

Advocacy and Youth Ministry: A Lesson plan

This lesson plan was developed from the work of Episcopal Appalachian Ministries, and a resource entitled, "The Advocacy Process in Episcopal Appalachian Ministries" was heavily used.

As in all lesson plans, "Sessions" are relative, and lessons may be lengthened or shortened as time allows. Also, please edit and add to this document as you see fit, sending copies of change or altered information to the Diocese of Southern Ohio Youth program for inclusion into our own programs.

Session one: What is advocacy and why are we called to do it?

Discussion:

1. **Advocacy:** the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal
2. **Lobbying:** to conduct activities aimed at influencing public officials and especially members of a legislative body [to influence a cause or proposal]
3. **Public Policy:** is an attempt by the government (or governing organization) to address a public issue.
4. As a non profit organization, **the Episcopal Church** is prohibited from using federal funds for direct lobbying of legislators. We are also prohibited from in any way advocating for or against the election of any candidate to any office (local, state or federal). Most advocacy and education activities are legally distinct from lobbying, and therefore not restricted.
5. Lobbying is a great privilege and responsibility for every American citizen. In a democracy every citizen can contact legislators to express his or her opinions. Our constitution protects the freedom of speech of individuals and also the freedom of religion for people to worship and form churches or other religious communities. Our constitution protects the freedom of the church from government control or influence. People of faith can express their viewpoint freely. As part of our responsibility we can express our viewpoints from our faith perspective. To be Christian means that we want to work for a fair and just society and we are called to oppose injustices. Voting our conscience as individuals is part of our Christian responsibility to work for a just society. Often our faith impels us to speak out on matters most important to us. Lobbying allows us to express our views which arise from our faith and attempt to influence the votes on legislation. Individual members as well as Churches as organizations can take stands on issues that are important and arise from their beliefs. To protect the separation of Church and state, the United States constitution prohibits a church or religious community from endorsing a candidate or party. Lobbying allows for us to influence issues without becoming partisan that is "endorsing political parties or candidates." Of course as individuals we always have that right.
6. For a more complete lesson on how to lobby your legislature, see appendix C

Bible Study of John 21:15-19:

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

- What would Jesus mean in today's world by the phrases "Feed my lambs," "Take care of my sheep," and, "Feed my sheep?"
- What do you think is meant that when you get older, "someone will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."
- What is God calling us to do through Christ's words?

The following page may be photocopied and distributed to students

Some ways to get involved:

- The Episcopal Public Policy network: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn/>
Become a member of this network to become active in the National Church's advocacy network. You will gain summaries of positions adopted by the church, and alerts on where and how to act on national legislation. Most dioceses also have a public policy network.
- Episcopal Appalachian Ministries: <http://www.visit-eam/org>
become a member of this network to become active in advocacy and public policy work in the Appalachian Mountain region. You will gain summaries of issues that are specific to Appalachia (mountaintop removal), and alerts on where and how to act on local and state legislation.
- Episcopal Network for Economic Justice: <http://www.enej.org>
ENEJ serves to strengthen and support those engaged in economic justice ministries and advocate for initiatives within the Episcopal Church. ENEJ offers a publication

that is helpful to congregations wishing to use their investments to promote social justice.

- The ____ Council of Churches (Ohio as an Example): <http://www.ohcouncilchs.org/>
The Ohio Council of Churches (OCC) is a partnership of 27 Christian faith bodies working together in service to God. Join this network to receive public policy brief on state and local issues, particularly focusing on Social Justice issues, Headlines and public news, Faith Based issues, and General Public Policy. Primary mechanism by which churches lobby legislators.
- The National Issues Forum institute: <http://www.nifi.org/>
Online resource of issue-related articles, forums to debate issues, and notifications.
- Find-law: <http://law.findlaw.com/state-laws/>
Topical and searchable database of state laws, listed by state.
- Your Diocesan Staff: (in Southern Ohio) <http://www.episcopal-dso.org>
- Others as the instructor recalls

Session Two: Choosing a focus

For the instructor: it would be excellent to have more than 4 resolutions from the most recent Diocesan or General Convention, or state and federal legislation, to bring before the students, so they can have some “ammo” to become excited about. Contact diocesan offices or any of the above organizations for help with creating a list.

