

Take Action!

**Justice & Witness Ministries
Wider Church Ministries**



**2015 - 2016
The 114th Congress**

Public Policy ADVOCACY GUIDE

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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Join the **J**ustice and **P**eace **A**ction **N**etwork!

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Justice and Witness Ministries

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Let Your Voice be Heard! Become a UCC Advocate!

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1. JUSTICE AND PEACE ACTION NETWORK Join the JPANet and receive weekly opportunities to take action on the issues you care about: ucc.org/join_the_network

2. WITNESS FOR JUSTICE Inspiring and thought provoking reflections on current events written by UCC leaders and justice advocates: ucc.org/witness_for_justice

3. GLOBAL MINISTRIES WEEKLY UPDATE Global Ministries is the common witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ: globalministries.org/join

**Our vision: a more just, compassionate and peaceful world that
honors all of God's creation**

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



☐ Take Action ☐ Witness for Justice ☐ Global Ministries Update

Name: _____

E-mail address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Conference: _____ Association: _____

**United Church of Christ, Justice & Witness Ministries, Attn: Helga Mingione
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CONTINUING TESTAMENT
EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME
CHANGING LIVES

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Dear Partners in Christ,

The United Church of Christ has a long-standing commitment to advocate for public policies that promote healing and reconciliation in this troubled world. For many years, Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries have published the *Public Policy Briefing Book* to provide information about our church's concern for national and global issues. Its success has been in part due to its user-friendliness and for interpreting our call as Christians who engage each other in the public square to wrestle through the concerns of the world.

New this year is the **Public Policy Advocacy Guide**. This trimmer version contains the advocacy organizing tools that you have come to value. What has been trimmed are issue briefs, many of which you will find online; http://www.ucc.org/justice_issues.

We hope this guide book will help members and churches become better informed about key issues and organize for justice and peace in concrete ways. It is in this way that we strengthen our engagement in legislation in our local communities, states, Congress, and in resolutions of the United Nations which further our understanding of the reign of God's love for people everywhere.

People often ask about the source of our particular justice stands. The UCC General Synod, meeting every two years, brings together people from the broad diversity of the church to deliberate on resolutions and pronouncements concerning the issues of our day. These statements are brought to the General Synod by local churches, associations, conferences and national bodies of the church. Once voted by the General Synod, they become a message to both church and society. Those policy statements are then the basis from which our faith voice is heard on these important matters.

We invite you to join the **UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet)**. http://www.ucc.org/join_the_network. Regular email alerts and a monthly newsletter give information about current issues. Congressional representatives report that they pay close attention to the volume of messages they receive from constituents, whether by in person visits, social media, mail and email, and telephone calls.

We join you in longing for and working for God's justice and peace here on earth. May God continue to bless your ministry.

In peace and solidarity,

Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister
Justice and Witness Ministries

Rev. James Moos
Executive Minister
Wider Church Ministries

COLLEGIUM OF OFFICERS
Rev. Geoffrey A. Black
GENERAL MINISTER AND PRESIDENT

Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

Rev. J. Bennett Guess
LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRIES

Rev. James A. Moos
WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES

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User's Guide to the *Public Policy Advocacy Guide*

The *Public Policy Advocacy Guide* is a resource developed by staff in Justice and Witness Ministries and distributed at various UCC settings of the church, i.e. the local church, association, conference meetings and General Synod. Likewise, it is circulated at some ecumenical gatherings such as Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference. An electronic version can be downloaded at http://www.ucc.org/justice_advocacy_resources

The Advocacy Guide Holds Tools You Need to Get Started

Advocacy in the United Church of Christ depends on congregations and their members. Each week, through the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) and other UCC take action vehicles, i.e. *Keeping You E-Posted*, more than 75,000 people of faith are given the opportunity to take action as it relates to federal policy issues. As is consistent with past editions, this year's version of the *Public Policy Advocacy Guide* includes information that you will need to get your congregation ready for organizing a witness on legislative issues. The Advocacy Guide also features links to issue briefings that highlights key domestic and international public policy.

So get started. Glance through the Advocacy Guide and get an overview of how you and your friends can participate. You may find it helpful to take the guide to a social action committee meeting or find out the issues of greatest concern to your congregation and help put your congregation on the road to advocacy!

