



BUILDING A JUST WORLD FOR ALL

A TOOLKIT FOR FAITHFUL ADVOCACY

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OFFICE OF PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY

United Church of Christ Office of Public Policy and Advocacy
United Methodist Building
100 Maryland Ave NE
Suite 330
Washington, D.C. 20002

Phone: 202.543.1517

Email: dcofficeadmin@ucc.org

Website: <https://www.ucc.org/office-of-public-policy-and-advocacy-in-washington-d-c/>

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CONTACT US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram: @justice_ucc

Facebook: @justiceUCC

X: @justice_ucc

Bluesky: @justiceUCC

Dear Partners in Christ,

As people of faith, we are called to bring our moral values to the public square. Our faith calls us to work for an end to poverty and oppression and to act as peacemakers and justice seekers in a broken world. The exhortations of the biblical prophets and Jesus's own ministry of love witnessed in the Gospel compel us to cry out against injustice in our nation and throughout the world.

The United Church of Christ has a long legacy of prophetic advocacy for public policy that promotes the common good. The UCC's Office of Public Policy & Advocacy in Washington, D.C. is mandated to help lift that voice and work with local churches, conferences, and interfaith partners to impact issues of public policy. To that end, this new resource is offered to help UCC members become better informed about key issues and organize for justice and peace in concrete ways. We hope this guide will strengthen your advocacy on key areas of public policy at the local, state, and federal level, and encourage engagement with Congress and the administration to further our goal of building a Just World for All.

We are pleased to share "Building a Just World for All: A Toolkit for Faithful Advocacy" in hopes that it will be a useful tool for you and your congregation to engage in the justice and peace movement of our time. Thank you for your faithful witness. Together we can make a difference!

As the United Church of Christ, we witness in the prophetic hope that peace is possible! We are committed to working for a "Just World for All" in which all are free from violence, free from poverty, free from hunger, and free from discrimination and oppression. For a "Still-Speaking" God at work in the world, nothing is impossible. We join you in longing for and working for God's justice and peace here on earth. May God continue to bless you and your ministry.

In solidarity,



Rev. Shari Prestemon
UCC Associate General Minister and
Co-Executive of Global Ministries



Rev. Michael Neuroth
Director, UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I: HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR A JUST WORLD FOR ALL

Getting Started

A Biblical Call to Advocacy: Why Should People of Faith Engage?.....	6
Legal Limitations on Faith Based Advocacy.....	8
Conversation Strategies to Address Toxic Polarization in our Congregations.....	9
General Synod and the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy.....	10
I) Passing a Resolution of Witness at General Synod.....	10

Advocacy 101

How to Email or Call Your Members of Congress or the Administration.....	12
I) Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet).....	12
How to Meet with Your Members of Congress.....	14
I) Types of Meetings.....	15
II) How to Request a Meeting.....	16
III) How to Plan an Effective Meeting.....	17
How to Comment on a Public Rule.....	19
Joining as an Amicus Curiae or a Plaintiff to a Lawsuit.....	19
Tips for Attending & Organizing an Act of Public Witness.....	20
How to Run an Our Faith Our Vote Campaign.....	22
I) Voter Registration and Empowerment Drive.....	22
II) How to Organize a Candidate Event.....	26
III) How to Keep Our Elections Safe.....	28

TABLE OF CONTENTS

How to Engage with Press and Social Media.....	29
I) Tips for Social Media.....	30
II) How to Write a Letter to the Editor.....	32
III) How to write an Op-Ed.....	34
Helpful Resources for Working with Congress and the Administration.....	35

SECTION II: FAITH GROUNDING AND TALKING POINTS ON THE ISSUES

Immigration Justice.....	36
LGBTQ+ Justice.....	38
Environmental Justice.....	40
Economic Justice.....	42
Racial Justice.....	44
Safety Net Programs and Federal Benefits.....	46
Civil and Human Rights.....	48
Reproductive Justice and Abortion.....	50
Global Concerns.....	52
Just Peace.....	54
Acknowledgements and Gratitude.....	56

A BIBLICAL CALL TO ADVOCACY

WHY SHOULD PEOPLE OF FAITH ENGAGE?

"And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:40)



In the challenges before us today, we, as people of faith, can hear the echoes of prophets and believers who throughout history lifted up a vision of right relationship between people, with God, and all of God's creation.

God's vision of wholeness, abundance, and justice has always challenged human limits of our thoughts, imaginations, and hopes.

God has brought people through exile, famine, and political turmoil, documented throughout the scripture. Jesus also challenged a power system, speaking first and always of God's love for all so that today, we can respond to those in trouble around us with mercy, hospitality, and justice. Our call to justice echoes our call to follow Jesus' ministry and model.

In responding faithfully to God's call for abundant life for all people, a common life in which no one is left behind, we are drawn inevitably to engage in public policy advocacy. There is an inherent connection between the Gospel call to respond to the hungry — the thirsty, the stranger, those in prison, and those who are sick — and the policy decisions that determine funding for issue such as school meal programs, global peacebuilding programs, standards for clean air, sentencing for nonviolent offenders, and health care access for all.

Advocacy is essential to participating in God's mission in the world.

It is our hope that this toolkit for faithful advocacy may provide a way to act on these connections.

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" (Isaiah 58:6-7)

LEGAL LIMITATIONS ON FAITH BASED ADVOCACY

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.” 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.

However, there are no restrictions on educating church members about election year issues and promoting discussion of public policy.

Other kinds of allowed political activity include holding non-partisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, preparing and distributing nonpartisan voter guides and voting records, prayer vigils, public witness, and advocacy for a safe and accessible election, 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].

ONLINE RESOURCE:

Learn more about how to engage in nonpartisan political activities from our webinar: “Be Prophetic, Not Partisan! Navigating Election Do’s & Don’ts for Churches”



Scan here or go to
bit.ly/be-prophetic-not-partisan

CONVERSATION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS TOXIC POLARIZATION

- 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 understand each other.
- Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings. Share personal experiences which help others more fully understand your concerns and perspectives on the issues. Conversation 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.
- 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 us all.

GENERAL SYNOD AND THE UCC OFFICE OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

People often ask what guides the statements, actions, witness, and ministry of the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy. For the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy, resolutions passed by General Synod give us the ability to advocate for the issues within them in Congress, the Administration, and through the courts.

General Synod is a faithful gathering that speaks to the church, not for the church. It does not speak for the whole church. In our UCC polity, no one entity speaks for every setting of the church. Individual members and congregations are free to disagree and to state their convictions in their own terms. Still, General Synod is the most widely representative body in the life of the denomination. It sets policy for the Covenanted Ministries and provides direction for conferences, associations, and congregations.

Having resolutions passed by Synod is therefore incredibly important – without resolutions of witness on a certain issue, the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy cannot raise its voice to support or oppose that issue when working with the federal government.

Many General Synod resolutions and pronouncements come about through the engagement, witness, and ministry of UCC members in local congregations who seek to share their experiences and witness with the larger church.

Since our formation in 1957, the United Church of Christ has made courageous statements on major social policy issues of the day, during times of great social and political change. This tradition grows out of the prophetic witness of our predecessor denominations.

The resolutions and pronouncements of General Synod invite us all to engage in reflection and dialogue around issues of critical concern in our world.

Many of the resolutions and pronouncements from General Synod are available through the UCC website at <https://bit.ly/synod-resolutions>. Older proceedings, resolutions, and pronouncements can be accessed through the UCC archivist.

Passing a Resolution of Witness at General Synod

If your church would like to write and bring a resolution to the next General Synod on an issue you believe our office should advocate for, we encourage you to go to <https://generalsynod.org/> for information, including the standing rules that every resolution must follow, as well as important deadlines.

“

Whereas many people have committed to memory John 3:16 - ‘For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only begotten child,’ and though this verse has become one of the best-known and often-quoted verses in the Scripture, we have failed to take cognizance of one of the key elements of this verse – ‘world’. We have believed, rather, that God so loved the church, or the well-behaved people or the Christians, but not really the world; i.e. the whole people. The church is people, people who are called in every time and every place to the task of continuing the essential ministry of Christ. We in the UCC need to understand that ministry and responsibly appropriate it in the world... Therefore, the 11th General Synod calls upon the United Church of Christ to marshal and utilize its resources to help equip our churches to fully and actively engage a prophetic ministry in political education and sensitivity including: a) citizen education, and registration efforts; b) political organizing and training workshops; c) public hearings on policy formulation; d) encourage participation in the political process.”

— Resolution on Political Education and Sensitivity, General Synod 11, 1977



ADVOCACY 101

Historic stories of larger-than-life faith leaders fighting on the front lines of change are inspiring but can make getting started in advocacy daunting. The truth is everyone can be an advocate and there are many ways you can get involved.

But what IS advocacy? Advocacy is the process by which we influence decision makers to make policy change. There are many ways to do this, including acts of witness, meetings with elected officials, and “get out the vote” (GOTV) campaigns.

While this book will only focus on federal policy, advocacy can be an effective tool for change at all levels of government.

Whether you feel most comfortable emailing your members of Congress or taking to the streets, we hope to offer you a primer on the many ways you, your congregation, and your community can advocate for a Just World for All.

HOW TO EMAIL OR CALL YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Your congressional representatives were elected to serve you. As their constituent, you shouldn't hesitate to share your thoughts, whether it's praise for something they've done or a concern about an issue that matters to you. Regular emails and calls are great ways to become connected and make sure your voice is heard.

Even if you do not hear back from your representative, every message you send matters. Congressional and administration staffers count the number of emails and calls concerning a certain proposed policy and use this tally in their vote and policy recommendations to their elected official. The more emails and calls office receives, the more impact this outreach has on the policy decisions of elected officials.

Sending messages or calling your elected officials through the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) is an effective and accessible way to advocate on public policy decisions and establish regular contact with your elected officials.

JUSTICE & PEACE ACTION NETWORK (JPANet)

The Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) is a network of tens of thousands of UCC members, clergy and partners across the country who mobilize on justice issues central to our faith. Managed by the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy in Washington D.C., the JPANet is one of the most effective ways the United Church of Christ raises its prophetic voice on Capitol Hill.

In keeping with God’s vision of a just and loving society, the JPANet offers accessible and impactful ways to contact your elected officials and appointed officials on the issues you care about most. Each week, a new action alert is sent directly to your inbox containing a pre-written, customizable letter and call script you can use to contact your members. Adding a personal story or explaining the effect of an issue or policy on your community makes even more of an impact.

With issues such as healthcare, racial justice, peacebuilding abroad, LGBTQ+ rights, and more—every letter or phone call made is another step to build a just world for all. If you would like to access previous alerts, check out our Action Center at ucc.org/action-center and lift your voice on a range of issues, at any time!



Email Template for Effective Engagement with Elected Officials

Feel free to use the email template below to get started with writing your own original email to your member of Congress. You should plan to submit this email via your member of Congress’s website, under their “Contact Me” tab, or you can use the prompts provided via the Justice and Peace Action Network.

