



# Living It Out

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September 11, 2001  
*A Challenge to the  
 Beloved Community  
 Of Peace and Justice for All*

## Interfaith Leaders Respond to September 11 Events and the Harassment of Local Muslim and South Asian Communities

Americans barely had time to absorb the horror of the events of September 11, before the grief deepened from reports of the harassment of Arab, Muslim and South Asian communities across the country, and here locally in the Birmingham area. In response to all these traumatic events, representatives of Birmingham's faith communities held a press conference on Friday, September 21, at First Presbyterian Church, in order to express their shared pain, as well as to reaffirm a commitment to the highest ideals of our faith and our relationships of peace with one another. What follows are excerpts of some of those who spoke on behalf of their faith communities and the larger metropolitan community.

**Introductory Remarks by Mr. Lemarse Washington:**

*"We are here to send the message that we are an inclusive community..."*

This gathering today is being coordinated by the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ). We are here today to send the message that we are an inclusive community and that we are together in the wake of the backlash against our Islamic brothers and sisters, our Arab brothers and sisters, our Indian brothers and sisters, or our South Asian brothers and sisters. We are here to say to our community that we are moving beyond that.

**Remarks by Reverend Karen Matteson:**

*"We do not have to think alike, to love alike."*

This is a difficult time. A difficult time for all of us in many different ways. But one of the concerns I have rising to the surface these days is about that way that some of our dearest ideals may be in jeopardy. First of all, our American ideal of freedom of religious belief and freedom of religious expression, that we as American citizens have the right to our beliefs and to the expression of our beliefs, as long as we are mindful that our neighbor has that same right. Our greatest ideal is that we cherish that right

(Continued on page 2)

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and strive not to trample on the rights of others.

But there is another great ideal that I'm concerned about our losing sight of in these days, and that's the ideal that is the foundation of all the great world faiths, a foundation of the understanding of a call, a commandment, if you will, to loving God and to loving our neighbor as ourselves.

There was a Unitarian who was martyred for his beliefs, which were branded heresies at the time, and who said, "We do not all have to think alike to love alike." And I've been reminded of that for the days to come. That this ideal of loving our neighbors as ourselves is one that we have to hold onto, that we have to find in our faith traditions, to pray about, to gather in worship about, not just to remind ourselves to keep it in our thoughts, but to bring it into our common life.

We live in a very small part of the larger world here in our community of Birmingham, Alabama, but look at who is assembled here today, at the colors, at the ethnicities, at what we can't see, our beliefs, our faith, and know that the foundation of all of our life together is in our recognizing we are children of God, and that we're called to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We must strive together to try to build the kind of community that keeps those ideals in the forefront of all that we do and say and all that we are in the days to come. And may that be so. Thank you.

**Remarks by**

**Rabbi Jonathan Miller:**

*"We're here to talk about the things we hate... And we're here to talk about the people we love..."*

I'm Rabbi Jonathan Miller from Temple Emanu-El. I want to wish you all a *shanaH tovah*, a good, sweet year. We're in the midst of

our new year now. And may all of us as Americans be inscribed in the Book of Life.

I want to share with you what I hate today. I hate violence. I tell you that I hate murder, and I hate suicide. I'm an American who loves my country, and as an American Jew who loves his country, I have the right and the obligation and the duty to hate these things that are hateful to all Americans.

I want to share with you the things I love. I love the people of my country. I love all Americans. Never in the course of my years as an American have I ever been so in need of every American to rally together, to share the hurts that I feel, and to give me an opportunity to be a comfort to all Americans—to Jews, to Christians, to Muslims, to Buddhists, to all Hindus and atheists, to all those who love our country.

So, we're here to talk about the things we hate, and we are noble in the things we hate. And we're here to talk about the people we love, for they are all noble.

My tradition teaches that God created human beings in the singular mold of Adam and Eve to show how great is God's creation. Because, if a human being creates from a mold, creations all follow that mold. Every 25-cent piece pressed from the same mold looks like every other quarter from that mold.

