

C O N N E C T I N G COMMUNITIES

FOR RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

This era of globalization and unprecedented migration is sweeping away social boundaries. It is creating an extensive interconnectedness among diverse nations and between disparate groups within the same society. Our future welfare is increasingly tied to that of other people.

In June 2001, 200 people from cities throughout the US, as well as South Africa, Australia, Mexico, Britain and Russia, gathered at Howard University in Washington, DC, to explore new ways of relating to one another, free of racial, ethnic, religious and class divisions. It was clear from those in attendance, that no single group claimed ownership of this challenging task. Present were conservatives



and liberals, young and old, and individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Local officials and business leaders committed to principled economic practice participated. Educators, social justice organizers and religious leaders who are building bridges with other faith groups attended as well.

When governments impose change without first preparing citizens to accept change through moral dialogue their policies fail, explained keynote speaker Dr. Amitai Etzioni. "Dialogue

leads to the kind of heart change that makes laws successful," said the founder of the communitarian movement. "Out of these conversations new shared moral commitments do arise."

The theme of the forum, "connecting communities for reconciliation and justice," expressed its two-fold approach to addressing historic wrongs. While calls for apologies and reparations for slavery fall largely on deaf ears in the US, the forum provided hope that the "good faith national effort dedicated to the goals of acknowledgment, atonement and reconciliation" called for recently by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, might yet be achievable. From speakers and fellow delegates, participants gained fresh insights, inspiration, and practical resources for plotting an ethical course to connect their own communities:

- Case studies from South Africa, Australia, the UK and United States showed how honest conversation can result in unexpected and creative alliances between disconnected or opposing groups.
- A symbolic event at the US Capitol provided a model for healing our nation's painful memories.
- Prominent leaders in the business and judicial community candidly addressed issues of institutional responsibility and restorative justice.
- Stories of personal responsibility verified the link between individual decisions and societal change.

Sir Howard Cooke, Governor General of Jamaica (right), met privately during the conference with Secretary of State Colin Powell, informing him about its goals and outreach. Pictured with them is Ambassador Richard L. Bernal of Jamaica (left).



A forum hosted by MRA Initiatives of Change, Agenda for Reconciliation, Hope in the Cities and The Faith and Politics Institute. Key partners were the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Study Circles Resource Center and The National League of Cities



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Forgiveness is Freedom

How can we connect communities divided by a legacy of injustice and separation? How can true freedom come through the offering and receiving of forgiveness? Three prominent theologians provided a framework for understanding and action.

Sometimes forgiveness is blocked "because the agents and victims of old injustice cannot repair the breach between them," said Dr. Donald Shriver, President Emeritus of Union Theological Seminary and author of *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*.

For people to give up resentment over past wrongs and build trust, the injuring party must acknowledge wrongfulness and feel genuine sorrow for it, said Canon Nicholas Frayling, Rector of Liverpool, England. The injuring party must provide some proof of change, he said.

The 'forgive and forget' formula for healing history may make us feel good, but it does nothing "to break an inherent pattern or evil and make possible new freedom of action," said Frayling. There are no short cuts. "Forgiveness is the fruit and not the shoot."

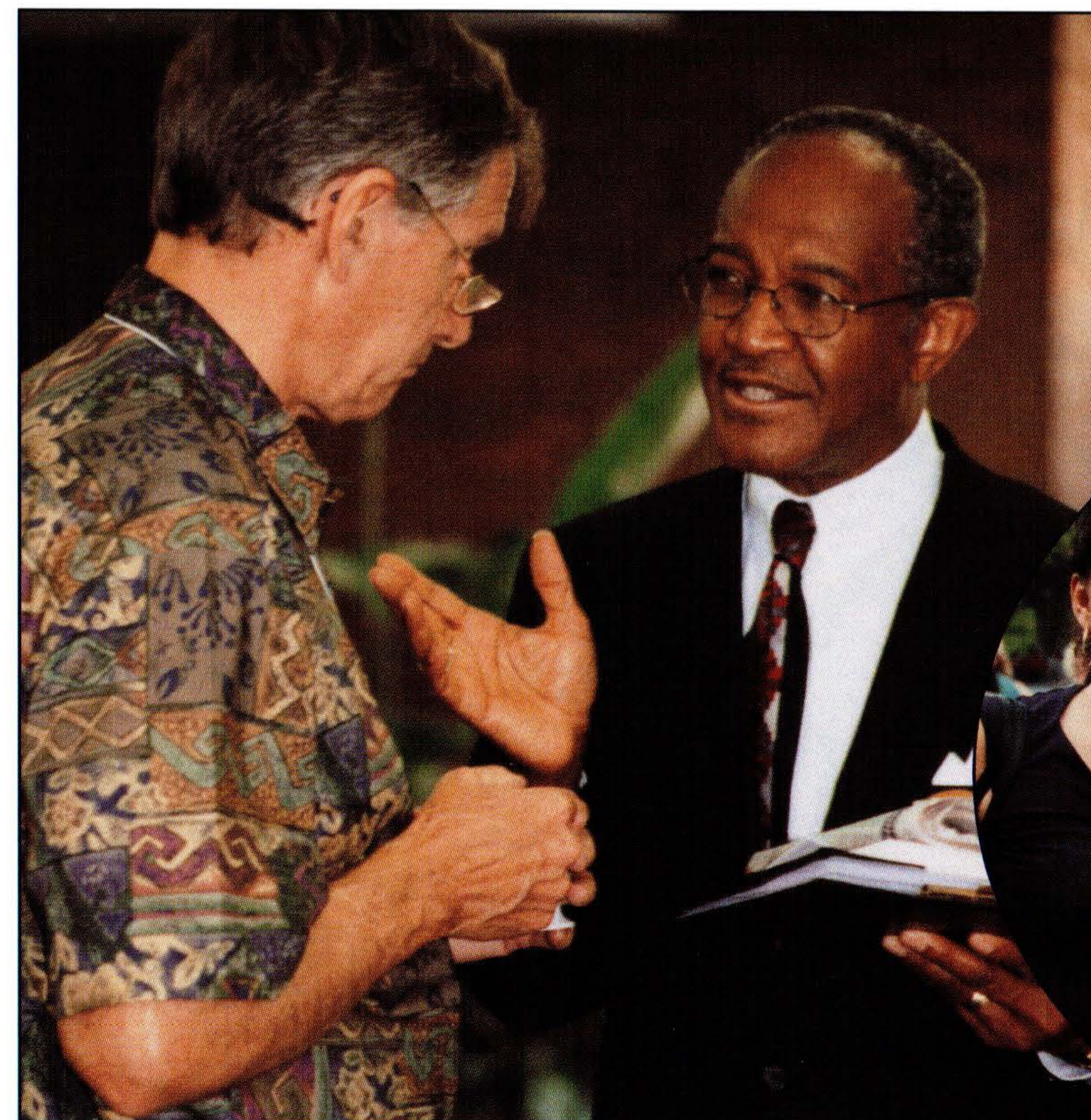
Dr. James Forbes Jr., Senior Pastor of The Riverside Church in New York, concurred. He said, "The history of our country, its heroic moments, as well as its times of shame and national disgrace, is our history together. Each of us out of our own values can identify those aspects which are not worthy of the ideals on which this country was built." He offered the following suggestions for action;



