility, getting beyond partisan divisions that prevent real solutions, and engaging each other and the faith community in a dialogue about results and accountability.

We have committed to the vision of the Covenant, which calls us to personal renewal and action, congregational renewal and engagement, and societal renewal through advocacy, and we’d like to start a discussion with you about the Covenant. **Hopefully you can meet with us in your district office during the August recess and/or visit our <organization/church/event>** so you can learn more about us, the Covenant, and its three broad goals: making work “work,” reducing child poverty, and ending extreme global poverty. You’ll find the Covenant, a list of national endorsers, and more at www.covenantforanewamerica.org.

I look forward to hearing from you about availability. You can contact me at cjcraig@bartlet.org or (202) 456-1111. I will follow up with your staff if I do not hear back. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

C. J. Craig
New Hampshire XXX

CC: <INSERT CITY> district office



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Ask the Tough Questions! Bird-dogging 101

Power concedes nothing without a demand. - Frederick Douglass

Introduction to Bird-dogging

Fact: 89 percent of Americans believe that the government should do more to help those in poverty, according to a recent poll commissioned by the Center for American Progress. So why in the world isn't the issue of poverty a major campaign issue?

The short answer is because constituents aren't demanding it. We can and must change this.

One of the big goals of *A Covenant for a New America* is for every candidate for elected office in 2008—especially presidential candidates—to offer and support a plan for overcoming poverty. But the midterm elections in 2006 will also be a critical time. Social movements don't happen overnight, and so we must build momentum for major commitments to overcoming poverty.

In order to place a commitment to overcome poverty at the top of the political agenda for the midterm and presidential elections, we must generate a critical mass of constituents that care deeply about overcoming poverty and will be prioritizing this commitment in their vote. "Bird-dogging" is a simple but effective tactic to pressure candidates to address the issue of poverty. Bird-dogging is politico-geek speak for asking candidates targeted questions at campaign-related events. During the course of both the primary and general elections, candidates appear at countless speeches, rallies, forums, and events. Typically these events feature a question and answer period during which attendees can ask questions of the candidate. Enter: you.

One Success Story

During the 2004 primary a well-organized coalition of students, activists, and faith leaders used this tactic to get the crisis of domestic and global HIV/AIDS squarely onto the Democratic political agenda. A calendar of speeches, forums, and events by all eight Democratic primary contenders were distributed across this network. People were trained and mobilized to bird-dog candidates at each event around a specific platform to fight the global AIDS pandemic. After weeks of being barraged with targeted questions at event after event, every Democratic candidate agreed to endorse the five-point AIDS platform prior to World AIDS Day on December 1, 2003.

8 Tips to Effective Bird-dogging

1. **Show up to the event early and often.** Candidate speeches, rallies, and public events are often sold-out and in packed venues. Therefore it is critical for you and your group (yes, the more the merrier) to arrive at least 30 minutes before the event begins or right when the doors open in order to ensure that you can get a good seat, close enough to ask a question.
2. **Do a trial run beforehand.** It's important to coordinate as a group in order to determine what questions each of you will ask. Practicing beforehand will also boost your confidence and comfort level before the real event.



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3. **Spread your group out across the venue.** Try to spread your group out in the audience in order to maximize the probability that at least one member of the group will get an opportunity to ask a question.
4. **Be the first one to raise your hand and/or to stand up behind the microphone.** Effective bird-dogging is not for the shy or timid. As soon as the formal speech is over boldly raise your hand and/or approach the designated microphone in order to improve your chances of being called upon. Often due to time constraints event moderators only solicit a few questions from the audience, thus you need to be one of the first in line.
5. **Introduce yourself and emphasize the church, organization, coalition, or other group you represent.*** In order to increase the power behind your question, it is important to present yourself confidently and respectfully. Mention in your introduction a larger group you represent. The broader the constituency the better.
6. **Ask for something specific in your question.** Good questions always end by asking what the candidate plans to do about the issue you are raising. A few sample questions are listed below.
7. **Follow up after the event with campaign staff.** At most events campaign staff are on hand listening to questions and taking notes. Some may approach you after the event, but don't count on it since staffers are very busy people. You should proactively try to find them in the audience in order to advocate further to see if the candidate is willing to engage in a dialogue.
8. **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** You need to be a broken record for overcoming poverty. If a candidate hears a question at one event, she or he can wiggle around the question. If a candidate hears the same question over and over, she or he will pick up on this and get the signal that they need to understand the issue more thoroughly.