Dear [Title] [Full Name of Official],

As your constituent and a [Christian/person of faith], I write to you today to respectfully urge you to [write out your request].

[Sentence introducing your perspective on the issue]. [Tell a story in three sentences on how the issue impacts you and your community].

I have become increasingly [concerned/heartened] by [federal government action] that [introduce negative or positive impact of this action]. [Insert other negative or positive impacts to you and your community here].

[Insert a few sentences on why as a person of faith you care about this issue. Feel free to cite the Bible and other religious texts].

We are confident that [Title and Last Name of Official] is supportive of [people of faith]. That is why it is with great [hope/gratefulness] that we [alert you to this issue/convey our support of XX policy], in the hope that you will use all [congressional/federal] resources at your disposal to [protect/support] the [your priority].

Sincerely,
[name and title]

Call Script Template for Effective Engagement with Your Elected Officials

It is best to have a script ready for you to read before you give your elected official a call. This will help you keep your thoughts organized and will help whichever staff member on the other end of the line take legible notes for the official.

Hello/Good Morning/Good Afternoon,

My name is XXX and I am a constituent of [Title and Last Name of Official]. My address is [street address and zip code]. I am also a [Christian/person of faith].

I am calling today to urge [Title and Last Name of Official] to [make your request here].

[Sentence introducing your perspective on the issue]. [Tell a story in three sentences on how the issue impacts you and your community].

I have become increasingly [concerned/heartened] by [federal government action] that [introduce negative or positive impact of this action]. [Insert other negative or positive impacts to you and your community here]. [Insert a few sentences on why as a person of faith you care about this issue. Feel free to cite the Bible and other religious texts].

We are confident that [Title and Last Name of Official] is supportive of [people of faith]. That is why it is with great [hope/gratefulness] that we [alert you to this issue/convey our support of XX policy], in the hope that you will use all [congressional/federal] resources at your disposal to [protect/support] the [your priority].

HOW TO MEET WITH YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Meeting with your members of Congress is one of the most impactful ways to lift your voice. Meeting with your members can help you establish a relationship that enables you to have direct access to a decision-maker who has the power to introduce, vote for or against, and pass long-lasting legislation. While the process for meeting with your member of Congress can be more difficult than just calling or emailing them, the impact you make is also much more significant.

Choose the Meeting Type That Works Best For You

IN DISTRICT MEETINGS OR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

- Meet with your members of Congress or their staff in their district/field offices located within your state (for senators) or within your congressional district (for House members), or virtually.
- These meetings are best scheduled during “recess,” which is the time when House and Senate members go back to their hometowns to meet with constituents and attend events. To find the House and Senate recess calendars, google “[Year] House Calendar” and “[Year] Senate Calendar” respectively.
- Some members of Congress will not accept virtual meetings, but if they do, this is another way to make meetings with members of Congress convenient, if your technological skill and access allows.
- In-district and virtual meetings tend to be convenient, can allow you to bring more advocates and have more meetings in a cost-effective manner.
- In-district meetings can demonstrate to members of Congress what people on the ground, their voters, are thinking.

FLY IN MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON D.C.

- Travelling to DC to meet with your members of Congress in the nation’s capital, while more inconvenient, can maximize your chance of meeting with the member of Congress, rather than staff.
- Request this type of meeting when Congress is “in session” which is when the members of Congress are meeting in DC to vote on legislation.
- By meeting with your elected officials in DC when Congress is in session, you will be able to advocate for issues during a time when they are actively considering legislation that could push forward, or reject, the priorities your congregations have.
- If you choose to come to DC, contact the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy! We can help set up meetings and can provide an advocacy training in advance. You can reach the office at dcofficeadmin@ucc.org

SITE VISIT/ PUBLIC EVENTS

- Scheduling a site visit or inviting a congressional member to a public event helps demonstrate your congregation’s unique perspective to elected officials.
- For example, if you invite a member of Congress to tour your soup kitchen, you can use that opportunity to speak about the growing hunger in your area.
- Putting the member of Congress in a position where they are faced directly with the justice issues you face every day is a very effective way to convince them to introduce policy or support existing policy that could further amplify your service work.
- It may be difficult to schedule a site visit or get a member of Congress to attend your public event, due to availability.
- Request this type of meeting well in advance and during recess.

How to Request a Meeting with Your Member of Congress

1. Go to this link to find your Representative and Senators: bit.ly/UCC-Find-Your-Legislators
2. Enter your church/organization's address
3. Scroll down
4. Click "view officials"
5. Listed under "Federal Officials" will be your two senators and representative
6. Click on the federal representative you want to request a meeting with (we recommend requesting meetings with both senators and your representative)
7. There you will find a link to their website and their office number
8. Go to your member of Congress's website and go to the 'contact me' tab
9. Fill out the meeting request form/contact me form
10. To ensure a response, you should also directly email the scheduler for each member of Congress you would like to meet with.
11. You can also reach out to the UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy (dcofficeadmin@ucc.org) and we will be able to provide you with the email for your members' schedulers.

Email Template to Request a Meeting With Your Members

Subject: Members of *[insert church/organization name]* Requesting Meeting with *[Rep./Senator XXX]* to Discuss *[Issue/Bill/Priority]*

Dear XXX/Good morning/afternoon/evening,

I am a constituent and a *[role]* of *[church/organization's name]* located in *[city/town/district]*. *[Insert sentence on number of congregants, or numbers served by your organization]*. We would like to express our thanks to *[Senator/Representative XXX]* for their work on behalf of *[district/state]*.

We would like to request a *[district office/virtual/DC office]* meeting with *[Senator/Representative XXX]* during *[month/week of XXX]*. We would like to discuss how as a *[type of organization]*, *[issue/bill/priority]* impact our work and commitment to *[mission]*.

We are particularly interested in outlining how the *[issue/bill/priority]* intersect with our *[work/commitments as a religious community]* and convey how *[religious communities/faith-affiliated service providers]* may be impacted if *[whatever decision Congress might make that could impact you negatively or positively]*. *[Add a sentence here describing your group and estimated attendees if you can]*.

Please let us know when *[Senator/Representative XXX]* would be available for this meeting.

Sincerely/Best,

[Requester or Point of Contact Name and title]

Requesting a Meeting FAQ

What if a member of Congress isn't available?

Feel free to suggest other dates or suggest a virtual meeting if you haven't already. If the member is unable to meet and they suggest staff, request that you meet with the Legislative Director or Legislative Assistant for a DC or virtual meeting, and for an in-district meeting request to meet with the District Director, Field Director, or the Chief of Staff. If you are given anyone else, ask that they send their notes to the elected official and their District Director (for in-district meetings)/Legislative Director (for all other meetings), so that the information is relayed to the decision makers.

What if we never get a response?

After a few days with no response, call the member's office at both the District Office number and the DC Office number. Let them know you have a meeting request, the date of your meeting request, and what you want to meet about. Keep calling until they respond! If they still never respond, contact the UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy and we will discuss alternatives.

How to Plan an Effective Meeting

Draft Agenda for a Member Meeting:

1. Introduce yourselves. If applicable, thank your official for any recent good actions they have taken. (5 mins)
2. Deliver Pitch (5 mins)
3. Answer Questions (5 mins)
4. Gather Intel and Restate Ask (5 mins)
5. Thank You and Photos (5 mins)

Talk to your group and assign each agenda item to someone in advance of the meeting. Do your best to stick to this timeline to allow room for questions!

Elements of a Successful Meeting

Introduce Yourself: Keep this very short – go around and give name, title, and role. Make sure to allow the staff/member to introduce themselves too!

Delivering Your Pitch : The most important part of your meeting is delivering your “pitch” which should include an “ask” - a statement that clearly and concisely communicates what action you want the Congressperson to take. Congressional staffers are not interested in long explanations before the ask. You are not being rude to jump right into your ask, they would prefer it.

The pitch includes these four elements: 1) Explain your perspective/why they should listen to you! 2) Introduce the problem 3) Offer a concrete, measurable solution (deliver your “ask”), and 4) Explain how this solution will help resolve the problem.

Constructing a Pitch for Engaging with Members of Congress

- 1. Introduce yourself/your organization.** Mention numbers that speak to impact, i.e. membership numbers or numbers served.
- 2. Introduce your problem:** What is happening in Congress or the Administration that will impact your work?
- 3. Explain why the Member of Congress should care about this problem.** Feel free to speak to your faith or speak to an experience that demonstrates the problem's impact on your work.
- 4. Offer a concrete, measurable solution that asks something of the member of Congress** (i.e. please write a letter to congressional leadership, please launch an investigation into the administration, please vote no/yes).
- 5. Explain how this solution will help resolve the problem.**
- 6. Emphasize accountability and continued relationship by asking questions and offering help** (i.e. offer to help them gain support with other members for the proposal or invite them to your church or organization).

Remember to think about your audience! Feel free to make each “ask” a little different for each member and try to relate your ask to the member’s religious or political beliefs to make your request seem more possible for them to fulfill.

Answering Questions Posed by Members of Congress

If you are asked questions about your position, do your best to respond with honesty and transparency. If you don’t know the answer, let them know you will follow up by email with more information. You should not be expected to have a fleshed-out solution to the problem you are presenting. Those who’ve run for office need to take on the onus of strategizing solutions.

Gather Intel, Restate Ask, Thank You and Photos

To close the meeting, first ask for information about your policy priority – have they heard about any resolution to your issue or any potential for this type of legislation to be passed? Restate your ask one more time, then thank them for their time. Ask for a photo with whoever met with you! Leave behind a short-written summary of your position and follow up your visit with a thank you email. The UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy would love to hear from you if your church recently met with a member of Congress! Please contact the office via email at ucctakeaction@ucc.org with your story from your visit and photos.

HOW TO COMMENT ON FEDERAL RULEMAKING

What is Rulemaking?

Federal agencies use rulemaking to issue new rules (also called “regulations”) or change old ones. Government agencies and recipients of federal funds are required to follow these rules.

The Rulemaking Process

Agencies typically give the public notice of a proposed rule before the agency makes a final decision. Then, the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register. Next, the agency invites the public to submit comments before a specified date. The comment period usually lasts between 30 and 180 days. The agency is legally required to consider each comment. After analyzing all comments, the agency publishes the final version of the rule.

How to Find Proposed Rules and Where to Submit Your Public Comment

Go to <https://www.regulations.gov/> and search for the key words of issues you care about, or if you know the exact proposed rule you’d like to comment on then enter the title of the rule. There you will find the deadline to submit public comments and the place to submit your comments.

Making Your Comments Effective

Comments can be brief or detailed. Begin by explaining your congregation’s mission. Make clear why your organization has a perspective on issues relevant to the proposed rule. As you draft your comment, note the experiences of your congregation, relevant data, and your analysis of the proposed rule’s potential impact. Feel free to suggest ways to improve the rule and ask the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy if they’ve already prepared materials you can use in your own comments. If you are part of a group of people commenting on a rule, ensure that you draft a separate comment from others in your group – identical comments will only be counted once by the portal.

