

# **Voices of Moral Mondays**

## Testimonies of Faithfulness and Civil Disobedience

Collected by the North Carolina Council of Churches



## Table of Contents & Credits

Introduction: Mustard Seed.....	3
I Could Not Not Do It.....	4
Three Young Men.....	5
Six More Years.....	6
Failure to Disperse on Command.....	7
Hot, Tired, and Hungry.....	8
This Is What Democracy Looks Like.....	9
Let the Little Children Come to Me.....	10
What Does the Lord Require of You?.....	11
My 150 New BFFs.....	12
It Takes A Village to Eat Breakfast.....	13
Furious.....	14
Maintaining My Sanity.....	15
Created in God's Image.....	16
It's Personal.....	17
A Small Thing.....	18
The American Demonstrations.....	19
Meet Me On the Corner.....	20
Without Hesitation.....	21
Where Do We Go From Here?.....	22
From Asheville to Raleigh.....	23
Turn On the News, Stay Calm.....	24
The Work of the Holy Spirit.....	25
Since 1920.....	26
The Common Heritage of This State.....	27
Seventy-Three.....	28
Shining a Bright Light.....	29
From My Journal.....	30
Bending the Arc.....	31
Communion and Community.....	32
The Wrong Side of History.....	33
No Longer Alone.....	34

### About the NC Council of Churches

Since its inception more than 75 years ago, the North Carolina Council of Churches has used Christian values to promote unity and to work toward a better tomorrow. This is reflected through the Council's motto: "Strength in Unity, Peace through Justice."

Today, the Council consists of eighteen member denominations, with more than 6,200 congregations and about 1.5 million congregants across North Carolina. The Council enables those denominations, congregations, and people of faith to impact the state on issues of health and wellness, climate change, immigration policy, farmworker rights, legislation, and much more.

To learn more about the Council and its work, visit: [www.ncchurches.org](http://www.ncchurches.org).

### Moral Mondays - Join the Movement

While Moral Mondays in Raleigh have ended for this year, the NAACP-NC and other organizations have continued to organize similar events around the state. Get the latest at: [www.naacpnc.org](http://www.naacpnc.org)

### Credits

Thanks to all the individuals who submitted stories for this project, and the thousands more who have participated in Moral Mondays. NC Council of Churches' staff Aleta Payne and George Reed edited this booklet. Chris Liu-Beers did the layout and design. Duke Divinity School intern Michael Burns provided photography, including the cover photo.



## Introduction: Mustard Seed

By Rev. George Reed  
Executive Director, NC Council of Churches, Raleigh

I've been thinking about mustard seed as I reflect on Moral Mondays. Jesus once described the coming kingdom of God by comparing it to a tiny seed that grows into a large tree.

Moral Mondays started with a simple call to people of faith to prayer, to pursue the "moral high ground" of nonviolent protest and peaceful assembly, to register distress at the direction our state was being taken by the General Assembly and Governor. The call came from the Rev. William Barber, pastor of Goldsboro's Greenleaf Christian Church, president of the state chapter of the NAACP, and the creator and prophetic force behind Moral Mondays. On April 29 (my birthday, but I'm pretty sure that's just coincidental) there was a "pray-in," followed by a rally at the General Assembly, followed by civil disobedience that resulted in 17 arrests.

From that modest beginning, what became Moral Mondays (as far as I can remember or find in my email, that name was not used for the first Monday gathering) grew into a movement that attracted national and international attention, drew crowds that were repeatedly several thousand in number, and produced more than 940 arrests from April through July. It also drew attention from the state's elected leaders, including the Governor, who famously proclaimed us to be "outsiders," but also from the legislative minority, who felt undergirded in this dismal session by the support of Moral Mondays.

The first inkling I had that it was becoming news beyond the state was when I got email from an old high school friend, someone I hear from very infrequently, saying that she had just read about it on Yahoo and wanting me to tell her more about it. The national news media came in to report. (I was interviewed by reporters from American Public Media's Marketplace and PBS' Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, though, sadly, I didn't say much that they thought useful.) I heard from several friends and colleagues across the country who had heard about Moral Mondays.

I am proud of the participation of Council people from the start. Several of the heads of our member bodies attended. Many Board members, pastors and lay members of congregations affiliated with the Council, and our staff (past and present) were there as witnesses/supporters, and a goodly number were arrested. There was an air of homecoming to Moral Mondays, and I never attended without seeing a host of Council friends.

For those of you who did not attend any Moral Monday, each included a rally – singing, praying, speeches – followed by the sending in (i.e., into the legislative building) of those who were going to engage in civil disobedience and be arrested. Many of the witnesses/supporters waited to cheer on those arrested as they were loaded into prison buses and carried away for processing. Rev. Barber said from the start, and many of those arrested have said the same, that the thousands of witnesses/supporters were as significant for Moral Mondays as were the hundreds who were willing to be arrested.

I hope you will appreciate the personal reflections which follow. They come from those who were arrested and those who were there as witnesses/supporters. All have powerful stories to tell, though words alone cannot adequately communicate the energy and emotion felt by those who were actually in attendance.

Jesus also used the mustard seed to describe the faith expected of his followers. As Moral Mondays become a series of local and regional rallies across the state this fall and as participants look ahead to the need for civic engagement in registering new voters, many people of faith are demonstrating our faith as we water and fertilize the mustard seed and see it continue to grow.

## I Could Not Not Do It

By Larry Gaissert  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Raleigh

I am an educated, financially secure, slightly-beyond-middle-age, healthy, white, heterosexual, southern male. In other words I am a person of privilege. As a teenager in the 1960s, I lived in Birmingham, Alabama and was an almost eyewitness to the events that occurred there during that era's civil rights struggle.

I am also a person of faith, and my faith tradition tells me that my privileged status is a gift that carries with it certain responsibilities. Primary among those responsibilities is to care for those whom we refer to as the least of these...those on the margins, the ostracized, the powerless, the voiceless.

I watched the Moral Monday events, attended a couple, saw two friends get arrested. All the while, memories of the events, the brave people, the martyrs in Alabama during the 1960s were flooding back. Soon I realized that attending the Moral Monday rallies, posting links to Facebook, and commenting on others' posts were not enough.



I am not a skilled writer. I am not a strong leader. I lack the power of persuasion. But I am passionate, and from time to time that passion simply must be channeled into action. I came to realize that getting arrested was the way I was to channel my passion. I could not not do it.

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On July 8, I attended the civil disobedience training, had a green armband tied to my left arm, and, with 63 other people, entered the General Assembly Building. When ordered to disperse and leave the building, we did not do so and were arrested.

Do I believe my arrest will make a difference? Not for a minute! But eventually more than 900 of us were arrested. I do believe, I must believe, that cumulatively our efforts will eventually make a difference.

## Three Young Men

By Aleta Payne  
NC Council of Churches, Raleigh

The three most important people in my life happen to be young, African American men. None was born in North Carolina, but all have lived here most of their lives.

Precious as they are to me, they are also beloved children of God. Their Creator values them as much as God values anyone else, regardless of skin color, wealth, age or any other factor intertwined with recent human decisions about who gained and who lost in our state.

Standing on the sweaty edge of the final Moral Monday, at the end of a summer too long on bad legislative decisions and too short on political common sense and humanity, I was also reminded and reassured that my boys matter to a lot of people who have never met and will never meet them. All the folks who came out – to sing, to pray, to face arrest – did so not just for themselves, but for others who deserved better than the state's majority leadership provided. They were there for everyone's children, everyone's elderly neighbors or kin, for schools and teachers, for North Carolina's natural resources, for a state that had been a progressive model but has rapidly become a late-night joke.

The Legislature didn't just set out to diminish my sons and people who look like them; they seemed determined to minimize a substantial swath of the state's population. But week after week, those protestors proved to be much more than the politicians set out to make them seem. Those gathered in Raleigh were not fragmented and unworthy sub-groups of the population. We defied the caricatures invoked in an effort to limit us — potentially felonious; needy and greedy; poorly informed about our own bodies and well-being; unreasonably expectant of a sound education; carpet-bagging agitators importing discontent.

