

Quest Newsletter

Fall 2011



QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

# Questings

## Introducing Brian McLaren

Ellen Sims

The day-long workshop and evening lecture Brian McLaren will lead on Oct. 26 will be a rare opportunity for Mobile's clergy and lay leaders to hear one of the most significant voices in American Christianity today. Sponsored by The Quest and the Christus Theological Institute, both the workshop and lecture will provoke deep theological reflection even as they equip church leaders and the people in the pews to channel their faith commitments into transformative acts of justice for our community and our world.

This English professor turned pastor turned speaker for an emerging Christianity is a frequent guest on television, radio and news programs. McLaren has appeared on *Larry King Live*, *Nightline*, and *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*. He has been covered in *Time*, *Christianity Today*, *Christian Century*, *The Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, and many other print media. He has lectured at many seminaries and has served on the boards such as Sojourners (sojo.net) and Emergent Village (emergentvillage.com) and was a founding member of the Red Letter Christians (redletterchristians.org).

A prolific author and blogger, his books include *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, *Finding Faith: More Ready Than You Realize*, *Adventures in Missing The Point*, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, *Everything Must Change*, *Finding Our Way Again*, and *A New Kind of Christianity*. Although *Finding Faith* is written for thoughtful seekers and skeptics, most of Mr. McLaren's books are written for Christian's seeking to make their faith and church more relevant in today's world. *Naked Spirituality* (2011), his newest book, for example, offers "simple, doable, and durable" practices to help people deepen their life with God.

Married and the father of four, Brian is a sought-after (and occasionally controversial) speaker and workshop leader offering engaging and interactive presentations. He is a social justice activist who lives out his Christian commitments. His visit to Mobile promises to inspire and equip local churches to become more vital sites for justice and peace making. See his website, [brianmclaren.net](http://brianmclaren.net), for more information. And mark your calendar for October 26<sup>th</sup>! More information and registration materials can be found at the Quest website, [questforjustice.org](http://questforjustice.org). Below is an outline of the day.



### **Workshop:**

## **The Church as Transformative Community**

### **Morning Sessions**

**The Gospel of Jesus and the Gospel of Today's Churches**

**The Crises Outside the Church**

### **Afternoon Sessions**

**The Church as Missional Community**

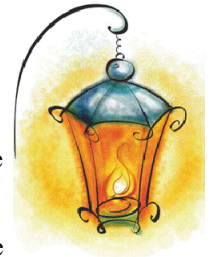
**Turning the Crises Into Opportunities for Growth, Vitality & Action**

### **Evening Lecture:**

**A New Kind of Christianity: How Ten Questions Can Transform Our Churches Into Agents of Change**

*The Quest for Social Justice, Inc. is a 501-C3 non-profit org. making connections between faith and social justice.*

# Shining the Light of Social Justice



## Central Presbyterian Church

Historically, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has demonstrated a strong commitment to peacemaking and social justice. Their Statement of 1958 “Affirms its conviction that neither the Church...nor Christians...can be neutral or indifferent toward evil in the world; Affirms its responsibility to speak on social and moral issues...reminds the churches that their duty is...to reveal God’s grace in places of suffering and need, to resist the forces that tyrannize, and to support the forces that restore the dignity of all men as the children of God, for only so is the gospel most fully proclaimed; ...” Since the 1940’s they have issued dozens of statements addressing social justice, social responsibility, and social activism.

Located in midtown, at the corner of Dauphin and Ann, Central Presbyterian Church’s history affirms the beliefs of their denomination. In the 1960’s their minister Rev. John Crowell led church members to march for civil rights and preached on the injustice of segregation. In the 1970’s the church made the conscious decision not to move west but to stay and embrace their neighborhood that was becoming more and more diverse. The church’s Vision Statement adopted in the 1990’s states, “We are a community across all boundaries of race, social class, life style, culture and gender...acting out God’s call in our lives and in the world...” At that time, it was mostly just vision; today it is actuality. Today, co-pastors Chris and Karen Bullock seek to lead a congregation that is more diverse than ever before.

