

JUSTICE

CREATING POLICIES, LAWS, AND SYSTEMS THAT WORK FOR EVERYONE

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COMMUNITIES FIRST

WORKBOOK 8

Justice

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1. Three Strategies You Can Use to Make a Difference

Work on a concrete issue that concerns you and members of your congregation.

Talking about poverty or debt relief or hunger in the abstract might be compelling if you get the right speaker, but for most of us, even we Christians, an issue has to affect us personally before we are compelled to act on it. Connecting policy with realities as we experience them makes for an effective and satisfying advocacy effort.

Take small steps. Understand that change doesn't happen overnight.

It can take years to change a law or to create a new one. For the most part, this is a good thing. Can you imagine what would happen to our system if laws were easy to pass? Help people understand that small victories are still victories, and that if you persevere you can make a lasting change.

Avoid partisanship

Party politics are divisive, but there is no need for the congregation to work at that level. In fact, being nonpartisan—and giving legislators of all political stripes your attention—is often more effective than hitching your wagon to one party.

2. How Do We Begin?

Preach about justice and injustice.

That got your attention, didn't it? You don't have to take sides to remind people of our God-given mandate to care about what happens to people and the creation around us. This is the arena of justice and politics. Christians are called to be active citizens framing the laws and systems that make life better for everyone.

Sponsor a voter registration drive in your church or community.

Sign people up to exercise their most basic right: the right to vote. If people think their vote doesn't count, remind them of what happened in Florida in 2000: a few hundred votes decided the outcome of the presidential race.

Contact an elected official.

Writing letters and making phone calls—especially at local levels, but also at the state and national levels—*makes a difference*. Legislators know that they work for their constituents. Hearing from those constituents often determines what direction they will take. If the legislator is philosophically supportive of something you want him or her to support, your calls and letters will help justify their vote!

People are often afraid to contact their legislators, for fear that they don't know enough about an issue and that the person who answers the phone will challenge their position. In reality, this rarely happens. Sometimes, the staff person who answers the phone will provide some detail on the legislators' position on the issue you are calling about, but most often they'll just mark you down as a "yes" or "no" on that issue.

Visit your elected official.

If letters and phone calls are the 400-meter dash, a visit to your legislator is the 5K. Visits with two to five constituents (too many and you've got yourself a rally—a very different, although sometimes also effective way to communicate with your legislator) are a very effective way to have your opinion heard and begin to understand the legislators' position on your issue. A visit can also help you to understand what you are up against with getting your law passed or your issue promoted. For instance, your legislator might be very supportive of preserving a piece of land as a migratory bird sanctuary, but she might be getting a lot of pressure from developers to turn that land into a shopping center. Helping your legislator get the word out to the public about the fate of this land might help her avoid seeming partisan, and having to capitulate to the developers.

Hold a candidate's forum.

This has two benefits: it draws attention to the political process and gets politicians on multiple sides to address issues that concern you. To avoid having your forum hijacked by a vocal majority, distribute blank cards on which audience members can write down their questions. Have a moderator screen the questions before giving them to the candidates to prevent duplication and grandstanding from the audience.

3. Examples of Injustice and Ways to End It

Living justice is both an individual and a communal reality. Communally, we need systems that ensure fairness, equity, and access.

Injustice results when

- people are active in the formulation of the laws, policies, and systems that most affect them.
- people do not have access to attorneys who work for their cause.
- people have little or no voice in how the courts function.
- people are isolated from the planning systems that produce the public services they need most (for example, public transportation, community gardens, and summer recreation programs).
- a culture of racism closes doors to access.
- a culture of discrimination keeps women from positions of leadership and power.
- a culture of class keeps groups of people separate from others.
- a monopolistic system of education fails everyone.
- a welfare system traps people in poverty.
- a tax system benefits one group of citizens over another.

Systems in the United States are typically determined by middle and upper class people. They are the educated leaders with the knowledge to access power and positional influence. They know the rules of engagement and systems formation. They are of European descent in disproportionate numbers compared to the general population they affect. They are also disproportionately male. Systems tend to favor the people who make them and place a burden on those who are not part of making them.