"Without sorrow there can be no question of repentance, and certainly not forgiveness," said Frayling, who is urging honesty about Britain's past in Ireland.

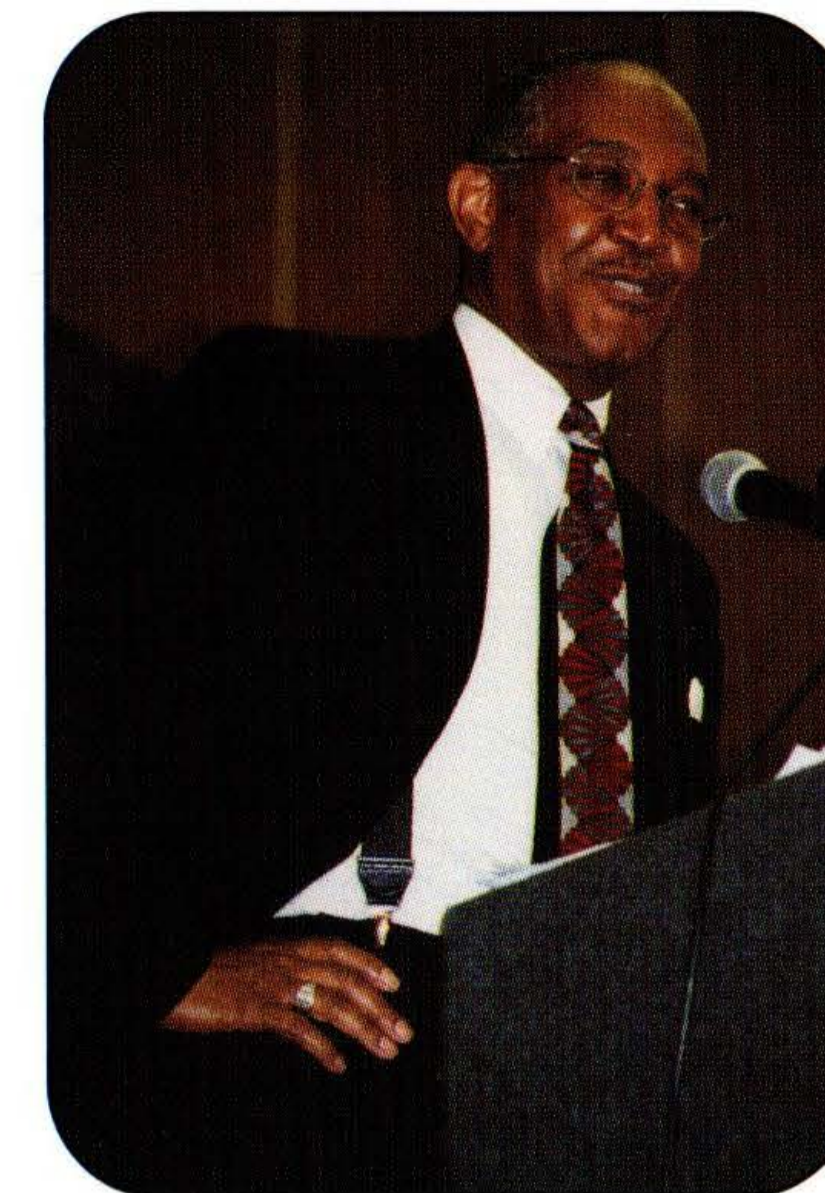


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"The history of our country, its heroic moments, as well as its times of shame and national disgrace, is our history together," said Dr. Forbes (right) with Dick Ruffin, Executive Director, MRA Initiatives of Change.

*Changing the World . . .
One Life at a Time*



"People who are threatened by demographic changes may be in too much of a self-protective mode to invest in new possibilities for the common good. All our religious traditions will need to help build the moral vitality of their adherents so that they will be secure enough to risk truth, justice, peace and compassion."

Telling the Truth about the Past

- Personal responsibility. Encourage fellow citizens to prepare a personal confession of the aspects of our past from which we wish to disassociate ourselves.
- Public acts of acknowledgment. In bearing witness to the seriousness of past offenses, and expressing our remorse, we can deepen our repentance, strengthen our resolve to transform society, and invite fellow citizens to join the ranks of the advocates for a new pattern of life.