But God takes one mold of Adam and Eve, and creates a rainbow of colors and a rainbow of beliefs, all of whom are beloved by the single Creator. So, it is incumbent on us to be loving to each other as Jews, and as Christians and as Muslims, but especially as Americans.

These are the ten days of repentance for the Jewish people. A very serious time. God says to us, "It is not the death of sinners that I seek. But rather that they should turn from their ways and live."

Let us celebrate life.

**Remarks by**

**Bishop Robert Fannin:**

*"To use religion for any purpose other than peace is to act against the*

*teachings of the Quran, the Torah and the New Testament."*

I'm Bishop Robert E. Fannin of the United Methodist Church, North Alabama Annual Conference. As a nation, we are still in shock following the horrendous, inhuman acts of some terrorists. Now we are mounting a united effort to bring the world and our country together. But we are also at the point where the name of America and the word, "freedom," must take on and reflect the meaning of inclusiveness, an understanding of love and the meaning of a democratic society.

In my opinion, the evil of the world has won if we ever judge any person of the world based solely on their accent, their name or their color. There is a great danger when we tend to lump all persons together of a particular faith as being of one personality. When our actions cause others to be afraid to carry on their normal, peaceful, daily lives, we become that which we deplore.

Our Muslim and Arab friends are as peace-loving as anyone here. To use religion for any purpose other than peace is to act against the teachings of the Quran, the Torah and the New Testament. Let us all as Americans not think in terms of slurs or threats or intimidations against our friends, but we must be united as peacemakers. For, by doing so, we will be the children of God.

**Remarks by**

**Rev. Tommy Hagler :**

*"I just believe that love will, in the end, win."*

I'm Reverend Tommy Hagler, pastor of Bryant Chapel AME Church and the President of Clergy That Care. I'm happy to have been invited to be a part of this faith gathering.

It's tough. This atrocious act has been done to our country. I look back and know what my people have gone through, but that does not give me a

right to be so personal that I forget where I live. This is, as the national anthem says, the land of the free and the home of the brave, and we must identify with that. There is too much tunnel vision. We must rally together.

I don't look at all Caucasians as Ku Klux Klansmen or skinheads. I don't look at all blacks as gang members. That's tunnel vision. We must face reality, and without complete vision, the nation will perish. So, I am just so glad to be a part of this kind of gathering. I refuse to think negatively. I know that I must love my brother. God said, "'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord."

I know that in my church, in my Bible class, I am teaching love because I know that love is the way. I am teaching respect for your fellow man. I am teaching that we are all Americans. And we must make sure that we respect everybody's belief. You have a right to those beliefs. That is what makes this country so great. I just believe that love will, in the end, win. Thank you so very much.

#### Remarks by

**Mr. Ashfaq Taufique:**

*"As Muslim Americans, we join our neighbors... in mourning the devastating loss of innocent, precious life that...Islam holds sacred. We pray for 1,700 Muslims that are still missing and presumed dead in the rubble of the World Trade Center."*

My name is Ashfaq Taufique, and I represent Birmingham Islamic Society. And standing with me are brothers from the Mosque of Quran and from the Nation of Islam, and I will speak on the behalf of the entire Muslim community of Birmingham.

We give our sincere and deepest thanks to the interfaith religious and

civic leaders of our town to come together to publicly denounce hatred and stereotyping of Muslims, Arabs and people of Asian origins simply because of their physical appearance.

We have said in the past, and we say again, that we the Muslims join the rest of the nation and condemn Tuesday's hijackings and attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and all our fellow-countrymen and properties. As Muslim Americans, we join our neighbors, co-workers, and friends across racial, cultural and religious lines in mourning the devastating loss of innocent, precious life that, I must say, Islam holds sacred.

We pray for 1,700 Muslims that are still missing and presumed dead in the rubble of the World Trade Center. We join all in praying for the families of the victims, for the law enforcement agencies, for the emergency workers, and all those whose confidence and security have been shaken by this terrorist act. We pray that Almighty God bless all of us, grant us with wisdom and strength in this time of trouble.