As it says on door hangers they recently distributed around Midtown and Oakley, “Multicultural Worship @ Central Church, it really does happen.” The members of Central believe that in order to follow the demands of Christ, they must not only wish for the world to change, they must act as an agent for change. They do not want to merely reach out to people different from them; the church desires to be a diverse community. When a person walks through the doors on Sunday morning, he or she will witness a mix of races, a mix of housed and homeless, a mix of culture, and a mix of lifestyle all connected by love and mutual respect.

They also strongly believe that it is up to the church to help correct inequities. Proverbs 14:31 says “You insult your Maker when you exploit the powerless; when you’re kind to the poor, you honor God;” and because they want to honor God, Central Presbyterian Church is kind to the poor. As part of their neighborhood outreach Central Presbyterian has participated in neighborhood cleanup, prayer walks, Creative Arts Camp and children’s activities. Neighbors are encouraged to share a community garden, computer classes are offered free of charge to anyone who needs to learn computer skills or set up email, every Tuesday they give out groceries to anyone in need of food, free breakfast is served on Sunday mornings before worship, mission trips to Mexico, and the list goes on.



Pastor Chris Bullock described Central Presbyterian as a church who is seeking to live out the Matthew 25 parable about separating the Sheep from the Goats, “Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'”

Denise Moore

## Board of Directors

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Denise Moore

*Director, The Quest for Social Justice*

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*Rob came to The Quest wanting to do something in response to the new Immigration Law and organized an Awareness Gathering with The Quest's support. We thank him for all of his hard work; he is truly an inspiration to us.*

Recently, I took part in organizing the Immigration Awareness Gathering that was held at Lyons Park on August 27. Before I go any further, I must offer thanks to two very important people: Dave O'Brien and Denise Moore. Without their help, this event would never have taken place, nor would it have been successful. The event comprised of prayer, speeches, and song. I wished for the event to focus primarily on the spiritual and moral implications of HB 56. I do not deny that I was disturbed by the political implications, but my interest in protesting this law was sparked by the moral implications.

As a favorite theology professor at Spring Hill College would sometimes say, "First, you need some background information." I am not a political activist by nature. I read the paper, follow the news online, and vote whenever elections come around. But I have never felt comfortable when taking part in political protests or felt the need to be more active than I have previously been. Normally, when I find an issue that causes anger I will rant and rave about the issue to my family and friends for a few weeks. I will go on and on about how it should be done and why the politicians are screwing things up for the rest of us. Then, after a few weeks, I'll lose interest. Another thing that people should know about me may come as a surprise: I have no experience with working with undocumented workers. I think I have about three friends who have either immigrated or their parents have immigrated to this country legally. My father's family came to America in 1850 from Ireland. As far as I know, they came here "legally." My personal background begs a question: how did I become involved with planning a protest to the new Alabama immigration law?

As a cradle-Catholic (one who was born and raised a Catholic), I grew up with certain notions. But I was not always what one would call a "good" Catholic. In high school, I doubt that I was a Catholic at all. And I am certainly far from perfect today. But my personal studies and time spent learning at "The Hill" taught me something that nothing can dissuade me of: we are all united by Christ, and no law can deny this fact. I have three firm ideals that I believe down to the very core of my being: God has more mercy than we can imagine, the Eucharist, and we are all equal under God. This does not mean that I do not firmly believe in other tenants of my faith. But I know that I am willing to make great sacrifices to defend these three beliefs. But that still does not explain why I went beyond mere ranting and raving to my friends and family. I can only come up with one explanation: the Holy Spirit.