Doing the Truth in the Present

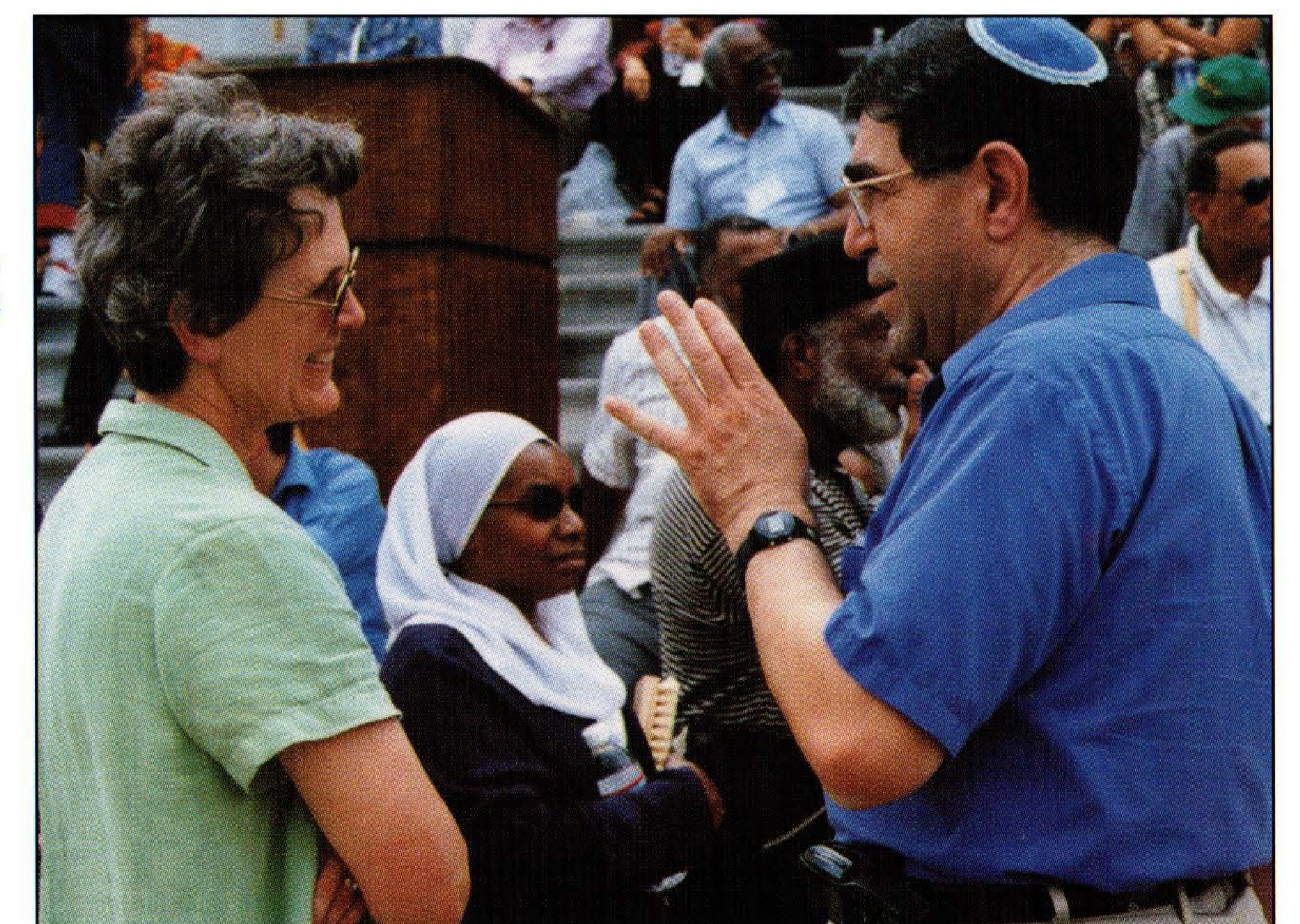
- Talk about how to make things right. As a nation, we should engage in a serious, in-depth conversation about reparations to African Americans wounded by slavery and our continuing moral obligation to Native Americans.
- Institute a USA Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A reparation commission would help us face the truth of our country's racial history and audit our progress toward being a truly democratic society.
- Declare our commitment to interracial, interfaith, interclass cooperation for shared action.

Investing in a Future More True to the Dream of Our Creator

- Establish a Jubilee Plan. Develop a plan to repair the damage done to past and present victims of oppression that provides subsistence necessities for all US citizens, including: food, shelter, health care, quality education, living wage employment, and the right to equal, unbiased justice.
- Advocate for human rights. Promote justice, peace, compassion at home and abroad. Encourage bipartisan support for a humanitarian policy toward Africa. As a repentant and enlightened nation we have a moral obligation to help restore what we helped destroy.

Forbes concluded that a spiritual revitalization was needed if citizens were to embrace these challenges.

In connecting the rich resources of all our many cultures, we can make America a place of hope, creativity and opportunity for all. In doing this we will provide a pattern for the world torn apart by racial, religious, and ethnic conflicts.



On the Steps of the Capitol Citizens Take up the Challenge of National Reconciliation



"We passed terrible laws for many years in this building... It's a simple thing to say 'I'm sorry' but it's hard to get people to do it. It's a tough issue but it's the right issue," said Congressman Tony Hall of Ohio.

