



# Mobilizing your Congregation

(Note Read this paper along with *Understanding Congregational Human Assets, and Education Advocacy*)

When we talk about members of a UMC being engaged in some form of advocacy, we have to be realistic. Everybody is on a spiritual journey, even if they don't know it or if they don't seem to have a route plan. Many are engaged in doing "church work" and are fully engaged, so we cannot expect their level of engagement in mercy or justice issues to be high. We also cannot expect families to be fully engaged, but we can expect one family member to show more than an "interest" level

So let's whittle all these members down to a realistic level. Let's say we have 300 family units, plus 200 singles making up an 800 membership profile. (We need to check this profile, so ignore the inaccuracy of the numbers and get with the idea here!!) That would mean 500 justice action elements made up as follows

- **Basic Level** 500 actions at the basic level once per year. These efforts may be created for them.
- **Minimal level** 200 people regularly attending education events dealing with injustice issues.
- **Learning and growing Interest level** On any short or long term advocacy issue at least 100 people doing more than just a single basic advocacy act, like attending public meetings of local government elected officials, helping get out the vote, supporting an issue at the legislative level
- **Seriously Supportive** 50 members on a task force or committee providing direct support to organize, propagate,
- **Committed** 25 members at the core of every issue, building, planning, evangelizing, educating, organizing, challenging!!!

We must expect that members of justice related committees to be at least at the "supportive level" or strongly headed that way. The committees or groups must create the opportunities for others to be engaged at whatever level. Every year the church should be looking for ways to increase these engagement numbers.

## Advocacy Approaches and Methods

There are a large number of advocacy methods and approaches that individuals and congregations can use to deploy justice practices. This list below may be an oversimplification but it does serve to illustrate the wide range of service possibilities by congregations. This may not be a complete or even accurately described list. See the detailed list at the end of this paper.

1. **Advocating for systems or political leadership change** – running voter registration and get out the vote campaigns to change the legislative representation. This is still the most effective way to get laws that oppress changed, you have to change the representation so that they can change the law.
2. **Proactive advocacy** – high level advocacy using experts lobbying to change the law, thus establishing justice based legal frameworks.
3. **Responsive Advocacy** – wide range of responsive and defensive advocacy to educate communities to resist or protest bad law; to organize resistance to the deployment of punitive action against targeted groups; to advocate and lobby for just treatment of those whose immigration status is in question by petitioning lawmakers; to communicate to the general public and empower support for or resistance to unjust immigration practices.
4. **Advanced law services** – Attorney based services providing full legal services to members and the general public in a variety of affordable
5. **Basic law services** –Service similar to the above but at a less complex level provided by para-legals or volunteers with some basic training on simple family related cases.

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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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6. **Information services** – Know your rights education; website information; congregation based workshops and information session.
7. **Sanctuary** – Churches providing sanctuary for the vulnerable, crime victims and felons completing their sentence and setting up all forms of support services and legal aid while in sanctuary.
8. **Advanced hospitality** – Congregations organizing formally established resources and advice services for daily living to help the homeless acclimatize into new surroundings. Formal help to the chronic homeless, those homeless because of a disaster, asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable immigrants with disputed standing.
9. **Simple Hospitality** – Congregations and individuals providing basic hospitality, friendship and welcoming support that is organized and intentional. This is the basis of all advocacy, to get to know people who need justice so that we can understand their suffering better. Advocacy works better when we fully understand the plight of the oppressed.

### How this must be done

Getting people to grow in their engagement is a lifelong task, and is actually the church's responsibility, with a special responsibility on the clergy to provide the spiritual and educational step ladder to get this done. The nature of the work is organizational, or social engineering. One method is Community Organizing, or a variant of it, and it should include some of these steps.

