



Church & Society

Living Faith. Seeking Justice. Pursuing Peace.



G U I D E L I N E S

Church and Society

Living Faith. Seeking Justice. Pursuing Peace.

General Board of Church and Society

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

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“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

Thank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world.

A Faithful Witness

As a leader in your local congregation's Church and Society Committee, you have a mission to engage the world in transformative ways. You are called, not only to make a difference in the world, but to lead your congregation to make a difference as well. This is an important job.

Public witness is a way to live out the gospel through concrete actions that can be seen by the broader community. In our baptismal covenant, United Methodists commit to resisting evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

"The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness." —John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*

Consider how God worked through:

- the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, whose acts of civil disobedience saved children from Pharaoh's decree.
- the reluctant Moses who, accompanied by his brother Aaron, challenged power and freed the Israelites from captivity.
- the prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, who publicly proclaimed timeless truths and cast a fruitful vision for the community.
- Queen Esther, who used her access to power for the benefit of her people.
- our savior Jesus who persuaded with parables, stood with the marginalized and directly resisted the empire of his day.

Our Wesleyan Heritage—Social Holiness

As United Methodists, we pursue social holiness that is rooted in our biblical understanding, informed by John Wesley's movement for change in English society, and built upon 250 years of work and witness by Methodists. Through acts of personal, social, and civic righteousness we can reflect the reconciling love of Christ to the Church and society.

"God has a mission for the church rooted in love and justice. It is the context for properly exercising the gifts of the church. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul lifts up agape—unconditional love—and commends it for the building up of the body of the church and how we engage in society. Love is the motivator behind our commitment to social justice." —Bishop Julius C. Trimble, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society

The World-transforming Mission of the Church

As we uphold the mission of The United Methodist Church to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we commit to witnessing to the gospel through concrete actions in the public sphere.

God is just, and as followers of God we are committed to be a people of justice. God is also merciful, and as followers of God we are committed to be a people who show mercy. Both mercy and justice are characteristics of God and as Christians we are committed to both.

Ministries of mercy are critical; they address immediate needs. They can include donations in response to natural disasters, food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, money to pay electricity bills or overdue rent, and a host of other acts of service. The church excels at responding to needs like this. United Methodists are generous in responding to human needs both globally and in our own communities. And our generosity goes beyond financial support. Hundreds of thousands of church members participate in volunteer mission programs. Many find these experiences life-changing both for participants and those receiving assistance

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” —Amos 5:24.

While it is essential to meet the immediate needs of all who suffer, justice results when our social structures reflect values of compassion, mercy, and justice that ensures the flourishing of God’s creation and all that dwells within it. Justice ministry works for social change through listening to the needs of one’s community, and working with others to address systems of injustice.

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” —Lilla Watson, Aboriginal elder, educator, and activist.

Ministry Description

As chair of your Church and Society Committee, thank you for hearing the call to put your faith into action! Through your ministry, your local church is joining in God's good work for justice and peace.

Your role is critical in building a team and shepherding your congregation to live out United Methodist social witness.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Chair

Some of the key responsibilities are found below:

- Listen with your team to learn what topics are most important to your church members
- With attention to biblical and theological grounding, work with your team to plan programming that educates everyone on important justice issues that are most relevant to your congregation and community.
- Facilitate partnerships between local community groups, including faith-based organizations and others, for shared events and actions.
- Provide information for events and actions related to social concerns to your church. Work with your church administrators to distribute materials through church newsletters, announcements during worship when appropriate, bulletin boards, and social media channels.
- Coordinate and lead opportunities for the congregation to study and grow in awareness of the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church.
- Encourage frequent use of the Social Creed and Social Creed Litany in congregational life.
- Promote Peace with Justice Sunday and Human Relations Day in your local church.
- Connect with your annual conference and the General Board of Church and Society for opportunities to further justice and peace.

Subscribe to Church and Society:
<https://www.umcjustice.org/subscribe>.

The Social Principles and United Methodist Witness

The Social Principles serve as The United Methodist Church's official summary of stated convictions on a wide range of social concerns, including civil and human rights, environmental justice, healthcare, migration, and more. First adopted by the 1972 General

Conference, the Social Principles stand in the Wesleyan tradition of forthright moral witness and ethical action.

