



A publication of the Office of Public Witness



I. INTRODUCTION

What Is Holy Discontentment?

Holy discontentment is what we feel when we look at the world and know, deep down, that something isn't right — and that it doesn't have to be this way. It's the restlessness that rises up in us when we see injustice, inequality, or suffering and sense that God is calling us to respond. It is not just anger or frustration — it is a faithful discomfort, rooted in hope for something better.



In Scripture, the prophets often name this feeling. They speak out against broken systems and harmful practices, not because they've given up, but because they believe in God's vision for justice and healing. In Isaiah, we hear that vision described as a world where *"your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt ... you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to live in"* (Isaiah 58:12).

Jesus also lived out holy discontentment. Throughout the New Testament, he talks about the reign of God — a new way of life breaking into the world, where the poor are lifted up, the sick are healed and the forgotten are brought close. The good news is that we are invited to be part of that transformation. As followers of Christ, we are called to speak up, to care for others and to work alongside God in building a more just world.

In this guide, we focus particularly on how holy discontentment can move us to engage with systems of power — to speak truth to policymakers, legislators and appointed officials. It is through faithful advocacy and public witness that we help shape policies rooted in compassion, equity and justice.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC WITNESS

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness (OPW) is the public policy and advocacy office of the General Assembly, based in Washington, D.C. The office represents the social witness policy of the church before Congress and the administration, lifting up the values and commitments expressed through General Assembly resolutions. As a ministry of prophetic witness in the public square, the OPW seeks to bring the voice of faith to matters of justice, peace and the common good.

In addition to carrying out the policy mandates of the church, the Office of Public Witness supports Presbyterians in their own advocacy efforts. Whether individuals and congregations are engaging locally, at the state level, or nationally, the Office of Public Witness staff are available to offer tools, training, guidance and encouragement. From providing briefings on policy priorities and writing templates to connecting advocates with elected leaders, the office equips Presbyterians to faithfully engage public life.



Grounded in Scripture and Reformed theology, the Office of Public Witness helps translate our faith into action. The staff works on a wide range of policy priorities — immigration, climate justice, voting rights, global and domestic economic equity, human rights, gun violence prevention and more — all with the goal of advancing the Church's witness in the world and building a more just society.

The Office of Public Witness also offers digital resources, action alerts, and opportunities for advocacy and learning, including prayer vigils, workshops, webinars and monthly policy briefing calls. Whatever your context, the office stands ready to walk with you in your efforts to speak and act for justice.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to help Presbyterians faithfully engage in public life through advocacy, organizing and witness. Rooted in the Reformed tradition and the social witness policies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), it offers both theological grounding and practical tools for individuals, congregations and mid councils seeking to respond to injustice.



Many people of faith feel called to act but are unsure where to begin. This resource is designed to bridge that gap. It provides reflections on the spiritual foundations of advocacy and outlines tangible ways to take action — through writing, speaking, organizing, and building relationships in the community and with public officials.

Above all, this guide serves as a starting point for those ready to raise their voices, deepen their witness, and live more fully into the call to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.



II. GROUNDED IN FAITH: WHY WE ADVOCATE

Scripture Foundation for Public Witness

From the earliest pages of Scripture, God calls people not only into relationship but also into responsibility — for their neighbors, their communities and the world around them.



The prophets speak out against injustice, exploitation and idolatry, not as outsiders, but as people grounded in covenant with God. In Isaiah 1, God says, *"Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow."*

In the New Testament, Jesus embodies this prophetic tradition. His teachings and actions consistently challenge systems that harm the vulnerable. Whether feeding the hungry, healing the sick or welcoming the stranger, Jesus shows us that public witness is an essential expression of faith.

ADVOCACY AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Advocacy is not separate from discipleship — it is one way we live it out. To follow Christ is to care deeply about the conditions in which people live and to act when those conditions fall short of what God intends. Ensuring impacted voices are included when decisions about their lives are being made, holding leaders accountable, and advocating for systems that reflect compassion and equity are all faithful responses to a Gospel that proclaims good news to the poor.

Presbyterians have long affirmed that faith has public dimensions. We are called to participate in civic life — not for power's sake, but for our neighbors' sake.

Advocacy as a spiritual discipline is a faithful expression of our commitment to civic discipleship — where our spiritual lives and civic responsibilities intersect in the pursuit of justice, peace and the common good.



JUSTICE IN SCRIPTURE

Justice, in Scripture, is more than punishment or fairness. It is the restoration of right relationships — between people, Creation and God. The Hebrew word *mishpat* speaks to a vision of justice that is active, communal and deeply moral.

Micah 6:8 offers a simple and enduring summary: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"

This call is not abstract. It is embodied through our choices, policies and actions — especially in how we treat the poor, the stranger, the sick and the oppressed.