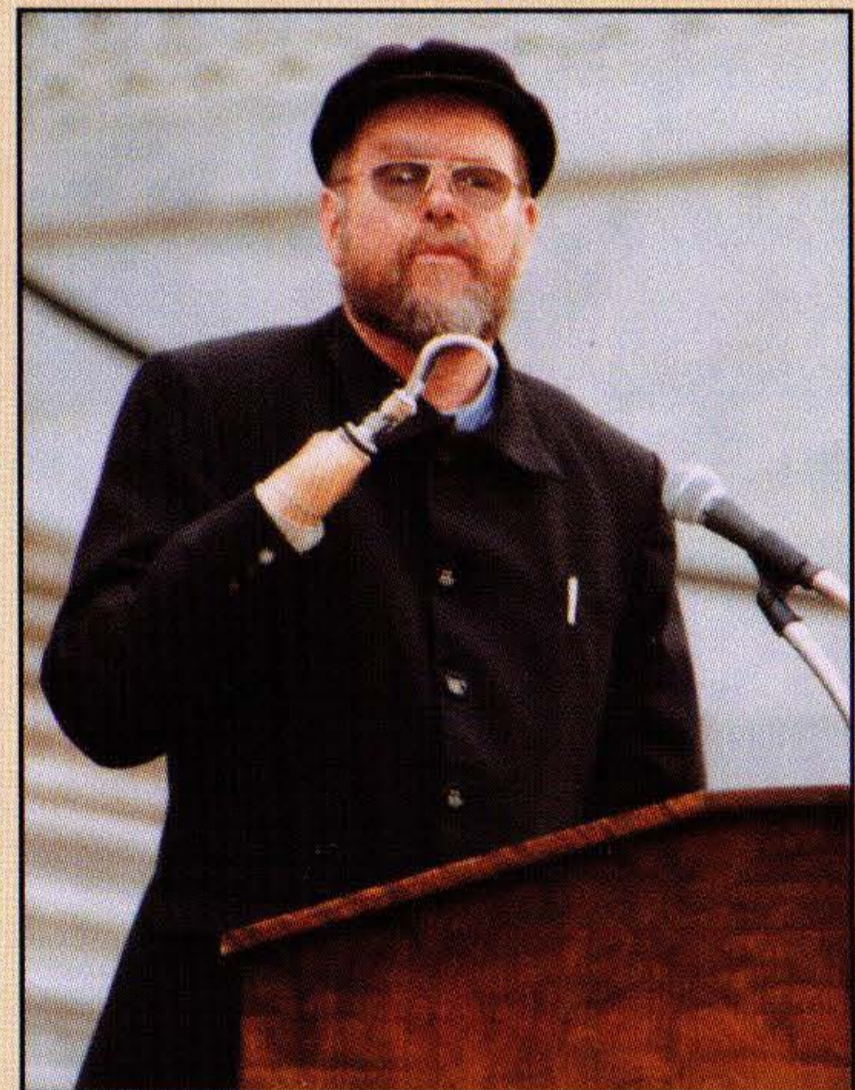
On June 21, Connecting Communities participants converged on the East Steps of the US Capitol. They came to make a contribution. No longer would they wait for the government to make amends for sanctioning slavery and the century of legislation that denied fundamental rights to non-whites. They decided to accept personal responsibility for healing the nation's painful history. They hope their actions will motivate the country's leaders to do the right thing.

One elected leader who has urged the US government to apologize for slavery is Congressman Tony Hall of Ohio. "Few people know that this symbol of global freedom was partly built by slaves," he said. Ayinde Dance Troupe opened the ceremony by portraying

enslaved African craftsmen building "monuments" to democracy while longing for the freedom these edifices represented. "We passed terrible laws for many years in this building... It's a simple thing to say 'I'm sorry' but it's hard to get people to do it. It's a tough issue but it's the right issue." We've got to "clean out the wound of slavery in our national life," said Hall. At this suggestion, those gathered ascended the steps with scrub brushes in hand. Silently and together, people of different colors, faiths and economic backgrounds wiped their brushes across the granite steps in a symbolic act of cleansing.

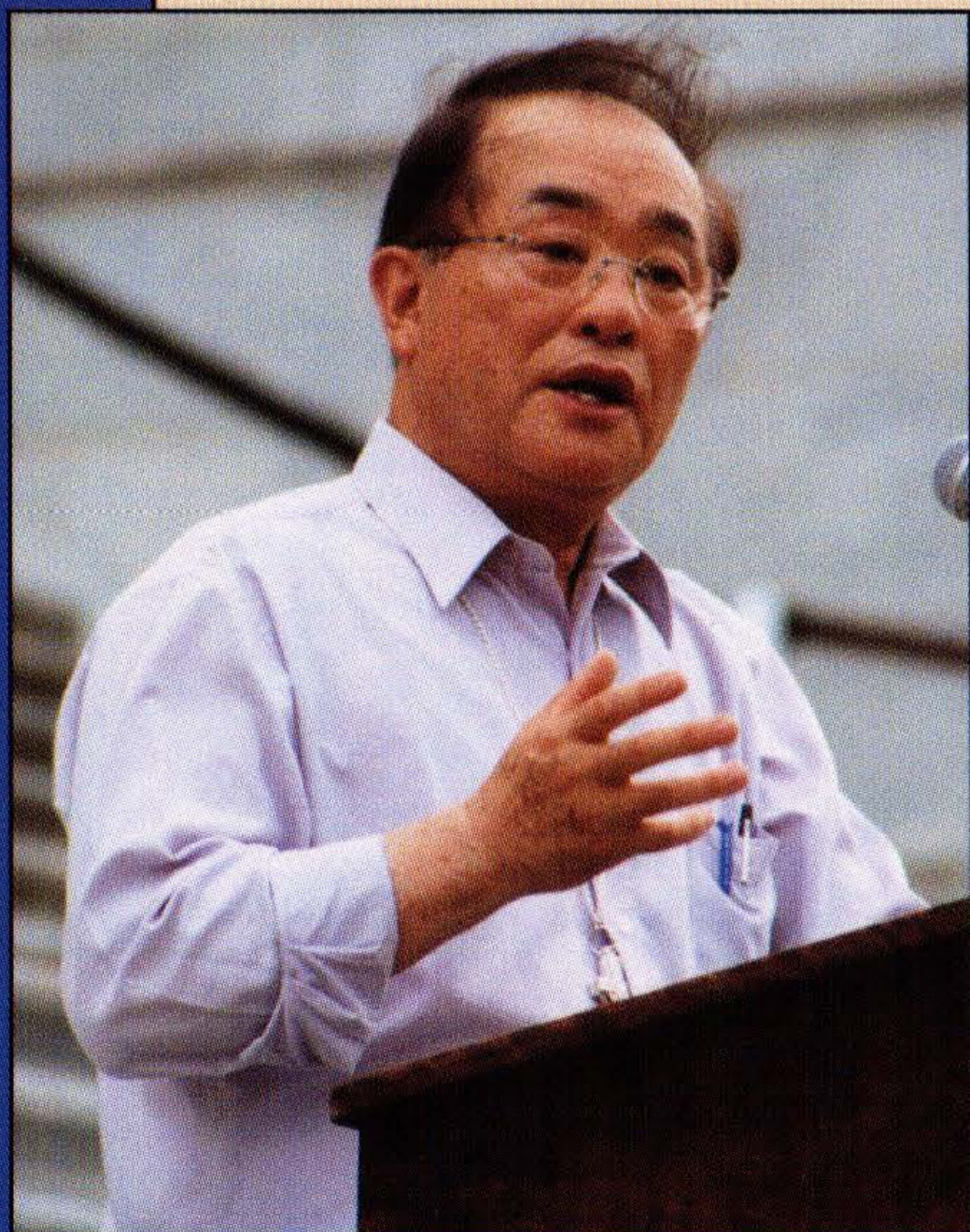
Through this action they hoped to free their hearts and minds of the burden of sorrowful memories. It was a means of clearing the way for new levels of responsibility from our government and its citizens, said Dr. Paige Chargois, a Baptist minister and Associate National Director of Hope in the Cities, from Richmond, Virginia. Others came forward to share stories about the power of reconciliation in their own countries and challenged participants to back up newly forged commitments with concrete action. Pat Dodson, the first chair of Australia's Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation,

