

Faith communities push for creation of green jobs as economy recovers

WASHINGTON - As the economy begins its slow recovery from the recession, a nationwide coalition of faith groups is calling upon policymakers to ensure that the new jobs being created give people the chance to become self-sufficient.

The call for jobs that provide a living wage, comprehensive benefits and safe working conditions came during a nationwide conference call marking the second Fighting Poverty with Faith initiative Oct. 14-21.

New jobs, especially those connected to the rapidly growing economy revolving around energy conservation and pollution reduction, must provide laid-off workers and low-income families the opportunity to shed the title of working poor by having a well-paying job, said Father Larry Snyder, executive director of Catholic Charities USA.

"As people of faith we can make a difference to develop and shape a new American economy, one that provides a living wage and one that provides the benefits where people don't have to rely on government benefits," Father Snyder said.

"We can, and must, work to reshape our economy so there is a balance and pay equity for all workers," he said.

The conference call highlighted efforts around the country that focus on the development of so-called green jobs. Among those cited were the Green Pathways program in St. Louis, sustainability programs coordinated through Sustainable South Bronx in New York, and a wide-ranging campaign involving low-income communities, labor, government, business and faith-based social service agencies in California's Silicon Valley.

Rabbi Steve Gutow, president of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said the Fighting Poverty with Faith initiative is grounded in the biblical call to care for

creation.

The push for well-paying jobs and green jobs comes as the country begins to emerge from what some experts are calling the “great recession.” Unemployment stood at 9.8 percent in September, its highest level in 26 years. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated the number of people living in poverty rose from 37.3 million to 39.8 million during September.

The week was to conclude Oct. 21 with a nationwide call-in to members of Congress urging them to support programs that invest in workforce development, education and training in new technologies.

Among the faith-based organizations involved in this year’s initiative are the National Advocacy Center of Sisters of the Good Shepherd; Network, a Catholic social justice lobby; the Alliance to End Hunger; American Baptist Churches USA; the Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies; Bread for the World; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Evangelicals for Social Action; the Hindu American Seva Charities; the Islamic Society of North America; the National Council of Churches; and the United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society.