

BUILDING POWER TOGETHER

A TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES IN LEADERSHIP



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**

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LIVING OUR FAITH

CONNECTING AT THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



Participating in politics is complicated. Our response to it may vary from high engagement to complete avoidance. The faith community's response is no different. Some feel the church should not be political and that clergy should abstain from politics and matters of government. Others point to our Methodist history and to our Social Principles and Book of Resolutions as evidence of the church's clear call to "continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust." (United Methodist Social Principles, ¶ 164.B)

If Christ's life was not political, then what was it?

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU, IN HIS BOOK "HOPE AND SUFFERING"



A United Methodist Seminar Program participant prays during the Faith and Guns Forum for an end to the gun violence epidemic in the United States.

In his life and ministry, Jesus advocated for the poor and the marginalized, pointing to how things should be “on earth as it is in heaven,” bringing attention to the ways that politics is not benefiting the lives of its people. Many of us recite this prayer out of habit, or we reflect on this prayer as a spiritual devotion disconnected from practical implications.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NRSV)

What if we were to consider the socio-economic and political facts of first-century Palestine? What was their lived reality as they were taught this prayer?

Give us this day our daily bread...

During Jesus’ time in Jerusalem, Galilee, Judea, and beyond the Jordan River, many of its people faced various forms of oppression. For those listening to and following Jesus, the petition for daily bread was a real material need and not just a spiritual one.

The region was under Roman rule and the Roman Empire enforced its authority through a system of governance that subjugated the local population. The Jewish people, in particular, experienced oppression. They were subject to heavy taxation, which burdened the impoverished population. Many tenant farmers were caught in a cycle of generational poverty as their harvest was extracted for rent, taxes, and tributes to the Herodian kings. They lived under the constant fear and threat of Rome’s military presence. Even the religious authorities imposed strict religious and societal rules and regulations.

It was within this combination of political, economic, military, and religious oppression that Jesus emerged, advocating for justice and the liberation of the oppressed. The prayer he taught was not a spiritual yearning for heaven, but for the creation of a just and equitable society in the here and now.

What are the issues that we face today? What are the persisting -isms that continue to oppress individuals and communities (racism, sexism, classism, ageism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.)? What does the Social Principles/Book of Resolutions say about such issues?

In the 18th century, John Wesley was deeply concerned about the social and economic inequalities that existed in England. He spoke out against social injustices and criticized economic systems that exploited those experiencing poverty. He established schools for children, advocated for prison reform, and promoted free medical care for those in need. Wesley favored bringing aid to the destitute rather than merely sending it because the heart of the ministry was the forming of relationships. For Wesley, it was this fellowship and the relationships created that helped him advocate alongside them.

During the early 20th century in the United States, worker’s rights and the labor movement was one of the major social concerns of the time. Workers were demanding better working conditions, a living wage, and an end to child labor and exploitation. In response to these social concerns, The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) adopted the Social Creed in 1908. Today, as seen in the Social Principles, we still advocate for a living wage and improved working conditions.

How are people/communities of faith reflecting the Kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven?

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

It is evident that we are not living into the proclamation of “on earth as it is in heaven.” We hear it in the cries and prayers that are lifted to turn our kingdoms of oppression, corruption, and colonialism into a Kin-dom of God where justice and equity reign. When we pray the words, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” it is a petition of our desires and a reminder of the work that is in front of us: to advocate for and pursue a more just world.

As United Methodists, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral — emphasizing Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience — can be a source of inspiration for advocacy.

Scripture is filled with numerous teachings that emphasize justice and compassion. We find them in the prophets who boldly confronted the social, economic, and political injustices of their time. We see it in the life and ministry of Jesus as he demonstrated care for the vulnerable and spoke out against oppressive systems. These examples serve as our moral compass as they remind us to challenge societal structures that perpetuate injustice.

Our Methodist tradition is a reminder of the accumulated wisdom of those who have worked for justice and equity before us. The year 1968 was a tumultuous time in American history. The streets were filled with protesters against the Vietnam War. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, which triggered widespread demonstrations across the country. There was civil unrest in multiple cities driven by frustrations over racial inequality, economic disparities, and police brutality. It also was the year that The United Methodist Church was

formed, and a Social Principles Commission established. The delegates of that General Conference recognized the need for a comprehensive statement on social issues and concerns that would guide the church’s positions and actions on social and ethical matters. It was an attempt to imagine what the Kin-dom of God on earth could look like.