"The holy spirit comes to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable," said activist Father Michael Lapsley from South Africa.

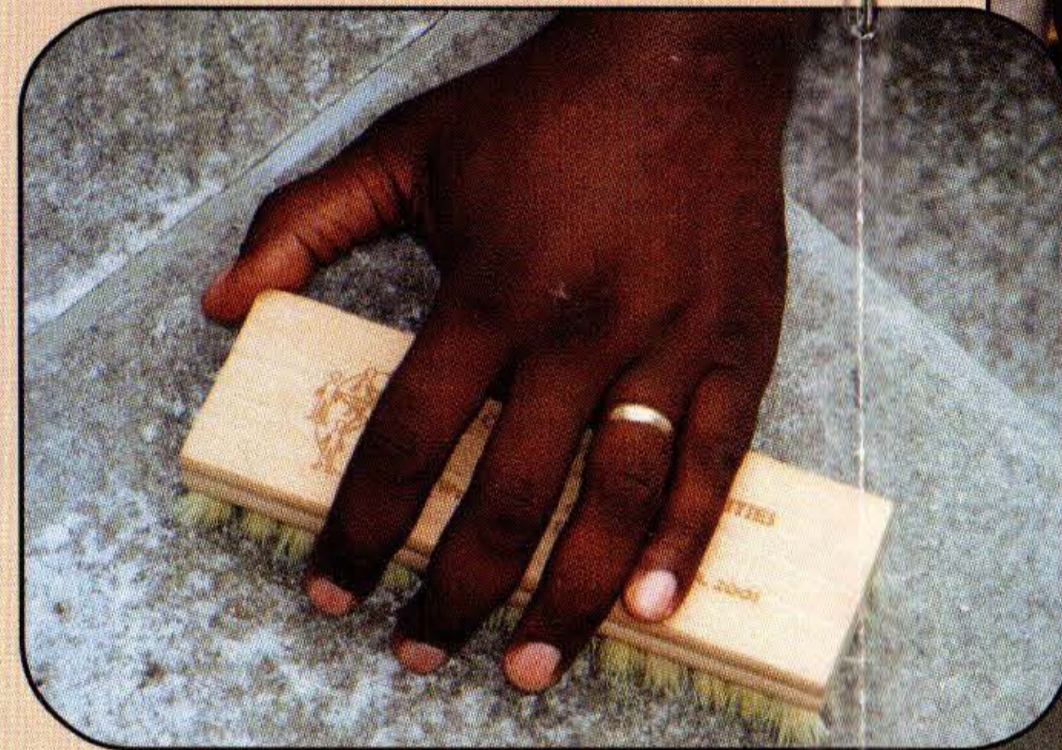


acknowledged the Native People on whose lands the Capitol was built. Activist Father Michael Lapsley from South Africa, who had his hands blown off by a letter-bomb from the apartheid government, described how he had learned to move from being a victim to being a survivor, then a victor.