How to Use the Advocacy Guide in Your Congregation

Not every issue that General Synod has ever spoken to is found online www.ucc.org/justice_issues. However, many faithful members in the UCC, Disciples of Christ or our partner organizations, including national staff, do work throughout the year on many issues that impact our daily lives. Therefore, if you aren't able to locate a particular issue, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

The internet and the newly expanded electronic advocacy capacity of the United Church of Christ has made it easier for advocates to time their actions with up-to-the minute strategies for influencing legislation. In the *Advocacy Guide* you will find links to the background on legislation so that you can begin to educate and organize members of your local church to act when a bill comes to a committee or floor vote in Congress.

Weekly actions and updates on issues are posted at www.ucc.org/join_the_network, our UCC electronic advocacy website. If you are not currently receiving JPANet Weekly Actions, which alert network members to legislative actions in Congress each week, you can sign up for them through the aforementioned website. Moreover, once you take an electronic action, you immediately become part of the network, unless you choose to opt out.

How Does the UCC Staff Work on Legislative and Policy Issues?

People often ask what guides the statements, actions, witness, and ministry of the United Church of Christ in all its varied settings. That vision is offered by UCC members from across the country who gather for General Synod, to pray, reflect, and discern a faithful response to God's vision through resolutions and pronouncements on the issues facing our world. Since the very beginning of its life in 1957, the United Church of Christ has made courageous statements on major social policy issues of the day, during times of great social and political change. Today members of our staff build on this legacy and reference specific General Synod statements in shaping our public witness and positions on issues of public policy.

The UCC Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) staffs work on both domestic and international issues. Our offices are based in Cleveland, OH; Whitakers, NC; Port Orchard, WA and Washington, DC. The UCC staff of Wider Church Ministries (WCM) and of Global Ministries, which includes the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), monitor international issues and are based in Cleveland, OH and Indianapolis, IN.

The UCC Justice and Witness staff in Washington, D.C. (Public Life and Social Policy Team) in partnership with UCC staff, conferences, congregations, and individual members, monitor and seek change in legislation at local, state and federal levels through a variety of coalitions and working groups.

The UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) is a common action arm of the four covenanted ministries of the UCC. The JPANet is charged with mobilizing UCC members for concentrated action as issues emerge. Contact staffs via a phone number listed below or online www.ucc.org/staff to locate individual email:

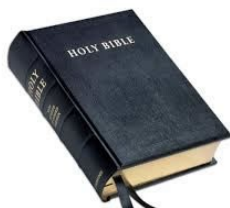
Justice and Witness Ministries
700 Prospect Avenue East
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-736-3700
216-736-3703 (fax)
866-822-8224 (toll free)
www.ucc.org/justice

Justice and Witness Ministries
Washington, DC Office
100 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 330
Washington, DC 20002
202-543-1517
202-543-5994 (fax)
www.ucc.org/justice

Wider Church Ministries/
Global Ministries (UCC)
700 Prospect Avenue East
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-736-3200
216-736-3203 (fax)
866-822-8224 (toll free)
www.globalministries.org

Franklinton Center at Bricks (JWM)
PO Box 220
Whitakers, NC 27891
252-437-1723
252-437-1278 (fax)
www.ucc.org/franklinton-center

A Biblical Call to Advocacy



“Doom to you who legislate evil, who make laws that make victims – Laws that make misery for the poor, that rob my destitute people of dignity, exploiting defenseless widows, taking advantage of homeless children. What will you have to say on Judgment Day?”

[Isaiah 10:1-3a, the Message]

These continue to be challenging times for our nation, as debate rages over fundamental decisions regarding our national priorities, values and commitments, and how they will be conveyed in public policy. Events of recent times remind us that we cannot ignore economic, racial, and ecological realities that have led to greater abundance for some and scarcity for many others. None of us remains untouched. In the challenges before us today, we, as people of faith, can hear the echoes of prophets and believers who throughout history have lifted up a vision of right relationship within human community and with God. God’s vision of the wholeness of creation has always challenged the human limits of our thoughts, imaginations, and hopes.

The Hebrew people were continually reminded that the way in which their human community was structured reflected their relationship to God. In the prophetic tradition, justice in human community is inextricably linked to being in right relationship with God, for as God had brought the people through great trouble, so they were to respond to those in trouble in their midst.

Jesus reminds us of the call to compassion and justice, showing special care and concern for those in his day who were considered expendable. “Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.” [Matthew 25:40, *the Message*]

When human community is broken by injustice, the relationship of the community to God is broken. Right relationship in human community and with God is reflected in how the least are treated – the orphans, the widow, and the sojourners.