Once again we thank our fellow citizens, religious and civic leaders, who stand by us in this time of trouble. Islam, the religion of peace, provides the same protection to the non-Muslim living in a Muslim land ruled by Muslim rulers, and I would like to end with the saying today of Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—who said, "Discipline yourselves to a principle. If people do good to you, do good to them. And if people mistreat you, still be just and refrain from being unjust." Thank you.

#### Remarks by

**Mr. Lemarse Washington:**

*"We must turn to each other, and not on each other."*

I would like to thank all of you for your comments and your inspiring words this morning. We are all here, and you look so beautiful from where I stand. This is truly America. It's beautiful looking at all of us here today, talking about an inclusive community, talking about who we are as a community, who

we are as a state and who we are as a country.

Our President asked us to return to normalcy. I understood what he meant by that. He wanted us to go back to work. He wanted us to move on. He wanted us to go to our services on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. But I challenge you and I challenge all of us as Americans *not* to return to normalcy. Because normalcy says that we don't come together like this, and we don't look like this on a regular "normal" basis. So, let's don't return to that kind of normalcy. Let's turn to inclusiveness. We must turn to each other, and not on each other.

I believe that because of the challenges ahead, because of the enemy without, we will be forced to pull together, to work together. But when the current tension and crisis is over, let's not return to normalcy. Let's stay with the work of building an inclusive America. That's what we are working for. So, let's continue to move in that direction.

#### Closing Remarks by

**Dr. R. Lawton Higgs, Sr.**

*"Hate for hate only escalates the presence of evil in the world."*

The comments made today were only representative. We could have stood here for days, the heart of our community speaking these words. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., taught us that to return hate for hate only escalates the presence of evil in the world. And as our President, George W. Bush, reminded us last night, all of us have known our religions to be hijacked by violence and hatred. And Dr. King also said that it would be people who were "maladjusted" to that activity, people who were committed to love and justice and community who would carry on the salvation of the world. And may each of us go forth from this place and live the highest and best of the faith with which God has blessed us—and be peacemakers.

## ADVOCATES MEET AT GOVERNOR'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONFERENCE

Eleven GBM board, staff and volunteers attended the Governor's Third Annual Affordable Housing Conference September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. Increasing numbers of people are recognizing the serious problems that Birmingham has in affordable housing. The scarcity of decent, affordable units drives rent prices higher and higher, while many other households have little choice but to take what they can find and afford. Those units are often in serious, even dangerous disrepair.

The theme of the conference was *"Reinventing the Wheel: Innovative Concepts in Affordable Housing."* Although few new concepts were discussed at the conference, GBM representatives did get an opportunity to ask an array of questions to Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials, City of Birmingham department heads, housing authority officials, HOPE VI developers and many others.

After learning of the conference theme and conference tracks, which included *Getting Started and Mastering Your Plan, Partnerships Connecting for Success, Financing Your Plan, Implementation, and Physical Development*, GBM's Economic Justice Work Group hoped to get much needed answers to questions such as

- How many units of housing are lost each year in the city of Birmingham?
- How can we provide decent, affordable rental housing in the absence of a landlord/tenant

law?

- What has happened to the residents of Metropolitan Gardens Public Housing Community who have been displaced as a result of the HOPE VI project?

The group attended the conference with more than 40 prepared questions on subjects ranging from modular housing regulations to apparent conflicts between local lead abatement policies and HUD lead abatement policies.

GBM participants listened carefully and asked tough questions, even when attempts were made to thwart any attempt to get important information about various programs. In the session on HOPE VI, Integral Group Chairman and CEO Egbert Perry said that any opposition to the HOPE VI program was "hogwash." This statement did not prevent GBM representatives from asking about the current situation and the number of low-income residents displaced by the HOPE VI project slated for Metropolitan Gardens. Integral Group is fully one half of the development team for the Birmingham HOPE VI project.

