



Understanding Congregational Human Assets

The Challenge

As with all voluntary institutions, getting volunteers fully committed to doing the work of the institution is hard. Getting UMC members to do justice work is even harder. People resonate with the idea that injustice in the world exists, that people need help to overcome injustice as it affects them, that even to provide help to those people is a good idea, and agree that removing the cause of suffering and injustice is essential. The engagement of those same people in the efforts to eliminate injustice is typically very low in comparison to the efforts to relieve suffering through charitable work.

Some definitions and paradigms to consider.

First, an idea to classify levels of engagement. Consider this model. The percentages here are illustrative, but the assumption is that we try to raise the percentages in the direction of getting more people to the “Committed” level. We will call this the “*Engagement Profile*”

Engagement level	% in Congregation	Description	Example
Disengaged	>50%	Have no interest, or have alternative interests not applicable to the one proposed. Totally disengaged from justice or mercy issues. May include people vehemently opposed to a UMC stated position.	Displays no interest, never show up to justice or mercy related educational events, and say no when asked. May show interest in church administrative committees and worship events.
Interested	< 50%, > 30%	Have a new or limited interest in the topic driven by a curiosity or a mild interest in Christian mercy and justice. However leaves the real work to others. This includes a growing number elderly formally more engaged, but now with age taking its toll.	Listens to reports or discussions, participates but does not seek further engagement. Will attend a briefing discussion, but will not participate in advocacy action of any sort. Some will be willing to a simple advocacy task like signing a petition. Some may resist and a few will detract or sabotage the initiative.
Learning more	<30% >15%	Seeks further information to test own limits of engagement interest. Must be invited personally to seek more, and must be encouraged.	Attends workshops and seminars but does not express an opinion outside of a general recognition that the issue is important or serious. May perform a simple act of advocacy work like writing a letter to a legislator.
Supportive	>15% <5%	Will support others committed to this initiative or topic. Do not fully commit because of other issues they commit to.	Will provide funds, attend events and show up at advocacy type events or initiatives, but do not lead or express an opinion openly “from the front”. May offer verbal support to others who are clearly more committed. Will express support for the initiative values.
Committed	< 5%	Fully committed to executing the ideas and programs concerning this topic. Always the same people.	Engages with others seeking their full participation or engagement. Propagates the initiative slogan or mantra, prepared to work hard at getting others support, will openly proclaim the issue in public. Regularly attends initiative meetings and advocacy efforts.

United Methodist Church – North Carolina Conference

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

**Building a relationship with your elected representative*

**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/>

ADVOCACY BUILDING

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Our challenge is to get every congregation member to do one act of justice deliverance on a regular basis. And that is the minimalist view, ideally every congregation member should follow the call of the Gospel and be fully engaged ALL THE TIME. But we hope for too much, so being realistic, let's focus on "one act of justice deliverance", and a lower level of more extensive support from a more ardent few.

More specifically the problem we face is one of the seemingly visible **interest** on the part of some, but the follow up with real action is very low. Most congregations consist of concerned individuals, however for many, the level of their concern is one of limited interest for the most part. Our challenge is to find more people with a deeper commitment to the levels of justice work God calls us all to be engaged in.

We suspect that there is a normal distribution of people across this range of levels, with the natural small number at the committed end, and most around the "Learning more" level.

As an example for any single justice issue, say access to universal health care, the number at the 'committed' level is likely to be less than 1% of the congregation. However the number who may be persuaded to do one single act of advocacy like send a standard letter prepared for them to a legislator may come from the "Interested" ranks and may number around 10 – 20% of the congregation.

Some may be "Disinterested" in certain issues, and be totally committed to others.

There will be many more folks at the higher levels who are engaged in "church work" than in justice or mercy related work. Getting them "converted" is the challenge.

<u>Commitment Level</u>	<u>Anticipated engagement level</u>	<u>Individual action</u>	<u>Church action to motivate individual Action</u>
Basic	>50% - 80%	Sign petitions, write letters, vote.	Draft letters and petitions for people to sign and send to legislators
Minimal	>30 - <50%	The above plus.. Attend church run briefing and educational sessions,	Create public briefing events, create petitions and opportunities for people to attend that demonstrate a point of view.
Learning and being curious	>15 - <30%	The above plus...	Create a series of learning events, visits to appropriate institutions, visiting with advocacy experts, training in advocacy methods, issue briefings with experts, visit with legislators, create small projects.
Seriously supportive	>5 - <15%	The above plus...	Provide support to advocacy team with research, provide training in advocacy methods, draft advocacy approaches for review, attend outside data gathering meetings on issue, high level of attendance at issue team meetings.
Totally Committed	<5%	The above plus...	Initiate substantive advocacy strategies that engage this level in long term direct advocacy work with legislative bodies at every level.

This document was created by Brian Heymans while he served on the Board of Church and Society.

