

CREATING CHANGE TOGETHER

A TOOLKIT FOR FAITHFUL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

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

As United Methodists, we understand that our personal piety is not separated from our social commitments. It is lived out and has been lived out for 250 years in a way that connects faith and life, church and society, and justice and peace. It's the thing that makes me most proud of being United Methodist.

My own faith formation is integrally connected to the work of civic engagement. As a young girl, I volunteered on missions caring for migrant children. As a high schooler, I visited the United Nations with my youth group and witnessed the power and importance of diplomacy. As a young pastor in South Carolina, I advocated alongside my parishioners for better working conditions in their textile mills. All of these experiences strengthened my faith and my connection to the Church.

If you have found yourself with a copy of this toolkit, you are likely a United Methodist looking to engage in your community. As the general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, I want to thank you for putting your faith in action and working for systemic change to make our world more just and peaceful. For over 100 years, Church and Society has equipped United Methodists across the connection to take the words of the Church and put them into action.

We have heard from United Methodists across the connection about the need for a resource like this: a toolkit to aid new and seasoned advocates alike in the pursuit of changing policies and systems. The tactics you will find in the following pages have been tried and tested by the staff of Church and Society as well as countless United Methodists throughout the years.

If every United Methodist put their faith into action, just think about the change we could create together.

Prayers for the journey,



Susan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIVING OUR FAITH	2
CLAIMING OUR STORY	4
Formulating Your Story	4
Sharing Your Story	5
Building Our Story	6
CONNECTING WITH DECISION MAKERS	8
Identifying Decision Makers	8
Advocate through Visiting	9
Advocate through Public Witness	10
Prayer Vigils.....	10
Press Conferences.....	11
Public Demonstrations/Marches.....	12
Using Church Facilities	12
Advocate through Calling	13
Advocate through Writing	14
Writing Directly to Decision Makers.....	14
Writing Letters to the Editor or Opinion-Editorials.....	15
Advocate through Social Media	16
ENGAGING IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS	18
Voting Responsibilities	18
Voting Rights	18
Dos and Don'ts for Engagement	19
CREATING CHANGE TOGETHER	20

LIVING OUR FAITH

A CHRISTIAN TRADITION OF PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION



As Christians, we are called to reflect God’s reconciling love to all we encounter. And as United Methodists, we recognize “our commitment to become faithful witnesses to the gospel, not alone to the ends of the earth, but also to the depths of our common life and work.” (United Methodist Social Principles Preamble)

Amidst the brokenness of today’s world, God calls us to be instruments of healing – transforming relationships and systems to pursue justice and peace among people, communities and nations.

And yet for too many of us, the tone and division of public discourse discourages us from using our voice or engaging our church and family in the important civic conversations of our day. But in the face of ongoing conflict, exploitation and oppression, we know that we cannot turn inward and silent. Instead, we must engage our neighbors, proclaim our faith values, and pursue justice in our communities.

This civic engagement can involve a variety of strategies and tactics. The Old and New Testaments are full of examples of faithful advocates whose experience both inspires and informs how we put our faith into action.

Consider how God worked through:

- The midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, whose acts of civil disobedience saved children from Pharaoh’s decree.
- The reluctant Moses who, accompanied by his brother Aaron, challenged power and freed the Israelites from captivity.
- The prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, who publicly proclaimed timeless truths and cast a faithful vision for the community.
- Queen Esther who used her access to power for the benefit of her people.
- Our savior Jesus who persuaded with parables, stood with the marginalized and directly resisted the empire of his day.

As United Methodists, we pursue ‘social holiness’ that is rooted in our biblical understanding, informed by John Wesley’s movement for change in English society, and built upon 250 years of work and witness by Methodists. Through acts of personal, social and civic righteousness we can reflect the reconciling love of Christ to the Church and society.

The attempt to influence the information and execution of public policy at all levels of government is often the most effective means available to churches to keep before humanity the ideal of a society in which power and order are made to serve the ends of justice and freedom for all people.

UNITED METHODIST BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS, #5012

HOW HAS YOUR FAITH INSPIRED YOUR ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIETY?

