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Grassroots Communications Toolkit



Connecting with Local Media



Writing Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds



Engaging Elected Officials



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The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...

Luke 4:18



The General Board of Church & Society is committed to helping United Methodist congregations and ministries in local communities across the country engage the public square with a hopeful, prophetic voice. This toolkit is part of GBCS's efforts to assist our partners in ministry by helping you communicate and embody good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, and liberty for all those oppressed.

Our goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We developed this toolkit to help you shape local awareness and initiate the work of Christ in our midst. It is designed to complement and support your current ministries and may serve as a reminder of the many things you can do to proclaim the Gospel beyond the pews.

With your own public outreach, and GBCS's support, we can continue to successfully engage local audiences and leaders.

Dispelling Media Myths

Many people have misconceptions about reporters and the news media. Here are a few myths and facts about the nature of news.

MYTH If it's in the news, it must be true.

FACT Journalists seek balance, not necessarily the truth.

Journalists strive to write a complete story, but often because of large workloads and tight deadlines, that's usually impossible. Instead, they try to ensure that stories are balanced. If they cite a spokesperson for one side of an issue, they will go out of their way to find someone on the other side. Both sides might be dead wrong, but the theory is that the truth lies somewhere between two poles of opinion.

Everything you say to a reporter could be taken out of context and filtered to fit into the final story. Print journalists will write the story based on their notes from the interview. Quotes could be placed in an entirely different context, and an editor will revise the completed story. Broadcast journalists will air only a few seconds from an interview that may have lasted an hour.

There are media venues that have minimal filtering, including talk shows, op-eds, letters to the editor, bylined articles and blogs. However, as filtering decreases, so does credibility. When a spokesperson is quoted in the legitimate news media, it carries an inherent endorsement by professional journalists that the source is newsworthy and credible.

MYTH Media are only interested in negativity and sensationalism, and they all cover the same news.

FACT Every outlet researches its audience carefully and creates an editorial product to fit. To understand what a media outlet covers, understand its audience.

It is true that many outlets cover big stories, but every outlet will try to add value. News is a very competitive business. If a television show or publication can't find its audience, it undergoes radical surgery or dies.

There are plenty of opportunities for positive stories about

community organizations, justice campaigns and ministry. News outlets know people tire of negativism. An outlet's greatest influence is not just the stories it covers but the stories it chooses not to cover. Deciding what makes news and what doesn't begins with what the news staff knows and understands about its audience.

MYTH **If something doesn't make the news, it must not be important.**

FACT **There are fewer news gatherers to cover the news, so sometimes news slips through the cracks.**

The number of news gatherers has been dramatically reduced, compared to 30 or 40 years ago. Few American cities support more than one daily newspaper. Most newsmagazines and networks have reduced their editorial staffs significantly. Even at the nation's largest newspapers, there is seldom more than one full-time reporter assigned to cover religion news.

At the same time, these reporters are covering twice the territory as their predecessors and meeting the needs of America's growing appetite for news, with the growth of 24/7 all-news television or radio stations and websites.

Reaching Out to Local Media

Study after study shows us that local media plays an increasingly significant role in influencing local public perceptions — and unfortunately much of the media coverage has painted a bleak picture of the mission and values of the church. Your church or ministry can take an active role in influencing the tone of media coverage in your local market to ensure our communities have an accurate understanding of the many positive ways The United Methodist Church is impacting lives in your community.

As a layperson or clergy, you are an expert in your market; thus, you have a unique position to serve as an informative resource for the people living in your community.

Media outlets offer you a free and objective medium to take your message to the public. In this toolkit we provide information on ways to engage your local media. These strategies may be undertaken independently or with the help of our communications team at the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS). You are probably already familiar with the work of your local media. Identifying news sources and reaching out to them will not take a lot of time, but it does require patience and persistence.



How to Take Action

- **Be Proactive.** Identify reporters/hosts that cover your issues. Read their columns or follow their segments. Understand the tone and the audience he/she is trying to reach. People to target include:
 - Editor-in-chief, for editorial submissions (e.g., letter to the editor or opinion editorial)
 - Editors (e.g., features, news, opinion)
 - Staff writers for appropriate beats or columns, including: local section, religion, human welfare, and events.

Contact information for reporters and editors can usually be found on the news outlet's website. Many online articles provide links to contact the story's author. A simple introductory email and/or phone call is all you need to initiate contact.