Now, I do not have a strong sense of spirituality. I'm a very skeptical person by nature, and can be quite cynical about a lot of matters in life. But I cannot explain why I took such a deep interest in the issue of immigration. My father feared the implications of my taking this opposition public, I had friends who disagreed with me completely about my beliefs about immigration, and I even had Catholic professors accuse me of exaggerating the truth about this immigration law. Overall, my stance was not a popular one. In short, I have no worldly, logical explanation as to why I became so

involved with this issue. I only have a faith influenced guess.

I have two reasons to believe that it was the Holy Spirit working besides the evidence of my lack of political activism. The first revolves around Dave. He had a conversation one day with a friend about how they wished a young person would step up and organize a protest in Mobile. Seeing as I am a recent graduate of Spring Hill College and underemployed, I fit the bill. But I had no idea that they had that conversation. I was merely someone who wanted to plan a protest that had no idea about how to organize one. I had previously met Dave a few times and I felt comfortable asking him where I should start. So I sent him an e-mail. He received the e-mail the same afternoon after he talked with his friend about his desire that a young person organize a protest.

The second encounter with the Spirit involved Denise and the Quest for Social Justice organization. I was a week or two into my planning, and I needed a contact list for the various churches in Mobile. Dave told me that I would find one at Quest. I had never heard of this organization before, so I gave their office a call. I also did not know that I called them on the same day as a meeting the board had about the need to organize a protest to HB56. Now, the first case with Dave could possibly be attributed to coincidence (but I do not believe in coincidences). But having this episode replay twice confirms to me that this event was not my work. When I realized that both of these events took place, I could think of no other plausible explanation. The Holy Spirit had to be at work here. After the event was over, I was congratulated often for its success due to the role I played in organizing it. I never enjoyed the public light, nor do I always enjoy praise (though I am very grateful for the gratitude and charity that was shown to me by my supporters). But I especially do not enjoy praise when I know the work was not my own doing. And in this case, the Holy Spirit was truly at work.



Rob Farrell, left, poses with The Quest Board of Directors on the August 29 Immigration Law Awareness Gathering.

# Fixing the Next Election

We are often reminded by pundits in the news media that “elections have consequences.” Yet the same opinion-makers have utterly failed to notice one of the most nefarious consequences of the 2010 elections that swept Tea Party majorities into statehouses across the nation. Determined to never again cede office to their opponents, and to seize back the White House in 2012, Republican-dominated legislatures in critical swing states have enacted laws that will disenfranchise millions of voters, most of whom are Democratic or Democratic-leaning. The laws in question include requiring voter identification cards at the polls, limiting the time of early voting, ending same-day registration, and making it difficult for third party groups to register new voters. Ostensibly all of these laws are framed as efforts to prevent “voter fraud,” but the actual effect of the bills will be to make it immensely more difficult for Democratic constituencies to actually cast a ballot. States that enacted voter ID laws this year include Texas, Kansas, Wisconsin, South Carolina, and Tennessee, all of which have Republican majority legislatures. Indiana, Alabama, and Georgia already had such requirements. The Maine Legislature voted to end same-day voter registration. Under newly-elected Governor Rick Scott, Florida shortened the early voting period, ended the ability of registered voters to change their address at the polls, and imposed onerous restrictions on organized voter-registration drives.

Let’s be absolutely clear here. Contrary to what the authors of these bills claim, polling place voter impersonation is so extraordinarily rare that it is virtually impossible to have any effect on an actual election. This point was underscored by statistics gathered by the George W. Bush administration’s own Department of Justice [from October 2002 to September 2005](#). Despite investing tens of millions of dollars into investigating voter fraud, the federal government found [“scant evidence”](#) of it during that period. Only 23 people were convicted of casting a vote while ineligible or for voting multiple times, *out of hundreds of millions of votes cast during the same period*. Of those 23 cases, the Justice Department did not break down its numbers into how many were convicted of absentee voter fraud versus how many carried out the dangerous and exceedingly rare practice of showing up at the polls and impersonating another voter. (After all, if

you arrived after that person has already voted, you are subject to arrest on the spot). Compare these 23 cases of known fraud to the more than 20 million legal voters in the nation --- the large majority of them Democratic-leaning --- who, according to the [NYU Brennan Center for Justice](#) and the [League of Women](#)

