



Advocacy Strategies

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 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 Strategies

The intent of this paper is to describe some forms of advocacy the church and individuals can undertake.

Guiding Principles

1. **Gospel based advocacy** – read your Bible, all the standards of action are there.
2. **Listen to the oppressed** – they know what they need
3. **Do it properly** – failed advocacy efforts are an injustice when we succumb to mediocrity
4. **Focus** – don't try to solve world hunger
5. **Understand the total system that affects this issue** – there's more to this issue than meets the eye
6. **Get professional advice on the complex stuff** – be smart, listen to good advice
7. **Don't panic or over-react**, - you'll just create more fear

The Christian Duty to Dissent

Jesus was not the first Jewish dissenter of his era. The prophets before him railed against the establishment religious institution of their day, the Temple and its inability to secure the rights of the poor and disadvantaged. Jesus certainly made it clear that he considered the Temple of his day a corrupt collaborator of an evil invasive power, and that it did not follow the Torah and its call to do justice.

We are called to advocate on behalf of those who suffer and are oppressed by all forms of injustice. We are called to advocate against that injustice, whether perpetrated by individuals or an institution, especially a government institution, which should be acting in the interests of the people. All too often we have allowed our institutions to do our sinning for us. We should be advocating to institutions to implement justice at every level of society, so this paper deals with advocacy, and its many forms.

Advocacy Defined

The word Advocate is derived from the Latin word *vocare* which means "to call". An advocate can be understood as "one who pleads the cause of another". Advocacy is our calling. We, as Christians, are called to speak up, and to "resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves."

Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Advocacy can include many activities that a person or organization undertakes including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research or conducting an exit poll or the filing of an amicus brief.

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 and advocacy possibilities by congregations. This may not be a complete or even accurately described list.

1. **Advocating for systems or political leadership change – Advocacy that changes the players that make unjust law and practice.**
 - a. 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.
 - b. Connect with voter registration organizations to get training and support. www.youcanvote.org
 - c. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/NC>
2. **Proactive advocacy – Advocacy that changes Systems, Policies and their deployment high level**
 - a. Advocacy using experts lobbying to change the law, thus establishing justice based legal frameworks.
 - b. Get congregations to study the law and advocate for improvements. Run small groups led by experts who will educate people on the opportunities for improvement in the law.
 - c. Write letters or email Federal and State representatives offering **specific** improvements to the law.
 - d. Attendance at state legislative sessions, Committee meetings and hearings.
 - e. Get congregation members to join with other advocacy coalitions and groups to make visible the needs to change the law.
 - f. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/NC>
 - g. <http://www.ncleg.net/representation/WhoRepresentsMe.aspx>
3. **Responsive Advocacy – Advocacy that defends current just law and practice.**
 - a. Advocacy that prevents the development of unjust law and practice wide range of responsive and defensive advocacy to educate communities to resist or protest bad law;
 - b. 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.
 - c. Communicate to the general public and empower support for or resistance to unjust immigration practices.
 - d. Advocacy that defends and protects people from unjust law and practice by speaking out loudly at public meetings, rallies and protest marches.
 - e. Advocacy that prevents bad law from being enacted at state and county levels
 - f. Attendance at state legislative sessions, Committee meetings and hearings.
 - g. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/NC>
 - h. <http://www.ncleg.net/representation/WhoRepresentsMe.aspx>
4. **In the case of Immigration Advocacy as an example.... here are some concrete ways to become engaged.**
 - **Advanced Immigration law services** – Advocacy that provides services to people to properly use and benefit from just laws and uses attorney based services providing full services.
 - The UMC has an agency called Justice for our Neighbors (JFON) which helps establish attorney based low cost legal services to immigrants. JFON clinics are established in host churches.
 - Call for the Annual Conference to initiate and fund JFON clinics in key areas.
 - **Basic law services** – Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) clinic with trained para-legal assisting with simple family related cases.
 - In the event of undocumented people being arrested and deported and being separated from their families who are citizens or have legal status, provide support legal services that:
 - Enable families to assign the responsibility of care of dependents by signing
 - Powers of Attorney,
 - health care powers of attorney,
 - formally appointing others to foster care those dependents,
 - provide authority over financial resources, and