One of the highlights of the conference was an informative session led by Ruth Wise, Executive Director of New Road Community Development Group of Exmore, Virginia. She told an empowering

story of how an impoverished community banded together to get a sewage system in the community. At the time, most of the homes had no running water or indoor toilets. The community developed an organization, bought the land that they were renting from absentee landlords and won the fight to get the sewage line. After winning the four-year sewage battle, 18 months ago New Road Community Development Group broke ground on its first house. To date, New Road has built over thirty 2 to 5 bedroom homes for its community.

The closing speaker was Selma Mayor James Perkins, Jr. Mayor Perkins' charge to the conference participants was to continue working to develop innovative ideas for low-income housing and to remember that the effort is to develop not only houses, but also healthy homes and communities.

Affordable housing in Birmingham has experienced some real successes, such as the developments by BEAT (Bethel Ensley Action Tasks), Habitat for Humanity, NSI (Neighborhood Services, Inc.) and others. Overall, however, Birmingham has not drawn even in the struggle, as more units are demolished or fall deeper into disrepair than are rehabbed or replaced by new units.

GBM continues to work towards neighborhood-based affordable housing initiatives that bring people and resources together with the leadership of those who face the problems most directly.



Ruth Wise is a 2001 winner of the Ford Foundation's "Leadership for A Changing World" award.

## MONTHS LATER, HEATING BILLS STILL BURDEN MANY AREA LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The dramatic rise in natural gas prices in the winter of 2000-2001 may seem long forgotten to many people, but the effects for many may well extend into the coming winter. Many low-income families, especially those on fixed incomes, remain in debt to local utilities. With large unpaid balances remaining, service for many families has been disconnected, and many will likely not be able to clear their accounts in order to reestablish service by the time cold weather arrives.

Jefferson County government worked in conjunction with the United Way and several area service providers, such as GBM, to provide some relief to families in

financial crisis as a result of the price increase. Those funds have been invaluable, but they have not been enough to solve the crisis for many other families.

GBM continues to seek donations from the community and to urge local governments to continue and step up their efforts before winter arrives. •

## DIRECT SERVICES NETWORK MEETS TO ADDRESS UTILITY CRISIS

Eighty-four year old Willie Hood did not have any other solution to her problem of an extremely high gas bill. She had to take out a \$1,000 loan to pay the bill if she was going to stay warm for the rest of the winter.

Many Alagasco customers like Ms. Hood were forced to choose between being warm and eating. Unlike Ms. Hood, many residents of the Birmingham metro area did not have the option to secure a loan to pay high utility bills in the winter of 2000. Many went without heat in the cold winter months and are facing that same fate this winter.

The original prediction for the increase of gas bills was 30-35 percent; however gas bills increased by 62 percent with no sign of decreasing. One GBM client reported that her monthly gas bill was normally around \$50 but had increased to over \$180 this winter.

The "Rising Cost of Utility Bills" was the theme of the first 2001 meeting of the Direct Services Network. The theme of the meeting was developed following numerous stories from clients

like Ms. Hood.

Thirty-plus service providers, advocates and community leaders packed into GBM's conference room to share their stories and information about resources from their perspective organizations.

The group noted Alagasco's guaranteed profit margin of 13.15 percent to 13.65 percent and other interesting facts about the company. Although the winter of 2000 was warmer-than-normal weather, Alagasco's net earnings were not affected because of the temperature adjustment mechanism that adjusts rates when the weather is too warm. According to the 2000 Energen Annual Report, Alagasco reported a net gain of 13.4 percent for fiscal year 2000.

The group also shared ideas on resources available to help people with gas bills and other utilities. Representatives from the Red Cross and Jefferson County Committee for Equal Opportunity (JCCEO) spoke about new programs that each offer. The group also decided to develop a sub-committee to continue the much-needed research around the utility crisis.

The sub-committee's charge from the group was to develop a position statement and recommendations on possible solutions for the crisis. The Direct Services Network will continue to meet every other month at Thirgood Memorial CME Church located on Center Street. The next meeting is scheduled for October 10 at noon.