Anyone who actually walked among the crowd on that last or any other Monday knew it represented North Carolina. Those protesting care about this state and everyone in it, whether out of a place of faith or a sincere conviction that diminishing one of us diminishes all of us. On behalf of the three young men who call me Mom, I am grateful.

**All the folks who came – to sing, to pray, to face arrest – did so not just for themselves, but for others who deserved better.**

## Six More Years

By Madison Kimrey  
Burlington

For weeks, I heard about Moral Mondays. Finally, I had time to go yesterday. I've been to several demonstrations, but nothing like this. This was like a rock concert for people who care about what's going on in North Carolina and around the country. There were thousands of people there.

One of the things I like best about going to any kind of demonstration or participating in different forms of activism is that I get to meet a lot of people and talk to them. One of the things that's great about going to a huge event like yesterday's is that people come out and demonstrate for a variety of reasons. The theme of yesterday's Moral Monday was women's rights. I met a lot of people there, like representatives of the National Organization for Women, who were there standing up for the reproductive rights I want to have someday when I'm older. There were people there for other reasons too. There were people from Democracy North Carolina who were registering people to vote. There was a guy advocating for legalization of medical marijuana in our state. My mom spent some time talking to one guy who was informing people about Wal-Mart. I had no idea there was an issue with Wal-Mart, and the fact that guy was there made me aware.

One of the most powerful parts of my whole experience yesterday was the crowd parting and the people wearing blue ties on their arms walking inside the Legislature. Those people knew what was going to happen when they got inside. They knew they were going to be taken to jail. They were going to be taken to jail because they want me to have rights. They were going to be taken to jail because there are people who would get better health care, meals, and a place to sleep in jail than they would trying to survive on their own in my state that continues to take more and more away from those who have nothing.

I wanted so badly to be one of those people with the blue arm bands on. Unfortunately, I'm just a kid.

I've noticed a distinct difference in the reactions of people who support discrimination and laws like those currently being passed in North Carolina and the people who stand against these things. The people who defend the policies react to me by saying I've been brainwashed and can't think for myself. The people standing against the policies are all very nice to me. They welcome me. They encourage me to learn things and form my own opinions, whether or not I agree or disagree with them. Even though I can't march inside the building to get arrested because I'm just a kid, many adults told me yesterday I was welcome to attend the meeting about it next time.

**I wanted so badly to be one of those people with the blue arm bands on. Unfortunately, I'm just a kid.**

It's time for people to wake up and realize that, like it or not, kids like me are going to run the country someday. We may not go into politics directly, but we will vote and take part in democracy in other ways. The policies of the GOP currently reflect old ideas and the attitudes of many of those who represent them reflect they do not welcome new ideas or the input of the next generation. It's common to shout "Four more years!" when people want a President re-elected. Well, I shout "Six more years!" because in six more years, I will be 18 and I will be able to vote.

# Failure to Disperse on Command

By Betsy Crites  
Durham

After attending several Moral Monday protests at the NC Legislature, I finally decided to join the ranks of those who “trespass” and “fail to disperse on command.” I was by no means a groundbreaker. I may have been the 800th to face this encounter with the law while expressing disagreement with policies that punish the poor and reward the wealthy.

On top of refusing federal unemployment benefits and Medicaid to people who are economically vulnerable, our legislators are setting up obstacles to voting that will cost millions of dollars to enforce while disenfranchising those who fail to jump the additional hurdles.

Those who object to this flood of extreme legislation have sought ways to respond. The NAACP, a major force in North Carolina ever since Rev. William Barber found his voice, opened a dynamic but carefully managed path for our anger, Moral Mondays.

One branch of the path is to risk arrest as a consequence of defying the police request to leave the building where we most want to make our voices heard.

In preparation, my internal work was to understand my anger, recognizing my own failings, and cultivating feelings of compassion toward our elected leaders. They love their families and experience doubt and frustration like all of us. I value and respect them as persons. It is their policies that I object to so strongly. This central tenet of nonviolence, to separate the behavior from the person, takes practice.

During the civil disobedience and arrest, of course, those officials were nowhere in sight. Instead, my attention was focused on staying cheerful through the long hours of processing, being stoic with the pain in my handcuffed wrists, and trying to exude calm for my co-arrestees. At times, I admired the professional, sometimes thoughtful treatment, and silent restraint of the police going through their paces.

The day after, I thought more about the hot, dark fortress-on-wheels they called a bus, which transported us from the Legislature to the detention center. The locked bus windows were reinforced with heavy metal mesh. I recalled my shock at being shackled together with six others to walk 100 feet to a waiting room.

Next we moved to holding cells. They were clean and had painted cement benches. On one wall was a stainless steel toilet and attached sink-fountain. The cell had large windows so if we needed to relieve ourselves it would be in full view of our cellmates and the staff in the hallways.

Security overrides dignity in jailhouse architecture.

Of the 101 people arrested that Monday night, I just happened to be the last to walk through the detention center door at 11:30 p.m. During those hours, I met teachers, a school counselor, a social worker, a professor, an art gallery owner, a college student, and several retirees and grandmothers like myself. A teacher arrested with me said she could not face her students as a presumed role model if she didn’t stand up for better public schools.

One woman told me her son depends on Medicaid to get his medications for mental illness. She is unemployed. While we waited, in fact, we witnessed a red-faced bare-foot woman scream and rage against her detention, frantic at being restrained. We guessed that she must be on drugs or perhaps off her medications. Families losing their jobs and their safety net have few resources to handle such problems. I fear that the punitive policies we object to will lead more people on the path to detention centers, but they won’t get out the same night.

My own thoughts were of my three little grandchildren who will face more crowded classrooms, declining universities, and job insecurity. If they have the misfortune of ill-health and/or unemployment, their home state will not help them and will even block the federal government from helping them. If they have a learning disability or behavior disorder, their schools will have fewer staff to intervene and support them.

Those of us arrested are privileged in a way. Most are still in the middle class and have never been arrested, but we are by no means immune from the effects of this legislature’s policies.

Rev. Barber called on us to “stand our ground,” playing on the meaning of the infamous Stand Your Ground law that justified the killing of young Trayvon Martin.

I felt the power of those words. We were standing our ground out of love and concern for young people of color, like Trayvon, who face racism every day on the streets and in the incarceration system, for teens who can’t afford college and can’t find a job, for the 500,000 poor who will be denied even the minimal health care of Medicaid, for the women who won’t have a choice about their own health and well-being, and more.

We were standing our ground for everyone’s children and grandchildren, and for ourselves, lest we all be swept away in the rush to regress.



## Hot, Tired, and Hungry

By Rev. Craig Schaub  
Parkway United Church of Christ, Winston-Salem

We were tired, hot, and hungry as we wove our way slowly through the crowd to head back to our car for the journey home. Our eight-year-old daughter was holding my hand and looked up. She said, “Dad, that was sort of cool.” On our way from the final Moral Monday in Raleigh back to Winston-Salem, she fell asleep in the backseat. Arriving home, she put on her pajamas, hunted for a book in her bookshelf, and thrust it before me. “I want you to read this to me before I fall back asleep.” It was a book about how representative government works. Not my idea of a typical bedtime story, but clearly what she wanted. Something was planted within her that night. It was enough for me.

It’s what my participation in the Moral Monday experience this summer has been about: planting hope in our communities, in our families, in ourselves.

I was less collected than our daughter at certain moments that day. Seeing the array of people gathered before our state capitol, my eyes leaked tears. Hearing the soulful response to songs and the words of Dr. Barber and others, something stirred. Not because we suddenly overturned an onslaught of regressive legislation. Not because we nailed down an electoral strategy. But because the experience fed a vision for something deep and broad and true.

In June, a number of clergy colleagues of the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity discerned that they would engage in civil disobedience at a Moral Monday vigil. Still rather new to Winston-Salem, I seized on the opportunity as a way to deepen relationships.

As one of our colleagues put it, “There’s nothing like the bond that’s forged going to jail together.” The experience has energized my work locally with many of these same colleagues.

What moved me on that warm and rainy June evening was the way I received witness from many with whom I was arrested from all over the state. Many of the folks with whom I spoke were retired, being arrested for the first time. Often they would say, “This is what I need to do as a grandparent.”