The prophet Isaiah points to the connection between our common life and public policy – the laws, policies, practices and decisions of our nation, states, and cities (Isaiah 10:1-2). Laws and policies order our common life. They reflect our priorities as a people, including what we value and who we value.

In responding faithfully to God’s call for abundant life for all people, a common life in which no one is left behind, we are drawn inevitably to engage in public policy advocacy. This connection is powerfully expressed in these words:

“Politics is often taken to be a dirty word. But political processes are simply the way that communities of people organize their common life, allocate their resources, and tackle their shared problems. Politics is about the rules we make, the values we honor, the processes we follow so that large groups of people can live together with some measure of fairness, order and peace. How can people of faith possibly wash their hands of that public arena when our Scriptures clearly show God’s preoccupation with it: with honest weights and measures in the marketplace; with judges who will not take bribes; with the plight of the poor and the perils of

wealth; with hospitality for strangers and foreigners; with beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks? For people of faith, public policy is never merely politics, merely economics. It is one way we try to plow the Biblical vision of shalom into the soil of our history. It is a way of living out the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.”

— *“The Good Samaritan, the United Church of Christ and Public Policy,” Richard G. Watts, adapted by David Bahr [note: no longer in publication]*

Do our policies and values reflect the vision to which our faith calls us? What is the connection between the Gospel call to respond to the hungry — the thirsty, the stranger, those in prison, and those who are sick — and the policy decisions that determine funding for school feeding programs, standards for clean air, soil and water, sentencing for nonviolent offenders, and health care access? It is our hope that the *2015-2016 Public Policy Advocacy Guide* may provide a way to think about those connections.

UCC General Synod Resolutions and Justice Advocacy

“Whereas many people have committed to memory John 3:16 - ‘For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only begotten child,’ and though this verse has become one of the best-known and often-quoted verses in the Scripture, we have failed to take cognizance of one of the key elements of this verse – ‘world’. We have believed, rather, that God so loved the church, or the well-behaved people or the Christians, but not really the world; i.e. the whole people. The church is people, people who are called in every time and every place to the task of continuing the essential ministry of Christ. We in the UCC need to understand that ministry and responsibly appropriate it in the world... Therefore, the 11th General Synod calls upon the United Church of Christ to marshal and utilize its resources to help equip our churches to fully and actively engage a prophetic ministry in political education and sensitivity including: a) citizen education, and registration efforts; b) political organizing and training workshops; c) public hearings on policy formulation; d) encourage participation in the political process.

— *Resolution on Political Education and Sensitivity, General Synod 11, 1977*

People often ask what guides the statements, actions, witness, and ministry of the United Church of Christ in all of its varied settings. That vision is offered by UCC members from across the country who gather for General Synod, to pray, reflect, and discern a faithful response to God’s vision through resolutions and pronouncements on the issues facing our world. Since the very beginning of its life in 1957, the United Church of Christ has made courageous statements on major social policy issues of the day, during times of great social and political change. This prophetic tradition grows out of the prophetic witness of our predecessor denominations.

What is General Synod? It is a faithful gathering that speaks to the church, not for the church. It does not speak for the whole church. In our UCC polity, no one entity speaks for every setting of the church. Individual members and congregations are free to disagree and to state their convictions in their own terms. Still, General Synod is the most widely representative body in the life of the denomination. It sets policy for the Covenanted Ministries and provides

direction for conferences, associations, and congregations, for all who hear the word of the still speaking God in the midst of the many words of General Synod.

General Synod has spoken some powerful and historic words. Whether by pronouncement or resolution, General Synod has prayerfully considered all of the issues we reference in these pages, and has offered a faithful response to the church and to the world. Many General Synod resolutions and pronouncements come about through the engagement, witness, and ministry of UCC members in local congregations who seek to share their experiences and witness with the larger church.

Many of the resolutions and pronouncements from the most recent General Synods are available through the UCC website at <http://synod.uccpages.org/archive.html>. Older proceedings, resolutions, and pronouncements can be accessed through the UCC archivist.

The resolutions and pronouncements of General Synod invite us all to engage in reflection and dialogue around issues of critical concern in our world. May God bless our efforts to discern what it means to live faithfully and courageously in the struggle for justice and peace. Amen.

