

MCC U.S. Washington Office



Introduction and History

The Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office opened in mid-1968 after a decade of study and discernment concerning Mennonite witness to government. From its beginning, the Washington Office has been a listening and interpreting post for MCC constituents and a bridge between MCC constituent concerns and the U.S. government. Initially, the office monitored six legislative issues: the draft, military spending versus human needs, international economic development, domestic poverty, racial justice, and preservation of human freedoms and religious liberty. This focus soon expanded to provide MCC staff overseas and locally with information about policies affecting their respective regions and to arrange meetings between MCC workers and government officials in Washington.

Mission Statement

The Washington Office is a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ presence on Capitol Hill providing and encouraging prophetic witness to the way of Christ on matters of U.S. public policy.

To fulfil this mission, the office:

- *monitors and analyzes U.S. public policy;*
- *facilitates MCC's peace and justice advocacy;*
- *informs, listens to and encourages the church in its witness to government; and*
- *is guided by the biblical vision of being restored to a right relationship with God, each other, and the whole of creation. This includes:*
 - * *justice for all, with special concern for poor and oppressed people (Deut. 14:17-22);*
 - * *nonviolent peacemaking (Matt. 5:9, 38-48);*
 - * *dismantling racism and sexism (Gal. 3:25-28; Eph. 2:11-22);*
 - * *human rights, including freedom of conscience and religious practice (Prov. 31:8-9; Luke 4:18-19; Acts 5:17-42); and*
 - * *care for the earth (Gen. 1:28-30; Ps. 8:5-8).*

Resources

- **Washington Memo**, a bimonthly newsletter, interprets national legislation and policy; includes a biennial congressional voting record.
- **Washington Witness**, a monthly column published by *Mennonite Weekly Review*, gives short summaries of current legislative issues.
- **Washington Comment** provides weekly commentary on a timely policy issue from an Anabaptist perspective. Visit www.thirdway.com and click "Wider View."
- **Hotlines** are one page action alerts calling for grassroots response on issues requiring immediate attention.
- **Washington Seminars** provide first-hand exposure to the workings of Congress and government agencies. Participants probe the implications of faith and public policy.
- **Brochures** provide a basic introduction -- including information, biblical reflection, action steps and resources for further study -- on a variety of issues covered by the Washington Office.
- **Study and advocacy packets** offer in-depth analysis of gun violence, global economic justice and other policy issues.
- The **Pastor-in-Residence Program** offers opportunities for church leaders to spend time in the Washington Office.
- The **International-Partner-in-Residence Program** is a joint effort between MCC's Washington Office and International Programs to strengthen relationships with and learn from international partners visiting the United States.

For more information on these resources visit us on the web at - mcc.org/us/washington/resources

Faith and Politics



Government's Role

The Bible contains contrasting images of government. One image highlights government's potential, the other its pitfalls.

In perhaps the most positive biblical statement on governing authorities, the Apostle Paul writes: "By [Christ] all things were created . . . whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created *by him and for him*" (Col. 1:16, *emphasis added*). Paul then describes government as "God's servant for your good," specifically noting its role in promoting justice and preserving order (Rom. 13:1-7). In this view, government is part of God's good creation.

Other biblical references are less flattering. God warned Samuel that human rulers would conscript men and women for military and civilian service, confiscate land for personal gain, tax heavily and grant political favors to their close friends (I Sam. 8:10-20). Jesus told his disciples not to be like the rulers who "lord it over" others and act as "tyrants" (Mark 10:42). Revelation 13 is often cited as an example of government at its worst.

Early Anabaptists, according to Mennonite ethicist Keith Graber Miller, saw government "as preserving order, curbing and controlling the power of sin." Historian Theron F. Schlabach says that even by the end of the 19th century Mennonites "still put little faith in government to perform God's work."

The 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* offers a more balanced perspective. It states that "governing authorities of the world have been instituted by God for maintaining order in societies . . . [and] as servants of God are called to act justly and provide order." It goes on to say that, "nations tend to demand total allegiance. They then become idolatrous and rebellious against the will of God. Even at its best, a government cannot act completely according to the justice of God because no nation, except the church, confesses Christ's rule as its foundation."