JOINING AS AN AMICUS CURIAE OR A PLAINTIFF TO A LAWSUIT

As a congregation or organization, you may be presented with opportunities to join a lawsuit, either to support a positive use of the law or to challenge a negative one. We recommend reviewing the following resource and consider speaking to legal counsel if you are presented with this opportunity:

<https://afj.org/article/rules-of-the-game-litigation/>

TIPS FOR ATTENDING & ORGANIZING AN ACT OF PUBLIC WITNESS

To organize an act of public witness, begin by following these quick tips:

- Reach out to local community organizing groups, congregational organizing networks, and other places of worship, to learn if there are opportunities to collaborate and to see what is already being planned.
- Look up your state laws on permitting and ensure you are aware of all laws and requirements in advance of the event.
- It is recommended that all organizers attend a de-escalation training in order to prepare before the event.

To prepare to attend a public witness event, follow these steps:

1) Make a plan and pack essential supplies

- When will you plan to arrive? Who will you go with? How will you get there? When will you leave? Where do you intend to go in an emergency?
- It is important to always have a partner or buddy to keep an eye on one another. Also, let at least one emergency contact know your plan and make arrangements to keep them posted on your status during and after the event. Memorize the phone number of someone who is trusted, not attending the protest, and available to help if anything comes up.
- Bring any needed supplies including water, medications, and cash.

2) Have an offline map of the venue and surrounding areas available as cell service may be limited in some cases. Plan multiple routes into and out of the area.

3) Dress for success

- Dress for the expected weather.
- To avoid facial recognition technology, wear plain clothes and consider wearing a mask or sunglasses.

4) Stay Cyber Safe

- When at the event, keep your phone in airplane mode and turn off your Bluetooth. If you can, turn off your phone completely or (optimally) leave it at home. If you do bring your phone, fully charge your cell phone and bring a battery extender if possible.

5) Stay Aware of Your Surrounding

- Do your best to know what is going on all around you at all times. Be alert to anything that seems suspicious; this could be a person's behavior, unclaimed packages, unusual activity, and vehicles. If you see something, say something.
- The “OODA Loop” (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) is a useful framework to stay calm and make decisions during high-stress situations:
 - Observe: Identify the source of danger and your surroundings
 - Orient: Determine where you are and where you need to go
 - Decide: Choose a course of action that minimizes risk
 - Act: Implement your decision and stay aware of changes in the environment
- De-Escalate: If you find yourself in a tense situation, practice de-escalation techniques:
 - Stay calm and keep your voice steady
 - Avoid provocative behavior
 - If necessary, walk away and remove yourself from the situation

A note on Nonviolent Direct Action (NVDA): NVDA is a strategic set of actions such as protests, marches, boycotts, or other forms of civil disobedience intended to challenge injustice without violence. Given increasing repression in this political climate in which actions that formerly did not provoke arrest might, education and training in NVDA is recommended for those wanting to engage in such tactics. Trainings are available from the UCC Faith INFO team, local organizations, and outside groups such as the DC Peace Team, the Meta Peace Team, Nonviolent Peaceforce, and others. The book, “Building up a New World: Congregational Organizing for Transformative Impact” is a great resource for further study.

Contact the United Church of Christ Faith INFO team at <https://bit.ly/UCC-Faith-INFO> or by scanning the QR code:



HOW TO RUN AN OUR FAITH OUR VOTE CAMPAIGN

VOTER REGISTRATION AND EMPOWERMENT DRIVE

The first phase of the Our Faith Our Vote campaign is to launch a voter registration and voter empowerment drive at your church. Our goal is to have every eligible voter at your UCC church registered and voting. The publicity that your voter registration and empowerment effort receives in your church will likely spark a conversation about the importance of expressing our faith through civic participation and getting your church members out to vote.

Form a committee to implement the Our Faith Our Vote campaign at your church.

Appoint a Team Leader(s) who can stay in touch with the congregation, local election officials, clergy, lay leadership, and the national UCC to get updates and support, and amplify trusted election information throughout the campaign.

A good committee will consist of members of your church social action committee and/or people who you recruit to volunteer who are willing and able to help congregants register, make a plan to vote, and navigate any challenges at the polls. One person for every 50 people in your church is a good guideline.

The more people involved, the more effective your campaign will be. Seek the support of your minister and church social action committee for the Our Faith Our Vote campaign. People will want to hear from the committee responsible for social issues, as well as your minister(s). Pastoral leadership is crucial for a successful campaign.

Mark Your Calendars

At the first meeting of your Our Faith Our Vote committee, set a timeline for your voter registration and empowerment drive. You can register and inform voters in the pews and/or set up tables before and after services. We strongly encourage holding these drives on more than one Sunday at your church.

Connect With Your Local Community

Before setting up your drive, contact your local Election Office to learn about how to check voter registration and registration deadlines, check polling locations and hours, learn about early voting or voting by mail options and timelines, and get briefed on local and state voter registration laws, keeping an eye out for ID requirements. You might even set up a meeting between local election officials and your Our Faith Our Vote committee members.



You can also reach out to your local mayor's office to explain that your committee will be helping ensure things go smoothly for your congregation on election day and offer to amplify trusted and timely information from your city/town. Explain your congregation's size and your committee's ability to communicate and directly respond in relation to any issues that come up on or after election day.

You should also use this as an opportunity to reach out to other faith communities and democracy nonprofits in the area to ensure you have partners you can work with if any issues arise during or after the election.

Consider Existing Church Outreach

If your church has a time when social services are delivered (i.e. a food pantry, homeless shelter or soup kitchen), talk to the coordinator of that program and offer to register and inform the people who come to your church. They should be given the same opportunities to learn about voting as everyone else in your church.

Tips for Launching the Our Faith Our Vote Campaign

- Ask your minister to help you launch the Our Faith Our Vote campaign in your church. On the first Sunday you plan to begin registering and informing voters, encourage your minister to give a sermon on the importance of civic participation.
- Announce the committee by writing an article for your church newsletter. Ensure congregants know that the people in this committee will help congregants register and make a plan to vote and will act as the point people for all election-related issues voters face.
- You can also ask any members who are Poll Chaplains or Poll Workers to reach out so that you can use them as a source of trusted information on election day and support them as front-line workers during the election.
- Place announcements in the church bulletin and arrange to give an announcement during your congregation's time for sharing concerns. *Remember to keep the announcements non-partisan.*
- Put up posters or signs around the church to announce the Our Faith Our Vote campaign and indicate when voter registration tables will be available to church members.



Registering Voters During Worship Service: Voter Registration and Empowerment Tables

Registering church members in the pews during the worship service is the most effective way to promote basic voter registration and participation. We encourage every church to promote an Our Faith Our Vote Sunday where voter registration is included during the worship service. Speak with your pastor and necessary church leadership about registering voters in the pews.

On the designated Sunday, prepare ushers with a sufficient quantity of voter registration forms and the QR code/link to online voter registration. At the appropriate time in the service, your minister should address the importance of civic participation and ask the ushers to distribute the voter registration information. Give people time to fill out the forms either online or by hand. Gather back any physical registration forms in a collection plate or ask church attendees to place the forms in baskets at the church exit.

Once the registration forms are collected, turn them into the Our Faith Our Vote committee members at the voter registration table.

Have a table or booth in the main foyer of the church where people can stop by before and after the service. Ask the minister to give special attention to the importance of stopping by the table to register and make a plan to vote.

Do what you can to make sure people complete the registration forms or online when they are at church. This will ensure that people actually fill out their voter registration form – if they leave without filling it out, they are less likely to complete it.



Calling Your Members

Phone calls are an essential element of the campaign because it offers an opportunity to have one-on-one conversations about the importance of expressing our faith through civic participation and ensuring every congregant knows where, when, and how to vote.

Please see below for a script:

"Hello, this is _____ from [name of your church]. We are calling every member of [name of your church] as part of the UCC's Our Faith Our Vote campaign to make sure that you are registered and prepared to vote in this fall's election. Are you registered to vote?"

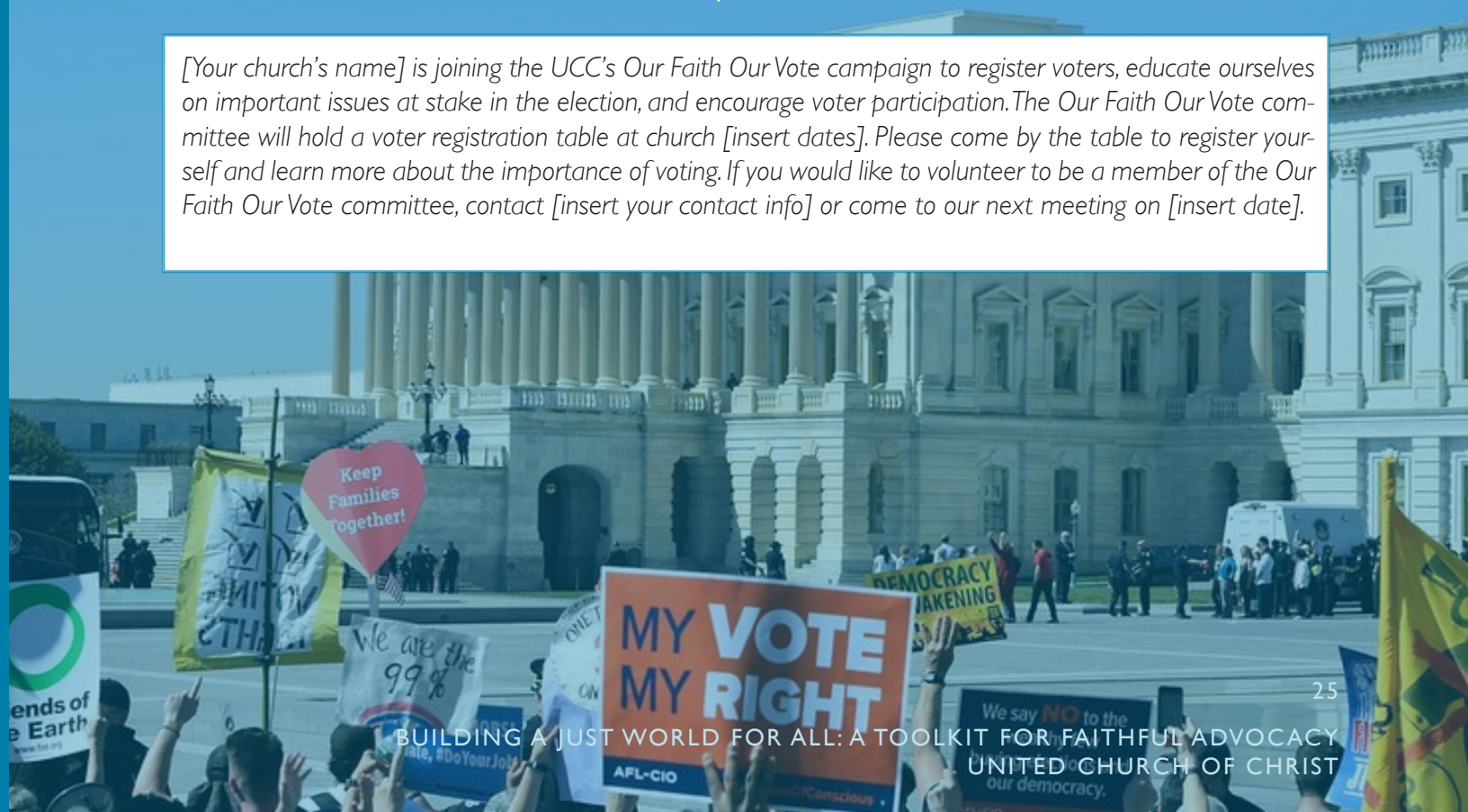
If they say YES: Ask them if their registration is up to date. If they have moved or want to change party affiliation, they can do so by filling out a new voter registration form. Also ask them if they have made their voting plan. Are they going to vote early and do they know when early voting opens? Are they going to vote-by-mail and do they know when they need to request their ballot and when it must be submitted? If they plan to vote in person, how will they get to their polling location? Make sure they are aware of any ID requirements and the hours of their polling location.

