

**Hunger Action Network
Faith & Hunger Network
Reform Jewish Voice
Interfaith Impact
Capital Region Ecumenical Organization
FOCUS Churches of Albany
NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network**

Press Release

For immediate release

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**Faith Leaders Pray for Suffering Poor at Governor's
Doorstep on GOOD FRIDAY**

Albany – Advocates today held a Good Friday Prayer Vigil for Economic Justice and Relief outside the Governor's office in the Capitol.

“We stand today in solemn recognition of our religious and moral obligations. Both the Jewish high holiday of Passover and the Christian commemorations of Jesus' arrest and execution have not only spiritual but moral and political significance. These religious observances both have at their root a profound recognition of God's concern for and action on behalf of the oppressed and suffering,” said Andreas Kriefall of Hunger Action Network. “And it is not only Pharaoh's Egypt or Caesar's Rome where economic hardship and oppression call for God's people to speak out for justice—our own state government in New York is negotiating a budget in the midst of a recession that has impacted the poor and vulnerable in horrific ways: unemployment, homelessness, hunger. We are hear to cry out for a just and compassionate state budget that uses the resources of the federal stimulus to relieve not add to this suffering,” he added.

Advocates called attention to the following shocking numbers to make their case: 850,000 New Yorkers are unemployed. 30.8% of the lowest earners tried and failed to find work in the last quarter of 2009, according to the Center for Labor Studies. Welfare rolls, homelessness, hunger, and foreclosures are on the rise.

“It is not a matter of Republican Party or Democratic Party—it's the same old party of business as usual leaving out the people that is the problem,” stated Rev. Dr. Victor Collier, associate pastor of Mt. Olive Southern Missionary Baptist Church. “We are here to call for and to pray for a government that responds to the reality of people's needs.”

“One of the great sages of Jewish tradition, Moses Maimonides, spoke already in the Middle Ages of the need for a holistic solution to poverty: giving people good work is the best response to poverty and suffering,” said Barbara Zaron of Reform Jewish Voice. “This is the principle we are reminding the Governor and state legislators of as they make their final decisions in this difficult budget year.”

“I represent the six bishops of the Episcopal church who recently met with the Governor. The bedrock and fundamental theme of their discussion was that the state budget is a MORAL document, it charts our priorities and creates the road map for our government’s choices. If we follow some of the Governor’s decisions, to scale back the welfare grant increase and decrease jobs funding, we are in danger of driving this state off the bridge, morally speaking,” said Demi McGuire of the NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network.

Robb Smith of Interfaith Impact echoed her message: “The budget should reflect a vision of the common good. We are all in this together, and that sense of shared fate should make us willing to provide as needed, especially for those suffering the most from our economic troubles.”

Both the Passover holiday just celebrated by Jewish believers and the Christian services of Holy Week emphasize God’s solidarity with the poor and the scriptural imperative for people of faith to take action on their behalf. This economic recession has vastly increased the troubles and suffering of the most vulnerable residents of our state.

Faith leaders prayed for a just and compassionate state budget, including a welfare grant increase and increases in state support for jobs for poor persons.

This coalition of religious organizations is asking the state legislature and Governor to fund the full promised 10% welfare grant increase and to include a full \$100 million for jobs in the welfare budget.

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