Plymouth Church Justice and Peace Action Network (P-JPAN)

Public Advocacy Guidelines and Procedures
(Adapted from the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries Take Action Public Policy Advocacy Guide)

Background and General Purpose:

The United Church of Christ has a longstanding commitment to advocate for public policies that promote healing and reconciliation in this troubled world. We hope this guide will help Plymouth Church members to become better informed about key issues and organize for justice and peace in concrete ways. We can strengthen our engagement in legislation and public policies in our local communities, at the state level, in Congress, and in United Nations resolutions.

Since its beginning in 1957, the United Church of Christ made courageous statements on major social policies during times of great social and political change. The current times are challenging, as debates continue over fundamental decisions regarding national, state, and local priorities, values, and commitments. Recent events remind us we cannot ignore economic, racial, and ecological realities that lead to greater abundance for some and scarcity for others. None of us remain untouched by these government decisions.

Jesus reminds us of the call to compassion and justice, showing special care and concern for those in his day who were considered expendable. “Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40, The Message)

P-JPAN issue advocacy connects the Gospel call, to help the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner, and the sick, with the Local, State, and Federal policy decisions that determine funding – for school food programs, clean air, soil and water standards and enforcement, workplace safety, sentencing for nonviolent offenders, healthcare access, etc. P-JPAN issue advocacy connects our church mission to grow in love of God and neighbor with public policy decisions that determine many day-to-day effects on us and our neighbors. We hope this guide provides a way to make these connections.

Developing Advocacy Strategy:

Prepare an overall map of where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there.

An effective strategy is based on these five key questions:

- What do you want? (What are your attainable concrete objectives?)
- Who can give it to you? (Who is/are your audience(s) with power to take action?)
- What do they need to hear? (What’s the clear, true, persuasive message for the audience(s)?)
- Who do they need to hear it from? (Which messengers have expert credibility, who speaks from personal experience, who has connections with the audience(s)?)
- How can we convince them to actually hear it? (How best to deliver this message to this audience?)

People of Faith - Engaging in Effective Policy Advocacy

Why Does It Matter? For people of faith, public policy decision-making is never merely politics. It is a way to live out the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. For Plymouth Church, effective policy advocacy is a way of growing in love of God and neighbor, as we say each week in worship. In responding faithfully to God’s call for abundant life for all people, a common life where no one is left behind, we are drawn to engage in public policy advocacy and decision-making. As people of faith, we bring the gift and responsibility to hold true to a vision of right relationship in human community that goes beyond any singular party, ideology, or platform.
Remember: Issue advocacy is not partisan political advocacy. We are not partisan. We are political. We can speak to policy issues from a faith perspective. We can communicate these views to decision-makers and to the public. We cannot make statements endorsing or supporting or opposing candidates for elected office. We are the church. We will not tell you who to vote for. But, we will ask you to vote for yourself, for your principles and morals. Your faith tells you to pay attention to these things. Vote for your community, your family, for the future. Vote for the future of children. (Portions taken from statements made during a webinar by Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister, Justice & Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ)

What Makes Policy Advocacy Effective? Be prepared to offer accurate information and assistance. Share your story, your experience with an issue, why it matters to you and our community, and how it impacts you and our community. Do your homework on issues you care about. Provide information in a form elected officials and other policy decision-makers can use, like a key statistic, a sound bite, a personal story. Providing information on the impact of policy decisions in an elected official’s specific geographic area is especially compelling and effective. Choose wisely. Consider and list the issues where you can devote time and energy and experience and expertise.

Remember your ABCs: Ask for something specific. Be persistent. Courteousness is essential. And, remain professional, gracious, calm – no matter how the decision-makers respond. Thank them for listening and considering your input.


Remember: Public policy advocacy should include building relationships with decision-makers and their staff. Make your presence known by connecting with local, state, and federal officials and their staff members through regular communication. They may be more likely to listen to you when an important time-sensitive issue arises.

Ready to join the (Plymouth Justice and Peace Action Network) P-JPAN Network? Here’s how:
1. Sign up for the P-JPAN Network by signing up via the Plymouth Church website here.
2. You will receive an email confirming your action alert preferences and contact information.
3. The P-JPAN network currently include AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy), Anti-Racism Committee, Board of Christian Social Action, Creation Care and Justice Coalition, Cuba Partnership Team, Human Trafficking Task Force, Peace Committee, and Welcoming Migrants Committee.
4. Look for action alerts from these committees on issues relating to climate change, creation care, economic justice, gun violence, human trafficking, immigration, juvenile justice, mental health, peace and Middle Eastern justice, racial justice, US-Cuba relations, voting rights, workforce issues, and more.
5. Take action as requested in these alerts. Use the effective advocacy strategies in this guide.
6. You can fill out the sign-up form again to change your action alert preferences here.
7. To suggest additional Plymouth committees and/or issues to add to the action alert preference list, contact Alicia Claypool, P-JPAN facilitator, at apclaypool@aol.com or 515-988-5831.

THANK YOU!
RESTORING CIVILITY

Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times

"Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not be-long to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ... As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ... if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." [1 Corinthians 12: 14-26]

"Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of your redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you. [Ephesians 4: 29-32]

While public discussion of political issues has the potential to bring out the best in us – by surfacing creative new ideas or developing effective problem-solving strategies – more often than not in our public dialogue about the issues of the day the opposite seems to be happening. From the national dialogue about health care to the passionate discussion of immigration reform this year, it is all too easy for anger and frustration to get the best of us. Whether around the office water cooler or the extended family dinner table, reasoned conversation is taking a back seat to personal attacks and replayed sound bites. Because we avoid these conversations, we miss out on deeper understanding.

