

The Alabama Faith Council

ALABAMA FAITH COUNCIL STATEMENT ON OBSTACLES TO JUST GOVERNMENT

In 1963, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the following in a letter to fellow clergy about segregation while in the Birmingham City jail: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” While Alabama’s segregationist laws have been rendered moot by the federal courts and laws, our 1901 Constitution—Alabama’s sixth one—is still a major impediment to racial and economic justice in the state especially for those whose needs are the greatest and those whose resources in life are the least. Alabama’s 1901 Constitution creates a governmental structure that concentrates power in the legislature where it is easy for wealthy interest groups to perpetuate the Constitution’s unfair impacts on poor and middle class Alabamians.

CONSIDERING THE FACTS:

- John Knox, the President of the 1901 Constitution Convention, said that the purpose of the convention was to “establish white supremacy in this state.”¹
- There is tremendous evidence that the 1901 Constitution was not legally ratified.²
- There is no right to public education in Alabama’s current Constitution.³
- The tax code is embedded in Alabama’s Constitution which makes it more difficult to change to a fair and adequate tax system.⁴
- Alabama taxes people in poverty at a rate higher than any other state in the nation. For example, Alabama has one of the most regressive tax structures because of its heavy reliance on sales taxes. Also, our state income tax threshold for a family of four is \$12,600 which is well below the federal poverty line.⁵
- A constitutional amendment prohibits Alabama from using any of our state gas taxes towards public transportation. Alabama is the only state east of Colorado that spends no money on public transportation.⁶
- Lobbyists can spend up to \$250 per day per legislator without having to report any of it.⁷
- Political Action Committees can transfer donations making it easy to hide the original source of large donations.⁸

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OUR FAITH TRADITIONS SHARE IN COMMON:

- The Torah calls us to pursue justice – “Justice, Justice shall you pursue” – Deuteronomy 16:20; “What does the Lord require of you but to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.” – Micah 6:8.
- Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount – “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” – Matthew 5:6.
- The Qur’an teaches us to hold fast to justice – “O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.” – An-Nisa 4:35.

IN VIEW OF THESE FACTS AND PRINCIPLES, WE RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

- To apply the principles of our faith to this important and timely issue.
- To study and reflect on the barriers to just government in Alabama.
- To support progress toward a more just government including efforts to create a new Alabama Constitution.

SIGNATURES TO THE AFC STATEMENT ON OBSTACLES TO JUST GOVERNMENT

Below are the names and titles of those who have signed onto this AFC Statement. Names are organized by date first and then by last name. Please note that official signatures are on file for each of the names listed.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Title and/or Jurisdiction</u>
11/1/07	The Rev. Father Paul Costopoulos, Dean, Holy Trinity/ Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Birmingham	
11/1/07	Rev. Thomas Evans, Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Sheppards & Lapsley, Presbyterian Church USA	
11/1/07	Rev. William Leggett, Pastor, Unitarian Universalist Church, Birmingham	
11/1/07	Albert Manzella for the Right Rev. Robert Baker, Bishop, Roman Catholic Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama	
11/1/07	Rev. Ricki A. Mason for the Right Rev. Julian Gordy, Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Southeastern Synod	
11/1/07	Rev. Dick Sales for Rev. John Mobley, Regional Minister, Alabama and Northwest Florida Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	
11/1/07	The Right Rev. Henry N. Parsley, Bishop, Diocese of Alabama, Episcopal Church USA	
11/1/07	Rev. Dr. Edward E. Rodgers, Second Vice President, Missionary Baptist Church, Alabama State Convention	
11/1/07	Ashfaq Taufique, President, Birmingham Islamic Society	
11/1/07	Imam Abdul-Hakeem Nabeeh Um'Rani, Masjidul Qur'an, Birmingham	
11/1/07	The Right Rev. Calvin Woods, Bishop, New Era Baptist State Convention of Alabama	
12/20/07	The Right Rev. Will Willimon, Resident Bishop, United Methodist Church in North Alabama	
12/24/07	Cantor Daniel Gale, Temple Beth-El (Conservative Judaism), Birmingham	
1/03/08	The Right Rev. Philip Duncan, II, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast	
1/03/08	Rabbi Donald M. Kunstadt, Springhill Avenue Temple (Reform Judaism), Mobile	
1/04/08	The Right Rev. H. Julian Gordy, Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Southeastern Synod	
1/08/08	Dr. Nancy Whitt, Birmingham Friends Meeting (Quaker)	