INTERFAITH AND ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP IN ADVOCACY

While our advocacy is grounded in Christian faith, we do not act alone. Across traditions, people of faith share common values: compassion, human dignity, peace and care for the vulnerable. Working in coalition with interfaith partners allows us to speak with greater moral clarity and broader reach.

Whether gathering for a vigil, co-signing a letter or showing up together at a legislative hearing, interfaith collaboration demonstrates that justice is not a partisan demand or a narrow cause — it is a shared moral commitment that crosses lines of belief and background.



III. ADVOCACY 101: KNOW YOUR ROLE

What Is Advocacy (and What It Isn't)?

Advocacy is the act of centering impacted voices and standing in solidarity with those harmed by injustice. It involves engaging public systems and decision-makers to pursue policies that reflect God's call to justice, compassion and the inherent dignity of all people.



As Penn State Educational Equity defines it, advocacy includes “organized efforts aimed at influencing public attitudes, policies and laws to create a more socially just society.” In a faith context, advocacy is rooted in discipleship — it reflects the ministry of Jesus, who consistently stood with the marginalized.

Advocacy is not about promoting political parties or personal agendas. It is a faithful, public witness to the values of our faith.

UNDERSTANDING 501(C)(3) STATUS AND PUBLIC WITNESS

Churches may not endorse or oppose candidates for public office. However, they can speak out on moral and justice issues, educate their members and urge elected officials to act.

Presbyterian congregations are encouraged to advocate on a wide range of issues — from economic equity to environmental care — so long as they focus on issues rather than parties. The Office of Public Witness is available to help navigate this work faithfully and legally. Mid councils and congregations are encouraged to seek legal counsel as needed when engaging in advocacy.

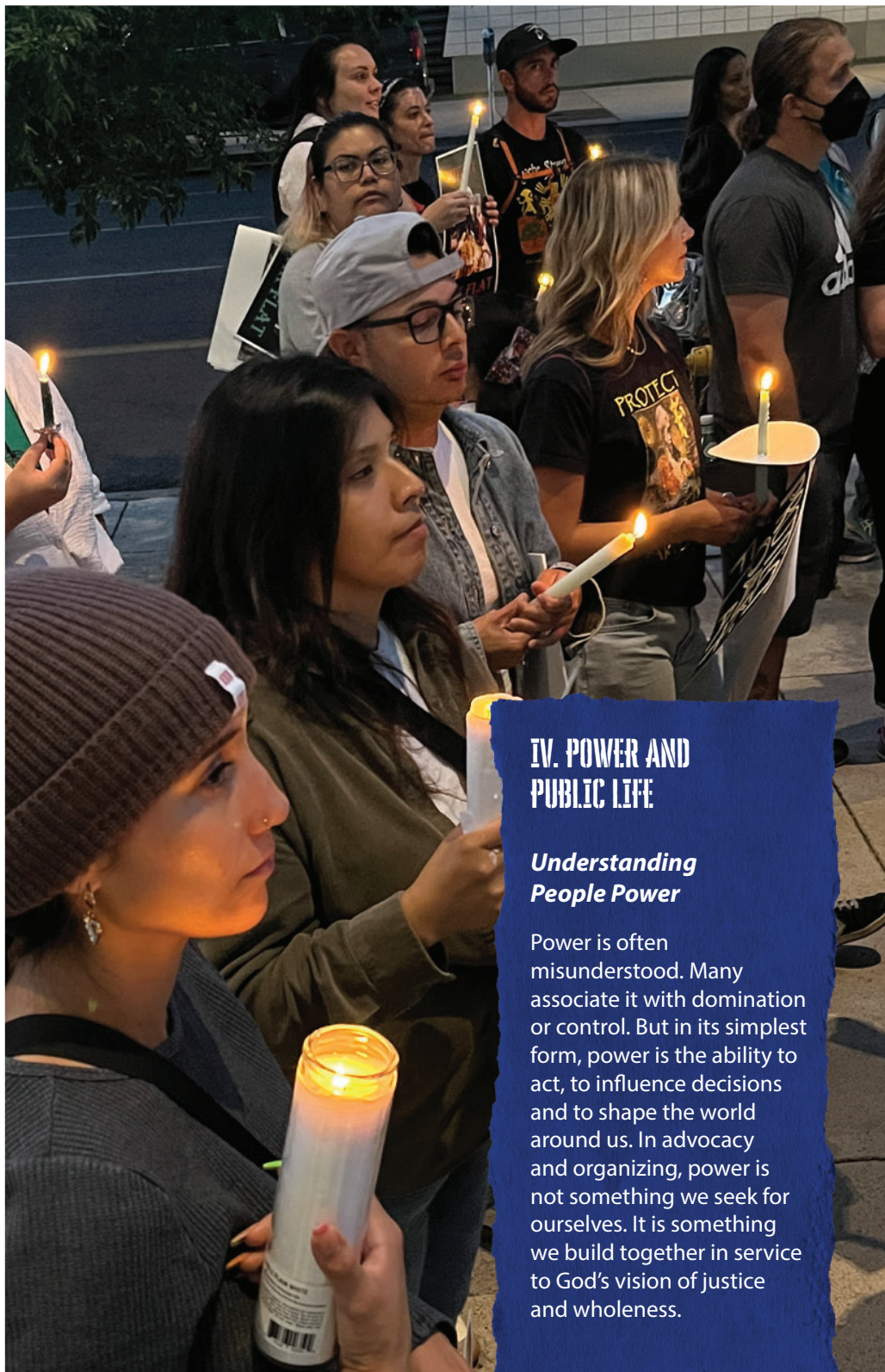
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADVOCACY, PARTISAN POLITICS AND LOBBYING