How are Issues identified?

- By Diocesan convention or committee
- By a Bishop
- By an individual diocese, General Convention, the Public Policy Network, the Episcopal Urban Caucus, etc.
- Organizations, like Episcopal Appalachian Ministries, need approval of their Board members to begin advocacy work, but individuals or informal groups (like youth groups) may seek the blessing of their Clergy and vestries, but do not need it to begin.
- **As a group, identify a list of 4 advocacy issues that can be addressed**

Some Good criteria for choosing a focus for advocacy work:

- Is there some local, diocesan, or regional group actively engaged in the issue already, someone you can partner with? We are always more powerful when we join together.
- Don't overstretch yourself. Choose one or two topics at a time to become advocates about (you can't solve the issues of immigration, racism, and poverty all at once)
- Research the issue on the internet and through as many sources as you can find. Try to discover the history of the issue, current laws pertaining to the issue, other groups addressing the issue, **use the attached handout to focus this research.**
- A great source for information on issues is the staff of the legislative committees working on an issue. It's important to know if the issue is a state or federal issue before you begin. Find out which committee (and which sub-committee) is working on the issue. Each party will have staff for the committee and they would love to talk to interested people. Send them an e-mail and you'll get lots of detailed information and the contact people for lots of groups working on the issue.
- **Split the group into four sub groups, who each have access to one telephone/cell phone to interview groups or individuals, one computer with internet access, and one master copy of the research guide to fill in. Let each group research one issue under staff support and supervision for the duration of session. If there are more students than tools, then have the additional students brainstorm ways to address the issue through media, education, partnerships, articles, etc. Push them to flesh out a response as much as possible using research and ideas.**

Advocacy Handout: doing the research

Students in Group:

Issue to Research: _____

Is this a (circle one) **Local State Federal** issue?

Can we find a scripture reference that guides or deals with this issue? If so, what?

Who do we know that is involved with this issue? (like governments, churches, individuals, etc) This can someone you know who feel passionate about this issue. List them here:

What laws pertain to this issue? State them briefly.

What is the history of this issue? Where does it come from? Does anyone know?

What specific steps can be taken to address or raise awareness of the issue?
Can we use: the internet? Newspapers? Word of mouth? Brochures or flyers?
How can we raise awareness of this issue to other students immediately?

Additional info:

Session three: Creating a plan

Let each of the four sub groups present their research, then answer the following:

- Where the Church's (or youth) voice is most needed?
- Who is taking the lead with this issue? Do we need to lend our voice to theirs?
- What resources do we have to mobilize our church (or community)? Can we publish an article, make a brochure, or create a video?

Consensus: a general agreement and group solidarity in sentiment and belief

Can we have a consensus about which issue we'll deal with as a result of this lesson?

From this point, the instructor becomes a facilitator (see Appendix A for respectful communication guidelines) in creating a step by step plan that is realistic and attainable for the group. This process could take another session as well, and might get heated at times. Let it run its course.

Some helpful results that are attainable:

- Write a resolution to Diocesan Convention pertaining to the issue (see Appendix B for tips on writing a Diocesan Resolution)
- Create a mock new report video with images and well rehearsed script that can be shared across various networks. This video would raise the awareness of the topic.
- Create a one page flyer educating about the issue and steps to take to change it. Assign every student to distribute it to a unique network (school, church, boy/girl scouts, work, etc.)
- Organize a mission trip or pilgrimage to a location where students and families may directly address the issue
- Organize a fundraiser to raise money for an organization dealing directly with the issue.
- Find out who the legislators on the committees addressing the issue are. Contact them and ask for a meeting with their staff members working on the issue (this is more effective than meeting with the legislators themselves). This is most effective if you are a constituent of that legislator but most of the state legislators will have their staff meet with people who are educated and engaged in issues.

