



G U I D E L I N E S

Church & Society

Advocate and Witness for Peace and Justice





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The Rev. Clayton Childers

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General Board of Church and Society

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

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Blessed to Be a Blessing

If you are reading this Guideline, you have said yes to servant leadership in your church. You are blessed to be a blessing. What does that mean?

By virtue of our baptism by water and the Spirit, God calls all Christians to faithful discipleship, to grow to maturity in faith (see Ephesians 4). The United Methodist Church expresses that call in our shared mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, or the *Discipline*, ¶120). Each local congregation and community of faith lives out that call in response to its own context—the wonderful and unique combination of God-given human and material resources with the needs of the community, within and beyond the congregation.

The work of servant leaders—your work—is to open a way for God to work through you and the resources available to you in a particular ministry area, for you are about God’s work. As stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1), servant leaders are entrusted with the precious and vital task of managing and using God’s gifts in the ongoing work of transformation.

In The United Methodist Church, we envision transformation occurring through a cycle of discipleship (see the *Discipline*, ¶122). With God’s help and guidance, we

- reach out and receive people into the body of Christ,
- help people relate to Christ through their unique gifts and circumstances,
- nurture and strengthen people in their relationships with God and with others,
- send transformed people out into the world to lead transformed and transforming lives,
- continue to reach out, relate, nurture, and send disciples . . .

Every ministry area and group, from finance to missions, engages in all aspects of this cycle. This Guideline will help you see how that is true for the ministry area or group you now lead. When you begin to consider all of the work you do as ministry to fulfill God’s mission through your congregation, each task, report, and conversation becomes a step toward transforming the world into the kingdom of God.

Invite Christ into the process to guide your ministry. You are doing powerful and wonderful work. Allow missteps to become learning opportunities; rejoice in success. Fill your work with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

God blesses you with gifts, skills, and experience. You are a blessing when you allow God to work through you to make disciples and transform the world. Thank you.

(Find additional help in the “Resources” section at the end of this Guideline, in *The Book of Discipline*, and through <http://www.umc.org>.)

Faithful Foundations

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.

Love Is the Centerpiece

We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Love is the centerpiece of our faith. Church and Society ministry grows from this love—our love for God and love for our neighbors—all growing from the love we experience in Jesus Christ.

Called to Relationship

At the center of the gospel is a relationship: God's desire to be in a restored relationship with a fallen, broken creation. As Christians we are called to be part of this ministry of reconciliation, to bring people together.

The Reign of God and Being Born from Above

The reign of God on earth as it is in heaven is not about Christians ascending to positions of prestige and power; it is about the way of God permeating all of life, from the least to the greatest, so that all of creation might be blessed and flourish. God wants everyone to enjoy abundant life (see John 10:10), but this life comes not in the acquiring wealth and possessions but in letting go, surrendering, trusting our lives to the way of Christ. As we say yes to Christ, we become new creations, we find our true selves, our minds are remade, and we assume new ways of living and being in the world. We begin to walk in the way of Christ. The love of God fills our being and flows through us. The light of Christ shines in us. And in Christ, we become God's agents of compassion and change in the world.

The World-transforming Mission of the Church

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church declares: "The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (§120). This mission reminds us that our faith is about more than us; there is a greater purpose to our discipleship—the transformation of a troubled, broken world. The Jewish faith has a name for this "mending or healing of creation," *Tikkun olam*. We see the same image in the Lord's Prayer as we pray, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

God is calling the church to join in the work of renewing creation. This is the ministry of Church and Society.

How can each of our local United Methodist congregations join in this work? Let's explore this question by considering the lessons of Scripture and our Wesleyan heritage.

The Church—A Fellowship of the “Called Out” Ones

The biblical word translated in English as *church* is *ecclesia*. In other ancient sources, this word is used for a political assembly “called out” to make decisions. It is interesting that *ecclesia* is the word the early Christians chose to describe their assemblies. You might be called out to be part of the *ecclesia* in Athens, or the *ecclesia* in Rome or Corinth, but you could also be part of the *ecclesia* of Christians. The church consisted of those who were “called out” to be part of the “Kingdom of God” movement. Indeed, Scripture tells us that though Paul was a citizen of Rome, he was also “called out” to be part of the church. This community of believers became the focus of his ultimate loyalty.

How is the local church a place where allegiances are altered? In the books of Acts and Revelation, Christians are “called out” to be a new nation. Our primary identity is to be as members of this new community (see John 14:17-21; 16:8-11; 17:13-18). By living our faith, seeking justice, and pursuing peace, we mirror on earth what happens in heaven.

Our Wesleyan Heritage—Social Holiness

“Preach the Gospel always. If necessary, use words.”
—St. Frances of Assisi

When John Wesley said that there is “no holiness but social holiness,” he was warning the church against the practice of isolating itself from the world. There is always a danger of hiding away within the walls of the church while the world is perishing around us. Holiness calls us to be God’s witnesses in a hurting world. We must not hide in the isolation of our holy sanctuaries. We are “called out” to go into the world where people are hurting.