If they say NO: Tell them about the voter registration and empowerment drive at your church and encourage them to fill out a voter registration form. If they can't make it to church when you have the registration table set up, offer to email them a link to the voter registration form. Thank them for their time and let them know that you will be back in touch to remind them to get out and vote.

Publicize in Your Newsletter or Church Bulliten

Please see below for a bulletin or newsletter sample announcement.

[Your church's name] is joining the UCC's Our Faith Our Vote campaign to register voters, educate ourselves on important issues at stake in the election, and encourage voter participation. The Our Faith Our Vote committee will hold a voter registration table at church [insert dates]. Please come by the table to register yourself and learn more about the importance of voting. If you would like to volunteer to be a member of the Our Faith Our Vote committee, contact [insert your contact info] or come to our next meeting on [insert date].



How to Organize a Candidate Event

Many people do not vote because they don't feel connected to the candidates or issues at stake in an election. Holding candidate forums helps open communication between candidates and their constituents and gets people interested in an election. What better place than your church to hold an open dialogue? Candidates for public office may be invited to speak at your church in their capacity as a candidate or as an individual. Candidate forums and debates held by UCC churches can help improve and redirect the political dialogue that has become increasingly divisive. We have the ability to set the tone of the debate and demand a higher standard of discourse.

Invite the Candidates

Have your Our Faith Our Vote committee pick a time and date to invite candidates to a forum or debate. You might want to find out if other churches in your community are interested in working together to set up and publicize the event. You will be more likely to get candidates to attend a forum if it is sponsored by multiple churches and/or groups in your community.

Send an invitation letter to the candidates well before the planned event and follow up with a phone call. Be sure to invite candidates from all parties in order to remain nonpartisan and 501c3 compliant. It may take some time to find a date that will work for the schedules of the candidates in a race. Be flexible.

Plan the Format

There are many ways to set up a candidate forum. Here are some of the common formats you can choose from:

- Allow the candidates to give prepared remarks and have people ask follow-up questions.;
- Have prepared questions to ask the candidates on themes important to your church and community.
- Pass out index cards to the audience to write questions on and pass them in to be read on the day of the event or solicit questions from members via email or question box after services prior to the event. Leave enough time at the beginning for the candidates to give opening statements. Give candidates the same amount of time to make their closing remarks.

Make sure to have your moderator thank the candidates for their attendance and to remind people of voting day and encourage them to get out and vote.

Publicize the Event

- Post on your church's social media.
- Include brief notices in the newsletters of churches, campus groups, community-based organizations, and other groups related to the ministry of your church.
- Ask radio stations to run public service announcements.
- Ask to be listed in calendars of events in the local newspapers.
- Display posters in places frequented by your target audience.
- Ask your minister to announce the event during church service.
- Ask the mission, social action or interest groups at your church to help get the word out.
- Make sure to invite the youth group and get them involved in planning the forum or debate.
- Invite the local newspaper and TV stations to cover your candidate forum or debate. This is a great way to get coverage of the issues out to a broader audience. It also helps demonstrate that UCC churches are engaged in the political process and secures press connections to use during and after the election.

Appearing at Separate Events/Limiting the Number of Candidates

You are not required to have all candidates speak on the same Sunday, or at the same event. However, you must provide equal access to other candidates in the same race. It is permissible to invite them to speak on successive Sundays as part of the regular worship service or organize evening forums. Inviting one candidate to speak at a traditionally well-attended event while inviting another to speak at a normally sparsely attended event is not providing an equal opportunity.

If the number of candidates for a particular office is too large to be practical during a forum or debate, your church may limit the number of invitees provided that you adopt and consistently apply reasonable and objective criteria for deciding between candidates. For example, you may invite the candidates from the two major political parties and a number of other candidates who have attained a predetermined proportion of popular support based on a credible, independent poll.

Please remember the following when organizing your candidate debate or forum:

- Questions for the candidates should be prepared and presented by an independent nonpartisan committee or individuals;
- Topics discussed by the candidates should cover a broad range of issues that the candidate would address if elected;
- Each candidate must be given an equal opportunity to present their views on the issues discussed;
- Do not ask candidates to agree or disagree with positions, agendas, platforms, or statements of your church or organization; and
- Make sure the moderator does not imply approval or disapproval of the candidates.

How to Keep Our Elections Safe

Become a Poll Worker or Poll Chaplain

Poll workers are election officers who volunteer to help run a polling location. Poll chaplains are lay people and clergy whose presence at the polls is meant to deescalate and keep the peace. Both roles can provide trusted information on election day and help the day go smoothly. Make sure your committee knows who in the congregation is a poll worker or chaplain so that they can help your committee stay informed, and your committee can help support these front-line workers on election day. You can learn more at <https://www.powerthepolls.org/> and <https://www.turnoutsunday.com/volunteer-chaplain>.

Your Our Faith Our Vote committee can also organize congregants to provide food and water or act as faith observers at the polls by standing outside of the polling location with nonpartisan signs (check local election guidelines before planning).

Spread the Word About Election Protection Resources

In advance of the election, your Our Faith Our Vote committee should also circulate the Election Protection Hotline to your congregation. If you have any questions about voting or if you or someone you see at the polls encounter difficulty when attempting to vote, you can call the Hotline. If you are at your polling location when you face this difficulty, find a poll worker or poll chaplain who can get help.

The national, nonpartisan Election Protection coalition, of which the United Church of Christ is a member, was formed to ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process. Made up of more than 100 local, state and national partners, Election Protection works year-round to advance and defend the right to vote. Election Protection provides Americans from coast to coast with comprehensive voting information on how they can make sure their vote is counted. Election Protection focuses on the voter - not on the political horse race - and provides guidance, information and help to any American, regardless of who that voter is casting a ballot for.

If you have any questions about voting or encounter difficulty when attempting to cast your ballot: call the Election Protection Helplines!

📞 **English: 866-OUR-VOTE 866-687-8683**

📞 **Spanish: 888-VE-Y-VOTA 888-839-8682**

📞 **Asian Languages: 888-API-VOTE 888-274-8683**

📞 **Arabic: 844-YALLA-US 844-925-5287**



HOW TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY PRESENCE

Engaging with social media in an advocacy setting is a powerful way to raise awareness, build momentum, and mobilize communities around important causes. Social media platforms allow individuals and organizations to share stories, data, and calls to action quickly and effectively. Through these platforms, faithful advocates can generate visibility for issues that may otherwise go unnoticed, creating public pressure and fostering a sense of solidarity among supporters.

When it comes to communicating with elected officials, social media can be especially effective. Lawmakers and their staff closely monitor platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Bluesky, and Instagram to stay attuned to public sentiment and emerging issues. A well-timed post tagging an official or joining a trending conversation can catch their attention and reinforce the idea that constituents are watching and engaged.

By leveraging social media, advocates can help ensure their voices are not only heard—but seen—by those in power.

As we engage online, it's essential to stay respectful—even when disagreeing—and to reflect the love, dignity, and compassion of the Gospel in both tone and content. These platforms can be a divisive, polarizing space with algorithms which can uplift hateful language and violent imagery at the expense of nuanced conversation. This environment makes it even more important for us to be intentional and lead with empathy, patience, and justice in our digital advocacy.

How to Build a Successful Social Media Advocacy Presence

Anytime you take action, whether you're writing a letter or participating in a protest, share that action via social media and tag your elected officials or decision makers. And feel free to share what you think about the decisions of people in power as well!



Follow these tips when looking to post on social media to advocate on an issue:

Know Your Audience: Make sure to tailor your message to the platform and the people you're trying to reach. When addressing elected officials, be clear, concise, and informed. Do research beforehand around their priorities and connect your message to issues they care about.

Use Engaging Visuals: Images and short videos are powerful tools to catch the eye of scrollers and to get your message across. Don't just talk about the issues you care about—show examples of them! Short videos have increasingly become the most effective means to communicate on social media. Try and keep videos to less than 60 seconds, and make it interesting by introducing movement, doing an activity while you speak, or making your background dynamic and colorful.

Always Tag Your Elected Officials: When posting about an issue, tag relevant officials and use appropriate hashtags to increase visibility. This will help get their attention!

Use Credible Sources: Do not assume every article, story, or photo you see online is true. Before reposting, check your sources and confirm you are sharing accurate information. If you realize you are spreading misinformation, make sure to correct your mistake!

Stay Respectful: The internet can be a hostile place, so let your digital actions be a witness to patience, humility, and empathy.

Embrace Your Faith: Leaning into faith language can be impactful because it grounds the message in shared moral values, helps build bridges across political divides, and invites elected officials to consider policy through a lens of compassion and conscience.

Lean Into Community: Don't just inform your audience about issues—invite them to take action! See someone whose posts you admire? Follow them! Remember, there are other people on the other side of the screen. Social media platforms can be a fruitful place of community building, spiritual formation, and movement solidarity. Lean into this.



Need inspiration? Check out these sample social media posts for a variety of online platforms:

FACEBOOK

**United Church of Christ Washington D.C. Office** ...
@justiceucc

📍 Today our congregation marched at the state capitol to call for the protection of SNAP benefits and draw attention to the issue of food insecurity right here in our community.

Too many families are struggling to make ends meet, and no one should have to choose between paying bills and feeding their children. Scripture calls us to "share your bread with the hungry" (Isaiah 58:7), and this bill reflects that calling in action.

Senator Husted, I respectfully ask you to vote YES on S.100 and help protect SNAP benefits so we all can #EndHunger in our community.

👥 Friends, let's continue to raise our voices together! Reach out to your elected official and send message to support this critical program today!