The Social Principles are intended for prayerful, thoughtful dialogue to reflect on faith and practice. While not considered church law, the Social Principles “provide our most recent official summary of stated convictions that seek to apply the Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic, and political issues” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶102).

In 2024, the General Conference adopted a wholly revised Social Principles document, a revision that had not occurred wholesale in nearly fifty years. The revision focused on developing a document that is biblically and theologically grounded, succinct, and globally relevant. The newly adopted Social Principles are a teachable document, intended to be used in Sunday school classes, preached from the pulpit, in seminary classes, and a guide for United Methodists.

Consider providing opportunities through Sunday school classes, worship, and community events to promote the Social Principles in your congregation.

Some ideas for promoting Social Principles include:

- Offer a six-week Sunday school class studying the Social Principles.
- Invite your youth group to read and discuss an issue of concern utilizing the Social Principles as a basis for dialogue.
- Write a reflection for your church newsletter utilizing the Social Principles to discuss a social concern in your community.
- Work with your worship team to include “A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed” in a Sunday service or other worshipful moment in the life of the congregation.

“It is recommended that this statement of Social Principles be continually available to United Methodist Christians and that it be emphasized regularly in every congregation. It is further recommended that ‘Our Social Creed’ be frequently used in Sunday worship.” — *The Book of Discipline*, ¶164

Peace with Justice Sunday

Peace with Justice Sunday is one of six churchwide Special Sundays of The United Methodist Church. This Special Sunday is a denomination-wide celebration intended to raise awareness that even in a world plagued by war and terror, violence and destruction, people of faith have a clear call to build peace with justice. Fifty percent of the funds collected on Peace with Justice Sunday remain in the annual conference to develop and strengthen social justice ministries within the local conference. Fifty percent of the donations collected fund national and international peacemaking ministries and grants through the General Board of Church and Society.

It is typically celebrated with an offering on the first Sunday after Pentecost, but we encourage churches to celebrate on a date that is most convenient for your congregation.

Work with your treasurer and communications team to coordinate the promotion of Peace with Justice Sunday.

Thanks to this offering, congregations promote ministries for peace in the annual conference and around the world. For more information, contact your annual conference Peace with Justice Coordinator or visit <https://www.umc.org/en/content/peace-with-justice-sunday-ministry-article>.

“Congregations are to observe Peace with Justice Sunday. . . . Peace with Justice witnesses to God’s demand for a faithful, just, disarmed, and secure world.” —*Book of Discipline*, ¶263.5

Human Relations Day Sunday

Historically, Human Relations Day has been celebrated with an offering on the Sunday before the observance of Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. It is one of six churchwide Special Sundays of The United Methodist Church.

The funds contribute to the Community Developers Program, the United Methodist Voluntary Services Program, and the Youth Offender Rehabilitation Program. For more information, visit <https://www.umc.org/en/content/human-relations-day-sunday-ministry-article>.

“This Sunday occurs during Epiphany, the season of manifesting God’s light to the world. Human Relations Day calls the Church to recognize the right of all God’s children in realizing their potential as human beings in relationship with each other.” —*Book of Discipline*, ¶263.1.

Annual Conference Connections

Each annual conference typically has designated leaders and working groups responsible for social concerns. Sometimes, the annual conference group’s and staff person’s responsibilities are combined so that the committee and staff member oversees social concerns alongside outreach or missions.

Reach out to your annual conference office and find out who is working on social issues for the conference. This can be an effective way to connect and deepen your impact and ministry with United Methodists in the region. Sign up for your annual conference newsletter to stay up to date on your conference’s ministries.

Getting Started

Much of this section is based on *Building Power Together: A Toolkit for Advocates in Leadership*. See the “Resources” section for availability.

Building Your Ministry Team

Building a team is an intentional leadership practice that provides opportunities to connect church and community members for sharing and learning together. Building a team is one of the most effective ways to bring about social justice. Building collective leadership through teams means building collective ownership and a collective vision for ministry together.

A team is a group of people that:

- is connected by a shared passion for an issue, love for people who are affected, vision for change, and commitment to work together to bring that change about;
- is in regular contact with each other (virtually or in-person);
- builds one-on-one relationships with each other, in addition to meeting face-to-face together as a team;
- studies and reflects on their life experiences and the world around them, together;
- builds relationships with those affected by the issue they are working on.

