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Annual Meeting
Sept. 9th, 9:30-3:00
in Montgomery

Resurrection Catholic Church
2815 Forbes Drive
Montgomery, AL 36110

From Birmingham:
Take I-65 S. to Northern Bypass
Exit #173. Continue on North-
ern Bypass to Lower Wetumpka
Rd. exit. Turn left onto Lower
Wetumpka. Go to first traffic
light and turn left onto Forbes
Dr. Proceed past Weeping
Willow Baptist Church and past
first Sheridan Heights entrance,
then turn right into Resurrection
driveway. Park in lot in front of
church. Enter building marked
"Resurrection School."

From Mobile:
Take I-65 N. to Northern Bypass
Exit #173. Continue on North-
ern Bypass to Lower Wetumpka
Rd. exit. Turn left onto Lower
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light and turn left onto Forbes
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then turn right into Resurrection
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church. Enter building marked
"Resurrection School."

Save the date!

Thurs., Feb. 15, 2007

Arise
Poverty & Policy
Conference

Birmingham-Southern
College

Stay tuned for details.



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Vol. 19, No. 3

August 16, 2006

Where do we go from here?

Members to set 2007 priorities

At the Annual Meeting on September 9th, member groups will determine Arise's advocacy agenda for the next legislative session. The slate of issues scheduled for a vote includes the 2006 priorities (minus the landlord-tenant law, which we achieved!), along with three new issues that emerged from this summer's listening sessions. Here are the new proposals, followed on Page 3 by the current line-up:

Environmental justice

by the ADEM Reform Coalition

Environmental Justice (EJ) has been a priority of the ADEM Reform Coalition since its inception in 2002. EJ is needed when poor and/or minority populations receive a disproportionate burden of pollution in their communities. The ADEM Reform Coalition has identified the desperate need for EJ in Alabama. Disproportionate burdens of pollution lead to public health and economic health problems that are important factors in the perpetuation of the vicious cycle of poverty.

The Coalition has made considerable progress throughout the past few years regarding the EJ agenda. Most notably, during the 2006 legislative session, money was set aside in the general fund for an EJ Unit to be established at ADEM. The "unit" falls very short of the "division" that we have been striving for, but it is indeed progress. However, ADEM has yet to staff the EJ Unit, and the Coalition still believes that we need to pass legislation that will

guide the work of this unit beyond simply "outreach and education" about environmental justice to truly protect poor and minority citizens against overburdening pollution in their communities.

The Coalition has already drafted two pieces of legislation with the help of ARC member organization Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation (LEAF). One of the pieces of legislation, the Environmental Justice and Health Protection Act, was introduced by Senator Ross as SB 256, but has yet to make it out of committee.

Environmental justice and health is an issue that brings together many diverse groups and can be very difficult to argue against if the message is properly carried out. It is also a subject that has been promoted by Representative Artur Davis in some of his earlier days in office. We believe it is very feasible that, with proper effort, this legislation could be passed in some form in only a couple of sessions.

The ADEM Reform Coalition currently consists of 41 member organizations from across Alabama, one of which is Arise. A combined effort to work more closely together on this issue that bridges environmental issues with poverty issues and affects the lives of so many Alabamians would greatly benefit both entities. This important legislation also provides an opportunity to combine efforts with the public health sector of our communities.

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A few words from Kimble —

If you haven't been to an Arise Annual Meeting, I'd urge you to join us Sept. 9. It's always a fascinating introduction to Arise political strategy. Our members are increasingly savvy in their analysis of low-income people's needs and the realities of the political environment.

Two of the advocacy proposals have been amended since they were submitted. The Mobile Fair Housing office had urged Lisa Thomas to get Arise involved in outreach on the new landlord-tenant law. After we explained that we're working with several groups to write a tenants' handbook – and that we were eager to involve Fair Housing folks in writing and dissemination – they agreed that it didn't need to be an advocacy proposal.

Lisa also proposed that we work on Katrina relief, but she agreed that the legislative handle is hard to identify. Most of the Katrina relief is (as it should be) federal. One way Arise could help would be to advocate for transparency in the handling of the federal funding distributed by Gov. Riley. Lisa agreed to submit her proposal as an endorsement issue, not a legislative priority.

At the Annual Meeting we'll also be talking about some fall goals for organizing. Last year we committed to find 20 new member groups in priority legislative districts, as well as 100 new individual members. We also committed to recruit 100 people who would commit to distribute 1,000 flyers on tax reform, whether in your neighborhood, at the barber shop, at ball games, at church – wherever we can find people. These are goals that can stretch us, but they're not beyond our reach!