VOICES FROM ACROSS THE CONNECTION

“

BISHOP SALLY DYCK
NORTH CENTRAL JURISDICTION

“Following Jesus means that we are called to the places where people are in need of our witness and presence. While I believe that it’s important to speak and act for others in order to bring justice and healing to their lives, I also know that it has tremendously changed my life by opening my eyes and ears to the lives and stories of others. I have learned over and over (and will continue to learn) how important it is that loving God is to love our neighbor and that loving our neighbor is the way to love God. My life and faith are enriched even as I hope in some small way to be a witness and presence for justice.”

“

DEACONESS NORMA DOLLAGA
PHILIPPINES CENTRAL CONFERENCE

“When in doubt about our civic engagement, trust the Immanuel who is within and amongst us. WE are the collective body of Christ, our civic engagement is our communion with the people as we envision and work for justice, peace and life with dignity.”

“

REV. ANDE EMMANUEL
NIGERIA CENTRAL CONFERENCE

“I am strengthened through prayer, fellowship, and engagement with my community. I have found a solid ground to grow even in my African background. I grew up in a community where “an injury for one is an injury for all.” Bringing people together for the common good of all has been an integral part of my discipleship journey. I love to connect and engage people, moving them for positive change either in the Church or in society.”

“

TILMANN STICHER
GERMANY CENTRAL CONFERENCE

“Being engaged in civic matters has made my life and faith more colorful and less black and white. I have met so many people, Christians or not, with visions, courage and willingness to join together for the transformation of the world.”

CLAIMING OUR STORY

THE POWER OF OUR LIVED EXPERIENCE



For us to be effective in our advocacy we first must be able to communicate why we care about an issue, how that issue impacts us, our community, and those we love, and how changing the system will bring us closer to our vision for justice. This involves reflecting on why we hold a particular position and how we can connect our faith values and lived experience to clearly and succinctly share our story with others.

FORMULATING YOUR STORY

Often, the specifics of policies and processes can be complicated and overwhelming. That is why it is important to start with what you know best: your story, your passion, your faith.

You are the expert of your own story. The most powerful thing you can do is claim your story and share it.

Grounded in faith with an understanding of your personal connection to the systems you are seeking to change, your actions become a powerful witness for change in the world.

Here are some questions to consider as you reflect on your story:

- Where does your commitment to the topic stem from? What initially prompted your connection to the topic?

- Who is directly impacted by this issue? Are you directly impacted? Are you connected to someone that is directly impacted? How can you learn from the relationships you have with people who are directly impacted by the issue?
- What does your faith tradition and values system tell you? How does that inform your participation in civic engagement?

Our deepest passions fuel our work and inform the perspective we have on a specific topic. Taking time to reflect on your passion, your experience, and your connections in the community will make your story a powerful one.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for more information on formulating your story.

The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.

UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES, ¶ 164.B

SHARING YOUR STORY

We learn the power of stories from scripture. Jesus repeatedly uses parables to teach His disciples important moral lessons and to reframe or re-imagine a situation to illustrate a deeper truth. We can do the same thing today using stories to share our values with decision makers who represent us.

Stories are formed by personal experiences, the experiences of those we know and love, faith values, and a vision for an alternative future. They have the power to influence because they invite others to imagine a situation or perspective different from their own. Statistics and numbers are often cited by proponents and opponents of the same issue. While they can be important to understand the scope of the problem, they are but a single piece of a complex narrative. Stories, however, convey the truth of our humanity and the reality behind the numbers.

Sharing stories of human experience creates space for listeners to develop empathy and connect with everyday realities. Think about a time you heard a story and felt moved to action. Why did this story inspire you to act? Just as this story has motivated you to take action, telling your story can help motivate others to pursue change as well.

As we pursue justice, we must be sure that decision makers understand how their policy decisions have real impacts on the lives of people - that the numbers and statistics they debate are made up of names and stories of people in our communities. Only then will they begin to consider the complete picture.



The Rev. James Brigman, the pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Rockingham, North Carolina, walked 375 miles from his home to Washington, District of Columbia. His 9-year-old daughter was born with several medical challenges. When he heard of proposed cuts to Medicaid, he felt God call him to speak out for his daughter and those like her who rely on Medicaid for care.



BUILDING OUR STORY

Your story and truth, stitched together with the stories of others, is a powerful force for change. As you connect with others in your community, listen for common values in their stories. Through these relationships, you can form a team grounded in a shared vision for justice and peace.