Sample Questions

“My name is ___ and I represent* more than 300 members of the (___) church in (your city or town)...

1. As a person of faith, I think it is unfair that millions of families are working hard, playing by the rules, yet are still trapped in poverty. What solutions would you propose to ensure that working people are able to support their families?
2. As a person of faith, I believe that children should not be poor, yet 13 million children live in poverty according to the Census Bureau. The United Kingdom has set a goal of reducing child poverty in 10 years. What policies and initiatives would you support in order to achieve that goal in the United States?
3. Roughly 1.2 billion people around the world live on less than \$1 a day—experts call this “extreme poverty.” Bono calls this “stupid poverty,” and I as a person of faith call it a “moral outrage.” What do you suggest we do to address the needs of people around the world who live in extreme poverty?

* Since many of you belong to churches or section 501(c)(3) organizations that are prohibited from partisan electoral activity on behalf of (or in opposition to) candidates for elective public office, be careful in your questions not to suggest to the candidate or the audience that you are supporting or opposing their candidacy. For more information about legal rules for 501(c)(3) organizations, visit <http://www.afj.org/nonprofit/> for the nonprofit advocacy Web page of the Alliance for Justice.



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Use the Media to Spread the Word!

Sojourners/Call to Renewal Press Contact:

Jack Pannell, Press Secretary
202.328.8842 • jpannell@sojo.net

Media can be a powerful tool to help spread the message of *A Covenant for a New America* in your local communities. One of the best and most articulate news articles generated from the Pentecost 2006 conference was published by Rev. Kenneth Williams and Rev. John Macholz attendees of the conference in their hometown newspaper, the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*. Below we have put together a few approaches to becoming a media organizer. We have also attached the news article by Rev. Kenneth Williams and Rev. John Macholz as an extraordinary example of grassroots messaging at work. As you organize events for the Covenant Campaign in your communities, we urge you to find creative ways to engage the media. As you build your organizing plans also consider drafting a media plan. The media staff at Sojourners/Call to Renewal is available to assist you with planning and strategy.

Writing a Letter-to-the-Editor or Op-Ed

Your words and stories of personal experience regarding poverty issues are the most effective and newsworthy articles. Start by crafting what you want your main message to be. Papers look for clear, concise, and passionate opinions. Combine your personal stories with tangible facts on how you have seen a particular issue affect the community. Identify who you are, why you are writing, what the issue is, how it affects the community, and what others can do about it.

Planning an Event

Planning an event, rally, or march can draw attention to the issue and create energy for *A Covenant for a New America*. Gaining press coverage for your local event is an important part of advancing the message of ending poverty. Events should be planned and executed with a goal of catching the media's attention. We have learned three basic rules for planning a media event.

1. **Frame Your Message.** *A Covenant for a New America* offers a very clear and unifying message of overcoming poverty with religious commitment and political leadership. *A Covenant for a New America* not only provides vision but also articulate talking points to guide your message for a successful and newsworthy event. Personal testimony from those in poverty is very effective.
2. **Timing is Everything.** When is the best time to hold your event? We can tell you the worst time. In most cities, unless you are breaking news, the worse time to plan an event is during the evening news hour and when newspaper reporters are usually writing stories. Thus, do not plan an event between 4 and 7 p.m. The best time for a press conference or news event is from mid-morning to mid-afternoon on weekdays. Give adequate notice to reporters on your media list but do so within seven days of the event. If you only have 24 hours to organize a press event, you diminish your chances for full coverage by numerous news outlets. Plan ahead.
3. **Keep it Simple.** TV and print photographers will make a decision to cover an event based on the compel-



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ling images they are likely to capture. So think visually and plan for an action to be captured on camera. Make sure your event is short, with just the right amount of speakers. A press conference should generally last no longer than 30 minutes. Be creative, keep it simple, and stay on message.

Conduct Media Research

Find out what your local media outlets are saying about domestic and global poverty, particularly on current political issues that impact the vulnerable in our society such as health care, education, housing, tax policies, and immigration. Conduct this research on three fronts: print, radio, and television. A quick and easy way to find lists of media in your city is to go to Congress.org and type in your zip code under “Browse Media Guide.”