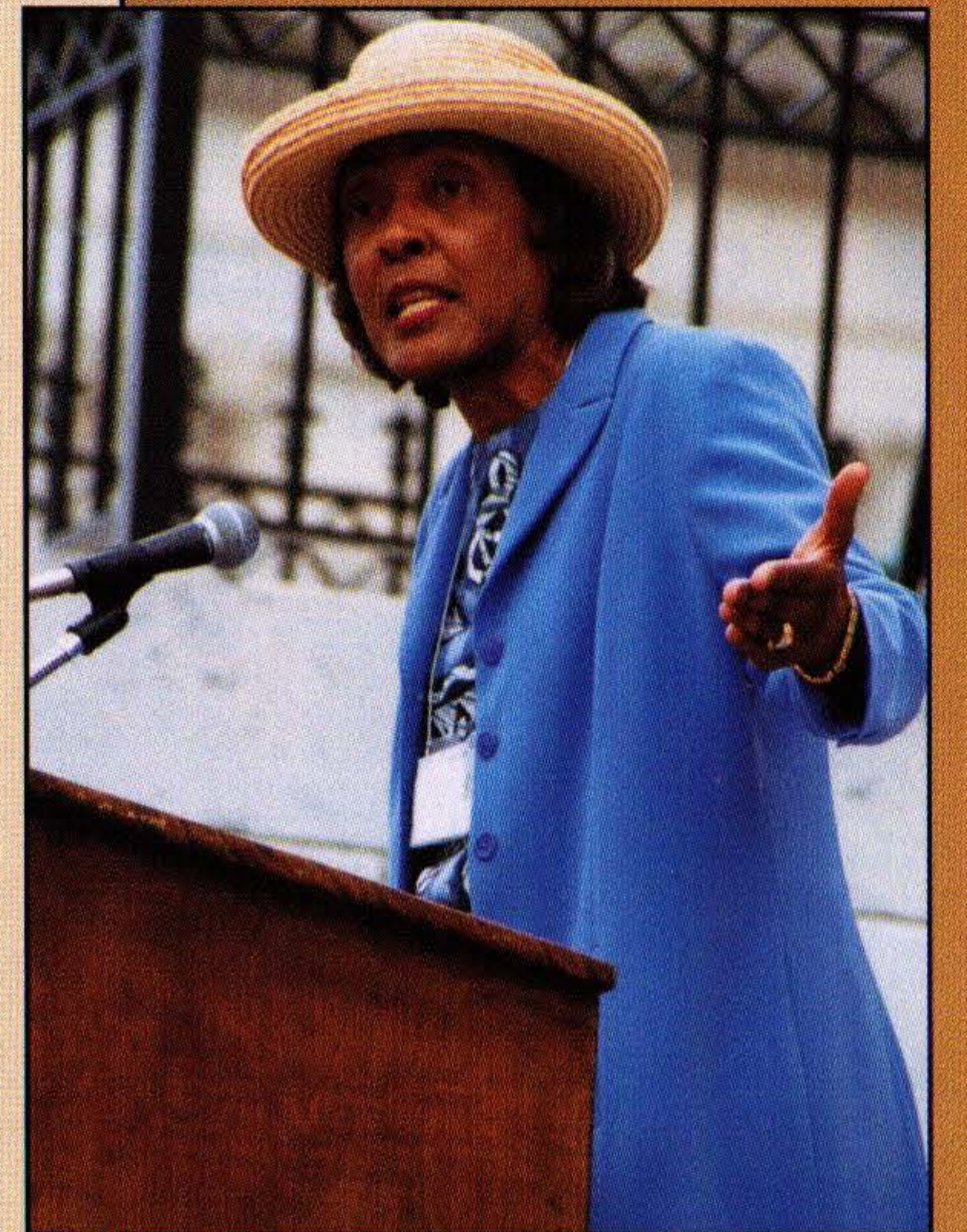
Dr. Sygman Rhee, former Korean soldier, refugee, and Moderator of the Presbyterian Church USA, spoke of his involvement in the reconciliation process between North and South Korea and America's vital role in helping Koreans overcome a tragic history. "What happens in the US Capitol affects the rest of the world, and if we admit our injustices, we will help other countries do that."



Dr. Rhee called the scrubbing of the Steps an action to "liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor."



"As we sang 'God Bless America' on the steps of the Capitol, I found myself unable to contain tears. I was overwhelmed by the concept of 'my home,'" said Vivian Paige of Norfolk, Virginia. "Yes, America is my home, even if there are those in it that don't want me here." She hoped her fight to end racism would change the hearts of white Americans so that one day black Americans, like herself, might be accepted as part of the country they love.



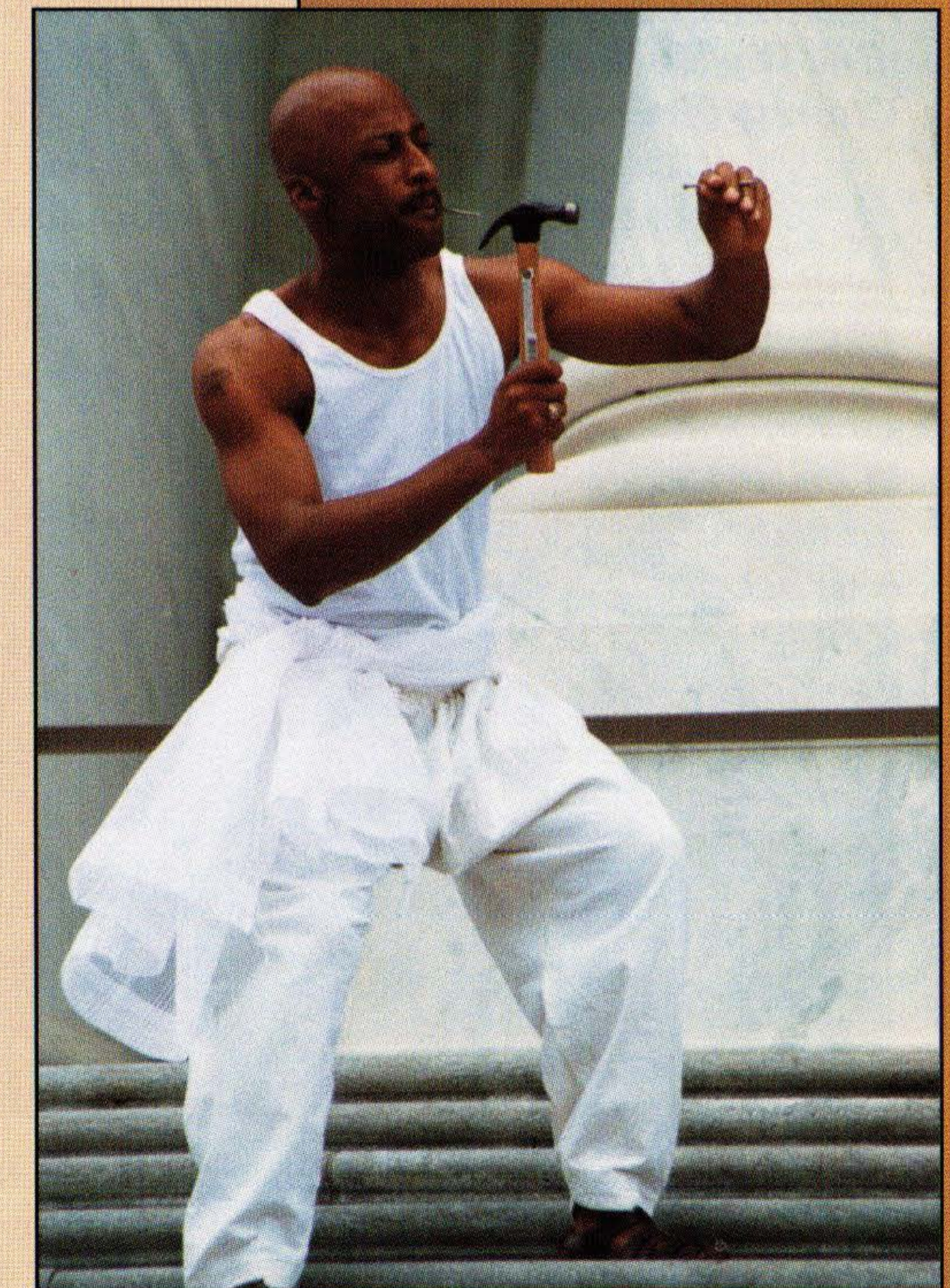
Dr. Sarah Harris spoke of the positive steps being taken in Dayton, Ohio, to address racial tensions.



