

Session Three

DEVELOPING A PLAN

Opening Prayer

*Oh, teach us, Lord, that we may teach
the precious truths which you impart;
And wing our words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.*

Hymn 403 *verse 3* *Lutheran Book of Worship*

Let's Get Started

**ADVANCE PREPARATION: USE THE FOLLOWING BIBLE PASSAGES
TO INFORM YOUR RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION.**

Divide the passages listed below among the group. Have each group identify Jesus' advocacy action in each story.

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|---------------|---------------|
| Mark 6:30-44 | Luke 16:19-31 |
| Mark 10:17-22 | Luke 19:1-10 |
| Luke 4:16-21 | John 8: 1-11 |

Based on your study, what public policy issues might Jesus talk about today? Who would he invite for dinner? What issues would he confront?

Let's Focus

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

In the line of the Hebrews prophets, Jesus is also an advocate. He had a heart for the poor and oppressed people. At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus reading from the prophet Isaiah announced : *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor* (Luke 4:18-19).

How did the government officials respond to Jesus' feeding the hungry, speaking out about the possible dangers of wealth and reminding people that he had come to bring good news to the poor?

How would the government system today respond to Jesus' message about the poor?

In what ways does the church today challenge the government to care for the poor?

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Let's Talk

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

*Have you ever thought of Jesus as an advocate before?
If you did, what helped you see him in that role?
If you didn't, what kept you from seeing it?*

What Does the Bible Say? Mark 14:3-9

ADVANCE PREPARATION: INVITE SOMEONE TO READ MARK 14:3-9.

*What do you think Jesus meant by the words "for you will always have the poor with you?"
What difference do you think it means that Jesus makes this statement on the eve of his crucifixion?
Read Deuteronomy 15:11. Were Jesus' words an excuse for accepting the presence of the poor?
Explain your response.*

How does society's greed and unjust laws work against the poor? Do you know or have you heard of an example when someone can't make it because the system seems against them? This may be a story of racism, sexism, taxation, or simply laws that favor others.

How Can We Help the Poor?

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING. ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS.

*What are the reasons people are poor?
Do you associate poverty with laziness or lack of initiative? Why or why not?*

Although there are people who are poor and lazy, statistically poverty is experienced most by the elderly, children and those who have some type of physical or mental infirmity. For those who can not care for themselves, poverty is a cruel and unjust way of life.

What are some of the possible impediments to people making a living wage?

The current minimum wage is not a liveable income. Those who work only one job and are paid the minimum wage must either supplement their income by working several jobs or rely on the religious community, government programs, and/or family and friends to make ends meet. For minimum wage workers the cause of their poverty is the amount of income they earn. This is often complicated by lack of medical insurance, affordable childcare and other benefits that are available to those with a higher discretionary income. The ministry of advocacy calls us to not only provide direct service but to examine the causes of poverty and advocate for change in a system that contributes to poverty.



Let's Talk

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING AS A GROUP.

*What are some of the ways you and your congregation can join in advocating for just work policies?
What might be the benefit of arranging a conversation with those who are affected by unjust work practices?
How could you find out what needs they have? How might you respond to those needs?
What are the ways your congregation or individual members are already advocating for the topic you have selected?
What prompted such advocacy work?
Would more people join in this ministry if they knew about it?*

Who me? Change the system?

INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE NEXT SECTION. ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS.

In our opening devotion we read “wing our words, that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart.” Changing a system that will affect the lives of God’s people involves telling people about your issue and changing the hearts of those who have the power to make the difference. It is a process that can often take many years to accomplish. Is it worth the work? Explain your answer.

As you examine and identify the issue your group would like to address, it is important to find out what changes need to be made. They can range from the simple to the complex. You may need to change both state and county and/or federal programs to accomplish your task.

Who do you need to persuade to change the system that affects your issue? Make a list.

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WISCONSIN CHURCH TACKLES WELFARE REFORM

A congregation in Wisconsin began working on welfare reform after an adult forum on domestic abuse. The presenter expressed concern that the coming welfare reform would exclude many women in need of the program

The pastor and a lay member read an executive summary of the plan and made a list of questions. After meeting with their state senator, who helped write the reform plan they realized there were many unanswered questions, and that the plan would not work for those who would slip through the cracks.

They then brought a resolution to their conference convention and their synod assembly urging congregations to educate themselves about the reform plan and to get involved in shaping their own county’s plans. After gathering others, the congregation then pledged itself to this effort and founded an ecumenical action group with partners from other congregations. They became involved with county committees and helped them find solutions for childcare, transportation, employment and other issues.

Congregation members supported the work of those on the committees with their prayers, written letters and continued involvement in advocating for those in their community.

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Before We Go

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ASSIGNMENTS AS A GROUP.

1. Using the research you have done on your chosen issue put together a plan for advocacy.

Consider these ideas as you plan:

- Write down your goal. Be sure it is specific, attainable and measurable.
- Once you have your goal, make a list of what you need to accomplish it.
- Who do you need to be in contact with?
- What other groups do you need to be in contact with?
- Who will you recruit to help?
- What is your time line?

2. Get the word out to your congregation (use your newsletter, adult forums, youth groups, stewardship talks, bulletin boards, and/or a direct letter to members of the congregation).

Write and mail your own letters and publicize any responses you receive.

Contact the media, local library, community center and share your concerns.

Write a letter to the editors of local and community papers.

Write a sample letter on the issue as a model for others to use.

Prior to an election, invite candidates to share their views on this issue.

3. Put your plan in writing and assign group members to the various tasks.

4. Close with prayer.





Make your Letters Count: What to Say

1. *Spell name of official correctly. Use accurate title. For addresses see www.loga.org*
2. *Write your own letter. Don't use a form letter. Handwrite personally or neatly type.*
3. *Use personal stationary with your return address or organization letterhead if authorized to use.*
4. *Be brief! Short paragraphs, too! One page, if possible.*
5. *Be positive! Avoid criticism, veiled threats, name calling, and judgmental statements. Express appreciation for recent speech, vote, or action indicating both your courteousness and your knowledge.*
6. *Address only one issue in a letter.*
7. *State who you are.*
8. *State what you are writing about, what you want done. Come to the point quickly. Be specific.*
9. *Give the reason for your concern, commitment, or request. Draw on personal experience and specific situations. Identify the impact of the issue on people (your family, our community, people in other parts of the world). Identify the human justice aspects of the issue.*
10. *Ask specific questions. The more specific and original, the more thought provoking and the more thoughtful the response. Also ask, "So how do you plan to vote?"*
11. *Summarize and restate main point in last paragraph.*

E-mail or Faxes?

Some legislators are open to receiving letters from constituents by either e-mail or fax. Check with your legislators staff as to what it is the best way to communicate. Be sure to sign your correspondence with your mailing address as well as your e-mail or fax number.