Having a committed team will be vital to your success throughout the life of your movement.

Many advocates focus on recruiting a strong team in the beginning and stop once it's in place. Because advocacy and justice require time and patience, routine maintenance of your team is essential to ensure the efficacy of your leaders.

Identifying Social Concerns in Your Community

With your team, begin to investigate the needs of your community by listening to the experiences of your congregation, connecting with community partners and service providers in your community, and inviting those directly impacted by injustice to be heard. Those with lived experience offer an invaluable perspective through their first-hand knowledge. Their voices should be elevated as often as they want to speak.

Through this process of listening and learning, listen closely for collective needs and values that align with the team's work.

Learning for Advocacy

Education plays a vital role in the work of advocacy. It is important for your team to understand the systems and policies that can address social concerns. It is essential that your advocacy work be grounded in fact-based research as well as the lived experience of those most directly impacted.

The process of educating your community can also help with building your team. As others in your community begin to see and understand the injustices around them, they may feel motivated and empowered to join your efforts.

Consider offering educational opportunities in partnership with community organizations to open doors for thoughtful discussion, develop a baseline understanding of the social concern, and allow for relationship building in your congregation and community.

Case Study

Building a Team in the North Texas Conference by Rev. Philip Dieke, Church and Society Chair for the North Texas Conference (from *Building Power Together: A Toolkit for Advocates in Leadership* [see the Resources section]):

In June 2023, our Conference Board of Church and Society partnered with a local congregation to host “Justice Begins with Us: Organizing in the Church for Social Change.” We promoted the event through Conference communication, inviting congregations to send a representative, or a group, from their church if they were curious about the work of Church and Society, or interested in diving deeper into justice work. Participants were encouraged to register for the event and as part of their registration we asked them to identify the most pressing justice issue the church should address in society today. The event, which began with speakers and a panel discussion, ended with breakout conversations focusing on the top six issues named during registration.

These breakout sessions were an opportunity for individuals across our conference to recognize that they are not alone in their passion, and they are not alone in the work. People shared stories, built relationships, exchanged information, and were sent back to their respective congregations with the charge of identifying five people they could invite into this work.

United Methodists are a people passionate about justice. The first step to building your team is getting in the same room to share that passion.

Identifying Gifts and Resources for Social Change

As important as identifying the social concerns of your community are, it is equally important to identify the gifts and resources of your team, congregation, and community in addressing injustice.

Spend some time with your team identifying what skills, resources, community partners, institutional supports, and financial resources are available at the individual, congregational, and community level.

After identifying individual and collective gifts and resources, the team can work together to discern how these gifts and resources can work together to create change.

For example, you may share the physical assets of a church building, have access to talented public speakers and facilitators, and are connected to local decision makers. You can bring these different resources and gifts together and host a town hall meeting to discuss issues in your community and how to address them.

The Social Principles are a powerful tool for congregations. Once you have identified social concerns with your ministry team and congregation, the Social Principles can be a helpful resource to refer to when thinking through the topic. They include suggested calls to action and important information on a wide range of issues.

Additional Sources of Help

United Methodist Seminars on National and International Affairs

The United Methodist Seminar Program on National and International Affairs aims to awaken a desire for justice and peace from a perspective of faith through custom-designed seminars for groups. The Seminar Program provides opportunities for groups to explore an issue by:

- Reflecting theologically
- Engaging with experts on the issue (national and grassroots organizations)
- Participating in interactive, experiential exercises
- Meeting with Congressional Representatives
- Engaging with local community organizations/activists
- Creating action plans to take home

Seminars are open to United Methodists and non-United Methodists alike. They are available year-round. The schedule and the duration of the seminar is up to the preference of the group. Most seminars are two days, but we can also provide one-day seminars or longer seminars. The seminars are offered at a very low cost per day.

The topic of the seminars is up to the group. Topics that are frequently requested are: Economic Justice, Human Trafficking, Interfaith Dialogue, Immigration & Refugee, Gender Based Violence, Environmental Justice, Mass Incarceration, Gun Violence Prevention, and more.