- Advocacy is speaking out on issues of public concern.
- Partisan politics means supporting or opposing candidates or parties, which churches must avoid, but individuals can do.
- Lobbying is urging action on specific legislation.

Understanding these differences allows congregations to act boldly while remaining compliant with legal and ethical guidelines.

CENTERING IMPACTED VOICES: A FAITHFUL CALL TO SPEAK AND STAND UP

Advocacy is not about having all the answers — it’s about showing up in love. As Ephesians 4 reminds us, we are called to live with humility, gentleness and unity. When we speak out, we bear witness to the hope and justice of the Gospel, joining our voices with those who are too often unheard.



IV. POWER AND PUBLIC LIFE

Understanding People Power

Power is often misunderstood. Many associate it with domination or control. But in its simplest form, power is the ability to act, to influence decisions and to shape the world around us. In advocacy and organizing, power is not something we seek for ourselves. It is something we build together in service to God's vision of justice and wholeness.

Faith-based advocacy begins by recognizing that our relationships, our presence and our voices hold power. When we act together, that power grows. You do not have to hold elected office or lead a large organization to make a difference. Your voice, your compassion and your willingness to act faithfully are more than enough.

POWER “WITH” VS. POWER “OVER”

There is a difference between the kind of power that dominates and the kind that heals.

Power over uses coercion and control. It takes from others in order to protect its own interests.

Power with is something else entirely. It is rooted in mutual respect, shared purpose and the belief that justice grows when people come together. It does not diminish anyone; it multiplies possibility.

Congregations are uniquely positioned to build power with. The church is a place of trust, community and courage. It is where people gather not to gain control, but to discern how they might serve together. As Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). This is what it means to practice power with, rooted in faith, grounded in community and pointed toward justice.

MAPPING THE POWER IN YOUR COMMUNITY

To act effectively, we must first understand where power lives. In every community, there are people and institutions, both visible and behind the scenes, who shape decisions. That power may come through official roles, like city council members or agency leaders, or through trusted relationships, like longtime residents, educators, or artists who carry the stories and values of a place.

A good first step is to map what power looks like where you are. Begin by listing:

- Who makes decisions that affect your community?
- Who is already organizing?
- Who is missing from the conversation?

You might consider school boards, local nonprofits, congregational leaders, small business owners or neighborhood coalitions. The goal is not just to name power but also to build relationships that can lead to shared action.

THE THREE SECTORS: CIVIC, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Power operates across different sectors of society. These sectors often overlap, and advocacy can happen within or between them.

- The civic society includes congregations, families, advocacy groups and local associations. These are spaces where people come together around shared values and common concerns.
- The public sector includes governments, public schools, elected officials, and agencies that make decisions and allocate resources.
- The private sector includes businesses, developers, banks and industries that shape the economic realities of our communities.

Each of these sectors holds influence. Each plays a role in how power functions and how it can be transformed. The church does not belong to any one sector, but it can serve as a bridge between them. As people of faith, we are called to bring a moral voice into all parts of public life and to work for justice wherever we are planted.





V. GETTING STARTED IN YOUR CONTEXT

Holy discontentment becomes transformative when it takes root in our own communities. The question is no longer just “What’s wrong in the world?” but also “What can we do — right here, right now?” Every context is different. What matters is not where you are, but how you begin.

LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL ADVOCACY: WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

Justice work looks different at each level of government, and effective advocacy depends on knowing where decisions are made.