Joe Devaney told how as Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Britain's principal port engaged in transatlantic slave trade, he had led the city council in an unconditional apology.



Nico Ferreira and Chris Magwangqana (below, center), of Stutterheim, told how their South African town has been transformed into an oasis of peace, stability and hope.





Who is Responsible for Change?

Ending Global Poverty: The Responsibility of Business

The benefits of globalization are not equitably distributed, said former CEO of Medtronic, Inc., Winston Wallin, who has launched a campaign to get business leaders to accept responsibility for ending poverty.

Wallin acknowledged the absence of corporate leadership in seeking solutions to global problems. "Businesses are pressured by investors not to be philanthropists," he explained. "The primary responsibility of a corporation is to manage its business effectively, not give away profits. Shareholders won't put money into poor countries, if they don't think they'll get a fair return on their investment." Consequently, the gulf between developed and less developed economies is increasing. Wallin, and other members of the Caux Round Table - an international network of business leaders who promote principled business leadership, are trying to change these institutional practices.

These senior business leaders are working to reduce world poverty. "It is up to business to do something about global poverty," said Wallin, "because business is the only group with sufficient resources."

When asked what citizens might do to reduce world poverty, Mr. Wallin recommended investing in stocks in developing countries. A socially responsible stockholder movement could do quite a lot, he said.

Jim Wallis, convener of Call to Renewal, a faith-based social justice network, also believes in citizen power. "Only through the growth of social movements will business and government take the necessary action," he said. For example, Wallis cited the impact of the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the cancellation of Third World debt.

"We can all do something to answer the need of crisis situations," said Charito Kruvant, President of Creative Associates International. Ms. Kruvant talked about the role of ordinary citizens in the work of helping societies to transition from a war economy to a peace economy.

Community Reconstruction

Just ten years ago, the South African town of Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape exhibited all the worst features of the legacy of apartheid. The black townships had no sanitation or electricity, crime was rampant and the economy was on the brink of self-destruction. Today, Stutterheim has been transformed into an oasis of peace, stability and hope. Mayor Chris Magwangqana and Nico Ferreira, Executive Director of the Stutterheim Development Foundation, told how their interracial partnership had helped pave the way to trust and constructive action. As a result, crime has dropped dramatically; more than 52 schools have benefited from education programs; water, sanitation and electricity have come to thousands of people; and jobs were created. Stutterheim has provided consultations and training seminars to 136 towns across South Africa. Speaking on behalf of his fellow South Africans, Ferreira said, "Nobody gave us permission to take responsibility. It's an example of what citizens can do."

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An international panel moderated by Harold Saunders of the Kettering Foundation included Viacheslav Igrunov, member of the Russian Congress or Duma (pictured on right with Dr. Bryan Hamlin and Andrei Mirinov, human rights activist). He described his own imprisonment during the Soviet period and his refusal to compromise. He said that when the democratic revolution happened, those who came to power had no moral values. Money and power were all that counted. "When politics is not founded on morality it is a crime," he said. As a result he had started a center for young politicians.

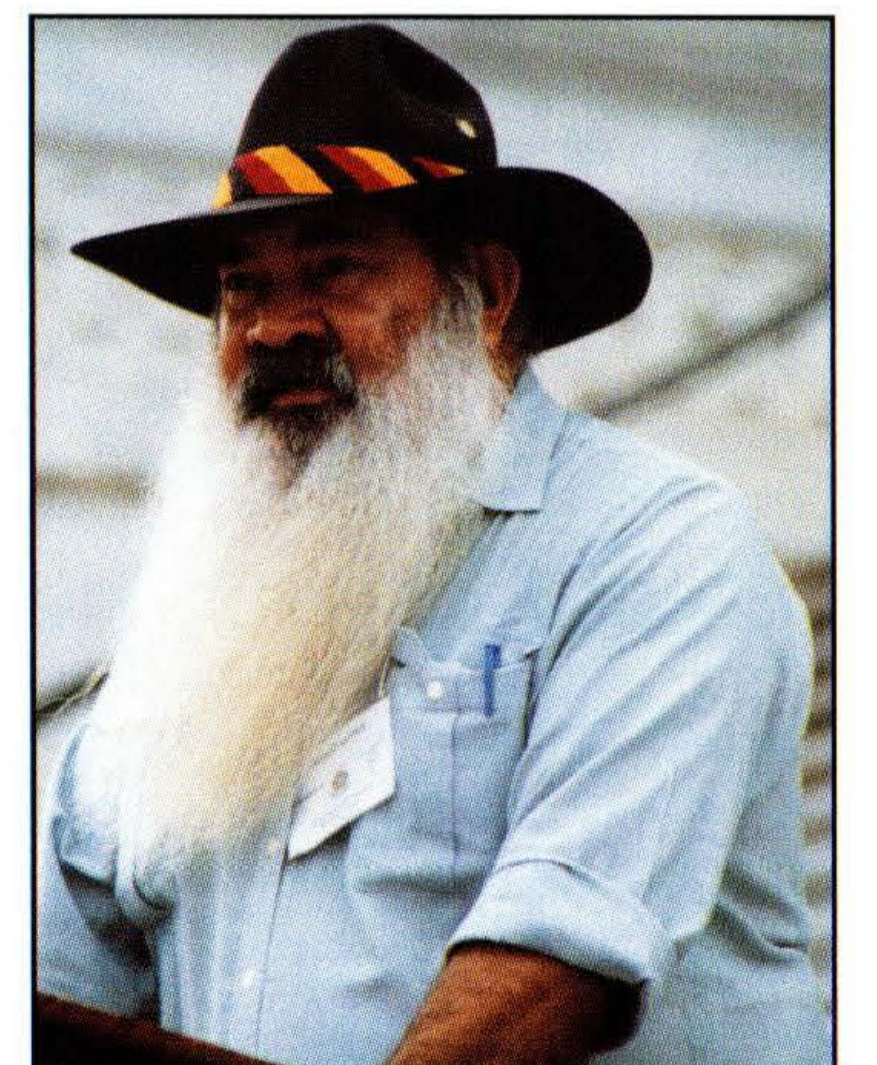
Elected Officials Work for Racial Justice