Witness by People of Faith

Precisely because governing authorities frequently misuse their power, God often uses people of faith to confront, challenge and call authorities to act justly and fulfill their intended purpose. Biblical narratives are full of such stories:

- Shiphrah and Puah, Hebrew midwives, risked their lives by refusing Pharaoh's order to kill all the Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1:15-22).
- Moses challenged mighty Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go into the desert to worship God (Exodus 5-12).
- Elijah confronted King Ahab when he killed Naboth and confiscated his vineyard (I Kings 21).
- Three youths named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than bowing down to King Nebuchadnezzar's 90-foot golden statue (Daniel 3).
- When King Darius ordered his subjects to pray only to the king, Daniel continued to pray to God -- and was thrown into a lion's den (Daniel 6).
- Esther risked her life to plead the case of her people before King Ahasuerus (Esther 4-8).
- The people appealed to Nehemiah, the governor, about unjust economic practices of the ruling class (Neh. 5).
- John the Baptist lost his head challenging King Herod about his unlawful marriage to Herodias (Mark 6:14-29).

Anabaptists also have a long history of witnessing to government on a variety of issues. Sixteenth century leader Menno Simons exhorted the magistrates of his day to take seriously their responsibilities "in the true fear of God, and not so cruelly to lord it over the children of God and his Word as alas, many of you have a way of doing, it seems" (*Complete writings of Menno Simons, page 193*). For many years, North American Mennonites have spoken to government leaders regarding religious freedom, military conscription and payment of war taxes. More recently -- often growing out of MCC's global relief and development work -- many Mennonites have spoken out against injustices that affected persons beyond the Mennonite community.

Still, before the MCC Peace Section made a decision on January 18, 1968, to open a Washington Office, numerous concerns were aired about the appropriateness of a more "official" witness on Capitol Hill. According to then Peace Section Chair, William Keeney, some people:

- thought it improper to "tell the government what to do."
- felt that the term "witness" should be used only when proclaiming the gospel.
- feared that Washington staff would get so caught up in the political power that they could no longer act from Mennonite principles; in short, Washington would influence them more than they would influence Washington.
- felt that it was futile to try to change a system unless one first brought persons to Christ.

In the end, however, the Peace Section voted unanimously to open the Washington Office.

Theological Roots

The New Testament describes Jesus as our advocate with God (I John 2:1-2) and the Holy Spirit as "another Advocate to be with you forever" (John 14:16). At its core, our advocacy on behalf of others grows out of an awareness of our own need for an advocate.

The theological foundation for witness to governing authorities is also found in Jesus' teachings known as the *Great Commission* and the *Great Commandment*.

The *Great Commission* challenges us to give witness to Christ's Lordship over all competing claims to our allegiance. This witness to the way of Christ is to be made to all peoples and nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). The New Testament declares that Christ is "head of every ruler and authority" (Colossians 2:10). This reality gives followers of Christ a legitimate foundation to address government.

The *Great Commandment* proclaims that "the Lord our God . . . is one" and calls us to love God completely -- with heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:29-30). The second half of the *Great Commandment* says that our love for neighbor must match our concern for our own well-being (Mark 12:31). Jesus defined neighbors as those in need -- even our enemies (Luke 10: 25-37; Matthew 5:43-48). Indeed, God so identifies with those in need that the Bible equates the measure of our love for God with the way we treat "the least of these" (Matthew 25:31-46; I John 4:16-17.)

Anabaptist Advocacy

We witness by:

1. *Showing respect to and praying for governing authorities.* Our advocacy must grow out of a spirit of concern for governing authorities and a proper understanding of the legitimate role of government.

2. *Being the church.* The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states, "We witness to the nations by being that 'city on a hill' which demonstrates the way of Christ." Advocacy has integrity as it is rooted in the practice, teachings and mission of the church.

3. *Calling governing authorities to act justly for all people.* While God's kingdom will not be legislated into being, and while governments "cannot act completely according to the justice of God," they can develop laws and policies that help to undergird life -- especially for those who are most vulnerable. The *Confession* says we should call for policies that move toward justice, peace and compassion for all people.

Legislative Advocacy

How Laws are Made

Congressional action generally follows a set pattern. Understanding this pattern can help you be more effective. The United States Congress works as a legislative body full-time, year-round with a number of short breaks, or recesses, spread over the year. It's primary purpose is to legislate -- or create laws and actions for the federal government to take -- and to appropriate money for those laws.

Shaping federal policy begins when a proposal is presented as a bill in either the House of Representatives or the Senate (or both simultaneously) by a member of Congress. It is then assigned to a committee or sub-committee for refinement. The committee or subcommittee can:

- hold hearings to receive input from selected citizens and groups;
- make necessary changes to the bill (a "mark-up" session);
- vote to approve or oppose further action on the bill.