- **Local advocacy** often has the most immediate impact on daily life. City councils, school boards, housing authorities and county agencies shape the conditions of our neighborhoods — things like policing practices, public transit, zoning and school funding. Showing up to a public hearing or meeting with an appointed or elected leader can be a powerful first step.
- **State-level advocacy** can influence broader systems — health-care access, education policy, worker protections and environmental regulations. States also play a critical role in how federal programs are implemented. Contacting your state representatives or joining coalition efforts can amplify your voice.
- **Federal advocacy** focuses on national issues — immigration, international aid, tax policy and civil rights protections. It can feel distant, but it matters deeply. Contacting your members of Congress, joining national sign-on letters and supporting the work of the Office of Public Witness are faithful ways to engage.

All three levels matter. Your voice is needed in each.

CHOOSING ISSUES THAT MATTER IN YOUR CONGREGATION

There is no one-size-fits-all model for faithful advocacy. Start by discerning what holy discontentment already exists in your congregation or community. What breaks your heart? What makes people feel restless or moved to act? What social outreach endeavors is your congregation already engaged in?

You might gather stories, hold a listening session or simply start a conversation during fellowship. Look for patterns — what issues come up again and again? What needs do people name, and what hopes do they hold?

From there, choose an issue that aligns with your congregation's passions and capacity. Don't try to do everything at once. Focus on what feels faithful, not flashy. Small, sustained efforts — letter-writing, educational events, local partnerships — can build momentum over time.

You don't have to start from scratch. The Office of Public Witness offers many resources, and you can partner with local nonprofits, interfaith coalitions or existing justice ministries.

USING THE PC(USA) ELECTION CENTER

The PC(USA) Election Center is an online hub designed to help Presbyterians participate in elections faithfully and confidently. It includes tools for:

- Registering to vote.
- Learning about current elected leaders and candidates running to represent you.
- Learning about local and state ballot measures.
- Hosting nonpartisan forums.
- Accessing guides on issue-based advocacy and civic engagement.

Congregations can use the Election Center to hold voter registration drives, educate members about the moral dimensions of public policies, and create a culture of faithful citizenship. It's a way to make voting more than a task — it becomes a form of witness.

You can find the Election Center and additional resources at votervoice.net/PCUSA/ElectionCenter.

ENSURING INFORMATION IS TRUSTWORTHY AND ACCURATE

In an age of misinformation, faithful advocacy also means being thoughtful about where we get our information and how we share it. Before acting or posting, ask:

- Is this from a reliable source?
- Does it align with our church's values and commitments?
- Could this information harm or mislead others if shared without context?

Use trusted sources like the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Office of Public Witness, respected nonpartisan organizations and peer-reviewed research. Check facts, cite your sources, and when in doubt — pause and ask.

Being careful with your words and well-informed in your witness honors both the truth and those most affected by injustice.



THE ADVOCATE'S TOOLBOX

THE ADVOCATE'S TOOLBOX

Various factors influence an elected official's vote, including their party's position, personal beliefs, the advice of staff and friends, and lobbyists. But their most important influence should be the voices of the constituents who elected them. Elected officials rely on input from the public, through letters, emails, telephone calls, in-person or virtual visits, social media engagement and media coverage, to better understand constituent concerns. The Office of Public Witness maintains an online action center where you can find your elected officials and their offices' contact information (votervoice.net/PCUSA/home). On this site, you can locate sample letters on various policy priorities, as well as send an email to your legislators from our online platform. Keep in mind that we, as the Church, are involved in policy priorities advocacy representing moral questions, not partisan, political lobbying.



MEETING WITH YOUR ELECTED LEADER

How do I request a meeting?

To request a meeting, you should first obtain the contact information for the office's scheduler. This can be found on the legislator's website or by calling their home district office. Email a written request to the scheduler. Include your name, the issue you plan to discuss, a range of times you are available to meet and your contact information.

What should I bring to the meeting?

- Proof of identification (you may need to show an ID at the door).
- Notes on what you plan to discuss.
- Something to take notes with during the meeting.
- A digital camera or phone to document the meeting.
- Materials to leave behind (fact sheets, business cards, etc.).

How long does a meeting typically last?

Meetings with a legislator can be as short as 10–15 minutes, though meetings with the legislative staffers may last longer. The following is a suggested framework for the roles and agenda of a visit and a template to adapt to your meeting's goals.

Roles and Duties

Facilitator	The Facilitator begins the meeting by introducing the group, explaining the purpose of the meeting, and providing space for each person to briefly introduce themselves. The facilitator helps guide the conversation and will redirect if it goes off-track.
Personal Storyteller	The Personal Story is key to every meeting. A member of your group who has either been directly impacted by the public policy or has worked closely with impacted individuals or communities should be present. While legislators are familiar with the statistics, these stories show how people's lives are impacted and how your community would benefit from a prophetic public policy.
Issues, Point People	Decide what specific issues your group wants to discuss while planning the meeting. Those who are well versed in these issues are the Point People and will help in providing facts and answering questions.
Asker	The Ask is the critical part of the visit when you request your elected official to support or reject specific policy or provisions of a piece of legislation.

