



Our Church Our World

Partnering with God's Mission



Steps to Building your Congregation and its Voice in our Communities

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INTRODUCTION

Our compassion as a public church is rooted in scripture and interweaves with our living a spiritual life of simple repentance and forgiveness. We approach advocacy knowing that the Bible offers more than a few isolated passages about seeking justice for the disenfranchised and about God's love for creation. We also realize that Dr. Martin Luther was an advocate for the poor. At the same time, the question of how to be a public church with a relevant voice while embracing diverse opinions is one that calls us to struggle and reflect through prayer and dialogue. In our discernment, with God at our center, we ask how we can best work with and on behalf of people whose needs are often overlooked. At times we may specifically be included in the groups of people we advocate for.

As people freed by God's grace, we keep our eyes on the policies that impact our communities and world rather than on any political parties. We look for the potential to engage with government officials with varied political leanings. We also hold those officials in our prayers.

A good portion of this booklet is a compilation of already existing materials within the ELCA along with some additions from our office. We hope that these materials give some guidance in understanding advocacy from a faith perspective and help people to develop advocacy skills individually and within congregations.

Thank you to Pat Zerega, former Corporate Social Responsibility Director, for supplying the out-of-print ELCA manual, *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*. Thank you also to Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Pennsylvania and to Faith Action Network (state of Washington) for the resources Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin (LOPPW) accessed from their websites.

We join our efforts with our national ELCA Office of Advocacy, ELCA World hunger, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the ELCA, and six bishops whose care for their synods include engaging in how their communities are impacted by public policies, Members of those six synods comprise the LOPPW advisory council. Other volunteer lay leaders and pastors also assist LOPPW's advocacy ministry in Wisconsin with support to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

We appreciate the plethora of leaders in our history who have modeled being faithful advocates. We stand on the shoulders of and in fellowship with a broad community of saints. With you I pray for guidance in all our work with great hope through Jesus Christ

For information and to sign up for **action alerts** go to www.lope.org Also please like us on **Facebook** (search for LOPPW) and follow us on **Twitter**. In addition, please check out our national ELCA Office of Advocacy <http://www.elca.org/advocacy>

Blessings,

Rev. Cindy Crane, LOPPW Director

Thank you to our partners:

East-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Greater Milwaukee Synod
La Crosse Area Synod
Northern Great Lakes Synod
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

ELCA World Hunger



TAKING STEPS

Each church is on a different journey as a community in Christ. You may find it helpful to expand on one or more of the following steps over an extended period of time or to take suggestions from the Ideas section and focus on those. If you've already delved into some of the materials included in this booklet you may want to skip over parts of the steps. This guide provides steps for an approach to how you can introduce advocacy into your congregation, but we invite you to use this in a way that is most beneficial in your particular setting.



STEP 1: *What is your story?*

Introductions

Devotion: Ask someone to read the below text out loud, and then invite each person to repeat one line that struck them.

Luke 10:25-37 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.^[a] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii,^[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Prayer (by leader or another member of the group).

Exercise (Thank you to ELCA World Hunger for this exercise):

Overview: 3-5 minutes quiet reflection and writing: Participants divide into groups of four – five. Select one question to reflect on and write for no longer than three minutes

10-15 minutes sharing one thing participants would like to contribute: Facilitator leads group in clockwise rotation as each person gives answer. Take about one-three minutes for each person to share.

1. **Who am I as an individual?**

What are personal stories I have that can be shared about nutrition/environment/foreign aid? Do I now a loved one who will be directly impacted?

2. **Who am I as a leader?**

What stories do I have from my work tackling hunger issues in my communities that would also help? How does the role I serve in my synod help me understand current legislation related to hunger and poverty?

3. *Who am I as a member of a larger faith community?*

Are there biblical verses or catechisms that Martin Luther wrote that I feel particularly called to share? What are aspects of my Lutheran faith I feel inform my understanding of this work for justice?

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Exercise: What’s happening in your church? This is a brief exercise to begin reflecting on the connection between your congregation and larger communities. You will come back to these questions later.

- Write a quick list of the ministries your church is involved with to address hunger and poverty and/or other issues related to social problems.
 - Name some of the problems that create suffering in your community experience (discuss more later)
-

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is speaking with and on behalf of the needs of another. It can also be standing up for oneself.

Exercise Pair off into two or three people.

- Think of a time you stood up for someone or a creature or the earth (it does not have to be related to public policy). Share with your partner/s.
- Consider a time you wished you had stood up but didn’t. How did that make you feel? Just for pondering.
- Think of a time someone stood up for you and a time you wished someone had but didn’t. Share one experience with your partner/s.
- Who are some people you know who need to learn how to advocate for themselves better? Just for pondering

Read out loud: In advocacy ministries we often use the word advocacy when talking about trying to influence public policy toward justice and the common good. **Advocacy involves getting to the core of a problem and strategizing ways to solve it.** A ministry of advocacy can be a companion to our social outreach that offers direct services as well as to our donations that support the work of our local congregations and ELCA World Hunger.



The Good Samaritan offered important immediate help. Later, an advocate could have asked, “Why is there so much crime on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem? Who else is getting robbed?”

In many of our congregations we offer very much-needed, even vital, services to our communities through a wide variety of ministries. For example, some churches provide food pantries or community meals; others may offer temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness. Advocates ask questions about why people are hungry and without housing? How could public policies strengthen safety nets so that more adults and children are not going to bed with hunger pangs or without a steady place to call home? And which policies would diminish the need for those safety nets?

Assignment: Read from Biblical Roots of Advocacy on p. 13 through p. 17.

Closing prayer

Step 2: What is the story of our tradition?

Devotion: Ask someone to read the below texts out loud, and then invite people to share one line that struck them.

Amos 5:10-15 There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. ¹¹ You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. ¹³ Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil. ¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you just as you say he is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.

Romans 3:24 "...they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is Christ Jesus."

Prayer

Discuss assignment:

- 1 How does the Old Testament talk about advocacy? What are some examples?
- 2 How does the New Testament talk about advocacy? What are some examples?
- 3 What is faith-based advocacy? Does being faith-based in your own advocacy make a difference to you?
- 4 Dr. Martin Luther is credited with the idea for the community chest? What did the chest fund? Did anything surprise you?



Let's talk about Grace: Grace is a free gift from God, unexpected and undeserved.

Exercise: Take a moment to reflect on a grace experience in your life and feel free to share it with the group if you'd like.

Read out loud: Luther challenged the Medieval way of thinking about good works, grace and poverty. The system he cut through was one that

- idealized poverty
- viewed alms as a means to purchase paradise
- supported an economy that rationalized itself as charity (Read the book, *Forgotten Luther* for a deeper understanding).

"Faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false opinions concerning works, that is from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works." Cynthia Moe-Lobeda

Consider watching The Forgotten Luther: An Interview with Cynthia Moe-Lobeda <https://vimeo.com/174713710>
ELCA Advocacy: Set Free to do Justice <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5bXIUXVixg>

Discussion

1. What tensions do we hold when professing we live by God's grace? Consider what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said about justification of the sin instead of the sinner as being cheap grace. What about the other extreme?
2. What kinds of images does our society have of people living in poverty today?

