



## STEPPING STONES

# WALKING alongside

strengthening congregational community ministries

## » Step by Step: Congregational Advocacy «

### » GETTING STARTED

#### What is Congregational Advocacy?

There are many ways that congregations can be involved in alleviating the pain of poverty, caring for those who are hurting, or ministering to those in need. Many times, though, these methods are not enough because the causes of the problems are structural. Government officials can create or change policies to eliminate these structures that keep people in poverty. Being an advocate means actively working to effect change on behalf of marginalized or vulnerable people whose voices are often ignored or not heard. Congregations can engage in advocacy by educating government officials about the issues and recommending change.

#### Components of the ministry

- ♦ *Education:* Provide opportunities to educate congregants about issues and what they can do to help people in poverty.
- ♦ *Write Letters:* Host a letter-writing campaign to bring congregants together and write letters to government officials about what they believe should be done.
- ♦ *Call or Meet with Representatives:* Call your government representatives and express your opinions about the problems you see or how you believe they should vote. If you live close enough to government offices, make an appointment and talk to your representatives in person.
- ♦ *Participate in a "Lobby Day":* Many faith-based advocacy groups sponsor lobby days where they will educate participants about the issues, prepare them for effective advocacy, and organize opportunities to speak with representatives.

#### Why is there a need?

There is tremendous need domestically and internationally, and it cannot be met by charity alone. Congregations can take up their cause and advocate for policy changes, better care, and more resources for help.

Around the world...

- ♦ There are 2.7 billion people in the world who are trying to survive on less than \$2 a day.
- ♦ 114 million children do not have access to basic education.
- ♦ An African child dies of malaria, a preventable and treatable disease, every 30 seconds.
- ♦ More than 800 million people are hungry.
- ♦ Five million people die every year as a result of unclean water.<sup>1</sup>

And closer to home...

- ♦ More than 37 million people in the U.S. live in poverty.
- ♦ 45.7 million people in the U.S. do not have any health insurance coverage.
- ♦ 4% of US households are hungry.<sup>2</sup>

#### Stepping out in faith

Here are some "first steps" to consider before your congregation engages in an advocacy ministry:

- ♦ Participate in an assessment of your community to determine areas of need and organizations with which your church can partner.
- ♦ Determine what issue(s) your congregation would like to learn more about and work to improve.



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- ♦ Recruit individuals from the church who are interested in the issue to help organize the advocacy effort.
- ♦ Research local, national, and international statistics about the issue. Find out what policies already exist, what organizations share your concern, and what materials you can use for your work.
- ♦ Determine what type of advocacy campaign you want to engage in and who will be involved.

#### **What this ministry might look like in your church**

There are a number of issues about which your church may choose to advocate and a number of ways that it can be done. Here are a few possibilities:

- ♦ Host an educational meeting about hunger and participate in a church-wide Offering of Letters through Bread for the World (<http://www.bread.org>).
- ♦ Write letters to the editor of your local paper.
- ♦ Serve fair trade coffee on Sunday morning and educate congregants about fair trade products.
- ♦ Learn about the Millennium Development Goals and host a telephone calling campaign to encourage government officials to help make them happen by 2015 (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/#>).

#### **Backpacks**

The Walking Alongside Web site provides a Backpack of additional resources and examples for this specific ministry. Included are published articles, Web sites, selected books, testimonials and existing ministries with contact information.

#### **Pathways**

Learn from the first-hand accounts of those already engaged in this specific ministry. Plus, develop networking contacts as go-to sources to explore solutions to challenges or celebrations of successes.

#### **Food for the Journey**

A short devotional based on scripture that can be used in church bulletins, as a Moment for Mission during worship or as an introduction to a Bible study.

#### **Footnotes**

1. "Fast Facts: The Faces of Poverty." Millennium Project. [http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/resources/fastfacts\\_e.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/resources/fastfacts_e.htm)
2. "Hunger and Poverty in the United States." RESULTS. <http://www.results.org/website/article.asp?id=350>