John Wesley on Ecology

“But the lesson which our blessed Lord inculcates here, and which he illustrates by this example, is that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the face of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical atheism; but with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth and all that is therein as contained by God in the hallow of his hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is in a true sense the soul of the universe.”
—John Wesley, Sermon 23, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount III”

Faithful Witness and Advocacy

What Does It Mean to Be an Advocate?

The word *advocate* is derived from the Latin root word *vocare* which means “to call.” An *advocate* can be understood as “one who pleads the cause of another.” Advocacy is our calling. We, as Christians, are called to speak up, and to “resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves” (Baptismal Covenants I & II, *The United Methodist Hymnal* [The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989]). By standing alongside those who suffer, we strengthen them, encourage them, and offer ourselves to support and amplify their cries for justice.

Advocacy and Prayer

It is important for you as a Church and Society leader to tend to your spiritual life. Advocacy can be draining and discouraging. At times it can be frustrating. We need help from God to do this work. Make time for daily prayer and enrichment. Share honestly and openly with God the challenges of your life. Pray for guidance in your role as a church leader. Pray for team members by name and pray for the tasks that need to be done.

Pray for your church and community. Pray as you read the newspaper. Pray for your community as you walk through its streets. Pray for community leaders and for state, national, and world leaders. Prayer is one way we “walk humbly with God” (see Micah 6:8). It helps us keep our work in perspective and reminds us to care for those whose views may differ from our own.

Advocacy and Worship

The act of worship is central to who we are as a faith community. How we conduct worship reveals much about our identity. Do people feel welcome in your local church? Visitors often watch to see if the values the church proclaims are expressed in the way it worships. Be sensitive to roles of leaders during worship: Who collects the offering in your church? Who says the prayers? Who reads the Scripture? Who preaches? Do the worship leaders reflect the diversity of people in your congregation and community? Do you see diversity of age, race, gender, ethnic backgrounds? Are the hymns and litanies supportive of our call to be ministers of peace and reconciliation in the world? Do they reinforce violent or narrow images of God?

Advocacy and Missions

People want to be able to act on their faith. Many Christians translate faith into action through volunteering for mission projects in their communities and beyond.

People can find a new place in the life of the church through mission trips. Youths can find new meaning in life by taking time from their summer vacations to be involved in voluntary mission service. Such projects offer excellent opportunities for discussion on the root causes of problems that plague our communities. They can foster an environment conducive to deeper analysis and critical thinking.

Consider these questions as examples: Why are so many people in our community homeless? What does this say about the availability of jobs that pay a living wage? What might this teach us about our community's provision of health-care services? How have poor communities in developing countries been affected by global policies that limit or undermine their economic development? Who benefits from the current system? Who pays the price for these policies? How might current systems be changed so they are fairer for everyone?

Careful research and some preparation can add to the hands-on mission experience by providing an important educational component. How can you partner with your missions committee in its work of addressing critical needs from a holistic perspective? It has been said that every service opportunity should be accompanied by prayer. It might also be said that every service project should be accompanied by social-justice reflection and advocacy.

Advocacy and Christian Education

Education happens every day. We are constantly being formed and reformed, and perhaps even *deformed* by the data and information we encounter. Rather than be tossed about, to and fro, with no purpose, we should direct education to accomplish particular ends. What then is our purpose?

Youth Overnight “Famine” Program Becomes Advocacy Opportunity

The Roanoke District in the Virginia Annual Conference hosted a youth-planned weekend gathering focused on world hunger. More than 80 youths gathered for an overnight retreat. They committed to fast for 30 hours to better empathize with the hungry of the world.

The planning team also made sure that the youths took time to discuss the systemic factors that lead to poverty and malnutrition. Using a Bread for the World video and teaching guide, youths were invited to write a letter to their congressional representatives to express support for additional funding for school-lunch programs. The small increase would make a big difference by enabling schools to provide more nutritious meals, buy locally grown produce, and develop school gardens in which students could grow their own fruits and vegetables.

Several months later youths from the district celebrated when the legislation was passed and signed into law by the president.

George Albert Coe, a leading figure in the growth of the Christian Education movement, once asked: “Shall the primary purpose of Christian education be to hand on a religion, or to create a new world?” (*What Is Christian Education?* [New York: Scribner, 1929], 29).

This is a critical question. We need to prepare people not only to be Christian believers but also Christian practitioners: people who practice their faith each day of their lives in ways that change the world around them. Education should always be connected to some form of concrete action. Education and awareness on an issue should lead to but not replace doing justice. We reflect critically on social concerns in light of our Christian faith so we can take action to make a difference. Education, when done well, results in positive change.

Advocacy and Evangelism

Many people have written off the church because they have not yet heard the whole message of God. What they know about the church has been shaped by the warped portrayals they see constantly in the media. Many have not yet heard that God passionately loves the world, and that we as God’s people are called to be faithful stewards of all creation. Many have not yet heard that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, and that we are called to be peacemakers, ministers of reconciliation in a world addicted to violence. Many have not yet heard that we as God’s people are called to love all of God’s creation, inviting and welcoming every person in grace and love to worship and serve God.