Reason can serve as a powerful source of inspiration for advocacy. It encourages critical thinking and analysis of social issues. It allows us to examine the root causes of systemic problems, evaluate evidence and understand the consequences of certain politics or practices, and assess its impacts on individuals and communities. It can also inform our policy efforts by providing evidence-based recommendations to be communicated to our decision makers. Reason is integral to educating yourself and others about complex issues. It can help raise awareness, challenge misconceptions, and help mobilize support for a cause.

Personal and collective experiences can inform and inspire advocacy efforts. When we consider the experiences of individuals and communities by listening to their stories and joining them in their struggles against social injustices, we can mobilize together to demand change.

Amen

When our prayer ends, our work begins.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “KINGDOM” AND “KIN-DOM”?

Use of the word “kingdom” has a deep history in the Christian church, and many prefer this traditional reference. For others, however, “kingdom” can conjure images of a monarchy associated with a legacy of colonialism, imperialism, sexism, and racism. Alternatively, “kin-dom” reimagines the balance of power into a horizontal structure of mutuality, inclusivity, and solidarity.

WHAT DOES FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP FOR THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

VOICES FROM ACROSS THE CONNECTION

REV. DR. SHARON AUSTIN | FLORIDA CONFERENCE

“Justice is rooted in the first and second commandments. Justice is not proprietary and is never an advantage for ‘just us.’ It does not give us an edge over others; it is an invitation to right relationship with others. When God’s justice is the destination, advocacy becomes a shared journey.”

REV. ROY BETH KELLEY | ARKANSAS CONFERENCE

“Faithful leadership requires recognition of past injustices. It models and teaches others that seeking justice is part of our calling as followers of Christ. In doing so, faithful leaders meet people where they are without judgment and help them see how God is calling each of us individually and a body of Christ to love our neighbors who have been and who still are being oppressed.”

REV. TISHA JERMIN-BRANCH | NEW YORK CONFERENCE

“Faithful leadership for the pursuit of justice is seen in those individuals, communities, organizations, and systems that ensure the welling being for all and creation. We witness it in those who show up consistently with grace, love, mercy, and peace, working in every way for the least, lost, unjustly treated, and unfairly broken. Fully committed humbly, yet boldly to serve with right action, right attitude, right motivation and a right spirit until all aligns to God’s Kin-dom way.”

ADO OMAKINDA ODIMBA | CENTRAL CONGO

“A faithful leader exhibits courage, passion, confidence, commitment and ambition. They nurture the strengths and talents of people and build teams committed to achieving goals and building sustainability in all they are doing as community.”

REV. INGRID MCINTYRE | TENNESSEE-WESTERN KENTUCKY CONFERENCE

“The most faithful way to lead towards justice is to do and be unwavering Love, present and embodied. Proximity and faithfulness will surely bring forth action for justice.”

REV. BICH THY “BETTY” NGUYEN | MOUNTAIN SKY CONFERENCE

“This [faithful leadership] looks like modeling lifelong learning, learning from those who are directly impacted, and posturing ourselves as those who are always practicing – moving towards ‘perfection’. Maybe pursuing justice is having the audacity to imagine what God’s Kin-dom might be so that it is what we work together towards.”

KENN SPEICHER | VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

“[Leadership is] inspiring faithful hearts with the joy and passion you bring to seeking justice for all in need. Paraphrasing E.B. White, always be on the lookout for wonder in every heart and every moment. Justice, connection, and compassion are pathways to the Beloved Community.”

REV. PYUNGAHN KIM | WISCONSIN CONFERENCE

“It [faithful leadership] is to love, to love more, and to love more widely and more deeply. It is to love without fear and without ceasing, and to love in hope and in public. It is to love as Jesus modeled and empowered us to do through the Holy Spirit.”

PLACIDE NDJEKAMBODI | CENTRAL CONGO

“A faithful leader is one who is courageous and honest. Today such leaders are despised while those who compromise are idolized. The future of the church is justice.”

EDUCATING TO ADVOCATE

AWAKENING A DESIRE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE



Understanding that our faith as Christians calls us to pursue justice is only the first step of educating ourselves for the work of advocacy. Education plays a vital role in driving policy and systemic change. Informed advocates can identify gaps in existing policies, propose evidence-based solutions, and influence decision makers to implement meaningful reform. It is essential that all advocacy work you lead or participate in is grounded in fact-based research.

