

**Advocacy Priorities**

**2021-2022 Legislative Session**

**January 2021**

The following 2021-2022 Advocacy Priorities have been established by the Council’s Commission on Public Witness (CPW), guided by the Council’s ***Principles for Public Advocacy***.

**Background**

Several years ago, the CPW determined that the Council should focus on “upstream” issues—those representing the root causes for why people live in poverty, why our economy is suffering, why our environment is being ravaged, and the like. “The Parable of the River” provides a helpful (and brief) illustration to explain what this means. A version of this parable is available at <https://www.justicemattersinkansas.org/justice_matters_mission>.

We believe the time has come to name racism and white privilege as the primary drivers of most of the injustices that we witness in our nation. While we see race as the major driver, we also recognize that misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia and other prejudices are part of the equation.

Attacks on and injustices leveled at those identified as “other”—immigrants, people of color, and LGBT populations—are nothing new, but they appear to have escalated in recent years. We have witnessed multiple deaths of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement, with the callous murder of George Floyd on Memorial Day 2020 setting off nationwide protests. We learned about the cruel separation of parents and children at our Mexican border, with no plan to reunite them. We heard chants of “Jews will not replace us” at the 2017 rally in Charlotteville, VA. We watched rollbacks in protections for LGBT populations in our nation’s military. We are currently viewing an increase of attacks on people of Asian descent because some in leadership blaming them for the pandemic.

Those who harbor fear and hatred of these populations were further emboldened by rhetoric from the highest echelons of government. Following a contentious, venomous, hyper-partisan election in 2020, this rhetoric fueled continued challenges to the outcome of the election, culminating in the invasion of our nation’s Capitol on January 6. Participants wore and displayed many of the symbols of racism, white nationalism, and anti-Semitism as they conducted their campaign to overthrow the government of the United States.

All of the chaos and division was amplified by a global pandemic, leading to an initial shutdown over much of the country in mid-March, leading to what may result in permanent change to how we do business in the future. We have been asked to take precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus—which is highly contagious—but millions of Americans objected to the wearing of masks and limits on gathering in groups, often promoted and led by political leaders. Many even claimed that COVID-19 was a hoax. Meanwhile, infections continued to grow and as of the end of February 2021, the US surpassed 500,000 deaths. As a result, we have experienced record unemployment, economic devastation, loss of health care coverage, growing hunger, threatened growth in homelessness, and millions grieving the loss of loved ones. While the pandemic has affected everyone, it has been particularly deadly for people of color—African Americans, Latinx, and Native Americans—because many of them are considered “essential workers” who are more subject to exposure, and economic and health-related injustices have left them more vulnerable to infection.

So, the roots of injustice continue to run deep, and appear to have grown deeper in light of the events of the last two years. We’ve seen virtually no change with regard to the injustices that we’ve named over the years, and if anything, the circumstances have grown worse. As we have noted over the years, these injustices are not due to random circumstances—the deep prejudice, intolerance, and even hatred for the other that exists in our society has been intensified by wide political divisions and toxic rhetoric from our leaders.

We would be remiss if we didn’t make note of assaults on our environment as well. We saw the worst wildfires ever recorded in our nation’s west, and further evidence of the devastation we have wrought on our environment as environmental regulations continued to be rolled back and as the previous administration prepared to sell off portions of the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve for drilling. We have witnessed more intense storms with flooding and destruction of homes and other properties that disproportionately affect people of color and those living in poverty.

So what does this mean for the Council’s advocacy in 2021-2022?

**2021-2022 Advocacy Priorities**

1. The Council will work to address the consequences of the spread of COVID-19 in our country, and for policies aimed at curbing its spread. Examples of such efforts include:
2. Funding for the manufacture, distribution, and administration of vaccines, with an emphasis on getting vaccines distributed and administered to underserved populations—primarily people of color.
3. Economic support/relief for individuals (stimulus payments, unemployment, SNAP, EITC and Child Tax Credits, etc.), businesses (particularly small and minority-owned businesses in danger of failure), and state and local governments whose revenues have collapsed due to the pandemic to provide relief for those who are most vulnerable to eviction and foreclosure, utility shut-offs, loss of child care opportunities, and other losses that threaten their ability to survive and live with dignity.
4. Protection and expansion of health care that covers all people—with particular emphasis on ensuring that health care services are available and affordable for BIPOC populations.
5. Continued focus will be placed on educating people of faith with the goal of building understanding and reducing racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, biases against differently abled persons, and prejudices against anyone who may be considered different or “other.”
6. The highest priority will be given to issues that have the greatest effect on our most vulnerable neighbors, including, but not limited to, immigration, criminal justice, gun violence reduction, environment, education, and wages and welfare policies. This includes disparate treatment of Black and Brown populations in policing.
7. Continued focus will be given to changing our political system at both the state and federal level to ensure that government serves all people, including, but not limited to, protecting the right to vote and seeking expanded opportunities for and ease in voting, reforming redistricting to prevent gerrymandering that privileges specific political parties, and limiting the influence of money in elections and lobbying. Particular focus will be given to ensuring access to voting for BIPOC populations.

Read an expanded description/elaboration on these priorities in the addendum to this document.

**How the Public Witness Ministry Efforts Will Be Carried Out**

The Council will continue to provide opportunities for people of faith to act on specific legislation and policies through individual action alerts and updates. This will include:

1. Continue to educate people of faith about their responsibility to be engaged in the public arena not just through voting, but through active engagement with elected and appointed officials—encouraging congregations and faith communities to use the Council’s civics curriculum.
2. In addition to traditional issue advocacy, it will also advocate for, and encourage others to advocate for, loving our neighbor and promoting civility in every place where people interact in our society—but particularly at every level of government and among all elected and appointed officials.
3. As always, enhance and expand the Council’s work and advocacy work with all appropriate partners in the faith community and beyond as a means of amplifying the Council’s faith voice on important issues.
4. Continue to make public statements about the important issues cited above as a means of educating people of faith and raising awareness among the general population.

To learn more about the Council’s vision with respect to its public witness, please view the ***Principles for Public Advocacy*** at <https://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Principles.pdf>.