The Seminar Program takes place at The United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, next to the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court.

Interested in learning more about seminars? For Washington, D.C. seminars sponsored by General Board of Church and Society, visit www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/seminars.

Local Church Grants

The United Methodist Church provides many opportunities for local churches, organizations, and individuals to apply for financial assistance in the service of justice. The opportunities vary in amount, eligibility, and purpose (see Resources section).

Advocating for Justice

This and the sections on “Engaging in the U.S. Electoral Process,” and “Self-Care and Fatigue” are based on *Creating Change Together: A Toolkit for Faithful Civic Engagement*, from the General Board of Church and Society. See the “Resources” section for availability.

As people of faith, we understand advocacy as speaking out on issues not only on behalf of impacted communities but alongside them. Advocacy can serve many purposes:

- passing, blocking and amending legislation, as well as holding elected officials accountable to their commitments;
- bringing attention to an issue to generate conversation or change the narrative;
- standing in solidarity with marginalized and affected communities;
- educating others on the ways your faith informs your engagement with society.

Identify Decision Makers

One key way to help promote social change is by addressing unjust systems and laws. Often, such change involves engaging decision makers at the local, state, federal, and global level. Below are some tips on how to connect with decision makers on issues that your team are addressing.

Decision makers are those with the ability to make systemic change and, therefore, are a focal point for advocacy efforts. Knowing which decision maker to connect with is essential.

First, consider the issue you want to change.

- Who has the authority to make these changes?
- Is this a local, state or federal topic?
- Is the concern specific to an agency, board, or office?

Because a series of people is often involved in making decisions, you will likely identify more than one person or group. Decision makers could be the president, members of the United States Congress, state governors, federal administrators and secretaries (United Nations, Environmental Protection Agency, and so on), and local elected officials (state legislators, sheriffs, county commissioners, school boards, and so on).

Unjust systems and structures have many layers. It takes time, commitment, and hard work to uncover the layers. Sometimes the decision makers—those who have the ability to create change—are found in corporate boardrooms rather than in elected offices. Influencing these corporate decision makers can involve many of the same tactics as with elected officials.

Case Study: The Fair Food Program

The Fair Food Program—developed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers—is an example of how corporate engagement can be transformative in improving the wages, working and living conditions of workers. What began with a farm worker-led focus on Taco Bell (including a boycott that The United Methodist Church endorsed at our 2004 General Conference) gradually evolved into an industry-wide program to provide better wages, safer working conditions, and zero-tolerance of sexual harassment in the fields. These changes were the result of sustained efforts of letter writing, shareholder advocacy, public witness, and consumer pressure that encouraged a growing list of companies to join as partners. The Fair Food Program has always been led by the workers themselves and it has been their stories—both of the oppressive working conditions and the positive changes brought about by the program—that have been central to the campaign's success.

Advocate through Public Witness

When we experience or identify injustice and oppression in society, organizing a public event can be one of the best ways to draw attention to a specific issue. The ways in which we can share God's message of love and justice can include prayer vigils, press conferences, public demonstrations/marches, or even using our church facilities to share messages of justice and action.

A public event can amplify our message, offer an opportunity for more people to engage, and hold decision makers accountable.

Using Church Facilities

Church buildings are often prominently positioned in our communities. There are many ways we can use our spaces to proclaim our values and offer public witness.

Signs. Many churches have signs out front that can be used to make a statement for public witness. Whether by using a marquee or temporary banner, churches can make a message highly visible to people passing by your building.

Art exhibitions and film screenings. Think about your space (front lawn, narthex, sanctuary) in a creative way! Art can be an effective medium to tell stories and evoke emotions in ways that words alone cannot. Seek out artists in your community who are passionate about creating art as a form of public witness.

Advocate through Writing

Written words can be a powerful vehicle for advocacy, and writing can be a more comfortable way for some people to share. Writing provides details and supporting information that is difficult to convey otherwise. You can write directly to decision makers, or you can share your message with a broader audience through news outlets.

Writing Directly to Decision Makers

Public figures that are accountable to a group of people (e.g., citizens, shareholders) will likely have an email address or an online form you can use to communicate with them.

Spend some time on the “Leadership” or “Contact Us” pages of decision makers’ websites to locate these email addresses. If writing to a member of the U.S. Congress, you can use the forms at www.umcjustice.org/take-action.

