

Church Council of Greater Seattle and Faith Action Network
Set to Transfer Funds from Bank of America

“No one can serve two masters...one cannot serve both God and Mammon.”
Matthew 6:24

Issues of wealth and poverty are prominent in the Biblical narrative and in religious teachings. The divine impulse stirs toward care for “the widow, the alien, and the orphan” as a sign of God’s favor. Indeed, in contrast to the sin of idolatry, the “preferential option” for the poor is the manifestation of true worship of the God of life who desires “life and life in abundance” for all. Great disparities of wealth, joined to the practice of “lording it over” a subservient class, usually implied a type of theft from those most in need and deserving of their daily bread for their labor. Wealth built on the backs of the poor was to be condemned. Indeed, from a faith perspective, the disparities fostered in empire are to be subverted and transformed toward jubilee justice - of the Reign of God, on earth as in heaven.

Today, the practice of Wall Street has led to an economic crisis not seen in American society since the Great Depression. Corporate after-tax profits are the highest in 80 years, while the percentage of people whose incomes fall below the federal poverty level and the national, state, and local unemployment rates continue at disturbing levels. Personal bankruptcies increased 157% between 2006 and 2010, and 2.9 million households experienced foreclosures. The top 1% of the population has seen its after-tax income grow by 275% over the last 30 years and they control 40% of overall wealth, while the bottom 20% of the population has seen incomes grow by just 18% over the same period. As in Biblical times, our faith calls us to challenge a crisis whose proportions are no less than a scandal, for these arise from a systemic injustice.

Bank of America and other megabanks contributed to the economic crisis by profiting from securitized mortgages and accepting bailout funds by the federal government. In essence, these banks benefitted handsomely from risks passed off on taxpayers. Nationally, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and JP Morgan Chase accounted for 26 % of mortgages and 21% of deposits in 2007. With new acquisitions and bailout funds, the three banks in 2009 held 42% of mortgages and 34% of deposits. Bank of America acquired Merrill Lynch and more recently Countrywide, responsible for a sizable portion of risky mortgages which ultimately resulted in corporate bankruptcy. While Bank of America profits from the fallout of the Great Recession, increased fees and charges for small nonprofits and individuals have been proposed and implemented.

The Church Council of Greater Seattle and the Faith Action Network (formerly the Washington Association of Churches) jointly announce our decisions to withdraw our respective organizations’ funds from Bank of America. We choose to take this basic step out of a desire not to cooperate with a banking system reaping windfall profits on a foundation of overreach and greed, in a time of deregulation and perpetuated economic disparities.

As part of the faith community, we identify the structural sin of a system, of which Bank of America is but a small part, as needing a re-formation. We acknowledge our complicity in this system and confirm our commitment and our desire not to cooperate further with our investments, by removing our funds from Bank of America and depositing them in local and regional banks and credit unions. These local banks offer the promise of a just return to taxpayers and a responsible approach to investment and community health and well-being.

Bank of America makes significant investments in the local community through the Community Reinvestment Act and through its charitable foundation, including contributions to nonprofits. We appreciate these investments and contributions. At the same time, bank investments in services for the homeless are increasingly eclipsed by mortgage failures, unemployment, and unfair tax burdens being endured by taxpayers through irresponsible lending practices, lack of oversight, and unbalanced tax policies supported and sponsored by Bank of America and other megabanks.

Our decriing the policies of the megabanks is not a reflection on the hard-working, tax-paying employees of Bank of America who contribute greatly to our communities. We stand today in solidarity with the 99% of the population, including these employees, to invite Bank of America and other megabanks to fundamental re-prioritization and re-formulation.

Further, we concur with resolutions passed by the Seattle City Council, specifically to:

1. Call for the tightening of regulation of the banking and financial sector, including adoption of new rules and vigorous investigation and prosecution of individuals and corporations that violate the fraud, theft, and securities laws.
2. Require the city to review its banking and investment practices to ensure that public funds are invested in responsible financial institutions that support our community.
3. Require the city to examine the number of home foreclosures in Seattle, the geographic neighborhoods in which the foreclosures are occurring, and the lender information on homes involved in the foreclosure process, including real estate owned homes.
4. Support job creation, substantial investments in the nation's critical physical and technological infrastructure, and deficit reduction by adopting fiscal policies with equitable corporate and individual taxation and a more equitable tax structure in the state of Washington.

We invite our faith communities to consider similar decisions and resolutions built on prayerful discernment and responsible financial practices. Ours is a small act, but one which we hope will have a ripple effect on deliberations by institutions and corporate entities wishing to act conscientiously for the common good in this pivotal economic crisis and to put the needs of human beings and human capital first.