With peace,

[Continued from Page 1]

The cost of such legislation could be expensive, but all of the fees can be incurred through the permitting fees at ADEM if they will agree to that. There need not be any extra expense to the General Fund. However, legislators would have to be educated about this, and ADEM would have to be encouraged if not required to utilize that power.

Environmental Justice is and will continue to be a priority for the ADEM Reform Coalition and to the many communities across Alabama that are suffering from unjust environmental practices. It would be a great boost to the environmental justice efforts in Alabama if Arise would join in the fight and put EJ legislation on the legislative priority list for the upcoming years.

Money & politics

by Explorers Sunday School Class,
Highlands UMC, Birmingham

There is much to be done in Alabama to bring some equity between those who have wealth and political power and those who are in poverty who have no voice. The current Alabama laws obviously support the wealthy, who use their wealth to lobby legislators and give large sums of money (without being detected) to politicians that support their agenda. Two of the most blatant ways this occurs are in the form of PAC-to-PAC transfers and the high amount set for lobbying disclosures.

Each of these current situations provide ways for the wealthy to promote their candidates and agenda while removing those in poverty from being an equal part of the political process. Having money or not should not be the determining factor in the amount of influence a citizen can have on their representatives and the legislative process. However, in our current system, it does. A change in the current system would greatly affect all people of Alabama, including the poor.

A strong democracy in which each voice has the opportunity to be heard keeps

our political systems, and the people who run them, in check. Without this important check, systems and people run the risk of becoming swayed by their own desires or greed rather than providing the best for the people of Alabama.

Unless there are groups that rely on this form of influence to promote their own agendas, there should be no member of Alabama Arise that does not support a change in the status quo of how money overly affects the legislators that are elected to strengthen the State of Alabama and its citizens, not just those with wealth.

Rep. Jeff McLaughlin (D-Guntersville) has been vocal about his desires to bring about a change to PAC-to-PAC transfers. He has sponsored bills at least four times, and this past year the bill to ban PAC-to-PAC transfers made it out of the House on a 97-2 vote. With that type of support it is clear that this legislation is not only needed, but also on the verge of being accepted.

Another important issue dealing with money and politics in Alabama is the amount lobbyists are allowed to spend on legislators. Most would agree that lobbyists play a vital role in politics and they should be allowed to take a representative to lunch, or provide other opportunities to meet with them and share their ideas. However, Alabama's current laws allow lobbyists to spend up to \$250 *per day* on legislators without having to report it. This type of preferential treatment for the wealthy gives them an unfair advantage in influencing Alabama's elected officials. A change to the amount lobbyists could spend without having to report has the potential of greatly changing the landscape of Alabama politics.

The current state of affairs shuts poor Alabamians out of much of the process. Alabamians who struggle to have their voices heard deserve to know who is putting big money into the system to influence legislation.

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Money Follows the Person

by Birmingham Independent Living Center

In 2000 almost half of Alabamians 65 and over said they had some type of disability. Of Alabama's population aged 21 to 64, 23.2 percent had some type of disability. Most people want to avoid going to a nursing home at all costs, but without alternative care options, they may have no other choice. Studies have shown home and community services generally less expensive than nursing home care. Alabama Medicaid spends far more money on nursing home care for children, adults with disabilities, and seniors than it does to provide the services and supports needed to enable them to live in their own homes.

For example, according to the Alabama Medicaid Agency's 2004 annual report, there were 7,565 recipients of the HCBS Elderly and Disabled Waiver. The actual cost-per-person of this waiver was \$6,110. Serving those same individuals in nursing facilities would have cost the State of Alabama \$27,918 per person. Therefore, this waiver saved the State of Alabama \$21,808 per person for a total of \$164,977,520.

<http://www.medicaid.state.al.us>

According to the Pew Research Center, Medicaid, the federal-state health care program, pays for 60 percent of nursing home care in America. Many middle-class Alabamians who need long-term care eventually exhaust their own savings and become Medicaid patients limited to Medicaid choices.

Until Alabama shifts more Medicaid money to community-based programs, we will wind up putting people in nursing homes when they really don't need or want that kind of expensive care. Medicaid home and community services are monitored by case managers. Personal assistants help with cleaning, meals, personal hygiene and other duties according to a plan developed with the individuals and treating professionals.