As people of faith participating in the public square, we are called to a higher standard of engagement and interaction with our neighbors – even and perhaps especially those with whom we may disagree on an issue. Our faith provides us with spiritual resources to take the conversation to a different level. We can choose respect and hope over animosity and bitterness. We can choose to listen and learn rather than attack and insult. We can choose to have civic discussions in civil tones.

We do not have to avoid the hard issues. We can prepare ourselves for a better conversation by thinking about some of the following ideas to shape our conversation on difficult and emotion-filled issues of the day.

"Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!"
- Isaiah 58:1
### Tips for Faithful and Respectful Discussion on the Issues

- Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a part of the truth you are seeking to discern.

- Follow the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" – even when you disagree with them.

- Listen respectfully and carefully to others.

- State what you think you heard someone say and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to make sure to understand each other.

- Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings. Share personal experiences to help others more fully understand your concerns and perspectives on the issues. Conversations can be passionate and still be respectful, civil and constructive.

- Speak for yourself, rather than as a member of a group. Use "I" statements rather than "You" statements.

- Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity.

- Look for and lift up points of agreement as well as disagreement.

- Create space for everyone's concerns to be spoken, even when they disagree.

- Seek to stay in community with each other even though the discussion may be vigorous and perhaps tense.

- Keep an open mind and heart. You may not hear if you judge too quickly.

- Pray for God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly and to remain open to the vision God holds for all of us.

*Adapted from "Ground Rules for Conversation" (Evangelical Lutheran Church Department for Communication) and "Seeking to be Faithful Together" (adopted by the 204th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA)*
Guidelines for Congregations on Political Action

How can UCC congregations participate constructively in the political process during this election year? What are the opportunities and legal limits to faith-inspired political activity? This guide will help you understand what kind of activities UCC churches can undertake to lift up our concerns and our witness in the elections.

Political Activities of Churches are Limited Due to IRS Tax Exempt Status

Almost all churches are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code on the basis that they are "operated exclusively for religious, charitable or educational purposes."

As a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, a church:

- is exempt from paying corporate income taxes, and donations to it are tax deductible on federal tax returns
- may expend funds for religious, charitable and educational purposes, and an insubstantial amount on lobbying and to promote legislation

A 501 (c)(3) exempt organization may not "participate in, or intervene in any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office."

Political Activities

Your church is restricted from engaging in some political activities because it is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. For example, your church is prohibited from expressing its support for or opposition to any candidate. Your church is also prohibited from making political contributions to candidates.

There are no restrictions on educating church members about election-year issues and promoting discussion of public policy.

Other kinds of unrestricted political activity include holding nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, preparing and distributing nonpartisan voter guides and voting records, and sponsoring candidate forums and debates

Clergy and church leaders have the same rights as every American citizen and may fully participate in political campaigns as individuals. "However, they must not participate in political campaigns by endorsing or opposing any candidate in a church publication or at a church function. When clergy do engage in a political campaign or political discussions as individuals, they should announce they are acting on their own and not on behalf of the church." [from Internal Revenue Service 2007 ruling: Rev. Rul. 2007-41]
## Guidelines for Congregations on Political Action

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Activities</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss the position of candidates on public issues*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endorsement of political candidates</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions to political candidates</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-kind expenditures in favor of or against political candidates</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Independent expenditures in favor of or against political candidates</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribution to PACs</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appearance of political candidate at church meeting or service**</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Payment of expenses for candidate to appear</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute at church:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Nonpartisan candidate surveys or guides***</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Voting records</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>3) Candidate political statements</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent church space at market value if offered at same rate for all candidates</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publish in church newsletter, bulletin, or magazine****:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Political ads sold at market rate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Political ads sold at less than market rate</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>3) News stories</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Editorials endorsing or opposing a political candidate</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan voter education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan voter registration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan get-out-the-vote drives</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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*Discussion of the position of political candidates is appropriate so long as the discussion does not involve an endorsement of, or opposition to, any particular candidate’s position.*

**A political candidate may appear at a church service. The appearance of a candidate before a church service, however, is limited as follows:**

- Any other candidate for the same office that requests to appear must be given the same opportunity; and
- No solicitation for funds may be made by any representative of the church. In addition, a church may allow political candidates to use the facilities of the church for events or meetings on the same basis that civic groups and other organizations are allowed. If civic groups and other organizations are required to pay rent for using the church property, the political candidate should be charged the same amount.

***A church may publish or distribute the results of surveys of candidates on public issues. Such surveys, however, must be nonpartisan. As a result, 501(c)(3) church groups should observe the following conditions in publishing or distributing the survey:**

- Publish the response of all the candidates for the particular office by use of 'yes' and 'no.' The survey should not specify what is the desired response.
- Do not include any words indicating either endorsement of or support for any of the candidates or their positions on issues.

****Church publications:**

Political Ads: A church newsletter or magazine may publish an ad for a political candidate, as long as the ad is purchased at the regular rate for ads in that publication, and as long as the church does not refuse to publish an ad by an opposing candidate.

News Stories: A church newsletter, bulletin or magazine may publish, without limitation, news stories on political candidates and political campaigns.

Editorials: A church may publish an editorial supporting or endorsing a candidate for political office or political party.