

Running with Perseverance

by Sandy Sorensen

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For faith advocates working to bring the voices and concerns of the most vulnerable in our communities to the center of public policy decision-making, the last several months have felt like an advocacy marathon. I have run two marathons in my life, and I learned the importance of pacing, stopping at water stations, and celebrating every small step toward the goal. As we approach the 2017 August congressional recess, we have an opportunity to do those things that will prepare us for the long haul of justice advocacy.

The recent defeat of the Senate “skinny repeal” version of health care reform represents a remarkable victory for the tireless work of faith advocates who refused to allow members of Congress to leave our vulnerable neighbors behind. UCC Justice and Witness Ministries Executive Minister Rev. Traci Blackmon wisely noted, “I know this is not the end. I know the struggles will continue. I know that before this day ends, there will be something else. But just for a moment, I invite you to pay attention to the strength of our collective voices. Pay attention to the power of our collective prayers. Pay attention to the miracle working power of God, and allow yourself one moment of joy.” It is important to celebrate this step and reflect on the power of our stories and voices as advocates to make a difference in seemingly impossible circumstances.

It is important to take time to restore ourselves at the water station, even as we continue the race. Finding moments and spaces to reconnect in a deep way to the power of our call to do justice is, itself, part of the work. Tempting though it may be to push past the water stations and push ourselves harder, the result is a spirit depleted of the resources needed to do the work.

Replenishment and pacing keep us resilient in long, often lonely and disheartening work of justice. And pacing is critical in these days – we can make no mistake, it continues to be a perilous time for the most vulnerable people in our communities. The FY 2018 budget debate has already begun in the House and will be taken up earnest after the August recess. It includes calls for increased spending on military programs at the expense of programs like Head Start, Meals on Wheels, affordable housing, school lunches, programs that help keep the most economically vulnerable from falling into inescapable

poverty. It includes a call for increased funding for a border wall while cutting back on environmental protections that pose far greater threats to our security.

Faith policy advocates have been working over the last several months to compile a vision of the federal budget that would truly reflect our faith values. A budget that puts our treasure where our hearts are. The preamble to the Faithful Budget document states, “As the American people we understand ourselves to be ‘one nation under God,’ not a mere collection of isolated individuals. All of us have something to contribute to our life together, and none of us is excluded from our circle of mutual care and concern.” The Faithful Budget vision encapsulates the three great loves of neighbor, children and creation (www.ucc.org/3greatloves).

So as August approaches, much work awaits us. It is a time to remember we are in it for the long haul, to tap into those things that sustain our spirits and to stay in the race. The words of the African American spiritual Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning sustain me in the struggle: “Children don’t grow weary, children don’t grow weary, children don’t grow weary, for the time is drawing nigh.”

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