- other assignment legal prerogatives that will protect the rights of dependents and other left behind.
- **Information services** – Know your rights education; website information; congregation based workshops and information sessions.
 - <https://www.nwirp.org/resources/know-your-rights/>
 - <https://3.basecamp.com/3438115/buckets/2601452/vaults/374688686>
- **Sanctuary** – Advocacy that provides protection and support to those oppressed by bad law and practice Churches providing sanctuary for the vulnerable and setting up all forms of support services and legal aid while in sanctuary.
 - <http://sanctuarydmv.org/>
 - <https://3.basecamp.com/3438115/buckets/2601452/vaults/374688686>
- **Engagement at legal and immigrant organization services as volunteers** – enhancing the capacity of immigrant service organizations such as Church World Services, which has a law clinic but also offers support services for refugees.
 - Join churches or groups that provide legal services to immigrants
 - Learn how to run English as Second Language classes (ESL)
- **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.
- **Simple Hospitality** – Congregations and individuals providing basic hospitality, friendship and welcoming support that is organized and intentional.
 - Invite refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants to especially arranged events of hospitality and care that show people love and friendship.
 - Hold informative sessions for congregation members that reduce fears people have of immigrants.

Building an Advocacy Case

Answer the following questions to build the case for undertaking advocacy work on a particular issue. Use the Matrix below to determine the range and target of your advocacy strategy.

- What about this issue concerns you?
- What are some facts or elements that give cause for concern or are simply unjust?
- What do you like about this issue?
- What do think God would say about this? Use the Biblical narrative to uncover God’s intent about creating a just world.
- What does the United Methodist Church say about this? Refer to the Social Principles.
- What would you like to see? What is your vision of the end game that reflects a just response?
- What do you think needs to happen to improve or change to eliminate this injustice?
- Who has the power to change public policy? Who do you have to influence?
- What is your power base or capacity to bring change to this situation?
- Create some ideas about what you, or a group of you, could do to:-
 - create awareness about this issue
 - gather more support for this cause
 - train people to advocate for this issue
 - train yourself in advocacy methods
 - build congregational capacity to advocate collectively.

Use this matrix to build a comprehensive approach to advocacy in your congregation or institution. Remember that you need to build all the facts about the issue, and build organizational capacity so that you have people with you to build power to act. The journey below suggests you build **Awareness** in your constituency, then **Educate** deeper to be able to **Discern** an advocacy strategy, **Proclaim** your intent to draw more support, then deploy that strategy to reduce harm through responsive **Advocacy acts of Mercy and Charity**, followed by **Advocacy acts of Justice to restore Justice and to prevent future injustice**.

Target audience	Congregations/Districts	The Victims of Injustice Families, children, educators, immigrants etc	General Public, Policy makers, Public officials.
1. Awareness <i>Listening, sharing, participating with others</i>	Create a forum to speak and listen to stories about this issue. Basic facts about the injustice; Study the Biblical narrative about the issue.	Providing basic legal information; brochures; social media information; and distribute this information to victims	Learn about the law governing this issue; learn about the state budget; establish public forums to listen. Build a relationship with your lawmaker.
2. Education <i>Providing "just" knowledge and skills</i>	Study the current state of the law and its enforcement; look for evidence of unfairness and injustice; listen to real stories and get the facts.	Share information about the legal process affecting people subject to injustice; legal rights information and briefings; provide opportunities to share stories.	Inform public of problems at your school through letters to the press; letters to the press; letters of advocacy to elected representatives.
3. Discernment <i>Building advocacy skills</i>	Empowering/educating congregations to research and examine the issues. Gather lots of data. Build multiple advocacy strategies to suit each issue	Run lots of listening sessions with parents, teachers and administrators to gather facts and problem solve. Seek out the solutions required by those subject to injustice.	Start building a relationship with your local elected representative. Find out their voting patterns on relevant issues.
4. Proclamation <i>Declaring justice</i>	Let the community know about what you find, the problems and the opportunities for mobilization. Declaring injustices; collaborate with other advocacy groups. Preach justice.	Find leaders among these groups to build a power base with them and within themselves.	Build some form of basic policy you require to be implemented about the issue and declare this to your your state representatives.
5. Advocacy <i>Acts of Mercy and Charity</i>	Create support groups for the victims in your local congregation. Provide coaching for families, plus coaching in parenting responsibilities for disadvantaged children.	Supporting victims through mercy programs. Support help agencies in their efforts to improve resources.	Deepen you relationship with elected representatives and keep them informed about the state of things through letters, petitions, briefing sessions, and face to face discussions.
6. Advocacy <i>Acts of Justice</i>	Mobilizing congregations to advocate to improve the application of constitutional law; vote for candidates who support improved public services.	Mobilizing communities to advocate to improve the application of constitutional law; vote for candidates who support improved public services.	Build strong advocacy approaches to change public policy and funding for public services. Challenge poor decision by public officials and advocate for improvements.

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