Read Out loud:

Social Statements “are teachings and policy documents that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. They are meant to help communities and individuals with moral formation, discernment and thoughtful engagement with current social issues as we participate in God’s work in the world. Social statements also set policy for the ELCA and guide its advocacy and work as a publicly engaged church. They result from an extensive process of participation and deliberation and are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA churchwide assembly.” Go to elca.org (search social statements)

1. Abortion (1991)
2. Caring for creation (1993)
3. Church in society (1991)
4. The church and criminal justice (2013)
5. The death penalty (1991)
6. Economic life (1999)
7. Education (2007)
8. Genetics (2011)
9. Health and health care (2003)
10. Human sexuality (2009)
11. Peace (1995)
12. Race, ethnicity and culture (1993)
13. Sexism

Social Messages: “These documents arise from and reflect on the changing circumstances of the world in light of God’s presence and work. They are developed to assist members and congregations in thinking about social issues, and to guide the church’s life in society and creation. They do not establish new teaching or policy. Rather, they build upon previously adopted teaching and policy positions, especially from social statements. Reviewed by the Conference of Bishops and adopted by the ELCA Church Council.”

1. Government
2. Human Rights (2017)
3. Gender-based Violence (2016)
4. Mental Illness (2012)
5. People Living with Disabilities(2010)
6. Terrorism (2004)
7. Commercial Sexual Exploitation (2001)
8. Suicide Prevention (1999)
9. Immigration (1998)
10. Sexuality: Common Convictions (1996)
11. Community Violence (1994)
12. End of Life Decisions (1992)
13. Homelessness (1990)
14. Israeli/Palestinian Conflict (1989)
15. AIDS (1988)

Question: Do you think people in your congregation are aware of our social statements and social messages?

Assignment: Each participant asks at least two three other people in your congregation what they think are the most significant problems in your community and why (engage them). Discuss ahead of time ideas for people to ask to include people from all age groups and who reflect any other diversity in your congregation.

Closing Prayer

Step 3 What are the stories in your congregation?

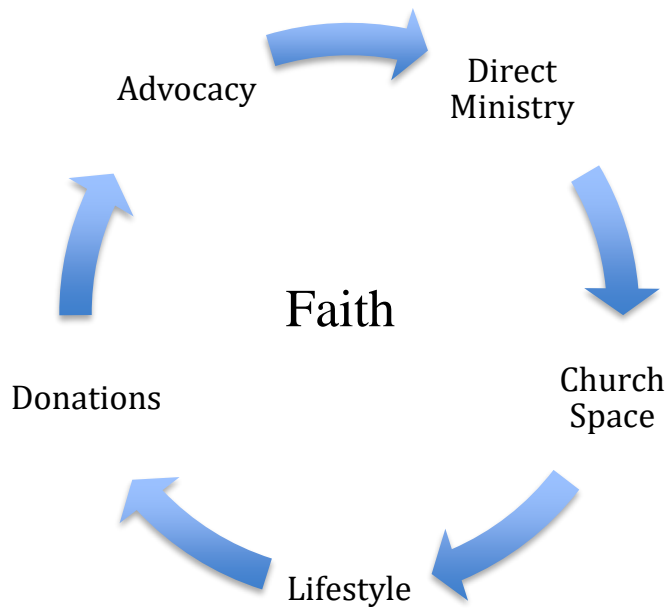
Devotion: Ask someone to read the below text out loud, and then invite people to say one line that struck them.

Micah 6:6-8 “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Prayer

Discuss your assignment – your experiences talking to members of your congregation.

FAITH IN ACTION CIRCLE – BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE



Read out loud: Whether you have a specific idea about the concern you want to address or are seeking ideas for advocacy, it is good to acknowledge where you are and celebrate the existing ministries you have in your congregation. In this exercise you will look at the different areas in which your congregation is engaged in doing social ministry and explore which ministries you’d like to expand or accompany with advocacy.

LOPPW offers a circle to use as a visual for social ministry, though you can list the ministries in columns on a sheet of paper (see next page). The Faith in Action Circle is purposely a circle rather than a vertical list so that we do not imply there is a hierarchy of ministries leading up to the one with the most value. It is true that one bill may have the potential to impact more people in a state than all the direct ministries in that state combined (if that bill passes into law). However, outreach to people via a ministry such as a food pantry helps people who are falling through the cracks and need food right now. Also, donations to your congregation’s ministries and to ELCA World Hunger help vital programs. ELCA World Hunger supports international and domestic efforts to diminish hunger and includes the ministry of advocacy. Therefore, we recognize all our ministries as moving together in a circle of

justice, and we invite you to add to or continue the significant ministry of advocacy within your circle. For convenience in listing your ministries we have columns. After listing your ministries determine which parts of the circle your congregations thrive and where you'd like to strengthen a ministry.

Exercise: Use a large sheet of paper with columns: Ministry, Donations, Lifestyle, Advocacy, Church Mtg. Space to list ministries for the Faith in Action Circle. Examples of what can go under each column below.

| Direct Ministry | Donations | Lifestyle* | Advocacy | Church Mtg. Space** |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Pantry • Community Meal • Prison ministry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial donations ELCA World Hunger • Turkeys for volunteers to deliver for holidays • Toy & clothing donations for local shelter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell and buy Fair Trade products • Involvement with Community Supported Agriculture • Use energy saving light bulbs in church | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum with an expert in areas who can connect problem to public policies • Letter writing party with sample letters and names of legislators available • Advocacy Bible studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSS office space • 12 step program meetings • Local environmental group meetings |

***Lifestyle** – refers to ways you as a congregation use energy and products or encourage members to use them in daily life.

** **Church Meeting Space** –refers to how you offer your church building space at no cost or low cost to groups that offer ministries and/or services to your communities.

If you are currently not doing anything in the area of advocacy, you could use that column to brainstorm ideas.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are these ministries important to your congregation?
2. Do the ministries correspond to concerns you and other members you spoke to have?
3. In which areas in the circle are you most prolific?
4. What would you like to strengthen?



Assignment: Talk to one person from the community who is not a member of your church but has expertise in one of the areas of your concern. Ask them about their work, their reason for their involvement (their story), headway they are making, and obstacles they face.

Closing prayer

STEP 4: What are the stories in your community? How will you move stories into advocacy?

Devotion: Ask someone to read the below text out loud, and then invite people to say one line that struck them.

Luke 4:16: ¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Prayer

Discuss your assignment – your experiences talking to individuals in your community.

- What surprised you?
- What did you learn?
- Does your outreach reflect needs in your community, society and/or world?

STARTING AN ADVOCACY MINISTRY is about building relationships within your church and community, listening to people of all ages and backgrounds, finding a common concern and then delving deep into it. Think of it as the work you’re already doing in loving God and your neighbor but taking it to another level as you pray and discern.



Which direction should you go in? Before delving more deeply into an issue you need to decide which one to focus.

Should you work through an existing committee? Do you for example have

- an ELCA World Hunger team?
- a social concerns committee?
- groups that work on direct service projects?
- an adult education committee?
- a care for God’s creation committee?

Should you start a new team? How you decide depends on your congregation.

Perhaps going through these steps, you are coming to a decision that you would like to propose to others in your congregation. Or through a series of adult education forums you will find a common concern with more members and after that share this booklet with them.

Here are some ideas from *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others* (some are repeated from earlier):

- Pick an issue that your church/synod or larger ELCA is already addressing through its social ministry.
- Form a group to study and discuss the issue, using ELCA social statements, LOPPW materials, newspaper articles, videos, guest speakers. Consider inviting a staff or council member of LOPPW or an elected official knowledgeable about the issue, or people affected by the issue.