**It’s what my participation in the Moral Monday experience this summer has been about: planting hope in our communities, in our families, in ourselves.**

A few days later, the elementary school where I tutor and mentor quietly received word that I had engaged in civil disobedience. Soon, there were teachers approaching me to say, “Thanks for standing with us, for letting us know someone cares.”

Sometimes people would ask what this “Moral Monday thing” was really for. “You aren’t going to change the minds of the governor or the majority in the General Assembly,” they’d say. But my participation is motivated by something beyond short-term, pragmatic politics. It’s about claiming humanity in a relational, non-violent way rather than simply getting angry or wringing hands. It’s about participation in a dynamic, diverse coalition, swinging for the fences with a vision, rather than letting someone else define what I see. Something was planted within me. It may not be enough, but it’s a good start.



# This Is What Democracy Looks Like

By Steve Ford  
NC Council of Churches, Raleigh

In a sense, Moral Mondays took place on my home turf. I worked for a bunch of years at The News & Observer, in downtown Raleigh. I often made the five-block walk over to the Legislative Building and patrolled the surrounding state government complex.

One of the glories of the North Carolina General Assembly is that an ordinary person can walk in the front door, the back door or any open door and go about his or her business. You might be eyeballed by a receptionist or security guard, but there are no sign-ins, no searches, no metal detectors.

This degree of openness is a throwback in a security-conscious, not to say paranoid, era. But it's inspiring. It represents an extension of trust to the people who are the ultimate bosses of those legislators whose little kingdom this is – legislators who could easily revoke their generous entry policy.

Moral Mondays ended up drawing thousands to the spacious mall just north of the Legislative Building. After the singing and the speeches came the moment to “go inside” – the moment when those willing to be arrested as testimony to their beliefs would stream in a column across the Lane Street pedestrian bridge and enter the building itself.

Having watched the ritual four times, I marveled at this: Nobody stopped them! The People's House remained open to The People – even though those in charge knew that the visitors' goal was civil disobedience rooted in harsh accusations that social justice was being trampled.

To me as a witness, entering the familiar Legislative Building was second nature. To many of the Moral Monday participants, the experience must have been strange and maybe a bit intimidating. But onward they came.

Those expecting to leave with their hands bound behind their backs took a stairway to the second floor between the House and Senate chambers. Others found their way to the third floor between House and Senate galleries, where they could peer over a railing as the drama below reached its climax. Through the Monday evenings of May, June and July, more than 900 people who came to denounce the hurtful policies of this General Assembly were arrested when they refused orders to disperse.

The essence of civil disobedience is that one breaks laws or rules in an act of protest and, if necessary, accepts the consequences. Instead of making arrests, authorities could more appropriately have issued citations to those who peacefully disobeyed orders. That would have made the point.

But whether they were protesters themselves or were among the many standing in solidarity, Moral Monday participants electrified state government's nerve center with their critique of legislative decisions on taxes, spending, voter rights, unemployment benefits, health care and many other issues. As a focal point and stage for those determined to exercise their rights as citizens, The People's House served its purpose.

On the evening of the last Moral Monday, with the legislature having adjourned and the now-customary arrest pageant on hold, the largest crowd of them all marched up Salisbury Street en route to Fayetteville Street. My wife and I joined the procession as far as the Capitol, then stepped aside to watch the multitudes.

A popular chant among the marchers was: “This is what democracy looks like!” Driven by righteous anger and by people's faith in their ability to make a difference through peaceful protest, Moral Mondays were among North Carolina democracy's finest hours.

## Let the Little Children Come to Me

By Rev. Susan Steinberg  
United Church of Chapel Hill

"Let the little children come to me, do not hinder them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." As a pastor whose ministry has focused on children and their families for the past decade, these words of Jesus guide me, challenge me, and inspire me. They are words I strive to live by each day, words that shape my pastoral identity and inform my responses to events in the public sphere.

Thus, I grew increasingly dismayed, alarmed, and yes, outraged when the current North Carolina Legislature began passing bills that cut funding for major programs that impact families, like Medicaid and unemployment benefits, for education across the spectrum, from early childhood programs like More at Four through the entire state university system, for health and safety provisions like school bus replacement regulations, and dental hygiene programs for children. This was followed by the relaxing of gun control laws such that guns could be carried in all kinds of public places, including playgrounds. Rather than welcoming children into a life of security and promise, it seemed to me that our state was intent on hindering them at every turn, poisoning the very earth on which they will grow into adulthood, and leaving them vulnerable to the kind of violence that has claimed the lives of too many young people across our country.

The Moral Monday rallies provided the gift of a constructive means for me to come out of isolation and voice my opposition to this sweeping legislation. Rather than burn with fury, frustration, and fear as I read the news in my own kitchen, I joined a community of hundreds of others who shared similar concerns.

From the moment of the first rally I attended, through the evening of my arrest, through the last rally, I felt the assurance of God's faithfulness come alive like never before: "You are not alone."

It was such assurance that led me to trust the deepening sense of call to commit civil disobedience by "creating a disturbance through singing and prayer" on June 17. Having witnessed and reflected on the example of others in my own congregation, of other citizens from around our state, and of the rich testimony of protest movements in our country's history -- including the 1963 Children's Crusade in Birmingham -- I was emboldened to act, for the first time in my life, in a way that led to direct conflict with law enforcement officials.

**Yes, much of the newly passed legislation is disturbing, cruel and damaging. But it is not the final word. The final word belongs to God, who continues to say even now, "Come to me."**

In my twenty years of ordained ministry, I have rarely felt so sustained by the presence of the God's Spirit, so moved by the vitality of God's people, and so hopeful about the possibilities for God's future as I did that evening.

Yes, much of the newly passed legislation is disturbing, cruel and damaging. But it is not the final word. The final word belongs to God, who continues to say even now, "Come to me."

# What Does the Lord Require of You?

By Rev. Ron LaRocque  
Metropolitan Community Church of Winston-Salem

On May 20, I drove from my home in Winston-Salem to Raleigh to participate in the Moral Monday campaign. Part of my participation included voluntarily committing an act of non-violent civil disobedience which resulted in my arrest. I admit I was not as calm on the inside as many of those arrested alongside me appeared to be on the outside. Still, the anxiety I experienced was a personal sacrifice I was willing to make in order to live out my faith.

In Micah 6:8 the Holy Voice asks, “What does the Lord require of you,” and then immediately answers that question saying, “but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

I went to Raleigh because our state legislature is not walking humbly. Instead, those drunk from the wine of new power continued to imbibe, seeking even more power for themselves and their cohorts as they strove to wrest control away from local governmental bodies, abolish judicial seats, and change the makeup of boards and commissions to suit their own political purposes. Throughout the session, they talked about, and in the closing days found a way to, extract even more power by making it increasingly difficult for some with opposing views to exercise their right to vote.

I went to Raleigh because our state legislature showed by their actions they do not love kindness. Quite the contrary, mean-spiritedness seemed the order of the day. Two of the first acts taken in the recent legislative session were to deny people access to affordable healthcare by refusing to expand Medicaid under the provisions allowed by the Affordable Care Act, and to unnecessarily deprive the long-term unemployed access to federal extended benefits which cost our state nothing.

I went to Raleigh because our state legislature is not doing justice. When bill after bill is introduced in and passed by the General Assembly – bills which effectively further disenfranchise some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state while further enriching the already-wealthy and further empowering the already-powerful – that is the very definition of injustice.

**Most of all, I went to Raleigh  
because I felt the Lord  
required it of me.**

Most of all, I went to Raleigh because I felt the Lord required it of me. I was required to do justice. The Lord did not suggest, did not ask, did not prompt, did not prod, but demanded I raise my voice against injustice until justice returns and God’s righteousness prevails. I went to Raleigh to play my own small part in helping bring about that righteousness. I trust God will bless my efforts and the efforts of many, many others taking a moral stand.



# My 150 New BFFs

By Laurel Green  
Charlotte

There is a bond between people who are arrested together performing civil disobedience. It grows from a soil of shared experience and blossoms into a garden of interwoven visions.