If the subcommittee and committee approve the bill, it is sent by the chairperson back to the floor of its respective chamber (House or Senate).

On the floor, the full House or Senate debates the bill. Here the process is somewhat different for the House and Senate. Debate in the House is governed by rules limiting its length and the number of amendments that can be offered. An entire bill may be offered as an amendment. Debate in the Senate is unlimited and therefore susceptible to longer debates (eg. filibusters) and more amendments; it takes three-fifths majority vote in the Senate (60 votes) to end debate.

If similar bills are passed in both the House and Senate they go to a conference committee where differences between them are resolved. If reconciliation is not possible, the bill dies. If the differences are resolved, the bill returns to both chambers for final approval.

If both the House and Senate approve the final bill, it is sent to the President, who may either sign it into law (enactment) or veto it. A veto may be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers. If the President neither signs nor vetoes the bill, it becomes law without the Presidential signature after ten days.

There are two major types of bills: authorization bills and appropriations bills. Authorizations establish programs and outline the general amount of funding needed. Appropriations provide the funding.

What You Can Do

Initiate a bill. If there is no legislation supporting a concern you have for a particular social justice or peace initiative, you can suggest to your member of Congress that a bill be written on that subject.

Support a bill. Once a bill is drafted, members of Congress look for other members to co-sponsor it. Encourage your Congress member to become a co-sponsor. This is a good point to write letters individually or as a group.

Shape a bill. Important changes to legislation occur at the committee level, where hearings are held and amendments are made. You can write or visit committee members to let them know how you believe a bill should be amended.