Agenda

Introductions

The Facilitator should begin the meeting by thanking the elected leader or staffer for their time, introducing the group as a whole, and then inviting everyone in attendance to introduce themselves. Each participant should state the faith community they represent to exhibit the group's capacity. This is also an appropriate time to share words of appreciation for the elected leader's previous actions, votes, statements or presence at community events.

Personal Story

A member of your group who is directly impacted by the public policy or has worked closely with the marginalized individuals or communities who are impacted should share the significance of the policy being discussed. Personal stories allow elected leaders to better understand the implications of a piece of legislation.

For example, a representative may support the general idea of expanding affordable housing, but hearing from a Presbyterian congregation that has partnered with local organizations to shelter families facing eviction can highlight the urgency and human cost of inaction, helping to shape how the representative prioritizes housing policies and funding.

The "Ask"

Summarize the goals for your meeting into an ask of your elected leader. As they answer, listen well and take notes. Look for indications of their views and find opportunities to provide helpful information and correct misinformation. While they may not agree with you on all issues, try to find a common ground to continue your work in partnership. You'll likely not convince them to change their position in one meeting, but you can be intentional in building a relationship to transform their perspective and stance.

Much of advocacy involves listening and providing opportunities for the elected leader or staffer to share their priorities and concerns and ask questions. They will appreciate the chance to be heard rather than only being talked at. If they ask a question you are unable to answer, that's OK. Be honest and offer to find the answer and report back.

Thank You and Invitation

Thank them and invite them to an upcoming service, prayer vigil or other event you have planned. Offer to be a resource to them and remember to exchange business cards or contact information. Consider asking them to take a photo with your group — most offices love the photo opportunity!

After the Meeting

Debrief your meeting: It's essential to regroup immediately after your meeting, while details are still fresh. Step outside the office building first to ensure privacy, then take time to reflect as a group:

- Did we meet our goals for the meeting? Reflect on your original objectives — were they fully or partially achieved?
- What are the next steps? Identify any action items or follow-up tasks, including who is responsible for each.
- How did we perform as a team? Consider what went well and what could be improved for future meetings.
- What new information did we learn that should be shared with the Office of Public Witness or other partners? Note any insights, data points or opportunities for collaboration.
- What questions remain unanswered? Determine what additional information or clarification is still needed and how to obtain it.

Introductions



Personal Story



The "Ask"



Thank You and Invitation

TELEPHONE

Calling your elected leaders is another effective way to communicate your opinion. Telephone calls are particularly beneficial when time is short, such as before an important vote. The disadvantage is that there is no written record.

You can find your elected leader's phone number on their website or by calling the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and asking for the office you are looking to contact by name. It is helpful to prepare the same way that you would for an in-person visit. Start by introducing yourself and sharing a personal story on how you or your community will be impacted by the discussed piece of legislation. Ask them the same thing you would if you were meeting in person, and thank them for answering your call or passing the message along if you leave a voicemail.

To express your opinion of an administration's action, you can submit a comment on the White House website or call the comment line at 202-456-1111. Although individual messages are not communicated to the president, the White House pays attention to the volume of public response, for and against, especially following a major presidential speech or action.

On occasion, the Office of Public Witness will join with partners to organize a "call-in day" in which thousands of advocates are invited to inundate the phone lines with a particular message for Congress. Please take advantage of these opportunities to take part in a larger strategy.

LETTERS

Handwritten letters are a powerful and personal way to communicate with your elected leader. They stand out and can leave a lasting impression. However, because of necessary security screening, it may take up to four weeks for a letter to reach a legislator's Washington, D.C., office. For time-sensitive matters, consider delivering your letter in person or using another method to ensure your message is received promptly. Even with the delay, a handwritten note can be a meaningful and memorable way to share your perspective.

Tips for writing a letter or email to your elected official:

- Be brief (a few sentences or a few paragraphs at most).
- Be polite.
- Draw on personal experience.
- Ask questions.
- Follow up after receiving a response.

EMAIL

For time-sensitive issues, email is one of the best means of communication with your elected officials. When you send an email, ensure you include your postal mail address so they know you are a constituent. Although emails will not receive a personal response from an official or staff, rest assured your voice is documented as being for or opposed to something. Therefore, it is important to be clear in your communication about your position so it can be documented accurately.

The Office of Public Witness has an online action center (votervoicenet.org/PCUSA/home) where you can find suggested letters and send them to your legislator directly. You can also access voting resources, sign up for action alerts and find legislation on the same site.