There are way too many reasons I felt compelled to take a stand as a part of Moral Mondays. From the privatization trend in our state to the outrageous intrusions on women's choices, from the dismantling of safety nets to the destruction of our environment, to the attempts at ripping away progress in civil rights, to the shredding of our public education system, the list is long and horrifying. North Carolina is being used as a petri dish right now by groups like ALEC; if we cannot stop them, surely other states will follow.

But I suspect that most of you who've found your way to these words already know these things. So instead I will share what it was like for me to participate in civil disobedience with 150 of my new dearest friends.

Those of us who had decided to risk arrest met ahead of time in a church where general info was given and questions were answered. Together we sang, prayed, laughed and prepared. This was one of the most inspiring uplifting parts of the experience, the energy when we left was of hope and commitment.

Almost 2,000 people gathering on the lawn, the heartfelt opening words during the rally, slowly marching by twos together into the NC General Assembly, all these things helped to replace moments of nervousness with pride and resolve.

Time began to alternate between stretching and contracting. Climbing the flight of stairs took a micro-second, but the final steps into a bowl of gold doors, fountains, cameras, and uniformed officers took much, much longer.

The sense of community and shared purpose was so strong as we listened to impromptu speeches and powerful prayers that it was easy to forget what was about to happen. But voices on megaphones and men in tall hats brought the present back into slow-motion focus.

I looked up to find a friend, a trusted ally standing in the galley above. In that moment of solidarity, eyes offering and receiving strength, I felt the support and joy of ancestors who cleared these paths so that we might walk them.

Being arrested is hard. Swallowing anger at injustice, even when you prepare in advance, takes deep breathing. It is also sad. I could feel a deep sorrow behind my eyes that things had come to this.

Being arrested is also incredibly empowering. The despair I sometimes feel fell away as I put one foot in front of another, taking my place in a line of people with hands bound, boarding a bus singing, heads held high.

As the stress, tension and fear fell away, the giddy humor took over. We did it. We were on a bus that reminded us all of childhood, singing hilarious variations of what were somber songs a few hours earlier. We made jokes that with hindsight were probably unwise under the circumstances, but nothing interfered with our sense of victory in that moment. We decided the beauty of the sunset was in celebration of freedom. We giggled like children as we combined our efforts and opened all the windows.

Being transferred from one grey bench to another, in and out of a dozen different cinder block rooms all painted white provides lots of time for storytelling. Conversations with strangers-that-are-now-your-family range from sharing deeply held beliefs and formative experiences to moments of improv theater that are hilarious and priceless. The uniformed men and women who were our companions in the multi-roomed ballet of grey benches eventually gave up trying to contain their own laughter. Our struggle was not with them; everyone present realized it.

We were tired, hungry, uncomfortable and did I mention tired? We laughed, a lot, but we were also deeply aware of the somber reasons that brought us all together sharing that experience. I know I was not alone in awareness of the privilege that allowed us to have made the choice we did or of the many people we were representing. We worked to keep our spirits high, floating on winds of change, but no one took the day's events lightly, I suspect we will all carry the experience within for many years.

The final thing I must share is how important it was to feel, viscerally feel, the support and love from those people who surrounded us at every step with their own strength. We knew we were not alone, not for a single moment.

We may come together "in spite of" our differences, but we leave honoring and understanding them as a part of our strength. Forward. Together.

# It Takes A Village to Eat Breakfast

By Stephen Boyd  
Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem

I participated in Moral Mondays — came to three rallies and was arrested on June 3 — to bear witness, that is, to call attention to what the North Carolina Legislature was doing to rip apart the common “garment of destiny” in our state.

When I looked closely at the legislative agenda of many of the newly installed super-majority, I was dumbfounded. These folks were in the midst of a frenzied attempt to cut off half a million low-income people, including seniors, veterans and children, from Medicaid coverage; to cut off women, many low-income, from access to safe, affordable health care, including pap smears, mammograms, as well as legal abortion procedures; to cut off more than a hundred thousand people in our state from unemployment benefits, while they looked for a new job — in an economy wrecked by irresponsible lending and security practices by financial institutions that were bailed out by our public money; to freeze teachers’ salaries and stop incentive programs that encouraged teachers to further their education; to eliminate the Racial Justice Act — the only law we had to root out racial bias in the administration of the death penalty; to make it harder for seniors, low-income citizens, and college students to vote. And they succeeded.

Do they want working women, seniors, veterans, teachers, poor children, the unemployed, college students, and African American men to self-deport — to leave the state — to disappear? Who is it they believe we do not need?

This morning I had oatmeal for breakfast. I thought about those who tilled the soil, planted the seed, harvested the oats, drove them to the processing plant, ran the machines that processed the grain, those who trucked the finished product to Harris Teeter, stocked it, and checked me out at the register.

It takes a village even to eat breakfast. Who in this chain do I not need? Who do we not need? Don’t each and all of them deserve to be safe; to have a roof over their heads at night; to receive an education; to receive proper health care; to put sufficient food on the table; to be free from unwarranted search, seizure and arrest; to participate in deciding who makes public policy on these and other matters critical for their well-being? If I want oatmeal in my pantry, everyone in this chain needs opportunities to pursue what they need.

**Whatever affects one directly,  
affects all indirectly.**

Dr. King reminded us that “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” It is, therefore, in the deepest and truest self-interest of each of us that we increase, not decrease, access to our common resources, educational opportunities, health care, and a fair justice system. The recent legislature has significantly decreased those opportunities and, by so doing, threatens to shred our common garment. For me Moral Mondays, shed a light on those threats, so that more people will see what needs repair.

## Furious

By Judy Occhetti-Klohr  
Lutheran Peace Fellowship, Raleigh

My husband Leo and I had made the decision to do civil disobedience on June 3 before we left for the 3 p.m. meeting at Martin Street Baptist Church. We arrived early and talked with Rev. Barber before the meeting began. When Rev. Barber ended the meeting with specifics about the rally, he asked Rev. Nancy Petty to read the names of those who would speak. To my surprise (and actually, it was shock at first), I was on the list. I was escorted to the speaker's stand. Here is what I said:

"I'm a little old lady. I have six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. I LOVE ALL children. Most folks call me a SWEET, LITTLE OLD lady. BUT...sweet little old ladies can get MAD...AND I AM MAD!

I am FURIOUS that too many children go to bed at night and pray that their mother will stop crying because she cannot afford to buy healthy food, they pray that their stomach ache from hunger will go away. They pray that their father will stop yelling because he feels so badly that he cannot provide financially for his family...pray that they can become CITIZENS.

These children don't care which political party will get energized or empowered by our gathering. They don't care if this gets covered by the national news OR only the local news. Most of them don't know what 'swing votes' mean. They are praying...praying for OUR HELP.

I'm a grandmother.  
I'm a voter.  
I'm here for the children.  
I'm FURIOUS!

**I have six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. I love all children. Most folks call me a sweet, little old lady.**

**But sweet little old ladies can get mad. And I am mad.**

These children are praying for OUR HELP."

And the crowd shouts...AMEN...AMEN...AMEN.

And at the end of the rally, Leo and I joined with 149 others who had decided to do civil disobedience. We both agreed that it was a very empowering experience for us. We were uplifted and thankful for the support of so many others and have attended all of the following Moral Mondays to pass on the support...for all the citizens.



## Maintaining My Sanity

By Rev. Robert Kennel  
Covenant Christian Church, Cary

Moral Mondays helped me maintain some sanity through this unbelievable legislative session. I was able to make nine Moral Mondays but did not get arrested because my wife sincerely asked me not to, perhaps because we were celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary in July.

**Moral Mondays helped me maintain some sanity through this unbelievable legislative session.**

William Barber is a friend and a fellow Disciple of Christ clergy brother. He has done a great job in leading the organization of effort and in keeping it on target and respectful. Over the spring, I met both old friends and new friends who have their heads screwed on straight and with whom I will work on upcoming elections to right so many wrongs.