You are always welcome to send handwritten letters, and these can be powerful. Keep in mind that any physical mail addressed to a member of the U.S. Congress goes through weeks of security screening before being delivered. Important to remember if your topic is time sensitive!

Whether handwritten or via email, begin your message by clearly stating what you are asking the decision maker to do. This “ask” should be focused, clear, and concise. It is tempting to share all your concerns with the decision maker, but when you focus on just one “ask,” the recipient is more likely to read and understand your message.

Be sure to include a personal story or connection in your message. The most compelling messages are those that make the reader connect with the reasons you desire change. You should clearly convey what is moving you to action (personal impact, your faith, your grandchild’s future, your lived experience). Facts can be important, but a personal connection will be more memorable and will help decision makers understand the impact of their actions on their constituents.

Don’t forget to thank decision makers when they do the right thing! This shows them that people are watching and are grateful when they step up and act for justice and peace.

Suggested Activity

Get others to join your mission by gathering postcards or signatures for a petition. Showing that several constituents care about the same issue can be motivating for a decision maker. Writing postcards and signing petitions can be great activities at an event or church gathering. Once you have gathered your signatures or postcards, deliver them to your decision maker to illustrate the breadth of your communal message.

Writing to News Outlets

News outlets can be great vehicles for sharing your message with a wide audience. Check your news outlet’s Opinion section to find their specific guidelines.

Local papers can be influential! While it might be tempting to submit your writing to a national publication, local papers are often more accessible. Many people in your community, including key decision makers, rely on local news outlets. Your representative’s national office is likely to review daily “clips” from local papers to stay connected with news and opinions from the district. And with a local paper, you can tailor your message more directly to your audience, which will make it even more powerful and persuasive.

Advocate through Social Media

Social media platforms can be influential when used to disseminate messages, organize groups of people, and communicate with decision makers. The number of social media platforms has proliferated in recent years, and new technologies are being developed every day.

Once you select the decision maker you want to influence, do some research about what platforms they use.

Suggested Activity

Hashtags are a great organizing tool to quickly and easily amplify a message or to connect with others engaged in the same campaign. They consist of a pound or hash symbol (#) followed by a word or phrase with no spaces. Most organized events or actions will have a hashtag. Check the campaign's website or search the latest social media postings on the topic to find what hashtag organizers are using.

Advocate through Calling

Among the easiest ways to register your opinion with government officials is by calling their offices. Elected officials, agencies, and corporations all have publicly available phone numbers to register your opinions and inquire about the office's position on a particular topic. For the U.S. Congress, you can call the general switchboard (202-224-3121) to connect with your representative and two senators. For fast-developing issues, calling is the surest way to have your views counted before a vote or decision is made.

Below are a few simple steps to keep in mind as you make your call.

- **Identify yourself.** Be sure to share your name and where you are calling from to register yourself as a constituent.
- **Clearly state the reason for the call.** State up-front your concern: "I am concerned about access to health care" or "I'm calling to ask (company name) to join the Fair Food Program."
- **Consider asking to speak with the staff person working on the issue.** In addition to registering your opinion with the receptionist, asking to speak directly with the staff person gives you a chance to discuss the issue in more depth and learn more about the decision maker's position.
- **Share your story.** Share why this issue is important to you, your family, and your community. Personalizing the issue will help the office understand how their decision will impact their constituents.
- **Make your "ask."** Be clear about what you want the decision maker to do (co-sponsor legislation, oppose an amendment, change their business practices, and so on).
- **Thank them and request a response or follow-up.** Once you have shared your opinion, be sure to thank them and either ask for a response or inquire about when you might follow up with another call.

While a steady stream of calls can be effective, it is even more powerful if you can encourage your ministry team to call in on the same day. Call-in days help amplify individual voices and are often strategically timed to influence key decisions or build momentum for change.

Advocate through Visiting

One of the most effective tactics for influencing decision makers is an in-person meeting. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, in-person visits from a constituent are consistently cited as having the greatest influence on representatives who are undecided on an issue. Even if the decision maker has a stated position different than yours, a visit is important to register your perspective, share why you and others hold a different view, and begin a relationship with the office for input and conversation about future issues.

