

# Quandary over moral values—Whose values are they?

By Marian Wright Edelman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Four days before the election, 2,200 people of every faith from all across America gathered at the Washington National Cathedral for an historic interfaith service for children and the poor.

Three weeks earlier, Reverend John Bryson Chane, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and Dean of the Cathedral, had issued with the Children's Defense Fund a call to witness for justice for children and the poor on election eve.

Bishop Chane reminded us during the moving interfaith service that although we were from diverse faith traditions, we were coming together "to claim and live a single moral imperative: that children enslaved by poverty in this country are a crisis unacceptable to us and to our creator, God."

Every major tradition calls on believers to put their faith into action by caring for the poor, the orphan and the widow. Yet, in our rich, powerful nation today, almost 13 million children are living in poverty, an increase of more than 1 million during President Bush's first term.

More than 5.5 million of these children endure extreme poverty. What moral values

in the richest nation on earth let its children be the poorest age group?

What are the moral values of leaders who, last year, permitted the richest 1 percent of Americans to reap 54 percent of public dollars from two tax cuts they had enacted earlier? The middle class got far less, and the poor got nothing. What kind of people are we when we permit our leaders to pass still more tax cuts recently for powerful special interests that further widen the gap between rich and poor when that gap is already the greatest it has ever been?

In October, the U.S. Department of Agriculture postponed the scheduled release of its annual report on hunger in America, a decision that kept crucial information under wraps until after Election Day. When the research paper finally came out (dated "October" but released on Nov. 19), it reported a rising number of American households suffering from "food insecurity."

The department said that in 2003, one in six households with children lacked money for access to enough food to meet basic needs and estimated that about 35 million Americans were "food insecure," including more than 13 million children; approximately 570,000 of those children experienced hun-

ger, meaning they had to go without meals for lack of money. Mothers often are the hungry sufferers who make sure children are fed first when money or food stamps run out at month's end. Those statistics were the worst since 1998.

Don't you think that millions of children waking up every day and not being sure where their next meal will come from or if they will get enough to eat, and more than half a million children going hungry in our wealthy, well-fed nation is a moral issue?

Nine million children in our nation lack health insurance, although 90 percent of uninsured children have parents who work. Forty-five million Americans are uninsured and hundreds of thousands of children needlessly suffer from preventable and untreated illnesses while their parents worry every time their child gets sick whether they should or can take their child to the doctor.

In 2002, infant mortality in this country actually increased for the first time in 44 years, and America lags behind 22 other industrialized nations in keeping our babies alive in the first year of life. How do we square these disturbing and unnecessary realities in the nation that leads the world in health technology and professes to value life?

The Gospels I read tell the story of a Great Physician whose earthly ministry revolved around healing the sick and curing the lame and bringing good news to the poor.

People of faith from every major tradition have a clear, moral litmus test. The prophet Isaiah told us "to loose the bonds of injustice" and to "share your bread with the hungry." The Qu'ran says, "Allah has instructed you... concerning the children who are weak and oppressed; that you stand firm for justice to orphans." And Jesus Christ said, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me, for the least among all of you is the greatest."

Now that our nation and pundits are focused on "moral values," those of us who believe and seek to follow these clear faith mandates need to speak up with a mighty voice. No one owns God or should be allowed to turn God into a single-issue partisan tool. Everyone who seeks to do God's will in the world should be working together to make our nation live up to the value that God and our national ideals require: justice for children and the poor.

Marian Wright Edelman is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

## NAACP

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est Black organization in the U.S.

"This is a clear opportunity to show America that Black America is no longer a monolithic people," Bryant says. "We're not all Democrats. There's a growing number of Republicans; that we're not all heterosexual, but there are gay African-Americans and I think that it's an urgent imperative for the NAACP to expand its order so that all of Black America will know that this is a home and that the next person will have a much broader shoulder."

Casting too broad of a net, however, could hamper efforts to expand support for the NAACP. Support for homosexual relations between consenting adults has varied from a low of 32 percent in 1986 to a high of 60 percent in May, shortly after the Supreme Court struck down a Texas anti-sodomy law. Citing Bush's support for a Constitutional amendment banning gay marriages, some Blacks abandoned Democrats in Ohio to support the Republican candidate for president.

The NAACP should also



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Foundation

establish an economics agenda beyond its annual corporate and hotel report cards, Ogletree says. "It's time to make sure this major civil rights organization is seated at the table where the economic benefits are being distributed," he says.

According to the University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth, annual Black spending power stood at \$688 billion in 2002 and is projected to reach \$921 billion in 2008.

Ogletree downplays report of strife between Mfume and Julian Bond.

"To me, the real story is how two strong-minded, incredibly gifted, committed people could work together so well," he says. "It's important to have organizations

with strong independent presidents to get things done and it is equally essential to have a clear unambiguous chairman who's going to fight the public and private battles to make sure the organization has its place at the table where resources are being redistributed. I saw it as a strength; not as a conflict."

Ronald Walters, a University of Maryland political science professor, disagrees.

"There's a problem with that," Walters says. "I think the CEO ought to take the point. This is the ironic thing about the NAACP. The chairman of the board had a stronger persona than the CEO. I've argued that they ought to have a much more aggressive CEO and that will take a lot of the heat off of the chair-

man of the board to be the out front person. It also would lessen, I think, some of the acrimony."

Bond says a search committee will be formed early next year, but the 64-member NAACP board will not rush into hiring a new president/CEO. General Counsel Dennis Hayes, who will serve as interim president, says he will not apply for the permanent position. The new president/CEO is expected to be hired

by the NAACP annual convention in July.

The key for whoever gets elected president will be their ability to walk in unity with the chair, says Ramona Edelin, former executive director of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

"We need someone who will complement the strength of the chairman and members of the board and who will be effective at organizing around an agenda, both

within the NAACP and within the larger African-American and African-descendants global context," Edelin says. "This must be someone who's experienced as an organizer and who is willing to roll up their sleeves and actually do the how-to. Hopefully, there will be a shared vision. I don't think there's been a time in history in which we've needed a clear agenda in a more compelling way."

## Curry

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American voters re-elected Bush last month even though they rated John Kerry, his Democratic opponent, more favorably on such issues as jobs, the economy and health care. They found Bush more likeable and felt he would do a better job fighting terrorism.

After the Supreme Court halted the vote count in Florida in 2000, leaving Bush with a minority of the popular vote, political observers predicted that with such a lack of mandate, Bush would try to govern closer to the center. Bush pushed an aggressive far-Right agenda, especially in his appointments to the federal courts and his opposition to affirmative action.

This time around, with a mere 3 percent margin of victory, Bush seems even more emboldened to continue his disastrous policies. Again, Bush has promised to unite the country. If the president wants to be true to his word, he can start by not misinterpreting the will of the American people. He was not given a mandate; he was given another four-year lease on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue to serve the people—all of the people.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

## Williams

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Well, I heard Mister Young sing about her

Well, I heard ole Neil put her down

Well, I hope Neil Young will remember

A Southern man don't need him around anyhow."

You can almost hear Alabama Governor George Wallace whistling away while burning eternally in his specially requested "WHITE ONLY" section of Hell.

Attorney Lloyd Williams is a member of the NJ, NY, CT, PA, MA & US Supreme Court bars.