*If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.*

- LILLA WATSON

Here are some thoughts to reflect on as you build your team:

- Are diverse experiences represented?
- Does everyone look the same?
- Are impacted individuals present?
- Is your team speaking for others who can speak for themselves?
- Remember, too, that the act of inviting others “to the table” can be a place of privilege. Consider asking to “sit at someone else’s table” instead of creating your own.

As your team convenes, be mindful of working “with” - instead of “for” - others. Listen before speaking. Follow instead of leading. Acknowledge that you alone do

not have all the answers. And remember that it is not the responsibility of impacted communities to teach you about their experiences. Instead, those who are not impacted should take on the responsibility to educate themselves, work to unpack their own privilege and biases, and seek relationships with impacted communities grounded in humility and solidarity.

Faith-rooted advocacy is strongest when centered on the experience, wisdom, and vision of those most directly impacted by unjust systems. Through this work and these relationships, we recognize the dignity and sacred worth of all God’s people. Together we can work towards God’s vision for the world.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/organizing for more information on engaging communities.

HOW CAN YOU AVOID ACTIVISM FATIGUE?

Unjust systems and structures have many layers. It takes time, commitment and hard work to uncover the layers, untangle webs of injustice, or dismantle a system that perpetuates suffering. We are called to be persistent and persevere. We are called to be faithful and allow God to give us strength for the journey.

It is important to be conscious of how our work impacts us. As we work to transform broken places in our society, we must be mindful not to let the work break us down as well.

Here are some tips to avoid activism fatigue:

PRAY

Maintain your relationship with God through prayer. With gratitude for the gifts God gives us and the ability to put our faith into action, ask for wisdom and strength for the journey.

New every morning is your love, Great God of light,
and all day long you are working for good in the world.
Stir up in us desire to serve you,
to live peacefully with our neighbors,
and to devote each day to your Son,
our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

United Methodist Hymnal, p. 568

BE FAITHFUL

This work is urgent and necessary in order to see changes in our world. While the task may seem overwhelming, stay focused and be faithful to God's vision.

CELEBRATE THE SMALL VICTORIES

Transformation does not come overnight. We experience small victories in the process. Celebrate each victory!

TAKE TIME TO RECHARGE

Be aware of when you need to step away. Take time to replenish. Spend time with the people you love. Do things that give you life. Allow healing to take place in you. Give yourself the time to recharge.

“ *The beauty of our United Methodist connection is that when I am tired and going to bed, I know somewhere in the world a United Methodist is waking up to carry on the work.*

— REV. JENNY PHILLIPS, PACIFIC NORTHWEST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

CONNECTING WITH DECISION MAKERS

TACTICS AND STRATEGIES TO PURSUE CHANGE



IDENTIFYING DECISION MAKERS

Decision makers are those with the ability to make systemic change and therefore are a focal point for advocacy efforts. Knowing which decision maker to connect with is essential.

First, consider the issue you want to change. Who has the authority to make these changes? Is this a local, state or federal topic? Is the concern specific to an agency, board or office?

Because there is often a series of people involved in making decisions you will likely identify more than one person or group. Decision makers could be the President, members of the United States Congress, state Governors, federal administrators and secretaries (United Nations, Environmental Protection Agency, etc.), and local elected officials (state legislators, sheriffs, county commissioners, school boards, etc.).

Influencers, those who guide decision makers, are also important to consider. Learn about those who support the decision maker and how they might be helpful in seeking justice and pursuing peace. Influencers could be fellow constituents, colleagues of decision makers, or pastors and communities of faith.

There are multiple online and print resources with contact information for decision makers. Research different channels of communication and begin planning correspondence. For U.S. elected officials, you can visit www.usa.gov/elected-officials.

Once you have identified who to focus on, you should consider what actions will be most effective in moving this person or group of people to create positive change. This section offers a variety of tactics for engagement. While some require more time and effort than others, each has value and all can be utilized as part of your strategy.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL DOESN'T AGREE WITH YOU?

It can be demoralizing if your decision maker never seems to share your views. Engaging with them might even seem futile. However, we cannot underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to transform hearts and minds.

Sometimes, allies can come in the unlikeliest of places and at the unlikeliest of times. Don't write off certain officials because they do not agree with you right now. By staying engaged and cultivating a relationship with their office, you may find areas of common ground. And it is important for decision makers to hear your opinion and not simply the voices of those who agree with them.

Regardless of the success of your advocacy efforts, registering your opinion with your leaders is an act of discipleship. Take inspiration from the story of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) and remain faithful.