SOCIAL MEDIA

All members of Congress, and most other elected officials, have active social media accounts. Here, they post opinions, actions, press statements and other beneficial information. You can gauge an elected or appointed leader's beliefs toward policies based on the posts on their account, who they follow and what issues they choose to post about. Follow your elected or appointed leader's page to stay up to date on their actions at home and in Washington.

You can share your beliefs in a post and tag an elected official, but it is not promised it will be seen by the official or staffer. Instead, using social media platforms as a tool for education and mobilization is a great option. When posting about an elected official, make sure the information is accurate and credible.

Facebook

To stay up to date on the actions of the Office of Public Witness, like our Facebook page (facebook.com/pcusawashington). To share a status with a friend or publish to your page, click the "share" button underneath the post.

Instagram

To stay up to date with the actions of the Office of Public Witness, follow our Instagram account ([@pcusa_opw](https://www.instagram.com/pcusa_opw)). To share a post with your friend or to your story, click the arrow icon underneath the post.

X and other social media platforms

Many members of Congress and other appointed leaders have an X handle. Leaders use the platform to express opinions on policies and communicate in real time with their constituents and the press. Constituents can reply to a post to express their support or disapproval of a leader's actions.

We recognize that the landscape of social media is ever-changing. New platforms are popularized constantly, including sites designed with partisanship in mind (Bluesky, Truth Social, etc.). We encourage finding any elected and faith leaders on any relevant platform.

HOSTING A PRAYER VIGIL

Hosting prayer vigils allows faith leaders to highlight that our nation's policy decisions are moral decisions rooted in shared spiritual and scriptural traditions that call us to care for poor and vulnerable populations, tend to the sick, welcome the stranger and seek peace. No matter how small, events such as a vigil send a powerful message about what is important to people of faith and conscience.

When planning a prayer vigil, it is important to thoughtfully incorporate patterns of prayer and reflection drawn from diverse ecumenical and interfaith traditions. Doing so helps provide a unified moral voice and public witness within communities, strengthening efforts to address systemic injustice and promote lasting change.

Preparation:

- Coordinate a public prayer vigil with faith leaders, local agencies and service providers, community members, and, if possible, local elected leaders.
- Identify the core leaders and speakers, and make sure to invite impacted people to help plan and speak at the event. Agree on messaging and talking points, assigning specific points to each speaker, and ensuring they have time limits.
- Consider inviting elected officials, including representatives, senators, city council members or the mayor.
- Be clear in your goals, what you want to accomplish and how many people you hope will join the event.
- Identify the best location for the vigil, which is generally somewhere central in a symbolic memorial, state capitol, park or city hall. If able, host your vigil at or near your member of Congress' local office. Ensure you apply for any permits needed for the location.
- Reserve or order any equipment necessary, such as microphones, cameras, banners, candles and projectors (make sure you can access electrical outlets).
- Choose a time of day best for attendance and media — most news reports take place at 5–6 p.m. and 10–11 p.m., so a few hours before is best for press events.
- Promote the event through social media, websites, congregational bulletins and flyers.

- Bring signs that are consistent with your messaging and agreed upon ahead of time.
- Invite the media by issuing a media advisory and following up with a press release after the event.
- If you are able to host a wide range of organizations together, you can hold a 24- or 48-hour vigil outside the office of your representative or senator. Create a spreadsheet to sign up each organization with a two-hour block of time.

Setup:

The setup for the vigil should ensure all faiths are respected and welcomed with awareness and consciousness. Drawing on faith traditions and rituals can make vigils much more powerful, raising the creative and dramatic tension.

- Ask clergy to wear collars, stoles, robes and any other appropriate religious attire.
- Include a procession with candles and other religious symbols to a symbolic location.
- Lift up stories in sacred text.
- Have space for participants to write prayers, then deliver them to your representatives and senators.
- Make visuals — photos, drawings, other art mediums, etc.
- Invite participants at the vigil to be part of further action and advocacy by writing and calling their representatives and senators.

Sample Prayer Vigil Program:

Welcome: Write a few words about the purpose and focus of your prayer vigil. Why now? What's the concern? Who's affected? What values shape your faith traditions' response to these concerns?

Opening Prayer: Ask a clergy or community leader to open with a prayer or a discipline from their faith tradition.

Music: Invite local musicians who share similar values to join your vigil — have them lead one or two songs throughout the program. Choose songs that are connected to the cause or songs that everyone can sing together. Be mindful of diverse faith traditions and language when choosing music.

Speaker: Include a personal story from a local community member about how the issue would impact families and communities. More than one story can be integrated throughout the program. You may also integrate creative symbols or rituals from faith traditions that draw more attention to the importance of the issue.

