

NWD PEACE WITH JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM (PWJMT)

Why Local Churches Are Involved in Advocacy Action

The Northern Waters District Ministry Team (PWJMT) is raising awareness of justice issues and opportunities in our district. On the Northern Waters district web page, <https://northernwaters.michiganumc.org/>, under the “Mission” heading is a “Peace with Justice” tab with the latest information. The PWJMT began taking steps of advocacy including planning an advocacy training event.

The world’s encounter with Covid-19 added an unprecedented urgency for justice actions in our churches. We in the Northern Waters District are part of the recovery process as we pray and act with and on behalf of those suffering because of Covid-19.

In a recent email, Dr. Susan Henry Crowe of UM Church and Society put it this way:

The systems and structures that routinely oppress have continued to disproportionately impact the most marginalized during COVID-19.

- Most essential workers are people of color and women
- Low-wage workers and laborers are the first to lose their jobs
- Those in prisons and immigrant detention centers, largely people of color, are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19...

We continue to build a new normal with a heightened urgency, starting with our five major advocacy priorities: pursuing peace, eradicating poverty, promoting abundant health, addressing climate change, and advocating for more just systems of global migration.¹

This call to advocacy is a call our team heard. The PWJMT and the Michigan Conference Board of Justice are facilitating a virtual advocacy training by the Friends Committee on National Legislation. The registration information is below.

GOD AND ADVOCACY

Humanity’s call to advocacy started shortly after our creation. We were created as

...specific image bearers, entrusted with derivative powers for representing God in the world. Moments after creating man and woman(Genesis 1:26), God trusts humans with certain powers for the growth of all things, blessing them and charging them to “rule” and “multiply” (v. 28) in accordance with how God advocates the flourishing of creation.²
...

God created the world. As God’s creatures, humanity is gifted and given the responsibility to “tend the garden” and see to it that the things that “grow” reflect God’s love intent for the world. That love intent of God informs the social, economic and political realities in the world. Humanity’s responsibility since our creation and the giving of the “rule and multiply command” is to see to it that God’s nature is reflected in all choices and actions.

¹ April 29, 2020 email from UM Church and Society, Dr. Susan Henry Crowe.

² *Advocating for Justice, an Evangelical Vision for Transforming Systems and Structures* by Stephen Offutt/F. David Bronkema/Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy/Robb Davis/ Gregg Okesson, page 61.

From reading scripture, we know that humanity's choices have not always reflected God's love intent for the world. Scripture also reveals God's reconciling plan, Jesus Christ.

Because of Christ's obedience even to the cross (Philippians 2:6-8; Hebrews 12:2) and our redeemed relationship with Christ, we are brought into God's redemptive plan for society (individually and as a community of believers). Christ had a purpose for his downward mobility journey to earth. His giving up heaven was for our redemption. Christ's character is the basis for our social, economic and political advocacy. Christ's call and the Holy Spirit's molding energize us to bring our society back to God's intent- humanity's flourishing.

As advocates we are God's called and sent ones. We speak truth to people in power in systems and structures of our society. Our advocacy brings God's light to bear on the choices before them. God's redemptive plan for the world continues as advocacy embraces accountability, to make all choices reflect God's love for flourishing of all humanity.

As we serve as advocates to bring God's intent into the social, political and economic aspects of the world, we too are brought closer to God's intent. We are being recreated as disciples, empowered to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

ADVOCACY AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

The UM Book of Discipline helps us understand the significance of the local church in God's redemption plan. The UM Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016, in Part VI, Chapter One, The Local Church, Section I states the following:

¶ 201. *Definition of a Local Church*—The local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs. It is a community of true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, the church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.

¶ 202. *The Function of the Local Church*—The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world....The local church is a strategic base from which Christians move out to the structures of society.

We are stewards of God's voice to the world. Our advocacy, what we say and do, is the continuation of God's redemptive plan for the world. We are a community of believers under the Lordship of Christ, taking actions to make disciples for the transformation of the world. Our actions help change the structures and systems of the world, bringing human flourishing for all.

ADVOCACY METHODS

Charity and community development are important actions in our society. In addition to these, **advocacy proposes more long-lasting solutions by addressing unjust policies, laws and social structures.** Changing these takes courageous persistence through strategic advocacy actions.

The Holy Spirit moves in people's hearts, and even though they are not suffering the injustice they are moved to **advocate for** those who are suffering.

In **advocacy with**, those concerned about a situation come alongside those most affected by the injustice and partner with them. In solidarity they become a powerful force. Those directly affected can speak with authority about firsthand experience. Those who feel concern often have more resources and access. This **advocacy with** becomes an opportunity to encourage and build the capacity of the marginalized and voiceless.³

When those suffering injustices tell their own story, it becomes **advocacy by**.

In some cases, those who are most affected by injustice take the greatest risk by confronting injustice. Where human rights are abused or violence permeates society, people who are truth tellers about injustice can experience backlash or, even worse, cruel retribution for challenging authorities. Telling one's stories can be an incredibly powerful tool.⁴

Through advocacy, the Holy Spirit leads us to a fuller sense of our discipleship and stewardship.

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³ Ibid., pages 124-127.

⁴ Ibid., page 125.