

RAIN Asks Nevada Legislature To Preserve the State's Social Safety Net

On Feb. 2, 2009, just prior to the start of the 2009 Nevada Legislative Session, more than 130 committed Christians from all over the State of Nevada met at the First United Methodist Church in Carson City to participate in a RAIN Legislative Forum. In attendance were two ELCA Lutheran Bishops (Mark Holmerud of the Sierra Pacific Synod in northern Nevada and Stephen Talmage of the Grand Canyon Synod in southern Nevada), as was Nevada's Episcopal Bishop Dan Edwards. The heads of the other denominations comprising RAIN (Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic) also had representatives present. These eight faith leaders of Nevada later participated in the opening ceremonies of the 2009 Session by standing behind the invocator, Pastor Tom Beck of Faith Lutheran Church in Reno and RAIN President, who offered the opening prayer to start the Session. They did so to emphasize to legislators that people of faith expect their government to consider the common good when legislating, which requires careful consideration of the impact of budget cuts on the most vulnerable people in the population.

During the program itself, powerful presentations were made, featuring some key issues facing the people of Nevada--the impact of the economic downturn on children and families (including the increase in homelessness and loss of homes due to foreclosure), the deterioration of the State's health care safety net (especially for the uninsured and unemployed), the imprudent and wasteful use of money in our criminal justice system that does nothing to reduce recidivism or help victims of crime, and the inability of State government to set realistic budget priorities and raise the needed revenue to fund basic services.

Nevada Chief Justice James Hardesty summarized some of the recommendations the Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice will make to the 2009 Legislature. They included authorization of a first step in establishing a reentry program for persons released from prison (using fees assessed on defendants, grant funds, and donations as start up monies), development of alternatives to long prison sentences for non-violent offenders, and full use of funds designated to help victims of crime. The suggestions were innovative, thought-provoking, and challenging.

Assembly Speaker Barbara Buckley invited the people in attendance to follow the budget hearings carefully in the 2009 session. She promised that every item in the budget will be scrutinized, intimating that some programs will either be reduced, consolidated, or eliminated. Once this budget review is completed, the Legislature will turn its attention to raising the revenue to fund basic services in the budget, as determined by the money committees. It was apparent to the group that the current fiscal problems of the State cannot be solved solely by making draconian cuts in the budget nor by raising taxes substantially. Either approach will not work. A compromise will be needed, and it will require legislators to be patient and understanding of each others' points of view.

Others who spoke included 1) Nevada Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford, 2) Executive Director of the Nevada State Medical Assn. Larry Matheis, 3) President of the Nevada Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Nancy Hart, and 4) Chairman of the Clark County Housing Authority, Tim O'Callaghan. Nevada's First Lady, Dawn Gibbons, also attended, as did Sen. John Ensign's regional representative, Pam Matteoni, and Sen. Harry Reid's regional representative, Susan Lisagor. Most of those in the audience were active members of Christian churches throughout Nevada, who are deeply engaged in works of social justice, charity, and advocacy for the least among us.

It was a very moving, powerful experience. Many who attended spoke of how much they were touched by this event. It had the flavor of a church service, and those who attended were sent out committed to spread the word to Nevada Legislators that people of faith are in no mood for platitudes, empty slogans, and meaningless rhetoric. They want action to preserve programs that serve the least among us, and they will judge legislators both by their words and deeds as they negotiate and struggle to find the right combination of budget cuts and taxes in order to preserve the State's social safety net while serving the common good. For Christians, events like this remind us that we are obliged by our faith to reach out in love to our neighbors who are less fortunate. As so poignantly stated in the video (produced by RAIN Board member Rev. Wayne Brown) at the start of program, quoting from Matthew, Chapter 25: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or, when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?" And Jesus answered: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

All in the RAIN network need to pray, to speak out, and to act, in accordance with their faith, to help their neighbors and their legislators to follow Christ's teaching noted above. Together we can play a part in preserving the State's social safety net.



**LIST OF PERSONS TO BE RECOGNIZED
RAIN BREAKFAST FORUM
FEB 2 2009**

- I. Host: Rev. Rob Jennings-Teats, Pastor at First United Methodist Church in Carson City (to offer Opening Prayer and Introduce Men's Group Who Cooked Breakfast)**

- II. Heads of Judicatories In Attendance**
 - A. Bishop Mark Holmerud, Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA**
 - B. Bishop Steve Talmage, Grand Canyon Synod, ELCA**
 - C. Bishop Dan Edwards, Episcopal Diocese of Nevada**
 - D. Mr. Chris Rhodes, Vice-Moderator, representing Rev. Carol Wood, Moderator, Nevada Presbytery, Sierra Mission Partnership, Presbyterian Church USA**
 - E. Rev. Jerry Smith, District Superintendent, Nevada-Sierra District of the California-Nevada Conference of the United Methodist Church, representing Bishop Warner Brown**
 - F. Rev. Candace Lansberry, District Superintendent, North District of the Desert Southwest Conference of the United Methodist Church, representing Bishop Minerva Carcaño**
 - G. Rev. Charles Durante, Pastor of St. Teresa Avila Parish in Carson City, representing Bishop Randolph Calvo, of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Reno**
 - H. Mr. Timothy O'Callaghan, Social Action Ministry Coordinator of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Vegas, representing Bishop Joseph Pepe, and member of RAIN Board of Directors**

- III. RAIN Board Members in Attendance**

Vice President Art Ritter (Presbyterian)
Treasurer Ruth Frazier (Episcopalian)
Rev. Wayne Brown (Methodist, Las Vegas)
Rev. Bonnie Polley (Episcopalian, Las Vegas)
Rev. John Auer and Julie Auer (Methodist, Northern Nevada)
Rev. Jane Foraker-Thompson (Episcopalian, Northern Nevada)
Rev. Alan Dorway (Presbyterian, Northern Nevada)
Mr. John Cracchiolo, Nevada Catholic Conference (Northern Nevada)
Mr. Larry Struve, Secretary (Lutheran)
***Note: Introduce Founder of LAMN and RAIN—Rev. Ron Rentner (if in attendance)**

IV. LAMN Officers in Attendance

Rev. Jack Ericson, President of LAMN--Sparks

Rev. Paul Hansen, Vice President—Las Vegas

Ms. Sheila Freed, Treasurer—Reno

Ms Barbara Butler, Secretary—Las Vegas

V. Political Leaders Who Have Announced They Will Attend

- **Legislators**
 - **Sen. Majority Leader Steven Horsford, Senate District No. 4 (to arrive 8:30 AM)**
 - **Assemblyman Kelvin Atkinson, District No. 17, Clark County, Chair of Assembly Transportation Committee**
 - **Assemblyman David Bobzien, District No. 24 (northwest Reno), Vice Chair of Assembly Government Affairs Committee**
 - **Senator David Parks, Senate District No. 7, Clark County**
 - **Assembly Speaker Barbara Buckley, who will speak at 9:30 AM**
- **Representatives of Congressional Representatives**
 - **Susan Lisagor, Regional Representative for U.S. Senator Harry Reid (Confirmed)**
 - **Pamela Matteoni, Regional Representative for U.S. Senator John Ensign (Confirmed)**
- **First Lady Dawn Gibbons**
- **Chief Justice James Hardesty of the Nevada Supreme Court, who will speak at 8:45 AM**