Local Advocacy: Mobilize Congregations and Communities for Social Change

Washington, D.C. isn't the only place we can express our faith and public witness on important issues. While not everyone has the financial means or time to travel to Capitol Hill, it is possible for all of us to engage in public discourse and communicate with our representatives by phone, email, and social media. We also have an opportunity to impact change in the communities where we work and live, breathing life into grassroots justice movements that contribute to broader social and political movements across the country.

Congregations vary in their approaches to and levels of community engagement. Below are a few entry points that may be helpful for churches looking to deepen their faith-based commitment to social change:

- **Attend the Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) conference**, an advocacy training and grassroots mobilization event held annually in March or April in Washington, D.C. A product of the ecumenical community in our nation's capital, EAD is a truly unique experience that brings together 800+ Christian advocates to learn about an issue, connect with other advocates from your state and district, receive training in advocacy skills and community organizing, and visit with legislators on Capitol Hill. You can learn more and find the dates for the next conference at www.advocacydays.org. Scholarships are available for young adults wishing to attend; you can contact the Washington, D.C. office at (202) 543-1517 early each year to ask about this opportunity.
- **Infuse justice education and conversations into existing faith formation programs.** Justice Leaders, Engaging and Developing (Justice LED) is a faith formation program produced by the UCC that includes interactive scripture study, engaging videos, and guided reflection and activities. Justice LED is not issue-based; it allows participants to identify and respond to justice issues that reflect their particular passions and concerns. The program can be used on its own or adapted for use in existing programs for adults and youth. You can find more information about this program at: http://www.ucc.org/justice_training_index.
- **Build advocacy and public witness opportunities into existing ministries.** Affirm what your congregation does well, and then look for ways to incorporate justice into that. For a church with a longstanding commitment to a local soup kitchen, for example, this may include hosting a speaker knowledgeable about food injustice, and a letter-writing party to urge political representatives to address the problem. You can also think about taking your congregation through one of the many issue-based processes the UCC has to offer, such as Accessible to All (A2A) or Open and Affirming (ONA). More information about these opportunities can be found at http://www.ucc.org/justice_justice-training.
- **Coordinate a justice immersion trip.** Immersing ourselves in another community or culture and learning from the experiences of others can move us to recognize and confront issues of systemic injustice and oppression. The UCC currently has several Centers of Education and Social Transformation (CEST sites) that offer justice immersion programs: Franklinton Center at Bricks, UCC Centers for Environmental Justice, and the Washington, D.C. Office. More information about these sites can be found here: http://www.ucc.org/justice_justice-training.

- **Partner with a Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO) network.** Joining interfaith or ecumenical coalitions engaged in advocacy, public witness and social change has multiple benefits. It draws church members into places and situations of relationship-building and collaboration with institutions and people in their communities (schools, neighborhood groups, civic leaders) and makes sure our faith values are heard in the public square. Major national CBCO's include Direct Action Research and Training (DART), Gamaliel Foundation, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), InterValley Project, Regional Congregations and Neighborhood Organizations (RCNO), People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) National Network. You can find out which one(s) are working in your area and get involved. Several CBCO networks offer training events each year, teaching strategic organizing skills that benefit individuals, congregations, and ultimately the communities we work and live in. You can find more information about CBCO's at: http://www.ucc.org/justice_cbcos.

Contact Peter Wells, Justice LED Organizer, (413) 244-6079, WellsP@ucc.org

Developing an Advocacy Strategy

Before any advocacy campaign begins — before the letter-writing, petitions, or protests — advocates must have a clear strategy — an overall map of where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there. At its heart, an effective strategy is based on five key questions:

What Do You Want? (Objectives)

An advocacy campaign must begin with a clear sense of what you want to achieve. It should be easily explainable and understood. An initial objective, i.e. a change in the law, should be big enough to attract people's interest yet small enough to win some concrete results within a reasonable time (six months to a year).

Who Can Give It to You? (Audiences)

The first question to ask is who has the authority to give you what you want? Is it Congress, the state legislature, your city council, your local school board, the local health department? Whoever it is, this is your primary audience. Second, who will most directly influence their decision-making? This could be the media, local business leaders, or other community groups. They also need to be a target of your advocacy efforts.

What Do They Need to Hear? (Message)

An advocacy campaign must have a message that is clear, true, persuasive and consistent for the audiences that the campaign has targeted. Advocates often make the mistake of believing that the most effective message is the most persuasive to themselves. What do your audiences think, and what will genuinely move them to your side? That message must be repeated, over and over again with clarity.