Date Name Title and/or Jurisdiction

1/11/08 The Right Rev. Earnest L. Palmer, Bishop, Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship of Alabama

FOOTNOTES TO THE AFC STATEMENT ON OBSTACLES TO JUST GOVERNMENT

- ¹ Day Two, May 22, 1901 of the Official Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Alabama.
- ² Malcolm Cook McMillan, Constitutional Development in Alabama (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), Pages 349-359.
- ³ Alabama Constitution of 1901, Amendment 111.
- ⁴ Arise Citizens' Policy Project and Voices for Alabama's Children, The Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook (Montgomery: Arise Citizens' Policy Project, 2005) Page 23 AND Arise Citizens' Policy Project, *Alabama's Next Step Toward Tax Fairness* (2007).
- ⁵ Arise Citizens' Policy Project and Voices for Alabama's Children, The Alabama Tax & Budget Handbook (Montgomery: Arise Citizens' Policy Project, 2005), Pages 18-19 and 26-32.
- ⁶ Alabama Constitution of 1901, Amendment 354 AND Survey of State Funding for Public Transportation 2005, Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Table 1.1, Pages 1-2.
- ⁷ Arise Citizens' Policy Project, *"Show Me the Money": Four Barriers to Transparency* (2007).
- ⁸ Ibid.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH ON OBSTACLES TO JUST GOVERNMENT

Flynt, Wayne. Alabama in the Twentieth Century. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004.

Hamill, Susan Pace. The Least of These: Fair Taxes and the Moral Duty of Christians. Sweet Water Press, 2003.

Lehe, Lewis It's a Thick Book DVD. ACCR Foundation, 2007.

Thomson, Bailey, Editor. A Century of Controversy: Constitutional Reform in Alabama. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002.

UNDERSTANDING AND REMOVING OBSTACLES TO JUST GOVERNMENT

As more and more individuals and groups become aware of issues of justice in the state of Alabama, the need arises for a list of specific items for prayerful study and action. Whether an individual congregant, a whole congregation or a state-wide faith community, there are several ways to engage in the effort to remove obstacles to just government in Alabama:

STUDY

- Read the Obstacles to Just Government Statement that is on the Alabama Faith Council's web site: <http://www.alfaithcouncil.org>.
- Watch the innovative "It's a Thick Book" documentary created by Lewis Lehe (either online or by ordering a free DVD): www.constitutionALreform.org/IATB.
- Invite your Sunday school class to study this issue through Greater Birmingham Ministry's curriculum: www.gbm.org.
- Hold a Wednesday supper program that shows the "It's a Thick Book" documentary and have a trained facilitator to help answer questions.
- Read the Alabama Arise Tax & Budget handbook and "Four Barriers to Transparency" two-page handout: www.alarise.org/.
- Participate in monthly Obstacles to Just Government Workgroup toll free conference calls.
- Attend a constitutional reform (CR) training session to get empowered to speak with others about these issues and engage them in the CR Movement.

Once you have studied and reflected about these important issues at the heart of justice in Alabama, consider the following ways you can share your time trying to resolve them:

ACTION

- Sign-up to be a part of Alabama's Constitutional Reform Movement and receive free updates: www.constitutionALreform.org/GetInvolved/.
- Arrange a meeting with your state legislators to get their opinion and share yours.
- Organize a letter writing campaign within your congregation.
- Volunteer your time to support the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform Foundation's Mock Constitution Convention.
- Visit the resolution web site (<http://www.constitutionalreform.org/resolutions.shtml>) to see if your congregation or faith community has passed a resolution in support of CR. If not, ask your faith's leadership to reflect on this issue and to consider passing a resolution.
- Work with your local interfaith group to get involved and, if there is no such group in your community, call clergy to arrange a meeting.
- Work with others to develop creative awareness raising activities or calls to action.
- Facilitate or lead a CR training session for people in your community.

There are members in all of the Alabama Faith Council faith groups who would like to be involved in the effort to remove obstacles to just government. If you have ideas on how to reach these people or would like to help, please contact Mark Berte, the Obstacles to Just Government Workgroup Chair:

Mark@constitutionALreform.org or (205) 266-3371.