As United Methodists, we cannot stand by as unjust actions are being proposed or implemented. To be silent is to be complicit. Raising our voices, whatever the immediate outcome, is a critical element of our faithful lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.



God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful.

- MOTHER TERESA

ADVOCATE THROUGH VISITING

One of the most effective tactics for influencing decision makers is an in-person meeting. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, in-person visits from a constituent are consistently cited as having the greatest influence on representatives who are undecided on an issue. Even if the decision maker has a stated position different than yours, a visit is important to register your perspective, share why you and others hold a different view, and begin a relationship with the office for input and conversation about future issues.

Here are a few key points to consider before, during, and after a visit:

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT IN ADVANCE

Call the office to schedule a time to meet and inform them of the issue(s) you would like to discuss and how many others will be joining you for the visit.

BE PREPARED

Take time to learn about the official you are meeting with and to think through the key points and questions you want to cover in the meeting.

BE ON TIME AND FLEXIBLE

Always leave time for the unexpected (traffic, security) and upon arrival at the office check-in with the receptionist confirming your meeting and how many are in your delegation. Many officials' schedules are busy and unpredictable so be prepared to wait or meet with a staff aide.

STAY FOCUSED AND FRIENDLY

Once your meeting begins, stay on topic and leave time to hear the office's perspective. Share why this issue is important to you and your community. Be firm but friendly in your position and questioning.

SAY THANK YOU, DEBRIEF AND FOLLOW-UP

When the meeting is wrapping up, reiterate your position and thank the official and/or aide for their time. Be sure to collect their contact information for follow-up. Immediately after the meeting, debrief with others in your delegation to compare what you each heard and decide who will follow-up with a thank you note (where you can restate your position and share resources) or a call to inquire about unanswered questions.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for more information on making visits to decision makers.

AMPLIFY
YOUR IMPACT

Consider inviting the decision maker to visit your ministry site. Most officials jump at the chance to be seen out in the community and such a visit gives you a better opportunity to deepen your relationship with the official and show more clearly the real-life consequences of the policies they are making.

ADVOCATE THROUGH PUBLIC WITNESS

Public witness is a way to live out the Gospel through concrete actions that can be seen by the broader community. In our baptismal covenant, United Methodists commit to resisting evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. When we experience or identify injustice and oppression in society, organizing a public event can be one of the best ways to draw attention to a specific issue. The ways in which we can share God’s message of love and justice can include prayer vigils, press conferences, public demonstrations/marches, or even using our church facilities to share messages of justice and action.

As we uphold the mission of The United Methodist Church to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we commit to witnessing to the Gospel through concrete actions in the public sphere. A public event can amplify our message, offer an opportunity for more people to engage, and hold decision makers accountable.

PRAYER VIGILS

As people of faith we are called to pray, and pray often! A prayer vigil is an opportunity for people of faith to come together in community to publicly proclaim our faith values.

A prayer vigil can be a communal lament, an act of solidarity, or a time to bring light to brokenness in society. It offers the community a space to connect with God so that God’s vision for love and justice can be carried out through us. While prayer vigils can be similar to other types of public events (press conferences, etc.), the first and primary objective of a prayer vigil is one of faithful practice. As United Methodists, we understand prayer vigils to be grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit to change the hearts and minds of people in power and to strengthen us in our work and witness.

Prayer vigils also allow the faith community an opportunity to lift up the voices of people whom society marginalizes, standing in solidarity with those who are directly impacted by unjust systems.

In response to an injustice or oppressive structure in your community, prayer vigils are a way for the faith community to come together, pray, share rituals and practices of your faith traditions, and share a public message of concern and hope.

HOSTING A PRAYER VIGIL

Before planning an event, it’s helpful to define your goals. Who do you want to reach? What voices do you want to be present? What specifically do you want this event to accomplish? Make sure that all speakers find a way to incorporate this vision into their prayers, songs, etc.

To make your vigil effective in influencing decision makers to support the change you want:

- Determine the most effective messengers to influence your decision maker.
- Host your vigil in a strategic location, such as in front of their local offices.
- Draw on symbolic and creative traditions and showcase the diversity of faiths present.

AMPLIFY
YOUR IMPACT

Vigils don’t have to be a one-time occurrence. You can coordinate a series of vigils over the life of a campaign or in the lead up to a decision.

