

Called to Advocate: Moving Beyond Charity



Advocacy, as defined in the dictionary, is “to speak or plead on behalf of another.” In the church, **advocacy** is a public witness to the Gospel where the church speaks with and on behalf of people in need, articulating positions consistent with our Catholic faith.

There are two different but complementary ways that we can walk in the path of love, or *caritas*. We call these the “Two Feet of Love in Action, based on Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’s reflections in *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) and *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth).

Advocating for “social justice...concerns the social, political and economic aspects and above all, the structural dimension of the problems and their respective solutions (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 201*).” Advocacy works to get at the root causes and improve structures.

Advocacy is a ministry of action; it is the act of speaking out. It is one foot of love in action. Christ’s ministry of caring for all people, regardless of society’s judgment of their worthiness, motivates us to advocate for policies that contribute to justice and peace for all people.

Advocacy is rooted in the Scriptures. The roots for advocacy ministry are found in God’s intent for justice, a theme which permeates both Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament...

- ⇒ the Exodus story -- when God hears the cries of the Hebrew slaves and calls upon Moses to advocate with Pharaoh on their behalf...
- ⇒ the law -- by which Israel lives out its covenant relationship with God. The law includes special protections for all who are vulnerable: widows, orphans, resident aliens. The Sabbath and Jubilee Years include provisions for liberation, redistribution of wealth and the periodic re-ordering of society to protect the poor and break cycles of domination. Fields are to rest, debts to be cancelled, slaves to be set free.
- ⇒ the prophets -- who fiercely defended the rights of the poor and declared God’s demand for justice in social relationships. They remind us that the God revealed in Scripture is a God of righteousness and mercy, who has delivered the ungodly and called us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8)
- ⇒ the new covenant -- in Jesus, the Messiah sent by God to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free... (Luke 4:16-19). Jesus was in continual conflict with religious leaders over the essential meaning of the law. The just treatment of people was at the core of his concern. Jesus and the prophets clearly inserted themselves into the political realm when they challenged social structures that abused or neglected people living in poverty.

Charitable works are the first simple response to immediate need, and represent one “foot” of love in action. Advocacy goes beyond important gifts of charity, like clothing, food, time and money, by encouraging the adoption of public policies that serve justice and help people who suffer.

Elements of Advocacy

- **Prayer:** Include petitions in your personal and communal prayers that center on community, society, our government at all levels, the poor, the vulnerable, those in need.
- **Conscience Formation, Study & Learning:** Organize opportunities to learn about and discuss the issues in your parish. Every community has resource people who are eager to speak with your group. Encourage those affected by problems to share their stories. **Study** Catholic social teaching documents, Vatican II documents, encyclicals and pastoral letters, which guide the advocacy work of our church.
- **Discernment & Planning:** Discern how are being called to be neighbors to those in need. How shall I/we respond? Who may I/we work with? What resources do I/we have?
- **Action: Write. Call. Serve. Go with. Give. Speak out.**