Prayer: One person may lead the prayers, or you might invite several faith leaders to pray according to their traditions. Involve vigil participants in praying a refrain throughout your prayer time or pray in a circle so everyone has the opportunity to participate. Consider offering prayers in multiple languages.

Song and Closing: Reiterate the focus and purpose of your vigil and send participants off with a call to raise their voices to the public sphere on this issue. Consider a procession or march to another significant location.

PUBLIC HEARINGS AND TOWN HALLS

Prepare:

- Find out when your member of Congress' next public event is. If you can't find announcements online, call your member directly to find out. When you call, be friendly and say to the staffer, "Hi, I'm a constituent, and I'd like to know when his or her next public forum will be." If they don't know, ask to be added to the email list so that you get notified when they do.
- Send out a notice of the public hearing to your group, and get commitments from group members to attend. Distribute whatever information you have on your member's voting record, as well as prepared questions, to all group members.
- Prepare values-driven questions. As people of faith, come ready with five to 10 sharp, fact-based questions that reflect moral clarity — link them to the official's record and raise the ethical stakes behind their actions and decisions.
- Get connected to the local press. Research online what local reporters have written about your members of Congress. Before you head to the public event, reach out and explain why you and your group are attending, and provide them with background materials and a quote. Journalists on deadline — even those who might not agree with you — appreciate when you provide easy material for a story.

At the public event:

- Get there early, meet up and get organized. Distribute the handout of questions and encourage members to ask the questions on the sheet or similar ones. Review your ground rules: You're going to be respectful, polite, and nonconfrontational in all of your interactions with the member and their staff.
- Get seated and spread out. Head into the venue a bit early to grab seats at the front half of the room, but do not all sit together. Sit by yourself or in groups of two and spread out throughout the room. This will help reinforce the impression of broad consensus.
- Make your voices heard by asking good questions. When the member opens the floor for questions, everyone in the group should put their hands up and keep them there. Look friendly or neutral so that staffers will call on you. When you're asking a question, remember the following guidelines:
 - Stick with the prepared list of questions. Don't be afraid to read it straight from the printout if you need to.
 - Be polite but persistent and demand real answers.
 - Don't give up the mic until you're satisfied with the answer.
- Keep the pressure on. After one member of the group finishes, everyone should raise their hands again. The next member of the group to be called on should move down the list of questions and ask the next one.
- Support the group and reinforce the message. After one member of your group asks a question, everyone should applaud to show that the feeling is shared throughout the audience. Whenever someone from your group gets the mic, they should note that they're building on the previous questions — amplifying the fact that you're part of a broad group.
- Record everything! Assign someone in the group to use their smartphone or video camera to record advocates asking questions and the member's response. These clips can be shared through social media and picked up by local and national media. Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws, along with any applicable Senate or House rules, prior to recording. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. If you are uncertain of the laws or rules in the jurisdiction, pause and ask.

After the public event:

- Reach out to the media. If there's media at the public event, the people who asked questions should approach them afterward and offer to speak about their concerns. When the event is over, you should engage local reporters on social media or by email and offer to provide an in-person account of what happened, as well as your pictures or videos. Ensure that the members of your group who are directly affected by specific threats are the ones whose voices are elevated when you contact the media.
- Share everything. Post pictures, videos, your thoughts about the event, etc., on social media. Tag the member's office and encourage others to share widely.

PRINT MEDIA

Members of Congress have staff that scan local, regional, and state papers on a regular basis, looking for opinion pieces, like letters to the editor and op-eds. Like email communication, these pieces frequently get sorted into for or opposed categories, though very specific "asks" or criticisms may receive a more personalized response. Members are particularly interested in opinion pieces in which they are mentioned by name, so do not forget to name your member and make your "ask" or criticism clear. The voices of clergy or unusual gatherings of people of faith are often interesting to the media, particularly when clergy speak in concert with ecumenical or interfaith voices (e.g., co-signed op-eds).

Tips for a letter to the editor:

- Submit your letter quickly, less than three days after the appearance of the original article to which you are responding.
- Always refer to the original article by title and date.
- Keep it concise by only making one point.
- Use firsthand experience, but also sound reasoning.

Tips for op-eds:

- Keep it between 500 and 750 words.
- Get to the point quickly.
- Anticipate the counterarguments and refute them with facts.
- Have at least one memorable phrase for them to easily quote.

- Close on a powerful and thought-provoking note.
- Use stories and personal experience.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Building Advocacy Teams in Your Church

Congregational advocacy begins with committed relationships and a shared sense of holy discontent. Building an advocacy team means gathering members who are willing to listen deeply, pray boldly and act faithfully. Teams can begin with as few as three people, representing diverse perspectives from the congregation. Their role is to identify pressing concerns about justice, educate the congregation, and connect with local and denominational advocacy efforts. Partnering with existing partners already doing this work — like mission committees, local partners and national agencies — can strengthen these efforts.