- Include the decision makers' names in the materials and event program.
- Make visuals (signs, photos, art, etc.) that display your message.
- Be sure to invite local media. By capturing photos and stories of the vigil, you can share your message with a broader audience.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for more information on planning prayer vigils.

PRESS CONFERENCES

A press conference is an effective way of using the media to reach new audiences. While some of the planning considerations are similar to other public witness tactics, press conferences specifically aim to generate news. Media coverage can also boost the morale of your group to continue building momentum for the work. A press conference is interactive and offers more information than a written press release. Diverse speakers can share stories and perspectives reinforcing your group's clear and consistent message during the program. These speakers are prepared to speak with and answer questions from the press. Press conferences can be a great opportunity to highlight diverse voices and control your message.

HOLDING A PRESS CONFERENCE

Before holding a press conference, consider a few questions: In what publications or mediums do you want your story to appear? What publications have a similar audience to you? Who are the best messengers to highlight?

To make your press conference successful in garnering media coverage to address your issue:

- Schedule a diverse cast of speakers to spread your message from unique perspectives. It is usually a best practice to include a speaker representing the community impacted by the injustice you are speaking about.
- Choose a location that is easily accessible. Locations with prominence or topical significance are best.
- Send out a press release to local journalists that cover religion and the topic of the press conference.
- Set up a run-of-show, or "tick tock" that outlines the order of speakers and the allotted time. Disseminate to all speakers beforehand.
- Draft a public-facing run-of-show with all speaker names and associations. This is handy for reporters as they cover your event and quote speakers.
- Access a sound system (microphones and speakers, bullhorns, etc.) and ensure it is in working condition prior to the start time.
- Make clear signage to have present (on a podium, behind speakers, etc.) with a slogan, hashtag or message for your campaign.
- If your press conference is scheduled for an outside location, formulate a plan for inclement weather.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

Reach the broadest audience possible. Set up a cell phone on a tripod and livestream your press conference through social media. Your speaker's message will reach everyone in your network in addition to the media coverage of your event.



PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS/MARCHES

Public demonstrations and marches are other tactics where groups gather to stand in solidarity with others, amplify a message, shed light on an issue, and call attention to decision makers. Demonstrations can take many forms including walk-outs, picketing, and sit-ins.

When participating in a public demonstration or march, consider the following:

- Determine the message of the demonstration or march and if it aligns with your values and vision for change.
- Plan how you will share your values and identity at the demonstration or march. Use signage or creative art to visually communicate your presence, add your distinct message, and connect with others who share your vision.
- Use channels like social media, church bulletins, and email networks to encourage attendance.
- Consider using the demonstration to connect with others and invite them into deeper engagement. You may want to host a small meetup or teach-in before or after the demonstration.

USING CHURCH FACILITIES

Church buildings are often prominently positioned in our communities. There are many ways we can use our spaces to proclaim our values and offer public witness.

SIGNS

Many churches have signs out front that can be used to make a statement for public witness. Whether by using a marquee or temporary banner, churches can make a message highly visible to people passing by your building.

ART EXHIBITIONS

Think about your space (front lawn, narthex, sanctuary, etc.) in a creative way! Art can be an effective medium to tell stories and evoke emotions in ways that words alone cannot. Seek out artists in your community who are passionate about creating art as a form of public witness.

We recognize the right of individuals to dissent when acting under the constraint of conscience and, after having exhausted all legal recourse, to resist or disobey laws that they deem to be unjust or that are discriminately enforced.

UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES, ¶164.F

ADVOCATE THROUGH CALLING

Among the easiest ways to register your opinion with government officials is by calling their offices. Elected officials, agencies and corporations all have publicly available phone numbers to register your opinions and inquire about the office's position on a particular topic. For the U.S. Congress, you can call the general switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to connect with your Representative and two Senators. For fast-developing issues, calling is the surest way to have your views counted before a vote is taken or a decision is made.

Below are a few simple steps to keep in mind as you make your call:

IDENTIFY YOURSELF

Be sure to share your name and where you are calling from to register yourself as a constituent.

CLEARLY STATE THE REASON FOR THE CALL

State upfront your concern: "I'm concerned about access to health care" or "I'm calling to ask (company name) to join the Fair Food Program."