For proof of this, take a look at some of the Systems issues that affect poverty in the United States:

A. Voter Turnout

50% of voters actually vote in a presidential election, less than 40% in general elections. Around 10 to 15% participate in local elections (unless there is a hot-button issue, in which case it might reach 20%). The percentages are lowest in poor communities.

Electing representatives who work for the people is something everyone can do to build justice in North America.

Example

Anna had been a U.S. citizen for 12 years. She had never voted for the following reasons:

- She believed someone might sort out her vote or throw it away.
- She thought someone might be watching the balloting place and recording who goes in and who votes for whom. It happened in her country of origin, and some people who voted were never seen again.
- She did not know the mechanics of voting.

- She was not sure if they would have ballots in Spanish, her native language.
- She felt uninformed and skeptical about all candidates and ballot proposals

What can be done for someone like Anna?

<p>Create an incentive for participation in a general civics class put on by your church or school. For example, provide a door prize for anyone who has never voted before and who completes a session (\$10 gas certificates or \$20 worth of groceries from the pantry etc.) Invite the most popular civics teacher in the region to teach the class. Have a translator(s) present.</p>
<p>Work with your precinct or township to set up a day to walk new voters through the process of voting and registering to vote. The township can advertise it through their regular communication channels to each household. Church members could go door to door with flyers advertising the event as they invite people to register to vote and answer their questions about how, when, and where to vote.</p>
<p>Prior to an election, set up a class at church or school where people can dialogue about the candidates and the issues. Make sure both sides are presented—you can be known as the church that gets the whole story out in a fair and balanced way.</p>
<p>What are your ideas?</p>

B. Democratization of Information: Getting Information to the People Who are Affected by It
 Computer technology and the Internet now bring information to citizens on almost every topic. Eligibility for social services and program information, tax forms, and most helping organizations in a community are listed on the web. The issue today is that people who need the information most are not ready to access and use it.

Example 1

Earned Income Credit (EIC), is a refundable federal income tax credit for low-income working individuals and families. Congress originally approved the tax credit legislation in 1975 in part to offset the burden of social security taxes and to provide an incentive to work. When the EITC exceeds the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit.

Luis did not know anything about these credits. His tax preparer did not know or did not tell him about this benefit, so he did not get the credit. Luis works hard as a welder, and makes less than \$10/hour. His wife does not speak English and works entry level jobs whenever she can. Living on their income with four children is no easy task. They need this benefit.

The information about EIC and how to calculate it is readily available to anyone. There is an organization in town that will match dollar-for-dollar Luis's EIC income if he will put it in a long term savings vehicle for an asset purchase (like a house, an education, or a business). How does Luis learn about EIC or this Individual Development Account program?

Example 2

Julie was late in paying her rent and on the edge of eviction. Her husband had left her and she was barely making ends meet. Julie's three children needed to eat, so she chose to spend her last few dollars on food rather than paying the rent. What Julie did not know was that she was eligible for \$340 a month in food stamps. She would not be facing eviction if she had access to good information. The information is as close as the nearest computer. How does Julie learn about this benefit?

What can be done for people like Luis and Julie?

Develop and advertise a drop-in center at your church where people can get information about how to find help. Staff the center with volunteers from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m., 11 a.m.-2 p.m., and 3-6 p.m. on certain days of the week. These are the hours when most people complete their work shifts. Have a computer or two available and be ready to direct people to the sites that will help them. If they don't use computers, offer help.
Recruit volunteers in your church to be citizen advocates. A citizen advocate spends time helping a person learn how to navigate information and services that will help them succeed. A citizen advocate becomes a mentor when they switch from information-giving to partnership with the citizen to achieve their goals in life.
Have a computer bank open and available to the community during certain hours each week. Have someone there to supervise and assist people in finding what they need. Have volunteers follow up with participants to encourage and continue directing them in their search.
Host computer training classes at your church. Recruit participants in your community. Give away recycled computers to those who complete classes (there are low-cost or free sources in most communities). Include training in navigating the Internet and in the key "Office" software functions. You can probably find existing competent young adults and professionals to do the training at your church.
List your ideas

