

Faith and Policy Guide

How are you engaging sacred spaces about the work of legislative advocacy?

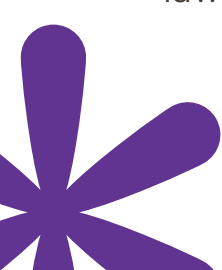
As communities continue to navigate the volatile nature of our political landscape, we see the presence and expansion of voices of faith and ethical clarity in the work for positive social change. With that said, many communities do not know how or where to start the work for advocating for communities who have been historically targeted by laws and systems. This is why we've put a short guide together to help you think about the ways you can and should be engaging your communities to do this work in strategic and sustainable ways.

The context of our work is simple: The voices of faith leaders and communities are, and have been, an integral part of this work because the issues of the world carry a moral urgency that call us to do what is right. While we do live in a country whose framework is based on a separation of church and state, it is clear that faith is playing a bigger role in the world of politics. For better and far worse than we can imagine.

Religious, secular, and spiritual communities and their leaders hold an important place to provide clarity and leadership to speak truth to power in the face of any injustice. And doing this with the necessary political education can give more strength to communities wanting to mobilize around the issues that they care about.

Take a look the guiding questions and resources we've put together to simplify your understanding how you might or not be engaging your communities in the work of policy change. You'll find key questions, recommendations, and supplemental materials that will help navigate the ways you're engaging political discourse in your sacred spaces. Special thanks to Allen Morris and Meera Rajput from the Policy Team of the Task Force who helped to put this guide together.

Please note: This guide does not serve as any form of legal advice for the work your community or organization may want to do. Please refer to a lawyer or legal aid center that can help you with specific legal questions.

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What issues are impacting your community?

- Are you having direct conversations with members of your faith community? What are they saying?
- How does your pulpit provide comfort, safety, and strength in difficult times?
- Do the members of your faith community know that there are positive ways that they can contribute to a cause?

How is faith being weaponized and used against communities?

- How do you speak to the use where the scripture, historical examples, or theology are used to discriminate and harm minorities?
- How is religion used to promote and expand agendas of authoritarianism, retribution, and the normalization of violence and punitive justice?
- E.g.: How you address the use of the Bible to enforce: The placement of the Ten Commandments in public schools? The banning of same-sex marriage? The regulation of curricula?

Who do you need to talk to about these issues?

- Are there fellow clergy or faith/lay leaders that you can talk to about working on these issues?
- Are there ways for you to bringing together stakeholders in your community to speak more freely and authentically about how weaponized religion may be impacting marginalized communities?
- Do the members of your faith community know how to get involved in policy change in non-partisan ways?

How do we speak about these issues to people in power?

- Do you know who your representatives are at the local, state, and federal level?
- Do you know who to go to specifically for the issue that may be concerning you or your community?
- Are there ways you can contact your elected officials, individually or collectively, that can make you feel heard?

Is there any limitation to our work?

- Do you know your rights and restrictions in doing interfaith advocacy work?
- Do you know what the differences are between speaking as a personal practitioner of a worldview versus someone representing a specific house of worship or organization?
- Did you know that the Johnson Amendment prohibits you from endorsing/rejecting political candidates as a community, even though it allows limited ways to directly advocate for legislation that represents your values?

Guiding Questions



Recommendations

Creating Spaces for Open Conversation

- Look at the spaces you have available after services (E.g., Coffee hour, fellowship, committee convenings) to think about curating space for engaging these specific issues.
- If you don't have a Social Justice Committee already, think about forming one that centers the leadership of under-represented communities that can help to highlight and educate your membership about issues that they wish to address.

Developing Narratives of Inclusion and Moral Clarity

- Invite your community to think about how the issues that impact us today may not always be comparable to the parables of the past, but maintain a historic precedent of love and compassion that all people need and deserve in the world
- Remind people that the road to empowerment and liberation calls on all people to get involved and that everyone has a role to play (demonstrators, advocates, artists, cooks, and everyone in between!)

Finding and Engaging your Elected Representatives

- Learn who represents your district and state - <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>.
- Once you've located who represents you, locate their website and review their priorities. If a topic you're passionate about, or impacts you, use the "Contact Me" feature and send them a personal story and request for support on said topic or issue.

Best Practices for Policy Priorities and Constituent Engagement

- Knowing your community is important. What is currently impacting them, have you held a townhall and expressed ways you plan to fight for their rights?
- Focus on the issue, and why it matters. Don't spend time focusing on party affiliation. Describe why the issue matters, how it impacts you, your family and community.
- Always ask for a commitment. Whether you're speaking with the member/rep directly or their staff, always ask for a commitment.
 - Here's an example: "Can you commit to ensuring healthcare access to all aging adults?"

Interfaith Approaches to Legislative Advocacy

- Knowing your member is important. What is their tradition or denomination, where do they worship, and how often does religion come up in their remarks? This will give you the insight into how they show up as an individual, and if their actions are based on personal beliefs and not what's best for all constituents, including those with opposing beliefs.

Resources



The work always starts with the right questions, the right intentions, and the right people getting involved. It's also just as important to start collecting the tools that can help you build relationship and community your issues with elected representatives and their staff. Make sure to remember to communicate the following things:

- Communicate clearly and succinctly, it will ensure that everything that needs to be said gets said
 - Share your name, your religious/spiritual/community background, the reason you're there, and the action you'd like the elected official to take
 - Share stories about yourself or constituents being impacted by the issue(s)
 - Name the impact of the issue and the consequences of the actions taken or lack thereof
 - Emphasize the important of the issue through a lens of moral urgency, sharing a principle or value from your worldview that calls you to speak up for the issues and the communities impacted
- Our colleagues at the United Church fo Christ published an important resource called **Building a Just World for All: A Toolkit for Faithful Advocacy!** that helps with best practices for communications, writing, and doing public-facing moral witness events. Check out their comprehensive guide and their individualized sections here:
<https://www.ucc.org/advocacy-101-resources/>

Here are some additional tools that you can use to engage in the work of multifaith action and solidarity:

- Interfaith Alliance has a resource page focused on education against authoritarianism, educating Americans about the threat of authoritarian theocracy, building interfaith communities who are showing up, and equipping them with the tools to defend our constitutionally protected freedoms: <https://www.interfaithalliance.org/issues/anti-authoritarianism>
 - Check for local resources from state-based advocacy groups doing the work of interfaith advocacy and organizing. Using the example of Texas, see some amazing resources that they provide:
 - Texas Freedom Network's Religious Right Watch: <https://tfn.org/tag/religious-right-watch/>
 - Texas Impact's Advocacy Guide, while state-based, has important information that would help any would-be advocate: <https://texasimpact.org/our-issues/civic-engagement/advocacy-101/>
 - Interfaith America has a resource on Elections and Interfaith Leadership Skills that demonstrates how interfaith leadership play in an election characterized by vitriolic disagreement: <https://www.interfaithamerica.org/resources/elections-and-interfaith-leadership-skills/>
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