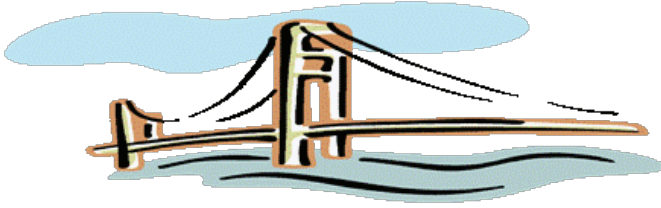
[Voters](#) would be unable to cast their legal vote unless they managed to obtain a state-issued photo i.d. In Wisconsin alone, according to a [University of Wisconsin Political Science professor David Canon](#), some 300,000 previously-legal voters will not be able to cast their votes next year unless they come up with the time, money, and resources to obtain an i.d. deemed acceptable by the state. (Ironically, but not surprisingly, student i.d.s from liberal bastions such as the University of Wisconsin will not be considered acceptable identification). The state’s new i.d. law was rammed through by the GOP-majority legislature and Governor Scott Walker in advance of recall elections that pared the GOP majority down to a single vote.

In some cases, the inconsistencies in the voter i.d. laws seem so absurd as to conceal their partisan intent. Texas, for example, allows voters to use concealed handgun licenses as valid identification, but not campus-issued student i.d.s. Is this a bizarrely Texan twist on voter identification? The bill’s intent becomes clearer when you consider that exit polls nationwide showed that John McCain carried households in which someone owned a gun by 25 percentage points but lost voters in households without a gun by 32 points. But new, arbitrary voter i.d. bills are not the only way in which the president’s opponents are determined to steal the next election. Recently, Pennsylvania’s state legislature has considered reapportioning the way in which its electoral votes are allocated away from the traditional “winner take all” system to one in which votes are allocated by congressional district. Under this plan, even if President Obama wins the state’s popular vote, he will receive fewer than half its electoral votes.

Right-wing commentator Matthew Vadum recently disclosed the real intent of these efforts at voter suppression when he opined that welfare recipients be denied voting rights. In his words, “registering them to vote is like handing out burglary tools to criminals. It is profoundly antisocial and un-American to empower the nonproductive segments of the population to destroy the country -- which is precisely why Barack Obama zealously supports registering welfare recipients to vote.” For all his objectionable Social Darwinism, Vadum is right on one point: in part because of a surge of voters who had not cast ballots before, the United States elected its first African-American president in 2008. Determined to prevent his re-election, Tea Party legislators have quietly enacted a re-imposition of Jim Crow voting laws. Whether or not these laws can be rolled back in the courts, their passage should unleash a civic campaign like the voter registration drives of the civil rights era. The poor, the young, and people of color should get their i.d.s (whether deemed “acceptable” or not in the eyes of the new laws), flock to the polls and demand their right to vote in 2012. If voters are to be disenfranchised, let it happen for all to see. The whole world watched us with admiration in 2008. In 2012, it will be watching again.

Mark Moberg





## Bridges Interracial Dinner Dialogue

Word of Life Community Church

Tuesday, October 4

6:00—8:30

Our theme for the next three dialogues is the Justice System. The first discussion will focus on “Law Enforcement and You.” Sheriff Sam Cochran has worked in both the police department and the sheriff’s office and can bring insight to how and why the system works like it does. His talk will be divided into three parts:

1. How law enforcement agencies interact with one another
2. The operations of and the similarities and differences between the sheriff’s office and police department
3. The public’s role in law enforcement