👍❤️ 62 1 comment 6 shares

👍 Like 🔍 Comment 📧 Send ➦ Share

BLUESKY

**United Church of Christ Washington D.C. Office**
@justiceucc.bsky.social

@SenJohnHusted As a person of faith, I believe no family should go hungry.

I urge you to vote YES on S.100 and support the protection of SNAP and stand with those in need. Loving our neighbors means ensuring they have food on the table. #EndHunger

X (FORMERLY TWITTER)

**UCC Washington D.C. Office**
@justice_ucc

@SenJohnHusted As a person of faith, I believe no family should go hungry.

I urge you to vote YES on S.100 and support the protection of SNAP and stand with those in need. Loving our neighbors means ensuring they have food on the table. #EndHunger

INSTAGRAM

**UCC Washington D.C. Office**
@justice_ucc

Vote YES on S. 100



Call your elected officials!

justice_ucc Today our congregation marched at the state capitol to call for the protection of SNAP benefits and draw attention to the issue of food insecurity right here in our community. Too many families are struggling to make ends meet, and no one should have to choose between paying bills and feeding their children. Scripture calls us to "share your bread with the hungry" (Isaiah 58:7), and this bill reflects that calling in action.

@senjohnhusted, I respectfully ask you to vote YES on S.100 and help protect SNAP benefits so we all can #EndHunger in our community.

Friends, let's continue to raise our voices together! Reach out to your elected official and send a message to support this critical program today!

Want additional examples? Follow the UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy on social media!

Instagram: @justice_ucc X: @justice_ucc
Facebook: @justiceUCC Bluesky: @justiceUCC

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are an excellent way to expand on an article or respond with another viewpoint. This section is one of the most widely read sections of the paper. Follow these simple steps to get started:

1. Respond to an article in the paper. Unless your paper has a “free for all” section or prints letters about a lack of coverage on a specific issue, you should assume that it is the paper’s policy to only publish LTEs responding to a story, column, or editorial. Begin your letter by citing that piece by name, date, and author.

2. Follow the paper’s directions. Most outlets publish instructions on how to submit a letter to the editor. Look for this in the Opinion section on the outlet’s website or simply google the name of the paper and “letter to the editor.” The directions will include the word limit, email address for where to send your letter, and often guidelines on what the paper looks for in LTEs. Failing to follow the instructions will greatly decrease the chances of your letter being published.

3. Share your expertise. If you are specifically qualified to speak to the topic you’re addressing be sure to include that in your letter. If you are clergy writing about an issue of moral conscience or something deeply effecting your congregation, a doctor writing about a health issue, an electric car owner writing about hybrid cars, or you are writing about energy issues and have solar panels on your roof—share that information up front.

4. Refer to the legislator or corporation you are trying to influence by name. If your letter includes a legislator’s name, in almost all cases their staff will give the lawmaker the letter to read. Corporations also monitor the media, especially in areas where they have offices or plants.

5. Write the letter in your own words. Editors prefer to run letters that are original and from a person living in the outlet’s circulation area. Be sure that you take the time to write the letter in your own words.

6. Refute, advocate, and make a call to action. Most letters to the editor follow a standard format. Open your letter by refuting the claim made in the original story the paper ran. Then use the next few sentences to back up your claims and advocate for your position. Try to focus on the positive. Close your letter by explaining what you think needs to happen now; make your call to action.

7. Include your contact information. Be sure to include your name, town of residence, and day-time phone number; the paper will contact you before printing your letter.

8. To improve the chances of having your letter published, submit it as soon as possible – within twenty-four hours if you can and no more than three days after the article you are responding to appears. Refer to the article you are addressing by title and date it appeared.

Template for a Letter to the Editor:

Date

Name of Editor

Name of Publication

Office Address

City, State Zip

To the Editor of _____,

[Tell readers what you're writing about, and make them want to read more] [Explain what the letter is about at the start. Tell your key point at the beginning]

[Explain why the issue is important - explain the issue and its importance simply to those who do not share your interest or background, using plain language that most people will understand] [Give evidence for any praise or criticism - if you are writing a letter discussing a past or pending action, be clear in showing why this will have good or bad results] [State your opinion about what should be done - you can write a letter just to "vent," or to support or criticize a certain action or policy, but you may also have suggestions about what could be done to improve the situation - if so, add these as well, be specific, the more good reasons you can give to back up your suggestions, the better]

[Summary of issue and why you are writing]

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Your name, typed

Your Title

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip

Your email and/or phone number



Writing an Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed)

You can also write an opinion piece. Follow these steps to get started:

1. Choose a current topic or “news peg” on which to hang your opinion. Express your point of view clearly and boldly in the first paragraph.
2. Use simple, short sentences and paragraphs. Avoid jargon.
3. Include at least one memorable phrase for use as a pull-out quote.
4. Close on a strong note. A short, powerful, last paragraph should drive your point home. Make it personal (avoid form letters) and provide accurate information.
5. Think of images or ways to make your message powerful and concrete. Stories and personal experiences are often very persuasive. Create a picture in the reader’s mind.

Template for an Op-Ed

[Introduction sentence setting the scene and grabbing your reader’s attention. This includes the news hook – what are you responding to?]

[Statement of argument – either explicit or implied. Should be based on evidence (such as stats, news, reports from credible organizations, expert quotes, scholarship, history, first-hand experience)]

[Introduce first point.] [Provide evidence for first point.] [Conclusion]

[Introduce second point.] [Provide evidence for second point.] [Conclusion]

[Add a few sentences here preempting your potential critics by acknowledging flaws in your argument and address any obvious counterarguments.]

[Conclude by circling back to what you said at the beginning – mention the new hook, or speak to the attention-grabbing information you used at the beginning]

Helpful Resources for Working with Congress and the Presidential Administration

1. Want to check who your federal and state representative are?

Refer to this site: <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>

2. Want to watch votes and other proceedings on the floor of Congress?

For the House of Representatives, refer to this site: <https://clerk.house.gov/>

For the Senate, refer to this site: https://www.senate.gov/legislative/floor_activity_pail.htm

3. Looking for live commentary and coverage of Congress?

Watch CSPAN: <https://www.c-span.org/congress>

4. Want to learn more about the weekly floor schedules for the House and Senate? Refer to these sites:

<https://democraticcloakroom.house.gov/weekly-floor-schedule>

<https://repcloakroom.house.gov/> or @SenateCloakroom on X

<https://www.democrats.senate.gov/floor>

5. Want to find the days when the House and Senate are in session/recess?

Refer to this site: <https://www.congress.gov/days-in-session>

6. Want to see all the proposed rules by the current administration?

For regulations, refer to this site: <https://www.regulations.gov/>

For executive orders, refer to this site: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/>

7. Want to look up current and past Supreme Court cases?

Refer to his site: <https://www.supremecourt.gov/docket/docket.aspx?Search=&type=Docket>



FAITH GROUNDING AND TALKING POINTS ON THE ISSUES

As people of faith, it is critical that we root our advocacy in the values and tenets of our faith and tradition as well as to speak to the critical issues of the day. Below you will find examples of faith grounding principles and talking points on several issues of importance to UCC churches that you can weave into your messages to policymakers, op-eds, or even sermons. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of issues, nor a complete summary of talking points but rather a helpful guide to get you started.

More detailed information on these issues and faith framing is available on [UCC.org](https://ucc.org).

Immigration Justice

Faith Grounding:

- “When the immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the immigrant. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:33-34).¹
- “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me: for it is the least among you all of you is the greatest.” (Luke 9:48).²
- The UCC affirms a vision of God’s family that is all-inclusive, accepting, and welcoming, recognizing the dignity of every human being; and rejects the divisive discourse of fear, xenophobia, bigotry, and racism that pervades the discourse on global forced migration, including as it relates to policy debates on immigration and refugee issues.³
- Jesus Christ himself was a refugee, so we are called to recognize the face of Jesus in today’s migrants seeking safety.

1 “On Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Church”, General Synod 31, 2017, <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS-31-immigrant-welcoming-denominaton.pdf>

2 “Protection of Immigrant Children and Their Families”, General Synod 32, 2019, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Plenary-Immigrant-Children.pdf>

3 “Addressing the State of Global Forced Migration”, General Synod 32, 2019, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/3-Global-Forced-Migration.pdf>

Talking Points:

- The United Church of Christ recognizes the ongoing struggles of refugees and migrants who come to the United States seeking safety, security, freedom and opportunity but instead experience suffering as they fear discrimination, raids, deportation, and witness their families being torn apart.⁴
- As the UCC, we follow a higher calling, understanding God's executive orders include welcoming immigrants in our midst, loving our neighbors, and caring for those in need as primary principles in our faith tradition.
- We believe that all people, including immigrants, are made in the image of God. Yet the ban of asylum seekers, the building of border walls, and the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants fails to respect the God-given dignity of every person and our call to welcome the stranger.
- As a Christian denomination called to love Jesus Christ, an immigrant himself, we cannot condone immigration policy that fundamentally violates our call to love and mercy.
- At a time when climate change, wars, civil unrest, poverty, and persecution cause more and more involuntary human migration, the United States ceasing asylee and refugee resettlement is antithetical to teachings of Jesus and our call to love our neighbor as ourselves. No one chooses to be a refugee.
- The United Church of Christ is an Immigrant Welcoming Denomination, meaning we work to stop deportations, support Sanctuary cities, accompany asylum seekers and advocate for just immigration reforms that include a pathway to citizenship
- For updated information and resources on immigration justice, visit ucc.org/justice-immigration-2.