Whom Do They Need to Hear It From? (Messengers)

The same message will have a very different effect depending on who communicates it. In general, an advocacy campaign should have some messengers who have credibility as experts, some who can speak from personal experience, and others who have special credibility or connection to the person or group you have targeted.

How Can We Get Them to Hear It? (Delivery)

Advocacy campaigns can deliver their message in many different ways — from lobbying or media work to protest and direct action. Campaigns need to evaluate their options for action and weave the right ones together in a winning mix.

Take a look at each of these questions, look at the resources you have to work with, (i.e. people power, information, and money endorsements) and develop a strategy from them that makes the most sense.

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Engaging in Effective Policy Advocacy

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead

Why Does it Matter?

For people of faith, public policy decision-making is never merely politics. It is a way of living out the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. In responding faithfully to God’s call for abundant life for all people, a common life where no one is left behind, we are drawn inevitably to engage in public policy advocacy and decision-making.

As people of faith, we bring the gift and responsibility of holding true to a vision of right relationship in human community that goes beyond any singular party, ideology or platform.

Issue Advocacy vs. Partisan Political Advocacy

People of faith can engage political work without being partisan. Faith communities can legally and effectively engage in issue-based advocacy. Partisan or candidate-focused advocacy is inappropriate and illegal.

Do...

Speak to policy issues from a faith perspective and communicate those views to decision-makers and the public.

Don’t...

Make statements endorsing or opposing candidates.

What Makes Advocacy Effective?

Be prepared to offer accurate information and assistance. You can provide valuable information, insight and resources on a particular issue. Accurate, informative communication helps decision-makers more effectively respond to the high volume of legislative measures and policy concerns that cross their desks. One of the most important advocacy tools that you have is your story, your experience of why an issue matters and how it impacts your community. Legislators need to know what is happening in the communities they represent.

Do your homework on issues you care about and provide decision-makers and staffers with information they can use – a key statistic, a story, a sound bite. Communicating the impact of policy decisions on a legislator’s district is especially effective and compelling.

Policy advocacy involves building relationships with decision-makers and their staff members. Make your presence known and establish connections with in-district staff as well as Washington-based staff members through regular communication.

Communicating with Your Members of Congress

People often ask, what is the *most* effective form of communication to legislators and staff members? Constituent visits (to both district and Washington offices) are generally most influential, followed by individualized, handwritten letters, individualized e-mails, phone calls, social media, and, lastly, form letters/e-mails/faxes.

Visits to the offices of your members of Congress are the best way to communicate about pending legislation. For many people, visits to in-district and Washington offices are not always possible. You can write personal, handwritten letters, though it is important to note that congressional mail continues to be screened for anthrax and may be delayed three weeks or more. Staff members in congressional offices are assigned to monitor and record your phone calls to the office and to monitor all e-mails received. If you can identify the staff person who covers your issue area, always take the time to send your message to that staff member as well through a personal e-mail.

Sending messages through the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) is a great way to advocate on public policy decisions and to establish regular, effective contact with your members of Congress and other key decision-makers. JPANet messages are timed to be sent out when they will be most effective in the decision-making process.

Remember that town hall meetings and campaign events are also great opportunities for raising issues that are important to you. *Come prepared with your questions.*

Know your lawmakers' committee assignments, previous experience, priorities and issue positions. You can often find this information on their web pages.

Scheduling a Visit

Contact the scheduler in your member's office to make an appointment with your member of Congress or a staff member who covers your issue. Let them know the dates you are available, the issue you want to discuss and who will be present during the visit. Make sure you identify yourself as a constituent in their district to get scheduling priority.

Check the congressional recess calendar to find out when members of Congress are likely to be in their home districts. This is a good time to set up a visit with a member or a staffer in their district office.

Some offices may require a meeting request in writing by fax or e-mail. [See sample meeting request letter]

Confirm your visit by phone a day or two ahead of your visit.

Whether you set up a visit in Washington or in your home district, you will most likely be meeting with a staff member; don't be discouraged. Staff members are the eyes, ears and advisors for our elected officials. They can be key to bringing your issue to the attention of your legislator.

Making a Visit

If possible, it is a good idea to practice or role-play your visit ahead of time.

Plan your agenda for the meeting and select one person to be the primary spokesperson.

Dress for success and be on time.

Introduce yourself and others and explain why you are there.

If possible, make a connection by thanking the Congressperson for positive votes or support on issues in the past.