*The evening will consist of a shared meal and facilitated conversation.*

*Sponsored by*

*The Bay Area Women*

*The Quest for Social Justice*

*Online registration is available at*

*[questforjustice.org](http://questforjustice.org)*

## Changes at The Quest

The Board of Directors of The Quest for Social Justice says thank you to Sister Judith Smits and welcome to Denise Moore and our new board members; Myra Evans, Johnnie Miller, Phyllis Mason and Jenni Currie. Sister Judith Smits has retired from her position as executive director and accepted a position on the Board of Directors. Sister Judith has been involved with the Quest since its inception in 2000 at a time when it was just an idea among religious women concerned about the racial separation in our community. We are forever grateful for the tireless and impassioned efforts Sister Judith has brought to the face of social justice in Mobile and the state of Alabama. Her transition only perpetuates her commitment to social justice and the works of all those who have traveled this journey before her.

Sister Judith’s retirement opened the door for another woman of faith who has exemplified in her own life a passion for social justice. Denise Moore was selected from a pool of impressive candidates for the position of Executive Director of the Quest for Social Justice. Denise brings to the Quest a passionate faith and commitment to what The Quest is all about...a voice to those who have none...compassion to those who have not been welcomed and a vision of the work to be done. Denise will not only build on Sister Judith’s impressive legacy; she will also carry the vision of The Quest into the future during some challenging times. Our funding sources are exhausted and with the current state of the economy potential funding sources for Social Justice causes are very limited.

The board of Directors welcomes new members, a new executive committee and a new Executive Director. The passion of the Quest is evidenced by those committed to the works of the Quest and the support of its mission. We are excited to see the Quest continue to grow and to continue to fight for inclusion that welcomes the stranger, compassion that provides education, employment opportunities and healthcare so all can live up to their potential and stewardship that responsibly uses the gifts of creation in order to renew the earth for future generations.

Please join me in welcoming Denise Moore as the new Executive Director for the Quest and saying thank you to Sister Judith and Reverend Ellen Sims who has stepped down from President but remains a member of the Board of Directors.

In Peace

John M. Conrad, President

Board of Directors, term; 2011-2013

*Because God is a God of justice, in any situation in which power is misused and the powerful take advantage of the weak, God takes the side of the weak. In concrete terms, that means God is for the oppressed and against the oppressor, for the exploited and against the exploiter, for the victim and against the victimizer.*

*Brian McLaren "The Justice Project"*

## Execution Prayer Vigil



As this newsletter goes to print, two men are scheduled for execution this week, one in Alabama and one in Georgia. This will make the fifth execution in Alabama this year and the fourth in Georgia. In both cases, there is new evidence that might exonerate them, but to date, there has been no action to stay the executions. Please pray for the families of these men, the families of the victims of these crimes, the people administering the injections and the governors of both states.

Derrick O'Neal Mason, Alabama



Troy Davis, Georgia

## The Quest Hosts Immigration Awareness Gathering

In June Alabama passed the controversial immigration law H.B. 56 making Alabama the toughest state on immigration in the country. Cecillia Wang, director of the immigrants' rights project of the American Civil Liberties Union said, "This bill invited discrimination into every aspect of the lives of people in Alabama." Several law suits have been filed against the state over the constitutionality and fairness of this law. The law, which was supposed to go into effect on September 1 has been temporarily blocked by U.S. District Judge Sharon Lovelace Blackburn until she makes a final ruling later this month.



On August 29 The Quest, with the help of recent Spring Hill College graduate, Rob Farrell, hosted an interfaith gathering to bring awareness of the inequities in this law. Prayers and scripture readings were offered by Rabbi Donald Kunstadt (Springhill Ave. Temple), Father Fred Boni (St. Dominic Catholic Church), Father Thomas Heard (St. John's Episcopal), and Rev. Kathy Jorgensen (Dauphin Way United Methodist).



Father Ted Arroyo (Jesuit Social Research Institute) was the first speaker and talked about the Biblical demands of social justice and reminded us that we are all aliens. Ms Ada Black entertained us with passionate songs of reconciliation between speakers.