- **Develop your pitch.** Create a story idea that fits with the outlet you are trying to reach. Do your homework and back up your story with concrete facts and trends. Use our sample local news stories to help you generate ideas.
- **Take action.** Call a reporter and introduce yourself, or write a letter of introduction along with your story idea. Be sure to provide background information to make your story attainable and relevant.
- **Draft a Letter to the Editor to be submitted to your local daily, weekly or monthly publications.** Sample letters to the editor have been included to give you a sense of the appropriate layout and tone, along with tips for drafting your own letter. Be sure to make your letter relevant to the audience, informative and factual. Most importantly, make sure your letter is unique.
- **Stay on top of local media stories appearing in your papers.** Draft a letter to the editor responding to a previously published piece, either agreeing or disagreeing with the main point(s).
- **Don't overlook smaller local community weekly papers that focus on suburban areas.** These outlets represent a more targeted audience within that specific community, and often this is who you are trying to reach as a community of faith.

Sample Articles

A Promised Fulfilled

Posted by Laura Markle Downton on July 25, 2012 | Faith in Action

This past Sunday in Oklahoma City, a promise decades in the making was fulfilled:

Donald Gilliard came to worship at Quayle United Methodist Church. Gilliard, a skilled stage director and performer, has been a part of the Quayle family since the mid 1990s. Yet having been sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole at age 33, his promise to worship one day with the Quayle congregation had appeared to be an impossible one.

Donald has never committed a violent crime, but was arrested for a drug conspiracy charge in the state of South Carolina that resulted in his life sentence in the U.S. federal prison system. Recalling the day of his sentencing, Donald shared that as the judge read his sentence, “I never accepted it or internalized it.”

His journey with Quayle United Methodist Church began in 1994 when Donald was transferred from South Carolina to a private prison in Oklahoma. While in prison, noting that many of the men in prison with him could not read and had not received more than a ninth-grade education, Donald had been teaching GED courses to other men inside.

Upon his transfer to the Oklahoma prison, drawing on his background in the theater, Donald decided to direct a production of “God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse” by James Weldon Johnson, a book of sermons compiled during Johnson’s travels in the 1920s documenting the powerful rhetorical traditions of African-American preachers who were a source for solidarity during slave uprisings and later resistance to the original Jim Crow laws. The men would need robes for the production yet lacked contacts to those resources since most were transferred to Oklahoma from throughout the United States.

Upon one man’s suggestion, however, a member of Quayle United Methodist Church, they reached out to the Quayle congregation with their request for robes for their production. In response, not only did the elders of Quayle send the robes to the prison, but they accompanied the robes with a letter asking if members of the Quayle congregation might come and see the final production.

Donald successfully convinced the warden to allow the congregants to come, and as a result, the women of Quayle United Methodist Church organized two buses full of eager theater-goers. The production was an enormous and moving success! It was not merely a decent show, rather, women of the church testified years later to the power and impact of the performance.

Donald Gilliard’s relationship to Quayle did not end there. After the performance, he and others made connection with some of the congregants in attendance who became pen pals. For years, while Donald continued appealing his sentence, he corresponded with the saints at Quayle who undergirded him and others inside the prison with care, concern and compassion.

It was said to Donald, “you act like you are free!” And indeed, after persisting in his appeal for 20 years behind bars, Donald is now a free man.

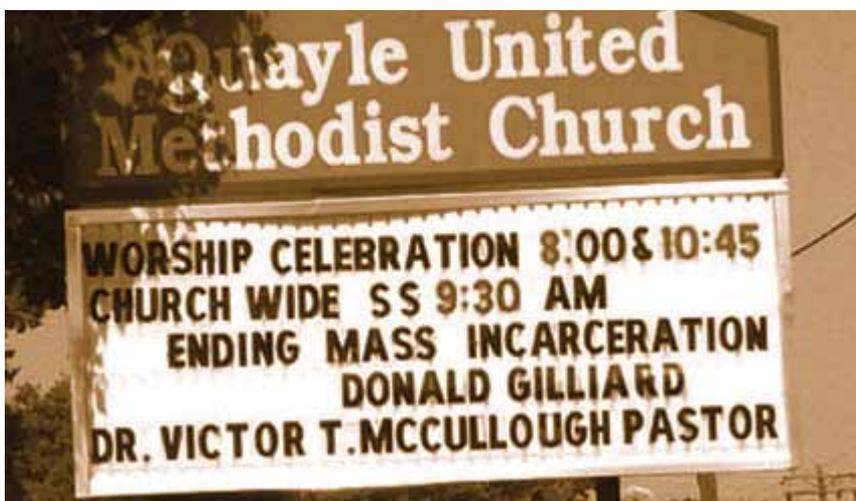
Today, he resides in his home state of South Carolina, traveling and speaking powerfully to groups large and small, with particular concern for the youths in danger of being swept into the cradle-to-prison pipeline.

Donald joined with guest speakers, including attorney Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, on Saturday, July 21, for the Oklahoma Commission on Religion & Race’s “A Christian Approach to The New Jim Crow Solidarity Mobilization.” With over 75 people of faith from Oklahoma and neighboring states in attendance, workshops included the expertise of faith and community leaders as well as concrete plans for follow-up action.