Session Four: Implementation

This entire session is dedicated to production of the agreed upon project. Please make sure everyone has a job, and monitor progress. It would be disappointing for the students to have worked so hard only to not have enough time to implement their decision.

Appendix A: Respectful Communication guide

Respectful Communication guidelines

- R take Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others. (“I” statements, not “you” or “they”)
- E Empathetic listening – enter into the other persons’ situation and point of view.
- S be Sensitive to differences in communication styles
- P Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- E Examine your own assumption and perceptions (Why am I reacting/feeling this way?)
- C Keep Confidentiality (to uphold wellbeing of community)
- T Tolerate ambiguity because we’re not here to debate who is right or wrong.

Mutual invitation process

- The leader/facilitator may share first or invite another to share
- After the person has spoken, they have the privilege to invite another to share.
- If the person invited chooses not to share, they may simply say “pass” and invite someone else. (no explanation needed to pass)
- The process continues until all have been invited to speak.
- Anyone who passed is invited again, but is still free to pass.

This method is a way to include all in the conversation in a respectful atmosphere. While a person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt or jump in to speak without being invited by name. In this method, no one has more authority than anyone else. There is no competition for time.

Community Bible Study Process

After 1st reading: A word, phrase, or image that stood out for you.

After 2nd reading: How does this passage speak to the work before us?

(This question may be modified for context, group, reading, etc.)

After 3rd reading: What does God invite you to do, be, or change through this passage?

Conclude with a prayer circle. Join hands in a circle. Facilitator begins with a 2 sentence prayer:

“I thank God today...” “I ask God today...” and squeeze the hand of the next person when finished. This process goes around the circle until it returns to the leader. The circle ends with the Lord’s prayer.

Appendix B: Guidance for writing a Resolution

From the United Nations website: <http://www.unausa.org/site/pp.asp?c=fvKRI8MPJpF&b=457173>

1. Be sure to **follow the format** for resolutions provided by the conference or convention organizers. For Example, in the Diocese of Southern Ohio:
 - a. Please submit resolutions in electronic data format, preferably a word processing file attached to an e-mail.
 - b. A resolution should include the subject at the top. The resolved part should state the who, what and when. The explanation states the why. If there are budget implications to the resolution, check with the person responsible for the line item to get approval or explain how funding would be secured.
2. Create a **detailed resolution**. For example, if your resolution calls for a new program, think about how it will be funded and what body will manage it.
3. **Be realistic**. Do not create objectives for your resolution that cannot be met. Make sure your body can take the action suggested.
4. Try to **find multiple sponsors**. Your committee will be more likely to approve the resolutions if many delegates contribute ideas.
5. Use historic justifications for action. Cite past resolutions, precedents and statements about the purpose of action.
6. **Make sure** to explain what the committee will do to address the issue I the resolution passes.

Sample Resolution:

A resolution directing that each vestry/mission council prepare a statement of stewardship.
Resolved, that each Vestry and Mission Council of the Diocese of Southern Ohio prepare a Statement of Stewardship which clearly commits its members to prayerful and thoughtful giving; and be it further **Resolved**, that such Statements of Stewardship be prepared and presented to their respective congregations by All Saints' Day of 2005.

Explanation

The Vestry or Mission Council is responsible for providing temporal leadership of its congregation and should set a positive example for those committed to its charge.

Impact on God's Vision in the Diocese of Southern Ohio

Explain how passage of this resolution will enable us of the Diocese of Southern Ohio to embrace the calling God has set before us through the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Presented by:

(Individual's name and church or committee or commission)

Financial and Program Impact Summary

Budgetary Impact: Actual cost, source of funds, and if from Operating Budget, is it approved.

Program Impact: What is the intended action? Who is responsible to implement? How will this action relate to existing programs?

Appendix C: Lobbying the local and regional government with Advocacy concerns.