Make your ask; state clearly and concisely what action you want the Congressperson to take. Make your ask within the first five minutes of meeting, and repeat it during the visit.

Be compelling; use personal experiences and bring the issue home to the Congressperson's own district or state. Talk about how this issue impacts the district.

Be honest and credible; if you don't know the answer to a question, send the information in a follow-up call or letter.

If the conversation goes off track, politely steer it back to your central message.

Listen and ask good questions. It is particularly helpful to ask for specific responses (i.e. Will the member co-sponsor a bill, speak in support of a bill?)

Be respectful of time. End on a positive note and thank them for their time.

Leave behind a short written summary of your position.

Follow up your visit with a thank you letter and continue to monitor the Congressperson's action on your issue.

Making a Phone Call

Ask to speak to the staff member who covers the particular issue you want to address.

Identify yourself as a constituent and a person of faith.

Clearly and briefly state your position on the issue.

Thank the staff person for his/her time and follow up with a letter.

Writing a Letter

State your purpose for writing in the first sentence of your letter. Identify the issue and make a specific request [i.e. "I urge you to support the Jubilee global debt cancellation bill."].

Be brief and focus on one issue per message.

Personalize your message; why does this matter to you? Use a story to illustrate the impact of a policy position.

Ask specific questions which may prompt something more than a form response.

Tips and Talking Points

Know the political landscape and know your audience. What are the key issues and priorities for the decision maker you wish to impact? Who are the key players with regard to the issues you want to influence? Who is opposed to your position and who is on your side? What are their arguments?

Think about the best angles with which to engage your particular legislator. Is your representative a fiscal conservative, a supporter of environmental issues, a member of a congressional issue caucus? Where can you reinforce what a lawmaker has done? Where can you point out new opportunities?

Remember Your **ABCs**:

Ask for something specific.

Be persistent.

Courtesy - be professional and gracious.

Connections

Connect with your federal officials directly through their Web sites via:

U.S. House of Representatives www.house.gov

U.S. Senate www.senate.gov

Library of Congress www.thomas.gov (tracking legislation)

Govtracks www.Govtrack.us (a civic project for finding information on legislation and members of Congress)

Or find them via the Government Social Media Wiki: govsm.com

Connect to our ongoing justice work via:

- facebook.com/JusticeAndWitnessMinistries@Justice UCC

Sample Letter: Requesting a Meeting with Your Member of Congress

Sample Letter: Requesting a Meeting with Your Member of Congress

Attn: [name of scheduler]
The Honorable [name]
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ms./Mr. [name of scheduler]

I am writing to request an appointment for [number of meeting participants] to meet with the Honorable [] in [note whether Washington or in-district] to discuss the Violence against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA is up for reauthorization this year, and we would like to talk about the importance of this legislation in addressing violence against women.

Please contact me to let me know when [] might be available to meet. I will follow up with you in the next week by phone.

Thank you for your assistance,

Name
Address
Phone number
E-mail address

Media Advocacy Tips

Think of the media as an opportunity to educate people in your community about the issues you care about and experience firsthand. The level of public debate and dialogue on key issues depends on the degree to which we effectively use or fail to use the media forum. As with all conversation, whether between two people or thousands, the quality depends on using our voices responsibly, faithfully, and respectfully.

Local media forums, such as newspapers, radio, or TV cable-access programs reach many people and are very significant in shaping opinions. People learn from and listen to people they know – people from their communities. In fact, recent surveys reveal that the major factor in influencing an individual's vote is conversation with family and friends. So you can be a powerful advocate right where you are!

When developing your message, ask yourself this key question: what piece of information can I offer that is missing from the debate that might change someone's thinking on an issue if they became aware of it?

Magnifying your Voice through Social Media

Social media is a great tool for strengthening your advocacy message and engaging your elected officials. Research by the Congressional Management Foundation has found that a majority of Congressional offices believe that social media platforms, especially Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are important tools for gauging public opinion. They take the messages they receive from their constituents via these channels very seriously.

Why you should engage in advocacy via social media

Elected officials respect opinions shared via social media because they are public and personal.

Social media posts function like a modern-day letter to the editor, making it possible for you to communicate directly with your officials, while publicly going on the record about your concerns with your friends and neighbors.

Offices receive thousands of emails each week. Social media gives you another tool for cutting through the noise and reinforcing your message.

The posts you share via social media can inspire others to engage in advocacy.

Social media is a great space for connecting with other advocates. Using hashtags you can identify other people who share your concerns and swap ideas, get inspired, and build momentum for change.