To the family of Quayle United Methodist Church, under the care of the Rev. Dr. Victor McCullough, there was little doubt their brother Donald Gilliard would one day be welcomed into their midst. And on Sunday, July 22, 2012, faith became reality.

As Donald testified to the congregation, his appeal was strong and clear: We have a human rights crisis on our hands. For communities of color disproportionately locked up and locked out, we as people of faith must respond. And our response can begin much as the Quayle United Methodist Church community responded, with hospitality, with concern and with eagerness to connect and take action.

Donald Gilliard authored the forward to a resource, *Prison is Not a Playground* by Antonio Barnes, that is designed for children to stop the cycle of incarceration.



Quick Tips for Writing a Successful Letter to the Editor

- **Keep it simple.** Your odds of publication are best if your letter is short and direct, so try to keep it down to two or three succinct paragraphs and under 200 words.
- **Focus on one key point.** Don't deviate too much or you might lose your audience.
- **Present yourself as a knowledgeable source.** As in the sample letters that follow, explain why readers should trust your thoughts and opinions.
- **Your letter should stand on its own.** Even if you're responding to another letter or an article, don't assume readers have read them. Provide necessary background information as briefly and simply as possible.
- **Carefully support your opinions with evidence.** Numbers, statistics and cited facts will make your argument more persuasive. Just be careful not to overuse them, as they can get confusing.
- **Don't use too much jargon.** Using a lot of technical terms, such as United Methodist buzzwords and acronyms, can be a turnoff to readers.
- **Include a strong closing.** Leave readers with a clear understanding of your message by reiterating your main point at the end of the letter.
- **Edit and proofread before submitting your letter.** You can do this yourself, but you should also ask a friend or colleague to take a look. They can help ensure that your writing is clear and to the point. Plus, they may catch an error you overlooked.
- **Include your contact information.** Put your name, address, phone number and email address at the bottom of your letter so that an editor can contact you to confirm that you are the author.
- **Follow the correct submission procedures.** Check out the submission guidelines provided by the publication to which you are writing. They are usually available online or printed in the publication's editorial section.
- **Host a letter-writing party.** The chances of publication increase proportionately to the number of letters your congregation or ministry submits. Hosting a letter-writing party helps alleviate fear of writing and builds camaraderie among your allies. Take photos of your party to document the event on Facebook and/or blog.

Sample Letters to the Editor

We can stop this insanity

By Sister Mimi Maloney, Sister Katherine Gray; Olympia; Olympia

In his book “Reflections for Peace of Mind,” Maurice Nassan SJ tells how New York’s former mayor, Fiorello La Guardia, sometimes presided at court.

Once, during the Depression years, an unemployed man was brought before him for stealing bread for his family. La Guardia said, “Sir, I am sorry! The law excepts no one. I sentence you to a \$10 fine.”

Then La Guardia opened his wallet, gave the man \$10, remitted his fine, and levied a 50 cent fine on everyone in the courtroom for living in a city where a person had to steal to feed his family. The man walked out of the courtroom with tears in his eyes and \$47.50 in his pocket.

This story makes us wonder what kind of indictment Fiorello La Guardia would level against us Americans today, for living in a country that plans to spend 58 percent of its discretionary monies for fiscal year 2011 on maintaining its military superiority in the world, when millions upon millions of our fellow citizens are falling into ever deeper poverty, hunger, foreclosure, homelessness, joblessness, hopelessness and utter despair.

We can stop this insanity.

The Western Washington Fellowship of Reconciliation is launching a multidimensional and multigenerational grassroots campaign to “Bring the Billion\$ Home.”

“This ... campaign will help inform and activate individuals and organizations to pressure Congress to cut military spending and use the savings to fund urgent human and environmental needs in the U.S.” (see www.wwfor.org).

Please join us in this urgently needed campaign.

Only God can create life

By Rev. Clayton Childers

Your commentary on capital punishment [Dec. 12] failed to recognize that a large number of anti-death penalty advocates are primarily motivated not by fear but by faith. Of course there is growing evidence that mistakes may lead to the execution of an innocent person. Of course it costs less to incarcerate inmates for life than to execute them. Of course it is certain that in our racist society it is impossible to administer the death penalty equitably.

No, the real issue for many Americans is moral. Capital punishment is simply incompatible with the religious convictions of most religious faiths. My own tradition, United Methodism, has maintained since 1956 that it is unalterably “opposed to the death penalty and urge(s) its elimination from all criminal codes.”

Only God can create life. All life is a sacred gift from God. The New Testament affirms a strong belief that it is not God’s “desire that anyone would perish.” The gospel of Christ holds out hope even for the most hardened criminal, even for those who would callously choose to commit heinous crimes, even their heart, we believe, can be changed by the gracious, redeeming presence of Christ. We believe that no one is beyond the pale of God’s compassion and no one should be beyond the pale of ours.

