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## Study guide

# When disciples use their voice

*Advocacy leads to new legislation*

By Robert C. Blezard

When it comes to helping shape our world to be more fair, more just and more compassionate, Christians have achieved much. By raising our voices to ask for policies that help others, advocates bring a welcome voice of conscience and reason to the public sphere.

### Exercise 1: Advocacy vs. lobbying

Lobbying and advocacy both work within our political system to influence public policy in certain directions. They are similar in approach and technique, but quite different in outlook and mission. It has to do with whose interests are being represented.

As for advocates and their interests, Tracey DePasquale, director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa), put it well: “We do not ask for anything for ourselves. Ordinary disciples speaking on behalf of their neighbor remind policymakers that God is at work in the world.”

- When you think of the lobbying that takes place in Washington, D.C., and our state capitals, what images come to mind? What words are used to describe lobbying? Do they tend to be flattering or not? How do you explain it? Why?
- Who are some of the bigger lobbying groups and interests at work in our political system? Who are their clients? Who benefits from their efforts? What methods do they use and why? Do they tend to work in the public interest?
- What advocacy groups are at work in Washington, D.C., and in state capitals? Whose interests do they represent? Who benefits from their efforts? Do they tend to work in the public interest?
- As DePasquale points out, church advocates are “ordinary disciples speaking on behalf of their neighbor.” Why is this a key difference?
- In what ways do advocates provide a counterbalance to the special interests and lobbyists at work to influence public policy?

### Exercise 2: Do justice (Micah 6:6-8)

Our common understanding of the term “justice” may be skewed by the word’s most common use in the context of “criminal justice” or the “Department of Justice.” But in the Bible, justice has to do with fairness, love for others, making sure that the common good is upheld, protecting



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## Study guide: **When disciples use their voice** *continued*

our weaker neighbors from oppression or harm from people or forces that would cheat, persecute or treat them unfairly.

Reading the Bible, it's easy to see that justice is an obsession for God and that God lifts up justice-making as a prime directive for God's people. Micah expresses it well. Read Micah 6:6-8 and discuss:

- The passage is concerned with how one comes to live in right relationship with God. What pathways to righteousness are described in verses 6 and 7? Micah asks rhetorically if God will be pleased with these things. What do you think the answer is?
- Verse 8 completes Micah's thought. How does his description of a righteous life differ from that of verses 6 and 7? What would a Christian's life be like if he or she tried to live according to verse 8?
- What does Micah mean when he implores God's people to "do justice"? How is that accomplished? What does that look like in daily living? In order to "do justice," what must our relationships with neighbors look like? How sensitive must we be to the forces that oppress or exploit people who are poor, weak or disadvantaged?
- Looking at the work that is done by Christian advocates in Washington, D.C., and in state capitals, how do they help us "do justice"? If we assist, support or join their efforts, are we doing justice?

### Exercise 3: Co-workers

Martin Luther King Jr. may be the best-known American advocate in the last 100 years, as he pushed for justice for African Americans, the poor and the oppressed. While incarcerated for nonviolent protest, he wrote his brilliant and prophetic "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

In the letter King noted: "Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right."

- Looking at King's work in the 1950s and 1960s, what causes and people did he and his allies and supporters champion? Why was their work necessary?
- In the "Jim Crow South," what ways were African Americans oppressed when it came to such things as voting rights, access to public accommodations, "separate but equal" education, employment and economic opportunities? Why and how are these matters properly considered issues of "justice"?



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- Reviewing Micah 6:6-8 (see the previous exercise), were King and his supporters “doing justice” with their advocacy efforts?
- Do you agree with King that “progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability”? Explain. If not for the advocacy of King and others in the 1950s and 1960s, would we have had such dramatic reform in areas of voting rights, equality and opportunity? Or would time have been “an ally of the forces of social stagnation”?
- How are Christian advocates “co-workers with God” in the struggle for justice and peace? How can you help?
- Looking at the work of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, how were they “co-workers with God” to accomplish the Safe Harbor legislation? In what ways is human trafficking a problem of justice and peace?
- Describe LAMPA’s “tireless efforts” to work for the Safe Harbor legislation. Did they work alone? How did they collaborate to get their message before policymakers? Did they look for a quick fix? How did it pay off?

### Exercise 4: Strive for justice and peace

Advocacy is hard-wired into us as baptized members of Christ’s church. The rites for baptism and affirmation of baptism found in both *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and the *Lutheran Book of Worship* ask us to affirm that we will “strive for justice and peace in all the earth” (*ELW*, page 236).

- What does justice mean to you? What does peace mean to you for your community, our nation and our world? To what degree is living and striving for justice a priority in your walk as a disciple of Christ?
- Looking at our culture and our world, what do you see as the most important problems or issues in the areas of justice and peace? Make a list of them. Which of these causes concern you the most? For which can you muster great enthusiasm or energy? How can you make a difference as one who is called to “strive for justice and peace”?

### For more information and action

The ELCA maintains an advocacy office in Washington, D.C., that helps to raise our voices on matters arising on a national level. Get informed and get involved! Check out [elca.org/advocacy](http://elca.org/advocacy).

And Pennsylvania is not the only state with a Lutheran advocacy office. Here are links to some Lutheran advocacy agencies that work on issues of importance to people of faith:

- Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania; [lutheranadvocacypa.org](http://lutheranadvocacypa.org).