- Join the ELCA advocacy network and LOPPW's action alert network to stay in touch with legislative developments. You can also sign up for updates on the state's legislative site.
- Form a local e-mail network or telephone tree for quick communication when emergency action is needed.
- Draft a model letter for congregational use.
- Educate parishioners about the issue by posting information on bulletin boards and publishing updates in your church newsletter and social media.
- Find out who else is working on these issues in your community and join with them to form a coalition. Be sure to invite other congregations and people of other faiths to join with you in the struggle for justice.

After you choose an issue educate, educate, educate!

Education is a large part of advocacy. Include roots of problems and pathways to systemic change as part of your efforts.

Examples

1. Your church has a food pantry, or your members help support a homeless shelter. The team you work with strategizes holding adult forums utilizing local experts and church resources. Include in your forums a systemic view of the problem of hunger and poverty and information about public policies. How would cuts to federal programs such as the Farm Bill impact your local food pantries and local shelters? Have a forum on the Farm Bill. Who exactly would be most affected by cuts? Make a plan for advocacy, receive and pass on action alerts, write letters to the editor, visit legislators, connect with other groups with similar interests in your community. Encourage a connection to worship and prayers in your church. Find more information about connecting with your legislators in this booklet. LOPPW and ELCA World Hunger offer materials on this.
2. Your church wants to care more for God's creation. Your team works with the property committee to strategize having an audit of your building done. You have adult forums as above and explore problems related to water impacted by high capacity wells, and other pollution in your area. Make a plan for advocacy as above. LOPPW offers some materials and recommended resources.
3. Your church wants to address sex-trafficking. What are systemic problems to address? How does the media and our culture in general support sexual abuse? Include adult forums that address public policies. Make a plan for advocacy. LOPPW offers some materials including workshops for youth.

Exercise

1. When considering the above suggestions, what do you think would work? What wouldn't work in your parish?
2. What do you think some of the barriers to doing advocacy would be in your congregation?

Assignment – Now that you have delved into the topic of advocacy with your group more, for next time share the following in a way you would share with other in your congregations:

1. What are three reasons your faith brings you the advocacy?
2. What biblical passages inspire your work?
3. Where do you look for church documents for grounding?

Closing Prayer

STEP 5: Review and Plan - Making Stories Known!

Devotion: Ask someone to read the below text out loud, and then invite people to say one line that struck them.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Prayer

Discuss assignment from last week.

Exercise – Quick Brainstorm

As you consider everything you've read and discussed through these steps what are some ideas for advocacy that you have? Without worrying about details, jot down what you have and share with the group.

Read this out loud and discuss.

ELCA PRINCIPLES FOR ADVOCACY MINISTRY IN A CONGREGATION

(Equipping Advocates to Empower Others Training)

- “Advocacy creates ownership in dealing with a problem.
- The size of the mission is always larger than the size of the ministry.
- Advocacy only happens when the spirit makes the ministry ready.
- Advocacy is best demonstrated by behavior.
- The gifts of this ministry are already present in most congregations and in their communities, waiting to be discovered.
- God does God’s best work in times of crisis.
- Growing in this ministry is a gift that requires a conscious choice.
- It is best to avoid single factor analyses and one-dimensional responses.
- Prayer is productive work envisioning and planning.
- Growing ministries give themselves away in mission.”

Decide what you'd like to do next. Use the next page with more ideas if that would be helpful. Feel free to consult with LOPPW: cindyc@loppw.org

Closing Prayer



MORE IDEAS

Hold a study on the ELCA Social Statements using LOPPW's Called into the World: Devotions on the ELCA Social Statements written by LOPPW advisory council members. Consider writing your own devotions on the statements. Include looking at the Social Messages.

Hold anti-racism trainings or encourage your congregation or get your church involved with trainings recommended by your synod.

Lift up the importance of voting without taking sides. Hold a candidate forum.

Hold a film series related to a topic or have a book study (examples of books below)

- *Forgotten Luther - Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation*, edited by Carter Lindberg and Paul Wee Volumes II and III are also now available.
- *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond
- *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

Connect advocacy to ELCA World Hunger Resources! For example, how is climate change related to water issues? Look for Customizable Food for a Week and other resources on the ELCA website under ELCA World Hunger E.g. of action plan: <http://search.elca.org/Pages/Results.aspx?k=customizable+food+for+a+week>



Get involved with advocacy days organized by interfaith or ecumenical groups (People of Faith United for Justice organizes an advocacy day every two years).

ADVOCACY DAY

Join in with other groups on an advocacy day. In Wisconsin each year the state prepares its budget (every two years) the Wisconsin Council of Churches organizes an advocacy day at the state capitol. Check with other groups connected to your issues in Wisconsin or Michigan or organize an advocacy day.

Recently **ELCA World Hunger** organized a gathering that included advocacy on the Farm Bill at our U.S. capitol (left). **ELCA Office of Advocacy** organized the training and the visits. On the left ELCA members from around the country are visiting their legislators.

Have a paper plate campaign. Invite youth to write messages about hunger on to paper plates to send with letters to legislators.





IDEAS FOR CONINUING THE MOMENTUM AND BUILDING A NETWORK

(Primarily from *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others* and Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Pennsylvania’s website).

- Reserve time during a social advocacy committee meeting to discuss an issue in light of advocacy and/or an adult education committee meeting to try to suggest including advocacy in forums if this has not already been a part of your initial efforts.
- Form a task force in your community
- Hold Bible Studies on advocacy and/or on a theme related for the priority you have made for advocacy if this has not already been a part

of your initial efforts.

- Build awareness via social media.
- Present articles related to advocacy if you have not yet done so.
- Form a letter-to-the-editor writing events. Encourage the WELCA circle, youth groups, or other groups to be involved.
- Have a lunch, coffee or pizza letter-writing event. And/or designate a Sunday letters can be written after church. Be creative. If the letters are on hunger, consider writing a letter on paper plates etc., use information in this manual to guide participants in writing letters if guidance is needed. Also consider having a similar event for writing letters to the editor.
- Include prayers for public officials. Consider making it part of your devotions. Prayers for public officials are already included in many church services; have a focus on it on a particular Sunday that is appropriate (when an adult forum is being held for example)
- Have “Advocacy Network” or other appropriate title of your advocacy ministry added to the time and talent sheet for stewardship.
- Give a talk on advocacy during worship.
- After reading the Race Equity, Public Policies and Budgets in the next section invite someone or a panel of people knowledgeable about this topic to speak at an adult forum.

Again, the key is to build relationships, decide on an issue and delve deeper as you pray and discern. Hopefully some of the ideas here will help you begin a plan.

BIBLICAL ROOTS OF ADVOCACY

(Entire section from *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*)

“Biblically advocacy comes under the term justice, which is cited 214 times in the Bible. Related terms like just, unjust, justly, and injustice add another 155 references. In biblical terms, justice means acting in an equitable and honest manner – being fair, ethical, and merciful with each person. Biblical justice decries cheating people out of a fair piece for their grain; exploiting poor people who are unable to pay their debts; bribing judges; overcharging; and paying inadequate wages. There are warnings against perverting justice (Dt. 16:19); mistreating the alien, widow and orphan (Ex 22:29; Jer 22:3); and denying justice to poor and innocent people (Ex 23:6). God calls rulers to do justice on how they have treated people in need (Mt. 25:31-46). The prophet Micah searches to know what God requires of him. The answer is “...to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God: (Mic 6:8). Jesus answers the scribe’s question about which is the greatest commandment saying: “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: Our God is one; you shall love your God with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The

second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:28-31). These two central passages demonstrate that love and justice stand together at the heart of biblical teaching.