Advocacy, at the most basic, is convincing someone to take (or not take) an action. So when you ask your parents to borrow the car and try to convince them to let you use it, you are being an advocate.

Normally when we speak about advocacy, however, we are talking about trying to get the government to take or not take some action.

In order to be an effective advocate there are a few questions you need to answer:

1. What is the action that I wish to have taken?
2. Who are the people who can take that action?
3. What is their current position on the issue?
4. Who do they listen to on this issue?
5. What other issues do they care about?
6. Who else might be able to influence them on this issue?

The answers to these questions form an advocacy plan.

- **What is the action that I wish to have taken?**

The first step is to define your position clearly. If what you want is to have a specific bill passed or defeated well and good, but usually we are advocating for something larger than one piece of legislation. For example, you may wish defeat a particular zoning change, but what you really want is to prevent a pig farm from moving next to your house, but the ultimate goal is to preserve the residential character of your neighborhood. If you know what your ultimate goal is you can avoid winning the battle but losing the war, for example, getting the zoning change that affects your next door lot defeated, but having one that lets a cow farm move in across the street. Focus on your ultimate goal and they will provide your arguments for or against a particular action.

- **Who are the people who can take that action?**

The key thing in advocacy is to advocate your position to the right people. There are various levels of government and various branches within the levels. You need to be sure that you ask the right people to take the action you wish. For example, a change in policy about school lunch times is first should be brought first to the principal and then to the school board. A change in the speed limit on a street, to the city council. A change in state law to the state legislature, but a change in policy to the state department involved, a federal law to congress and a federal policy to the federal department involved.

Identify which level of government you should approach and if it is a legislative or an executive matter.

If it is a legislative matter, you have a direct representative (a representative or a senator) but it will be most effective if you ask to speak to the person in the representative's office who deals with your topic.

If it is an executive matter, identify the correct department and the assistant or deputy secretary who deals with your topic.

This is really the key to advocacy. Many people start with their representative, and certainly, sending an e-mail to your elected representative is one way to advocate your position. But to really affect change, you need to make yourself and your position known to the people who influence the

representatives. Also, it is often the aides and lower level executives who actually draft the laws and policies and who manage the committee hearings where changes are made to legislation.

You can find the phone number of your legislator's office on the website of the state legislature or the U.S. Congress. Call their office (or e-mail the general address) and ask for the contact information for the aid working on your topic. Send them an overview of the action you want to have taken and why you think it is important and ask if they will schedule a meeting (or a phone call) with you. It's sometimes easier to get an appointment if there is a group of you advocating the same thing.

You can find the phone numbers for most of the major offices of state and federal government on the web as well (government websites have the extension .gov in their address) Find what you think is the right sub-office and ask the person who answers the phone or e-mail to direct you to the right person.

The people who answer the phone and e-mail deal with hundreds of people every day. The more polite you are, the further you will get.

- **What is their current position on the issue?**

Be sure you know the current position of your legislator or the executive department before speaking to the staff member.

If they are opposed to your position you are trying to change their mind. In this case, it is important to find out why they hold the position that they do and for how long they have held that position.

If they are on the same side of the issue as you, you are asking what you can do to help bring about your mutual goal.

- **Who do they listen to on this issue?**

Try to find out if any of the legislator's major donors, or significant constituents or party leadership agree with you on this issue and is there a way that you can get them to use their influence with your legislator. Remember also that state representatives represent fairly small districts and a small group of people can make a huge difference in their fund raising and campaign volunteer corps.

- **What other issues do they care about?**

Find out what other issues the legislator cares about and works on and see if there are ways in which his or her position on that issue can inform his or her actions on your issue.

- **Who else might be able to influence them on this issue?**

Many legislators pay close attention to the members of their own party who serve on the legislative committees that work directly with issues, so find out who those people are and use the same techniques to try to influence them. Also, you can often be more effective changing laws (and even defeating them) in the legislative committee before they get to the floor of the house.