Example 3

Maria is a participant in an English as a Second Language (ESL) tutoring program run by a church. Maria is a native of Mexico but a resident of the U.S. since 1988. She was matched with Bea, a retired school and church librarian, for her tutoring classes. As Bea began tutoring Maria she learned that one reason Maria was interested in learning English was to become a U.S. citizen. Bea offered to help her study the questions on the citizenship test. Maria went to the local congressman’s office to get the study questions for the test. The questions came with a list of answers. Bea quickly learned that the answers in the Spanish translation were very different from the answers in the English. They were wrong! Question #30 said there are 104 senators. Question #44 names the 13 original colonies, but it lists New York twice and omits Georgia. Some of the questions were not at all relevant to citizenship, such as: “What is the form number for the citizenship application?” Bea became outraged that people studying to become U.S. citizens were given wrong answers to study for their citizenship test. Unfortunately, this is not at all unusual.

What can you do about this problem?

Sign up with a church or local organization to be a tutor or mentor to someone who wants help.
Learn about the systems that the person needs to navigate in order to take next steps.
Attend court or hearings with them so that you can use your gifts and skills to accurately listen, interpret, and help navigate to successful steps and actions. Being with them through an extended process can add to their power to persist.
Read their paperwork with them to ensure accuracy of information and answers
Introduce them to their elected officials and hold those officials accountable for fixing problems in the public domain.
If you see a problem take personal responsibility to get it fixed.
If necessary include an attorney to put pressure on a system.
List your ideas

C. Community Organizing for Just Actions and Policies

It usually takes a good number of citizens working together to change systems. This applies to changes in the local community, county, state, or federal levels of public policy.

Example 1: Community Organizing in the Neighborhood

On the corner of 19th and Pine two men were stabbed Friday night. This is a corner where violence erupts all too often. There is a liquor store there that seems to be a magnet for trouble; this location had the largest number of police interventions of any block in the city in the last year. In the last few months there has been a house fire, two drive-by shootings, and several drug arrests. Where are the citizen neighbors? They are cowering behind closed doors, victims of violence and fear. What will it take to turn things around on this block?

The answer is citizen action and community organizing. It will help citizens take back their block; it will call them to cooperate with the police and invite their full participation in restoring order; it will help the people in the neighborhood spend time together and experience each other as friends and as partners; it will result in a shared agenda for change in the neighborhood—including radical changes of ownership and activities.

How can you begin organizing your community?

Host backyard picnics so that neighbors can get to know each other.
Find ways to bless the “problem families” on your street. Do good deeds, be courteous and encouraging, go out of your way to engage them and be a friend. Look for the best in them.
Gather neighbors in the community and invite the police to meet with you. Begin conversations about the ways ordinary residents can work with the police to restore peace and safety.
Organize neighbors so that two people are on foot patrols together during peak “problem” hours. They should wear something distinctive that marks them as community patrol persons. For safety reasons they should carry a cell phone so they can contact police instantly if necessary.
Neighbors can work together around a map of the neighborhood, targeting specific properties where changes are needed. They can engage with a community development organization or form their own to take responsibility for the long term direction of their neighborhood. They can manage change via programs that help individuals and families—such as property transfers, sales or evictions.
The strategic placement of a Christian family or two on a block as peacemakers is another way to begin the process of neighborhood redemption. Training and support for these strategic neighbors will help them develop ideas and endurance for affecting change. They need to see themselves as the long term missionaries on the block, bringing God’s peace. They need to understand their role in terms of reweaving the fabric of community and working together to make this a great place to live.

List your ideas

Example 2: Community Organizing for a System’s Change

Mark is 24 years old and completing his fifth year of a six-year sentence for drug offenses. Warehousing prisoners like Mark hurts us all. The majority will be repeat offenders and will come out of jail tougher than when they went in—in jail there is no process to help them mature emotionally and relationally. What will it take to develop restorative justice policies and laws? It will take education, citizen participation and organizing to convince law makers and courts that the current system is faulty. It will require citizen participation in trying alternative methods, such as drafting alternative laws and regulations that govern jail time. It will require raising funds to pay for services that restore and rehabilitate. Organizing citizen actions is what produces change in systems that affect us all.