It is very clear through the eyes of biblical history that God repeatedly commands civil and religious leaders to render justice for *people who are poor*. The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt begins with political maneuvering of God sending Moses to Pharaoh demanding the people’s release from slavery (Ex 3:7-12). The Exodus event has been told *repeatedly* as a story of hope for oppressed people. The Exodus became a model for the Israelites regarding their relationship to poor people, immigrants, and foreigners: ‘You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me. I will surely heed their cry (Ex. 22:21-23). God teaches the people to learn from their own history of suffering, not to oppress others.

The Hebrew scriptures are filled with safeguards against the abuse of power and wealth. Landowners were required not to reap the borders of their fields or gather the gleanings after harvest. These were for the alien and poor people (Lev. 19:9-10). Creditors were obliged to release borrowers from their debt every seven years, and not to deny a loan to a poor person because the seventh year of release was near (Dt. 15:1-11). As Israel moved out of the wilderness to settle the land, kings, priests and elders became responsible for the nation’s observance of the law. When the law was broken or when those in power became corrupt, God sent messengers to call for repentance and a return to right relationships. This was the time of the prophets. Two of the transgressions most often cited by them were worship of other gods and injustice. The two were related in that false worship led people to turn away from God and forsake justice: “Hear the word of God, O people of Israel; for God has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Perjury, lying, and murder, and theft and adultery break out; bloodshed follow bloodshed: (Hos 4:1-12). The prophet’s condemnation of civil and religious authorities for their love of wealth and exploitation of poor people was openly political: “God enters into judgment with the elders and princes of the people: “It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding their face of the poor’ says the God of hosts” (Isa. 3:14-15). The haunting song of the Vineyard (Is 5) laments the greed and violence that have taken root among the people, leading God to exclaim: “But the God of host is exalted by justice and the Holy God is shown holy by righteousness” (Is 5:16).

The story of God calling a public official to account is the story of King David and the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:7) Jeremiah was later just as unequivocal in his message to the royal house of Judah: “Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages... your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.” (Jer 22:13, 17).

A key to understanding the advocacy role of the prophets is that society in biblical times was religiously refined. Political and religious institutions performed allied functions. The king, priests, and elders had a sacred duty of insuring the observance of God’s law. Confrontation with every religious authority was a civil act. Amos’ challenge of Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, is a good illustration (Amos 7:10-12). Amos addresses himself as much to the priests and elders of the people as to the king when he says: “Hear this, you will trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, “When will the new moon be over...that we may practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (Amos 8:4-6). The Bible is clear that structural injustice often masks itself behind a religious veneer. God condemns such hypocrisy outright: “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them...but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream.”

The same uncompromising sentiment is a God in Isaiah 58:3; 6-7):

“Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,

and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Advocating justice for poorer, oppressed, and hungry people with the political rulers, religious leaders, and elders of the people is a compelling and fundamental component of the Hebrew Scriptures. Is the same true for the New Testament? Jesus began his ministry, quoting Isaiah, and identifying himself with marginalized people: ¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:16-19)

Jesus was continually in conflict with religious leaders over the essential meaning of the law. Just treatment of people was at the core of his concern: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For tithe with mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith, it is these you ought to have practiced without Pharisees and Sadducees.” He was confronting public-policy decision-makers. It was not just his teaching that incensed the priests and elders, but his association with people outside the law. Jesus consorted with public centers, like prostitutes and text collectors, who were ritually and socially cut off from the community. In doing so, he openly challenged the social and the political structures of his day.

Jesus’ social activism extended his association with Samaritans. This is one of the most telling features of this ministry, an area where his public stand was a sharp contrast to the political and social norms of the community. Samaritans were shunned on historical, racial, religious, and social grounds. They were descendants of colonists brought in by Assyrians who mixed with the local population after the Northern Kingdom fell in 721 BCE. Centuries later they were still despised by Judeans as half-castes who had forsaken the authentic temple worship. To the shock of his contemporaries, Jesus kept company with, healed, and taught Samaritans (Luke 17:11-19; Jn. 4:7-42). There are a few more politically charged sections of the Bible than the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Its context as a response to the lawyer asking, “Who is my neighbor?” amplifies the force of its

message. By holding up the Samaritan over the priest and Levite as the model of a true neighbor, Jesus directly countered the religious, racial, and political bigotry of the time in much the same way some modern-day Christians brought their faith to bear on the civil rights issue.

The political dimension of Jesus is ministry fits naturally into the context of his life and teachings about riches. (Mark 10:17–22); compassion (Mark 6:30-44; Mt. 25:31-46); simple lifestyle (Lk. 12:22-34); social barriers (Lk. 14:7-14) and fundamental priorities in life (Mt. 19:19-21; Lk. 16:19-31). The capital charges leveled against him were political (John 11:45 to 50). He translated his commandment of love into a personal identification with the downtrodden of society and advocated for changes in the norms governing societal structures to reflect the true spirit of God's law. Those in authority rightly interpreted his life and teaching is a threat to establish values and behavior. Jesus and the prophets clearly inserted themselves into the political realm when they challenged social structures that abused poor, oppressed, and hungry people.”

FAITH-BASED ADVOCACY & OUR TRADITION

We encourage you to keep God and prayer at the center of your efforts rather than placing all your faith in achieving results. Spiritually and emotionally we could run into frustrating dead-ends if our theology developed into a strategy for seeking perfection and a utopian society or realizing a divine political party ordained by God. Every generation has challenges with human sin. We are imperfect people engaged with political systems that are both beneficial and flawed. All of us are in need of God’s grace. Our path as Christians involves being faithful even more so than being successful. We of course want positive results, and sometimes as we remain alert, by grace we find just the right openings to have a voice and make a difference. And we may also at times have an impact without realizing it.

As stated in *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*, “Christians are both commanded and equipped to participate with God in holding ‘the powers’ – whether in the form of governments, interest groups, or private organizations-accountable for their dealings with people. God’s people, the church, are ‘authorized to preach God’s Law to these ‘powers’ and to call them to account when they disregard the welfare of the human family, particularly its weakest members.”

Various interpretations of Luther’s withdrawal from the peasant revolt in the 16th century and his teaching about the two kingdoms have during certain periods of history led to quietism in our Lutheran churches. Perhaps those interpretations even contributed to the silence of many Christians during the Holocaust and Nazi persecutions. The famous Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, confronted that silence in a way that did not turn his theology into a political tool replacing the Gospel, but gave him a voice rooted in the Gospel challenging political and moral injustice. In the Berlin police records the lesser known Lutheran pastor, Gerhard Braune, is recorded as being the only clergy of any denomination who publicly stood up against the persecution of homosexual men; for him it was a pastoral act to save four of his parishioners, who ended up being killed (research done by Andreas Pretzel, who led a presentation at Lakeview Lutheran Church in Madison, WI in 2008. Also see <http://issuu.com/triangulo/docs/orientaciones5>). We still are left wondering why so many others considered to be great theologians were silent or actively in collusion with immoral forces.