We worship a savior who opens his arms wide on the cross and in so doing proclaims: “There is nothing you can do to me to make me stop loving you.” This is the gospel message, God’s open invitation that many have not yet heard. How can we reach religion’s “culture despisers,” those compassionate but secular people who consider the church at best irrelevant or at worst as an “opiate of the people”? How do we connect with the masses of people who see the church as being preoccupied with “pie in the sky, by and by” and unconcerned about making a difference in the here and now? We know that this is not the true essence of the church, but many people believe this is who we are.

Following in Jesus’ Steps

Are we following in the footsteps of Jesus if we fail to go out into the “highways and byways” where he spent so much of his time? Jesus lived among the people, and most of his recorded encounters happened in people’s homes, in marketplaces, on hillsides. What does this mean for the ministry of our church? Where is our energy expended? Through faithful community involvement, our commitment to the way of Christ can provide a healthy influence to a wide variety of community organizations.

The General Board of Church and Society hosted a group of 24 students from Africa who were studying at schools in the United States. We worked with advocacy partners to plan an “Imagine No Malaria Advocacy Day” in which the students were briefed on the issues of global health and then went to meet with members of the U.S. Congress. The students first thanked the legislators for the generous support given by the U.S. government in

the past. Then the students asked that Congress continue to support the fight to eradicate deaths and suffering from malaria.

As we walked back to the United Methodist building, a staff member from a partner anti-malaria agency, who helped plan the day's visit, was asked if he was involved in a church anywhere. "No," he said, "but if I ever got involved, I'd want to be involved in a church like this one."

We need to rethink how we do church. Church must be more than a building. It is more than an organization. Church needs to be seen as a movement of people formed by the love of Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and actively working to renew God's world according to God's will.

Advocacy and Prophetic Witness

What does it mean to be a prophet?

Often, people equate *prophet* with "soothsayer" or "fortune teller." In the Bible, prophets are "truth tellers," people called out to be God's messengers, proclaiming God's word in a world gone astray. They lift up a holy vision. They call people to change. The Bible is filled with stories of people fulfilling this role.

Shiphrah and **Puah** were two courageous midwives in ancient Egypt. They conspired to defy a law established by Pharaoh. They took prophetic action to protect newly born Hebrew male babies (see Exodus 1:14-16).

Moses was a prophet. He became God's spokesperson, demanding freedom for the Hebrew slaves in the halls of Pharaoh's palace (see Exodus 5-12).

Esther is remembered for her courage as she risked her life to go before the king to plead the cause of the Hebrews (see Esther 5).

The prophet **Nathan** confronted King David with God's word of judgment after David had an affair with Bathsheba and had her husband killed (see 2 Samuel 12).

Daniel refused to obey the order requiring all people to pray to and worship the king (see Daniel 6).

Jeremiah repeatedly warned the people of Jerusalem about their coming defeat at the hands of the Babylonians.

John the Baptist is key to understanding the ministry of Jesus. John was the son of a priest, Ezekiel. It was expected that he would follow in his father's footsteps and become a priest as well. Instead, Scripture tells us "John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins" (Mark 1:4).

People flocked to him. Surely John's preaching and popularity were provocative to the priestly class that oversaw the temple. This is where sacrifices were being made each day by the priests to forgive sins. John was offering the people an alternative way of worship and forgiveness. How significant is it that Jesus identified his ministry with John's ministry (see Mark 1:14-15)?

Jesus also was a prophet. Jesus is celebrated in the Christian church as God incarnate, the very presence of God in the world. His life and teachings bear witness to God's vision for all people. Jesus' ministry was both life-transforming and world-transforming.

No evidence suggests that Jesus ever had any official credentials or theological training. He was never ordained. While he was not recognized as a leader by those in established positions of power, he was celebrated as a leader in the eyes of his followers. They saw in him the presence of God and identify him as the “Word” of God.

Following Jesus Can Be Dangerous

“Jesus got into trouble, and so will we, for attempting to transform society rather than to conform to it. But if we name the Name, and if we are followers of The Way, we are called to engage in the redemption of the social order. We are to help bring healing and wholeness to a broken world.” —The Rev. Dr. George Outen, former General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society

Ministries of Mercy and Justice

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 through UM Volunteers in Missions and similar programs every year. Many find these experiences life changing both for participants and those receiving assistance

Holistic ministry, however, must address both symptoms and root causes. It needs to be both reactive and proactive. While ministries of charity or mercy tends to focus on direct response to needs, justice ministry focuses on going “upstream” to address the root causes of problems. How can we supplement ministries of mercy with ministries promoting justice? This requires some imagination, study, advocacy, and organizing.