What can you do?

Read about restorative justice. What is it and how does it work?
Connect with the people in your area who are leading the way toward restorative justice and find a way to contribute.
Connect your local restorative justice group with others around the nation to work toward a national movement.
Frame policy alternatives and laws that can work in your community. Involve police, lawyers, convicted people, and victims. Track progress of changes taking place around the country.
Develop a growing advocacy list of people who will pray, make phone calls, solicit signatures for petitions, and vote for systems changes at the right time.
List your ideas

Example 3: Community Organizing at a City or Regional Level

Some issues require bringing together individuals, groups, and/or institutions in order to affect change. How does a city or region develop enterprise zones? How does a community annex a neighborhood? Can communities have their political jurisdictions changed? How does a region attract federal funding for a regional issue? Some systemic changes require broad networking, collaborating and massive voter participation.

For example, “Healthy Families Healthy Marriages” (HMHR) is a collaboration of many individuals, institutions, and neighborhood groups in the city. They came together to strengthen families in urban areas. They had a common goal and they developed a framework for cooperation that resulted in millions of dollars coming to the city to help strengthen families.

What can you do?

Bring the issue to the attention of your political representatives.
Find out who has a stake in the issue and begin meeting with their leaders to discover common values and solutions.
Create a platform or policy change together around which to mobilize others.
Create a city-wide or regional network for advancing the cause.
List your ideas

D. Framing Policy

We, the people, govern ourselves. We create a system that produces regulations affecting everyone. Poor people are less involved in this process.

Example 1: Drafting a law

Geranda is a low-income single parent of two children. For three generations prior to hers, all of the families have been single parents and welfare dependent. Geranda would have followed suit, but her caseworker forced her to work. Now she wants her children to aspire to something greater than she has. The problem is that the public school system in her neighborhood is failing everyone. Fewer than six out of ten students graduate from high school.

Geranda wants to send her children to a local Christian school run by a church in her community. The kids there have a 98% graduation rate. However, she cannot afford it. She wants to change the system so that parents can send their children a school of their choice. Geranda believes that home, church, and school need to participate together in raising children to be

successful. Everyone else gets the benefit of tax dollars, why shouldn't she? What would it take for her to change the laws?

Example 2

Rosaria is a 52-year-old immigrant. Her English is marginal. For three years she has worked hard as a housekeeper in a local motel. Last week she was told that she would no longer be paid by the hour. She would only be paid at the rate of \$3.50 per room. This is a way for management to bypass fair labor and compensation laws. What can Rosaria do to change the system and force justice in the workplace? What kind of law could be enacted to force hotels to pay a fair hourly wage?

Existing laws are in the public domain. Geranda and Rosaria would have to study the existing laws and amend them, or write a new law. Anyone can draft or petition to change a law, but there are strict procedures for getting laws passed. Once drafted, a member of the House or Senate has to bring the bill into the legislative process. Then it will require significant citizen support to get passed, or it will die.

*See Appendix A for the general process of getting a bill passed into law.

What can you do?

Spend time with a low-income family. Find out what system issue(s) affects them and other low-income families adversely.
Help them articulate the issue clearly.
Help them frame an alternative.
Help them access or develop public platforms for expressing their views.
Help them form a network with people similarly affected.
Help them access media coverage for their story and the policy change.
Help them navigate the political process until they find a champion representative who will take on their issue.
List your ideas

E. Empowerment: Access to and Sharing Positional Power

Who makes and administers the rules for whom? Who controls the flow of resources? These are questions about power. The poor often feel disempowered—unable to access resources or to adjudicate rules, overlooked in establishing rules, and pushed like pawns in a game they never agreed to play.