I have written three letters to the editor of the Raleigh News & Observer this spring, two of which were published. All spoke to the embarrassment I feel as a native North Carolina citizen about what Gov. McCrory (whom I used to admire) and the majority of legislators (for whom I feel disgust) have done in this session. Perhaps the biggest disappointment of all is the arrogant over-reach on “voting rights suppression.” That is at the core of our democracy. As a former US Air Force officer and proud NC State graduate, my patriotism has risen to new heights of civic commitment.

## Created in God's Image

By Willona Stallings  
NC Council of Churches, Raleigh

I had the pleasure of joining a distinct group of social activists at a Moral Monday rally in downtown Raleigh. I decided to participate because my faith calls me to care for the least among us and to stand on the right side of justice. Also, the fact that so many people had traveled from near and far to have their voices heard was a great motivating factor for me.

I live and work in Raleigh, just minutes from Halifax Mall – so if my brothers and sisters could take the time to catch a bus, make a sign or invite a friend along, surely I could do the same.

As a young African American woman, I reap the benefits of social change – made possible by my ancestors and other civil rights activists – each and every day. It's hard to imagine not having the basic necessities to enjoy life, put food on the table or to pay my bills.

Unfortunately, that's the harsh reality that so many of my brothers and sisters are facing as a result of poor leadership and policymaking at all levels of government, particularly at the state level.

My participation in one of the Moral Monday rallies was incredibly impactful. It was powerful to see people from all different walks of life coming together to offer up a unified voice against injustice. Some were even willing to be arrested, while others, like me, were simply there to offer support in some small way – by chanting, holding up a sign, cheering for those who were being arrested, or by joining in song.

Every action, no matter how great or how small, made a difference. If nothing else, it showed those who stand on the other side of these important humanitarian issues that we won't go down without a fight; that they can't keep grabbing the tail of a lion without hearing its courageous roar!

**We were all created in God's image and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect; to be given a fair shot at this thing called life.**

We were all created in God's image and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect; to be given a fair shot at this thing called life.

It was a pleasure to be in the company of so many brave, compassionate souls down at Halifax Mall. Thank you for your shining example! Together, we shall overcome.

## It's Personal

By Jonathan Kotch  
President, Health Care for All North Carolina

It has been very gratifying to meet fellow health-care reform advocates, including Physicians for a National Health Program and Health Care for All NC members, on Halifax Mall on the several Mondays I managed to make it. Some of you helped hold our banner. Others, like our treasurer, Robin Lane, addressed the 1,000 or so participants from the podium. My own experience, when I was arrested on June 3, was very personal.

Rev. Barber and other organizers emphasized time and time again that there is no added moral value to getting arrested. It is a complex decision conditioned by one's experience and opportunity. I understand that on June 3 more people were arrested, a total of 151, than on any day before or since. Those of us who were arrested on one of these earlier days went through the whole booking process, including mugshots and fingerprints, whereas the powers-that-be got tired of us as June led into July. The more recent cohorts were neither photographed nor fingerprinted, depriving the Civitas Institute the opportunity to play games with their mugshots.

The expression of support leading up to the arrest was exhilarating. Chris Kromm, executive director of the Institute for Southern Studies and publisher of Southern Exposure, grabbed my arm as we marched into the General Assembly together. Riding in those white school buses that say "Division of Prisons" on the side (you have seen them on the interstate) was like going to summer camp, with the exception of having our hands handcuffed behind our backs. To be truthful, however, everything after that, until I was released at 3:30 a.m., was boring.

The organizing effort mounted by the NAACP was terrific. They provided bail for those who needed it, and offered free legal representa-

tion for those who chose to take them up on it. Once out of the Wake County Detention Center, there was a folding table in the parking lot with drinks and snacks (peanut butter or pimento cheese sandwiches), and volunteers waiting to take the former detainees back to their cars.

**No one knows if any of the demonstrations on Halifax Mall have made a difference, although polls indicating that North Carolinians are more likely to approve of Moral Monday protesters than they do of their state legislature are encouraging.**

As of this writing, the Moral Monday demonstrations are winding down. The legislature is adjourned, having done as much damage as possible. We (HCfA-NC) continue to support the NC Justice Center's efforts to bring Medicaid expansion to our state. Maybe with the legislature out of the way, cooler heads will prevail. It will be interesting to compare the North Carolina experience in the first year of the Affordable Care Act with the experience of other states who signed on for Medicaid expansion.

There is no particular glory in getting arrested. No one knows if any of the demonstrations on Halifax Mall have made a difference, although polls indicating that North Carolinians are more likely to approve of Moral Monday protesters than they do of their state legislature are encouraging. Furthermore, no one knows if getting arrested adds at all to the impact, if any, of Moral Mondays. The real deal will be determined by the 2014 elections. Until then, deciding one's level of involvement is about doing what feels right. It's personal.



## A Small Thing

By Natalie Boorman  
United Church of Chapel Hill

I attended most Moral Monday rallies and chose to participate in civil disobedience on June 3. Moral Mondays are important to me because I believe all of us have a right to fair treatment by our government, and our current state government is unfairly and severely cutting programs for the poor and middle classes.

I am a social worker by profession and am especially concerned about cuts to health care for as many as 500,000 particularly vulnerable people in North Carolina. I am confused by politicians who say people should be allowed to have guns, and those who are mentally ill should seek treatment. How are they going to do that when hospitals and other treatment options are having their budgets cut, thus fewer resources are available?

While I was waiting to be “processed” in jail, I noticed a teenage African American boy locked in a cell directly across from me. His behavior made me wonder if he had mental health problems. Where will he go for services in the juvenile court system? Has it become a substitute for mental services? Does he have any support outside prison? Will prison become his life? I also observed a young African American woman who was dragging a bundle of possessions behind her as she walked to her cell. What will happen to her? Is she alone in the world, except for prison?

I realized during the brief time I was a prisoner, that even in jail, or perhaps especially in jail, white privilege counts. I had a huge support network within the jail (there were 151 of us arrested that night), we were treated with respect and kindness by the jail staff, and we expected to be released within a few hours.

**Going to jail was both a small thing and a big thing.**

Not only that, the moment we were released, many people were waiting to thank us, NAACP-NC attorneys were there to explain the legal process, and there was food! They fed us hot dishes, sandwiches, fruit, cookies, on and on at 1:30 in the morning. “When I was hungry, you fed me.”

Going to jail was both a small thing and a big thing. It was truly a small sacrifice given how well I was treated. It also was big for me in so many ways. My eyes were opened to the irony of poverty within the jail system and the gratitude others showered on me. Why is it so easy for us to give to those like us and hard to give to those who seem different?



Photo by Michael Burns

## The American Demonstrations

By Wojciech Szczerba  
Evangelical Protestant Seminary, Wroclaw, Poland

*Editor's Note: Dr. Wojciech Szczerba is the rector of the Evangelical Protestant Seminary in Wroclaw, Poland. He was in Raleigh, with his family, for a two-month sabbatical during the summer of 2013. His powerful reflections on Moral Monday were first shared with us by Art Ross, retired pastor of White Memorial Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, and a member of the board of the seminary in Poland.*

Our last important experience, besides the Pit today, was Moral Monday. I remember demonstrations in Poland in the beginning of the 1980s, when communism began to shake to its foundations, with lots of police, blood and violence. I remember being in Moscow in '91 when Gorbachev was nearly overthrown by Lanaiev and seeing tanks, soldiers and riots at the Red Square. I remember visiting Cairo in 2012 and experiencing demonstrations there with hundreds and thousands of people fighting for survival and dignity. All these dramatic experiences shaped me somehow as a person but also helped me to appreciate the peace which we enjoy at the moment.

So, when I was invited to Moral Monday by friends in North Carolina, obviously I wanted to go to see American demonstrations, but – frankly – one of the first questions, which came to my mind was how safe it was for my family and me. Not really trusting the assurances that we would be fine there, we went to the Mall ready to evacuate in case the police or even army intervened. Well, nothing like this happened, as you best know. To my surprise we came to a picnic-type atmosphere with surely hundreds or even thousands of demonstrators with important and dramatic appeals, but presented in a peaceful and nice atmosphere. I was astonished to see a pastor leading the crowd and religious language being applied (unthinkable in Europe now).