Luther actually called Christians to challenge structures. In the Large Catechism Luther portrayed God as standing by those who are disenfranchised and told Christians to do the same. “They should be alert and resolute enough to establish and maintain order in all areas of trade and commerce in order that the poor may not be burdened and oppressed, and in order that they may not themselves be charged with other men’s sins.” (Large Catechism 249 as quoted by *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*).

In his sermon, *Children of the Revolution*, Steed Davidson, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Pacific Lutheran Seminary, talks about how Luther's theological and academic work produced, "a new sense of all human beings as children of God." Luther's followers for the first time believed that God's grace was available without restriction or merit and to people regardless of economic status. That transformation affected both churches and issues related to the state. When people who were poor and oppressed found their voice they worked with Thomas Müntzer in the Peasant Revolt to seek out better living conditions. Luther withdrew from the revolt when peasants threatened violence against the princes. According to Davidson, "Luther understood then what George Orwell later came to experience and what we only still see darkly, that oppressed people easily become oppressors without the necessary restraints in place." The spiritual and political kingdoms would remain separate. "Luther understood the engine of the revolution to be God and that under God's guidance new societies can emerge with new faithful people."

Davidson also points out that the demand for justice is at one with the Lutheran focus on the common person. "A civic duty to the poor, a civic duty to homelessness, a civic duty because people get robbed by their bank and mortgage companies, a civic duty because children are denied proper education..." (for the entire sermon go to <http://www.plts.edu/davidson20071028.html>)

With God at our center we remember that Christ is our Advocate. The work of advocacy can be trying. What is just and unjust sometimes seems very clear but in other situations ambiguous and change often is slow. However, we are not isolated in our ministries. We begin, follow through, and end any particular effort in faith within community. Even if we do not always see the fruits of all our actions or success in the ways we desire, we respond to the grace in our lives with faithfulness knowing we are not alone. "God will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." (St. John 14:16)

Luther and the Common Chest (this information is from the book, *Forgotten Luther - Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation*, edited by Carter Lindberg and Paul Wee). Dr. Martin Luther is credited with the idea of establishing a common chest in Wittenberg in 1522 as a way to advocate for the poor. He addressed hunger by working with others to care for people's immediate needs and by seeking systemic ways to end hunger. He thought it was the duty to challenge government from the pulpit. "How skillfully Sir Greed can dress up to look pious person if that is what the occasion requires well he is actually a double scoundrel and liar." The common chest offered for example,

- Immediate help for people who were poor
- Education for poor children
- Refinancing loans with high interest rate,
- Vocational training and retraining for artisans.
- A community physician for people who couldn't afford a doctor.

The common chest was the professionalization of welfare with four different locks, directors from various classes, who provided a triannual report. The printing press allowed Johannes Bugenhagen to spread pamphlets to other parts of Germany, Norway, Denmark, and throughout other parts of Europe. The common chest was based on faith active in love and a practical motivation for helping the poor. Administering assistance involved a large network structured by lawyers and jurists.

Luther warned against idealizing poverty as the ideal Christian state, viewing alms as a means to purchase paradise. And supporting an economy that rationalized itself as charity. Saved by grace, we respond in our service.

THE ELCA AND MINISTRIES OF ADVOCACY

From our ELCA Advocacy office in Washington D.C.: “As the ELCA, we believe God is calling us into the world to serve together. Through our direct service, we aid immediate needs before us. Through our advocacy work, we impact systemic, long-lasting change.

The public policies our officials write, amend and ultimately adopt can have ongoing effects on our neighbors who are struggling with hunger and living with poverty, as well as God’s creation. By telling our lawmakers how Lutheran ministries help our world and urging them to advance legislation that reflects these commitments, we are helping create opportunities to overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, and defend God’s creation.

In its very first social statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” from 1991, our church committed to “work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless and those who suffer, using its power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace and the care of creation.” <http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Advocacy/Why-Advocacy>

TAKING POSITIONS

When the ELCA develops social statements, it involves congregations. The ELCA and state public policy offices such as LOPPW take positions on some specific issues after studying those social statements, scripture, Lutheran teachings and receiving feedback from bishops. LOPPW also has an advisory council made up of members from each of the six synods it serves to help set priorities for addressing public policy issues related to hunger.

The umbrella under which policies that impact hunger can fit is broad. Several state public policy offices address concerns related to homelessness, human trafficking, healthcare, immigration, the environment, education, taxes, unemployment, etc. However, we try to focus our major advocacy work on a few issues at a time and will in a secondary manner support additional efforts of the ELCA as well as other faith partners.

This is a very helpful quote from *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*: “In taking public positions on issues, it is carefully noted that these are not binding on the conscience of ELCA members. We believe the Christian people disagree on important matters while maintaining an understanding of community, is one measure of the power of the Gospel. We do not claim to speak unambiguously for God or all Lutherans. Yet, in our public advocacy we try to witness to the word of God as it has been revealed to us and as it is reflected in the established positions of the ELCA.”

BIBLICAL REFERENCES

(from Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania)

“This is a partial list of biblical references on justice and advocacy. For a more comprehensive study consult a complete Concordance. In addition to the word ‘justice,’ you can broaden the list by looking up texts on hunger (hungry); alien(s); yoke; peace; mercy; plead; compassion; love; and other words that relate to the notion of justice and advocacy. Even though this is not an exhaustive list of biblical references to poverty and injustice, it demonstrates the importance of advocacy. Such references point out the Biblical mandate to care for those who suffer from hunger and poverty. Caring includes addressing the needs of the poor on a micro level by literally giving out food, clothing etc. as well as engaging in advocacy, which strives to change the larger power structures of the world so that they are more in line with a Godly view of justice.

Excellent sources for biblical quotations: Cry Justice: The Bible on Hunger and Poverty by Ron Sider Poverty and the Poor in the Bible from the American Bible Society The Poverty and Justice Bible from the Bible Society UK.”

- Ex 3:1-12 God sends Moses to Pharaoh
- Ex 16:1-30 Trust God to provide our needs
- Ex 22:21-23 You shall not oppress the resident alien
- Ex 23:1-9 Do not pervert/deny justice to your people
- Lev 19:9-10 Leave gleanings for poor people
- Lev 19:15-16 Judge with justice; do not take advantage
- Deut 15:1-11 Sabbatical year and remission of debts
- Deut 16:18-20 Justice, and only justice, shall you pursue
- 2 Sam 12 Nathan condemns David
- I Kg 21 Ahab's greed leads to the murder of Naboth
- Ps 12:5 The Lord provides security for the needy
- Ps 72 Prayer for the king to deliver oppressed people
- Ps 82 God wants justice for the weak and destitute
- Ps 132:15 God will provide food for Zion's poor
- Prov 13:23 Unjust people withhold the poor's means for food
- Prov 21:13 Listen to the cry of poor people
- Prov 22:9 Those who are generous with the poor are blessed Is 3:13-15 Elders and princes crush poor people
- Is 5:1-17 The Lord is exalted by justice
- Is 58:1-14 The true fasting that God desires
- Jer 22:3 God commands the king to act with justice
- Jer 22:11-17 Woe to the king who builds his house on injustice
- Ez 22:23-31 Princes, priests, and prophets oppress poor people
- Hos 4:1-11 Priests and people follow false gods and injustice
- Amos 5:10-24 God despises the people's worship
- Amos 8:4-8 Poor people are bought for a pair of sandals
- Mic 6:6-8 What God truly requires
- Mt 6:25-34 First seek God and God's justice
- Mt 23:23 Woe to Scribes and Pharisees who neglect justice
- Mt 25:31-46 "I was hungry and you gave me food"
- Mk 6:30-44 Feeding the five thousand
- Mk 10:17-22 The man with many possessions
- Mk 12:28-34 The great commandment
- Lk 4:16-21 Jesus sent to bring good news to the poor
- Lk 10:25-37 Parable of the Good Samaritan
- Lk 14:12-14 Invite poor people to your dinner
- Lk 16:19-31 The rich man and Lazarus
- Lk 19:1-10 Jesus and Zacchaeus, the tax collector
- Jn 8:1-11 The woman caught in adultery
- Acts 2:44-45 The believers provided for each other's needs
- Rom 15:24b-29 Paul's churches helping the poor of Jerusalem
- 2 Cor 2:8-9 Jesus made himself poor

