



Advocacy Priorities

2017-2018 Legislative Session

November 2016

The following 2017-2018 Advocacy Priorities have been established by the Council's Commission on Public Witness (CPW), guided by the Council's *Principles for Public Advocacy*.

For the 2015-2016 Legislative Session, the Commission determined that the Council should focus on what might be deemed "upstream" issues—those representing the root causes for why people are living in poverty, why our economy is suffering, why our environment is being ravaged, and the like. "The Parable of the River" provides a helpful (and brief) explanation of what this means. A version of this parable is available at http://www.justicemattersinkansas.org/justice_matters_mission.

However, the experience of what was perhaps the most vicious political cycle in our lifetimes causes us to go deeper into what the root causes of injustice really are. Certainly inadequate and inequitable education, mass incarceration, pay and wealth inequities, environmental injustices, and other conditions contribute to the situations that many of our neighbors are experiencing. But these conditions are not just due to random circumstances. The seeds of injustice lie in the deep prejudice, intolerance, and even hatred that exists for the "other" in our society. These attitudes have always existed, but were laid bare in the venom and vitriol we heard on the 2016 campaign trail. The open expression of such hateful rhetoric seemingly gave permission for these long held and long-repressed attitudes to be expressed freely and directed verbally and sometimes physically at those who are different for any reason.

So what does this mean for the Council's advocacy?

- 1) The Council will still provide opportunities for people of faith to act on specific legislation and policies through individual action alerts and updates.
- 2) Greater focus will be given to educating people of faith about the issues of racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, biases against disabled persons, and prejudices against anyone who may be considered different or "other."
- 3) The highest priority issues will be those most affected by the attitudes named in (2) above, including, but not limited to education, criminal justice, immigration policy, wages and welfare policies, and environmental justice.
- 4) Additional strong focus will be given to changing the political system itself, including, but not limited to, limiting the influence of money in politics and reforming Pennsylvania's redistricting system to place power in the hands of an independent commission.

The Public Witness Ministry will also:

- 1) Continue to educate people of faith about their responsibility to be engaged in the public arena not just through voting, but through active engagement with elected and appointed officials;
- 2) In addition to traditional issue advocacy, also advocate for, and encourage others to advocate for, civility in every place where people interact in our society—but particularly in every level of government and among all elected and appointed officials;

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- 3) As always, enhance and expand the Council's work and advocacy efforts with all appropriate partners in the faith community and beyond as a means of amplifying the Council's faith voice on important issues; and
- 4) Begin to make public statements about the important issues cited above as a means of educating people of faith and raising awareness among the general population.

To learn more about the Council's vision with respect public witness, please view the *Principles for Public Advocacy* (adopted 10/23/12) at <http://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Principles.pdf>.