I was amazed with the commonly made references to the civil rights movement. I was surprised to see many families with little kids. And most of all I did not expect to see policemen smiling and talking to the demonstrators in a friendly way. I could hardly believe in what I saw. I kept asking myself what it was. However, in time, my initial disbelief and skepticism gradually gave way to a different feeling. I realized that this was a good example of one of the ways how stable, democratic society talks, conducts inner dialogue in a peaceful way initiated long ago by Gandhi, then carried on by Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the others. It was a good example to me of how people can peacefully execute their rights, can talk about important issues, appeal for changes and how society with its various factions really strengthens its identity. It was a good lesson for me and my kids, and I thank God that I had the opportunity to be there, that I could listen to the speeches and songs, that I could see those who chose to be disobedient even at the cost of being arrested. Thank you for this example. I hope the appeals and demonstrations will in time bring changes to the society.

**It was a good lesson for me and my kids, and I thank God that I had the opportunity to be there, that I could see those who chose to be disobedient even at the cost of being arrested.**

## Meet Me On the Corner

By Rev. W. Gaye Brown  
Galloway Memorial Episcopal Church, Elkin

I am the vicar of a small Episcopal congregation in Elkin. When I first heard about Moral Mondays, I yearned to participate, but time was short and Raleigh was almost three hours away. As I reflected on this, I realized that one didn't have to go to Raleigh to participate — that we could have our own Moral Monday in Elkin. So I sent an email to the congregation and another to the local ministerial association inviting folks to join me and our senior warden on a street corner in Elkin on the following Monday, June 10, at 5:00.

A group of ten to twenty folks have met on the corner every Monday since that time -- to pray, to hold signs, to wave to those who pass by, to answer questions, to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Raleigh. In the process we've made some new friends and worked together ecumenically to express our concerns about legislation that unfairly affects the most vulnerable among us.

Now that the demonstrations in Raleigh have ended, we have begun looking at and planning for the future, including sponsoring a town hall meeting to which we will invite the community, our legislators, folks who are being impacted adversely by some of the bills that have been passed, social service providers, teachers, etc., for dialogue, conversation, education and action. We are excited to be working together ecumenically to address issues created by the passage of very hurtful legislation.

**In the process we've made some new friends and worked together ecumenically to express our concerns about legislation that unfairly affects the most vulnerable among us.**





## Without Hesitation

By Patricia B. Anthony  
Clayton

On June 10, I chose to exercise my Constitutional right to petition my legislature, to express my concerns about legislation they had passed and were considering. To be clear, we did not go there to be arrested, we went to present our grievances to the legislature. I chose to remain standing when the police ordered us to disperse, and I was arrested, handcuffed, and brought to the Wake County Detention Center. My reasons for feeling so strongly are many.

I have been feeling as if the state legislature is going through the capital with a bulldozer, pushing back decades of progress in education, in health care, in civil rights, in voting rights, in environmental protection, in workers' rights – all things I care about and that I believe are essential for us to live as free people. I felt helpless and hopeless. I saw some news coverage of the Moral Monday protests, and then I saw video of Rev. Vernon Tyson, an 84-year-old retired Methodist minister, talking about his experience getting arrested. He inspired me to follow his lead.

I participated in the demonstrations as a supporter for a few weeks before I finally took the steps that led to my arrest. Each week my frustration and anger grew stronger at the way the legislature was treating the “least of these,” the ones Jesus told us to care for. Many of their decisions seemed to me not even fiscally sound but just mean-spirited. Turning down money to provide health care for half a million people who can't afford it?

Those people are still going to get sick. And they'll be sicker when diagnosed, because they haven't had regular care. And they'll go to the emergency room, the most expensive place to get treatment, because they don't have any other options; and they won't pay for it because they don't have the money. So who pays for that? We all do, don't we?

**Each week my frustration and anger grew stronger at the way the legislature was treating the “least of these,” the ones Jesus told us to care for.**

Finally, in the company of many like-minded citizens, I took my stand. I was arrested with teachers, social workers, clergy, students, retirees, but no corporate CEOs to my knowledge. I feel it was the right thing to do, and I would do it again without hesitation.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

By Rev. William Jeffries  
Retired United Methodist Minister, Durham

It has been a refreshing experience to participate in Moral Monday rallies. It has given voice to those who are frustrated by the North Carolina General Assembly's turning the clock backward on social programs.

A key to reversing this "race to the bottom" is rescuing the elections process from suppressive measures, so that young, elderly, and poor voters do not have their votes denied:

- Many who dwell in retirement facilities, as I now do, are no longer able to drive, and do not have up-to-date driver's licenses. Let us, as individuals, and as organizations, offer information and transportation to Division of Motor Vehicles offices to get a North Carolina government-issued photo I.D. card, which will be asked for at the polls.
- Help folks get their voter registration up-to-date at the county Board of Elections office.
- Help folks get to the polls for elections during the reduced early voting period. Arrive as early as possible in the day and on as early a day as possible, to avoid long — even prohibitive — lines. Polls will not be allowed to let people vote after closing time, no matter how many are still in the line!

Hopefully, there will be successful court challenges to the suppressive changes that have been made. But meantime, let us do what is still available to us in order to protect people's right to vote. Let us pay special attention to the "lesser" elections that take place in non-presidential election years and any off-year elections that will be held before then.

Our churches and other civic-minded agencies can do much now to rescue our society where government has failed them. Let us demand justice, as did Amos and the other Prophets!

**Let us do what is still available  
to us in order to protect  
people's right to vote.**

## From Asheville to Raleigh

By Rev. Jeanne Finan  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Asheville

I was on a three-month sabbatical away from my parish when I began to hear about the Moral Monday protests. I read an article by Jonathan Wilson-Hargrove explaining why he chose to be arrested. A clergy friend posted on our FB clergy group page to see if there were those in Western North Carolina who wanted to go to Raleigh. I connected with the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins on Facebook to find out the where and when.

I began to ponder the question, "Where is the church? Where are the clergy?" I realized that I needed to go to Raleigh and stand. Where are the clergy? Well, some of us are right here. I wanted to make the statement with my presence that I care. I wanted to make the statement that I felt our legislators were moving farther and farther away from the truths of the gospel and farther and farther away from the desires and needs of the people of my beloved home state. So I called some clergy friends from across the state, and we met in Raleigh that day — in the rain.

I chose to not be arrested because I feared it might prevent my ministry with those in prison and yes, sadly, some who have been arrested are now banned from ministering to those in prison. I was extremely moved that day when those who were making that very difficult and profound decision to commit an act of civil disobedience marched two by two together through a parted sea of umbrellas and entered into the Legislative Building.

**We are called to care for the entire community, most especially the poor. How could I not go and make that stand?**

Since that day others in my congregation made the long trek to Raleigh for Moral Mondays. People care. The church cares. We are called to care for the entire community, most especially the poor. How could I not go and make that stand?



Photo by Michael Burns



## Turn On the News, Stay Calm

By Leigh Sanders  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh

In the beginning, I was hesitant to attend Moral Mondays because I thought it was a strictly religious response and not being devoutly anything, I assumed I wasn't invited. Then I attended a Moral Monday meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh and understood that not only was I invited, I was late!

As a long-time women's rights activist, I am privy to the issues our state has tackled while working to advance a progressive agenda. The needs of women and girls especially, have suffered from the "good 'ol boy network" on both sides of the ticket. But never have I seen the wrath of political guerrilla warfare like I have this legislative session. By far this is the most civil rights-violating group of elected officials in our state's recent history.

My personal reasons for identifying with the actions of the General Assembly were three-fold: as a woman, an educator and a mother. As a former teacher and stay-at-home mom, I spent two years working on a master's degree in the hope that I could reduce some of the lost wages incurred from staying home with children. I had left the teaching profession because financially I could not reconcile my salary and childcare requirements. It never once occurred to me that teachers would be financially penalized for being too educated for the job.

The night of the Sharia Law/Family, Faith and Freedom Act, I received a text from my friend that read, "Turn on the news, stay calm." I learned about the sneak attack on reproductive rights with unbridled rage that couldn't help but succumb to worried tears over the course of a sleepless night.



