

AFACT

ANCHORAGE FAITH & ACTION • CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER



SPRING 2010

Alaska Native Families Raise Concerns With School Board Candidates

On Sunday, March 21, nearly 150 people poured into Central Lutheran Church to hear the School Board candidates address issues of particular concern to Alaska Native families. The forum, hosted by AFACT's Alaska Native Organizing Ministry, had the largest audience the candidates had faced since the School Board race began. Attending the forum were candidates James LaBelle, Tommy O'Malley, Don Smith and Jeannie Mackie.

Gemma Gaudio of Catholic Native Ministry chaired the forum. Before turning the meeting over to the moderator, she said, "For the past five years we have been visiting Alaska Native families and listening to their issues and concerns. We heard many concerns but most of all they were concerned with their children in the Anchorage School District."

Harold Napoleon, author of "Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being," moderated the forum. Mr. Napoleon applauded the families for participating in the forum and lifting up important issues.

Wally Kalerak noted the high dropout and low graduation rate of Alaska Native students and asked the candidates, "To what do you attribute the struggle of Alaska Native students and how should the School Board and District address it?" Loretta Parker asked the candidates what could be done to assure the success of those students who are transitioning from rural to urban Alaska, and Wendy Gales asked what role the School Board could play in addressing racism.

Members of the Alaska Native Organizing Ministry have been addressing the education concerns of Alaska Native families for nearly five years. In meetings with the School District administration and members of the School Board, Ministry leaders have insisted that bridging the divide



Top: Harold Napoleon moderates the forum, as Gemma Gaudio and the candidates look on. Above: Robin Kiyutelluk and Begal Ochoa sing, accompanied by Pastor Brian Crocket of Brevig Mission. Right: Loretta Parker of Alaska Native Lutheran Church asks the candidates about the needs of students transitioning from rural Alaska.

Photos by Ron Nicholl

between the school and the families is imperative.

Aimee Aloysius shared that educators seem to agree that the parents' connection to the school is an important factor in the success of the student. She noted that AFACT leaders have proposed training teachers to meet with parents outside of the school, in their home or a coffee shop, to begin to build relationships and asked, "What role do you believe the school has in connecting parents to the school and what methods would you support to accomplish this?"

The forum gave audience members valuable information as they decided who they would vote for on April 6. Following the forum, the Ministry held a potluck where informal discussion with the candidates took place. ⚓

AFACT Leaders Host Assembly Candidate Forums

This spring, seven AFACT member congregations held four Assembly Candidate Forums in their respective districts. These forums served as an opportunity for AFACT leaders to ask candidates to address the issues that are most pressing to the members of AFACT congregations.

MIDTOWN

AFACT Midtown congregations, First CME Church and St. Mark Lutheran Church, hosted the Midtown Assembly Candidates Forum with candidates Andy Clary and Dick Traini. Nina Rivera, of St. Anthony Catholic Church, moderated the forum.

Patricia Smith of First CME asked the candidates to clarify their views on the state of chronic homelessness in Anchorage and the Housing First model. This issue has been a high priority for two AFACT member congregations that are frequented by many people in the chronically homeless population. In addition, Midtown is home to Anchorage's second largest shelter.

On a very local level, Reverend Craig Alston of First CME asked the candidates what they would do to address the new traffic issues that the expansion of the University campus has created on their street.



Patricia Smith of First CME Church asks the candidates in the Midtown forum for their views on addressing chronic homelessness.

Photo by Jonathan Ryan

School District high schools and has recently experienced youth violence. The School Resource Officer program places Anchorage Police Department officers in public schools. They develop relationships with the youth, enabling them to gather information for solving and preventing youth crime. The officers also act as police officers, serving the neighborhoods surrounding the schools where they are placed. A recurring issue in Anchorage is whether the School District or the Police Department should fund the officers.

WEST

The Local Organizing Ministries of West Anchorage AFACT congregations, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church and Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, hosted the West Anchorage Assembly Candidates Forum with candidates Ernie Hall and Matt Claman. Rev. Michael Keys, Bishop of the ELCA Alaska Synod, moderated the forum.



Moderator Bishop Michael Keys explains the rules of the forum to the audience and candidates in the West forum.

Photo by Ron Nicholl

SOUTH

South Anchorage AFACT congregations, Amazing Grace Lutheran Church and Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, hosted the South Anchorage Assembly Candidates Forum with candidates Keli Booher and Jennifer Johnston. Dahna Graham, of Central Lutheran Church, moderated the forum.



Candidates answer questions at the South Anchorage forum at Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church.

Jennifer Turner of Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church asked the candidates to clarify their position on the School Resource Officer (SRO) program, and asked what entity should be responsible for funding the program. While the issue concerns residents citywide, South Anchorage is home to two Anchorage

Darla Siver, of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, asked the candidates to clarify their positions on public safety and community oriented policing. Public safety is an issue that affects all of Anchorage, but the neighborhood around Gloria Dei Lutheran has experienced significant increases in crimes against persons and property. Since 2004, AFACT congregations have been championing community oriented policing as the best option for improving public safety.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church has a significant immigrant population that has been interested in various Assembly actions regarding immigration enforcement. Daniel Esparza, of Our Lady of Guadalupe, asked the candidates for their views on the role of the Municipality in enforcing federal immigration law.