After you have identified which outlets you are interested in contacting, go to their Web sites and find out what they have been writing or saying about these issues. How have the issues been covered in the news recently? Have the outlets taken a particular stand on the issue editorially? The more knowledgeable you are, the more credible you are. Back issues of newspapers can be reviewed at their offices, in the library, or at a local college or university library. Your subject matter search should cover the past six months to a year. With this information, you will have a much clearer picture of the news outlet’s thoughts on your topic.

Assemble a List

The next step is to identify specific reporters, producers, and columnists who cover poverty-related issues for your local news outlets. There are several ways to do this. First, go to their Web site and see which reporters or columnists have written stories, columns, or op-eds on the issue. (Be aware that online newspaper archives usually go back only seven days.) Some news Web sites will even list reporters by department. You can also call the newspaper’s main switchboard and ask the operator for information about who covers economics, politics, and domestic issues.

Once you have names and contact information, use a spreadsheet tool like Microsoft Excel to compile a list. Be sure to include the reporter’s name, media outlet, e-mail address, and telephone number.

Using the List

Once you have a list compiled, you can use the mail merge feature to send press releases, media advisories, or other information via e-mail. Prepare your document to send, send it, and then follow up with phone calls and/or personal e-mails to a few key reporters. Keep the list updated with current e-mails and telephone numbers and add and remove names as appropriate.

Writing a Press Advisory

Press advisories should be succinct—about a half a page—and be marked clearly with the words “Press Advisory.”

The first paragraph should include the who, what, where, why, and when of the event. For example: “People of faith rally with the common desire to overcome poverty at Springfields Town Hall, 1212 Mainstreet, on July 30th, 2006 at 12 Noon. We invite members of the community to join with us in support of *A Covenant for a New America* that moves from poverty to opportunity.” If a speaker is making a presentation, include that information as well.

The second paragraph of a press advisory should include a deeper description of the purpose of the event and how it was organized. Do not assume the reader will understand the need for a public event.



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You might want to include a quote from a spokesperson of the organization in charge of the public event. Make it clear and to the point.

At the end of the advisory, type “#” Then include two contact names with phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Print it on the letterhead of hosting organizations.

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For more information on working with the media, including samples and writing a longer press release on the day of your event to encourage further coverage, see http://www.actionforchange.org/launch_guide/reaching_out.html.



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Religious leaders stand up for unity in fight against poverty

(This guest essay was reprinted from the July 7, 2006, edition of the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, Rochester, NY)

The Rev. Kenneth Williams

The Rev. John Macholz

Guest essayists

(July 7, 2006) — As the rain fell in biblical proportions on Washington, D.C., more than 500 religious leaders, 200 of them under the age of 30, met in National City Christian Church in late June to join their spirits in revival and start a new political movement.

It is a movement based on two primary principles: that poverty should rise in the American conscience as the primary moral issue of our day, becoming a focal point of the 2008 presidential election, and that the religious right should not be the only voice of faith heard in the public square.

We were privileged to be there.

The Rev. Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners* magazine and author of the best-selling book *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*, has been quietly building the foundation for this movement for a long while. The three-day rally in Washington focused on a document titled *From Poverty to Opportunity: A Covenant for a New America* (covenantforanewamerica.org).

Against a culture divided over the war in Iraq and immigration, and demoralized by Katrina failures that exposed the appalling level of poverty in the richest nation on Earth, this movement is determined to overcome poverty with religious commitment from a broad spectrum of faith traditions and political leadership that is bipartisan in nature and moral in character.

The document calls for achievements in three areas. First, “work must work and provide for family economic success and security,” with the primary objective of raising the minimum wage. Studies have shown that the present wage, set in 1997, has the buying power of wages paid in 1955.

Secondly, “children should not be poor.” The challenge is to follow the United Kingdom’s lead with the development of a national plan to cut child poverty in half in 10 years.

The third area is the declaration that “extreme global poverty must end,” aiming for support by the United States of the intent of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, which call for increased aid to the poorest nations, debt cancellation, and fair trade policies.

The 500 of us marched a mile and a half to the Capitol through the rain, holding signs that read “Make poverty history” and “Poverty is not a family value.” Organized by state, we visited congressional delegations. We were able to have a very lively exchange with Rep. Louise Slaughter, and we joined a larger New York delegation to meet with a staffer in Sen. Charles Schumer’s office.