- 2 Cor 6:3-10 Encouragement in physical hardships; though poor, in Christ one has everything
- 2 Cor 9:11-15 Generosity is enriching and an expression of the gospel
- Hebrews 10:23-25 Encouragement to be concerned for one another
- James 2:1-9 Love all people the same; especially the poor, despite appearances
- James 2:14-17 Action must accompany faith in providing for those in need”

RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Various public policies and budgets can have profound positive or negative impacts on various racial and ethnic groups. Organizations such as Race Forward – The Center for Racial Justice Innovation (<https://www.raceforward.org/>), offer assistance in discerning those impacts. The extent to which any individual or group in a congregation with an advocacy ministry will end up analyzing policies will vary, but the work done by Race Forward at the very least helps us to be more alert to how various groups are affected by public policies and budgets.

In the *Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide for Economic Policies and Public Budget* Terry Kelcher presents several questions to consider. Below are examples of questions under three headings:

1. “Analyzing Current Problems:
 - What are the **adverse effects** that different racialized communities experience under current policies?
 - What are the **causes or contributing factors** that produce or perpetuate the inequalities?
2. Developing and Advancing Proposed Changes
 - What steps can insure **public input and participation** by the most disadvantaged racial communities and stakeholders in developing proposed policies and budgets?
 - What **new opportunities** can be created to enhance equity, inclusion and unity across different racial/ethnic groups?
3. Analyzing Current Proposals
 - Will the proposal **reduce, limit or eliminate programs** that are vital to or disproportionately needed by, particular disadvantaged racial/ethnic communities?
 - Will the proposal **increase, expand or create programs** that are vital to or disproportionately needed by, particular disadvantaged racial/ethnic communities?
 - What **modifications** in the proposal are needed to maximize racial equity and inclusion?”

Kelcher quotes Jermaine Toney, Organizing Apprenticeship Project; 2007 Minnesota Race and Budget Matters Report: “**State budgets are not just checkbooks, they are moral documents.**”

For the entire guide that was created under the Applied Research Center, which is now Race Forward, please go to file:///C:/Users/LOPPW/Downloads/Racial_Equity_Impact_Assessments2009%20(1).pdf

In addition to the questions posed by Race Forward related to budgets and economic policies, also consider which groups are most immediately impacted by environmental policies, voter Id laws, etc.

INTERCESSARY PRAYERS

(from *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*)

Intercessory prayer is prayer behalf of others. Most Christians intercede for family members, friends, ministry and mission endeavors. Many church services include prayers for our public officials.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life and all godliness and dignity.
1 Timothy 2:1,2

God is active in the world through faithful believers serving as instruments and working mysteriously beyond our human efforts. Intercessory prayer is important to both aspects of God's activity.

Prayer Suggestions

- Integrate intercessory prayer for government officials and just policies into your regular personal prayers and devotions, and worship services and small group meetings.
- During your prayer recall a scripture passage expressing God's concern for the issues you were praying about. Scripture can help you have faith that your concern is important to God and that God will respond to your prayer.
- Link your prayers to specific people and situations.
- Pray for faith based organizations that are directly involved in witnessing to government officials
- Include yourself among those who need to make more just decisions and take more peaceful actions.
- Listen for God's Spirit to nudge you regarding what steps you can take to be an instrument of transformation.
- Express thanks to God for the positive things the government is doing.

COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

(First sections primarily taken from the Wisconsin State Legislature site:

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/Pages/cg/contact.aspx>. Information also largely comes from the Faith Action Network's website and *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A FAITHFUL ADVOCATE?

Doing simple things. Calling and writing your legislator. Educating people in your faith community. Connecting with each other. Keeping prayer integrated in your journey.

FIND YOUR LEGISLATORS:

For Wisconsin: Find your legislators and their exact address at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/> You can also reach your legislators by calling the Legislative Hotline. In Madison, dial **608-266-9960**. Toll-free, call **1-800-362-9472**. general information about the Wisconsin Legislature, legislative processes, bill histories, or other inquiries, you can [talk to the Legislative Reference Bureau's research staff](#) by calling **(608) 266-0341**.

For the Upper Peninsula of Michigan: Find your legislators and their exact addresses at legislature.mi.gov Or call the legislature at (517) 373-0135

HOW DO I CONTACT MY LEGISLATOR?

The first step in contacting your legislator is to know who your legislator is. The easiest way to do this is the tool found on the Legislature's home page. For Wisconsin click onto <http://legis.wisconsin.gov> For the UP, <http://www.house.mi.gov/mhrpublic/>. Go to the center of the Wisconsin page is a link that says Who Represents Me? On the left side of the Michigan page is a link that says, Legislators. Click on that link and fill in the form to get the names of your state representative and senator.

If you do not have computer access, you can call your local town, village, or city clerk's office to find out who represents you in the state Legislature. Your local library may be able to help you with this also.

KEEPING UP WITH LEGISLATION

Consider signing up for LOPPW and ELCA Advocacy Action Alerts! Go to the bottom of the Home page of www.loppw.org and click on to Join the Advocacy Network. You can also sign up for alerts directly from your state legislatures. In addition, there are Facebook apps and list serves of local groups you can join.

ADVOCACY IN PERSON

“Call to make an appointment to visit your legislator. It can be effective to bring more people with you but probably no more than five in total. Legislators also conduct listening sessions in their districts. These are specifically designed to give constituents direct access to the legislator. Watch the newspapers for announcements or call the legislator's Capitol office to ask if the legislator is planning such a session.

- Prepare for the meeting by deciding the following:
 - What information and messages you want to convey.
 - What you want the legislator to do.
- Be on time for your appointment. Be prepared, dress neatly, be polite and be brief. At the beginning of the meeting, state who you are, whom you represent, what you want to discuss, and what you want your legislator to do. State that you are a constituent from their district.
- Do not be surprised if your legislator does not know about your issue. Legislators have to know about many issues and may specialize in areas unrelated to your work. Avoid overwhelming the legislator with information and detail. If you do not know the answer to a specific question, offer to find the answer and then forward the information to the legislator.
- Most meetings with legislators last for 15 minutes or less but can go longer. Be sure your message is short and concise. Avoid getting into too many details about your issues. An anecdote is good, but a life story is too long.
- State the problem that concerns you, its importance and what you want them to do about it. Pause to allow the legislator to respond; listen to them to find out where they stand on the issue.
- Be ready to answer questions. It is okay if you don't know the answers. If this is the case, just tell legislators that you don't know the answer, but that you will get back to them—if you say this, you must follow through.
- Leave some information (like a fact sheet); be sure that it has your contact information on it.
- It's OK if you meet with the legislative assistant. They are usually very friendly and will convey your message to the legislator.
- Follow up your meeting with a note thanking them for the meeting, restating your concerns, and providing further information (if needed).”