4 "On Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Church", General Synod 31, 2017, <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS-31-immigrant-welcoming-denominatonon.pdf>



LGBTQ+ Justice

Faith Grounding:

- As Christians, we are many members, but we are one body in Christ (Romans 12:4), and Jesus calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31) without being judgmental (Matthew 7: 1-2) nor disparaging of others (Luke 18:9-14).⁵
- We are called by Christ's example, to proclaim release to the captives and set at liberty the oppressed (Luke 4:18).⁶
- We affirm that we are called to act as agents of reconciliation and wholeness within the world and within the Church itself.⁷
- The United Church of Christ reaffirms and proclaims people of transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse experiences are beloved by God, with unique gifts and graces from the Divine for the life of the church and society and are among the neighbors Jesus commands us to love and treat with worth and dignity.⁸
- It is Good News that sexual orientation and gender identity or expression are gifts from God.⁹
- Through past General Synod resolutions, UCC delegates have demonstrated strong commitments to LGBTQ+ justice by calling on UCC churches to covenant as Open and Affirming, advocating for a ban on conversion therapy, and affirming the dignity of transgender and nonbinary folks.¹⁰

5 "Calling On United Church of Christ Congregations to Covenant as Open and Affirming", General Synod 15, 1985, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/85-GS-76.pdf>

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 "Actively Affirming the Human Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons", General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Human-Dignity-Trans-Nonbinary-Persons-Plenary-Final-1.pdf>

9 "A Resolution to Ban the Practice of Conversion Therapy", General Synod 33, 2021, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/21-GS-35.pdf>

10 "Continuation of Open and Affirming Covenant", General Synod 15, 1985, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/85-GS-76.pdf>; "To Ban the Practice of Conversion Therapy", General Synod 33, 2021 <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/21-GS-35.pdf>; "Actively Affirming the Human Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons", General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Human-Dignity-Trans-Nonbinary-Persons-Plenary-Final-1.pdf>

Talking Points:

- Our faith teaches us that transgender, nonbinary, and intersex people are beloved children of God, are created in the image of God, and are deserving of dignity and equal protection under the law.
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community have far more challenges than advantages in all aspects of their lives. Hateful, discriminatory bills threaten their well-being and can worsen mental health outcomes for an already vulnerable population.
- Let us work together for a world where all children of God are cherished, protected, and free to be their beautiful selves.
- We believe that the fluidity of God's design is wondrous and vast. No matter who you are or how you identify within your sexuality gender, or beyond, God makes no mistakes. You are beloved and wonderfully made.
- We stand with those facing systemic oppression at the intersection of gender & sexuality by offering care, sex positive education & curriculum, gender & bodily autonomy education & programming, policy & advocacy, and partnership & outreach opportunities.
- LGBTQ+ folks face higher rates of discrimination in the United States and around the world, especially when taking into account other intersecting, marginalized identities.
- Queer and trans youth are particularly at risk for poor mental health outcomes and suicide attempts. We know that anti-LGBTQ+ policies, as well as anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, significantly worsen the mental health of queer youth and adults, an already vulnerable community. We also know that respecting pronouns, making schools gender-affirming and inclusive, and having supportive loved ones lowers suicide rates.
- Within the trans community, Black trans women are the most targeted by deadly violence. LGBTQ+ rights are truly a matter of life or death. We must do everything in our power to bring about a just, safe world for the queer community.
- Each individual is the expert in their lives. When we hold these experiences deeply and lean into the mystery of creation, we leave ourselves open to witness God's kin-dom in bloom.



Environmental Justice

Faith Grounding:

- Our faith teaches that God formed humankind from the earth and breathed life into us to be its caretakers. Fulfilling this role requires that we hold those who have harmed creation accountable for the damage caused, and work to repair and prevent further harm.
- We are called to protect God's creation. The earth sustains us and deserves to be handled with care. As stewards we are to use and not abuse, respect the world as a sacred "trust;" and continually demonstrate gratitude for God's good gifts.¹¹
- The United Church of Christ recognizes the scale and immediacy of the climate crisis, the urgent need to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, and the moral obligation to embrace the unprecedented socio-economic changes that we must effect and engage as opportunities to create fair paying jobs, secure clean air and water, redress manifestations of environmental racism and pursue a just transition to clean and renewable energy.¹²
- The UCC recognizes the disproportionate impact climate change is already having on those living in poverty and in the least developed countries, the elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases, and recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy plan in a way that is both just and compassionate.¹³
- Through past General Synod resolutions, UCC delegates have urged strong commitments to climate action at the federal level of the US government, such as transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy by 2040, reducing plastic pollution, and affirming the intersectionality of climate justice with all justice issues.¹⁴

11 "Environment, Solid Waste, and Ecologically Sound Lifestyle", General Synod 17, 1989, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/89-GS-63.pdf>

12 Let Justice Roll Down -- Declaring Support for the Green New Deal and Affirming the Intersectionality of Climate Justice with all Justice Issues", General Synod 32, 2019, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Comm.-15-Supporting-the-Green-New-Deal-Final.pdf>

13 "Resolution Urging Divestment from Fossil Fuel Companies", General Synod 29, 2013, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/13-GS-25.pdf>

14 "Environment, Solid Waste and Ecologically Sound Lifestyle", General Synod 17, 1989, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/13-GS-25.pdf>; "Action on National Toxic Injustice Crisis", General Synod 15, 1985, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/85-GS-55.pdf>; "The Use of Plastic Foam (i.e. Styrofoam®)", General Synod 32, 2019 <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/5-Plastic-Foam.pdf>; "Support of Calhoun County, Alabama and Citizens of Communities Living Near Chemical Weapons Stockpiles", General Synod 24, 2003, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/03-GS-42.pdf>; "Urging Divestment from Fossil Fuel Companies", General Synod; 29, 2013 <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/13-GS-25.pdf>; "ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN EAST ST. LOUIS, ILLINOIS", General Synod 19, 1993, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/93-GS-48.pdf>

Talking Points:

- The burdens of pollution do not fall on everyone equally. Climate-related disasters do not affect everyone the same. Race, poverty, and other societal inequities all play a role in who currently suffers the most and who faces the greatest impending dangers.
- Indigenous communities around the world are facing land grabs by governments and development of their sacred land against their will. Despite “making up less than 5 percent of the global population, indigenous peoples manage more than 80 percent of global biodiversity.”¹⁵
- In the United States, communities of color and lower-income communities are much more likely to be exposed to environmental hazards and pollution in their neighborhoods. Historically, the UCC has played an instrumental role in addressing toxic waste and environmental racism.¹⁶
- The UCC affirms the intersectionality of climate justice with all justice issues.¹⁷ Environmental racism impacts public health outcomes including higher rates of cancer, lung problems, asthma, heart attacks, high blood pressure, and low birth weight.
- Often people who have contributed the least to climate change, including those in the Global South, are those who are impacted the most by global warming. Scientists estimate that by 2070, large regions of Africa, Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Australia could be inhabitable due to extreme increases in hot temperatures.¹⁸
- Despite the Global North contributing to the majority of climate change, the Southern areas of the world are already suffering much more acutely from the climate crisis. If dramatic actions are not taken, as many as 3.5 billion of God’s children will have to flee their homes as climate refugees in less than fifty years.¹⁹

15 *Faiths for Forests: Declaration and Action Agenda*, Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, [*Faiths-for-forests-declaration.pdf*](#)

16 *A Movement Is Born: Environmental Justice and the UCC - United Church of Christ*, https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/efam/environmental-justice/a_movement_is_born_environmental_justice_and_the_ucc/

17 *Let Justice Roll Down -- Declaring Support for the Green New Deal and Affirming the Intersectionality of Climate Justice with all Justice Issues*, General Synod 32, 2019, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Comm.-15-Supporting-the-Green-New-Deal-Final.pdf>

18 *One-third of people will face unlivable heat by 2070 unless greenhouse gas emissions are cut* | World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/05/temperature-climate-change-greenhouse-gas-niche-emissions-hot/>

19 *One-third of people will face unlivable heat by 2070 unless greenhouse gas emissions are cut* | World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/05/temperature-climate-change-greenhouse-gas-niche-emissions-hot/>

Economic Justice

Faith Grounding:

- “Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.” (Proverbs 13:41)
- Throughout scripture and history ancient and recent, the Spirit of God speaks unequivocally through Jesus, prophets, and people-powered movements to uplift the need for communal economies that ensure each person’s material needs are met, and creation’s resources are stewarded in ways that guarantee sustained renewal.
- Abundance for all is our divine birthright, by virtue of belonging in the web of existence. It is also completely, practically feasible. There are enough resources and food to ensure that all are sufficiently sheltered, fed, cared for, and kept safe.
- General Synod affirms upholding the common good and reclaims the imperative to share God’s resources equitably and sustainably with all God’s children; and to affirm the role of public institutions paid for by taxes for ensuring essential services and protecting the good of the wider community.²⁰
- General Synod advocates for a more just economy that raises the minimum wage and continues to increase it in accordance with living costs.²¹
- When economic systems and their governing powers push these rights and equity out of balance, God’s directives are similarly clearcut: relieve debts (Jubilee) and return wealth and land to those from whom it was unjustly stolen or withheld (Reparations).
- Extractive, racial capitalism is the overwhelmingly dominant economic system in our modern world, building on several centuries of genocide, slavery, plunder, theft, and exploitation. This death-dealing system is anti-Christ: antithetical to the dreams of God and any viable future for our planet and all that sustains or finds life on it.
- In the United Church of Christ, we have gathered to name, specifically, the ways we are called to manifest Jubilee, Abundance, and Reparations, so that all might thrive. We call ourselves to solidarity, advocacy, and action with those fighting and working towards God’s vision for economically just societies.
- Over the decades, led by the people in our churches, the UCC has passed several relevant resolutions to direct our shared work and give us stories, opportunities, talking points, and actions that empower us in the pews, the streets, the boardrooms, and the halls of power.

20 “For the Common Good”, General Synod 25, 2005, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/05-GS-35.pdf>

21 “A More Just Economy: \$15 Minimum Wage, Living Wages and Job Creation”, General Synod 31, 2017, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/17-GS-47.pdf>

Talking Points:

- Our society is wealthy enough to take care of all who call it home. Each person is an image-bearer of the divine, and we are called to treat them accordingly. Even when someone is unable to work for compensation, for any reason, we want our shared resources/taxes to be stewarded in ways that ensure all are housed, with enough food to eat, comprehensive health care, and straightforward ways to access what they need.
- Those able to work require a living wage as compensation for their labor. A living wage is one that enables a person to comfortably secure food, housing, transportation, and care for themselves where they live and work. Research shows that when people have what they need to not just survive, but thrive, the surrounding community's well-being is similarly impacted to the benefit of all.
- Communities are safer for all who call them home when people have what they need to live.
- Housing is a human right. We know God calls for safe shelter for all. Moreover, providing safe, affordable, clean housing is exponentially cheaper on taxpayers and communities than criminalizing and incarcerating people, especially those experiencing or at-risk of houselessness.
- Health care is a human right. Our profit-driven "health" insurance system is governed by motives that stand in the way of the bodily and mental health needs people and our communities need to thrive. Allowing people to lose out on necessary care, or to go into exorbitant debt to receive it, is a grave sin. Medical debt must be abolished and often can be for pennies on the dollar for what the care was priced at. Accessible, guaranteed health care is a powerful antidote to poverty, preventable illness and death, and is also a prescription for a healthy, robust national economy. All should be treated as we ourselves wish to be treated.
- Workers deserve protections, whatever industry they are in: protection from harassment and wage theft, protection from safety hazards and overwork, and protection to organize for these rights. Protected workers make for safer and wealthier communities and lift up historically marginalized groups.
- Our country's economy is intimately connected to the workings of the global economy and countries around the world. Too many countries that provide artificially cheap goods with underpaid labor we take from are the same that were exploited and enslaved by colonial powers for centuries. They now owe debts to these same powers in their attempts to build their own growth, which in fact inhibits it. The wealth of impoverished countries belongs to them: all debt must be erased for collective thriving

Racial Justice

Faith Grounding:

- The Bible, from its first chapter (Genesis 1 :27) to its last book (Revelations 7:9) speaks of one people without reference to race and indeed explicitly stresses our common roots, noting that “from one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth” (Acts: 17:26).
- Christianity began as a movement of revolutionary love. We have an obligation to continue on this humble path of loving kindness as we join the movement toward racial justice.
- God created humankind in God’s image and likeness, so all people share equal status as human beings.
- The United Church of Christ has a long history of advocating in support of racial justice. In 2003, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ declared itself to be an anti-racist church.²² In 2021, General Synod declared racism a public health crisis.²³ In 2023, General Synod confronted the idolatry of white supremacy.²⁴
- At Riverside Church in 1967, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called on us to not only respond like the Good Samaritan did, with compassion for the suffering we encounter, but to ask why the road to Jericho was so dangerous to begin with for this poor traveler. Why is it, that a person is left for dead on the side of the road and their only hope is left up to the kindness of one person, rather than in a society that sustains safety for all? Racism and white supremacy have been longstanding, and present, dangers on this proverbial road to Jericho.
- In the Hebrew Scriptures, God implores the newly emancipated Israelites to remember their history and to teach it to their children, saying “But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children— how you once...” (Deut. 4:9-10). The people are reminded to remember their own histories and the stories of God’s unfolding love in action, and to hold that memory as central to their communal identity. And not just the triumphant or easy parts, but also the hardships and suffering. As the people journeyed through the wilderness from emancipation to freedom, God knew they needed to hold close the truth of what had been so that they could imagine who they were being called to become.