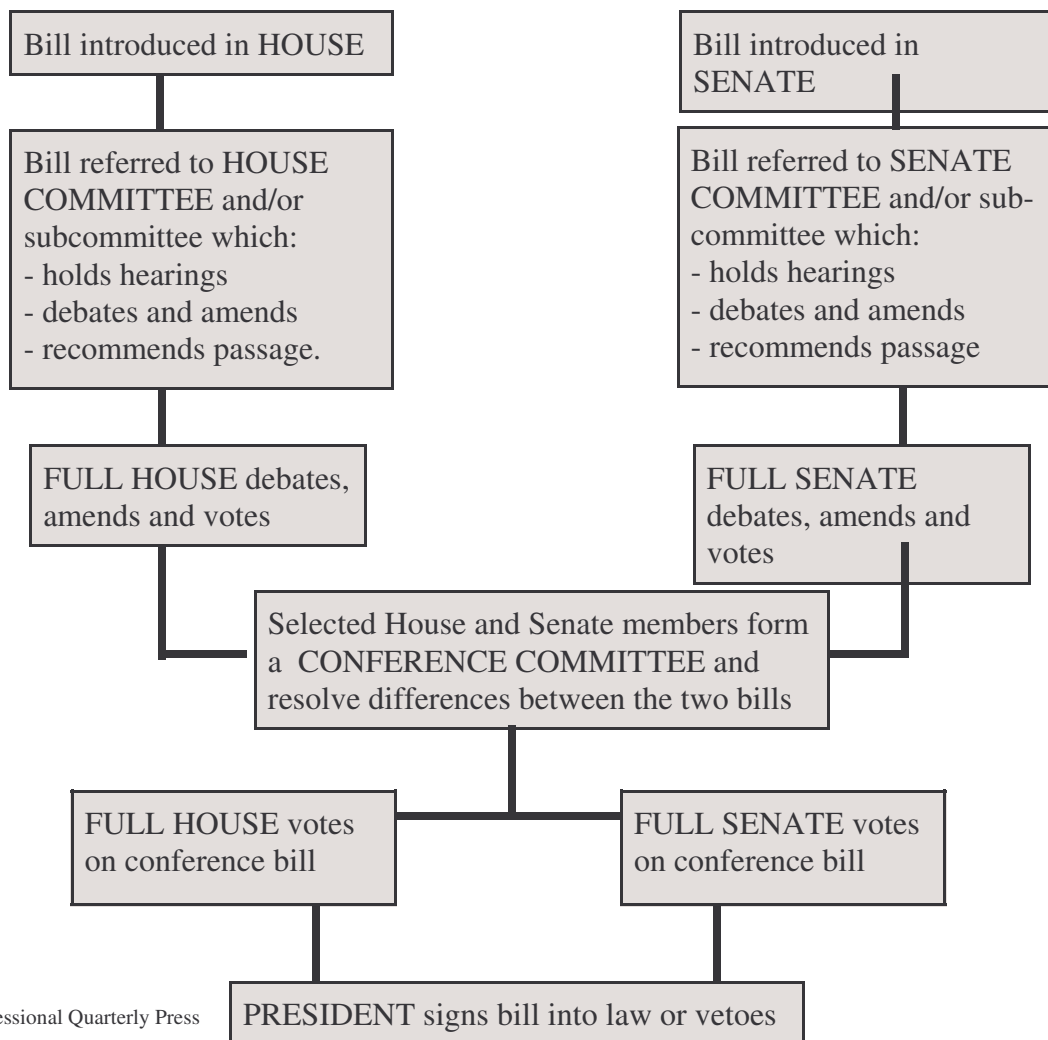
Many Are Introduced, Few are Passed

In the 109th Congress:

- 6,436 bills were introduced in the House;
- 4,122 bills in the Senate;
- 483 bills were enacted into law

Source: Thomas, Library of Congress - <http://thomas.loc.gov>

How Laws are Made



Get floor votes. If a bill passes through committee and is sent along to the entire legislative body (in either the House or Senate), then it is almost ready for a pass or fail vote (a simple majority is required). Generate lots of letters, phone calls, lobby visits and media awareness at this stage. Key members of Congress (swing votes) can be identified and persuaded to vote for the bill.

Conference committee. Conference committee members may be encouraged to protect the bill from weakening amendments as the House and Senate versions are reconciled (unless they are identical).

Get the President to sign. Once a bill passes both houses, you can publicize its passage and generate support for the President to sign. If the bill gets signed, CELEBRATE!

Opposing legislation follows the same principles but with a different message. Generally legislation is easier to block than to pass. This is especially true in the more deliberative Senate, where individual members have more influence in the process. If Congress passes a law that is unconstitutional it may be struck down by the Supreme Court.

Hints for Effective Letter Writing, Phone Calls, Faxes, E-mail and Visits

Communicating faith-based concerns about public policy to your congressperson -- whether through a letter, phone call or a visit -- is an under-used but powerful means of witness. It is estimated that only 5 percent of Americans communicate with their representatives in government. Of those, only 1 percent communicate on matters going beyond self-interest to focus on the hurting people of our world.

Yet taking the time to contact your elected officials is consistently found to be the most influential way to affect their position. One letter from a constituent to a member of Congress is considered to represent the views of 100 people.

Be assured that you do not have to be an expert on an issue to express your concerns. Often the conviction behind your words is as persuasive as extensive knowledge of an issue. But the effectiveness of your witness can be enhanced by following these advocacy tips:

Letter Writing



Letters are excellent means to educate and persuade your member of Congress. A quality letter can make a significant impact. Writing at least 4-5 times per year is a good goal.

- **Your views.** Typewritten or neatly handwritten letters on personal stationery denote sincere, grassroots interest. Form letters, postcards or petitions do not receive the same attention.
- **Be brief.** Keep the letter short and sweet (1-2 pages) and focus on one subject. Discussing current legislation receives more attention than general observations.
- **Identify the bill or issue.** When possible, cite the bill number or legislation title. It is helpful to summarize the bill since hundreds of bills cross legislator's desks.
- **State your purpose.** Be clear what you're asking the congressperson to do (e.g. co-sponsor a bill).
- **Give your reasons.** Don't be afraid to make the letter personal. Explain how *your* experience, observations or Christian faith shapes your concerns. If appropriate, mention your MCC connection.
- **Be constructive.** Emotional outrage, "holier-than-thou" tones, or threats are more likely to generate an adverse reaction. Let your member know why you feel strongly, but try to be constructive and not merely critical.
- **Ask a question.** If you want more than a form letter response, raise a specific question. A well-stated question can express a view-

WHY BOTHER CONTACTING MY CONGRESSPERSON

Responses to Frequently Asked Questions

Why bother when...

... rich, special interests have all the influence?

It's true that money buys an undue amount of leverage in Congress. However, congressional analysts have consistently found that letters and phone calls from constituents are the most influential communications affecting congress members' positions. It is when there is a lack of constituent response that special interests are best able to fill the void.

... I'm quite sure how my congress member will vote?

Letting your congressperson know the importance you place on an issue may move a member to greater action or to oppose a bill less intensely. Most politicians are mindful of their next election and with enough feedback from constituents they sometimes vote in surprising ways.