### *Living it Out*

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#### **Sponsoring Faith Communities**

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Unitarian Church of Birmingham  
United Church of Christ  
United Methodist Church

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## Ava Hopkins To Become Director of Southern Organizing Cooperative

On October 15, Ava Hopkins will leave her position as GBM Economic Justice Organizer and become the Executive Director of the Southern Organizing Cooperative.

Ava leaves after two years with GBM, but her new role will keep her in close touch with Greater Birmingham Ministries as one of the members of the cooperative.

“This is probably one of the toughest decisions that I have had to make in a long time,” Ava wrote in her letter notifying GBM of her decision. “This move will allow me to build upon the work that was begun while I was at GBM and hopefully share some of the lessons that I have learned during these past two years of service. The Coop is embarking upon a new and challenging direction, a mission in which GBM played an instrumental role in creating. I hope that you will continue that leadership in the future, now, not only as a member, but a friend.”

We at GBM are sad to see Ava go, but we certainly wish her the very best and are grateful that the connection between us will remain through shared our work and respect, and appreciation. •

<b>GBM Direct Services Report</b>  <b>January – September, 2001</b>	
Total Number of Families Assisted	2,331
Total Number of People Assisted	5,782
Number of Children	2,634
Number of Food Bags Distributed	3,769
Value of Food Given	\$120,608
Qualified Financial Requests Received	\$231,832
Financial Assistance Given	\$123,044
Total Value of Physical Assistance Given	\$243,652

**We Need Your  
Help!**  
 Gas Bills from last  
 winter’s gas price increase  
 are still a major problem.  
 (see stories, page 5)

## Recent GBM Board Meetings Highlight Important Issues

Over the past few months, GBM’s board has invited various people from the community to meet with them and to address topics of concern. Some of those people and topics include:

- *Jim Fenstermaker*, Affordable Housing in Birmingham
- *Dr. R. Lawton Higgs, Sr.*, Reflections on the visit of Black Theology Founder James Cone to Birmingham
- *Felix Yarboro*, Remarks on the work of Community-Building in Birmingham upon his retirement from Independent Presbyterian Church
- *Helen Rivas*, A first-hand report on her participation in the recent United Nations’ World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa.

Each of these speakers brought invaluable information to our own work as a board. GBM deeply appreciates the willingness of people such as these to take the time to share their insights into these kinds of issues.



# Center Point Presbyterian Church Meets Minister's Challenge

Reverend Terry Tingle, the new minister of Center Point Presbyterian Church, "took a vow to shave his head" if his congregation would provide at least 2,000 cans of food for the food distribution ministry of Greater Birmingham Ministries. The congregation more than met the challenge, and they asked GBM Staffperson Sarah Price to help fulfill the pledge. Rev. Tingle had also challenged other area Presbyterians to also donate food during the summer months, when food demand often



outpaces seasonal donations.

Donating food to GBM's food pantry is a long-time commitment for Center Point Presbyterian, so members smiled as they got out their check books.

Undaunted, Rev. Tingle has pledged to hot wax his legs if local Presbyterians donate 15,000 cans of food to GBM.

## Open a Door

By making a contribution to Greater Birmingham Ministries, you open a door of opportunity and hope for people in need. Your contribution of money provides help with rent, utilities, and medicine for individuals throughout the Birmingham/Jefferson County area. Your contributions of food and clothing make it possible for others to conserve their meager financial resources to pay other bills. Your contribution of time and effort lets you work with and get to know people from all parts of the community.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Greater Birmingham Ministries. GBM is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization as defined by Internal Revenue Service codes. Contributions are tax-deductible.

## **Thank You...**

*To all the congregations,  
organizations, faith communities  
and individuals for your  
contributions to the work of Greater  
Birmingham Ministries, and*

## **Please...**

*Continue to help with  
donations of food, funds and  
clothing,*

***Especially** as the holiday food  
and gift distribution season  
approaches!*

A Belated

לשנה טובה

Shanah tovah

Happy New Year  
to the Jewish  
Community of  
Birmingham.

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