Finally, social networks are useful tools for connecting with local journalists. Journalists are increasingly using Twitter and other social tools to identify stories and sources. You can build a relationship with these writers; promote your advocacy; and work to establish a reputation for yourself and your congregation as thought leaders and potential spokespeople on the issues you care about.

Anytime you take action, whether you're writing a letter or participating in a protest, share that action via social media and tag your elected officials or decision makers.

Examples:

Twitter:

I just called **@SenSmith** and asked him to support an inclusive Violence Against Women Act. **Join me! #VAWA**

I just signed the **#UCC** petition to **#endgunviolence**. **Will you join me? Pls RT!**

Facebook:

Today we marched for farm workers' rights at the state capitol. This is an issue of great importance for our community and I hope **Representative Jones** will join us in taking a stand for workers' rights.

Writing a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are an excellent way to expand on an article or respond with another viewpoint. This section is one of the most widely read sections of the paper.

To improve the chances of having your letter published, submit it as soon as possible – within twenty-four hours if you can and no more than three days after the article you are responding to appears. Refer to the article you are addressing by title and date it appeared.

Stick to one point. Keep your letter short. Use sound reasoning, facts, and firsthand experience.

Find out your newspaper's requirements for submitting a letter. Often you will need to sign your letter and provide your address and phone number.

Writing an Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed)

Choose a current topic or “news peg” on which to hang your opinion.

Express your point of view clearly and boldly in the first paragraph.

Use simple, short sentences and paragraphs. Avoid jargon.

Include at least one memorable phrase for use as a pull out quote.

Close on a strong note. A short, powerful, last paragraph should drive your point home.

Make it personal (avoid form letters) and provide accurate information.

Think of images or ways to make your message powerful and concrete. Stories and personal experiences are often very persuasive. Create a picture in the reader's mind.

RESTORING CIVILITY



Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times

"Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ...As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

[1 Corinthians 12: 14-26]

*"Shout out, do
not hold back!
Lift up your
voice like a
trumpet!"*

- Isaiah 58:1

"Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of your redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you."

[Ephesians 4: 29-32]

While public discussion of political issues has the potential to bring out the best in us – by surfacing creative new ideas or developing effective problem-solving strategies – more often than not in our public dialogue about the issues of the day the opposite seems to be happening. From the national dialogue about health care to the passionate discussion of immigration reform this year, it is all too easy for anger and frustration to get the best of us. Whether around the office water cooler or the extended family dinner table, reasoned conversation is taking a back seat to personal attacks and replayed sound bites. Because we avoid these conversations, we miss out on deeper understanding.

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



United Church of Christ
Justice and Witness Ministries

100 Maryland Ave., NE #330
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As people of faith participating in the public square, we are called to a higher standard of engagement and interaction with our neighbors – even and perhaps especially those with whom we may disagree on an issue. **Our faith provides us with spiritual resources to take the conversation to a different level.** We can choose respect and hope over animosity and bitterness. We can choose to listen and learn rather than attack and insult. We can choose to have civic discussions in civil tones.

We do not have to avoid the hard issues. We can prepare ourselves for a better conversation by thinking about some of the following ideas to shape our conversation on difficult and emotion-filled issues of the day.

Show Respect: Rather than trying to “win” a debate with your arguments, judge your success by how well you demonstrate respect for other people and for what insights or interesting challenges arise for you. Stay away from insults and personal attacks, and keep trying to return to the substance of the issue. The more respect you show for someone else’s opinions, the more reason they have to respect yours.

Listen: One of the best ways to show respect is to listen. Focus on what the other person is saying, rather than focusing on what you are going to say next. Ask yourself, “What are they trying to express?” “What is important to them?” “Where do we agree?”

Seek Understanding: Try to understand the context from which other people are speaking – ask yourself why they see things the way they do. Ask open-ended questions that invite others to say more about why they believe what they believe.

Share Your Own Views Well: Put thought and energy into articulating your own views clearly and concisely. What do you believe and why? Statistics can be helpful, but often sharing your personal stories is most effective. Claim your own opinions by using “I” statements, such as “I believe...” and “In my experience...” Try to avoid exaggeration or the use of sound bites or slogans – use your own words.