Example 1

After two years of hassling with the authorities, Joe was no closer to resolution than the day he found out his identity was stolen. He knew the name the person was using (his name), the Social Security # (his SSI), the address in Kalamazoo where the person was living, the place where this person was working, and a list of items the perpetrator had charged to credit cards in Joe’s name that were now on his credit record. Joe lost his job and could not get unemployment benefits because records showed continuing income. Joe called the IRS, who they referred him to the Federal Trade Commission, who suggested he fill out forms—which he did. Joe called the local sheriff’s office, and they claimed they had no jurisdiction in the town where the perpetrator lived. Everyone had a list of things Joe could do and papers to fill out, but no one would go apprehend the perpetrator and stop the identity fraud. Joe gave up! He was stuck, powerless, a nobody in the system. He honestly thought about going to the perpetrator’s home and doing him bodily harm to force action. Disempowerment often leads to violence—a less attractive used of power for everyone.

What can you do?

Become a mentor to someone who feels helpless to change his or her situation.
Help them break down complex problems into smaller parts and encourage them to tackle them one at a time, rewarding them for each step completed.
Go with them to those appointments that seem frightening until they have the confidence to go alone.
Encourage them to voice in a clear and respectful way both their dreams and the things that have block their way to accomplishing those dreams.
Help them discern accurately who (and at what levels) in a system is blocking their way.
List your ideas

Example 2

Rose Park church is a church with four full-time staff and seventeen part-time staff. All of the full-time staff are white men, while all of the part-time staff are women. Their community is 32% Latino, 4% Asian, and 14% African American. Their membership is 94% Caucasian. What will it take to get a Latino or an Asian on the leadership team? What will it take to get women on the leadership team? Is there a glass ceiling of empowerment?

What can you do?

1. Honestly evaluate whether your organization is accessible to women and people of color. Complete a race and/or gender analysis.
2. Diagram all positions in your organization.
3. Make a note of which positions are held by women.
4. Make a note of which positions are held by people of color.
5. Do some analysis:
 - a. Are all segments of your community represented well in the organization? If not, why not?
 - b. Are there impediments at any levels of the organization to access by a person or group of people?
 - c. What would you want to change?
 - d. Create a plan to institute appropriate changes

F. Classism: Overcoming Class and Culture Barriers

In her essays *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* and *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*, Dr. Ruby Payne talks about how we can understand cultural systems and learn to operate within more than one of them. She addresses the following issues:

- hidden rules among economic classes of people
- characteristics of generational poverty.
- language patterns among various classes
- differences in violence and conflict resolution
- differences in family structure and relationships

Example

Tanya was a single parent of three children below the ages of seven whose husband had left her. She came to a church for help. The church asked her what her goals were. They asked her to finish the sentence: "Life would be better if..." Tanya replied, "...if I had my own home, if I had reliable transportation, if I had my children in good schools, if I had a livable wage job." A family from the church agreed that these were admirable goals and over the course of the next four years they spent hours and days every week mentoring and supporting Tanya until she had achieved all her goals.

After all of their work with Tanya, the mentoring family was disappointed that she did not become part of their close circle of friends or join their church. The reason for this was that the family had never really learned the language of culture and the framework of poverty that was

Tanya’s reality. They were always in a different world from Tanya’s perspective. Tanya did not feel comfortable in their middle-class framework.

What can you do?

It takes work and understanding to trust and relate to someone who is different from us. Dr. Payne’s materials offer practical exercises to help people begin to learn about their differences concerning culture and class. Study, discuss, and practice them. Develop a level of comfort living in multiple “zones.”

G. Courts and Judicial Procedures

The poor cannot access adequate legal council that is affordable and that fairly represents them.

Consider

- The courts run on a set of middle-class principles, guidelines, and language. It takes translation to make oneself understood by the courts if one does not live and operate in this world.
- The poor cannot afford legal counsel, but do not have the education to represent themselves.
- Public defenders have case loads that are already heavy—they do not have the time or resources to get to know the client and the circumstances of a case thoroughly.
- The courts’ rosters on most days are so heavy that cases need to be substantially developed outside of the court room (except in jury cases). This means that the case is presented in affidavits and documents. Little of the case is developed through conversation, listening, and attending to the people involved.
- Getting at the truth and circumstances of a case is even more difficult for those for whom English is a second language. Often interpretation of questions and events are misunderstood.
- The ability of many low-income families to accurately interpret documents from the courts is marginal. Often the paperwork is put on a pile and lost. It is not a written culture, but an oral culture.
- The court expenses, child custody fees, attorney costs, and interest on everything quickly become an insurmountable mountain of debt for a low-income family already in trouble.

