

AFACT

ANCHORAGE FAITH & ACTION • CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER



FALL 2009

Families Gather for the Health of Their Children

Gabrielle Cardenas' grief flooded Central Lutheran Church on September 28, as she shared with 300 people her daughter's need for a heart and lung transplant. Through her tears, Ms. Cardenas lamented her daughter's lack of health care, saying "we don't qualify [for Alaska's State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)] by \$400, we are over by \$400..." Unable to continue her testimony, Ms. Cardenas left the microphone weeping and clutching her daughter in her arms.

Ms. Cardenas was speaking at AFACT's second large public

*Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no healing
for the wound of my people?*

Jeremiah 8:22

meeting urging the expansion of Alaska's SCHIP and healthcare for more Alaskan children. SCHIP is the federally funded program that provides healthcare coverage to low-income working families. Known as Denali KidCare in Alaska, 65% of the costs are covered by the federal government.

Although the Alaska legislature increased the income eligibility for the program following the first AFACT meeting in April 2007, the program has not been restored to its original level, covering families earning up to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL).

More than 300 people poured into Central Lutheran Church to share difficult stories with AFACT's guest, Commissioner Bill Hogan, Alaska Health and Human Services, and with the state legislators who were present.

Standing with his wife and three children, Adan Ortega said, "I work hard to give them health insurance but I can't. Last summer, I applied ... and I was over by \$80...now I tell my kids - please don't be sick..."

Sarah Weber, a mother of three, acknowledged the blessing Alaska's SCHIP had been for her family, but sadly, her children are currently uninsured. "With the cuts ... in the last couple of years, we've either teetered on the edge or fallen off, depending on the fluctuation of my husband's wages," she said. She added that her family could "...afford something but not the whole ticket. If I had to pay \$20 every time we use the doctor, that'd be fine....We just need something to bridge the gap."

A small business owner, Annette Alleva had never qualified for Alaska's the program for her five children and health insurance remained unaffordable for her family.



Sarah Weber, with her daughter, shares her story with Commissioner Hogan, while Amber Rodriguez stands with her children preparing to testify. (Photo by Ron Nicholl)



Bob Lincoln of Bethel Chapel, Kay Gajewski of Holy Family Cathedral, and Cristina Cuenca of Our Lady of Guadalupe listen intently while Commissioner Bill Hogan addresses the gathering. (Photo by Ron Nicholl)

Ms. Alleva explained that increased income eligibility in the program and a co-pay option would have helped her family enormously. Instead "three of my children have aged out of the program while the legislature has bounced around the eligibility level."

Commissioner Hogan directly addressed those laments in his remarks. Representing Governor Parnell, the Commissioner admitted his concern after hearing testimony from families that were close to qualifying, but were ineligible because of \$45 a year or \$80 a month. He said "We need to



Adan Ortega of Our Lady of Guadalupe speaks to Commissioner Hogan while his wife and son look on. (Photo by Ron Nicholl)

Families Gather, continued inside

The Journey of Empowerment

When AFACT's leaders gather to learn, share and pray together, the vision of AFACT becomes tangible. Through its annual retreats and statewide leadership trainings, AFACT empowers congregation members to confront local issues that impact their lives. In that process, people reach across denominational, socio-economic, and ethnic boundaries and strangers become neighbors and friends walking together in the journey of empowerment.

ANNUAL RETREAT

AFACT's fifth annual retreat was held in August at Holy Spirit Center in Anchorage. Thirty leaders from eight congregations spent Friday evening and Saturday sharing their experiences during the past year, as well as reflecting on the values of their faith.

Gemma Gaudio, Catholic Native Ministry, shared the roller coaster of emotions that she has

experienced in her organizing ministry work on Alaska Native student education – moments when she felt invisible in the world and moments when she felt that people in positions of authority were really listening to, and acting on, her concerns. Throughout the ups and downs of working on Alaska Native education, Mrs. Gaudio celebrated that she never had to walk alone. Her fellow AFACT leaders always strengthened and supported her efforts to speak out and lead.


St. Anthony Catholic Church leader, Pat Petrivelli, reflected on the process by which leaders in the organizing



AFACT leaders gather for a group photo at the Annual Retreat.

ministry had moved from concern about San Roberto road, to concern about overflowing dumpsters and graffiti in the neighborhood. After analyzing and researching the three seemingly distinct issues, the leaders chose to merge the issue into one: neighborhood blight. Ms. Petrivelli shared with those gathered the concrete improvements that had been made in the community since the

church held a public meeting on the issues. She reflected on the power of gathering the community and public officials to imagine a safer and brighter neighborhood.

In the last session of the retreat, two AFACT leaders shared their families' experience with accessing children's healthcare and opened a discussion which would shape the upcoming meeting on the issue. Leaders reflected on the moral, economic and public health imperatives to insure more children in Alaska and left the retreat with renewed energy to address the issue for their families. 

STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

In October, 31 people gathered at Holy Spirit Center for AFACT's four-day Statewide Leadership Training. Fourteen people traveled from rural Alaska – Emmonak, Brevig Mission, Teller, Wales and Nome – to attend the training. Others came from AFACT congregations and Palmer.