A youth choir from Manchester United Methodist Church in St. Louis was visiting the United Methodist building in Washington, D.C. They were asked: What does justice mean to you? One of the young women, a 15-year-old, replied, “Justice means making the world look the way Jesus would want it to look if he were here.” If this is, indeed, what justice means, how do we make justice a reality, “on earth as it is in heaven”? We have to create new systems, just systems, systems that allow all people to flourish and reach their full God-given potential.

Many have asked is it better to teach people to fish or to give them a fish? While it is essential to meet the immediate needs of those who suffer, it is better to equip people with

the skills and resources they need so they can care for their life needs without requiring ongoing help. Justice ministry works to establish new systems that enable all people to grow and flourish and reach their full potential.

Many people believe that mercy is optional, that we can voluntarily extend help or withhold it. It is our choice. Yet, as followers of Christ, is this true? Is there not an inner voice calling us to act when we are faced with human need? We may say no to the Spirit's call, but in doing so we fall short in our faithfulness. In reality, each time we are confronted by a person in need we make a choice to respond or not. And how best to respond in a way that is most helpful. It may come down to choice but it may depend on our benevolence, our willingness to help.

Justice is not an option. It is a commitment we, as a society, have made to one another. It is also a characteristic of God which followers of God seek to imitate. Justice results when we establish social structures that protect human dignity and ensure human rights for all.

David Hilfiker, in "The Limits of Charity," an article from *The Other Side* (vol. 36, no. 4, July–August 2000) suggests that acts of mercy unaccompanied by acts of justice can actually be harmful. Charity can preoccupy our time and energy to the point that we are too weary to even imagine, much less work for, a world of justice. The individual or family with a problem is taken care of, but the broken system remains unchanged.

Charity does little to change the wider social and political systems that sustain injustice. In fact, most charities depend heavily on the very volunteers, individual donors, and institutions that have prospered under the current systems. And people who have done well in a system are usually not interested in changing it drastically—in fact, they may be diametrically opposed. So even if we ourselves perceive the need for systemic changes, we may feel compelled to whisper those perceptions rather than shout them for fear of alienating those on whom we most depend. Charity offends almost no one; at one point or another, justice offends practically everyone.”

—David Hilfiker, "The Limits of Charity"

Justice requires that we challenge the oppressive system that keeps people in poverty. Poor education, unaffordable housing, lack of access to health care, unfair wages, and under-employment are all root causes of poverty that must be addressed. Until the root causes are changed, people will not be able to live lives of dignity. They will continue to be dependent on charitable handouts. This is why it is so critical for the church to be holistic in the ways we respond to poverty. We must address both the immediate needs of the poor while also working to change unjust and oppressive social systems that keep people poor.

Faithful Application

Practice Healthy Dialogue

Dialogue is often confused with *argument*. We generally think of argument as having winners and losers, and points are made for the sake of winning. In dialogue, we seek new solutions that may use the best of both positions to articulate a creative alternative. —The Rev. Neal Christie, *Justice in Everyday Life* (Discipleship Resources, 2014), 65.

Why Not Church?

Every day we are flooded with news of events throughout the world. We hear immediately about the latest bombings in Middle Eastern cities, natural disasters in Asia, famines in Africa, governmental coups and scandals in various parts of the world. Over and over we are confronted with gun violence, terrorism, poverty, economic injustice. Where do we go to think about these critical events in light of our Christian faith?

Why not church?

Church should be a place where we can be real people, express honest viewpoints, pray about vital issues, and then try to do what we can to help. This is what it means to be relevant. It means we are real.

Social Media for Good and Ill

Facebook, Twitter, and other social media have become powerful communication tools. In many ways they have brought democracy to masses of people who were formerly dependent on others for communication. A downside, though, is that false reports spread just as quickly as truth. Church leaders must be cautious in what they forward to others. If it seems incredible, check it out. Websites such as Snopes.com (<http://www.snopes.com/>) can be an invaluable asset. Copy a section of an article and run it through the Snopes search engine to confirm the truth of a story before you forward it. Once a story has been sent, it is hard to “unsend.”

Our Public Witness—The Church Engaging Society

In Acts 1:8, Jesus directed the church to go forth, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be Christ’s witnesses in “Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Our

mission is local, but it must not stop there. We must also be Christ's witnesses on a state level, a regional level, a national level, and a worldwide level. Jesus Christ came to redeem the whole creation. This must be the church's vision as well.

Called to Be Principled, but Not Ideological

The church is not aligned with political parties. The church does not take partisan positions. The church does, however, make ethically informed, theologically cogent public statements about problems in society.

Called to Be Clear, and also Civil

The United Methodist Church advocates for mercy and justice, and strives to avoid becoming self-righteous in the process. We know that the church is not exempt from social critique, so we apply our Social Principles to the way the church orders itself, the values it communicates, and the needs it addresses (see the *Discipline*, part 5, ¶¶160–166).

Called to Be Engaged, but Not Used

The church of Jesus Christ is engaged in dialogue with the institutions of society. These may include local social-service and civic groups, nongovernmental offices, nonprofit agencies, and national political groups, including parliaments and congresses and the United Nations. In each encounter, the church affirms its own vision for the way the world ought to be as seen through the eyes of God. The Social Principles invite us to make a different world, not just a difference in this world (Neal Christie, *Justice in Everyday Life*, 21).