Issues proposed for renewal

These proposals represent the unfinished business from the 2006 advocacy priorities:

Tax reform

Raising Alabama's income tax threshold from \$4,600 to \$12,600 was a major win in 2006. But the victory was only partial – Alabama continues to tax low-income people deeper into poverty. Arise promotes steps toward a fair, adequate and accountable tax system.

- Arise will promote raising the threshold to the federal poverty level (currently \$20,000 for a family of four) as the next step toward a fairer tax system. Rep. John Knight's bill would lower taxes on those who pay too much and increase them on those who pay too little.
- We will build public support for a constitutional amendment to increase the minimum local property tax for education to 10 mills.
- We support new revenue for the General Fund, especially for health care.

Adequate funding

In a budget crisis, the programs at risk of cuts are often the ones on

which low-income families depend. Arise will speak out to protect funding for health care (Medicaid, ALL Kids), child care and education.

Public transportation

Alabama provides no state funding for mass transit. Arise wants to remove the constitutional prohibition against spending gas and fuel taxes on public transportation.

Death penalty moratorium

Arise will support a three-year hold on executions while the state conducts a study of the fairness of our capital justice system. We will also support bills to bring Alabama law into compliance with recent U. S. Supreme Court rulings against executing minors and individuals with mental retardation.

Constitutional reform

Arise will support two measures:

- an amendment to remove racist language from Alabama's current constitution;
- a proposal for a constitutional convention to write a new state constitution.

HB 169 and SB 588, legislation introduced during the 2006 legislative session by Linda Coleman in the House and Vivian Figures in Senate, would have established an "Alabama Money Follows the Person Program." The Money Follows the Person Program would allow the transfer of money currently appropriated by the Legislature to Alabama Medicaid to provide care for eligible individuals in nursing facilities instead to be used for home and community-based services for those individuals who are eligible and who choose to return to the community or to avoid nursing home placement from the outset. The Money Follows the Person Program would eliminate

barriers that prevent or restrict the flexible use of Medicaid funds to enable Medicaid-eligible individuals to receive support for appropriate and necessary long-term services in the settings of their choice. This legislation will be re-introduced in the 2007 session.

Why should the Legislature act? Money Follows the Person allows people with disabilities and older Alabamians the freedom to choose where they live. Money Follows the Person supports family values and strengthens communities by allowing people to remain in their homes and be active members of their community. Money Follows the Person requires no new funding, no tax increase, and no loss of services.

Thank you, contributors!

We appreciate the following contributors for their generous non-deductible gifts to Alabama Arise received between May 16 and Aug. 11, 2006:

AAUW of Alabama
Alabama New South Coalition
Alabama Rural Ministry
Alabama CURE (Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants)
All Saints Episcopal Church, Mobile
Bay Area Women Coalition, Mobile
Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa
Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile
Catholic Social Services, Mobile
Christian Church in Ala./N. W. Fla.
Church of the Reconciler, Birmingham
Committee of Unified Leadership, Anniston
Community Enabler Developer, Anniston
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa
Edmundite Southern Missions, Selma
Episcopal Diocese of Alabama
First Presbyterian Church, Auburn
First United Methodist Church, Montgomery
First United Methodist Church, Birmingham

Lillian Ford, Birmingham
Holy Spirit Catholic Church, Huntsville
Homeless Coalition of the Gulf Coast, Mobile
Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity
Jubilee Community Center, Montgomery
Lowndes Citizens United for Action
National Association of Social Workers, Alabama Chapter
Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Selma
Presbytery of Sheppards & Lapsley
Prince of Peace Catholic Church, Birmingham
Southern Poverty Law Center
St. Paul United Methodist Church, Birmingham
Unitarian Universalist Church, Huntsville
United Methodist Church
Ala.-W. Fla. Conf., Church & Society
N. Ala. Conference, Church & Society
United Presbyterians of Wilcox County
University Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa
Upper Sand Mountain Parish, Sylvania
Valley Christian Church, Birmingham
Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church, Birmingham

A note from Brenda

Dear Arise Friends,

I want to extend a special word of appreciation to those who support the work of Alabama Arise, the lobbying arm of our organization. Contributions to AA between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006, totaled \$51,000; our member groups contributed 98 percent of that amount.

Many of these groups have faithfully stood by Arise over the years, and the 2006 legislative session brought substantive results. But the threshold increase to \$12,600 for a family of four is only a first step toward long-overdue tax fairness.

We look to our Arise members for continued support. Our budget goal for FY 2006-07 includes a 20 percent increase in member giving. As your group charts its course for the coming year, please join us in aiming higher!

*Brenda Boman
Development Director*

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