Decision makers are inundated with facts and data, which may be intimidating as a constituent and advocate. Always remember that your role is not to be an expert on the topic. Personal experience and stories of and from people affected by injustice are far more influential to share because they demonstrate how policies have real-life consequences.

However, having a general knowledge of the systems you are attempting to change will help you understand the root cause of the injustice, provide you with direction as you strategize your action plan, and determine the best decision makers to appeal to as you advocate.

RESEARCHING AND RESOURCES

As people of faith, consider studying the Bible through personal or group study to learn what Scripture says about justice, mercy, compassion, and God's care for the oppressed and marginalized.

As United Methodists, consider studying the Social Principles and the Book of Resolutions to learn the official positions of the United Methodist Church on a wide range of social concerns, including human rights, environmental justice, healthcare, migration, and more. These principles and resolutions are grounded in the teachings of Jesus, informed by the ministry of John Wesley, and seek to promote justice and peace. They serve as resources for individuals and congregations to actively participate in advocacy, service, and justice work in our communities and the world at large, aligning our actions with our faith commitments.

As you research the issue you wish to advocate for, remember to gather facts, statistics, and relevant information from reliable sources.

Considerations while fact-checking your sources:

- Evaluate the facts, data, images, and other information to ensure they are accurate and current.
- Who is the source? Is there a bias?
- How are people/communities represented/unrepresented?
- Seek out different perspectives.

LEARNING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

As we will discuss later in **BUILDING YOUR TEAM**, advocacy is not undertaken in isolation. The policies and structures that create and perpetuate injustice are not created, and are not protected, by single individuals. To counter that position of power you need numbers. And as important as it is for you to understand the systems you are attempting to change, it is just as important for your team to also understand those systems.

Consider the ways you can invite studied and lived experts to help with the process. Are there ways you can learn alongside your community so that you are not responsible for disseminating research and facts that may be new to you?

The process of educating your community can also help with building your team. As others in your community begin to see and understand the injustices around them, they may feel motivated and empowered to join you in your pursuit for change.

Remember, too, that education can serve many purposes. While some may want to be part of your team, others may be uninterested in the issue or otherwise unwilling to participate in your efforts. That's okay! Education can open doors for thoughtful discussion with those who might disagree with your position. It can also establish a baseline understanding in your community around the issue and generate sympathetic, if not active, support for your cause. Members of your community, depending on the context, may be voters, influential voices, or possibly donors who can help sway public opinion and hold decision makers accountable even if they are not actively involved in your efforts.

Find ways for the learning process to include relationship building so that your pursuit for justice is welcoming, accepting and invitational.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/seminars-trainings for more information on educational opportunities with the United Methodist Seminar Program.



United Methodist Seminar Program participants hear from lived experts, Steve Thomas and Candi Darley with the Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau at the National Coalition for the Homeless.

ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

TAKING COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST INJUSTICE



Mary Ritter Beard, an author and suffragist raised in The Methodist Episcopal Church (North), famously said: “Action without study is fatal. Study without action is futile.” Her words remind us that education and action must work in tandem. One of the ways that we can take collective action is by engaging in organizing.

Organizing at its core is a Gospel practice. In the same spirit that Jesus invited, trained, and equipped the disciples, sending them out in pairs to spread the Good News, the practice of organizing allows people of faith to come together through the power of the Holy Spirit to transform conditions of injustice. Across our United Methodist global connection, we engage in this labor of justice through organizing and committing to the mission of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”.

For the church to organize to build a more just world we must begin by asking two critical questions: **what are we building and what are we changing?** United Methodist, who are engaged in community organizing, aim to grow the Kin-dom of God on earth by building deep, intentional, incarnational relationships that lead to teams, networks and movements working together for justice. Together, we seek concrete changes in the lives, hearts and minds of people through transforming unjust policies, practices and structures into those that honor God’s vision for our world.

MAPPING YOUR COMMUNITY

Effective advocacy relies on a strategy that is informed by comprehensive research. We first must understand the systems and structures that created and perpetuated the injustices we oppose. Then we can begin to understand the ways in which those systems and structures can be dismantled with community-based solutions.