Casting a Hope-filled Vision

In one of the most famous speeches in U.S. history, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed, "I have a dream." This speech has impacted so many hearts. Why? Rather than condemning the ills of racism, it invites you to be part of creating a new world. We are hungry to be part of something larger than ourselves, something lasting, something that transforms lives and the world. This is the ministry of Church and Society. Be positive. Set forth a vision of a transformed future and invite people to join in making it a reality.

Getting Started

Five Steps to Success

As you engage in advocacy ministry keep these goals in mind:

1. **Pray.** Seek God's help and wisdom as you embark on your work.
2. **Take time to build relationships** with other key members of your church and community. Most people will be willing to hear your perspective if you take time to develop a positive, respectful relationship with them.
3. **Educate.** People you work with will want to clearly understand why an issue is important before they are willing to get involved. Take time to lay the groundwork.

4. **Act.** It is not enough just to study social issues and to discuss them among ourselves. We need to become part of the public witness and advocacy process. Send a letter to legislators. Make phone calls. Write a letter to the editor. Talk to friends and neighbors. Let your voice be heard.

5. **Reflect.** Take time to celebrate and reflect. Talk together about actions taken, celebrate successes, and note ways to improve.

Twelve Ways to Engage

1. **Pray regularly for public servants** (local, state, national, international).

2. **Stay informed.** Think critically. As a church leader, your faithful witness can inspire others to become informed citizens as well.

3. **Teach the Social Principles** in new-member classes, confirmation, Sunday school, and other forums.

4. **Sign up for “Faith in Action,”** the weekly e-newsletter of the General Board of Church & Society (http://action.umc-gbcs.org/signup_page/joinnetworks).

5. **Recruit partners.** Many people would welcome a chance to make a positive difference.

6. **Lead your team to focus on particular social concerns** important to your congregation and community. What are they? What can we do?

7. Organize an “Offering of Letters” on a particular issue. Bread for the World offers samples (www.bread.org). People write their members of Congress to express heartfelt concerns. The congregation may dedicate the letters before they are sent.

8. **Host forums at your church on vital issues.**

9. **Encourage voting.** Democracy works only if people participate.

10. **Host a voter registration booth at your church.** Contact your local board of elections for details.

One Thing You Should Not Do

Do not lead your congregation to endorse particular candidates or parties or support them with your church’s resources. This could put the congregation’s tax-exempt status at risk. Also, if you host a candidate forum, invite *all* candidates.

11. **Discuss and reflect.** What are the issues we need to be concerned about as people of faith? How can we add our voices to the public debate? How can we become advocates for God’s *shalom* in our community and throughout the world?

12. **Get help.** Who in your local church would be interested in the type of ministry Church and Society offers? Look for people passionate about caring for the environment, concerned about the needs of the poor. What young people are eager to work to change the world? Let them know that there is room for them on your team!

Faithful Examples of Successful Ministries

Your stories matter. Remember them. Learn from them. Appreciate them. The stories your congregation tells will define who you are and show the differences you make in society. Stories about disciples doing justice grip the imagination and help others picture ways to transform the world for Jesus Christ. Consider these first-hand stories from “reporters” around the United Methodist connection. They may have much in common with your congregation. What they succeed in doing may be quite different from what you have done in the past. Take some time to imagine what you can learn from their stories of social justice ministry.

Micah Corps Peace-with-Justice Interns in Great Plains

The Great Plains Conference sponsors “Micah Corps,” a summer intern program to give young adults opportunities to grow in their spiritual walk with God; link faith with social justice action; learn from social justice experts in Nebraska, Kansas, and Washington, D.C.; strengthen leadership skills; and connect interns with United Methodists across Nebraska and Kansas.

Micah Corps believes holistic discipleship includes direct service (charity), education, and justice work. Interns do all three with a special emphasis on justice work.

Most of a summer’s experiences center on tearing down the walls of poverty, environmental degradation, violence, nativism, and food scarcity. Interns learn through a variety of experiences, some hands-on and others through travel, interviews, book studies, and lively team discussions.

Spiritual methods the interns practice throughout the summer include *lectio divina*, centering prayer, walking the labyrinth, journaling, and music prayers. From their home base in Omaha, teams travel in pairs across Kansas and Nebraska to share with local congregations and youth groups. (Carol Windrum reporting)

“We give people fish. We teach them to fish. We tear down the walls that have been built up around the fish pond. And we figure out who polluted it.” —Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Zondervan, 2006), 87.

Bishop's Forums Promote Respectful Dialogue in North Carolina

North Carolina Conference churches and Bishop Hope Morgan Ward have conducted a series of Bishop's Forums addressing critical social issues. The forums give a fair hearing to different perspectives. One was on human sexuality, and another on investment or divestment in Israel. As our nation becomes more polarized, these forums are a shining example of how Christians of different perspectives can still find a deeper unity in our shared commitment to Jesus Christ and can listen to one another with respect. (Eric Lindblade reporting)

Is thy heart as my heart?

