



United Methodist
Church – North
Carolina
Conference

Board of Church
and Society

This series provides congregations and individuals the skills to build and deploy justice ministries and advocacy methods. Other methods in this series include:

**Building relationships with elected representatives*

**Writing a letter or email to your elected representative*

**Writing a letter to the press, blog or website*

**Organizing a rally or protest meeting*

**Building a congregational justice ministry*

**Proposing legislation*

**Parish based Community Organizing*

**Creating a Conference Resolution*

**Asset Based Community Development*

**Challenging legislators*

**Community Listening*

The Board of Church and Society provides advocacy and justice programs for congregations.

<https://nccumc.org/christianformation/church-and-society/>

Advocating UMC Elected Representatives

The Challenge

Elected representatives at any level of government make promises to the public to uphold and work for those public policy issues they believe are derived from the public they represent. They also inform the public of their own views and those views draw supporters or detractors. Some elected representatives disclose their religious affiliation and use it to disclose their public policy opinions or ideology. There are a number of representatives in Congress and in the NC General Assembly (GA) who are United Methodists, and whereas the UMC holds positions on a wide range of public policy issues, some of these representatives hold positions diametrically different from those the UMC holds. The challenge is to help these representatives to accept or propagate positions close to those held by the UMC as described in the Book of Resolutions and the Social Principles.

This advocacy approach is to track the voting patterns of UMC representatives in Congress and the NC GA and seek to advocate the UMC public policy positions with them. This will hopefully ensure that they would then vote on public policy issues that have been informed by UMC derived positions. This approach seeks to build a relationship with each representative over time and persuade them to follow UMC positions.

Scope of this work

The intent is to focus on Congressional and NC GA UMC member representatives. Each UMC member would “adopt” a representative closest to their residence and follow the Advocacy Process described here in a disciplined way. Getting others to join in this process is welcomed.

(Note. For the most part UMC positions on public policy matters are clear, however there are some social policy issues that the UMC remains divided on, namely abortion, gay marriage, and LGBTQ issues. These issues require a deeper level of discernment.)

Intent of this Advocacy Approach

The intent is to get all UMC representatives to vote in patterns advocated by the UMC. If they don't, the intent is to expose the voting records of these representatives to their constituencies in order to apply the use of Relational Power to get others to inform them of their needs so that voting patterns would change. It is known that many people vote for candidates who advocate for issues not in their own best interests. Why people do this is not known, but much of this is driven by fear, disinformation, ignorance, cynicism, distrust of other candidates, unfounded belief in candidates and much more. So part of the intent is to expose candidates who claim one position and vote against that claim thus misleading their constituents. Example: *“I want everyone to have access to affordable health care!!” Then they vote to dismantle or reduce that access to affordable health care, or vote to reduce the budgets of services that provide health care.* These contradictions are often ignored by voters to their own detriment.

Advocacy Process Goals

This process has the following goals-

- To engage with the representative and exert influence in a way that gets the representative to vote on public policy issues in accordance with UMC public policy positions.
- To inform UMC constituents of the voting positions of their UMC member representatives.

ADVOCACY BUILDING

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Representatives

- To empower constituents to take advocacy positions that influence their representatives in the direction of UMC positions.
- To use Relational Power to change or affect representative voting patterns to reflect UMC positions.
- To place pressure on representatives that regularly vote on positions diametrically different from UMC positions.

Advocacy Process

Step 1 Self Education and Data Collection

- Obtain a copy of the UMC Social Principles and Book of Resolutions, study them and discern your own positions on all the issues contained therein. Select the issues you wish to focus on and write down your main positions on those issues.
- Obtain a list of your Senatorial and House representatives at the Congressional and NC General Assembly levels. Establish their religious affiliation.
- If their religious affiliation is not United Methodist, feel free to select other representatives you wish to track and engage with. Go to the following web sites to establish the voting records and positions on issues of the selected representatives. www.votesmart.org and <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/NC>
- See also <http://www.ncleg.net/representation/WhoRepresentsMe.aspx>
- Browse these sites and build a profile of their positions and voting records and compare those with the UMC Social Principles and your own.
- Build a plan to routinely track the selected representative's actions, position statements, public statements and voting record. The web sites mentioned above keeps track of those voting positions.

Step 2 Building Relationships

- The **initial relationship building process** is to start writing simple letters requesting information, particularly the representative's position on a single issue. This will establish a basic relationship, and if you write a regular letter, the staff of the representative will begin to recognize your name. These initial letters should not disclose your position on these issues at this point, but are used to reflect the areas of concern you may have. A typical response will come from a staff member and will be a standard letter. The more you write, the easier it will be to go to the next step, advocating for your position, or advocating against the representatives position.
- Use your tracking system to build a voting profile of the representative. Use the profile to continually question the content and motives of the representative.
- When you feel you have a series of responses that tell you that they have noticed you, build an argument to visit the representative to discuss an issue.
- The key is to encourage the representative to vote in yours (and the UMC's) direction, so anything they do that you feel is positive, give positive feedback.
- Send your representative a copy of the Social Principles and ask him/her to view their voting patterns in the light of those principles.
- Every time you write to the representative, quote relevant parts of the Social Principles.
- See the Briefing documents on "How to write a letter to your Representative", and "Building Relationships with Elected Representatives"
- Form small Issue Task Teams in your congregation, they can be as small as 3 – 5 members, but limit them to about 15 people per issue.
- Get those members onto the Data gathering process you have started, assign them to follow the voting and position patterns of the representative.
- Build short summary papers of those positions comparing them with the Social Principles.

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Education
Advocacy

Step 3 Building Relational Power

- The use of power to put pressure on the representative has deep Biblical roots. Relational Power is the collaborative and collective use of power by coalitions and groups that creates pressure and a high level of visibility
- Given that there is the possibility that you disagree on most things with your representative, sterner advocacy methods will be required. At this point going it alone will not provide the visibility or clout you need, so engaging other members of your congregation in bolder action will be necessary.
- Organize Issue Forums in your congregation.
- Organize public Issue Forums and invite the general public. Get an elected representative to participate and construct an agenda of listening and proclaiming.
- Organize Community Listening sessions to garner the view of ordinary citizens. (See the Briefing document on this topic)
- Build small coalitions with existing advocacy or community organizations to build strength in numbers. Collaborate with other congregations to build small collaborative groups on issues.
- Share the voting records of your representatives with everyone you have a relationship with. Build cases for challenging the representative.

Step 4 Using Relational Power

- Define the issues you will focus on that will improve society. This will include issues you feel your representative does not support. The goal is to change the voting pattern of the representative, or get them voted out of office and be replaced by someone who supports your agenda.
- Make the unacceptable views of the representative as visible as possible through the press, any web page or blog, in public forums you have organized. The key is to force the representative to change his/her vote, or to build a profile of the representative that becomes unacceptable to the general public and they get voted out.
- Organize a voter registration campaign in your neighborhood/congregation.
- Meet with the representatives as often as is possible, get to know them as people, support them when they do the right thing, but hold them to the Social Principles when they don't. Make sure they know who you are, and that you have a very cordial and respectful relationship. Be clear about what you want, and what you don't want, but balance the advocacy to cover both.

The Christ-like way is a higher standard, beyond ethics and values, so we need to discern that high standard to enable you to speak with authority and justice with your representative. Be above partisan ideology.

For additional assistance with any advocacy initiatives contact the Board of Church and Society bheyms@mindspring.com (512) 656-9611