Keep Your Head: Talking about public policy issues often taps into strong emotions and passions in all of us. Remember to pause, take a deep breath from time to time, and give yourself time to respond. Few people benefit or learn anything from a shouting match. You can help set the tone of the conversation by continuing to act with civility even when others are not. If someone is not showing respect – for instance, by interrupting or not listening to your comments – calmly ask that they do so.

I believe our communities, our country and our world are stronger and safer when we treat each other with respect. I believe that my voice is important, and I believe that listening to the voices of others is important for a healthy, vibrant democratic process. I believe that insulting, attacking or demonizing people with whom we disagree is unproductive and unacceptable. As individuals and as community, we can and should do better.

As a person of faith, I pledge to participate responsibly and faithfully in the electoral process. I recognize my responsibility for supporting a free, fair and respectful democratic process, and I pledge to do my part. I commit to honoring my own voice and the voice of others. I commit to educating myself and others about the issues at stake in these elections. I commit to expressing myself responsibly, to seek to learn from different perspectives, to always offer respect to others, and to challenge hurtful, disrespectful behavior when I can.

SIGN THE PLEDGE—Visit <http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote/civility.html>

Tips for Faithful and Respectful Discussion on the Issues

- Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a part of the truth you are seeking to discern.
- Follow the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – even when you disagree with them.
- Listen respectfully and carefully to others.
- State what you think you heard someone say and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to make sure to understand each other.
- Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings. Share personal experiences to help others more fully understand your concerns and perspectives on the issues. Conversations can be passionate and still be respectful, civil and constructive.
- Speak for yourself, rather than as a member of a group. Use “I” statements rather than “You” statements.
- Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people’s motives, intelligence or integrity.
- Look for and lift up points of agreement as well as disagreement.
- Create space for everyone’s concerns to be spoken, even when they disagree.
- Seek to stay in community with each other even though the discussion may be vigorous and perhaps tense.
- Keep an open mind and heart. You may not hear if you judge too quickly.
- Pray for God’s grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly and to remain open to the vision God holds for all of us.

[Adapted from “Ground Rules for Conversation” (Evangelical Lutheran Church Department for Communication) and “Seeking to be Faithful Together” (adopted by the 204th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA)]

Links to Additional Resources on Civility

- *Reclaiming Civility in the Public Square: Ten Rules That Work*, www.instituteforcivility.org
Radio interview with Diana Butler Bass: On Civility and Graciousness, <http://tinyurl.com/248y8qv>
- Dialogue vs. Debate: A Guide, <http://tinyurl.com/qhjspxb>
- UCC General Synod Resource: <http://tinyurl.com/ow8lqc3>

Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet)

What is the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet)?

The UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) is our denomination's way of mobilizing our members to speak and act prophetically through a grassroots advocacy network. UCC members, clergy, and partners across the country make up the JPANet.

What does the JPANet do?

Our vision in Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries is a just, compassionate, and peaceful world that honors all of God's creation. In keeping with God's vision of a just and loving society, the JPANet equips its members through issue education and weekly opportunities for public policy advocacy. Our work is grounded in General Synod teachings, consonant with historic UCC witness, and informed by a biblical understanding of our call to work for justice.

The JPANet collectively advocates for justice and peace in the range of issues that come before Congress and to which our General Synod has spoken. Our work is resourced by the national staff of Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries, who work with UCC advocates and with ecumenical, interfaith, and secular partners to shape and coordinate strategy on our common witness.

What resources and opportunities does the JPANet provide?

Weekly Legislative Action Alerts: A brief update on an issue under consideration before Congress, the President or other decision makers with an easy opportunity to take action with one click!

Monthly Newsletter: Resources, reflections, upcoming events and opportunities for witness.

To Join the Justice and Peace Action Network: www.ucc.org/join_the_network.

When Pigs Fly? Why Wait!



Civil Rights?
When Pigs Fly!
Women's Suffrage?
When Pigs Fly!
Marriage Equality?
When Pigs Fly!
Apartheid Abolished?
When Pigs Fly!

People around the world continue to give thanks that justice seekers and activists did not wait for swine to sprout wings.

Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing (JLED) offers skills based training and support to local UCC churches and members wanting to join those not waiting for porker projectiles.

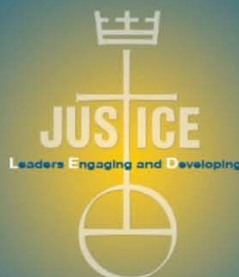
For more information:

www.ucc.org/justice_training_index

or contact Rev. Peter Wells (wellsp@ucc.org)

at 413.244.6079

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