As a woman, I was persecuted by religion and, as a mother, I was powerless to protect. I was one of the first people to arrive and sit in front of the Senate the next morning. I watched as legislators interloped on my children's future and prophesied on their free will. Using myopic Christianity and banal rhetoric, they made themselves and our great state a national lampoon.

Every week, Moral Mondays provided me with the North Carolina I know and adore. Whether the roots of those at Moral Mondays were established in the sand like my own or the red clay or the steep bedrock, we were a united front for justice, our voices one:

*"Forward together, not one step back."*



# The Work of the Holy Spirit

By Jay Davis  
Rougemont United Methodist Church

In 1959, I graduated from Central High School in Charlotte in what I believe was the first integrated graduating class in the state. A brave young African American named Gus Roberts suffered two years of living hell to make that kind of dramatic progress for North Carolina. I was not among the students that hit him or spat on him or verbally assaulted him during that time. I, also, was not one of those who befriended him, or supported him, or stood up for him. At least once during those two years I could have said to the bullies attacking him, "Leave him alone. He is not bothering you," but I didn't. By my silence I, in effect, held the coats of the cruel students that daily accosted Gus. In later years I would be haunted by that silence, but, at that point in my life, my eyes were blind to the evils of prejudice and racism.

My life was about to change, however. In August of 1963, I watched Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in my home in Charlotte. It was a profoundly affecting experience. In the words of John Wesley, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." I knew as I listened to Dr. King's words that I had to do something to help his dream become a reality. Looking back on that day, I am convinced that my life was almost instantaneously changed. At the risk of sounding like a religious zealot, I truly believe it was the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the fall, I returned to Appalachian State in Boone. One night during the middle of a blinding snowstorm and subfreezing weather, a friend and I were trying to catch a quick bite to eat at a local fast food place. It would only serve the local African American population from an outside service window. As we watched those miserably cold people waiting to be served, we were so offended that we demanded that they be served inside before we would eat there.

The next morning we were threatened with expulsion for trying to "turn Boone into another Chapel Hill." That event was the first in a long series of battles I entered in the name of social justice. By the 1970s, I was married, teaching school in Delaware, and regularly making the drive to DC to protest the Vietnam War.

**On June 3, 2013, I joined 150 others in raising that protest at Moral Monday, and it is one of the proudest days of my life.**

I spent most of my career as an organizer for the teachers union in New York and California. When I retired and returned to live in North Carolina, I believed I was returning to a reasonably progressive state. When the GOP began its assault on all the progress we had made in the 50 years since Dr. King's speech, I refused to let it happen without a protest. On June 3, I joined 150 others in raising that protest at Moral Monday, and it is one of the proudest days of my life.

## Since 1920

By Mary Klenz  
League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg

League of Women Voters members here in Charlotte-Mecklenburg spent several hours making signs for today's Moral Monday in our home base. It is inspiring to see the energy, commitment and caring that people have around these issues of social justice, fairness and access to voting. The LWV has been fighting for voting rights for all people since 1920, and we're not stopping now.

Members and friends have been there in Raleigh, and we will be there in Charlotte.

Thanks to the North Carolina Council of Churches for your continued support. We need it now more than ever.

**The League of Women Voters has been fighting for voting rights for all people since 1920, and we're not stopping now.**



Photo by Michael Burns

## The Common Heritage of This State

By Susannah Tuttle  
North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light, Raleigh

As Director of NC Interfaith Power & Light, it is both my personal and professional responsibility to draw connections between the spirituality of stewardship and the procedures of policy making. I often lead my presentations with the point that caring for the environment is not just political, it is spiritual doctrine shared by all faith traditions.

When the seventh Moral Monday focus was designated as environment, justice, and health, I was absolutely elated. Too often environmental protection issues take a back seat to other subjects of social justice. It gave leaders in the Creation Care movement reason to celebrate when Rev. Barber publically pronounced:

*"We have a moral call to protect the environment... When these leaders deny people the basic human rights of health care, education and environmental justice, so that they can give more to the wealthy, they are defying one of the greatest moral principles of faith and the values of our Constitution."*

I was inspired that Rev. Barber so eloquently balanced the values of church and state in this statement. It encouraged me to review the law, and I admit I was surprised to learn that with all of the destructive environmental policies that were presented by NC Legislators this past session, Article XIV Sec. 5. of North Carolina's state constitution reads:

"It shall be the policy of this State to conserve and protect its lands and waters for the benefit of all its citizenry, and to this end it shall be a proper function of the State of North Carolina and its political subdivisions to acquire and preserve park, recreational, and scenic areas, to control and limit the pollution of our air and water, to control excessive noise, and in every other appropriate way to preserve as a part of

the common heritage of this State its forests, wetlands, estuaries, beaches, historical sites, open lands, and places of beauty."

My work and leadership across the state has been affected tremendously by the outreach, education, and community building impacts of the Moral Monday experience. The transparent orientation of Moral Mondays through the NAACP's leadership and Rev. Barber's captaincy has created a movement re-birthed from the civil rights progressions of the last half century combined with the evolutionary awareness of our interdependence with all of Creation.

**I have never been prouder to serve the people of North Carolina, and it is an incredible privilege to join hands with the faithful -- from the mountains to the sea -- as we walk "forward together, not one step back."**

The massive positive response to the invocation to publicly hold our elected officials morally accountable for their policy decisions is profound and inspiring. I have never been prouder to serve the people of North Carolina, and it is an incredible privilege to join hands with the faithful — from the mountains to the sea — as we walk "forward together, not one step back" into the future of the promised land!

## Seventy-Three

By Robert Hunt  
St. Francis by the Sea Episcopal Church, Salter Path

I went to Moral Monday with my old Raleigh church, St. Mark's Episcopal. I am now at the beach and first brought my priest who preached about it the next Sunday.

The next week, I took three women from my beach church. It was such a blessing to stand up for those whom Jesus would have stood up for. My daughter, who is a federal employee, said she was very proud of me.

I am 73.

**It was such a blessing to  
stand up for those whom  
Jesus would have stood up for.**



# Shining a Bright Light

By Rev. Lorraine Ljunggren  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Raleigh

As these words take form it is the Feast of the Transfiguration in the Christian tradition. A day on which we recall a divine light breaking through the everydayness of life to reveal the power of God's love to transform. To me, Moral Mondays mean shining a bright light on the needs of God's people all around us, stranger and friend alike, people of all ethnicities and economic standing, of all ages and backgrounds, and to reveal the ways in which our decision-making transforms for the better or the worse the circumstances of life in the here and now.

Moral Mondays are about bearing witness to the two Great Commandments: to love God and to love our neighbors. My understanding of the promises I made in Baptism compelled me to be a participant and to encourage others to participate – to work for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being.

Being the vulnerable creatures we are, human beings can inadvertently or intentionally slip into the habit of making decisions based on our personal fears of whomever we perceive is “the other.” To me, Moral Mondays are about revealing injustice and oppression which is so often cloaked in language which covers up or even distorts the real-life impact on real-life people.

I am personally affected by the issues raised up by Moral Mondays because I am part of the human family. I am a woman – our rights are more limited than they were before. I am a voter – our rights are definitely more limited. I am a parent of a teacher – support for professional improvement is more limited and the resources for students are more limited.

I am a person who believes that everyone deserves access to health care and to a job with a living wage and to have safety nets available in times of trouble. I am one who, based on my faith, believes we are our sisters' and brothers' keepers. I am a person who believes it is short-sighted to limit human rights either legislatively or judicially.

**Moral Mondays are about bearing witness to the two Great Commandments: to love God and to love our neighbors.**

On Moral Mondays, I found myself often moved to tears by being in the midst of such a great crowd of witnesses, amid the marvelous diversity of participants, and surrounded by the energy which filled Halifax Mall. My hope is that we can find a way forward, that we can undo the damage which has been done to the people of North Carolina and to the systems of our society. We are in this life together, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. Ultimately whenever we hurt one, we hurt all. It may take awhile for the impact to be felt among those insulated by power or wealth. We can hope that open hearts and high ethical and moral standards will prevail. May we continue to be bearers of light in the days to come.