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- Lutheran Engagement and Advocacy in Nevada; [leanforjustice.org](http://leanforjustice.org).
- Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey; [leamnj.org](http://leamnj.org).
- Lutheran Advocacy Ministry–Minnesota; [lutheranadvocacymn.org](http://lutheranadvocacymn.org).
- Lutheran Advocacy of Illinois; [lutheranadvocacy.org](http://lutheranadvocacy.org).
- Lutheran Office of Public Policy (California); [lutheranpublicpolicyca.org](http://lutheranpublicpolicyca.org).
- Lutheran Advocacy Ministry–New Mexico; [lutheranadvocacynm.org](http://lutheranadvocacynm.org).
- Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin; [loppw.org](http://loppw.org).
- Lutheran Advocacy Ministry–Colorado; [rmselca.org/advocacy](http://rmselca.org/advocacy).

In addition, there are many Lutheran social service agencies that advocate on specific issues in the public sphere. An internet search engine might help you find such agencies in your state or region.

# When disciples use their voice

Advocacy leads to new legislation

By Courtney Olsen

Since 2007, more than 40,000 cases of human trafficking in the United States have been reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, and it has received more than 125,00 signals about potential trafficking hot spots. In 2018 alone, more than 5,000 cases were reported and 14,000 signals were received.

For the last several years, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa), a state public policy office of ELCA Advocacy, has worked with a coalition to advocate for legislation to protect victims of child sex trafficking. This “Safe Harbor” legislation provides funding for rehabilitation services so victims aren’t sent to prison under prostitution charges. After four years of work, Safe Harbor was signed into law by Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf on Oct. 24, 2018.

Lutheran energy around advocacy for victims of sex trafficking grew in 2014 at the Women of the ELCA’s triennial convention. “We passed a resolution for women to become knowledgeable about sex trafficking, to take a stand on it,” said Joyce Ray, former president of the Lower Susquehanna Synodical Women’s Organization.

Tracey DePasquale, director of LAMPa, saw the opportunity that convention created. “[LAMPa works] where the Holy Spirit is already calling disciples to act. In this case, there was

“Ordinary disciples speaking on behalf of their neighbor remind policymakers that God is at work in the world.”

already a statewide group of women who were informed and inspired.”

DePasquale also connected with the Villanova Law Institute to Address Sexual Exploitation, a Roman Catholic organization dedicated to creating systems to help survivors of sex

trafficking. The institute was working on the Safe Harbor initiative with Pennsylvania Sen. Stewart Greenleaf at the time.

In partnership with women across the state who were invigorated to work for this bill, DePasquale and the LAMPa team helped channel that energy into advocacy. Congregations across Pennsylvania engaged in letter-writing campaigns and called legislators asking them to support the bill.

“There were various ways that advocacy and sharing information took place,” said Linda Theophilus, pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Eastmont, Pa. “LAMPa provided information, and my congregation ... worked on letters to our legislators to make it happen.”

Many congregations also prepared soaps with human trafficking hotline numbers that were delivered to hotels and rest stops as part of the “Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (SOAP)” project.

It took four years of advocacy work for the Safe Harbor bill to move through the bureaucratic channels of the Pennsylvania government. During



On Oct. 24, 2018, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf (seated center) signed the Safe Harbor bill into legislation. The bill provides funding for rehabilitation services for victims of human trafficking.

the final months before the bill’s passage, advocacy efforts ramped up to put pressure on legislators.

Lynn Fry, LAMPa program director, accompanied several trafficking survivors on legislative visits. “With each visit, it became more apparent how important it was for the legislators to hear from survivors of trafficking to truly understand the depth of the problem,” she said.

“A couple of the legislators I had the opportunity to visit were very surprised that underage children were being arrested and placed into the criminal justice system. As they heard stories of survival, they recognized how easily young people found themselves in this unthinkable, vulnerable position.”

Jennifer Hope-Tringali, director for evangelical mission for new mission in the Lower Susquehanna Synod, also spoke to legislators about the bill. “I testified to the Senate judiciary committee from the lens of a faith leader who has a neuroscience background and experience with children experiencing trauma,” she said. “The hearing was attended by the committee but also by faith leaders and social service providers. Everyone present had a particular expertise to share.”


When the bill was signed into law, Villanova’s institute, one of the primary organizations behind the bill, expressed how invaluable LAMPa’s efforts were.

Sarah Robinson, justice for victims fellow at the institute, said, “Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Pennsylvania, and director Tracey DePasquale in particular, were highly instrumental in advocating

for the passage of Safe Harbor. They consistently supported us during Advocacy Days in Harrisburg, speaking at press conferences and meeting with legislative staff and other stakeholders.”

For the Lutheran advocates of Safe Harbor, their faith was a critical piece of their advocacy.

“When the church speaks as an advocate in the public square, their message is received differently,” DePasquale said. “We do not ask for anything for ourselves. Ordinary disciples speaking on behalf of their neighbor remind policymakers that God is at work in the world. We are the church of ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ But we are also called to use our voices for God’s reconciling and redeeming mission in the world.”

Theophilus agrees: “As Christians in the United States, our citizenship gives us a lot of opportunities and gifts. Being good stewards of the citizenship means we have a voice. We have a voice to ask our government, as well as our culture, to do things that are good and right. Our best advocacy is an expression of love for our neighbor.” 

Download a study guide for this article at [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org) by clicking on the “Spiritual practices & resources” tab.



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