

# Faith United Against Tobacco



May 25, 2004

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
John Kerry for President, Inc.  
P.O. Box 77247  
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Senator Kerry:

We are writing to you as national leaders of America's faith community on behalf of our clergy and lay members throughout the country to strongly urge you to support effective national measures to reduce smoking, particularly among children. We in the faith community believe that our nation's leaders, and particularly the President of the United States, have a moral obligation to do all they can to protect Americans from the horrors of tobacco-caused death and illness. That is why we are sending this letter to you and to President George W. Bush.

The most important thing you could do as President to reduce tobacco addiction would be to work for the enactment of strong legislation supported by the public health community giving the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to regulate tobacco products. We find it incredible that the FDA can ensure the safety of everyday items like macaroni and cheese, but has no authority over tobacco, a product that kills over 400,000 Americans every year. We also urge you to actively pursue the federal lawsuit against the tobacco industry that was begun by the Clinton Administration and continued by the Bush Administration.

Finally, we ask you to support legislation to increase the national tobacco tax and use the money raised to increase tobacco prevention and cessation services and to fund health care expansion for children. The data is clear that increasing the tax on cigarettes is one of the most effective ways to keep children from smoking. That is why we urge you to endorse the recommendation by the Cessation Subcommittee of the Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health - of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) - calling for a \$2 per pack cigarette tax. Members of the Subcommittee, including HHS officials and other top public health leaders, recommended that at least 50 percent of the new revenue generated by this tax be earmarked for increasing access to cessation services for all Americans. Some of the revenue should also be used to provide economic transition assistance to tobacco farmers, including a quota buyout. When the national tobacco tax was last raised in 1997, the proceeds were used to help fund children's health insurance programs in the states that have done a lot of good but are now under great financial pressure. These programs could very much use additional federal money from a new tobacco tax increase to guarantee access to health care for as many children as possible.

Our clergy spends too much time burying mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers who die because they became addicted to tobacco products when they were young. We know all too well that the tobacco companies continue to spend billions of dollars to addict young and old to this deadly product. We also know that the federal government can reduce this addiction, particularly among vulnerable children, by fully regulating tobacco products, increasing the tax on cigarettes and expanding tobacco prevention and cessation services. For our children's sake, we urge you to do so.

This year is the fortieth anniversary of the landmark Surgeon General's Report that opened everyone's eyes to the horrors of tobacco addiction. Though we have made some progress in reducing tobacco use in this country, there are still far too many smokers, and far too many teenagers who become addicted to tobacco. We urge you to save as many children as possible from tobacco addiction by endorsing both full

FDA regulation of tobacco and a \$2 increase in the federal tobacco tax and by continuing the federal lawsuit against the tobacco industry. We would be grateful to know your position on these issues by June 30, 2004. We would also very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can all work together to protect our children from the horrors of tobacco addiction.

Sincerely,



James Winkler, General Secretary  
General Board of Church and Society  
United Methodist Church



Bishop Henry Williamson,  
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church



Dr. DeWitt Williams, Director  
Health Ministries, North American Division  
Seventh Day Adventists



Sarah Ward, President  
Woman's Christian Temperance Union



Karen Vagley, Director, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Julie Taylor, Executive Secretary for Children, Youth and Family Advocacy,  
Women's Division, GBGM, United Methodist Church.



Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed  
Secretary General  
Islamic Society of North America



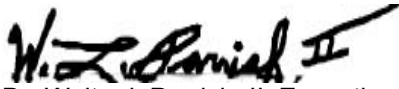
Rabbi David Saperstein, Director  
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism



Dr. Tyrone S. Pitts, General Secretary  
Progressive National Baptist Convention



Rev. Deborah L. Patterson, Executive Director  
International Parish Nurse Resource Center



Dr. Walter I. Parrish, II, Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of the South



Rev. Kristina Peterson, Global Action Chair  
Church Women United



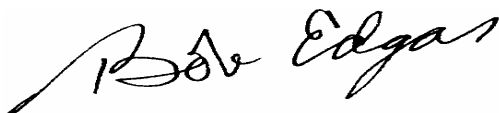
Phillip Jones, Director  
Brethren Witness/Washington Office,  
Church of the Brethren



Rev. Dr. Gary R. Gunderson  
Interfaith Health Program, Emory University



Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory, Director  
Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office



Rev. Bob Edgar, General Secretary  
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA



Rev. Michael H. Crosby, OFM Cap., Coordinator  
Tobacco Program  
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility



Roy Branson, Co-Chair  
Inter-Religious Coalition on Smoking or Health



Barbara Baylor, M.P.H.  
Minister for Health and Wellness  
United Church of Christ



Sharon Adkins, President  
Health Ministries Association