CONSIDER ASKING TO SPEAK WITH THE STAFF PERSON WORKING ON THE ISSUE

In addition to registering your opinion with the receptionist, asking to speak directly with the staff person gives you a chance to discuss the issue in more depth and learn more about the decision maker's position.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Share why this issue is important to you, your family, and your community. Personalizing the issue will help the office understand how their decision will impact their constituents.

MAKE YOUR "ASK"

Be clear about what you want the decision maker to do (co-sponsor legislation, oppose an amendment, change their business practices, etc.).

THANK THEM AND REQUEST A RESPONSE OR FOLLOW-UP

Once you have shared your opinion be sure to thank them and either ask for a response or inquire about when you might follow up with another call.

While a steady stream of calls can be effective, it is even more powerful if you can encourage your friends or ministry team to call in on the same day. Call-in days help amplify individual voices and are often strategically timed to influence key decisions or build momentum for change. Church and Society highlights critical moments when your individual voice can join with others to be heard most effectively, so be sure you are signed up to receive our emails.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for more information on making calls to decision makers.

CAN YOU SUBMIT COMMENTS TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES?

When government agencies implement policy changes, there is often a process to solicit public input. These 'comment periods' allow the public to share written or oral comments as part of the rule-making process. From proposals to protect clean air to those that would restrict access to health care services, these regulations can have a profound impact on the lives of our families and our communities. Submitting comments is a great opportunity to raise your voice and demonstrate public interest on the topic. Whether through a written submission or by attending a public hearing, it is important for these decision makers to hear a strong moral perspective and know that people of faith are paying attention.

ADVOCATE THROUGH WRITING

Written words can be a powerful vehicle for advocacy, and writing can be a more comfortable way to share your story. Writing allows you to control your message and provide details and supporting information. You can write directly to decision makers or you can share your message with a broader audience through news outlets.

WRITING DIRECTLY TO DECISION MAKERS

Public figures that are accountable to a group of people (citizens, shareholders, etc.) will likely have an email address or online form you can use to communicate with them. Spend some time on the “Leadership” or “Contact Us” pages of decision makers’ websites to locate these email addresses. If writing to a member of the U.S. Congress, you can use the forms at www.umcjustice.org/take-action.

You are always welcome to send handwritten letters, and these can be powerful. Keep in mind that any physical mail addressed to a member of the U.S. Congress goes through weeks of security screening before being delivered. This is important to remember if your topic is time sensitive!

Whether handwritten or via email, begin your message by clearly stating what you are asking the decision maker to do. This “ask” should be focused, clear and concise. It is tempting to share all of your concerns with the decision maker, but when you focus on just one “ask” the recipient is more likely to read and understand your message.

Be sure to include a personal story or connection in your message. The most compelling messages are those that make the reader empathize with the reasons you desire change. You should clearly convey what is moving you to action (personal impact, your faith, your grandchild’s future, your lived experience, etc.). Facts can be important, but a personal connection will be more memorable and will help decision makers understand the impact of their actions on their constituents.

Don’t forget to thank decision makers when they do the right thing! This shows them that people are watching and are grateful when they step up and act for justice and peace.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for more information on writing to decision makers.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

Get others to join your mission by gathering postcards or signatures on a petition. Showing that a number of constituents care about the same issue can be motivating for a decision maker. Writing postcards and signing petitions can be great activities at an event or church gathering. Once you have gathered your signatures or postcards, deliver them to your decision maker to illustrate the breadth of your communal message.

WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OR OPINION-EDITORIALS

News outlets can be great vehicles for sharing your message with a wide audience. There are two standard ways to contribute to a news publication: Letters to the Editor (LTEs) and Opinion-Editorials (Op-Eds).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor (LTE) are generally written in response to an article that was published in the last day or two. LTEs are most effective if they are a quick response to a message that will still be on readers' minds when the LTE is published.

It is a best practice to explicitly reference the article to which you are responding in the first sentence of your letter. E.g. "I must adamantly oppose the sentiments presented in 'Higher Minimum Wage Will Do Nothing to Improve Lives' (NYT editorial 4/29)..." or "Regarding 'Coal Trains Provide Much Needed Jobs' published 4/29..."

LTEs tend to be anywhere from 150-350 words and vary by outlet. Often, outlets have an online form where you can copy and paste (or directly type) your letter for submission. Other outlets utilize an email address. Check your news outlet's Opinion section to find their specific guidelines.