... the MCC U.S. Washington Office is conveying my sentiments for me?

We do visit congressional offices to share our perspectives, but we are most credible when congress members have also heard from Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituents. In a recent visit, one legislative aide said to us, "the congressman would like to take the position you're advocating, but he won't unless he also hears the same from the voters. He needs his constituents to give him room to do the right thing."

... nothing seemed to change after I wrote the last time?

Sometimes one letter can effect change; sometimes we must be prepared for long-term advocacy; sometimes we act even knowing we may never see results in our lifetime. [Sending your letter to your local newspaper is an effective way to maximize your advocacy efforts.](#) Congressional offices monitor their local papers to stay attuned to local concerns. Also, sending a copy of your letter to the MCC Washington Office gives us

point and, at the same time, stimulate a response.

- **Say "well done."** Thank your congressperson when they vote the right way or take a courageous stand. We should not forget, they are human too and appreciate encouragement.
- **Group letter writing.** Organizing a letter-writing campaign, so that a member of Congress receives a number of thoughtful and personalized letters on an issue, is a very effective use of the letter-writing tool. Creativity, such as writing a hunger letter on a paper plate, underscores your message and makes the letter more noticeable. If people are less motivated to write their own letters, having one letter with many people signing-on (with their names and addresses) is a second choice option.

Phone Calls



Telephoning is especially useful when time is short; e.g. just before an important vote. In most cases, you will not speak directly with your senator or representative, however offices keep a "count" of constituent calls and that information is passed on to the congressperson.

- **Talk with "Washington."** If you call the local office, ask the staffer who takes your message to pass it on to their Washington office. A more effective approach is to call the legislator's Washington office directly and ask to talk to the person on staff who deals with your issue. Or you can do both.
- **Introductions.** Identify yourself as a constituent. If you talk to a legislative aide, be sure to write down his/her name for future reference or for a follow-up letter.
- **Be succinct.** As with letter-writing, focus on one topic, articulate your position and ask your legislator's position on the issue of concern.

Faxes and E-mails

Faxes and email should follow the same outline as letters. **Sending a fax** can be especially helpful when a vote is imminent and there is not enough time for a letter. It is as fast as a phone call while providing a written record of your communication. In view of some ongoing mail delays because of tighter security after September 11, 2001, faxes are a good way to ensure timely delivery of your views.

A growing number of members of Congress have email. **E-mails** may not always be given as much weight as letters, faxes or phone calls, however. If you use email, be sure to include your postal mailing address so it is clear that you reside in your member's district, and to enable the office to send you a postal mail response. The best way to email your members of Congress is to go to their web page and follow the instructions for contacting them by email. You must be a constituent to use this method. Members' web sites and fax numbers can be accessed by going on the internet to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

Visits

Visiting a legislator's office, either locally or in Washington, D.C., is the most effective way for a citizen to do advocacy. Visits provide an opportunity to build a rapport with the congressperson or staff person. Congressional recesses are an excellent time to meet locally with your legislator. But in many ways speaking with a staff person is just as important since they play an influential role in legislative decision-making.



- **Schedule ahead.** To schedule a visit, write or phone ahead (preferably at least two weeks in advance), specifying the issue you wish to discuss. Also, mention a preferred date and length of the meeting, and number of people coming. Confirm the date with a letter.
- **Strategize.** If you are visiting as a group, your group should plan to meet prior to the visit and identify the most important things you want to convey. Research in advance the current status of the legislation, the pros and cons of the argument, and the member's voting record and committee assignments.

- **Assign roles.** In a group it is often helpful to appoint spokesperson(s) who are responsible for explaining the issue and making the group's specific request, and a "moderator" who ensures that the visit is a conversation. The discussion should not be monopolized by either the legislator or the group.
- **Introduce yourself.** Have each person introduce him/herself. If appropriate, identify your affiliation with MCC or the Mennonite or Brethren in Christ church.
- **Be flexible.** You should be prepared for both a 90 second meeting as well as a 20 minute meeting. It's not uncommon for the schedules of legislators and their aides to change at the last minute. Be prepared to get your point across even if you don't have as much time as anticipated.
- **Be honest and respectful.** It's alright to respond to a legislator's question by admitting you don't know. Offer to find out and send information back to the office. Be polite and respectful, but don't be afraid to disagree.
- **Ask questions.** Ask what his/her position is on the legislation and why. Ask if they are hearing from opponents or supporters and what they are saying. Ask what will influence their decision on this issue.
- **Leave materials.** It is useful to bring supporting materials or position papers to leave with the person you meet.
- **Write follow-up letter.** After the meeting, write a letter thanking the legislator for the meeting. Reiterate your position and your understanding of any commitments made during the meeting.