Community mapping is a process that helps you, and the larger community you are working with, to learn and identify collective values and assets that already exist within the community to create systemic change. There are countless ways to build a community map, but this process largely depends on the collective motivation and goals shared by you and the team you are creating change with. The process of community mapping is an essential tool that helps you understand “why” this labor for justice matters to you.

Your “why” is informed by a vision of justice that is connected to your faith. Earlier we shared about how to live your faith through the lens of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This framework will help your team cultivate a vision of justice that is grounded in the gospel witness and empowers you to envision sustainable solutions that dismantle conditions of oppression. To incorporate this vision into your context, you, as the leader, must be intentional about connecting the gospel-centered vision of justice with the community-based solution that you have mapped and identified. Community mapping helps connect God’s Kin-dom vision and the community’s solution.



Church and Society Board of Directors hear about the experiences of immigrants and the impacts of global migration on communities in Berlin, Germany.

IDENTIFYING YOUR COMMUNITY

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines community as “a unified body of individuals.” We all occupy a variety of communities whether they be based on geography, demographics, institutional affiliations, interests, occupations, etc. It’s important to build with those who share your collective values and vision for change. Returning to your motivation and goals can help you clearly identify the community you are building and creating change with.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Based on shared community motivations and goals, start to investigate the needs by connecting with community partners and service providers that are deeply engaged in the community. As you connect with these partners and services, ask for resources that provide both

qualitative and quantitative data. Interview a diverse and inclusive representation of your community to understand the variety of perspectives.

Every stage of community mapping should include intentional relationship building, but perhaps no more so than when identifying the needs of your community. Doing so will reveal whether you should create a new team or join one that is already working on the issues you’re passionate about. This will also help ensure that you are truly meeting a need rather than duplicating efforts that already exist.

Those who are directly impacted by injustice are the experts of their experiences. Their voices should be elevated as often as they want to speak, and their first-hand knowledge is an invaluable perspective when pursuing justice. As you engage with experts from your community, listen closely for collective needs and values that align with your own.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA?

Quantitative data reflects numerical statistics that can be measured. It can provide verified facts and reveal patterns to inform your efforts.

Qualitative data is based on observations and individual feelings that are collected and reported on together. It is more subjective than quantitative data, but also more descriptive and allows for a deeper understanding of lived experiences.

IDENTIFYING YOUR INDIVIDUAL ASSETS

Assets are the skills and resources you possess or have access to that can help you achieve your goal in creating social change. Reflect on the following questions, inspired by *“The Power of Asset Mapping”* by Luther K. Snow, to help you assess how your personal assets can aid your pursuit for justice:

- What physical resources do I own or have access to?
- What skills and talents do I have?
- What community partners am I connected to?
- What institutional structures do I support?
- Where do I spend my financial resources?

IDENTIFYING YOUR COLLECTIVE ASSETS

After you have reflected on your personal assets, the next step is to identify and gather with a team of others with a shared vision of justice to assess your collective assets.

Your team could include formal leaders in your church, such as representatives of United Women in Faith, United Methodist Men, a youth member, or trustee chair. Others who do not identify as formal leaders may also be passionate about your cause and wish to participate. They may be outside the congregation, including neighborhood association members, or members from local community-led organizations. The most important part of gathering your team is that you share values and a vision for what transformation looks like in your community.

The labor for justice cannot be done in isolation, it must be done in relationship with others. Just as Jesus sent his disciples two-by-two, we need to work together to recognize all the ways God has called us to create change. Once you have identified and gathered your team, invite them to reflect on their own individual assets and then come together to prayerfully reflect on how your individual assets can work collaboratively.

Feel free to use the questions for the individual assessment to discern additional shared assets that can help you and your team build towards the vision of justice you all know to be possible in your community.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

Identifying your assets is a prayerful exercise that affirms the abundance of skills and resources that God has provided you with to live into the call of bringing love and justice to your community. Be in an attitude of prayer and gratitude as you move through these questions to recognize all the ways that God is at work in your life and the life of your community.

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY POWER

After identifying individual and collective assets, the next step is to discern how these assets can work together to create change.

For example, you may share the physical assets of a church building, have access to talented public speakers and facilitators, and are connected to local decision makers. You can bring these different assets together and host a town hall meeting to discuss issues in your community and how to address them.

