

We Are North Carolinians

by M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister

On February 7, I got to be part of a march through Raleigh, North Carolina. More than 80,000 people from across the country and all walks of life joined together in solidarity with our North Carolinian brothers and sisters to call attention to the recent emergence of state legislative actions that will further deny basic rights to those who are already marginalized. Led by the North Carolina National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), *The Forward Together Movement* has gathered over 150 groups who have joined together in a powerful nonviolent demonstration of unity.

The issues of injustice being raised by North Carolinians include the rolling back of voting rights, access to health care, re-segregation of public schools, immigration reform, income inequality, women's rights, LGBT rights, and environmental justice. Each of the 150 coalition member groups continue to focus on their primary mission, but it is clear that *The Forward Together Movement* has increased their visibility, strengthened their determination, and demonstrated the power of the people to come together for a common cause. It is democracy in action.

We congregated in Raleigh as a demonstration of solidarity. Overwhelming hospitality and welcome was extended by North Carolinians that day. However, some press reports noted that thousands who showed up do not reside in the state, some criticizing the presence of outsiders. One such story even referred to non-North Carolinians as agitators being lured in by the North Carolina NAACP to support their dissenting views.

Another reason we joined the public rally was to remind state elected leaders that thousands of North Carolinians are left out. They do not have access to a government "of the people, for the people, and by the people." These principles

give people the right to challenge their elected officials who are passing laws that are unfair and unjust. Exclusion from democracy is happening in North Carolina just as it is happening in other states throughout the land.

All the justice issues that I named above do plague the common good in our country. One that is a glaring obstruction of justice is the right to vote. The North Carolina Legislature just passed new rules requiring that voters present acceptable I.D. cards. Furthermore, they have shortened voter hours and done away with early voting, knowing full well that 70 percent of African Americans voted early in 2012. This does not look like democracy to me.

Voting is fundamental to this nation and essential for a sound democracy. Unfortunately, in cases like these, it seems to apply only to the wealthiest and most powerful. We see it demonstrated over and over during the election season when the most viable candidate is measured by his or her ability to raise money rather than votes. Then highly financed lobbyists converge on elected officials to ensure that their wealth is protected during deliberations on laws meant for the common good – also known as equality and fairness. This is happening in North Carolina as it is in states throughout the land.

We came from across the country – as near as Georgia and Washington, D.C. – and as far as Ohio and Oregon to show that Dr. King was right, “a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” On that day, we knew that we were all North Carolinians.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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