

**T I M E T O A C T**

**Opening Prayer**

*Oh, fill us with your fullness, Lord,  
Until our very hearts o'er flow  
In kindling thought and glowing word,  
Your love to tell, your praise to show.*

**Hymn 403 Verse 4** *Lutheran Book of Worship*

**Let's Get Started**

**RESPOND TO EITHER QUESTION.**

The ministry of advocacy is the ministry of helping others. The poet Henry Thoreau wrote, "A thousand wacks at the branches is not worth one at the roots." Advocacy is a direct "wack" at the systems that frustrate people and keep them from reaching their God given potential.

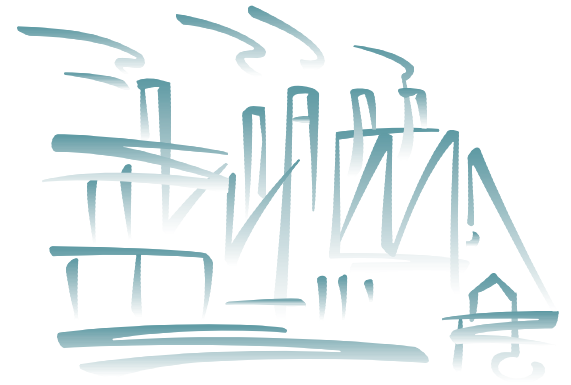
Do you remember a time you were frustrated by a system that kept you from reaching your God given potential? Do you recall a time you helped someone deal with a system that kept them from reaching their God given potential? Briefly describe such a time.

**Let's Focus**

**INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING OUT LOUD.**

*How would you describe the difference between lobbying and advocacy?*

In the ministry of advocacy the word "ministry" is used intentionally. We look at legislation and our actions on how they affect poor people first and then ourselves second. This kind of faithful compassion sets us apart from others who try to influence public policy. When congregations often begin talking about advocacy they raise the concern about what is "allowed and not allowed" by the United States Government. There are many things we can do to reflect our faith, theology and spirituality as part of our ministry of advocacy. A number of these are listed in the box on the next page.



### **ACTION ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER:**

- Host a Bible study on the connection between Christian faith and citizenship.
- Pray for all elected leaders, candidates and voters.
- Encourage/organize unbiased voter registration and participation (provide absentee ballots to the sick and shut-in, college students, and military personnel; provide transportation to polling places and day care for voters).
- Offer your church as a polling site.
- Develop a broad list of issues around which to determine candidates views (showing no bias for/against a particular party or candidate).
- Gather the opinions of candidates for a particular office on those issues (fairly-worded/unbiased candidate questionnaires, neutral candidates' forum).



### **Let's Talk**

**COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SURVEY AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND DISCUSS YOUR RESPONSES AS A GROUP.**

- |   |         |        |
|---|---------|--------|
| Is it proper for an individual to endorse/oppose candidates or parties?   | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| Is it proper for a congregation to endorse/oppose candidates or parties?  | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| Is it proper for an individual to contribute money/time/space/ mailing lists to a candidate/party?                                  | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| Is it proper for a congregation to contribute money/time/space/ mailing lists to a candidate/party?                                 | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| Is proper for an individual to distribute/display campaign literature?  | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| Is it proper for a congregation to distribute/display campaign literature?  | Yes ___ | No ___ |
| Do you agree with the statement: Churches may talk- and should talk- about issues, but never talk about the parties and candidates? | Yes ___ | No ___ |

*Please note: Congregations who endorse only one candidate, contribute money/time/space/ mailing list to only one candidate, or display campaign literature for only one candidate may jeopardize their tax exempt status.*

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# Session four

## TIME TO ACT

*continued*



### **What Does the Bible Say? Luke 10:25-37**

**ADVANCE PREPARATION: INVITE SOMEONE TO READ LUKE 10:25-37.  
DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A GROUP.**

Were you surprised that Jesus makes the Samaritan the principal actor in this story? According to the law of the day, a neighbor was another Jew, not a non-Israelite. Describe how Jesus turns this discussion from who is qualified for my help to what need can I meet.

The Good Samaritan model of advocacy reaches beyond those in our community to others in our world. How is your congregation involved in Good Samaritan ministry? Describe what it is like in your congregation when attempts are made to go beyond community concerns and become involved in national and global realities.

### **Good Samaritan Advocacy**

**DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING AS A GROUP**

Imagine you are a part of this story. You know that almost weekly someone is being robbed and left for dead along this road. What is the advocacy potential here? As an advocate what is your action?

Now make the discussion more personal to your community. Who are the Samaritans- the people in your community that might not be considered neighbors? What needs to be done to help them in a time of need? What will you do to advocate for them?

Now make this discussion more global. Who are the Samaritans—those that are considered outcasts in our world? What needs to be done to help them? What is our role in helping them?

### **Advocacy and Elected Officials**

**INVITE SOMEONE TO READ THE FOLLOWING.**

Many people are afraid of visiting with their elected officials about their concern. They conjure up images of being quizzed or challenged and not having enough information. Most elected officials are enthusiastic about meeting with their constituents. They often learn from their local people what issues are really important. They also concede that with the thousand of issues that are open for discussion they can not be an expert on all of them. They do not expect that from you either. What is important to remember in your visit is that your vote counts and that by telling them that you represent your committee your vote multiplies.

*When we insist and persist to bring the needs of the poor and the marginalized before others then we are claiming their worth and God's love. Our ministry of advocacy is our witness for social justice to the world.*

## **Before We Go**

### **DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING AS A GROUP**

Now you have a plan. You have picked an issue, studied the background material, looked for others to build a coalition, written a letter and started involving your congregation. What's next? Prayer.

- 1.** *Encourage your congregation to pray for the ministry of advocacy and elected officials- even if it is not election time. Check out the prayers in the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 43.*
- 2.** *Check over your list of who else can you involve. Consider involving youth, confirmands, families and elders in an advocacy project. Ask the youth group or youth adult class to host the candidate night of your congregation. Consider a field trip to an ELCA advocacy office or to a legislators office who is willing to talk about their own faith and their political decisions.*
- 3.** *Look over your goal statement and time line. Is your time line realistic?*
- 4.** *Close with Prayer*

## **Final words**

One of the important parts of being an effective advocate is to understand that faithfulness is part of the witness we make. It is true that we will not win all our battles, sometimes even those that seem to be simple. What is important to remember is that we need to be present in the world of public policy to be an effective witness. We are in this discussion as witnesses of justice. That in itself is an important part of our effectiveness and our faithfulness.

Remember our opening prayer: *"Oh, fill us with your fullness, Lord until our very hearts overflow. In kindling thoughts and glowing word, your love to tell, your praise to show."* (LBW 403 vs.4) Our witness to the world of public policy is one of telling God's love for God's people. It is one of the ways that we show that overflowing love of God to others. When we insist and persist to bring the needs of the poor and the marginalized before others then we are claiming their worth and God's love. Our ministry of advocacy is our witness for social justice to the world.

It takes time to be effective. Members of congregations who have been involved in advocacy for a long time can tell you stories of how they worked with a legislator for a number of years before they were able to convince them of the necessary changes that needed to be made. They may also tell you that just "getting your foot in the door" is a great beginning. ■

### **PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF...**

One congregation which had a significant ministry with the homeless tried to get the county to add to its budget a line for funding health services for the poor. They asked for \$100,000 to begin with.

After several years they were finally able to convince the board of supervisors to put a line in the budget and fund it at \$15,000. Although this was far from what their original goal had been they were able to show that this was an effective program and gradually over the years they increased the funding to their final goal.

They were both patient and effective.