Discerning how to use your individual and collective assets to pursue change builds power among your team. We build people power to disrupt and undo existing systemic structures that silence, oppress, and exploit people and resources for the benefit of some at the expense of many.

Learn more about identifying decision makers in your community in our toolkit *Creating Change Together* at www.umcjustice.org/toolkit. You can also visit www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/grassroots-organizing to find training opportunities on power mapping and other workshops.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A “FORMAL LEADER” AND AN “INFORMAL LEADER”?

When we think of leadership, it's common to think of people who have been assigned a specific role or title. These are *formal leaders* and, in the context of The United Methodist Church, are public-facing individuals who have been elected, appointed or hired to fulfill a designated set of tasks. They set goals, cast a vision, and provide oversight for the work.

Informal leaders, however, are people who have built institutional partnerships, interpersonal relationships, and have some degree of influence in their community. They may also demonstrate skills that support or enhance a team's strategies and tactics. While not necessarily assigned to lead, *informal leaders* are often well connected and are valuable for collaboration and mobilization.

Effective advocacy will strategically utilize both *formal* and *informal leaders* to advance the mission. If you identify as a *formal leader*, consider individuals in your community, church or conference who have natural gifts and abilities that can aid your efforts and invite them to be part of the team. If you identify as an *informal leader*, do not be discouraged by your undefined role. Prayerfully discern how God or those around you are calling you to provide your service and expertise.

And if you find yourself wondering why a *formal leader* has not been assigned to a particular role, you may have just found a need you can fulfill! Talk to those with the authority to elect, appoint or hire someone to step into a *formal leadership* position and consider whether you are being called to step forward.

BUILDING YOUR TEAM

Building a team is one of the most effective ways to bring about social justice. Building collective leadership through teams means building collective ownership and a collective vision for the organizing work. We need everyone's experiences, ideas, and gifts to make this collective vision a reality.

A team is a group of people that:

- is connected by a shared passion for an issue, love for people who are affected, vision for change, and commitment to work together to bring that change about.
- is in regular contact with each other (usually face-to-face, occasionally by phone).
- builds one-on-one relationships with each other, in addition to meeting face-to-face together as a team.
- studies and reflects on their life experiences and world around them, together.
- builds relationships with those affected by the issue they are working on.

A team is not:

- an email list or listserv.
- a committee that does little outside of meeting times.
- a group of people mandated by some other power to be on a committee.
- a group of people that are more interested in being “the representative” or some other role in a formal structure than they are in building relationships and working together.
- disconnected from the people affected by the issue they are working on.

Return to *Creating Change Together* at www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for tips on crafting and sharing your public story before you begin building your team. For step-by-step guidance on building your team, visit www.umcjustice.org/BuildingPowerTogether.



United Methodist ministry leaders gather in Orlando, Florida for Rooted in Relationship: A Ministry WITH Gathering for skill building workshops on relationship-based ministry.



United Methodist leaders meet at Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe to discuss the Social Principles.

ONE-ON-ONES

Building a team is an intentional leadership practice that provides opportunities to connect church and community members for sharing and learning together. To deepen these connections, we can engage in the practice of one-on-ones.

One-on-one conversations are a simple way to create a team. A one-on-one is a strategic conversation where you identify the shared values and vision of specific individuals who will help you achieve your goal for change. Making time to have one-on-one conversations with existing team members or other people who you'd like to have involved in the work should be a consistent practice.

Prepare for your one-on-one with our one-pager at www.umcjustice.org/BuildingPowerTogether.

MAINTAINING AND GROWING YOUR TEAM

Having a committed team will be vital to your success throughout the life of your movement. Many advocates focus on recruiting a strong team in the beginning and stop once it's in place. Because advocacy and justice require time and patience, routine maintenance of your team is essential to ensure the efficacy of your leaders.

Pursue opportunities that nourish your team spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and even physically. Activism fatigue happens to everyone from time to time, but investing in the long-term wellbeing of your team will help mitigate burnout.

- Plan retreats that include moments of rest, worship, learning, and healing. Spending time in the community while regaining energy will ultimately strengthen your team and your movement.
- Never stop inviting people into your movement. Leadership is essential for planning the direction of your movement, but your leaders will burn out even faster if there are not allies supporting them and helping carry out those plans. Having a strong network of supporters also establishes a pool of future leadership if/when your team members need to step away.
- There is strength in numbers. Inviting others to participate in your movement deepens the breadth and impact of your efforts.

