Advocacy Priorities
2019-2020 Legislative Session

November 2018

The following 2019-2020 Advocacy Priorities have been established by the Council’s Commission on Public Witness (CPW), guided by the Council’s Principles for Public Advocacy.

Background

Starting with 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.

While 2018 was not another presidential election year, it still featured many contentious and sometimes venomous hyper-partisan campaigns. The previous two years saw nearly continual attacks on and injustices leveled at those who are identified as “other”—immigrants, people of color, and LGBT populations. Those who harbor fear and hatred of the other appear to have been emboldened by rhetoric coming from the highest echelons of government. These fears have resulted in people seeking safety from violence, intimidation and persecution being labeled as terrorists and invaders, and in the inhumane policy of separating families in the name of “deterrence.” A number of highly visible mass shootings have awakened younger populations and spurred them to action, seeking legislation to reduce gun violence. Powerful storms, growing devastation from wild fires, rising temperatures, drought and water shortages in some areas, and record rainfall and flooding in others have roused millions more to the awareness that long established environmental protections are critical and must be protected from attempts to roll back and eliminate them.

The roots of injustice continue to run deep, as we’ve seen little change with regard to injustices we’ve named before—poor education, mass incarceration, pay and wealth inequities, and inadequate access to affordable housing, child care, and health care. As we have noted before, 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—as cited above.

So what does this mean for the Council’s advocacy in 2019-2020?

2019-20 Advocacy Priorities

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) Continued 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 environment, education, criminal justice, immigration policy, gun violence, and wages and welfare policies.

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4) We will continue to focus on changing the political system itself, including reforming Pennsylvania’s redistricting system to place power in the hands of an independent commission, seeking expanded opportunities for voting (such as early voting, no excuse absentee voting, and automatic registration), and limiting the influence of money in elections and lobbying.

Read an expanded description/elaboration on these priorities in the addendum to this document.

**How the Public Witness Ministry Efforts Will Be Carried Out**

The Council’s Ministry of Public Witness will:

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—encouraging congregations and faith communities to use a newly completed civics curriculum;

2) In addition to traditional issue advocacy, it will 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;

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) Continue 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.