

# OPINION

## Unwavering Messenger of Hope and Justice

### Lessons in servant leadership

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



This past month the Children's Defense Fund was blessed with a visit from one of the greatest nonviolence practitioners in our nation and world, Rev. James Lawson. He shared lessons in leadership with our staff from our greatest American prophet, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who called Rev. Lawson "the leading theorist and strategist of nonviolence in the world."

In some of the recent elections Americans once again reaffirmed their desperate hope for positive, principled leadership in times of chaos, calamity, and confusion. Rev. Lawson has long been an example of exactly this kind of leadership.

Rev. Lawson has been for me and countless others a peerless teacher, role model, and leader of nonviolent direct action.

He guided Dr. King and thousands of young leaders of all races and ages seeking racial and economic justice. He is our living embodiment of effective social

change and exemplifies and taught us Christ's and Gandhi's nonviolent values and strategies to combat our nation's recurring birth defects of slavery, Native American genocide, exclusion of women and non-propertied white men from our political and economic processes. And for 90 years he has been a singular and unwavering voice calling across generations for a nation and world where every child of God is welcomed, respected and empowered to realize their God-given potential.

Rev. Lawson is the son and grandson of Methodist ministers and received his own ministry license during his senior year of high school. He was educated at Ohio's Baldwin-Wallace College, Oberlin College and Vanderbilt Divinity School, but he was also schooled by the 13 months he served in federal prison after being arrested for refusing to enter the military when drafted—or in his words, refusing to "put on somebody's military uniform for the purpose of using arms against other human beings."

It was in prison that Rev. Lawson reread the writings of Gandhi and theologian Howard Thurman. Afterwards he spent three years as a Methodist missionary in India,

where he first read about Dr. King and the Montgomery Bus Boycott—a milestone in the movement brewing at home in the United States that he would help lead.

Rev. Lawson and Dr. King met in person in 1957 after Rev. Lawson returned to the U.S. and was studying at Oberlin's Graduate School of Theology. Dr. King urged him to come south to join the Civil Rights Movement, arguing that there was no other clergyman with his experience and knowledge of nonviolence. Rev. Lawson replied that he had been thinking about it and would come as soon as his studies were complete, but Dr. King convinced him to come immediately.

In January 1958 Rev. Lawson moved to Nashville to nurture, challenge and prepare the students of the Nashville movement, producing some of the great leaders of the national Civil Rights Movement including Congressman John Lewis. Rev. Lawson served as Director of Nonviolent Education for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Rep. John Lewis later wrote: "Jim Lawson knew...that we were being trained for a war unlike any this nation had seen up to that time, a non-violent struggle that would force this country to face its conscience.

Lawson was arming us, preparing us, planting in us a sense of righteousness and righteousness."

He has never stopped doing that and our nation has never stopped needing him and benefiting from his unwavering nonviolent moral voice. Rev. Lawson continues to mentor and prepare communities for nonviolent struggle and direct action organizing. He has been part of the movements for racial justice, reproductive choice, a living wage, the rights of hotel and other service industry workers, undocumented immigrants and those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. He has worked across our nation with students, including the Dreamers who pushed for the DREAM Act to grant legal status to immigrant children. And he is a role model for me and generations of younger servant leaders as he continues to teach and preach and inspire.

I am so grateful for Jim Lawson's example, stamina, extraordinary intellect and generosity of spirit to so many and am so glad to have him as friend, mentor and teacher. He has been God's unwavering messenger of hope and justice for all of God's children.

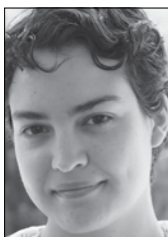
*Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund*

## We Have 12 Years to Save — or Lose — Our Only Home

### Consider this your warning to act now

BY OLIVIA ALPERSTEIN

Pull on the seat-belt in your gas-guzzling car, folks, and strap in for the worst ride of our lives.



This fall, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a critical report warning that humans have about 12 years — until 2030 — before global warming reaches a catastrophic level.

The report concludes, frighteningly, that the world can't allow global temperatures to warm past 1.5 degrees Celsius, or there will quite literally be hell to pay. And unless we take drastic action, we're already all set to get there.

Consider this your all-hands-on-deck, siren-blaring warning that we need to act comprehensively to mitigate climate change now — or forever hold our peace.

The IPCC predicts an increased

risk of devastating climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food, water, security, and economic growth.

As sea levels and global temperatures rise, low-lying communities will disappear and heat-related deaths will increase, along with diseases like dengue fever and malaria. Areas that cease to be inhabitable by humans will fuel an accelerated refugee crisis, while resources like agriculture and crops will be decimated in key areas impacted by climate change.

That's just a few of the highlights of the Ten Plagues-like punishment we'll get for endangering our planet. We're facing a pretty grim future — and that's even if we manage to cap the rise at 1.5 degrees, which we're not on track to do.

For those of us who are pretty young like me, our golden years may be anything but.

Before you slip quietly into your doomsday bunker or start praying that someone invents interstellar space travel, there's an urgent message of hope: We've

got a little bit of time to save the only home planet we've got. And it's going to take all of us to do it.

While dire, the report also contains some critically useful recommendations.

Governments, companies, indigenous peoples, local communities, and individuals all have a critical role to play to solve this crisis. We can and must act quickly and collaboratively on a local and global scale before it's too late. Acting alone or failing to cooperate, the IPCC report emphasizes, will fall short.

The Paris Climate Agreement isn't going to be enough — we need massive, World War Two-level mobilization. The victory will be that we get a living, healthy planet.

The report also highlights the need to consider justice and equity as we consider solutions.

Some nations, like the United States, are leading contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and other accelerants of climate change. Others contribute less to emissions but are more vulnerable to catastrophic damage. A number of low-lying nations (on whose

approval the Paris Agreement depended) will literally be underwater if temperatures rise beyond the IPCC's limit.

The point being: The countries that have contributed the most to climate change need to contribute the most to fixing it — and to helping those who suffer most to adapt.

What can you do, right here, right now, besides giving up meat, your car, or plastic bags and straws?

Urge your local or state government to commit to 100 percent renewable energy in the next decade. Get your community and your state to ban the use of fracking and other fossil fuel production that will drive us to doomsday that much quicker, not to mention the other dangerous risks to people's health.

Call on the federal government to implement the recommendations of the IPCC report, and commit to working with the rest of the world to act swiftly.

*Olivia Alperstein is the Media Relations Manager for Physicians for Social Responsibility. Distributed by OtherWords.org.*



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