Consider calling the office in advance to schedule a time to meet and inform them of the issue(s) you would like to discuss and how many others will be joining for the visit. When attending the meeting, be prepared with some brief talking points, and questions for the decision makers about the issue, stick to the amount of time allotted, leave behind any pertinent information on the issue that you want to share, and write a brief thank you following the meeting.

Engaging in the U.S. Electoral Process

Rights and Responsibilities of Faithful Voters

Just as we pursue change by advocating for just policies, so too we are called to faithfully engage in the electoral process. Elections provide an opportunity for us to put our faith into action by selecting representatives, deciding local funding priorities, and voting on other ballot initiatives.

“While declaring our ultimate allegiance is to God, Scripture recognizes that faithfulness to God requires political engagement by the people of God.”
—Church-Government Relations, *The Book of Resolutions*, #5012)

Voting Responsibilities

Voting can be an act of faith. Voting for policies and individuals that uphold our shared values of justice and peace is one of the ways Christians can work for a world that more closely resembles the one God desires for us. With this ability to impact change comes responsibility.

First, we have the responsibility to actually *vote*. And second, we have the responsibility to *be informed*. Before you step into the voting booth, research the candidates and potential ballot initiatives on which you will be deciding.

Suggested Activity

Host a voter registration drive at your church or in your community! Gather information from your secretary of state to determine what materials you will need.

Voting Rights

Voting is a tremendous opportunity to create change. Because of its power, the right to vote has historically been withheld from many. In the United States, it has been a centuries-long struggle to expand the “right to vote” beyond the original electorate of land-owning white men.

Elections are generally organized and regulated by the states. In some states, there are efforts to undermine access to voting processes and depress voter turnout. These infringements on voting rights include voter ID laws, polling place closures, the purging of voter rolls, limits on early voting, and the denial of voting rights for ex-offenders. These policies

and practices disproportionately impact the elderly, hourly workers, students, and communities of color.

Other states have taken innovative approaches to increase voter participation including vote-by-mail, automatic voter registration, and same-day registration. Find out the voting laws in your state and advocate with your state legislature, governor, and secretary of state to expand voter participation and to guarantee the voting rights of all citizens.

Dos and Don'ts for Engagement

In the United States, churches, pastors, and other people of faith might be wary of engaging in the electoral process because of a church or organization's tax-exempt status. Faith leaders and religious organizations can legally safeguard the right to vote, educate communities on issues and candidates, and encourage participation in the electoral process without running afoul of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

The United States tax code grants tax exemption to 501(c)(3) organizations, including nonprofit and religious organizations. The Johnson Amendment of 1954 prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations from some involvement in the electoral process. The IRS provides guidelines that outline permissible actions for these organizations. In accordance with these guidelines:

Churches Cannot:

- endorse or oppose any candidate for public office;
- fundraise for or make financial contributions to any candidate or political party;
- provide educational material distributed by candidates or political parties. Materials must be unbiased toward all candidates;
- rent space to any candidate for a reduced cost. If offering space, it must be made available to all candidates equally and at the same rate;
- publish advertisements sold below market rate or editorials that favor any candidate.

Churches Can:

- host voter-registration and "get out the vote" events;
- provide education on topics in a non-partisan manner;
- welcome candidates for public forums, if every candidate is invited to participate;
- encourage support for issues or policies important to your community;
- serve as a polling site.

Tip: If in doubt, consult the Internal Revenue Service website for guidelines.

Self-Care and Fatigue

Unjust systems and structures have many layers. It takes time, commitment, and hard work to uncover the layers, untangle webs of injustice, or dismantle a system that perpetuates suffering. We are called to be persistent and persevere. We are called to be faithful and allow God to give us strength for the journey.

It is important to be conscious of how our work impacts us. As we work to transform broken systems in our society, we must be mindful not to let the work break us down as well. Here are some tips to avoid activism fatigue:

- **Pray.** Maintain your relationship with God through prayer. With gratitude for the gifts God gives us and the ability to put our faith into action, ask for wisdom and strength for the journey.

New every morning is your love, Great God of light, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Stir up in us desire to serve you, to live peacefully with our neighbors, and to devote each day to your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

—UMH, 877, quoting *The Upper Room Worshipbook* (The Upper Room, 2006), 8.

