

Session one

SEEKING THE LOST AND LONE

Opening Prayer

Lord, speak to us, that we may speak
In living echoes of your tone;
As you have sought, so let us seek
Your straying children, lost and lone.

Hymn 403, first stanza, *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

Let's Get Started

RESPOND TO EITHER OR BOTH OF THESE SITUATIONS

Have you ever stood up to a bully, perhaps someone who was picking on your little brother or sister? Maybe you didn't have to do more than say a few words. Maybe you simply stood there with him/her and the bully left him/her alone and went away. Briefly describe such a time.

Have you ever spoken up for someone who wasn't present? Perhaps you defended a friend against an unfair accusation or attack? Briefly describe such a time.

Let's Focus

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THIS OUT LOUD

"Advocacy" is defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as: 1. To speak, plead or argue in favor of. 2. One that argues for a cause; a supporter or defender. 3. One that pleads on another's behalf; an intercessor. The situations you described in the opening exercises are examples of personal advocacy. Simply put, advocacy is speaking with and on behalf of another in order to see that justice is done.

Public policy advocacy is speaking with and on behalf of those who have the least voice in our society. We speak in order to change public laws, programs and policies so that justice can be a part of their lives. Advocates work to change the systems that keep those who need the most help from getting it. For example, when a mother of a victim of a drunk driving incident began to organize others they were able to change the laws so that others would not experience the same injustices.

Let's Talk

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A GROUP

Are there members of the group who have been involved in the work of MADD, SADD, etc.? Share what such participation has meant in your life. Are there other individuals that participants know who are involved in advocacy? What difference do their efforts make in our society?

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Are there members of the group or their families who have benefitted from the advocacy work that has produced fair labor practices, health care changes, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, food stamps or Women, Infant and Children (WIC)? Share what such policy changes have meant in your life. Think about others in society who benefit from these programs. What difference do these efforts make in their lives?

What does the Bible say? Exodus 3:1-8

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ EXODUS 3:1-18. DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS.

How does God know about the injustices being experienced by the Israelites?

What is God's response to this suffering?

Who does God call to serve as an advocate for the Israelites?

How does this individual respond to the call to serve as an advocate?

To whom does God send the advocate? What is the role/function of this person in the Israelite society?

What does this say to you about the nature of advocacy?

What does this story say to you about God's concern for the "lost and lone" of our day?

In what ways might this story speak to your congregation's ministry of advocacy?

ADVOCACY MINISTRIES OTHER CONGREGATIONS HAVE CHOSEN

Food stamps

Housing

Disabilities

Transportation

Immigration

International debt relief

Middle East peace

Should we be talking about politics in the church?

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING.

What do you think of when you hear the words "separation of Church and State"?

When the U.S. Constitution was written the founders wanted to protect each person's freedom. An important part of this protection has been the First Amendment. This amendment is primarily concerned with the right of people of faith and religious organizations to speak out on political issues. The Constitution gives religious communities freedom to speak out on many issues. This aspect of our Constitution has contributed to civil peace in our country. It has become even more important as our society has grown more diverse.

Over the centuries churches have been one of the most consistent forms of charity in our society. Yet God requires both charity and justice, and justice can often be achieved only through the mechanism of government. Biblical advocates like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos told of how governments as well as individuals will be judged by the way they treat the weakest and most vulnerable. In Scripture there is no separation of church and state. In fact, in biblical times the church and state were often one. Jesus frequently confronted the political leaders of his day to change the system to care for the marginalized.



Let's Talk

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A GROUP.

How would you describe the relation of church and state today?

What are the responsibilities of the "state"? What are the responsibilities of the "church"?

How ought church and state cooperate and work together? Where do you see that happening?

How would you define charity? How would you define justice? How are charity and justice related?

Does the ELCA Participate in Politics?

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING.

Yes! The ELCA Constitution authorizes and endorses advocacy as part of the structure of the church. The church is to:

- Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.
- Lift its voice in concord and work in concert with forces for good, to serve humanity, cooperating with church and other groups participating in activities that promote justice, relieve misery, and reconcile the estranged.
- Study social issues and trends, work to discover the causes of oppression and injustice, and develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice, and peace in the world.
- Establish, support, and recognize institutions and agencies that minister to people in spiritual and temporal needs.
- Work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state in a relation of functional interaction.

ELCA Constitution Chapter 4.03

ADVANCE PREPARATION: ENCOURAGE RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

What do you notice about these constitutional mandates?

What does your congregation's constitution say about the ministry of advocacy?

How does your congregation exercise its ministry of advocacy?

The ELCA responds to these mandates as a church body in several arenas. The Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) in Washington D.C. witnesses for social justice on domestic and foreign policy issues. The Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC) in New York represents the ELCA at the United Nations. State Public Policy Advocacy offices advocate to state governments, in partnership with synods and social ministry organizations.

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The ELCA also responds to these directives through the Corporate Social Responsibility desk. This ministry provides investment criteria and counsel addressing corporations on a range of global and domestic issues through shareholder action and resolutions, and develops church and corporation dialogues on major corporate and economic issues.

What do these different arenas of advocacy say about the ELCA commitment to this ministry?
How would you describe the reason for this commitment to advocacy?

Before We Go

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ASSIGNMENTS AS A GROUP.

- 1** Make a list of issues that affect your community, people in the United States and people in the world, who are “lost and lone.”
- 2** After you have your list of issues, name the possible public policy connections between those issues. For example, homelessness can be connected to issues of minimum wage, mental illness/healthcare, and education.
- 3** As a group begin to explore what issue you might use during this study to explore the ministry of advocacy. Use the “Criteria for Selecting a Local Advocacy Issue” questions below in your decision making process. *Note: If you are unable to select an issue by the end of this first session, please agree about an issue prior to beginning session two.*
- 4** Close with prayer.

WHEN SELECTING AN ADVOCACY ISSUE ASK:

How urgent is the need to be addressed?

How many people are affected by the problem?

Is this a timely issue?

Will it be possible to address the issue in upcoming public policy deliberations?

What is the possibility of achieving the desired outcome?

How basic is this issue (does it cause or contribute to other problems of concern to the church)?

Is there a special reason for the ELCA (the church) to take a leading role in addressing this issue?

Is their sufficient time for effective advocacy? —ELCA Advocacy Plan 1999-2000