It is an unavoidable consequence of the present weakness and shortness of human understanding that several men will be of several minds in religion as well as in common life. So it has been from the beginning of the world, and so it will be "'till the restitution of all things." . . . Every wise man, therefore, will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions, than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He bears with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he desires to unite in love that single question, "Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" —John Wesley, *The Sermons of John Wesley*, Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit"

Lion and Lamb Festival in Illinois Great Rivers

Churches in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference supported a Lion and Lamb Festival. The first two yearly events were in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This festival is a day full of music and speakers dedicated to peace-and-justice issues. The target audience is primarily teens and young adults. The cost of the festival is covered by donations and grants. (Bunny Wolfe reporting)

"We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. . . . We insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to work together to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them." —United Methodist Social Principles, ¶165.C

Refugees, Strangers, Friends?

In July 2015, the German Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees (BAMF) President Manfred Schmidt reported approximately 79,000 refugees came to Germany—more than ever before—and more are expected. The German government is struggling to provide

appropriate housing, not to mention necessary programs to help the refugees adapt to their new home. A new refugee center was built in the beginning of the year in Bremen, North Germany, and the local United Methodist congregation decided to help the refugees there with what everyone needs: open arms and ears.

The congregation initiated a program called “Integration through cooking—international cuisine with refugees.” Refugees and members of the congregation were invited to cook dishes together that the newcomers used to cook at home, and to share the taste and stories of home.

Laura Brose, 17, a local church member, describes her experience as follows: “In the beginning there was silence and shy smiles. What can you talk about with someone who lost everything and used to live a completely different lifestyle than mine? But after a few months we knew each other pretty well. Now the kids welcome us full of excitement, whereas in the beginning they were holding their parents’ hands and were afraid of us strangers.”

The United Methodist church in Bremen opened its doors for strangers in times they needed help—and the strangers became neighbors, and in some cases even friends.

Anti-violence Seminars in Illinois Great Rivers

The Illinois Great Rivers Conference is addressing issues of violence by creating curricula to be used in local churches, campus ministries, and other such venues. Written by a team of lay and clergy persons, the courses cover such topics as creating a safe church, a safe school, a safe home, violence in the Bible and in the history of the church, bullying, and suicide. District training sessions equip local leaders in teaching the classes. (Miley Palmer reporting)

CROP Walk to Stop Hunger in Idaho

Bonnars Ferry United Methodist Church in Idaho helped organize a CROP Hunger Walk in Boundary County, raising \$8,428.16 where the population is fewer than 11,000, and very high unemployment and poverty exist. The church partnered with the local ministerial association. The Church and Society Committee also initiated the BFUMC recycling program and promotes justice for teens at risk through the local Phoenix project. (Judy Dirks reporting)

Organizing for Education in Rural Nigeria

Churches in rural Yorgorobi, Nigeria, supported a training for seven local leaders. At the training, the leaders identified that an urgent problem in their community was access to education. The majority of area children weren’t going to school because the closest school was nine miles away.

The five organizers that emerged out of the training created an action plan to talk to churches and their neighbors about the importance of education. They went door to door, talked to people in the market, and gave presentations at churches. The awareness campaign spread through both the Christian and Muslim communities. People expressed a strong desire to send both their boys and girls to school.

As awareness and excitement about access to education increased, the leaders decided the next step was to take the initiative to actually build a local school and then work with the government to supply the teachers. The leaders realized that they needed to raise money for bricks, and decided to mobilize the entire community to do that. They worked with families, who did jobs around the community, including farm work, to raise money for the project. They were able to raise 800,000 Naira and got 1,000 bricks and enough wood to build a three-room classroom for 90 children, grades one through three.

They are now working with churches and parents to collect funds to send their children to school, and talking with the district government to secure funding for teachers. They hoped to launch the school in September 2015. (Ande Emmanuel reporting)

Young Justice Advocates in West Ohio

Lancaster United Methodist Church sent four young adults to the West Ohio Conference's Young Justice Advocates training. "After my four students completed the Justice Immersion weekend," reports youth pastor Joe Palmer, "they returned to our congregation eager to address social injustices in our hometown: poverty, food scarcities, racial disparities, mental health stigmas and human trafficking.

"Not only are they learning about these injustices, they are speaking from their hearts about creating real change. The Spirit is driving them; and the church is beginning to listen."

Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation in Nigeria

Churches in Jalingo, Nigeria, organized a Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation training with 84 young people between the ages of 14 and 35. The aim of the training was to teach about different religious backgrounds in order to reduce the rate of tribal and religious violence.

Participants learned about causes and prevention of conflict, and how to develop an action plan for their communities. After the training, the participants returned to their local communities and multiplied their efforts by training another 10 young people, thus forming teams of local leaders.