ADVOCACY BY MAIL AND E-MAIL : A letter is an important, even critical, way to influence legislation. Letters to the writer's own Senator and Representative are especially important.

Try to keep your message to one or two paragraphs; staff members are too busy to read messages that are several pages long.

- When possible writing a letter on a company or organization's letterhead will get increased attention, but do not let not having a letterhead stop you.
- **Include your postal address.**
- TAKE THE TIME TO QUICKLY CRAFT A KEY MESSAGE - it doesn't have to be perfect (perfect is the enemy of good!) or entirely original; expanding on a message from a group's action alert is fine, but personalizing that message is important.
- Write in your own words and include your own thoughts: tell how the legislation will affect you and others like you.
- Show as much knowledge as you can, but don't worry if you're not an expert: Your personal experience is the best testimony that you can offer.
- Avoid sending form letters, but if you do send one, be sure to personalize it with a hand-written note.
- Don't threaten, browbeat, or get nasty.
- Write briefly, on one subject at a time, and refer to bills by name and number.
- Don't try to become a pen pal; if you write too often you become a nuisance.
- If you ask a question and don't get a reply, follow up with another letter asking politely, but clearly for a response.
- When a legislator votes as you asked, send a thank-you note.

Mail. You can reach your legislator by mail at one of the following addresses:

For assembly members address them as Representative (Full Name) or The Honorable (Full Name)

For senate members address them as State Senator (Full Name) or The Honorable (Full Name)

SAMPLE LETTER

Date

The Honorable _____ Room _____ State Capitol, City, State, Zip

(Use the same address on the envelope.)

Dear Senator or Representative or Governor _____,

(Identify yourself, as a legislative constituent if you are one or your interest in the committee of which he/she is a member). Identify the issue you are concerned about. Add any reason you may have for a special interest in the issue, like how people may be affected by the issue.)

I am writing to you today as my senator because I am especially interested in efforts to provide programs that assist workplaces to provide employment for those who are most impoverished. I feel that it is very important that everyone in our state has an opportunity to make a living. It is, for example, very difficult for people who have been recently released from prison to find work and support themselves.

(Try to be specific about what you would like the legislator to do.)

I would ask that you support efforts to increase funding for transitional jobs in our state. When bills are introduced during this session, I will try to be more specific about legislation that I would urge you to support.

(Thank the legislator for her time and interest.)

Thank you very much for your time and for any efforts that you are able to make to increase the availability of jobs for the most impoverished and diminish poverty in our state.

Sincerely,

Your name and address (you could also leave your phone number and e-mail address)

E-mail. E-mail information is on your state legislature's website. Remember to include all the same relevant information that you would include in a letter.

ADVOCACY BY TELEPHONE

Here are some recommendations for making telephone calls directly to your legislators:

- Whether you created it or took it from an action alert -- remember your key message!
- Identify yourself by name and address (this verifies that you are a constituent).
- Identify the bill you wish to talk about, by name and number (if possible).
- If your legislator needs further information, supply it as fast as possible.
- Do not be abusive; don't threaten your legislator.
- Don't argue if the legislator has an opposing view or hasn't yet decided.
- Recognize that legislators are often away from the office, at committee business or on the floor of the chamber, so you may talk instead to an aide. That's great! Use the same basic rules. Staff members are very reliable and will pass along what you said.
- Remember that telephone calls are often taken by a staff member, not the member of the state legislature. Asked to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment. If they are not present, leave a short message with all pertinent information. After identifying yourself and where you live, tell the agent you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell senator or representative and then the name that I support/oppose and the name the bill."
- You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your legislators or representatives position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call. Offered to provide further written information. Follow up with a letter.
- Follow the call with a note restating your position and thanking them for their time.
- Don't be intimidated. You are a concerned citizen talking to public servants elected to represent you.

VIRTUAL VISITS RESOURCE (also helpful for in-person visits from out DC office)

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATOR

Whichever form of communication you use remember to do the following:

- **Contact your own legislator.** It can also be appropriate to make contact with **members of a committee** working with a proposed bill in which you are interested; you may want to ask your legislator about this.
- **Give your name and contact information.** Put this information on the letter you send (if you send a letter) in case the envelope is lost or discarded. Include contact information in e-mail and faxes as well. Also leave behind in writing who you are such as in a business card when visiting your legislator in person. Give your contact information verbally when making phone contact.

- **Ask for a response.** In particular, ask what your legislator’s position is on the topic about which you are contacting him/her. As a constituent, you are entitled to know.
- **Be polite.** If you have strong feelings about a bill, there is the temptation to contact the author to express your views, even if the author is not your legislator. You are certainly free to do so but be aware that a legislator will give little weight to the opinion of residents of another legislative district. If you are requesting assistance, it is particularly important to contact your own representatives. If you know of positive actions your legislator has done in the past you can begin by thanking him or her for those actions.
- **“Adopt” an issue.** Maximize your influence by writing your legislators about only one or two issues, no more than once every few weeks. Focusing your communications on one or two issues can make you an “expert” in the eyes of the office. Thank your legislators if they do what you ask.
- **Capitalize on the local.** Include information about how specific legislation may affect your district or state.
- **Be reasonable.** Try not to ask for something your legislator cannot do.
- **Be specific and clear.** If you are contacting your representative about specific legislation, be sure you know the bill number before you make contact. If you have trouble finding the bill number a legislative aide in your representative’s office should be able to help you. If you are contacting your legislator to recommend legislation, describe the problem that you believe needs to be addressed and, if you have a particular solution in mind, describe that as well. Also, be sure to state your reasons for the positions you want your legislator to take.
- **Be timely.** If you want to influence a vote, you need to connect with your legislator before the vote is taken.
- **Be personal.** To have the greatest impact, take the time to learn about the issue and then sit down and write a letter in your own words or make a phone call stating your own thoughts, or be prepared to communicate your personal interest for a personal visit. On particularly controversial topics, advocacy groups deluge legislators with hundreds of identical post cards or phone calls. To be sure, legislators count these contacts, but give them much less weight than individually prepared communications. In addition, to the extent possible, base your comments on your own experiences. A personal story has much more impact than a generic statement of position.

THE MEDIA

This section is taken from Faith Action Network’s website and *Equipping Advocates to Empower Others*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

“Letters to the editor are impossible to overuse.” – Congressional Aide

Sending letters to the editor is an easy way to voice your opinion to policymakers and to educate people in your community about issues that concern you. You can use letters to correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article, to explain the connection between the news item and those issues, or to praise or criticize a recent article or editorial. Without exception, the letters section is one of the most highly read segments of newspapers and magazines.

