

An Open Letter from Faith Leaders to Andrew Young

The Honorable Andrew J. Young
c/o GoodWorks International, LLC
303 Peachtree St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30308

Sent via fax to: GoodWorks Atlanta (404) 527-3827
 GoodWorks Washington (202) 736-2213
 GoodWorks New York (212) 867-4410
 Edelman Washington (202) 371-2858

Dear Ambassador Young,

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., often referred to war, poverty, and racism as the triple evils of our society. It is imperative that those of us who worked closely with Dr. King and who have followed in his footsteps tread carefully as we ponder our actions when interacting with Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. and taking into account its harmful effects on our communities.

We are a group of religious leaders who have endured one civil rights struggle after another faced by brothers and sisters home and abroad. We are united in our concern about a new organization, which we believe serves no other purpose other than to act as a front for Wal-Mart and its unethical business practices. Regrettably, this organization is now headed by one of our own, Reverend Andrew Young.

Wal-Mart's behavior in the community has confirmed our suspicions with regard to their exploitative practices. Consequently, Wal-Mart has begun to feel the pressure and we are aware of its history of breaking child labor laws and its failure to adopt a zero-tolerance policy on the exploitation of illegal child labor across the globe. To avert our attention from their illegal activities, they have chosen a respected African-American leader to support the mission of their organization and in doing so hinders our ability to pose/raise questions or critique the business practices that ultimately affect the African-American community and beyond.

Several of us have made statements about Young's position, including Rev. Jeremiah Wright, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, who said, "It is unfortunate that Rev. Andrew Young is so out of touch with his own denomination's position on Wal-Mart that he has ended up on the wrong side of the issue. Dr. King would have disagreed with Mr. Young on this issue. King sided with the poor; he took a stand against the rich who oppressed the poor. The night before he was assassinated, King was standing in solidarity with the sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. Young, however, is taking a stand that is diametrically opposed to everything Dr. King stood for. Young is taking a stand against the poor and is siding with the filthy rich who are oppressing the poor."

“I am disappointed that he has chosen to defend the wayward ways of Wal-Mart. I thought that he was seeking to help them change and become a positive force, not to justify their negatives with ‘voodoo’ economic theories and excuse their exploitative practices which swell the ranks of the working poor here and abroad,” says the Rev. Joseph Lowery, former head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

We also know that there is hope for Wal-Mart workers and the communities which have been negatively impacted by Wal-Mart. We know from first hand experience in the struggle against apartheid internationally and in the fight for civil and economic rights here at home that Wal-Mart workers can and will someday rise above poverty, provide their families with health care, and work free of discrimination and exploitation. We stand in support of these 1.8 million Wal-Mart workers worldwide.

We call upon our colleagues, including Ambassador Young, to stand up against Wal-Mart and the front groups they create to divide our community. We also call upon those who care about economic and civil rights to join us and stand up with millions of Americans who want Wal-Mart to make real, substantive changes to its harmful business practices rather than giving us public relations smokescreens.

Signed,

Archbishop C. Phillip Johnson
Family Praise and Worship Center
Washington, D.C.

Rev. Sandra Yarlott
United Church of Christ Minister
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Elizabeth Morris Downie
St. Christopher's Church
Grand Blanc, Mich.

Rev. Arthur S. Lloyd (Retired)
Member of Vestry, Episcopal Church of
St. Peter
Redwood City, Calif.

Rev. Antonio R. Flores
First United Methodist Church
Glendale, Calif.

Rabbi Alana Suskin
Adas Israel Congregation
Washington, D.C.

Rev. Victoria Safford
Mahtomedi, MN

Rev. Gerard A. Robinson, Sr.
McKowen Missionary Baptist Church
Baton Rouge, La.

Rev. Graylan Scott Hagler
Plymouth Congregational United Church
of Christ
Washington, D.C.

Rev. S.C. Dixon
Greater Mount Olive Missionary Baptist
Church
Baton Rouge, La.

Rabbi Steven Jacobs
Temple Kol Tikvah
Woodland Hills, Calif.

Rev. Marvin Zuckerman
Washington, D.C.

Rev. Ron Stief
United Church of Christ Justice and
Witness Ministries
Washington, D.C.

Rev. Tyrone Pickett
Jacksonville, N.C.

Rev. Stan Warren
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)
Minister
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Mark Hallahan
Church of the Ascension
Tujunga, Calif.

Rev. Dave MacMillan
Washington, D.C.

Rev. Peter Laarman
Progressive Christians Uniting
Los Angeles, Calif.

Father Chris Ponnet
St. Camillus Church
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Jim Lawson
United Methodist Minister
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. William Smart
Liberty Tabernacle
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Oliver Buie
Greater Community CME Church
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Beth Osthimer
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. David Wheeler
Clergy and Laity United for Economic
Justice
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Alexia Salvatterria
Clergy and Laity United
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Lewis Logan
Bethel AME Church
Los Angeles, Calif.

Rev. Patricia Jones
New Prospect Family Praise and
Worship Center
Washington, D.C.

Rev. William J. Johnson
Wal-Mart Watch
Washington, D.C.

Rev. Craig Ward
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)
Minister
New York, N.Y.

Rev. Carol Bean
Oakland, Calif.

James Lafferty
Executive Director, National Lawyers
Guild, Los Angeles

Rev. Jeremiah Wright
Trinity United Church of Christ
Chicago, Ill.

Rev. Joseph Lowery
United Methodist Minister
Atlanta, Ga.

Sister Marie J. Gaillac, CSJ
Orange County (Calif.) Interfaith
Coalition for Social Justice

Alliance for Spiritual Community
Commission on Peace and Justice
Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles

Los Ranchos Presbytery, Presbyterian
Church
Anaheim, Calif.

Council on American-Islamic Relations
Orange County, Calif.

St. Anselm of Canterbury Episcopal
Church
Garden Grove, Calif.

Episcopal Cmte. on Advocacy for
Children and Youth
Orange County, Calif.

St. Mary's Episcopal Church of St.
Simon and St. June
Irmo, S.C.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Pacifica Synod Fullerton Interfaith
Orange County, Calif.

Sikh Center of Orange County
Orange County, Calif.

Emergency Services Inspired Action
Orange County, Calif.

Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange
Orange County, Calif.

Interfaith Council of Garden Grove
Orange County, Calif.

Unitarian Universalist Church of
Fullerton
Fullerton, Calif.

Interfaith Council of Westminster
Orange County, Calif.

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of
Laguna Beach
Laguna Beach, Calif.

Interfaith Council of Stanton
Orange County, Calif.

Unitarian Universalist Church of South
County
Mission Viejo, Calif.

Interfaith Council of Laguna Beach
Laguna Beach, Calif.

Interfaith Council of South Orange
County
Orange County, Calif.

United Methodist Church
Santa Ana, Calif.

Interfaith Peace Ministry
Orange County, Calif.

La Purisima Catholic Church
Orange, Calif.

National Council of Jewish Women
Saddleback Section, Calif.

Orange County Society of St. Vincent de
Paul Social Justice Ministry
Orange County, Calif.