

HEALTH CARE AND HOUSING ARE MORAL ISSUES

*At PIA's Annual Convention in January, the Reverend Scotty McLeman, Dean of Religious Life at Stanford University, delivered a keynote address about **Revitalizing Democracy as People of Faith. Below are some excerpts of his talk.***

[Regarding the November 2004 presidential elections] the equations according to the media became “religion equals right wing politics,” “secularism equals left wing politics,” and “moral values equal personal sexually-oriented matters...” But what about the incredibly compelling stories of hope you just heard from PIA members? Are not availabilities of affordable housing and health care moral issues? Are these merely secular matters? Are these issues owned by one political party and rejected by another?

Aren't these clearly universal, human issues to which all religions have always spoken? “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream,” cries the Jewish prophet Amos...Jesus' last instructions ...before his death are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, take care of the sick, and visit those in prison. One of the Five Pillars of Islam is social responsibility—caring for those in need not only individually, but [institutionally]. My own tradition, Unitarian Universalism, has always insisted on justice, equity and compassion...as an integral part of our religious life.

These are religious issues, not just secular issues. Our traditions speak to them directly and enjoin us to take concrete action in working on them. And American democracy from the beginning has been imbued with religious values, despite periodic claims to an impenetrable wall of separation between church and state.

Let us give thanks in 2005 for Peninsula Interfaith Action, which stands in this religious tradition of revitalizing democracy in America, in its own time and place.