22 “Calling the United Church of Christ to Be an Anti-Racist Church”, General Synod 24, 2003, [CALLING-THE-UNITED-CHURCH-OF-CHRIST-TO-BE-AN-ANTI-RACIST-CHURCH.pdf](#)

23 “A Resolution to Declare and Respond to Racism as a Public Health Crisis”, General Synod 33, 2021, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/21-GS-12.pdf>

24 “Calling on United Church of Christ Local Churches to Witness ‘A White Supremacy-Free Zone’ & Confronting White Supremacy”, General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/White-Supremacy-Free-Zone-Confronting-White-Supremacy-Plenary-Final-1.pdf>

Talking Points:

- Remembering and teaching the history of racial oppression and white supremacy is an essential spiritual practice for communities of liberation.
- Racism is present in every system in our society and therefore must be addressed at a systematic level. Responding to racism calls for us to oppose poverty, not the poor; to oppose the racist policies and social conditions related to drug use, not the people who use them; and to oppose the criminal legal system, not the incarcerated. Eradicating racism will happen only as we take action to produce conditions that will allow for the fullness of life for those who have suffered its destructive impact.
- We must work to reorient institutions that perpetuate racist practices and dismantle systems that coalesce to produce racial injustice. Engaging in this kind of action is an act of faith and faithfulness to God.
- Current cultural and ethnic shifts encourage embracing inclusive theological, biblical, and diverse faith traditions beyond Eurocentrism - according to the Brookings Institutes research the nation is diversifying faster than predicted, “the new estimates show that nearly four of 10 Americans identify with a race or ethnic group other than white and suggest that the 2010 to 2020 decade will be the first in the nation’s history in which the white population declined in numbers.” A demographic shift represents an opportunity to reimagine the beautiful stories and experiences our siblings bring to the UCC.
- Christianity began and flourished for centuries alongside the Jewish and Muslim faiths on the African continent. It is vital and important for the Christian Church to remember that our history is not complete until we go back further than colonial narratives. Grounded in the truth of history and living faithfully means actively participating in the work of restorative justice. God is calling the Christian Church to restore a broken world and address the harm of racism.



Safety Net Programs and Federal Benefits

Faith Grounding:

- The teachings of Jesus Christ instruct us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and in prison, and above all else, love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 25:40-45). What we do for the most vulnerable people in our world, we do for God.
- As Christians, we know that people should not live in or die from poverty in our rich nation. We deserve to live in an economy where all God's children can survive and thrive.
- I Cor. 11: 20 offers a challenge to those who share in the Lord's Supper but are concerned only about their own consumption while others go hungry. And Deut. 15: 11 commands us to open wide our hands to the poor and needy, not to turn our private or public backs to those who go without; God's judgment is rendered on societies regarding how the poor, the hungry, the widow, the orphan are treated-- not on government alone, nor solely on the private sectors, but all of society.²⁵
- As Matthew 6:21 says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The fiscal decisions the federal government makes have long term impacts on the wellbeing of all of us.
- As early as the Eighteenth and Twentieth General Synods, the United Church of Christ affirmed its commitment to ending hunger, including childhood hunger, in the United States.²⁶
- During the Twenty-First General Synod, the United Church of Christ set a precedent for opposing all efforts to dismantle critical federal welfare programs by passing a resolution disapproving of the Welfare Reform Act, which would restrict access to federal benefits.²⁷
- During the Twenty-Seventh General Synod, the United Church of Christ passed a resolution proclaiming that healthcare was not only a basic human right, but also a basic human need.²⁸
- During the Twenty-Ninth General Synod, the United Church of Christ passed a resolution calling for advocacy in support of additional federal funding for affordable housing.²⁹

25 "A Call to a Covenant for the Future Regarding Hunger in the United States", General Synod 20, 1995, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/95-GS-19.pdf>

26 "A Call to a Covenant for the Future Regarding Hunger in the United States", General Synod 20, 1995; 95-GS-19.pdf, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/95-GS-19.pdf>. "Campaign to End Childhood Hunger", General Synod 20, 1995 <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/95-GS-19.pdf>

27 "Welfare Reform", General Synod 21, 1997, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/97-GS-34.pdf>

28 "An Urgent Call for Advocacy in Support of Healthcare for All", General Synod 27, 2009 <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/09-GS-44.pdf>

29 "Advocating for Funding to Construct Quality Affordable Housing", General Synod 29, 2013, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/13-GS-61.pdf>

Talking Points

- We are called, as people of faith, to stand on the side of the poor, the sick, and the hungry, and to tell our government that every attack on our healthcare, food assistance, and benefits, is an attack on all of us.
- As people of faith, we lament all attempts to cut our healthcare, housing, and food assistance to pay for tax cuts for the rich. We stand with the hungry, we stand with the sick, we stand with our low-income communities and all those who are suffering from the cruel policies and funding cuts being considered by the U.S. government.
- We need a government that feeds the hungry, enables the sick to be healed without going into debt, and provides reasonable priced housing that correlates to the federal minimum wage.
- The UCC won't stop resisting all attempts to steal from the poor to pass even more wealth to the rich and powerful.
- Greed and selfishness are fundamentally sinful. The UCC rejects elements of greed that contribute to inequity in housing and healthcare for all God's people.



Civil and Human Rights

Faith Grounding:

- As Christians, we know that all human beings are created equal, no matter what differences their bodies and minds may exhibit, in order to properly follow Jesus Christ's call to love all.
- Paul's words in I Corinthians 12:21-26 remind us that the church is a body, with each part playing a crucial role. When parts of the body are excluded—whether by physical barriers, social norms, or cultural misunderstandings—the whole body suffers.
- As people of faith, we believe in upholding the dignity of each person, which means protecting their sacred right to participate in the democratic process, unencumbered by voter suppression.
- As followers of the One who proclaimed freedom and release to the prisoner, it is incumbent upon us to work to build a justice system that honors human dignity and allows for the possibility of redemption of all people.
- We witness Zechariah's speech-stealing angelic vision and his response that dreams of the dawn of God's tender mercy. We behold Gabriel's message of impossible possibilities to Mary and her revolutionary song that offers a vision of table-turning justice. Even Joseph gets in on the action, with his own dreamtime angels inspiring him to dream beyond social conventions and embrace the prophetic vision God has for him and his family. All of these moments are dreams toward freedom. Each of them gives voice and substance, flesh one might say, to abolitionist visions.
- Jesus commanded his followers to visit those in prison (Matthew 25:36). The letter to the Hebrews goes even further, directing Christians to "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." (Hebrews 13:3)
- As people of faith who follow Christ that proclaimed release to the captive, let us act as Christ's body to proclaim the release of those tortured in our name to create a truly just system of restoration, not retribution.
- The Twelfth General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a "Pronouncement on Human Rights" that denounced torture of any kind and affirmed that the "relationship of God to creation gives all human beings their inalienable human right." And further stated that "rights must be not only declared and codified, but also must be cared for, nurtured and embodied in covenant relationships between persons, groups, nations and between human beings and nature."³⁰
- The Twenty-Fifth General Synod called on the United Church of Christ to prioritize the inclusion of the disabled community in every part of the church, and to advocate against barriers to their ability to thrive in society.³¹ The Thirtieth General Synod called on the United Church of Christ to focus all efforts to end mass incarceration, racial bias in policing, and restoring voting rights for those who

30 "The Pronouncement on Human Rights", General Synod 12, 1979, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/79-GS-31.pdf>

31 "Called to Wholeness in Christ: Becoming a Church Accessible to All", General Synod 25, 2005, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/05-GS-32.pdf>

have served their sentences.³²

- The Thirty-Fourth General Synod called on all settings of the United Church of Christ to work with other faiths and human rights groups, including the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, among others, to condemn the torture of prolonged solitary confinement, work toward its abolition in the United States and around the world, and support humane and restorative alternatives.³³

Talking Points

- We are united with all other Christians in seeing that the inherent dignity of humanity comes from its relationship to the Creator. God made humanity in the divine image – the treatment of any human being speaks volumes about one’s relationship to God. Prolonged solitary confinement and other practices of torture thus not only ignore individual rights but also violate inherent human dignity and worth.
- The scripture demands that Christians reach out to those in prison. Jesus commanded his followers to visit those in prison (Matthew 25:36). The letter to the Hebrews goes even further, directing Christians to “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” (Hebrews 13:3)
- We will continue to witness to the inherent God-given dignity of each person by advocating against prolonged solitary confinement. We will remember those who are in prison, as though we were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though we ourselves were being tortured (Hebrews 13:3).
- Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:21-26 remind us that the church is a body, with each part playing a crucial role. When parts of the body are excluded—whether by physical barriers, social norms, or cultural misunderstandings—the whole body suffers.
- We must proclaim loudly, that we stand with the disabled community, and that the barriers they face are our barriers as well. As Christians, we must pave the way so that all people, no matter their body or mind, thrive.
- Our democratic institutions are contingent on the idea that each person’s voice is represented by their vote. Right now, barriers exist for voters of color, veterans, voters with disabilities, rural voters, new Americans, and young people.
- When people’s votes are suppressed or laws are passed to make it harder to vote, our democracy is diminished. The late representative and voting rights advocate, John R. Lewis, once said, “the right to vote is precious, almost sacred.” As people of faith, we believe in honoring the sacred voice and vote of every person and that free and fair access to the vote is a moral issue.
- Democracy is the political enactment of a spiritual idea - we are all children of God, and therefore, we all deserve a voice in the direction of our country. Democracy honors the sacred worth of all human beings by recognizing that we all have a spark of the divine that allows us to shape our own destiny. The right to vote is a sacred right and must be protected.

