



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

## NORTH CAROLINA STATE CONFERENCE

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*What does the Lord require of you?  
But to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.*  
– Micah 6:8

### Open letter to Governor McCrory and State Legislators

Dear Governor McCrory, President Pro Tempore Berger, and Speaker Tillis,

We are clergy members who have devoted our careers to serving the people of North Carolina. Many of us are natives, and have lived here all our lives. We care about the moral fabric of our State. We trust you also care about the people of North Carolina—all the people.

We have never doubted the good heart of the state and its people. North Carolina ranks high in the South. It is consistently characterized as a caring state, by observers across the nation.

At the core of North Carolina's good reputation is our ability to build bridges of democracy—not walls of division. We have earned the nation's respect because most of the time we govern for the common good—the hallmark of democracy. We take seriously our pledge that this is a nation with *liberty and justice for all*.

From the moment each of you were elected, we have hoped for an energized, forward-thinking governance of an enlightened population. In the past three months, however, we see old bridges being torn down, and new walls being built up. As moral leaders we are compelled to speak out. We must fight back against your insistence on building walls.

We call on all people of good will to examine the tools of the non-violent moral movement to expose the hurtful, immoral, unconstitutional policies being discussed and passed in the Peoples House. These policies are similar to those by repressive regimes in other countries, who see their own citizens as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. If we are truly moral leaders, we must expose with our words and deeds these shameful attacks on the poor and working people of North Carolina.

We are guided in our critique by the words of Micah 6:8: *What does God require of us but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.*

We are also guided by the moral framework of our State Constitution: *We hold it to be self-evident that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness. All political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.*

Many of the policies you have proposed and adopted in the Peoples House are eerily reminiscent of the Old South policies shortly after slavery was defeated, in the 1870's, when the old slave-holders launched their campaign to 'redeem' (their) America. Your policies attack the voting and political participation rights of African Americans, just as the redeemers did back then. You rejected funding for Medicaid that stripped over a half million poor people of health care. You rejected funding for weekly payments for over 150,000 workers looking for jobs. You have repeatedly disrespected our sisters and brothers from Latin America. You insist on promoting policies to de-fund public education—which will lead to more re-segregation of our children's school years. You cut the tax credit for over 900,000 poor and working people, while giving a tax break to 23 of the wealthiest people in our State. And you introduced your voter suppression law on the day all African Americans and people of good will remember—April 4th—when Dr. King was assassinated for trying to expand the electorate—not take it back to the all-white voting days. While crucifying the voting rights of the poor and minorities you advocate making it easier to get guns. These policies are eerily similar to Richard Nixon's white Southern Strategy and George Wallace's interposition and nullification policies, with a 21<sup>st</sup> century twist.

Is this really how the leadership of the 2013 General Assembly wants to be known? Do you really want to be remembered as being on the wrong side of history? The wrong side of democracy? The wrong side of the Constitution?

Your policies target vulnerable people. The LGBT community was discouraged--but not defeated--by the rejection of marriage as a right of all couples. Little children are being rejected for pre-school programs, and the policies being promoted in the name of educational reform will further divide the rich from the poor, one race from another. Immigrants are important and inseparable members of our communities. But we penalize those who lack proper documentation.

You get our point. North Carolina has long-standing pockets of poverty, within our cities and in our country-side. We should be ashamed. North Carolina has some of the best secondary and higher education institutions in the country. But we also have some of the worst, and the gap widens. A poor woman may work three jobs and still be poor. We cannot demonize the people Jesus called "the least of these." We must stand together, or the house we have built will not stand. We are committed to five principles for the common good:

1. **Economic sustainability and ending poverty** by fighting for full employment, living wages, the alleviation of disparate unemployment, a green economy, labor rights, affordable housing, targeted empowerment zones, strong safety net services for the poor, fair policies for immigrants, infrastructure development and fair tax reform.
2. **Educational equality** by ensuring every child receives a high quality, well-funded, Constitutional, diverse public education, access to Community Colleges and Universities and equitable funding for minority colleges and universities.
3. **Healthcare for all** by ensuring access to the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security and providing environmental protection.
4. **Fairness in the criminal justice system** by addressing the continuing inequalities in the system and providing equal protection under the law for black, brown and poor white people.
5. **Voting rights** by defending the right to vote and expanding voting rights for all people by standing against suppression tactics, such as voter ID, restriction of Early Voting, race-based redistricting, or any other effort that undermines equal protection

under the law.

It is our perspective that North Carolina has stopped moving forward. We are stalled. Political differences are no longer bound by picket fences, but rather by walls of steel and concrete, high and daunting.

We could learn a lesson from our past. Eleven days after Bloody Sunday at Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on March 18, 1965, the walls of Jim Crow voting began to come down when Senate Bill 1564 was introduced by Mike Mansfield, a Democrat, and Everett Dirksen, a Republican. Over 94% of all the Republicans in the Senate voted to tear down the southern walls of virtually total voter suppression for African Americans. And, almost every northern Democrat joined them--73% of all Democrats voted to tear down the Jim Crow Voting Walls.

Every time a wall comes down -- walls that divided states, political parties, and citizens -- we can all move about freely in the confidence that honest communication, not walls of division, is the wellspring of our nation.

Yet we are concerned—as are our church members, as are many citizens of our state--that division, polarization, and conflict will eventually rebuild walls. We see your attack on our voting rights as building walls. The right to vote is, for example, the single way that the poor, disenfranchised, and ostracized residents of our state can show their pleasure or displeasure with the policies that affect each of us at every level.

Do you not know or understand that when this Republican-led General Assembly seeks to push a poll tax disguised as voter ID, curtail Early Voting, ban Same-Day registration, eliminate Sunday voting, add additional qualifications and burdens to the formerly incarcerated and so-called mentally incompetent, draw racially designed redistricting maps and in every way attempt to block and suppress the right to vote for all North Carolinians, it stinks of constitutional and voting rights violations? It reveals what Gen. Colin Powell called the shameful dark vein of intolerance that has taken over the Republican Party. These regressive and race-based policies are bad for North Carolina, bad for America and bad for everyday people of North Carolina.

Instead of going backwards we call on the General Assembly to expand democracy by:

1. Enforcing compliance of the 14th, 15th, and 24th Amendments to the Constitution, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
2. Maintaining the best voting system in the nation: Signature attestation combined with a five-year felony charge for lying.
3. Stopping race-based gerrymandering and redistricting which disenfranchises black and minority voters.
4. Enforcing the N.C. Constitution's requirement that all elections are free.
5. Improving Early Voting by opening polls on more Saturdays and Sundays.
6. Opening countywide voting centers on Election Day with Same Day Registration.
7. Maintaining automatic enfranchisement after people have paid their debt to society.

8. Releasing Help American Vote Act (HAVA) funds to allow for smoother elections.
9. Automatic registration on 18th Birthday, like the draft.
10. Making Election Day a State Holiday.

We call on all of us to build the bridges of understanding, and not the walls of division. The policies now being promoted demand our voice, not our silence. These new walls demand our action, not our complacency. We call on NC citizens who believe in the common good to pray and discern the ways we can use the moral tactics of the nonviolent movement to dramatize the shameful place we find ourselves in.

We shall speak and we shall act. We call upon all people of good will to join in the moral movement to be the beloved community that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called on each of us to build as people of faith.

Sincerely,



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Chair, Political Action and Legislative Committee  
Pastor, Greenleaf Christian Church Disciples of Christ, Goldsboro

/s/

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President, Greensboro Branch of the NAACP  
Pastor, New Light Missionary Baptist Church, Greensboro

/s/

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