

## CHURCHLETTER

Wyoming Association of Churches – On line News

MARCH 2006

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## CHURCH-STATE SYMPOSIUM IN CHEYENNE

“Protecting the Glass Crucible - The Struggle between Church and State in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” is the title of a special symposium scheduled on Tuesday night, MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup> at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Cheyenne. This symposium will examine the relationship between various governmental authorities and religious beliefs. It will review the American principle of the “separation of church and state” as set forth in the “establishment clause” of the First Amendment.

The Rev. Warren Murphy, WAC Director, will present a brief historical overview of how the First Amendment came about and how it has been put to the test over the years. Responses will be given by two attorneys; Steve Cranfill who serves as Cody City Attorney and Linda Burt of the American Civil Liberties Union. There will then be time for participant discussion.

This program will in no way advocate for a particular position regarding this sometimes emotional topic. It will rather point out the legal, cultural and religious complexities involved. WAC urges anyone in the Cheyenne area to attend and be a part of one of the few public opportunities to weigh in on this important topic.

## ROCK SPRINGS COMMUNITY NETWORKING

March will also see the year’s second “Community Networking” workshop which will be held MARCH 14<sup>TH</sup> in ROCK SPRINGS. The goal of the workshop is to build collaboration between government agencies, community organizations and faith based groups in order to solve important community issues. It is sponsored by WAC and Faith Initiatives of Wyoming. There is no cost for the workshop which will be held at the Evangelical Free Church, 125 Firestone Rd. in Rock Springs, and lunch will be provided. It begins at 10:00 a.m. and will conclude no later than 3:30 p.m. To register, contact [info@fiwy.org](mailto:info@fiwy.org) or call 307-634-7878 EXT 20.

## PRAYER SERVICE BEGINS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

On February 13<sup>th</sup>, WAC sponsored a Legislative Prayer Service which was held at 12:00 NOON in the Capitol Rotunda in Cheyenne following Governor Freudenthal’s Opening Address. Many legislators were part of the gathering of about 150 people who filled the rotunda and the balconies. Three legislators; Rep. Colin Simpson (Cody), Rep. Dan

Zwonitzer (Cheyenne) and Rep. Ann Robinson (Casper) participated in the liturgy while Ann Robinson and Rep .Bill Thompson (Green River) helped with the music.

In his homily, Bishop David Ricken of the Catholic Diocese of Cheyenne commended the value of public participation in government and reminded legislators of the importance in serving the poor. Prayers were offered for the work of the legislative session and for the state in general. The Rev. Rick Veit of Cheyenne coordinated the worship and was assisted by The Rev. Robert Schmidt of Cheyenne, The Rev. Su DeBree of Buffalo, and the Rev. Doug Goodwin of Sheridan. There is much talk about the “second annual” service next year. Our thanks to all who helped make this a success!

## SU DEBREE TO LEAVE WYOMING

At the WAC Board meeting, held February 13<sup>th</sup> in Cheyenne, the Rev. Su DeBree announced that she is accepting a call from the United Methodist Yellowstone Conference to become a District Superintendent in Montana. She will take up her new duties on July 1. The Rev. Tim Trippel of Worland, Vice Chair, has agreed to fill out the first year of Su’s term.

Su DeBree has been a key player in WAC’s recent re-organization and she has been the “glue” that kept things together. She will be missed but we wish her the best in her new ministry.

## WAC BOARD ACTIONS

Also at the February board meeting, members voted to assist the Lander Ministerial Association’s “One Stop Center” with administrative oversight until they obtain their necessary 501C-3 certification from the IRS. This program is designed to help people in need find their way through social service bureaucracy on their way to assistance. It could be a model program for other communities.

The board also spent an evening going through legislation proposed at the 2006 Budget Session. They agreed to pursue the following legislation:

- HB106 - Extend Domestic Violence Protection Orders
- HB46 - “Duty to Retreat” - Opposed to this bill and it died in House Judiciary Committee on 6-3 vote
- HB48 - Anti -bullying in schools
- HB91 - Increased mental health and substance abuse funding
- HB92 - Quality child care
- HB117 - Sales tax off food and utilities. This bill failed in Revenue Committee but may be considered as a budget amendment. This was our priority legislation.
- SF36 - Stronger Open Container Law
- SF49 - Ignition Interlock Systems
- Increased funding for Wildlife Trust Fund

Wayne Dvirnak was welcomed as the new American Baptist representative to the board.

Guests were Jack Russell of Cody and Mike Shonsey of Cheyenne who are assisting WAC in the legislative area.

## CAN WE TALK WORKSHOP

There will be another CAN WE TALK? Workshop March 10 and 11 in Sheridan. It will be held at the First Christian Church and will run from 5-9 PM on Friday March 10<sup>th</sup> and 8 AM to NOON on Saturday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. This is a very good introductory training on instituting drug prevention and sex education for youth. To register, go to [www.wyhc.org](http://www.wyhc.org) or contact Sharla Allen, Wyoming Health Council at 307-632-3640.

## PRAYERS

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Rev. Tim Solon on the death of his son, Patrick who died February 5<sup>th</sup> in Cheyenne. Tim has long been active with the WAC and recently served as our legislative liaison. Memorials for Patrick may be sent to either of the following organizations:

Make a Wish Foundation of Wyoming  
201 E. Second St.  
Casper, WY 82601

The Children's Hospital Foundation  
1056 East 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Denver, CO 80218

## HEAT AND EAT - NOT YET

For some time now the WAC has been working to remove the sales tax off the basic necessity of food in Wyoming. Many WAC members are working on getting signatures for a ballot initiative to do this. The legislature has an opportunity to pass this kind of legislation but they failed in their first opportunity. Rep. Ann Robinson (Casper) and several other legislators proposed HB117, known as the "Heat and Eat" bill, which would remove the sales tax from both food and utilities and restore lost funds to the local communities by tapping Wyoming's budget surplus. The House approved introduction of HB117 on a 49 - 9 vote. However, the Revenue Committee voted it down despite overwhelming support at the committee hearing. A recent statewide poll published in the Casper Star Tribune showed voters support this by a 73% figure.

The WAC has made this a priority legislative issue because it would help not only our poorest residents, but would especially benefit the working poor who are right on the financial edge and who do not (yet) qualify for welfare assistance. This would include many elderly residents as well as church members. But the legislature again seems to thank otherwise. It is also notable that there are several other bills working their way through the session that would give tax breaks to the energy industry. This becomes a statement about contemporary Wyoming. It is also a matter of justice unfulfilled.

As of this date not all is lost. Rep. Robinson hopes to add the sales tax removal as an amendment to the overall budget. This would have to happen in both the House and Senate. It's an uphill journey, but possible. The WAC urges you to contact your legislators and remind them that our state's bounty should be shared by all. If all fails in this session we will continue to support rounding up signatures to take this issue directly to the people. I am convinced this unfair and regressive tax will eventually be removed and justice will prevail.

Warren Murphy

The Wyoming Association of Churches, The Rev. Warren Murphy, Director and Pam Noesner, Administrative Assistant publishes this newsletter. We welcome your comments and suggestions. If you know of someone who would like to receive our publication, please email us at [wychurches@wyoming.com](mailto:wychurches@wyoming.com). If you do not wish to receive the ChurchLetter, simply email [wychurches@wyoming.com](mailto:wychurches@wyoming.com) and type "unsubscribe" in the subject line.