

## The Poor People's Campaign: 50 years and counting

I have been a pastor for the past twenty eight years. In that time, I have seen people of every hue and background suffer and struggle. The wealthy get tax cuts, and the rest of us get stagnant wages. The peace dividend we *should* have to rebuild our own country is being consumed by this endless war we have been in since we invaded Iraq (a country that did NOT attack us) in 2003. Tens of thousands of lives have been lost, injured and maimed, and our brave "all volunteer" patriots bear the brunt of this endless war. So many of these young people felt compelled to join the military to try to make a better life for their families, because they couldn't earn a living wage at home with jobs being shipped overseas by the tens of thousands.

The same three evils of capitalism, militarism and racism that led Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others to establish the Poor People's Campaign fifty years ago still abound. Greed is hollowing out the soul of our nation from the inside out. That's why I have joined the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

On Monday, I'll be going to the statehouse in Annapolis, along with hundreds of people like me in over 30 states across the country. We'll be putting lawmakers on notice that people are demanding action on issues like systemic racism, poverty, the war economy and destruction of the environment.

And this is just the beginning. I'm also pledging to take part in six weeks of nonviolent civil disobedience this spring, because I'm ready to do whatever it takes to make sure elected leaders in Maryland and Washington, D.C. put the needs of poor people first. 39.2% of *children* in this country receive some type of means-tested assistance. Yet our elected "representatives" in Washington just gave a \$2 Trillion tax cut to corporations and the wealthy and now want to try to balance the books on the backs of our struggling fellow citizens and their *children*. We've looked out for the wealthy and corporations long enough!

It has been 50 years since the original Poor People's Campaign began. You would think that in that time, things would have changed for the better. But in reality, the problems that motivated Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others to launch the original Poor People's Campaign have only gotten worse for many of our fellow citizens.

Today the gap between the rich and the rest of us has grown larger. Extremist politicians are attacking voting rights all across the country. Spending on prisons and the military is skyrocketing, but politicians keep trying to cut funding for basic programs that poor families need to survive. Too many communities across the country lack access to clean air and water.

We can't wait in silence hoping these problems will solve themselves. We need to act now. What we need today is a movement of people from all backgrounds who are willing to stand up, speak out and even risk arrest until those in power hear us. That's what I see in the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

Of course, thinking about risking arrest is scary. But you know what's scarier? A criminal justice system that exploits communities of color; people living in poverty in the richest nation in the world; and politicians – the party before country crowd – who try to suppress voters instead of encouraging people to vote. It's no wonder that voter turnout in the United States is lower than most democracies in the world. We can't afford to let things stay the same. That's why I've joined the Poor People's Campaign.

I know I'm not alone either. Politicians often try to divide us, but in this movement I see people from all backgrounds coming together. And starting this spring, we'll be demanding change with one powerful voice that will not be ignored; the voice of *We The People*.

Submitted by Rev. Stephen Andrew Tillett, Pastor of Asbury Broadneck United Methodist Church, AACo. NAACP Branch President and recipient of the 2018 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dinner Peacemaker Award