Learn more about building consensus and mobilizing your team at www.umcjustice.org/BuildingPowerTogether.

CASE STUDY

TAKING ACTION: ORGANIZING IN THE NORTH TEXAS CONFERENCE

Written by Rev. Phillip Dieke, Church and Society Chair for the North Texas Conference

One of the things I love about being United Methodist is the passion our members have for justice. However, with this passion comes the challenge of knowing where to begin. In the North Texas Conference we have sometimes struggled to organize around a specific issue because there are so many injustices taking place.

In June of 2023, our Conference Board of Church and Society partnered with a local congregation to host “Justice Begins with Us: Organizing in the Church for Social Change.” We promoted the event through Conference communication, inviting congregations to send a representative, or a group, from their church if they were curious about the work of Church and Society, or interested in diving deeper into justice work. Participants were encouraged to register for the event and as part of their registration we asked them to identify the most pressing justice issue the church should address in society today. The event, which began with speakers and a panel discussion, ended with breakout conversations focusing on the top six issues named during registration.

These breakout sessions were an opportunity for individuals from across our conference to recognize they are not alone in their passion, and they are not alone in this work. People shared stories, built relationships, exchanged information, and were sent back to their respective congregations with the charge of identifying five people they could invite into this work. While many lessons were learned from this experience, some of the most crucial were the value of relationships in the work of justice, the power of stories, and the reminder that our connectionalism holds great power and influence.

United Methodists are a people passionate about justice, the first step to building your team is getting in the same room to share that passion.



North Texas and Central Texas United Methodists gather with Church and Society staff for Advocates for Justice, an initiative to identify and address key social issues impacting Texas communities.

ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD THROUGH
PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND CIVIC RIGHTEOUSNESS



Pursuing justice is not a linear process. The work of learning and team building is never complete and often happens in conjunction with your advocacy efforts.

As people of faith, we understand advocacy as speaking out on issues not only on behalf of impacted communities, but alongside them. In doing so, we affirm that injustice impacts everyone. Calling for change from leaders, institutions and systems that operate contrary to the teaching of Jesus is a vital part of Christian discipleship.

The United Methodist 2016 Book of Resolutions states: “The attempt to influence the formation and execution of public policy at all levels of government is often the most effective means available to churches to keep before humanity the ideal of a society in which power and order are made to serve the ends of justice and freedom for all people.” (Resolution 5012, Church-Government Relations)

Advocacy can serve many purposes:

- Passing, blocking and amending legislation, as well as holding elected officials accountable to their commitments
- Bringing attention to an issue to generate conversation or change the narrative
- Standing in solidarity with marginalized and affected communities
- Educating others on the ways your faith informs your engagement with society

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit to view *Creating Change Together* to learn about executing advocacy tactics and strategies.



Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, former General Secretary to the General Board of Church and Society, marches in Glasgow, Scotland with an international faith community to advocate for climate justice during COP26.

ADVOCATING WITH: YOUR COMMUNITY

As discussed in **ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE**, your community includes any setting in which you are spending time with others who share common characteristics. This could be your city, school, neighborhood, workplace, clubs, congregation, and even your conference. Return to the community mapping exercise to better understand the environment which you are attempting to advocate within.

Once you have identified where the power lies in your defined community, narrow in on the decision makers most relevant to the circumstances you are attempting to change. Also consider those who may not have direct power but are highly influential and can advocate with you in strategic ways.

With your team, build an action plan that fits your specific context and community needs. Remember to do this alongside and in conjunction with those directly impacted by the injustice you are addressing and any institutional partners already working on the issue.

ADVOCATING WITH: YOUR CONGREGATION

While tactics and strategies may differ depending on your context and goals, the fundamentals of advocacy remain the same regardless of your community. Your church is one example of a community you are part of and can advocate with.

Many United Methodist congregations feel called to create a Church and Society committee or ministry team “in order to fulfill the mission of the local church.” (United Methodist Book of Discipline, paragraph 254) This group would make decisions together, in cooperation with church leadership, to lead members in advocacy and justice ministry. If your church does not have such a committee, speak with your fellow members and church leadership to discern whether there is an interest in creating one. Your conference Church and Society Chair can be a wonderful conversation partner as you get started. This is a great opportunity to practice your one-on-one skills discussed in **BUILDING YOUR TEAM**.