- **Be Faithful.** This work is urgent and necessary to see changes in our world. While the task may seem overwhelming, stay focused and be faithful to God's vision.
- **Celebrate the Small Victories.** Transformation does not come overnight. We experience small victories in the process. Celebrate each victory!
- **Take Time to Recharge.** Be aware of when you need to step away. Take time to replenish. Spend time with people you love. Do things that give you life. Allow healing to take place in you. Give yourself the time to recharge.

A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed

The following litany can be used in a worship service or to close an event with your ministry team and congregation (see the *Discipline*, ¶ 164).

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God cares for the integrity of creation,
wills the healing and wholeness of all life,
weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God cries with the masses of starving people,
despises growing disparity between rich and poor,
demands justice for workers in the marketplace.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and streets,
rebukes the world's warring madness,
humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace,
celebrates where justice and mercy embrace,
exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.
And so shall we.

Today is the day
God brings good news to the poor,
proclaims release to the captives,
gives sight to the blind, and
sets the oppressed free.
And so shall we.

Resources

Special Sundays for Church and Society

Human Relations Day, the Sunday before the national observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, strengthens United Methodist outreach to communities in the United States and Puerto Rico, encouraging ministries of social justice.

Festival of God's Creation/Earth Day Sunday, the Sunday closest to Earth Day, April 22, is a collaboration of the General Board of Church and Society and Creation Justice Ministries to produce "Festival of God's Creation" resource materials. This resource helps congregations celebrate and promote stewardship of God's creation.

Peace with Justice Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost, enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. Because of the special offering received on Peace with Justice Sunday, global outreach through the General Board of Church and Society, and annual conference-related peace-with-justice ministries transform lives.

United Nations Sunday is the last Sunday of October. The General Board of Church and Society United Nations & International Affairs office prepares special resources to support the observance. These resources may be used by local churches, Sunday schools, and adult study groups. For the entire month of October, focus is on the joint campaign by the U.N. Fund for UNICEF. The General Board of Church and Society provides materials to support Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF.

Global HIV/AIDS Day (December 1) affirms our unity with brothers and sisters throughout the world suffering from and ministering to those suffering with HIV/AIDS. We not only provide health care to the afflicted, but also work to change public policies that inadequately address HIV/AIDS.

Resources for Church and Society

General Board of Church and Society (<http://umcjustice.org/>). Find resources at <https://store.umcjustice.org/>.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. Updated and published by The United Methodist Publishing House following each General Conference. Pay

attention to the sections on local church ministry and General Board of Church and Society. The Social Principles begins in part V, ¶ 160.

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church. Updated and published by The United Methodist Publishing House after each General Conference. Includes social-concerns statements for consideration and action by all United Methodists.

Faith and Facts Cards. Four-color, worship-bulletin-size cards that address a variety of subjects. Topics include health care, domestic violence, criminal justice reform, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, death penalty, climate justice, living wage, alcohol and other drugs, gambling, hunger and poverty, and U.S. immigration. Visit <https://store.umcjustice.org/> for more information.

Building Power Together: A Toolkit for Advocates in Leadership. Offering guidance and helpful tips for new and experienced advocates alike, this booklet unpacks and explores how to build sustainable movements that lead to justice and peace. Visit <https://store.umcjustice.org/> for more information.

Creating Change Together: A Toolkit for Faithful Civic Engagement. This booklet provides more resources on the importance of civic engagement and additional tips for engagement. Visit <https://store.umcjustice.org/> for more information.

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcuh.org, Madison, NJ,
973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, www.umcjustice.org, Washington, DC,
202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, www.resourceumc.org/communications,
www.umns.org, Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, www.umcdiscipleship.org, Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780;
Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; The Upper Room,
<http://www.upperroom.org>.

General Board of Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmmission.org, Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, www.gcorr.org, Washington, DC,
202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, Chicago, IL,
1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcumm.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, www.abingdonpress.com,
www.cokesbury.com, www.ministrymatters.com, Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, www.uwfaith.org, New York, NY, 212-682-3633

Wespath (retirement/benefits), www.wespath.org, Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

**For additional resources, contact your annual
conference office.**

