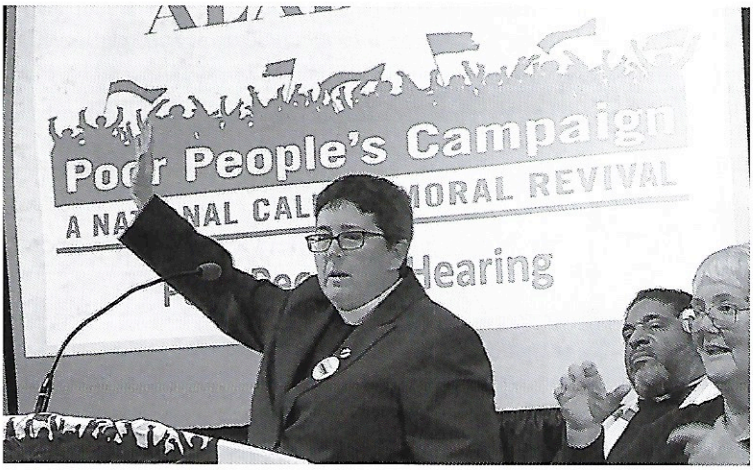
ASSOCIATION FOR EPISCOPAL DEACONS
ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

diakoneo
GREEK: TO BE A SERVANT; TO SERVE



Deacon Carolyn Foster, co-chair of Alabama Committee of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, speaks at a press conference outside the Alabama State House in Montgomery, March 5, 2019. (Photo: The Alabama Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival)



Deacon Kelley Hudlow speaks at the Poor People's Hearing in Montgomery, Alabama, March 4, 2019. (Photo: Chris Dayton)

"We commit ourselves to ministry of active engagement, advocacy, and support. We commit ourselves to empower and lift up the individuals, communities, and parishes we serve. We commit ourselves to utilize our gifts, resources, and networks of relationships to support the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival..."

~ Community of Deacons, Diocese of Alabama

THE DIAKONIA OF THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

A National Call for Moral Revival

BY DEACON KELLEY HUDLOW

On March 20, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed a mass meeting at the First Baptist Church in Eutaw, Alabama. In that speech, he outlined the goals of the Poor People's Campaign:

> *Now we are going to get the right to have three square meals a day. Now we are going to get the right to have a decent house to live in. . . . Now we are going to get the right to be able to educate our children... Now we are fighting for the right to get proper medical care. . . . Now we are fighting for the right to get the basic necessities of life.*[1]

Though King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, the Poor People's Campaign did make it to Washington, D.C. On Mother's Day, May 12, 1968, Coretta Scott King led thousands of women in the first wave of demonstrations. A tent city, known as Resurrection City, was built on the National Mall and would remain there until June 24, 1968. The Poor People's Campaign had some success, but King's ambitious goals were left unfulfilled.

On November 19, 2017, at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in the midst of a contentious special election for a U.S. Senate seat, the Rev. Dr. William Barber II and the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis led a mass meeting for the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. This was the thirteenth stop on a nationwide tour to build support for the campaign. Building on King's vision, the revived campaign sought to address the issues of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy, and the distorted moral narrative in our country. The campaign began with 40 days of nonviolent direct action coordinated across 30 states, commencing on the Monday following Mother's Day, and culminating in a rally on the National Mall on June 23, 2018. This season of nonviolent direct action saw over 2,500 moral witnesses arrested across the country.

Each participating state formed a state committee, and Deacon Carolyn Foster of St. Mark's Birmingham was chosen to serve as one of three

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committee co-chairs. Through her work with Greater Birmingham Ministries, an interfaith organization that advocates for and provides direct services to people in need, Foster was well connected to the faith community and to directly impacted persons. As a co-chair, she organized logistics of trainings, direct action events, cultural events, and served as a moral witness by being arrested the second week of the campaign.

On March 2, 2018, the Diocese of Alabama Deacon Community met and, as a community, endorsed the work of the campaign and pledged support. "We commit ourselves to ministry of active engagement, advocacy, and support. We commit ourselves to empower and lift up the individuals, communities, and parishes we serve. We commit ourselves to utilize our gifts, resources, and networks of relationships to support the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, and particularly the Alabama State Organizing Committee."[2] The support from the Community of Deacons included preaching and teaching about the work and goals of the campaign, financial support, attending and supporting rallies and direct action.

Alabama deacons continue to support the work of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Throughout the summer and fall of 2018, work of the campaign shifted to voter engagement and mobilization. On March 4, a Poor People's Hearing was held at Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Montgomery, Alabama.[3] This hearing was held on the eve of the state legislature going into session. On March 5, Foster and other members of the campaign held a press conference outside of the state house and attempted to deliver the campaign's demands to legislators and the governor.[4] The group was granted limited access to the legislators' offices but were denied access to the governor's office.[5] Throughout 2019 and 2020, the campaign will continue with hearings, bus tours, and voter empowerment.



Deacons Kelley Hudlow and Carolyn Foster attend the mass rally in Washington, D.C., June 23, 2018.

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is a "fusion movement" that calls on people of faith and conscience to put aside difference and to work together. This commitment to work across difference echoes Dr. King's words "We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality… For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured." [6]

Deacons are particularly equipped for the work of the Poor People's Campaign. Deacons at ordination are called to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely; to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by our word and example; and to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.[7] Through the work of John N. Collins in examining *diak-* words in the New Testament, the understanding of *diakonia* as being direct service to the poor and attending tables has expanded. *Diakonia* is perhaps better expressed "as a commission to fulfill an important task or mission, more specifically, God's mission in the world."[8] The work of *diakonia* and



Deacon John Stewart waits to lead prayers at the first rally on the steps of the historic state capitol building in Montgomery, May 14, 2018. (Photo: Kelley Hudlow)

its embodiment in deacons is accomplished through proclamation and action and the "practice of restoring broken relationships and affirming the dignity of the marginalized."[9] Deacons are called to affirm "the dignity and power of those involved in its work, and especially of those judged as poor and helpless…[by] opting for practices that allow people to be subjects in the process of working for a better future."[10]

As the go-between of the Church and the world, deacons are equipped to build connections and relationships across difference. In the Diocese of Alabama, the community commitment to support the campaign has allowed deacons from varying contexts and ministries to work together. The campaign has challenged the deacon community to broaden its focus from meeting daily needs to include systemic change. The community has been challenged to empower those whom it serves (both inside and outside of the church) to advocate for the loving, life-giving, and liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ to transform our state and our nation.

The *diakonia* of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival continues, and it needs more deacons. To learn more about the campaign and how to get involved, visit www.poorpeoplescampaign.org.

[1] "Martin Luther King Jr.'s Call For a Poor People's Campaign," *The Atlantic*, accessed on 3/10/2019, https://bit.ly/2UyOflk.
[2] The letter is available at: https://www.dioala.org/dfc/newsdetail_2/3191122.
[3] Video of the hearing, including speeches by Foster and Hudlow is available at: https://www.facebook.com/AlabamaPPC/videos/267540604171633/.
[4] Video of the press conference is available at: https://www.facebook.com/AlabamaPPC/videos/794109600945050/.
[5] Video of delivery of demands is available at: https://www.facebook.com/AlabamaPPC/videos/408426393253762/.
[6] "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., on 31 March 1968. Accessed 3/10/2019, https://stanford.io/1ABRiXS.
[7] *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 543.
[8] *Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia*, April 17, 2018, p. 44. Accessed 3/10/2019, https://bit.ly/2CjrtXA.
[9] Id. at 42.
[10] Id. at 46.

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