OPINION-EDITORIALS

Opinion-Editorials (Op-Eds) should generally be about a topic that is considered newsworthy. A newsworthy topic is timely (relevant at this point in time), applicable to the audience (relevant to the outlet's core audience), or local (relevant to the outlet's distribution region).

Whereas LTEs are short, you have a little more room to make your point in an Op-Ed. Op-Eds are typically no longer than 750 words and should focus on one specific topic. Some outlets have online submission forms, and others utilize an email address. Each outlet has their own guidelines that can be found in their Opinion section.

Visit www.umcjustice.org/toolkit for samples and more information on writing Letters to the Editor and Opinion-Editorials.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

Local papers can be influential! While it might be tempting to submit your writing to a national publication, local papers are often more accessible. Many people in your community, including key decision makers, rely on local news outlets. Your representative's national office is likely to review daily 'clips' from local papers to stay connected with news and opinions from the district. And with a local paper, you can tailor your message more directly to your audience which will make it even more powerful and persuasive.

ADVOCATE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms can be influential when used to disseminate messages, organize groups of people, and communicate with decision makers. The number of social media platforms has proliferated in recent years, and new technologies are being developed every day. Once you select the decision maker you want to engage, do some research about what platforms they use. Facebook and Twitter are generally a good place to start.

Always remember to be courteous. Social media offers a great opportunity to contact decision makers, but often conversations become mean-spirited. You can share a strong message that also reflects your faith values. Your critique or support is more likely to be received if it is genuine, earnest and courteous.

FACEBOOK

There are a number of ways to get a decision maker's attention using Facebook: tagging, commenting, sharing, posting, etc. One of the best ways to ensure that the decision maker (or someone on their staff) sees your message is by commenting on a published post by the individual or organization's official page. Decision makers have staff who are responsible for monitoring

comments on posts to gauge constituent engagement and identify profane or offensive remarks. This ensures someone on staff will read your post.

TWITTER

Twitter is a quick and succinct tool you can use to communicate with decision makers. You are limited to 280 characters (letters, spaces, and punctuation) to share your message.

Some decision makers manage their own Twitter accounts and engage with constituents directly through tweets. By tagging a decision maker in a tweet, there is a chance they might see your message themselves. To do this, locate their Twitter handle (a name with an @ symbol before it) and place it in your tweet. Be sure to place some characters before the @ symbol so that others can more easily view the tweet. Public tweets can add more pressure to the message. E.g. "Hey @SenatorIsakson, your fellow United Methodists are calling on you to protect SNAP!"

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

Hashtags are a great organizing tool to quickly and easily amplify a message or to connect with others engaged in the same campaign. They consist of a pound or hash symbol (#) followed by a word or phrase with no spaces. Most organized events or actions will have a hashtag. Check the campaign's website or search the latest tweets on the topic to find what hashtag organizers are using.

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE IN A CORPORATE CAMPAIGN?

Unjust systems and structures have many layers. It takes time, commitment and hard work to uncover the layers. Sometimes the decision makers – those who have the ability to create change – are seated in corporate boardrooms rather than in elected offices. As United Methodists, we understand that “corporations are responsible not only to their stockholders, but also to their stakeholders: their workers, suppliers, vendors, customers, the communities in which they do business, and for the earth, which supports them.” (United Methodist Social Principles, ¶163.I) Influencing these corporate decision makers can involve many of the same tactics as with elected officials: letter writing, phone calls, and public witness. In addition, as consumers or shareholders, there are additional strategies to consider including shareholder advocacy, divestment and boycotts – all with the goal of bringing about positive change in corporate practices.

The Fair Food Program – developed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers – is an example of how corporate engagement can be transformative in improving the wages, working and living conditions of workers. What began with a farm worker-led focus on Taco Bell (including a boycott that The United Methodist Church endorsed at our 2004 General Conference) gradually evolved into an industry-wide program to provide better wages, safer working conditions, and zero-tolerance of sexual harassment in the fields. These changes were the result of a sustained effort of letter writing, shareholder advocacy, public witness and consumer pressure that encouraged a growing list of companies to join as partners. The Fair Food Program has always been led by the workers themselves and it has been their stories – both of the oppressive working conditions and the positive changes brought about by the program – that have been central to the campaign’s success.



ENGAGING IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FAITHFUL VOTERS



“While declaring our ultimate allegiance is to God, Scripture recognizes that faithfulness to God requires political engagement by the people of God.”
(United Methodist Book of Resolutions, #5012)

Just as we pursue change by advocating for just policies, so too we are called to faithfully engage in the electoral process. Elections provide an opportunity for us to put our faith into action by engaging candidates, encouraging participation, selecting representatives, and voting on ballot initiatives.