If your congregation creates a committee, work together to plan programming that educates everyone on important justice issues that are most relevant to your shared context. Learn what topics are most important to your church members and work together on strategies to pursue justice.

CASE STUDY

TAKING ACTION: WORDS FROM A LIVED EXPERT

Written in collaboration with Rev. Sammy Kagwi, Peace With Justice Coordinator for the Kenya-Ethiopia Conference

Election reform in Kenya has been an ongoing process, particularly since the 2007 General Elections which saw the worst post-election violence in history. As a result, Kenya created an Independent Review Commission (IREC) to monitor election validity, help with election transparency, eliminate bias, and better train election staff.

In previous Kenyan elections, churches and faith institutions were criticized for failing to speak out against electoral injustices and ethnic violence. For the 2022 election, the local Peace With Justice Coordinator worked with other observer teams to mobilize United Methodists for election monitoring and peacebuilding efforts. The Peace With Justice Coordinator and two other volunteers were trained by the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission of Kenya (IEBC). They then trained a larger United Methodist electoral observation mission team who were sent to polling places in all constituencies, where the results of elections are final once they have been certified and announced by the appropriate offices.

Due to the extensive monitoring by various members of civil society and churches, the August 2022 general elections in Kenya were deemed to be the most transparent and credible ever. United Methodist election observers played a part in making this happen.



East Africa Conference Peace and Justice Leadership Seminar in Nairobi, Kenya

ADVOCATING WITH: YOUR CONFERENCE

Your conference is another example of a community you are part of and may want to advocate with. Whether there are issues impacting residents of your conference (or state/country, should the issue lie outside of the church) that you want to see addressed, or concerns you have about United Methodist policies, you can advocate for justice.

Identify fellow United Methodists in your conference to build your team with those who share your concerns. Be sure to engage your conference Church and Society Chair, Peace With Justice Coordinator, or any equivalent conference leadership who are already doing the work or want to work with you to start fresh. And remember that your General Board of Church and Society is a wonderful resource for education, best practices, and building connections with other United Methodist advocates.

One fundamental component of The United Methodist Church is our connectional system. By relating to one another and working together under the governance of the General Conference, United Methodists have a strong organizational structure that helps us to “carry out our mission in unity and strength.” (United Methodist Book of Discipline, ¶ 701)

Our connectionalism also provides opportunities for every United Methodist to participate in establishing, amending, perfecting and clarifying the laws and polity of our church. This allows members to advocate for justice within our church, as well as define the ways in which our church advocates for justice in society.



Youth from the Arkansas Conference participating in the United Methodist Seminar Program meet with United Methodist, Senator Tom Cotton, on the steps of the United States Capitol to advocate for policies to eliminate hunger.

CASE STUDY

TAKING ACTION: DRAFTING LEGISLATION FOR ANNUAL AND GENERAL CONFERENCE

Written in collaboration with Martha Hill, Chair of the Justice and Advocacy Committee for the West Virginia Conference and Andrea Paret, Peace With Justice Coordinator for the Great Plains Conference



LEARN ABOUT THE PROCESS

Contact your conference office for information about the process and deadlines for submitting legislation to annual or general conference. Many conferences accept resolutions and petitions from congregations, groups within a congregation; individuals (both lay and clergy), district organizations, or Conference Boards and Committees. Often, conferences will have submission deadlines for resolutions to be printed in the workbook, but most also allow legislation to be brought on the floor if it didn't make the deadline.

FIND OUT WHO IS ALREADY WORKING ON OR AFFECTED BY THIS ISSUE

Ask whether there is a team in your conference office or any other group or individual working on your issue. Find out whether legislation on this issue has been brought to annual conference before and whether there are specific groups or individuals who might support or be opposed.

DRAFT YOUR PETITION OR RESOLUTION

See if you can find sample legislation from another conference to use as a starting point. Seek out community allies beyond the faith-based space – often, secular organizations will have sample legislation you can easily adapt. Start with Scripture/include Social Principles or resolutions, then go into “this is what we as United Methodists believe.”

FIND SOMEONE TO SPEAK IN FAVOR OF THE RESOLUTION AT THE CONFERENCE

There will be an opportunity for someone to speak in favor of the resolution at annual or general conference. If possible, find someone with a personal stake in the issue who can explain how they are affected and why the resolution is important.

