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# OPINION

## A Witness for Justice and the Common Good

### Using religion to discriminate is not new

BY REV. M. LINDA JARAMILLO

One of the privileges of living in the United States is the freedom to speak out and step forth on any variety of issues. The public square in the United States provides the plat-

form for our voices to be heard, whether we agree or disagree on the topic at hand.

There is power in public witness as we gather in nonviolent public demonstrations on the streets; visit or write letters to public officials; or engage in



acts of service to help someone in need.

The Witness for Justice, first known as the Civil Rights Journal, has a long and rich history that has inspired and provoked dialogue through the years. It has been and will continue to be one way that we March Forth for Justice.

There are so many issues of injustice that arise every day. We need only turn on the radio or television, pick up a newspaper, or go online to learn about another court decision or another policy that is being enacted. Tragically, it's hard to keep up with it all. But there has never been a greater time that the voices

of the masses need to be heard.

One such headline that just hit the news is an action taken by the Arizona Legislature. Arizona Senate Bill 1062's "exercise of religion" would have made it legal to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.

Sadly, using religious conviction as the basis for discrimination is not new in this country.

History tells us that the Scriptures were used to justify the enslavement of African Americans. Furthermore, women continue to be excluded from leadership in our churches based on that same scriptural story.

The Bible is intended to be a guide for good and reasonable living; using it to

exclude and discriminate goes against everything we have read and heard from the Prophets through the ages, including Jesus himself.

Let it be known that we absolutely and resolutely disagree that our Christian conviction gives us the right to exclude and discriminate against anyone at any time.

We add our Christian voice to the opposition of Arizona Senate Bill #1062 or any other such a law to become part of the social fabric of that state or any state in this nation.

Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister for Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

## Historic Opportunity to Bridge Achievement Gap

### Endorsing Common Core Standards

BY MARC H. MORIAL

There is a quiet – yet increasingly disruptive – revolution underway in American education. Since 2010, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense have adopted Common Core State Standards in their schools.

This represents an historic opportunity to raise academic standards and better prepare students for college and good jobs. If implemented effectively, Common Core will help bridge the achievement gap by leveling the playing field so that all students, regardless of race, geography or income, have an equal shot at gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century global economy.

The National Urban League and a broad cross-section of civil rights, public policy, business and education leaders are in full support. But while a majority of states are implementing these new and more rigorous standards in English Language Arts and Math, Common Core remains a mystery to many parents and students, giving its critics an open lane to spread misinformation and undermine progress.

First, let's clarify exactly what Common Core is and what it is not. The Common Core Standards were developed by governors and chief state school officers from both sides of the aisle who brought together teachers, parents, school administrators and education ex-

perts to write them.

Despite what some of its critics claim, Common Core is not a top-down, "Big Brother," federal program.

The states determined that these standards were necessary to improve outcomes for students, and 90 percent of the states (including Oregon and Washington) within our union have decided that they are critical to better prepare our country's students for the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow.

Second, we are talking about academic standards, not a standardized curriculum. Common Core establishes what students need to learn at each grade level, but it doesn't dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms, ideally utilizing the state standards to create even more engaging and educational approaches and content.

In order to move us forward, it was determined that the Common Core State Standards must be:

Aligned with expectations for college and career success; clear and consistent across all states; inclusive of content-based knowledge and high-order reasoning skills; an improvement upon current state standards and standards of top-performing nations; reality-based for effective use in the classroom; and evidence and research based.

Finally, it must be said that Common Core can only be successful if it is equitably and similarly implemented in a high-quality manner. Given that excellence and equity are inseparable, states, districts, teachers and principals must

have the resources and supports necessary to fully realize the promise of Common Core State Standards.

The National Urban League will continue to join parents, educators, as well as civic and business leaders, in insisting that implementation is resourced equitably and responsibly. However, it is neither fair nor accurate to assert that Common Core is a failure because of recent implementation challenges – for any innovation requires adjustments on its path to success. We do not need to figure out new standards; we need to figure out how to implement these effectively and equitably. Our children are counting on us, and we must get this right – for them, their future and our nation.

We have long advocated a leveling of the playing field in education and the injection of additional quality as we do so. It does not serve our nation or our

future when some children are systematically less prepared than others, nor does it serve our nation to have this issue tossed onto a political battlefield where it becomes a casualty of partisanship and deliberate misinformation.

Instead this moment should be an opportunity for education stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, policymakers and reformers alike – to build a common agenda towards our shared goal of better educating the nation's children and youth.

It is our belief that by raising and developing better standards for everyone, Common Core State Standards can pave the way to a 21st century American educated citizenry and workforce that is second to none.

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