

WITNESS for JUSTICE

A weekly commentary from
the United Church of Christ

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Post-Election Accountability

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In the aftermath of last week's election, emotions range from celebration to lamentation, depending upon on which political party or candidate that we supported. If the barrage of political ads leading up to the election didn't already exhaust us, we are now forced to digest the endless speculation of political analysts recounting all the reasons for the results. Negotiation among elected leaders is once again promised as a solution to the gridlock, which has severely discouraged voter participation throughout the land.

In the midst of all the media buzz, it is good to see that communities of faith are stepping up to join forces with non-religious organizations working together to support basic human needs. Momentum is growing and with it we see renewed energy to hold policy makers accountable to voter-endorsed measures dedicated to advancing the common good.

Need an example? Voters from Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota overwhelmingly recognized the need for a living wage in their states. Last week these states joined twenty-five others that have previously endorsed an hourly wage that surpasses the woefully inadequate federal minimum wage. Because of this action, nearly 700,000 low wage workers can look forward to modest raises. This movement across the country demonstrates our support for families and shows that we recognize the struggle of parents who must work two or three jobs to meet the basic needs of their household. By supporting these workers, we are demonstrating our commitment to one another and to improving the economic situation of whole communities.

Policies responding to the needs of working families were affirmed by Massachusetts's voters who supported paid sick leave, and further reinforced by Oakland, California and two New Jersey cities — Trenton and Montclair. Eight similar measures passed earlier this year with several campaigns

God is still speaking,
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gaining strength. Families will undoubtedly benefit from these recent actions and economic development reports predict that it will also be good for business.

California voters also acted to address disparities in their criminal justice system and are slowly but surely overturning their 1994 “three-strikes” law, which has disproportionately affected low-income persons and people of color. While the law was intended to address offenders committing violent crimes, it has also resulted in life sentences for petty thieves and shoplifters. Last week, Californians supported Measure 47, which will convert low-level drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors, reducing the sentences of an estimated 10,000 inmates. In the past, arguments in support of this step concentrated on the excessive cost of implementing the three-strikes law; however, a Los Angeles poll in September indicated that Californians felt that fairness was far more important than money. Voters from both sides of the political spectrum led the way to justice by passing Measure 47 with a 58% majority.

Stories like this were visible across the nation. Voters stepped up in this election cycle to support basic human needs. At the same time scholars at the Pew Research Institute are documenting a surge of support for churches that engage politically, especially in advancing the common good. It seems that we are at an important moment as a nation, and that we, as people of faith committed to justice and equality, are uniquely poised to help hold our elected officials accountable to the will of the people in this post-election time.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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