

An article written by Adam Gottesfeld appeared in *The Trenton Times*. Parts of this article are excerpted below:

Campaign puts faith in a smoke-free society

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PRINCETON BOROUGH - Religious sermons and public policy debate shared the same pulpit this weekend.

"Lord, teach us compassion for all those who share the air we breathe: casino workers, who go to work each day in rooms swarming with tiny particles of second-hand smoke," Patricia Sosa told the congregation at Princeton United Methodist Church on Sunday. Sosa, a consultant for the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, was reading the litany for a smoke-free Sabbath, part of the nation's first ever Smoke-Free Sabbath that took place in New Jersey this weekend.

Houses of worship across the state encouraged smokers to quit and advocated the benefits of healthy living. Religious leaders also asked members of their congregations to sign petitions favoring a proposed New Jersey Smoke Free Air Act, which seeks to prohibit smoking in most workplaces throughout the state.

"This legislation sends a strong message - that smoking cigarettes and exposure to second-hand smoke - is lethal," said Rev. Jack Johnson, the founder of the Interfaith Partnership Campaign against Tobacco. "The faith community is proud to support this legislation and just as importantly, we want to let our fellow parishioners know that they are not alone in their fight to quit smoking."

Johnson said one of the bill's biggest challenges comes from leaders of the state Democratic Party, who he said are under pressure from restaurant owners and tobacco companies to keep the bill from passing.

"Every religion holds sacred its commandment to help one's fellow man, and that is why over 100 houses of worship are participating in this call to prayer, study, and action as a show of solidarity to help those who smoke to quit, and to promote smoke-free communities statewide," Johnson said.

In his sermon, Johnson invoked the passage from Genesis that says that God breathed life into man. Man is God's creation, and smoking damages him, he preached.

"I looked at the Bible and couldn't find the commandment that thou shall not smoke and Jesus never said a word about the matter," he said. "It's an issue of our faith. It's not about you, it's not about me, it's not about us, it's about God's creation, and about what God has created us to be. We are created in the image of God."