- Build and asset map of all human assets in the church and their areas of expertise and personal capabilities. Identify those who are currently "Committed and Supportive", they will be the justice leaders.
- Form the small institutions of interest and power (teams, task forces, committees, call them whatever) and authorize them to get on with it. Send them out as Jesus did, with authority.
- They build the Justice plan for the issue, PLUS they build the process to get others engaged at every level described above.
- Have one-on-one meetings and small house meetings to create commitment.
- Start educating on the issue and training people in advocacy skills
- Form advocacy initiatives that when coordinated have a multiple approaches that target specific elements of an issue that deserve radical change. Multiple advocacy approaches are necessary to build a **power base** to force action.

All churches have a members and adherents with a wide range of education and life and occupational skills that use these skills to do a range of public service, volunteer, or even have jobs that serve others in secular ways. Many of these skills can be modified to work in other related mercy, charity and justice type activities, however most get very little guidance from the church as to how to deploy these talents in ways that do provide resources to issues requiring mercy or justice ministry responses. There are also a wide range of levels of commitment to public policy or charitable issues, and we need to find out everybody's talents, skills and level of commitment.

Many are directly engaged in careers or work that provide social services or societal support for the common good, either directly or indirectly. Some may be academics who also indirectly support justice level efforts simply by the nature of their qualifications. Sadly most of their efforts are focused through their employment, and they garner little advocacy support from the church, either directly or indirectly. More thought must be given to building collaborative strategies to harness this resource. The initiative to identify these human resources within each UMC is essential.

The following chart profiles some of these categories of people.

	<u>Types</u>	<u>What others can do to engage with them</u>
1	People who work in the advocacy industry, lobbying, propagating legal solutions and seeking justice solutions to complex social justice issues. They can provide the church and other individuals' opportunities to do advocacy work. They can also educate the congregation in the ways of influencing public policy.	*Help them draft legal solutions. *Recommend legal and legislative options to address justice issues. *Attend advocacy events created by the subjects to the left. *Write letters of support for the issues they represent
2.	People working in government institutions may be limited in their ability to perform advocacy actions because of their status, BUT could use their Christian values to advocate indirectly by positively affecting other people's understanding of public policy. Their positions may make it difficult to design social policy, but they can educate others as to what that policy is so that they can make advocacy choices. They can also act as whistle blowers where they see corruption and injustice occurring, regardless of the legality. Some may have clear public policy creation authority, and should exercise that authority with Christ-like justice in mind. Some only execute or deploy policy, and should do so similarly to that described above.	Others can "hear" policy injustices and design advocacy strategies to influence policy makers. Advocacy can be writing letters to legislators, building support groups, public protest, organizing others to advocate and so on.
3.	People working in for-profit businesses in roles where they have influence in the formation of employment or corporate responsibility policy, and where they can influence the treatment of other employees and the public. These would include managers and leaders.	The effort should be directed to help these leaders to make more ethical decisions regarding the employment practices of a company, if not in the policy, at least in the execution of policy in such a way that it is deemed ethical and more just.
4.	People working in for-profit businesses who have little or no influence on corporate policy or the company's public policy.	Sometimes they become aware of injustice in the workplace and should bring this to the attention of those in authority. They should examine their own ethical positions with regard to who they work for. Is this company acting as a good corporate citizen? What is their public or social responsibility policy?
5.	Academics of every persuasion. They provide education, reason, analysis skills, expertise where appropriate, motivate students to also be engaged, orchestrate the opening of doors to other experts.	Learn from them. Provide advocacy support for the causes represented by these experts.
6.	People working in non-profit charitable or social service agencies benefitting specific indigent categories. Where they have status to influence public policy they should do so. They should seek public and church member support for their cause.	Learn from them. Provide advocacy support for the causes represented by these experts.
	Volunteers at non-profit charitable institutions including the church. Educate the public about the cause or institution. Seek support and other volunteers	Others should provide advocacy support to this cause.
	Your everyday church member who may claim to be in no place of influence or have any special knowledge, or may be restricted by age or personal circumstance.	The church should regularly create opportunities for all categories of people to perform at least one simple act of advocacy or support for a just cause. This would mean creating petitions, public events, drafting standard protest letters for many to use, providing travel to public meetings and events and so on. All these activities would place means into people's hands that they would have little excuse to refuse to do.

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