What can you do?

Spend a day or two in court listening to a docket of cases and observe carefully from the perspective of the accused what happens.
Offer to mentor someone in trouble with the law. Help them understand and respond appropriately to the demands of the system. Help them learn to navigate the system for their own benefit.
Develop a relationship with a parole officer. Offer to mentor one of their clients who will “make it” with a little support.

Develop facilitated support groups for men and women on probation. The point is to help them learn life skills, how to navigate in middle-class culture, and how to live and love in community.
Find ways to support someone with competent legal support.
Offer to write formal correspondence to the courts on their behalf.
Become an advocate for a low-income family, insisting on truth and justice, and helping the courts understand the circumstances of the case.
List your ideas

H. Zoning

Zoning laws and regulations create communities of exclusion that hurt us all. Have you noticed where poor people live in your community? With California as a notable exception, low-income housing is almost always developed in isolation from the middle and upper classes. There is a perception that poor people will bring down property values. Zoning laws in most communities are developed to benefit the rich and the middle class. Often ordinances are created that do not suit the lifestyles of the poor. The sad reality is that these zoning laws end up creating communities of exclusion that label and isolate people and cultures.

Consider what might happen if:

- Every third house in any community in America was a starter home or a low-income housing unit.
- If no new development by law could have more than 20% rental units.
- All new developments were designed in a way to encourage and facilitate community.

What can you do?

Get to know the housing, zoning, and community association laws affecting your community. Ask some low-income families what in the regulations might prevent them from becoming your neighbors.
Get a map of your neighborhood or city. Mark all places where low-income housing is dense. (Work with your community college to get a GIS map of your area).
If you do not live in a low-income neighborhood, help a low-income family integrate into your neighborhood.
Convene a meeting of realtors and developers to discuss how we can use real estate development and sales to better integrate communities and desegregate communities on the basis of income.
Create a citizen “watch dog” group with low-income families to monitor and challenge city hall on all developments and real estate zoning changes—work with them to make policies that are fair and just for all.
List your ideas

Public Services and their Administration (public transportation, public gardens and summer recreation programs)

Low-income families are most affected by reductions in public services.

Example 1

A city has just announced that it will chop \$1.2 million from its projected budget deficit by eliminating summer parks and recreation programs. This is the easy money to chop—there will be less resistance in the community from chopping this than other items. Those affected are least able to resist! But look at the decision from another point of view. What will it cost in extra policing? There will be more petty crime because young people are going to be on the streets rather than in supervised and supported parks programs. What will it cost in extra vandalism repair? What will it cost in extra court costs? What will it cost in taxpayer counseling mandated by the courts?

Example 2

The city transportation department has just announced it will reduce its hours of service to seven neighborhoods. Three things are driving the decision:

- 1. lower rider counts during these hours
- 2. budget cuts are needed
- 3. driver safety—drivers experience double the trouble incidents during the hours being cut

Interestingly, none of the regular riders were consulted about the decision in advance. The decision was made by the administration without regard to the impact on riders. Every route was in or to a low-income neighborhood. It is the second and third shift folks who need this service most. How are they going to get to or from work in the late night hours?

What can you do?

Pay attention to announcements about changes in public policy and programs. Ask those most affected how the change will impact them.
Help those adversely affected join together by creating a citizen response group.
Attend the public board meetings of the appropriate agencies and demand to be heard. Go to the press with your side of the story and make the issue public.
Work with the boards to develop alternative actions and policies that create win-win solutions.
List your ideas

4. What Is Legal for a Church Group to Do?

You may have heard that engaging in lobbying or other political activities will cause a church to be fined or punished in some other way. So, what is legal for a church group to do?

Churches are legally allowed to engage in lobbying, as long as they don't endorse or oppose specific candidates for office. Churches can lend their names to candidate forums, voter registration drives, voter education campaigns, or anything that doesn't endorse a specific candidate or party. When you cross that line, you risk breaking the law.