Julieta Garibay, DREAM Act activist was scheduled to speak about her experiences as an undocumented youth and the struggles she has experienced as an adult trying to become a citizen. Unfortunately, she had an emergency

and was unable to attend. Thankfully, Denise Moore board member, Jenni Curie, stepped up and shared a little of Julieta's story and told of *CAMP Anytown*, the award winning diversity, leadership, and social justice program for high school students where she met Julieta and other Dream Act youth. Julieta Garibay came to this country as a child of undocumented immigrants. She now has a Masters Degree in Public Health and is married to a U.S. citizen who serves in our military. She has been unsuccessfully trying to receive U.S. citizenship since she turned 18 and is at risk of being deported. The DREAM Act provides a way for Julieta and others like her to become citizens of the country they call home.



As a nice surprise, Rep. Napoleon Bracy, Jr. was in attendance and offered to speak. He has been vocal in his opposition to the law since it's onset and gave a very passionate and informative expose' of the problems with this law. The event climaxed with a candle lighting unity ceremony led by Rev. Bob Frankenberg (First Presbyterian Citronelle.)



Special thanks also go out to Rob Farrell for all his hard work, for Don Halimunanda for a tasty meal, and Billy Kavula for the sound system. Many thanks, also, to all who attended. We appreciate your support.

# The Quest Welcomes Our New Director

S. Judith Smits

On July 20<sup>th</sup> The Quest welcomed its new Director, Denise Moore. She jumped right in, getting acquainted with computer files and Quest projects. In no time Denise was attending meetings of various organizations that share Quest's interest in justice. Then came the anti-immigration law rally with the many details of organizing such an event. You could say she hit the ground running.

Denise is originally from Florence, AL and moved to Mobile in 1985. She has two teenage sons. Chase is a sophomore in the business school at USA. Christopher is a junior at UMS Wright. Ms Moore is engaged to Rev Michael Moore, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in DeFuniak Springs, FL. An elder at Central Presbyterian Church, Denise is deeply involved in worship planning and serves as worship leader. She is also involved in the congregation's neighborhood outreach program with the weekly distribution of food at the food pantry. Denise was a youth director at her church for 20 years and is a member of the Presbyterian Cur-sillo movement. This organization provides Christians the opportunity to renew their faith in a weekend of lectures, sharing, and prayer.

Ms Moore is a member of the board at 15 Place, the day center for the homeless. She also enjoys American Sign Language which she uses during worship services. When asked how she feels about the job so far she says, "I love it! I'm learning a lot and feel blessed to have a job to match my gifts with my passion and to really make a difference."

We at The Quest feel the Spirit was with us during the search process. We are blessed to have her and look forward to having the message of social justice reach more and more people through Denise's leadership.



## Upcoming Events

October 4, 2011 6:00-8:30 pm  
Bridges Inter-Racial Dinner Dialogue

October 26, 2011 9:30—3:30  
Workshop  
The Church as Transformative  
Community  
Brian McLaren

October 26, 2011 7:00 pm  
Christus Lecture  
Brian McLaren

October 27, 2011 7:00 pm  
Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue

## Quest Supporters

July, August, September

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St. Dominic Parish  
Brenda Boman  
Magdala Thompson

### One World

Enable us to actually meet each other  
before we think we know someone.

Remind us that nobody fits neatly  
into a box on a census form....

We all came from somewhere  
and nobody owns the Earth.

We're all sub-letting here, till our time is up,  
so grant us camaraderie and kinship.

Not tolerance.

Not just putting up with each other,  
but openness and a world-wide welcome mat.

Allow us to share this space,  
and consider every living thing  
our next-door neighbors.

We encourage you to check out our facebook page. "Like" us and you will get updates on activities. (We promise not to post too many times a day.)

Share articles and activities of interest on our page for our fans/supporters to benefit from the information.





# The Quest, Inc

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