

NORTH CAROLINA ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING TOUR WITH REV. WILLIAM BARBER II, AL GORE, AND KARENNA GORE

By Herman Greene and Alice Loyd

Rev. William Barber II, as president of the North Carolina NAACP, led the Moral Monday campaigns in Raleigh, the state capital, to protest actions taken by legislators that hurt poor people, such as not approving Medicaid expansion. In 2017 he left this position to start the national "[Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival](#)" in honor of the original 1968 campaign founded by [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) King campaigned against the evils of racism, poverty, and militarism. Rev. Barber added *ecological destruction* to this campaign, and, especially, the effect it has on poor people.

Joined by former vice president Al Gore and Karenna Gore, who directs the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, in the heat of summer Barber brought the campaign that began in the Old North State home.

Sunday, August 12, 2018, Greenleaf Christian Church, Goldsboro, North Carolina (Herman Greene)

On Sunday, August 12, Barber held an ecological call to action at his home church in Goldsboro. The pews in the sanctuary filled up early and attendees filled the fellowship hall as well. Rev. Barber and other leaders at his church reminded people that there is a higher power at work in the world and the call to moral action comes from this power and commands attention. Al Gore's half hour sermon was delivered with all the skill of an evangelist and his knowledge of the Bible was sound. Karenna Gore led a liturgy.

This movement by Rev. Barber to link environmental concerns with the needs of the poor is a powerful one. Caring for the environment is not about making the world nice enough for rich people. It is, as Gore reminded people, about reducing asthma of African Americans who are ten times as likely to have asthma as non-African Americans. It's about the torrential rains and floods, the droughts, sea level rise and storms that follow climate change and disproportionately affect the poor. It's about coal ash ponds and waste dumps in poor neighborhoods.

The 500 and more people who were present were duly moved, and the people of this small southern town had a visitor they never expected to see.

Monday, August 13, 2018, Shiloh Baptist Church, Greensboro, North Carolina (Alice Loyd)

Al Gore joined the Moral Mondays team at Shiloh Baptist Church in Greensboro and hit a homer. The event spotlighted North Carolinians who shared about the impacts of ecological injustice in their communities as well as Dr. Barber delivering his usual brilliant exposition of the topic. But Mr. Gore delivered the sermon and did he ever. Gore, who has been preaching about

climate change all over the world for almost four decades, has in the process become ever more coherent and passionate, and on this occasion he found his perfect audience.

The thousand people present who heard him—the rainbow of race, class, and religion that the Campaign has brought together—were clearly inspiring to what he confessed was his oft-times tired, even despairing spirit. He said in fact he felt as of that moment more hopeful than he had ever felt before. I shared this feeling. To me it seemed the message I've also been bearing, though not for as long or as widely, was finally connecting with the ones who mattered most. The resounding applause, cheers, and standing ovations that arose again and again seemed to come from the entire congregation and to promise action that might make the difference. Often I just sat while others stood, and the tears came; I wanted to treasure the hope. May it be so.