Other Resources

Shalom Seekers — Living the Call to Do Justice: CRCNA Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action. www.crcna.org/justice

The Church World Service puts out a helpful guide on advocacy, found online at www.churchworldservice.org/Educ_Advo/advocacy-tips.html.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has an excellent study guide on advocacy, a must-read before any significant church-based advocacy work, found online at www.elca.org/dcs/thatwemayspeak.pdf.

Alliance for Justice's "Worry-Free Lobbying for Nonprofits", found online at www.alliancforjustice.org.

"Nonpartisan Voter Guides for Churches and Nonprofit Organizations," published online at the Liberty Counsel's website, www.lc.org/OldResources/voter.htm

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Appendix A

Getting a Bill Passed into Law

Step 1. Referral to Committee

Bills are usually referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

Step 2. Committee Action

When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee's calendar. A bill can be referred to a subcommittee or considered by the committee as a whole. At this point a bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on a bill, it is the equivalent of killing it.

Step 3. Subcommittee Review

Often, bills are referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to "put on the record" the views of the executive branch, experts, other public officials, supporters, and opponents. Testimony can be in person or submitted in writing.

Step 4. Mark Up

When the hearings are completed, the subcommittee may meet to "mark up" the bill, that is, make changes and amendments prior to recommending the bill to the full committee. If a subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill dies.

Step 5. Committee Action to Report a Bill

After receiving a subcommittee's report on a bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the subcommittee's recommendations and any proposed amendments. The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the House or Senate. This procedure is called "ordering a bill reported."

Step 6. Publication of a Written Report

After a committee votes to have a bill reported, the chairman instructs staff to prepare a report on the bill. This report describes the intent and scope of the legislation, impact on existing laws and programs, position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members.

Step 7. Scheduling Floor Action

After a bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and Majority Leader largely determine if, when, and in what order bills come up. In the Senate there is only one legislative calendar.

Step 8. Debate

When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules and procedures governing the debate. These rules determine the conditions and amount of the time allocated for debate.

Step 9. Voting

After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the members voting.

Step 10. Referral to Other Chamber

When a bill is passed by the House or the Senate it is referred to the other chamber where it usually follows the same process through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it.

Step 11. Conference Committee Action

If only minor changes are made to a bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when the actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve the conference report.

Step 12. Final Actions

After the House and Senate have approved a bill in identical form, it is sent to the President. If the President approves of the legislation, he signs it and it becomes law. Or, if the President takes no action for ten days, while Congress is in session, it automatically becomes law. If the President opposes the bill, he can veto it; or, if he takes no action after the Congress has adjourned its second session, it is a "pocket veto" and the legislation dies.

Step 13. Overriding a Veto

If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to "override the veto." This requires a two-thirds roll call vote of the members who are present in sufficient numbers for a quorum.

Reference: Capitol Advantage, "Congress at Your Fingertips" 2nd Session 2000

JUSTICE

CREATING POLICIES, LAWS, AND SYSTEMS THAT WORK FOR EVERYONE

This book will help you learn what your church can do to tackle injustice in your community. You'll also discover:

- Where to begin
- Examples of injustice
- Three strategies for making a difference
- What is legal for a church group to do

This book is part of the *Communities First* series, designed to help churches and Christians bring unique gifts to their neighborhoods and communities. Combined with consultation, these materials will help you engage with your community and influence it in ways that will make life better for everyone here and now. As a result, you will see your community respond and change in surprising and redemptive ways. The Church and God's Kingdom will grow.

In addition to the cornerstone book simply titled *Communities First*, other workbooks include:

The Theology of Development: A Biblical Understanding of Christian Mission and Community Development

Through God's Eyes, With God's Heart: Building Readiness for Community Ministry

Meeting Needs: Moving from Relief to Individual Development

Case Management: Creating a Plan for Change through Covenantal Commitment

Developing a Community Vision

Community Strengthening

Community Organizing

Justice: Creating Policies, Laws and Systems that Work for Everyone



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Living Justice, Loving Mercy