

# Anniston Star

## James L. Evans: Justice needs in Alabama

01.08.10 - 02:58 am

In my column last week, I wrote in general terms about the difference between justice and charity. The piece concluded with a reference to the Prophet Micah, who advised those desiring to please God to "love kindness and do justice."

I received considerable response, but with a consistent theme. Almost all of those responding to the column wanted specific examples of what doing justice might look like.

As I began compiling some examples, mostly from Alabama since that's the world I live in, it occurred to me that most of the resources I was using had been developed by Alabama Arise.

Arise is a statewide nonprofit organization comprising 150 community groups and congregations working together in Alabama on behalf of the poor. Each year, it puts together a laundry list of issues affecting the poor in our state and develops strategies for addressing them. If you want to see some opportunities to "do justice," just follow that list.

At the top is a call for adequate state budgets. If the state of Alabama is going to be responsive to the needs of the least of these in our midst, it is necessary that our budgets reflect adequate funding. Cutting budgets for health care, child care, education and other human services does not serve the most vulnerable in our midst, nor does it serve the cause of biblical justice.

Arise is also passionate about tax reform. Even though in 2006 we finally ended the despicable practice of taxing families earning as little as \$4,600 a year, we continue to tax families earning as little as \$12,600. This is only slightly less despicable.

And we are not talking about some sort of give-away program here. These are people who work and yet find the tax structure in Alabama aligned against them. Tax reform remains a significant opportunity for us to "do justice." Learn more at [www.untaxgroceries.org](http://www.untaxgroceries.org).

Arise also is concerned about the slow pace of relief for Hurricane Katrina victims. Four years after the devastating storm, hundreds of coastal Alabama residents, including families, seniors and people with disabilities, remain in damaged housing. These are our neighbors, and Jesus said we should love them. Their need represents a significant opportunity for us to "do justice."

Of course, Alabama Arise is one of the leading proponents of constitutional reform. Almost all of the streams leading to economic and social injustice in Alabama have their origins in our outdated Constitution. It was written with the expressed purpose of suppressing the power of local governments and ordinary residents. Our Constitution gives the Legislature control of numerous aspects of local policymaking, taxation and spending.

This albatross of a governing document is the single largest impediment to Alabama making real

progress in the area of education. Replacing this legal monstrosity with something that works for all people of our state would be a glorious demonstration of doing justice.

I agree with Arise that the best way to rewrite our Constitution is with a people's convention. But the Legislature, in a blatant effort to protect the power it wields, won't even let us vote on whether to have a constitutional convention. And the reason it won't let us vote is because it knows how we would vote.

These are just a few of the many injustices that exist in our state. For those who would seek to follow the wisdom of Micah and Jesus, these issues are where the faithful are called to do justice.  
© annistonstar.com 2010