Learning the steps in the organizing process and engaging with the faith principles and philosophy underlying faith-based community organizing was central to the training. However, participants were most touched by the new relationships they formed and the insights those relationships brought.

Sandy Fazio, a leader from Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Anchorage, wrote that one of the highlights of the training was "spending time with others in our faith community who have the same goals in wanting to develop empowerment in others. I also really enjoyed talking to folks from the villages."

Janice Straub from Brevig Mission wrote that "organizing,

socializing, creativity and leadership were very important" parts of the training. Stanley Oxereok from Wales "liked the practical applications" that came from role playing and discussions.

Breakfast each morning was followed by morning prayer, led by each of the faith communities represented at the training: Lutheran, Catholic,

Dr. Jose Carrasco teaches the "how" of building leaders to improve communities, while Carla Kakoona's five-month old daughter, Mary, of Brevig Mission reminds participants of "why" they want to improve their communities. (Photo by Sandy Fazio)



“Help us hold our heads high as Alaskans that clearly value the health and vitality of all our kids in actions as well as words.”

~Chair Dahna Graham

avoid a cliff ... that if you make a few dollars more you get nothing and that is what we need to address with cost-sharing options...”

Commissioner Hogan encouraged all those gathered saying “I can tell you that the Governor supports moving [eligibility] to 200% and wants to talk to you, to the legislature and to others about going beyond 200% with some sort of cost-sharing consideration or proposal.”

AFACT leaders followed up and asked the Commissioner if the Governor would take a leadership role and urge legislative action for the 200% increase, to which the Commissioner said yes. The Commissioner also committed to work with AFACT to develop a plan for cost-sharing for families earning more than 200% and to meet with AFACT leaders again in February.



Colette Victor, Bethel Chapel, stands with her daughter Michel-Ange while testifying at the meeting. (Photo by Ron Nicholl)




Statewide Leadership Training participants pose outside of the Holy Spirit Center.

Fr. Dominic DeMaio, Holy Family Cathedral, and Lay Pastor Gilbert Oxereok, Thornton Memorial Lutheran Church in Wales, enjoy a break in the sunshine. (Photo by Sandy Fazio)



and nondenominational Christian. Prayer led directly into a ten-hour day of training, discussion, and role playing.

Participants also had fun and laughed at the training—a noted highlight for many of those in attendance. Alaska Native drummers and dancers performed, teaching all of the participants the traditional dances, and Samoan participants shared their music and dancing.


The participants departed Holy Spirit Center with new knowledge, new insights, new skills, and new friends with whom to build better communities. 



Deborah Sims, Fred Kugzruk, Gilbert Oxereok, Travis Tocktoo, Annette Alleva, Daniel Olanna and Stanley Oxereok share a laugh at training. (Photo by Kristyn Brouwer)



St. Anthony Samoan Choir performs at the children's healthcare meeting at Central Lutheran Church. (Photo by Ron Nicholl)

Before the meeting closed with Cal Williams leading a unique rendition of “There is a Balm in Gilead,” Chair Dahna Graham summed up the sentiments of the families. “Our hope for something better for our kids has carried us through; your presence here tonight is evidence of that. Clearly there is will in the administration. The future [of children’s healthcare] now rests with the legislature. We implore our legislators not to delay. Act immediately in the beginning of the session. Do not bargain with our children, do not hold this back. Help us hold our heads high as Alaskans that clearly value the health and vitality of all our kids in actions as well as words.” 

PFD Giving Program Provides Boost To AFACT

In 2009, Alaskans were able to donate a portion of their Permanent Fund Dividend to AFACT through the PFD Charitable Contributions Program. These generous donations enabled AFACT to continue to empower people and build leaders to participate fully in the life of the community.

The PFD giving program provides a safe, secure and easy way to make a donation. Alaskans donating through the program become an important force in bettering our communities and our state. AFACT members have impacted Anchorage and Alaska in so many ways – from helping people clean up their local neighborhoods to lifting up the statewide issue of children’s health care. Since AFACT’s support does not come from government sources, the generosity of individual donors is essential.

For those who already support AFACT, we appreciate your gift and hope you will use the PFD Charitable Contributions Program to give again in 2010.

When you go on-line to sign up for your dividend, you will see the option called “The Gift of Giving.” Search for us by choosing Judicial District 3 and our name, AFACT. Click and follow the instructions to make a new donation, or an additional gift. Please take the extra step to provide your contact information, as we want to acknowledge and recognize your generous support. This is the only way we will know it’s you making the gift.

You can find more information about the program, including frequently asked questions at www.PickClickGive.org or you may call us at 907-297-7731. 

AFACT Member Congregations

Alaska Native Lutheran Church
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church
Anchor Presbyterian Church
Bethel Chapel
Catholic Native Ministry
Central Lutheran Church
Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church
First CME Church
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Holy Family Cathedral
Immanuel Presbyterian Church
New Hope Baptist Church
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
St. Anthony Catholic Church
St. Mark Lutheran Church

*For more information contact:
Anchorage Faith and Action –
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