32 “Dismantling the New Jim Crow”, General Synod 30, 2015, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/15-GS-38.pdf>

33 “Resolution Condemning Prolonged Solitary Confinement as a Form of Torture”, General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Solitary-Confinement-Plenary-Final-1.pdf>

Reproductive Justice and Abortion

Faith Grounding:

- The Thirty Fourth General Synod “affirms the right of all people to access reproductive healthcare including contraception and abortion”³⁴

The resolution calls upon Local Churches and their members to engage with the Our Whole Lives: Sexuality and Our Faith curriculum to promote holistic sexuality education, including information and education about contraception, and to support and offer access to contraceptives.

It proclaims that forced birth is an act of sexual violence and the choice to have and care for children is a sacred decision which should not be forced upon anyone

It declares that every person seeking an abortion is a beloved child of God, our neighbor, and a person we love

- The Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ reaffirms the historic commitment of this church to recognize and affirm that every human being is created in the image of God and is due respect for their inherent human dignity and rights so that they may not only survive but thrive.³⁵
- “The Twenty-eighth General Synod adopts the resolution “Supporting International Human Rights Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,”³⁶
“Affirms the wide public attention being given to issues related to sexuality and sex roles, particularly as they affect women, but expresses concern regarding the need to explore such issues as they affect men. The 11th General Synod urges the Board for Homeland Ministries, the Office for Church Life and Leadership, conferences, associations, and congregations to develop programs which take into account the needs, experiences and viewpoints of both males and females, and which encourage further understanding of sexual identity; the effects of sex role stereotyping and present economic, legal, political and other societal conditions based upon gender.”³⁷
- “Deplores and condemns the dehumanizing portrayals of women and men, the abuse of children, and the exploitation of sex in printed and electronic media of communication, recognizes the rights of adults to access to sexually explicit materials, and affirms that efforts toward change must recognize First Amendment principles.”³⁸

34 Denouncing the Dobbs Decision and Proclaiming Abortion as Healthcare, General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Abortion-as-Healthcare-Plenary-Final.pdf>

35 “Actively Affirming the Human Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons” General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Human-Dignity-Trans-Nonbinary-Persons-Plenary-Final-1.pdf>

36 “Supporting International Human Rights Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity”, General Synod 28, 2011, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/11-GS-46.pdf>

37 Ibid.

38 “Recommendations in Regard to the Human Sexuality Study”, General Synod 11, 1977, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/77-GS-64.pdf>

Talking Points:

- The United Church of Christ promotes bodily autonomy for all people and supports the rights of each person to access health care that upholds their dignity and humanity. A 2023 resolution, “Denouncing the Dobbs Decision and Proclaiming Abortion as Healthcare” proclaimed abortion as healthcare, forced birth an act of violence, and calls for systemic measures to increase access to the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare.³⁹
- As Christians we believe every human being is created in the image of God and is due respect for their inherent human dignity and rights so that they may not only survive but thrive.
- States that ban and criminalize abortion have higher rates of maternal and infant deaths and increased economic insecurity. Pregnancy-related deaths are on the rise as doctors are afraid of having their license to practice revoked and being jailed for saving lives.
- The majority of people of faith support abortion legality.⁴⁰
- Abortion bans threaten access to contraceptives, emergency medical care, and in vitro fertilization.

39 Denouncing the Dobbs Decision and Proclaiming Abortion as Healthcare, General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Abortion-as-Healthcare-Plenary-Final.pdf>

40 Abortion Views Across All 50 States: Key Insights from PRRI's 2024 American Values Atlas, <https://prri.org/research/abortion-views-across-all-50-states-key-insights-from-prris-2024-american-values-atlas/>



Global Concerns

Faith Grounding:

- “Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.” (Romans 12:16)
- “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.” (1 John 3: 17-18)
- The United Church of Christ, as a Just Peace Church, has long called for peace and justice in the Middle East. In the context of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Twenty Fourth General Synod calls for a consistent and coherent approach to US policy in the Middle East, including, but not limited to, the issues of weapons proliferation and enforcement of United Nations resolutions in a principled way. It also calls upon the U.S. government to work diligently to mend broken fences with countries of the region and the world to reduce feelings of animosity and distrust.⁴¹
- On Israel and Palestine, General Synod has an extensive body of resolutions that oppose violence, call for an end to Israeli occupation and settlement construction, support human rights, call for the protection of children living under Israeli military occupation⁴², support a shared Jerusalem, and support the use of economic measures such as boycotts, divestment, and sanctions to promote peace⁴³. In 2021, the Thirty Third General Synod adopted a resolution that promoted a rights-based approach to peace and justice, naming Israel’s system of laws and legal procedures as apartheid, calling Israeli oppression of Palestinians sin, and rejecting theologies or ideologies that privilege or exclude any group.⁴⁴
- The Thirtieth General Synod calls for the Korean War Armistice Agreement of 1953 to be replaced with a permanent peace treaty, finally bringing an end to the state of war and calling for a mutual commitment to end provocative military exercises on the peninsula, to reduce military expenditures, and to eliminate nuclear weapons on the peninsula, establishing a model for peace, demilitarization, and reconciliation in Northeast Asia.⁴⁵

41 “U.S. Policy in the Middle East,” General Synod 24, 2003, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/03-GS-22.pdf>

42 “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation”, General Synod 31, 2017, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/17-GS-12.pdf>

43 “Proposed Substitute Resolution Concerning Use of Economic Leverage in Promoting Peace in the Middle East,” General Synod 25, 2005., <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/05-GS-40.pdf>

44 “Declaring for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel,” General Synod 33, 2021, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/21-GS-33.pdf>

45 “A Call for Peace, Justice and Reunification in the Korean Peninsula”, General Synod 30, 2015, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/15-GS-39.pdf>

- The Thirty First General Synod calls for continued advocacy to encourage further U.S. administrative actions and congressional legislation to secure the full normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States including an end to the embargo.⁴⁶

Talking Points

- Pentecost shows us as Christians that God seeks to have us understand each other even when we come from different backgrounds and speak different languages. As Christians we must seek to follow God's guidance and work together for justice for all people.
- Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Though we may disagree with our neighboring countries or those of different religions, ethnicities, etc. It should never diminish our love for them and our desire to see justice done onto them as it is ourselves.
- Global Ministries (Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ) core values of presence, community, mutuality, justice, and peace are guides and goals for our global advocacy work. We center the voices and experiences of our global partners in our advocacy to be in solidarity with the disempowered and marginalized around the world and to begin to decolonize our understanding of our global partnerships and the church.

46 "Bring Down the Wall in the Caribbean Ending the United States Embargo on Cuba", General Synod 31, 2017, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/17-GS-23.pdf>



Just Peace

Faith Grounding:

- The Fifteenth General Synod affirmed the United Church of Christ a “Just Peace Church.” In contrast to the theological traditions of just war, Just Peace is rooted in an understanding of shalom in which both peace and justice flourish. Shalom, the biblical concept of human well-being, is not merely the absence of war and violence, but the state of right relationship between all creation and God. Just Peace is grounded in hope. Shalom is the vision that pulls all creation toward a time when weapons are swept off the earth and all creatures lie down together without fear; where all have their own fig tree and dwell secure from want. As Christians, we faithfully believe that peace and justice are possible.⁴⁷
- Nonviolence is a Christian response to conflict shown to us by Jesus in Matthew 5:9 and Romans 12:18. The United Church of Christ, as a Just Peace denomination, recognizes our theological and moral calling to be peacemakers and work together for a just world for all. There are many ways that we employ policy to accomplish justice globally.
- The Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on the U.S. President and Congress take necessary steps to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and make nuclear disarmament the centerpiece of our national security policy; and urges the National setting, conferences, associations, and local churches to convey this message to 139 policymakers.
- In recognition that unrestricted personal firearms, which may have played a necessary role in securing the early American frontier, have no such legitimate place in an urbanized nation with public police protection; a UCC General Synod of 2023 resolution calls on congregations, associations, and conferences in the United Church of Christ to prayerfully consider joining the Guns to Gardens movement, and to host safe surrender events for unwanted guns to be dismantled according to rules of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives.⁴⁸
- Nonviolence is a Christian response to conflict shown to us by Jesus in Matthew and Romans, Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Romans 12:18 “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”



47 “Pronouncement on Affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church”, General Synod 15, 1985, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/85-GS-50.pdf>

48 “Affirming Guns to Gardens and Other Gun Violence Prevention Ministries”, General Synod 34, 2023, <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Guns-to-Gardens-Plenary-Final.pdf>

Talking Points:

- The history of the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace denomination spans back 40 years and was established at the 30th General Synod where, “We commend to all local churches the use of the World Peace Prayer, using the example of the Benedictine Sisters who pray this specific prayer each day at 12 noon: Lead me/us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead me/us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead me/us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe”
- Violence is not far removed from our lives. It is very close to home, indeed, it is often in our homes. Our response to gun violence cannot simply be the old wording of thoughts and prayers, it must also be action and policy.
- The United States, one of the few major nations to permit an almost wholly unregulated proliferation of firearms, sustains each year thousands of civilian gun casualties, assaults and armed robberies, with highest rates in those states with the least gun control.



Union Congregational Est. 1894 United Church of Christ

**WE ARE
JUST PEACE
IN WEST PALM BEACH!**

EVERYONE WELCOME HERE! SUNDAY WORSHIP 10 AM

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND GRATITUDE

Thank you to the UCC National Staff who contributed to this resource. Your faithfulness, insight, and collaboration make this work possible. We are deeply grateful for your wisdom and partnership.

Thank you also to you—the reader, the seeker, the advocate—who has taken the time to engage this toolkit. Your commitment to justice is a sacred act. We truly couldn't do this work without you. Your voice, your presence, and your persistent hope are living testimonies to a gospel that demands both love and action.

We are grateful to each and every one of you for putting your faith into action, for lifting your voice when it would be easier to stay silent, and for standing with the vulnerable and marginalized in the pursuit of a Just World for All. You are the body of the church in motion—healing, challenging, and rebuilding the world in love.

As you do your bit of good where you are, struggle for what is right, and speak truth with compassion, know that you walk in the footsteps of prophets and peacemakers—and in the way of Jesus. You are not alone in this work. We are in it together, bound by shared faith, shared hope, and shared purpose.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to the UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy—we are here to support, equip, and walk with you.

Now go forth, inspired and empowered, to love boldly, act justly, and bear witness to the liberating love of Christ. Let this toolkit not be the end of your learning, but the beginning of your action.

The UCC Office of Public Policy and Advocacy

Rev. Michael Neuroth, Director

Helen Nwabara, International Policy Advocate

Abigail Cipparone, Domestic Policy Advocate

Hannah Santos, Communications and Campaigns Specialist

Justin Henry, Program Assistant

Cassandra Saunders, Justice and Peace Policy Fellow



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“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

-John Lewis



PERSONAL NOTES AND REFLECTIONS