Jim Hunt, a councilman from Clarksburg, West Virginia, told how his town was working to become an inclusive community and how black and white had stood together when the KKK reared its head. Elected officials took part in a workshop facilitated by Lorna Gonsalves-Pinto who directed the National League of Cities project on racial justice. Mayor Melina Carnicelli of Auburn, New York, Commissioner Dean Lovelace of Dayton, Ohio, and Angel Fuentes, President of Camden City Council, were among those who took part.



Daily dialogue sessions at the forum gave participants working knowledge of the individual healing effects of telling one's story and having experiences validated. Delegates discovered that dialogue fosters trust building, shared moral commitments, and the capacity for individual and collective action. Several dialogue models were presented in forum workshops, including those of Study Circles, the Kettering Foundation, NCCJ, Hope in the Cities, and Oregon Uniting's youth prototype.

Ten years ago in Australia, a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established with Pat Dodson as its first chair. A nation-wide program of study circles enabled thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to meet together. This focused national attention on the government's policy of forced removal of thousands of Aboriginal children from their families, a practice of assimilation into white society which continued until 1970. Dodson said the results are seen in poor health, high levels of incarceration, low self-esteem, substance abuse and broken relationships. Last year a million people took part in walks calling for an apology and for a new relationship based on justice and respect. Dodson said that the challenge is to translate this hope into national initiatives. He is calling for a treaty between Aboriginal people and the Australian government.



from the personal to the global



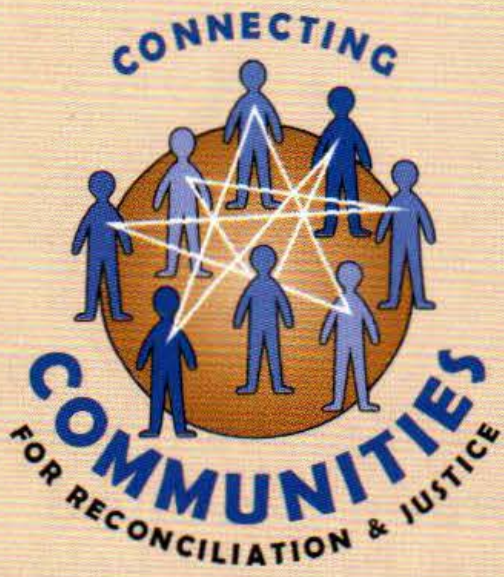
"It is up to business to do something about global poverty," said Winston Wallin, former CEO of Medtronic, Inc., "because business is the only group with sufficient resources." Pictured with Jim Wallis (left) and Charito Kruvant.

Fiona Martin, former mayor of Witbank described the courageous struggle for democracy in her South African province.



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Initiatives of Change. . .



The Power of Citizen Groups

Since its groundbreaking "walk through history" in 1993, Richmond-based Hope in the Cities has provided inspiration and training to interracial teams across the US. They provide practical evidence that people can come together across seemingly unbridgeable historical differences and work for constructive change. Coalitions from Dayton, Ohio, and Baltimore, Maryland, led workshops on team building and visioning. A new dialogue model that addresses "intractable" issues of race, economics and jurisdiction has completed its first phase in Richmond.



Terri LaVelle, Program Director at The Faith and Politics Institute, with Rob Corcoran, National Director, Hope in the Cities.

A team of twenty from Oregon Uniting provided convincing evidence of the power of citizen groups to repair history. Their efforts resulted in a Day of Acknowledgment at the State Capitol on April 22, 1999. Anitra Rasmussen, until recently a member of the Oregon House of Representatives, told how 800 Oregonians, of all backgrounds, crowded into the House chamber to face the truth about Oregon's history - the officially sanctioned exclusion of "negroes and mulattoes" from the Oregon Territory, an act later repealed in 1926. State officials publicly acknowledged this history and called for ongoing dialogues and action. A series of multiracial dialogues was launched in the middle schools as part of the healing process. At

the Connecting Communities forum, youth facilitator Julie Gallagher told the audience, "In searching for my voice, Oregon Uniting was presented to me by God as a step toward the long, slow walk to freedom." She said it gave her a means to liberate the human spirit and heal painful histories, including her own. After the forum, she wrote a letter of reconciliation to her father. "How can I facilitate reconciliation among middle school students if I don't do it myself?"

What is at the heart of all these initiatives?

It's not technical know-how or political power. It is ordinary people - people with moral fortitude who accept responsibility for healing their communities, rather than leaving the task for others. It is people who transcend historic divisions and unite as allies to transform shared pain into a powerful reconciliation and justice movement. These stories remind us that ordinary, everyday sorts of human beings frequently make extraordinary contributions to social change.

Many of the stories presented at the forum are told in a new publication, *Connecting Communities*. It reflects the accumulated experience of Hope in the Cities and some of its partner organizations nationally and internationally. It includes detailed descriptions of the process of building and sustaining community coalitions, honest dialogue, and the work of healing history. Please contact Hope in the Cities to order your copy.

www.mra-usa.org

More information about the Connecting Communities forum, including more extensive text from some of the speakers, is available on the website.

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