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Throughout the conference there were addresses by an impressive array of political leaders from both sides of the aisle—Sens. Rick Santorum, Sam Brownback, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Blanche Lincoln; Reps. John Lewis, James Clyburn, Rosa DeLauro, and Dennis Moore. Exhibited was a universal passion, beyond expedient political agreeableness, for a movement like ours to break the stagnation and ideological log jam in Congress. The politicians echoed with their energy the line in the Covenant: “Our country needs a new grand alliance between liberals and conservatives that makes overcoming poverty a nonpartisan agenda and a bipartisan cause.”

Thirty-seven million Americans live below the poverty line, 13 million are children. Forty-five million Americans have no health insurance. More than 2 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. We spend billions of dollars on the war in Iraq. As Marian Wright Edelman from the Children’s Defense Fund told us at the conference, “We spend more on our prisons in America than we do on education.”

Our priorities as a people and the use of our limited resources need to be examined for their human impact. Quality of life issues are moral issues that must be addressed, particularly by people of faith.

The rains in the Northeast during this time gave way to floods affecting hundreds of thousands of people. We raced resources to those people, giving them hope in the midst of calamity. We told them, “We’re in this together. We will see you through.”

The movement just released, to build *A Covenant for a New America*, will make this promise to the poor every single day, rain or shine.

Macholz is pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church, Williams is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Rochester.



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Appendix

Endorsers of the Covenant (List updated 7/18/2006)

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Stan Hastey, Executive Director, Alliance of Baptists*
Bread for the World
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Office of the General Minister and President
Christian Community Development Association
Christian Community Health Fellowship
Rev. Dr. Peter Borgdorff, Executive Director of Ministries, Christian Reformed Church*
Clergy Strategic Alliances
Community of Christ
Rev. Dr. Daniel Vestal, Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship*
Bob Andringa, President Emeritus, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities*
Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)
Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane D.D., Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C.*
Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education
Glenn R. Palmberg, President, Evangelical Covenant Church*
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Ronald J. Sider, President, Evangelicals for Social Action
Dr. Robert M. Franklin, Professor of Social Ethics, Emory University and
President, Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta*
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Gamaliel, National Clergy Caucus
Habitat for Humanity International
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches USA
Dr. Ron Benefiel, President, Nazarene Theological Seminary*
Dr. Tom Nees, Director of USA/Canada Mission/Evangelism, Church of the Nazarene*
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Rick Chamiec-Case, North American Association of Christians in Social Work
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America*
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
The Servant Forge
Rev. John Thomas, President and General Minister, United Church of Christ*
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
Volunteers of America
World Vision

* Churches/organizations listed for identification purposes.

Endorsers support the principle of overcoming poverty with increased religious partnership and political leadership and support the broad goals of the Covenant. They may not have formal positions on all public policies named within and/or may not be actively working on all issues addressed.



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STATE AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Steven McCullough, President and CEO, Bethel New Life Inc., Chicago

Disciples Advocacy and Witness Network of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Capital Area

Rev. Gabriel A. Salguero, The Lamb's Manhattan Church of the Nazarene, New York

The Let Justice Roll Coalition, Chicago

Protestants for the Common Good, Chicago

FROM POVERTY TO OPPORTUNITY

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Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

—Proverbs 31:9

Throughout the Bible, God shows a special concern for those in poverty and acts in history to lift them up.

Our times call for a new moral and political will that merges personal and social responsibility, a commitment to reverse family breakdown, and a more honest assessment of both the individual decisions and social systems that trap people in poverty. Our country needs a grand alliance between liberals and conservatives that makes overcoming poverty a nonpartisan agenda and a bipartisan cause.

Religious leaders from across the theological and political spectrum are building new common ground around a commitment to meeting the needs of “the least of these.” We are insisting that strengthening the common good be the standard that guides public policy.

Restoring the hope of our poorest families will require nothing less than a national change of heart. It is a challenge the church and political leaders should embrace. Our vision is:

■ **Work must work and provide for family economic success and security.**

Those who work responsibly should have a living family income that provides a decent standard of living.

■ **Children should not be poor.** As a first step, our nation should develop and commit to a plan that reduces child poverty by half over 10 years.

■ **Extreme global poverty must end.** The U.S. should support effective aid, good governance, just trade policies, and debt cancellation in order to help lift billions of people out of extreme poverty.

We embrace this covenant and invite God’s help as we commit to:

- Personal renewal and action
- Congregational renewal and engagement
- Societal renewal through the advocacy of voice and witness

CONNECT WITH THE COVENANT AT

www.covenantforanewamerica.org