EAST

Members of the St. Anthony Catholic Church Local Organizing Ministry hosted the East Anchorage Assembly Candidates Forum with candidates Paul Honeman, Thomas Purcell and Andy Clary. George Cannelos, Board Chair of the Anchorage Community Land Trust, moderated the forum.

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Leaders Travel to Capitol for Alaska's Children

Hoping to see more Alaskan children access health care, AFACT leaders traveled to Juneau in March to meet with legislators and share their children's need for affordable health care. The leaders included Pastor Lisa Smith of Central Lutheran Church, life-long Alaskans Gemma Gaudio of St. Anthony Catholic Church and Bob Lincoln of Bethel Chapel, and Frank Box of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church.

It was in 2005 that AFACT leaders began to fear that a perfect storm was in motion around children's health care: families were beginning to drop off of Denali KidCare due to Alaska's 2003 freeze on eligibility, while the cost of health care was rapidly rising. Families began to share their plight in AFACT visits and decided to take action in a 2007 public meeting with then Commissioner of Health and Human Services, Karleen Jackson.

Hoping to see eligibility restored to its previous level of 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, AFACT leaders urged the Commissioner to take a leadership role. The legislature responded with a compromise, raising eligibility from just above 150% to 175%.

AFACT families continued to rally around their children during 2008 and 2009, meeting with legislators and holding a second public meeting with the newly appointed Commissioner of Health and Human Services, Bill Hogan. With Governor Parnell's support, covering more children seemed likely.

The March trip to the State Capitol marked the first time that any of the four leaders had visited the Capitol building and met with legislators in that arena. *(See sidebar at right on Bob Lincoln)* At noon on the day of the visit, simultaneous prayer services for children's health care were held in Anchorage at Central Lutheran Church and in Juneau on the steps of the State Capitol.

The trip was an eye-opening experience for all and the leaders brought back significant learnings to their colleagues in AFACT. The trip was funded by a generous grant from the Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society. 🛡️



Pastor Lisa Smith, with back to the camera, leads a prayer service on the steps of the Capitol Building in Juneau.

A Leader in Juneau....

Bob Lincoln has lived in Mountain View most of his life. He raised his children there and is now watching his grandchildren grow up in Mountain View.

Mountain View has had its share of troubles, and Bob came to accept that his neighborhood wasn't regarded as the safest in Anchorage. In a recent conversation, Bob described the metaphorical "moat" he had built around his home and his life. But since becoming involved in AFACT, the moat has dried up and he is eager to engage with his neighbors and the community.

The change happened one afternoon in 2006 when Bob met with an AFACT organizer who was working with his church, Bethel Chapel.

Bob recalls that after that conversation, he began to picture himself riding bikes around the neighborhood with his wife and grandchildren, without fear for their safety. He realized that day that "I can make that change in my neighborhood."

Fast forward four years and Bob Lincoln was walking the halls of the State Capitol with his AFACT colleagues. He remembers that when he first joined AFACT, "going to Juneau was the furthest thing from my mind. Politics always left a bad taste in my mouth. I used to turn politicians away when they came knocking at my door."

Bob said that when they first arrived at the Capitol, he was afraid of interrupting the representatives or interfering with their work, but he became more comfortable after the first meeting. "I wanted to say something, and I think they wanted to listen."

Bob was especially pleased when his own representative introduced him in the House of Representatives. Representative Max Gruenberg noted that it is rare that his constituents from Mountain View are able to make the trip to Juneau. He was honored to introduce Bob Lincoln to his colleagues in the Alaska House.

Bob said his perspective has changed now that he has traveled to Juneau. "I am really glad I had this opportunity and would like to go to Juneau again." His involvement in AFACT has brought other changes. According to Bob, "a better understanding of the political process has pushed me to watch the news more, read the paper and stay informed. When I'm watching TV and I hear something about a bill, my antennae go up."


The fear of "interrupting" legislators has been replaced with a confidence that his voice is an important one in the public discourse. 🛡️



*Assembly Candidate Forums,
continued from inside*

Northeast Anchorage has a noticeable lack of quality, affordable youth recreation programs. For the past few years, the Parks and Recreation Department and St. Anthony Catholic Church have operated a summer PLAY program in Northeast Anchorage, where nearly 4,000 children under the age of 15 live. Until this program was secured by the community, this neighborhood had never had any affordable, quality recreation program. Quinn Berry, a sixth grader at Government Hill Elementary School and alumni of the summer PLAY program, asked the candidates what they would do to ensure affordable,

accessible youth programs in Anchorage neighborhoods.

Pat Petrivelli, Alice Young and Barb Dodson asked the candidates to explain how they would provide a long-term solution to other issues that plague the neighborhood, such as graffiti, excess garbage and poorly maintained roads. 

Barb Dodson of St. Anthony Catholic Church asks the Eastside Candidates to explain their views on local neighborhood issues.

Photo by Ron Nicholl

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 –
Congregations Together***

P. O. Box 143294

Anchorage, AK 99514

907-297-7731

www.anchoragefact.org

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Address Services Requested

Anchorage, AK 99514-3294
P. O. Box 143294

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