Tips to increase your chances of getting published:

Know the Publication’s Policies on Letters

Find out the publications policy for printing letters. Some have weight limitations, some letters to the typewritten and almost all require that you and your name, address and phone number. (Your address and phone number will not be printed; most publications call you to confirm that you really did write the letter anyone to have it published).

Be Timely

Responding to a recent article, editorial or off and peace is one of the best ways to increase your chances of getting published. Shouldn't mention the name of the article in the date it was published. You can also capitalize on recent news events anniversaries. For example, you might use Earth Day as an opportunity to write about the importance of environmental regulations. Or you can write to inform citizens how their legislators voted on an important issue.

Keep it Simple

Keep your points clear and concise, stick to one subject, and try to keep your letters to three or four paragraphs. Make sure the first sentence is short and catchy. Don't be afraid to be direct, engaging and even controversial.

Make it Local

- Use local statistics: a letter on environmental issues should point out how many rivers and lakes are unsafe.
- Use personal stories: if you or someone in your family has become ill from contaminated drinking water, say so in the letter.
- Use names: if a letter to the editor mentions a representative or senator by name, they will see it. Elected officials care about how they are being perceived it home. Also urge readers to express their views to elected officials.
- User credentials: if you have expertise in the area you are writing about, say so! However, don't be afraid to write even if you do not have a particular expertise in the area about what you're writing.

Don't Forget the Follow Up

Do not stay discouraged if your letter is not printed. Keep trying. You can submit a revised letter with a different angle on the issue later. And if your letter is published, be sure to send it to your representative with a personal note attached.

Think Strategically

Think of a letter-to-the-editor as a regular strategic tool. Target several different papers in your district at the same time and encourage others to explore different angles on the same issue.

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Other than the front page, the letters to the editor section is the most read part of your local newspaper. On average, 80% publish most of the letters they received. Our state and federal representatives pay attention to letters to the editor, particularly if their names are mentioned. When you write your letter keep in mind the following suggestions:

1. **Keep it short.** It is recommended the length of your B about 250 words. Periodicals have a limited space and often receive more letters than they can possibly publish. If there is less editing for the editor it is more likely your letter will appear.
2. **Get to the point.** Letters should always state the specific issue, and what action should be taken. Include the name and/or number of the bill you're commenting on. Mention the name of your senator and/or representative and what action you would like them to take.
3. **Write in simple language.** Newspapers are looking for letters that are understandable by a variety of educational levels. Writing an intelligible letter need not be complicated. However, do not be afraid to address sophisticated subjects.
4. **Be sure to be credible.** If you use a statistic, site your source. Check the number of your bill through the legislator's office or call a legislator or senator sponsoring the bill to see if the number has changed.

5. **Be timely.** Letters to the editor need to be written as soon as you are aware of an action. Periodicals and online news that are published daily, such as newspapers, treat news as “new” for only a short time. Letters to the editor and editorials will be printed if they are current or if they reflect what will be happening in the near future.
6. **Sign your letter.** Newspapers will not publish your letter without a signature, although you may request that your name be kept anonymous. And considering this option remember the letters that are anonymous are often not considered credible. Include your signature your residents and/or voting district as well.
7. **Please consider sending a copy of your letter to LOPPW office.** We will use your letter as a resource to encourage others to write and will also be able to note others who support the position of the ELCA.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Write with a moral purpose to influence public opinion. The test of success in editorial writing is a clearness of style, a moral purpose and sound reasoning, using the power of words to express what the writer conceives to be the right course of action on an issue to influence public opinion.

A good editorial can win the support of readers by changing their opinion—and often those readers are people who have the power to change public policy.

What should an editorial do?

1. **Criticize:** If it criticizes, it requires suggestions for change. If you instigate an argument against something in an attack, you must be immaculate in your reasoning and articulate it with excellence. An attack is best if it’s quietly forceful; criticism does not have to be vigorous, but it has to be substantiated with good facts as well as suggestions for change.
2. **Defend:** A good editorial stands up for a viewpoint, individual or institution that is under attack with the purpose of widening that support base.
3. **Endorse:** You must give rock-solid reasons for your endorsement or support.
4. **Provide kind words:** When you compliment, show why that compliment is sound judgment. When praise is warranted it can be powerful.
5. **Compel and Inspire:** By making this appeal, you are showing a willingness to move forward for something—improvements in the school lunch program, for example. Or you might advocate that this be accomplished by backing suggestions put out by a school committee that studied the problem. An appeal editorial might mean that you’d encourage people to help inform their elected leaders or public officials.

How should an editorial be written?

Avoid moralizing editorials. They tend to preach and turn the reader off. Whatever type of editorial you write, it must be built around a logical framework. It must have an:

1. **Introduction:** To get the reader’s attention. This is where the rubber meets the road. The first sentence (the lead) can compel a reader to read on or give them the opportunity to escape into the comic section.
2. **Body:** To persuade the reader the body of an editorial has to provide good reasoning with convincing facts.
3. **Conclusion:** To prompt the reader into action the conclusion must be stated clearly. The best conclusions call the reader to a specific articulated action.

An effective formula for editorial writing is to

1. State the problem
2. Take a Position on the problem within the context of what’s current
3. Provide Evidence to support your position
4. Conclude: Who’s affected and how?
5. Provide Solutions to the problem: (At least two)

MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Remember, reporters are humans too. Good reporters work hard to establish rapport with their sources. Be carefully candid, civil and above all, honest. Faced with such good manners, a reporter is most likely to respond in kind (hopefully). Also remember that if you're talking to a broadcast reporter: In 1968, the average was 42.2 second sound bites. Today it's 7 seconds. And when viewers were asked what caused them to believe the message delivered, 16% said they believed the message because of what was said. 84% said they believed it because of HOW it was said.

What to do:

1. Remember, there is nothing in the First Amendment that requires you to answer any question or to talk to a reporter at all. If they call you on the phone and you aren't sure what you want to say, simply tell them: "Let me call you back when I get the information you need. What's your phone number?" (Then hang up and call a professional!)
2. Keep your answers short, simple and to the point. Avoid industry jargon and acronyms that may be alien language to the interviewer.
3. Determine a concise way of relating your overall message. Think over and rehearse answers to likely questions. Try to keep the reporter focused on your main message and say it several ways to get the point across.
4. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say: "I don't know." Or, you can simply answer another question of your choosing.
5. Realize that only a small part of what you say will appear in print or be heard on the air.
6. Be very judicious in speaking "off the record." The best policy is to talk only "on the record" and understand that everything you say can be quoted. Just because they're not writing doesn't mean they aren't remembering what you say. Some reporters don't use notes.
7. Get you, or you and your staff media training!

What not to do:

1. Never lie.
2. Don't talk fast—some reporters (even print) record your comments. Most are writing things down and you want them to get it right.
3. Don't answer questions that aren't part of your agenda. Sometimes the best answer to a question is rephrasing the question itself.
4. Don't be afraid to change or redefine the topic or angle the reporter may be using. Consider yourself an educator. Gently correct wrong impressions, terminology or facts.
5. Don't talk down to the reporter. If they need to be taught something, teach gently.
6. Don't lose your cool even if you're seething inside. You will only alienate a powerful friend.
7. Never say, "No comment." Remember how that looks in print or on the air: "Refused to comment." Instead, offer an oblique answer, directing the conversation back to your message. You can always begin that effort with: "What's important here is..."

Remember that you are not alone! We begin with God, walk with God, and end with God.

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