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By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

The Ohio Church of God in Christ Coalition of Bishops has united to make sure all their members are registered to vote. Monday, during a press conference at the Cathedral Church of God in Christ where Bishop FE Perry is the pastor, they launched the “Getting Souls to the Polls” campaign.

This campaign is a massive statewide voter registration initiative to fight the voter suppression laws throughoutOhio. The “Getting Souls to the Polls” is a non-partisan effort to register, educate, and mobilize voters.

“We are not telling anyone who to vote for or endorsing anyone,” said Perry. The Ohio Bishops andChurchofGodin Christ pastors represent over 300 plus churches in the state and have empowered their members to vote, but they must first register.

“We know the right to vote is an inalienable right extended to all qualified citizens of the United States and enforced by law in 1965 with the Voter Rights Act and we want to make sure our members help deliver Ohio,” said Bishop David Herron Sr.

During the press conference, the bishops layed out their game plan for this initiative. Their goal is to make sure everyone registered to vote, first. Second, they want to make sure they are educated on the important issues in the upcoming election thus prepared to vote for their choice of candidates and issues.

Third, they want voter mobilization, which is a plan to move all their members to the various voting destinations throughout the state. “We have determined it as a social and civic imperative to educate and aide our constituents on being fully empowered and to move them to operate within their right which is the right to vote,” said Herron.

This is the first time that all bishops have united for any political cause. “This election is crucial forOhioand we have to do our part to make everyone aware of why they are trying to suppress our vote,” said Bishop Edward T. Cook.

It has been clear that Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted brought attention to the state by trying to eliminate voting hours. It even caused President Barack Obama to file a lawsuit against the state ofOhio. Democrats have been fighting Husted on the laws such as voter-list purges, early-voting curbs, and photo-identification.

“In Ohio, voting rights are under attack and they continue to pass voter suppression laws under the notion of stopping voter fraud. The Ohio Bishops are standing firm behind the need to make everyone aware of their right to vote and the importance to vote,” said Bishop Clifford Kimbrough.

“In the past, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called voting the foundation stone for political action. Sadly, and I say sadly, we have seen that foundation weaken in recent years due to voter suppression and other intimidation tactics. The Ohio Coalition of Bishops is committed to insuring everyone with the right to vote inOhiohas the ability to exercise that right,” said Perry.

Husted is determined to suppress the vote and even dismissed two who tried to go against his wishes. “The secretary of suppression, Jon Husted, he and his cronies have got a plan and that is to steal this election. And by golly, we’re not going to let that happen,” said Tom Ritchie Sr., who was fired by Husted in a dispute over early voting as was fellow Democratic member of the Montgomery County Board of Elections, Dennis Lieberman.

“We are covering 88 counties with our churches in Ohio and we plan to educate them about early voting and assist anyway we can. It is clear voter ID laws can change opportunities for many voters to come out,” said Perry.

TheChurchofGodin Christ was founded in 1907 and is the largest Pentecostal denomination. The Ohio Coalition of Bishops are made up of Bishop F.E. Perry, Ohio South Jurisdiction; Bishop Clifford Kimbrough, Ohio Northwest Jurisdiction; Bishop David Herron Sr., Ohio Central Jurisdiction; Bishop Beauford Terry, Ohio North East Jurisdiction; Bishop Emmitt Nevels Sr., Ohio West Jurisdiction; and Bishop Edward Cook, Ohio North First Jurisdiction.