Dear Friends,

"Community organizing…builds personal relationships across racial, ethnic, religious and class lines. It empowers marginalized communities. *And it does these things better than any kind of social justice activism that I know," s*ays ethicist Gary Dorrien, expert on the social gospel movement. Our congregation has been involved in community organizing for decades through Durham CAN, and we just completed one of the crucial steps in the organizing process: listening sessions, that activity when all our member organizations listen to their constituencies to determine CAN's priorities for the next 2-3 years. Decisions about CAN's agenda are not top-down, rather the agenda comes straight from the voices of member institutions.

Over the last couple of months, 94 people in our church took part in listening sessions, joining 1200 others in CAN institutions. We considered such questions such as, "If you could fix anything about Durham, what would it be?" and "What keeps you up at night about our community?" Our congregation's top four priorities were **schools, housing, immigration issues, and violence.** At a recent meeting with representatives of all Durham CAN institutions, we learned that our top concerns coincide perfectly with the concerns of all the other groups.

True to the CAN organizing process, four Actions Teams were immediately formed to focus on each of these four priorities. These teams will do a lengthy, in-depth study of the problem, both to understand it and to discern specific, winnable ways to address it. A few years ago, in the last round of listening sessions, poverty emerged as a priority, and the Poverty Action Team chose universal free lunch in all Durham Public Schools as the winnable issue. Similarly, gun violence was one of the priorities and the Gun Violence Action Team advocated for an Office of Survivor Care that will offer resources to families of homicide victims and to people who have lived through a gunshot wound. Both efforts were successful.

We have important elections coming up this Fall, including three City Council members and the Mayor. The Action Teams will be busy over the next few months deciding which specific issues we will ask the candidates to endorse. CAN does not endorse candidates, we ask candidates to endorse our agenda! It will be a busy time as well as an energizing time to see local democracy in action. When many are concerned about the future of democratic principles at a national level, CAN is a place where we can participate in a citizen-led process of advocating for social justice as people of faith.

There are at least three ways you can participate in CAN. One, you can join an Action Team and take a deep dive into issues involving schools, housing, immigration issues, or violence. Two, you can join our congregation's Core Team. Three, you can ask to be notified when CAN calls for a large turn out at a City Council meeting, a press conference, a large delegates assembly, or any other event where we are making a public show of our strength.

For more information, please contact me or a member of the Durham CAN Core Team: Sharon Hirsch, Tom Bacon, Howard Eisenson, Kathy Krahenbuhl, Lea Bingham, Jane Williams, or Dan Hudgins.

Susan Dunlap