President _____
the White House
Washington DC 20500
(202) 456-1111

Senator _____
United States Senator
Washington DC 20510
(202) 224-3121

Representative _____
House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515
(202) 224-3121

Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Letters to the editor provide the opportunity to communicate your concerns to many other people as well as to members of Congress. These letters are among the most widely read features in the newspaper. In addition, members of Congress normally read the newspaper from their district in order to learn about what issues their constituents are concerned with.

- Type the letter, double-spaced, on only one side of the paper.
- Keep it short, less than two pages.
- Deal with only one topic. If possible, refer to a recent news item, editorial or letter.
- Express your thoughts clearly and concisely.
- Supply facts that may have been omitted or slanted.
- Avoid a hostile or sarcastic tone.
- Use a relevant personal experience to illustrate your point, and or give any relevant personal background that increases your credibility on the issue.
- Express the moral values and concern for justice that motivates your letter; avoid sounding self-righteous or "preachy."
- Sign your name. Most papers also require your full address and phone number, although these will not be published.

Opinion pieces (op-eds) are more difficult to get published than letters, though this is more likely in local papers than in leading newspapers. An op-ed should be under 750 words. In submitting an op-ed it is important to provide information on your experience or background that indicates why the newspaper should give you a platform on the issue.

Meet with the editors if your view is not already being represented in the paper's editorial page. A small delegation of three people representing several community groups is ideal. Plan for the meeting, bring a selection of background

materials to leave, and provide telephone numbers of contact people who can provide additional information.

Advocating as a Faith Community

Witness and ministry is most fruitful when it arises from communities of faith. Witness to governing authorities is no exception. Church communities can be prophetic advocates by educating themselves on government policy issues and participating in dialogue with elected officials.

Educating Ourselves

1. Congregation and community education. Organize a Bible study or Sunday School series on Christian witness to governing authorities. Plan a service focusing on witness to governing authorities. Have a theme Sunday to increase awareness of an issue, such as world hunger or domestic violence. Include a practical activity, like letter writing to the President and your Congress members. Missionaries, MCCers and local faith-based advocacy groups could talk to church groups about the impact of U.S. government decisions on people struggling with poverty.

2. MCC U.S. Washington office resources. The Washington Office can provide you with information and analysis on advocacy issues from an Anabaptist perspective through the *Washington Memo, Hotlines, brochures and study & advocacy packets*. Churches can get multiple subscriptions of the *Washington Memo* to make available for classes, small groups or literature tables.

3. Other congregations. Develop a relationship with another congregation whose members come from another race, ethnic group or economic class. Learn about their concerns and how they engage in witnessing to government.

Doing Advocacy

Although churches -- like other not-for-profit organizations -- are not permitted to endorse or oppose particular candidates for elective office, there are many ways they can work together to witness to government officials.

1. Pray for government officials. During Sunday worship, include prayer for government officials and for wise decisions advancing justice and peace (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

2. Write letters to policy makers. Encourage church members to write timely letters to elected officials on issues of concern. Periodic announcements could remind people to use the *Washington Memo* as the basis for a letter. More ambitiously, the church could organize occasional congregational letter-writing initiatives. A prayer service could be held before sending the letters off.

3. Form a relationship with your member of Congress. Your member of Congress visits your district regularly. Attend local "town meetings" and ask one or two thoughtful questions. Establish a task group in your church to develop an ongoing relationship with the member. Meet periodically to express your concerns and ask what concerns he or she has that you could pray for. The MCC Washington Office's bi-annual *Voting Record* highlights how your member voted on important issues. **Upon request, the Washington Office can also tell you what issues it would be important to emphasize with this particular member, based on the committees he or she serves on.**

After a relationship is established, set up periodic meetings between the member and individuals in your church or community who are struggling with poverty or discrimination. Missionaries and MCCers on home leave could also meet with the congressperson to discuss how U.S. policies affect people overseas and within the U.S. **Invite your member of Congress to address your congregation** or several congregations if your church is small. An evening supper forum might be especially fitting, but an adult Sunday School class could also be appropriate.

4. Collaborate with other churches. Work with other churches to organize a special worship service in your community with a theme related to an important policy issue.

