

William J. Barber II awarded MacArthur “genius” grant

The Moral Mondays and Poor People’s Campaign leader looks at public policy through the lens of moral values.

by [Religion News Service staff](#) and [Christian Century staff](#)

This article appears in the [November 7, 2018](#) issue.



William Barber II. Photo by Josh Rushing via Creative Commons license.

William J. Barber II, architect of the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina and leader of the Poor People’s Campaign, has won a MacArthur “genius” grant.

Barber, 55, pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina, will receive \$625,000 paid over five years as one of 25 recipients announced in October.

“My work, growing out of a deep religious and spiritual foundation, [is] to help people look at public policy through the lens of our deepest moral values, both constitutionally and religiously,” Barber said in a video statement. “How do we talk about public policy without just getting into the normal right-left discussions?”

Earlier this year Barber, along with Liz Theoharis, resurrected the Poor People's Campaign—first organized by Martin Luther King Jr. 50 years ago—to address systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation. The campaign held 40 days of demonstrations nationwide and continues organizing low-income Americans for political change, leaders wrote in an email.

In 2013, Barber began a series of demonstrations called “Moral Mondays,” intended to challenge policies in North Carolina that cut unemployment benefits, health-care funding, and environmental regulations.

“He is effective at building unusually inclusive fusion coalitions that are multiracial and interfaith, reach across gender, age, and class lines, and are dedicated to addressing poverty, inequality, and systemic racism,” the MacArthur Foundation said of Barber.

It is not the first time the MacArthur Foundation has awarded its prestigious fellowships to a clergy person: J. Bryan Hehir, a Roman Catholic priest and now a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School, won the award in 1984.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “People: William J. Barber II.”