

Alabama Faith Council: Have You Heard the One About . . . ?
(submitted for the March 2008 newsletter of The Quest for Social Justice)

So a Catholic nun and a Baptist preacher are driving down the road This line may sound like the start of bad joke that includes meeting up with a Jewish rabbi and follows with “and they all go into a bar.” Actually, it describes the start of an inspiring journey Sister Judith Smits and I made to attend the inaugural meeting of the Alabama Faith Council in Birmingham—where we did, come to think of it, meet up with some Jewish rabbis.

On February 25, over 250 people of faith from across our state attended the first annual state-wide meeting of the Alabama Faith Council. We gathered in respectful appreciation of our diverse expressions of faith and with the intention of addressing concertedly problems plaguing Alabama. Through keynote speakers and break out sessions we learned more about four main topics: immigration, constitutional reform, pre-kindergarten education, and interfaith dialogue. Although the main religions represented were the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—participants from other religions were also warmly welcomed. Not only did attendees learn about pressing needs for the people of Alabama so that we may join in common work, but we worshiped together in a spirit of unity and hope.

Sister Judith and I were glad to represent The Quest for Social Justice at this historic meeting. The goals of the AFC are consonant with the social justice goals of The Quest. As its website explains (www.alfaithcouncil.org), the Alabama Faith Council “exists so leaders and members of communities of faith may consult with each other, draw on one another’s faith and wisdom, and seek the best actions possible for the people of Alabama, especially those whose needs are the greatest and those whose resources in life are the least.” Its guiding principles are these:

- All life is sacred to God.
- All people are inherently equal in their humanity, worth, and dignity.
- Working together creates a safer and stronger community for all
- Dialogue among member groups is essential to build trust.
- Speaking on issues collectively is better than speaking alone
- Communities of faith are called to make a positive contribution to the common good through compassionate support of and listening to the voices of the poor and vulnerable.

The day-long event concluded in the sanctuary of the hosting Baptist church where a Jewish cantor sounded the shofar, a Muslim imam chanted an Islamic prayer, and a Christian led all in singing “Amazing Grace.” Sacred scriptures were read; prayers from varied traditions were spoken. At the end of the day, our common commitments melded into our harmonious experience of worship together. After all, at the end of the day we see what really matters for ourselves and those whom we serve because of our faith commitments.

And at the end of the day, two friends drove back from Birmingham to Mobile: a Catholic sister and a Baptist minister sharing from their own faith journeys as the miles flew by and home grew ever closer.

Submitted by:
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