

Session Two

TALKING WITH OTHERS

Opening Prayer

*Oh, lead us, Lord that we may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet:
Oh, feed us Lord, that we may feed
Your hungry ones with manna sweet.*

Hymn 403, Stanza two, Lutheran Book of Worship

Let's Get Started

RESPOND TO EITHER OR BOTH OF THE FOLLOWING.

Recall a time when you influenced a decision or changed someone's opinion on an issue by what you said. Describe. Describe a time when you were able to see the other side of an issue. What helped you gain that perspective?

Let's Focus

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING OUT LOUD. RESPOND AS A GROUP TO THE QUESTIONS.

Get five people involved in a discussion about the role of the government and the care of the poor and you get six different opinions! We disagree on how to care for the poor. But it is clear in Scripture that we are called to advocate for just policies that will care for the "hungry ones" of our society. When we have our disagreements, it is important to remember who we are advocating with and for. The ministry of advocacy calls for us to evaluate policies and laws that affect the poorest of our society. We need to think of them before we get caught in our own self interest. The church's voice is critical in helping shape public policy and to give voice to those often unheard. The needs of children, the elderly, homebound, the mentally ill, and others must be heard and represented by people like us. What happens when public policy advocacy is part of our ministry? What happens when we ignore public policy as part of our ministry to the poor?

Let's Talk

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING AS A GROUP.

Who are "hungry ones" you have identified in need of your ministry of advocacy?

Share with each other what you have learned about these people.

Review the information gathered in response to the questions in the "When Selecting an Advocacy Issue" box on the previous page.

What other questions do you have about these "hungry ones"?

Where will you go to seek answers to these questions?

What are your hopes and concerns as you begin this ministry?

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What Does the Bible Say?

ADVANCE PREPARATION: INVITE SOMEONE TO READ PROVERBS 31:8-9, ISAIAH 10:1-2, AND AMOS 5:12.

How would you describe the theme of these Scripture verses?

Why do you think King Lemuel's mother would encourage her son in this way?

Who did Isaiah rail against? Why? Where might we find those people today?

Who did Amos challenge? Why? Where might we find those people today?

Why are the prophets concerned for the foreigner, the orphan and the widow?

How would you describe what the scriptures say about defending the rights of the poor and needy?

In what ways can you "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves"?

Advocacy and the role of the Government

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING.

The religious community has a powerful history of caring for the poor. Churches, mosques and synagogues have been the front line of service providing clothing closets, feeding programs, shelters, and resettlement for refugees. These acts help to provide daily assistance for those who need help with daily survival. Yet, if we worked on the issue of fair wages for labor and challenged the system to give a liveable wage to those who work, we would permanently change the lives of the working poor. Then those who are the working poor would be able to gain dignity and leave our shelters and food pantries. Studies (Bread for the World, 1997) show issues such as hunger and housing could be eliminated with changes in public policy both here in the United States and around the world.

Let's Talk

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

What is the difference between giving someone a fish and teaching them to fish?

How would you describe the relationship between giving food to the hungry and changing the system that keeps people hungry?

In what way are both efforts parts of the ministry of advocacy?



“It is taught...that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin (be involved in civic matters)...”

—Augsburg Confession

Advocacy and our Lutheran Heritage

**ADVANCE PREPARATION: INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING.
ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS.**

1. *Civic involvement and the search for justice is part of our heritage and history as Lutherans. In the Augsburg Confession we read:*

“It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, buy and sell, take required oaths, possess property, be married, etc.”—Article 16, Civil Government

2. *Martin Luther wrote in a time of unrest for the church. He wanted to challenge the ways and the understanding of the church as he knew it. As he explored Scripture and wrote the catechism he continually made mention of the poor and marginalized and invited the church to be involved with their care.*

■ *Look at Luther’s explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer in his Small Catechism where he asks the question “What is meant by daily bread?” What is the answer?*

■ *Look at Luther’s explanation to the petition “Thy will be done” from the Lord’s Prayer in the Large Catechism. Note especially where he writes: “In a good government there is need not only for good builders and rulers, but also for defenders, protectors, and vigilant guardians.”*

■ *Look at Luther’s explanation to the Eighth Commandment from the Lord’s Prayer in the Large Catechism. Note especially where he writes: “Everyone should help his neighbor maintain his right. He must not allow these rights to be thwarted or distorted but should promote and resolutely guard them.”*

■ *How would you describe the emphasis Luther’s writings place on using civil institutions to promote justice and order?*

3. *Has the study or experience of advocacy been part of your religious education? What difference do you think it would make if advocacy was part of faith formation of children, youth, adults and elders?*

4. *Since the time of the Reformation the church has continued to be involved in the reform of our society through the ministry of advocacy. Today, the ELCA uses its messages, statements and resolutions to comment on and guide the church concerning issues of social importance. (See page 23 for an overview of messages, statements and resolutions). Through its own efforts and those of predecessor church bodies, the ELCA has over 100 position papers outlining its perspective on a variety of issues. ELCA social statements are resolutions that are adopted by the Churchwide Assembly. Copies of these statements are shared with the congregations to help them discern the ways they can speak out on these issues. ELCA messages are approved by the ELCA Church Council. ELCA advocacy ministries use these papers to evaluate their position on issues and encourage ELCA members to be involved in caring for our world.*

What experience does your congregation have with messages, statements and resolutions?

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Before We Go

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ASSIGNMENTS AS A GROUP.

1. Discuss what you see as the role of the government and the role of the church in helping the poor and marginalized. How are they related? How are they different?
2. Assign members of your group to study the issue you have chosen. Be sure to answer the following questions as part of your study:
 - How does your issue affect the poor and marginalized?
 - What is happening with your issue today? Is there any current legislation being worked on?
 - What do the ELCA messages, statements and/or resolutions say about this issue?
 - Check with the advocacy offices of the ELCA to see if they are working on this issue and if they can provide resources.
 - Find out if members of your congregation are already working on this issue—either through advocacy or direct service (ministry to the homebound, food pantry, youth program)
 - Who else is working on this issue? Can you find other local or national coalitions?
 - What government agencies (county, state, national, international) are involved?
 - What are the positions of your elected officials on this issue? Find out their positions by checking their homepage on the Internet or calling their offices and asking their staff.
3. Begin a discussion on what your congregation might do on this issue. How will you get others involved and what do they need to know to be committed to this issue. Don't, however, finalize any plans yet. Instead, use this time to gather answers to the items mentioned above.
4. Close with prayer.