5. Tell others. Share your efforts at Christian witness to governing authorities with other congregations, in church periodicals, and with the MCC U.S. Washington Office.

Intercessory Prayer for Governing Authorities

Intercessory prayer is prayer on behalf of others. Most Christians intercede for family members, friends, ministry and mission endeavors. Fewer of us pray consistently for government officials and public policy decisions, although scripture urges us to do so.

Why Intercessory Prayer

God is active in the world through faithful believers serving as instruments and beyond our human efforts. Intercessory prayer is important to both aspects of God's activity.



We ask God to act in history beyond what we alone can do. Prayer invites the work of God. It is both empowering and humbling. We understand that we are not in control of history and cannot make history "turn out right." Jesus, however, has the power and authority to intercede in history's course and shape its outcome (Revelation 5:1-14).

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity (I

We are transformed by God's Spirit. By praying in Christ's name to ask God to act, and by prayerfully becoming attuned to participate in what God is doing, we too can be faithful and effective agents of transformation. Prayer energizes us to persevere in working for transformation and opens us to divine guidance and wisdom. It helps us identify our own complicity with injustice and violence and teaches us to be reconcilers and peacemakers.

Prayer Suggestions

- Integrate intercessory prayer for government officials and just policies into your regular personal prayers and devotions, in worship services and small group meetings.
- During your prayer, recall a Scripture passage expressing God's concern for the issue you are praying about. Scripture can help you have faith that your concern is important to God and that God will respond to your prayer.
- Follow the daily office lectionary readings and reflect on how these biblical texts might apply to public policy (<http://www.cfg.com/bin/dailyoff>). Pray accordingly.
- Link your prayers to specific people and situations.
- Pray for the MCC U.S. Washington Office staff and other Christians and Christian organizations who are directly involved in witnessing to government officials.
- Include yourself among those who need to make more just decisions and take more peaceful actions.
- Listen for God's Spirit to nudge you regarding what steps you can take to be an instrument of transformation.
- Express thanks to God for the positive things the government is doing and for answers to your prayers.

Many Ways to Witness

"What is that in your hand?" God asked Moses before sending him to Pharaoh, and it happened that a shepherd's staff became a powerful tool for advocacy (Exodus 4:1-5). The ways to witness to governing authorities are as limitless as the human imagination and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The following is a list of mostly "unconventional" ideas that may be useful tools for education and advocacy and which may spark other ideas.

- Spend time with people adversely affected by current or proposed public policy.
- Plan dialogue sessions for members of your church or others who are on opposite sides of particular policies.
- Invite a Sunday School class or small group to make a quilt that visually emphasizes a particular concern.

- Organize a visual display for your church or a public event that highlights a policy issue (e.g. 38,000 pairs of shoes on the Capitol grounds to call attention to the annual number of gun deaths).
- Make a bulletin board of information on a particular issue for your church or home.
- Get on the Internet. A wealth of information is available.
- Organize or participate in a public prayer and fasting event in relation to a policy concern.
- Organize or participate in a day of "prayer and *faxing*" in which church members pray for public officials and fax them letters addressing a particular issue of concern (as MCC Great Lakes did concerning war with Iraq).
- Organize a public witness such as a march, demonstration, or vigil.
- Engage in nonviolent civil disobedience to call attention to a law or policy that is immoral. This may include withholding a portion of taxes going to the military. Include a letter to the IRS explaining your action and copying it to your senators and representatives. (Be sure you understand the legal consequences and "count the cost" before you decide to break the law for conscience sake).
- Tell the story of your creative advocacy through your local media or the Mennonite press.
- Vote and help with voter registration.

Please write and let the MCC U.S. Washington Office (mccwash@mcc.org) hear the stories of how you are doing advocacy.

Issues Monitored by MCC U.S. Washington Office

Africa. MCC's African policy advocacy focuses on (1) poverty alleviation through just trade policy and development assistance; (2) conflict resolution—specifically Sudan and Northern Uganda; and (3) advocating for increased funding for HIV/AIDS programs.

Asia. The Washington Office seeks to promote policies which make for peace in a region where the U.S. military continues to play an influential role. Of concern are the legacy of war and militarism. Specific issues include: U.S. military presence in Afghanistan; working for a peace in Burma; and promoting constructive, diplomatic relationships with the governments of North Korea, and China. In addition, the Washington Office works to promote a just policy towards refugees from Cambodia and advocates for the continued efforts in clearing cluster bombs in Laos.