CONTINUE THE GOOD WORK

Do not be discouraged by temporary setbacks. Gaining momentum can take time, and continuing to foster dialogue can help to move issues forward. It is important to stay grounded, to celebrate small victories, and to re-engage when you are ready.

CREATING A MOVEMENT, NOT A MOMENT

REMAINING FAITHFUL



Even as you educate, organize and advocate, justice is unlikely to arrive overnight.

The systems and structures that create and perpetuate injustice are often protected by people with power who have ample resources to keep those systems intact.

The 1908 Social Creed of The Methodist Episcopal Church, a predecessor of The United Methodist Church, called “for a living wage in every industry.” More than a century later, United Methodists are still pursuing this right. Justice takes time, organization, and persistence. That is why it is important to take steps that create sustainability and ensure your efforts are *movement* building rather than *moment* building.

DOCUMENTING YOUR EFFORTS

Sustainable movements require record keeping. Teams experience leadership transitions, especially those engaged in long-term movements. Incoming team leaders will be more effective when they understand the history of the movement prior to their joining the team.

- Keep minutes of your meetings
- Leave a “paper trail” for all decision making
- Update your records as often as necessary to reflect your team, supporters, and partners
- Regularly assess the efficacy of your efforts and report all relevant data to illustrate your work

The longevity of your movement could hinge on the documentation of your efforts. Without it, new leaders are left in the dark without an understanding of which direction to move. Don’t let a preventable knowledge gap be the reason why future leaders abandon the movement.

CELEBRATING GOOD WORK

Similarly, celebrate the hard work of your team. Consider ways you can acknowledge the persistence and commitment of your leaders and supporters. The more appreciated they feel, the more encouraged they will be to continue contributing to your movement.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

Remember to regularly find opportunities to take care of yourself, in whatever ways best suit you. Take breaks, spend time enjoying your life outside of the movement, and reconnect with your motivation as often as possible. These moments will re-energize you and keep you strong for the movement.

WHAT IS MY ROLE?

Often times new or prospective leaders don't know what to do or where to get started.

If you find yourself elected, appointed, have volunteered or been “volun-told” to lead justice work in your community, church or conference, you may be wondering what your responsibilities are. The good news is that the organizational structure of The United Methodist Church can also be an asset to your efforts.

First, identify where your position lies within the structure of the church. While there may be differences in titles and roles from one church or conference to the next, there are some standards mandated by the Book of Discipline. Paragraph 610 states, “The annual conference...shall provide for the connectional relationship of the local church, district, and conference with the general agencies.” That means conferences are required to relate to all the general agencies of The United Methodist Church, including The General Board of Church and Society. In many cases that will be the Church and Society Chair and/or Peace With Justice Coordinator (or equivalent) for the conference. If you are that person, reach out to leadership at the conference office, generally a Director of Connectional Ministries, to learn more. If you are not that person, connect with the person who does hold that role to get started.

Set a meeting with any leaders assigned to oversee the relationship between the conference and issues of advocacy and justice. Some responsibilities are held by conference staff where others are delegated to Church and Society Chairs and/or Peace With Justice Coordinators (or equivalent). If possible, connect with your predecessor to receive any handoff items and to understand the relationship between your position and conference leadership. Through these conversations you'll learn what is expected of you, what you can expect from the leaders above you, and how to work collaboratively to minimize duplicated efforts or gaps in responsibilities



BUILDING POWER TOGETHER

Leadership is a calling to serve, share our gifts, and support others as we pursue common goals together. For all the ways you have answered this call in your community, conference, and The United Methodist Church as a whole, we offer our sincere thanks. Your partnership in this work strengthens our collective pursuit for justice and sustains us for the journey. As you sharpen your skills and practice what you have learned, remember that you are not alone. Connect with others to share the load and extend the call to unrealized advocates waiting to discover their own passion for creating change.

And remember the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “...the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

May these words from the companion litany to our Social Creed strengthen you for your endeavor to live out your faith, seek justice and pursue peace:

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth’s goodness.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into
friends.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich
and poor,
demands justice for workers in the
marketplace.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world’s warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.

And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.

And so shall we.

**Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.**

And so shall we.

United Methodist Book of Discipline, ¶166

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CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

Living**FAITH** Seeking**JUSTICE** Pursuing**PEACE**

www.umcjustice.org