Methodists and the Leveling of Society

At times our witness can challenge established social structures. Consider this letter from an early critic of the Methodist movement:

"I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers. Their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavoring to level all ranks, and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting, and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiment so much at variance with high rank and good breeding." —Letter from the Duchess of Buckingham to the Countess of Huntingdon, who was a supporter of the Wesleysans.

Within the Southern Nigeria Annual Conference, there are now 840 young advocates of interfaith Peacebuilding and Conflict transformation. These young advocates worked on educating their churches and communities on peaceful election practices. They were proud that, despite violence during previous elections, there were no recorded incidents of post-general-election violence in Taraba State following the most recent presidential election. (Ande Emmanuel reporting)

Habitat for Humanity in the United States and Beyond

Many local United Methodist congregations support this vital ministry. The mission of Habitat for Humanity is “to put God’s love into action by bringing people together to build homes, communities, and hope.” Habitat’s approach preserves dignity and promotes justice as families receiving new homes agree to complete 200–300 hours of “sweat equity” by volunteering at the construction site, attending homeownership and financial literacy classes, and/or volunteering in the office or for special events. Families also pay for the actual cost of the homes through no-interest loans. In this way, donations are funneled back to Habitat for Humanist to be reinvested in more homes. Learn more at www.habitat.org.

Local Church Health Clinics in Mississippi

In Mississippi, churches have come together to build nine health-care justice teams, who have created Health Education Centers across the Delta region. Teams have organized health fairs and are exploring next steps for reintroducing Medicaid expansion in Mississippi. (Detra Bishop reporting)

Taking Back the Community in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe churches are “taking back their communities” by environmental cleanup, road repairs, advocating for health education, and creating children’s rights programs. United Methodist churches bring people together across religious backgrounds in slum areas to clean up their neighborhood together. (Lloyd Nyarota reporting)

Justice, Not Jails, in California

Churches in the California-Pacific Conference are supporting a “Justice, Not Jails” campaign focused on training and equipping congregations to work on ending mass incarceration. (Doug Walker reporting)

Chicago Area Urban Strategy in Northern Illinois

The Northern Illinois Conference created an urban strategy to engage Chicago area churches in four critical areas: restorative justice, community safety, literacy, and food security. Churches have already responded by becoming part of the “Safe Haven” program and opening their doors to children and youths who might otherwise be caught in the violence on Chicago’s streets. The churches are also working toward becoming restorative-justice hubs. With the assistance of a grant from the General Board of Church and Society,

Northern Illinois has hired an organizer who is coordinating quarterly Urban Summits, creating issue-based Learning Communities, and working with church clusters on strategic engagement around issue areas. (Kristin Kumpf reporting)

Ending Mass Incarceration in Ohio

United Methodists in the West Ohio Conference have been organizing to end mass incarceration, support justice for immigrants, and combat domestic violence. They have created an innovative model to equip Young Justice Advocates to learn about issues such as food security and immigration through weekend justice immersions, while creating a space for the youths to learn and practice leadership skills. Out of these immersions, the youth teams create action plans to take back and engage their churches in organizing for justice around an issue in their community. (Dee Stickle-Miner reporting)

State-level Legislative Victories in the United States

United Methodists have played important roles in working for change at local and state levels of government. State legislative victories include winning universal background checks on all gun purchases in the state of Washington in 2014, passing a bill to abolish the death penalty in Montana in 2014, and building momentum for the Insure Tennessee (Medicaid expansion) in 2015. (Bill Mefford reporting)

Social Principles Study Leads to Social Action in Nigeria

The Rev. Yunusa Z. Usman, pastor of McBride Magami United Methodist Church in Jalingo, Nigeria, teaches the denomination's Social Principles during midweek prayers and Bible studies. The congregation learns what United Methodists believe and what it means to behave as a United Methodist.

Many of the congregation's members are taking these lessons to heart. They have volunteered in the community to help internally displaced victims of the terrorist group Boko Haram with food and shelter, donated blood at State Hospital, and educated and advocated in the community for clean water in rural areas.

The United Methodist Church is seen as a witness for Christ's peace for all people through this work. (Ande Emmanuel reporting)

People with Disabilities in Russia

One of the most acute social problems in Russia is the lack of social access for people with disabilities. Urban public transport is not adapted for transport of persons with disabilities; many buildings are not equipped with ramps for wheelchairs; and not enough organizations are working to support persons with disabilities to ensure their access to the broader community.

The Resurrection United Methodist Church from Voronezh, Russia organizes summer camps for the disabled and their families and then helps camp participants meet on holidays. Over the past seven years, the congregation has helped more than 50 families find friends, reveal new talents, learn about God, and feel needed and loved.

The mercy of God touches not only young people with disabilities but also their parents and members of the congregation who serve them. They have learned to appreciate what they have, and experience the power of God's love through this ministry. (Irina Margulis reporting)

Fair Trade Marketplace in Missouri

Manchester United Methodist Church in St. Louis started a Fair Trade Market four years ago with a handful of volunteers, a few tables of items, and big desire. Today the market has become the largest, annual, all-volunteer Fair Trade Market in the United States. It is a widely anticipated event in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area.