VOTING RESPONSIBILITIES

“The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens.” (United Methodist Social Principles, ¶164.B)

Voting can be an act of faith. Voting for policies and individuals that uphold our shared values of justice and peace is one way Christians can work for a world that more closely resembles the one God desires for us. With this ability to impact change comes responsibility.

First: a responsibility to actually *vote*.

And second: a responsibility to *be informed*.

Before you step into the voting booth, research the candidates and potential ballot initiatives on which you will be deciding.

VOTING RIGHTS

Our United Methodist Social Principles state, “The form and the leaders of all governments should be determined by exercise of the right to vote guaranteed to all adult citizens” (United Methodist Social Principles, ¶164.B) Voting is a tremendous opportunity to create change. Because of its power, the right to vote has historically been withheld from many. In the United States, it has been a centuries-long struggle to expand the right to vote beyond the original electorate of land-owning white men.

Elections are generally organized and regulated by the states. In some states, there are efforts to undermine access to voting processes and depress voter turnout.

These infringements on voting rights include voter ID laws, polling place closures, the purging of voter rolls, limits on early voting, and the denial of voting rights for ex-offenders. These policies and practices disproportionately impact the elderly, hourly workers, students and communities of color.

Other states have taken innovative approaches to increase voter participation including vote-by-mail, automatic voter registration and same-day registration. Find out the voting laws in your state and advocate with your state legislature, governor and secretary of state to expand voter participation and to guarantee the voting rights of all citizens.

DOS AND DON'TS FOR ENGAGEMENT

In the United States, churches, pastors and other people of faith might be wary of engaging in the electoral process because of a church or organization's tax exempt status. Faith leaders and religious organizations can legally safeguard the right to vote, educate communities on issues and candidates, and encourage participation in the electoral process without running afoul of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

The United States tax code grants tax exemption to 501(c)(3) organizations, including nonprofit and religious organizations. The Johnson Amendment of 1954 prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations from some involvement in the electoral process. The IRS provides guidelines that outline permissible actions for these organizations.

In accordance with these guidelines:

CHURCHES CANNOT...

- Endorse or oppose any candidate for public office.
- Fundraise for or make financial contributions to any candidate or political party.
- Provide educational material distributed by candidates or political parties. Materials must be unbiased toward all candidates.

- Rent space to any candidate for a reduced cost. If offering space, it must be made available to all candidates equally and at the same rate.
- Publish advertisements sold below market rate or editorials that favor any candidate.

CHURCHES CAN...

- Host voter-registration and "get out the vote" events. Consult your state's secretary of state for resources and guidelines.
- Provide education on topics in a non-partisan manner.
- Welcome candidates for public forums if every candidate is invited to participate.
- Encourage support for issues or policies important to your community.
- Serve as a polling site.

When in doubt, consult the Internal Revenue Service website for guidelines.

WHAT ABOUT THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

People of faith are sometimes anxious about engaging in the political process because of the separation of church and state. The United Methodist Church has long supported "the rightful and vital separation of church and state, which has served the cause of religious liberty." Our United Methodist Social Principles also go on to say that this cause "should not be misconstrued as the abolition of all religious expression from public life." (United Methodist Social Principles, ¶164.C) In line with our Wesleyan heritage, we believe there is no holiness without social holiness. Individuals can be staunch supporters of the separation of church and state and, at the same time, be strong advocates for a more just and peaceful world.

CREATING CHANGE TOGETHER

In whatever ways you are engaging, we give thanks for your commitment to living faith, seeking justice and pursuing peace. Take comfort in knowing you are not alone in the work for justice.

Connect with other advocates around you. Connect with us. Connect with the Church and Society Chair or Peace With Justice Coordinator in your Annual Conference. Call upon these natural allies to walk with you.

The path to justice is long and winding, but these connections will support you along the way. The community that we build together will strengthen and sustain us.

Recalling the words of the companion litany to our Social Creed, may you be renewed for the journey ahead:

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

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

And so shall we.

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

And so shall we.

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

And so shall we.

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

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

And so shall we.

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

And so shall we.

United Methodist Book of Discipline, ¶166



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

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

www.umcjustice.org