Civil Rights. MCC supports public policy and efforts to dismantle systemic racism, sexism and other barriers facing people in under-represented communities as important ways to promote justice and inclusion for God's many peoples. Specifically, the Washington Office focuses on advocating for racial justice legislation, promoting efforts to close racial and gender disparities, ending violence against women, and addressing Native American concerns.

Crime and Justice. The current criminal justice system views crime as a violation of law that is rectified by the state inflicting punishment and pain. Recently, however, Anabaptists have initiated and supported efforts to employ restorative responses to conflict which understand the Bible to view crime as a violation of relationship that calls for accountability and action needed to bring about healing. Consequently, the public policy advocacy of the Washington Office resists the trend towards ever harsher punishment including the use of the death penalty. Other efforts include promoting restrictions on deadly weapons as one response to this country's high rate of gun violence.

Economic Justice (U.S.). From its inception, MCC has sought to live out the gospel by providing food to the hungry. As the gap between the haves and have-nots widens, however, it is increasingly important to address the root causes of economic inequalities. The Washington Office seeks to address systemic economic injustice in the United States, in part, by advocating and educating on concerns related to food security, access to healthcare, affordable housing, income disparities, and lifestyle issues.

Environment. The Washington Office works on various environmental issues to draw the connections between biblical teachings and stewardship of the earth. Recent emphases have been on: climate change and energy policy, and clean water and mining issues. As environmental degradation tends to disproportionately worsen living conditions in poor communities and hinders development in under-developed nations, the Washington Office advocates for just environmental policies at home and abroad.

Health Care. MCC's concern about health care arises from extensive work with the poor and marginalized in this country.

Inadequate health care robs people of the abundant life which God wills for everyone. The Washington Office seeks to preserve safety-net programs such as Medicaid and Medicare, and to advance church resolutions on health care reform, which call for a national system that provides access to basic health care for everyone in the United States.

Immigration. Immigrants to the United States often face a culture of unwelcome reflected in the laws and policies of the U.S. government. The Washington Office advocates for policies which are consistent with Christ's message of reconciliation and that address the human need experienced by both recent immigrants and citizens. In the long run, MCC believes true immigration reform involves revising foreign policies and trade agreements that undermine stability in immigrants' countries of origin.

Latin America and the Caribbean. The Washington Office advocates for policies that reduce poverty, oppose militarization and promote human rights. Specific issues include: canceling debt in Haiti; calling for just trade policies that help lower income countries to experience authentic broad-based economic and social development, opposing military aid to Colombia and working against the militarization of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Middle East. MCC's Middle East advocacy grows out of almost 60 years of work in the region. Among MCC's advocacy concerns are: a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that allows all to live in peace and security; U.S. development assistance that promotes regional cooperation; the needs of refugee and displaced people throughout the region; religious freedoms; respect for human rights; regional disarmament; the start of U.S. troop withdraw from Iraq and support for reconstruction efforts; and improved U.S. diplomatic and trade relations with Iran.

Militarism. Anabaptists believe that global security is built through friendship, diplomacy, economic development and equitable sharing of resources, not through military might. The U.S. now accounts for one-half of all global military spending. This discrepancy feeds the growing U.S. tendency to act alone to impose its will on other countries. Military spending siphons scarce resources away from education, health, housing and environmental programs. MCC advocates for reducing military expenditures and shifting resources to life-giving programs. MCC supports arms control treaties and banning land mines and cluster weapons which have indiscriminate impact on children and civilians.

Religious Liberty. As a small faith community whose journey has been marked by state persecution, Anabaptists have reason to be wary of government intervention in religion and do not believe government is competent to pass judgment in matters of faith. Therefore, the Washington Office works to protect religious freedom by opposing government intrusions such as prayer in public schools. The Washington Office also advocates for the unfettered right of conscience in the non-payment of military taxes, military conscription, and other areas where the callings of faith and government are in conflict.

World Poverty and Global Economic Justice. Twenty-nine thousand children die daily throughout the world from poverty-related preventable and treatable illnesses. In addition to advocating the cancellation of burdensome international debts owed by low income countries, the Washington Office opposes structural adjustment programs imposed on under-developed countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which further burden the poor. Other specific concerns include monitoring trade policy issues and seeking to promote more just trade relationships which include respect for worker's rights and the accountability of transnational corporations. MCC promotes a model of participatory, people-centered development assistance to poor countries.

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