Leading as Youth, Members, Elders and Clergy Together

Holy discontent is not bound by age or title. Advocacy flourishes when youth bring prophetic imagination, members bridge community connections, elders offer wisdom and institutional memory, and pastoral staff provide structure and theological grounding. Create shared spaces for leadership where decisions and action steps are co-created. Encourage youth and young adults to speak in worship or lead intergenerational forums. Members can motivate their community networks. Elders can sponsor events or bring motions before session meetings. Pastoral staff can coordinate resources and ensure alignment with the church's mission.

Church Bulletins, Worship Integrations and Public Messaging

Worship is central to who we are as Presbyterians — and it's a powerful space for advocacy formation. Use bulletins and liturgies to highlight justice concerns with prayers of the people, confessionals or minute-for-mission updates. Incorporate hymns and Scripture that reflect themes of liberation, peace and repentance. Make advocacy visible and spiritually rooted: Include QR codes to sign petitions, promote local vigils or community events, and share stories of impact. Public messaging — on your website, social media or church signs — should reflect a theology of justice that welcomes the community and invites others into the movement.

PASTORAL NOTES FOR FAITH LEADERS

Navigating Your Role in the Community

Faith leaders are often seen as moral compasses, bridge-builders and public theologians. In seasons of holy discontent, your voice matters — and so does your presence. Be intentional about how and when you show up in the public square, recognizing the power and responsibility that comes with clerical leadership. Building trust with community partners, local officials and interfaith allies expands your congregation's witness. Listen before speaking and lead with both humility and conviction.

Building Congregational Resilience

Congregational justice work can stir discomfort, conflict or fatigue — especially when challenging long-standing systems. Resilience begins with spiritual grounding. Anchor your community in prayer, Scripture, spiritual practices and Sabbath rest. Create spaces for lament as well as joy. Equip congregational leaders to help carry the load and rotate leadership roles to avoid burnout. Remind the congregation that faithful justice work is a long journey, not a short campaign.

Discerning Your Congregation's Public Voice

Not every justice issue will resonate equally in every church, but every congregation has a public voice shaped by its theology, history, local context and global connections. Discernment involves listening — through prayer, study, and dialogue with your session and members. Ask: What is breaking God's heart in our community right now? Use that question to shape statements, sermons and public actions. When your church speaks or acts publicly, ensure the message is grounded in Scripture, General Assembly policy and pastorally sensitive — bold, but not polarizing; clear, but never cruel. Be sure to be mindful of vulnerable individuals when participating in advocacy events — especially those with mixed immigration status.

A NOTE ON NONVIOLENT ESCALATION AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Strategic Escalation in Advocacy Campaigns

Injustice often resists polite appeals. There are times in advocacy when moral urgency demands that we escalate our tactics — moving from petitions to protests, from quiet meetings to visible public witness. Escalation is not about anger for its own sake; it is a faithful, strategic tool to amplify marginalized voices, disrupt complacency and compel decision-makers to act. Look to Scripture for precedent: prophets tore garments, Jesus overturned tables. Nonviolent escalation — when done prayerfully and with purpose — can awaken hearts and systems alike.

Discernment and Safety in Public Witness

Civil disobedience is not entered into lightly. It requires spiritual discernment, legal awareness and pastoral care. Faith leaders and congregations must prayerfully consider: Is this action aligned with our mission? Are we prepared to accept the consequences? Who is most impacted by this decision? Work with experienced partners and know the legal boundaries. Prioritize the safety — emotional, physical and spiritual — of your participants, especially those who are vulnerable or already targets of unjust systems. Some may protest in the streets; others may pray in the pews. All are part of the witness.



RESOURCE GUIDE AND UPDATES

Recommended Trainings, Networks and VoterVoice

- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Social Witness Policy Statements by Topic: pcusa.org/about-pcusa/agencies-entities/interim-unified-agency/ministry-areas/social-witness-policy/social-witness-policy-topic
- PC(USA) Action Alerts: votervoice.net/mobile/PCUSA/home
- PC(USA) Election Center: votervoice.net/PCUSA/ElectionCenter
- Washington Interfaith Staff Community: washingtoninterfaith.org
- How to Stay Updated with the Most Recent Guide: <https://pcusa.org/resource/how-stay-updated-with-most-recent-guide>
- Advocates Templates <https://pcusa.org/resource/advocates-templates>

INTERACTIVE TOOLS

- Advocacy Planning Worksheet
- Blank Meeting Agenda Template
- Social Media Campaign Planner
- Congregational Action Plan



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