Fair trade provides developing-world artisans and their families quality-of-life income for the course of a year. The gains are a life of dignity and the sense of worth from earning fair pay for fair work. For the family, this often means more than one meal a day, a chance for children to attend school, access to health care, work in safe environments away from sweatshops, and the ability to smile with pride for a job well done.

Consumption

“Consumers should exercise their economic power to encourage the manufacture of goods that are necessary and beneficial to humanity while avoiding the desecration of the environment in either production or consumption. Consumers should avoid purchasing products made in conditions where workers are being exploited because of their age, gender, or economic status.” —Social Principles, ¶163.D

Voter Registration in Oklahoma

Many people are marginalized in part because they do not know how to mobilize the power of their voice and vote. First American United Methodist Church in Norman, Oklahoma, orchestrated the “Rock the Vote Campaign” to promote civic participation. The congregation partnered with others in the community to use music and celebration to encourage youth and Native American voter registration. (Chebon Kernell Jr. reporting)

Resources for the Journey

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 cooperating with Creation Justice Ministries to produce "Festival of God's Creation" resource materials to help 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://umc-gbcs.org/>). Find resources at <http://umc-gbcs.org/store>.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. Updated and published by The United Methodist Publishing House following each General Conference. Pay particular attention to the sections on local church ministry and General Board of Church and Society. The Social Principles are part 5, ¶¶160–166.

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.

“How to Engage in Faithful Advocacy.” Brochure produced by the General Board of Church and Society.

Justice in Everyday Life by Neal Christie (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2014), ISBN: 9780881774917. Instruction on how to teach the Social Principles.

“Living Our Principles” is a 6-episode DVD film series that illustrates how United Methodists put into practice the Social Principles. Each episode focuses on a different section of the Social Principles and the people who live them out through education, advocacy and organizing. To order the series or to host or attend a screening and discussion, go to <http://livingourprinciples.org>.

Social Principles of The United Methodist Church. Booklet includes Social Principles accompanied by a study guide. (<https://www.cokesbury.com>)

Ecumenical Advocacy Days

This annual spring gathering in Washington, D.C., of 1,000 Christians from across the United States is organized by denominational offices in the nation’s capital and the National Council of Churches of Christ. Concludes with visits with legislators on Capitol Hill. (<http://advocacydays.org>)

Lake Junaluska Peace Conference

Organized and run by a grassroots cadre of United Methodists and several interfaith partners, the conference is an annual gathering of people of faith concerned about peace and justice. It is held each fall at Lake Junaluska Retreat Center in North Carolina. (<http://www.lakejunaluska.com/events/>)

United Methodist Seminars on National and International Affairs

United Methodist seminars have been enriching lives for generations and can be a vital part of your congregation’s Church and Society ministry. These seminars are educational, interactive, faith-forming, thought-provoking, and fun. Seminars are tailor-made for each group, which selects the topic. The design team at the General Board of Church and Society creates a seminar to answer questions, challenge assumptions, and open the group to reflection on the chosen issues. Recent topics include hunger, immigration, peace, racism, and health care.

Everyone is welcome to participate in the seminars, which are engaging for any age group, from youth to adult. United Methodist Seminars take place at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill adjacent to the Supreme Court and the U.S. Capitol. In addition, United Methodist Women organizes U.N. seminars that take place at the Church Center for the United Nations across the street from the U.N. headquarters. Seminars in both locations often include “field trips” to places that connect participants to the seminar theme.

Interested in learning more about seminars?

- For Washington, D.C., seminars sponsored by General Board of Church and Society, call (202) 488-5609.
- For United Nations seminars, sponsored by United Methodist Women, call (212) 682-3633.

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. (<http://umc-gbcs.org/conference-connections>)

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

General Board of Church and Society, www.umc-gbcs.org, 202-488-5600; Service Center, 1-800-967-0880

General Board of Discipleship (d/b/a/ Discipleship Ministries), www.umcdiscipleship.org, 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>, 1-800-972-0433; The Upper Room, www.upperroom.org, 1-800-972-0433; email: info@umcdiscipleship.org.

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmision.org, 1-800-862-4246 or 212-870-3600; email: info@umcmision.org

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, 615-340-7400

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, www.gbophb.org, 847-869-4550

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcaph.org, 973-408-3189

General Commission on Religion & Race, www.gcorr.org, 202-547-2271; email: info@gcorr.org

General Commission on the Status & Role of Women, www.gcsr.org, 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcum.org, 615-340-7145

General Council on Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, 866-367-4232 or 615-329-3393

Office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting (General Commission on United Methodist Men), www.gcum.org, 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, 615-749-6000; Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591; Cokesbury, www.cokesbury.com, 1-800-672-1789

United Methodist Communications, www.umcom.org, 615-742-5400; EcuFilm, 1-888-346-3862; InfoServ, email: infoserv@umcom.org; *Interpreter Magazine*, www.interpretermagazine.org, 615-742-5441

United Methodist Women, www.unitedmethodistwomen.org; 212-870-3900

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.