## From My Journal

By John Hilpert  
Covenant Community Church, Raleigh

On the one hand, these legislative reactionaries are giving Christians a bad name. On the other hand, Moral Monday protests steadily growing into the thousands are providing a clear embodied look at the Gospel.

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We thin out a lot of trees to improve the health and beauty of the forest. A number will respond by sending up a dozen saplings. I lop them out, sometimes ending the process. For sweet gums, poplars and maples, this usually needs to be repeated. For non-native highly invasive *Alnus*, the shoots just keep coming. Then I spray to get at the roots. Some social actions remind me of this process, where we stop one wrong and a number pop up. We need discernment on when to strike at the roots or focus prayer on God doing that and we do our parts.

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OK sure, we reps from the progressive churches and groups started protesting early, easy to ignore by the powers. Then the moderates started showing up. Still no real problem either. Now conservatives who care are getting aroused. Don't think the reactionaries wanted to cross that line. When a group is drunk on absolute power based on illusions, they get oblivious not only to the people outside their narrow base, but their own interests.

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Ocean anger spent, its damage done. About the time the legislature is set to adjourn and go home. Perhaps in the quiet unfettered time, a few might listen. Or catch glimpses of the destruction they have wrought. Or hear a major theme of the Gospel in a new way. Or simply in the passage of time, grow out of an adolescent mindset. A few options for prayer.

**Perhaps in the quiet unfettered  
time, a few might listen.**

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The largest Moral Monday protest, good to connect with long-term friends. Too large and too noisy for this introvert; good for the movement. Well diversified in age, race and issues - linkages among the latter the most amazing.

## Bending the Arc

By Chris Liu-Beers  
NC Council of Churches, Raleigh

I felt called to participate in Moral Mondays as a way to “bear witness” in this time and place. I believe that as a society we are judged by how we treat the most vulnerable people among us; and as a North Carolinian, I could not stand silent while the General Assembly passed bill after bill that harmed the marginalized and propped up the powerful.

So with my family I stood on that grassy lawn, surrounded by the halls of power, bearing witness to the ways our state is failing its most vulnerable members. We shouted our slogans, sang our songs, joined together in prayers, bearing witness to the vision of justice for all people. I felt honored to be a part of such a peaceful, diverse, and strong crowd, lending my voice to the cries for justice. I’ve never experienced anything quite like it.

For me, the true highlight of Moral Mondays was the opportunity to line up and cheer on those who would go on to be arrested for acts of civil disobedience inside the General Assembly building. These ordinary folks – pastors, nurses, and teachers; professors, students, and administrators; young and old – demonstrated true courage by bearing witness even at the risk of imprisonment. There is a powerful biblical precedent for this kind of faith-in-action, and it was deeply inspiring to play even a small part.

Moral Mondays has given me hope that even when our state leaders go down the wrong path, there is a great cloud of witnesses holding them accountable and raising awareness about the implications of their actions. Some of these harmful policies may take years or even decades to undo, but I have faith that together with God’s help we can bend the long arc of history towards justice.

**I believe that as a society  
we are judged by how we  
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people among us.**

## Communion and Community

By Judith Mathis  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Raleigh

I started going in mid-May. I went with a friend from church that I knew would also be interested. I was so inspired to be in the company of others that believed in our government as I do. It gave me strength to not feel alone in my beliefs.

Dr. Barber is such an inspirational speaker and connects our faith with the way democracy should be. I really missed that “communion and community” this past August 5. I would hope we would at least meet monthly so we can be strengthened to continue working to restore our dignity and our state.

**Dr. Barber is such an inspirational speaker and connects our faith with the way democracy should be.**



Photo by Michael Burns



## The Wrong Side of History

By Dr. Leonard Beeghley  
Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Durham

During the summer of 1969, I found myself in Fayette, Mississippi, where I met Mr. Charles Evers. Just elected the first Black mayor of a southern town since reconstruction, he proudly called himself “the most hated man in Mississippi.” His election symbolized the spread of democracy into the South.

I stayed in Fayette for a short while, helping the new administration get organized and watched Neil Armstrong’s moon walk in Mr. Evers’ home. Now, I am an old man with grandchildren, living at a time when our democracy is again threatened – here in North Carolina and other states, especially in the South.

Moral Monday is really about my grandchildren: their future, the kind of state they will inherit. I told them that voting is the most sacred act in a democracy. I described some of the people who fought and sacrificed to ensure that everyone has the right to vote, like Mr. Evers, his brother Medger, and others as well.

Although it is hard for children to understand, I explained that sometimes the law is used to oppress people and that attempts to keep citizens from voting provide a good example. I made plain that such actions are wrong and immoral.

In this context, I pointed out, Dr. King taught us that non-violent civil disobedience constitutes an honorable way to protest, a way of following in the tradition of Jesus. When the police arrested me and almost a thousand others this summer, we told those with power that they must change, that by restricting the vote they stand on the wrong side of history. With luck, all our grandchildren will remember that, in a small way, we stood up for what is right on Moral Mondays.

**Moral Monday is really about  
my grandchildren:  
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they will inherit.**

# No Longer Alone

By Rebecca Cary  
St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Durham

During the past winter and spring, as I followed the news, I grew increasingly dispirited. Our state government was taking more and more actions that I believed, as a Christian, to be fundamentally unjust. Christ healed the sick and fed the hungry. The legislature was blocking access to Medicaid and taking benefits away from those who had little, and claiming to be helping our state by doing so.

These actions are not only morally wrong, they are financially absurd. People receiving the Earned Income Tax Credit are spending the money it saves them, on necessities like food, clothes, and rent. Those few families previously subject to the state's estate tax are unlikely to be feeding the money they save directly into the local economy. Money spent locally on necessities helps create jobs in our communities. Money invested in the stock market does not.

I started hearing about Moral Mondays. A group of religious leaders was organizing demonstrations. People were being arrested. I was teaching summer school until 4:45 on Mondays, so while it was interesting, I didn't think about it as something I could do. Then my schedule changed. Suddenly, I was going to be able to go if I wanted to. But I was uncertain, and a little scared – how did things work? Would I be arrested? When and where and how long is it, how do I get there, where do I park?

Serendipitously, just as my schedule changed, my church announced an adult forum where people who had been going to Moral Mondays, including two women who had been arrested, would talk about their experiences and answer any questions people had. I went, and what I heard gave me confidence, and I felt called to join my fellow parishioners. The very next day, June 17, I went over to Raleigh with another woman from my church.

Standing there on Halifax Mall, in the heat and the threat of rain, I felt hope. All around me were people who felt like I did. I wasn't alone anymore. I was part of an "us." And as I talked to people about my experience, I came to realize that I knew dozens of people who agreed with us, that the increasing crowds on Halifax Mall represented a much larger community formed of many smaller groups uniting in common purpose. I saw migrant workers and union organizers out in the rain or the blazing summer sun vocally defending my right to choose, and marriage equality activists doing the same in defense of labor rights, and NAACP organizers protesting discrimination against LGBT people, and white feminists denouncing the repeal of the Racial Justice Act.

**These actions are not only morally wrong, they are financially absurd.**

Not only was I no longer alone, I no longer felt powerless. If our community could hold together, through love of justice and God and each other, we could change things. We could register voters, get people to the polls, make sure they had ID. And we will do that. And eventually, together, we will win.



Photo by Michael Burns

## More About the NC Council of Churches

We make our home at the intersection of faith, social justice, and policy here in North Carolina. From rigorous policy analysis to stories of everyday grace, we've got you covered. Jesus was an advocate for social justice. So when we work on behalf of farmworkers and recent immigrants, those living in poverty or with disabilities, children and the elderly, we are doing what Jesus did.

But we can't do this alone. So find a friend and start praying, find a pen and start writing, find a shovel and start gardening, find a bullhorn and start shouting. Change never comes easy.

While we remain committed to our founding ideals, our work continues to expand: to peace as both a local and global issue, to care of creation, health care for all, gender equality and fair treatment for our LGBT brothers and sisters. We continue to break new ground with work to establish churches as centers for good health and to view food as a faith issue.

Learn more and get involved today: [ncchurches.org](http://ncchurches.org).