Quick Tips for an Opinion Editorial

Generating an Op-Ed

- Check the editorial page or the paper's website for instructions on submitting an op-ed. The preferred length is usually in the range of 500-800 words.
- Scan your paper's opinion pages to get a sense of what people are and are not writing about. Opinion editors often look for pieces that cover issues they are not yet covering.
- Remember, anybody can write; the difference between a published and unpublished piece is in the number of rewrites you are willing to do and your openness to seek and receive help if you need it. A good rule of thumb is to have an opening paragraph (engage), three paragraphs of content (problem and inform), and your closing paragraph with a strong call to action.
- Get in touch with how you personally feel about the issue and feel free to use personal examples, relating your message to your own experiences. You want to activate the heart before you activate the head.
- It's often helpful to open with a story or anecdotes and then circle back around to it by referencing it at the end.
- Because an op-ed is longer than a letter to the editor, resist the temptation to cover more than one issue or idea and instead go deeper on the issue you want to cover. Tell an illustrative story, give a detailed example, include a bit more data, or highlight other people's points of view. Keep it simple.
- Make sure there is a call to action for your members of Congress and/or your readers. An op-ed is a prominent piece that will be read by many people; use this opportunity to be bold in what you want.
- Make your piece current and relevant; have it relate to something that is going on now.
- Once you have drafted your piece, send it to your partners and/or GBCS Communications staff members for feedback. This is a critical step. Feedback from others helps ensure that you have an op-ed of publishable quality.



Submitting Your Op-Ed

- Find out who makes decisions about op-eds for your paper. Sometimes this is different from the Editorial Page editor.
- Submit your piece by email and confirm that it was received within 24 hours of submission.
- Once you've confirmed it was received, contact the editor or writer again within 48 hours to see if they are willing to print your piece.
- If you learn the editor does not plan to run it, find out why and determine if a revision would improve its chances of being published. In some cases, the paper may give you the opportunity to shorten it and have it printed as a letter to the editor.
- Alternatively, you can submit your piece to another paper and ask if its editors would be interested in your op-ed. If they will not run it, consider submitting it to another publication.
- To increase your chances of publication submit to multiple papers at once.
- In most cases, GBCS can also publish your op-ed on our Justice Matters blog.
- When your op-ed is published, follow up with a thank you to the Editorial Page editor.
- Be sure to send your published op-ed to GBCS.

Sample Opinion Editorial

Elford: Solitary confinement hurts more than it helps

John Elford, Local Contributor

Published: 6:35 p.m. Friday, July 13, 2012 | Statesman.com

Imagine life in a 50-square-foot room. A bed, a small table and a toilet are your companions. The lights are on all day and all night.

The noise of huge metal doors banging open and shut and the boom of voices cascading off the metal walls is nonstop.

You receive your food through a slot in the door.

Your one window to the outside is opaque. You have one hour outside, time spent without meaningful human contact.

This is life for thousands of prisoners in solitary confinement in the American prison system.

Last month, with a group from Texas Impact, I visited the Hughes Unit, a maximum security prison, one of five prisons in Gainesville run by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Correctional Institutions Division. We spent the day touring the prison facility with Warden Edward Smith and heard about all of the programs available for inmates.

But the image of that small room, the huge doors and the men who languish there stayed with me.

At the first congressional hearing on solitary confinement last month, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., announced that the United States “holds far more prisoners in segregation or solitary confinement than any other democratic nation on Earth.”

The Senate hearing in Washington included testimony from Anthony Graves, wrongly imprisoned for 18 years in Texas (10 years of which he spent in solitary confinement).

His conviction was overturned, and he was completely exonerated in 2010.

Many were moved to tears as he described the lasting impact of isolation on himself and fellow inmates.

“I will have to live with these vivid memories for the rest of my life. I would watch guys come to prison totally sane and, in three years, they don’t live in the real world anymore. I know a guy who would sit in the middle of his floor, rip his sheet up, wrap it around himself and light it on fire.”

He concluded that “by its design, (solitary confinement) is driving men insane.”

Proponents of solitary confinement argue that it’s a necessary evil.

If inmates are already in prison, what else can we do when they misbehave but restrict them to even smaller, more isolated detention?

Prison safety and disciplinary enforcement are typically touted as prime reasons for

the use of solitary confinement. One would think, then, that segregating violent prisoners would lower prison violence.

Not so. As demonstrated by a growing number of states, there are safe alternatives to the use of prolonged solitary confinement.

Mississippi safely reduced its solitary confinement population by more than 75 percent by critically evaluating and reforming the policies determining how prisoners are classified for placement in isolation.

Institutional safety was not jeopardized as a result; in fact, it improved. Violence fell by 50 percent, explained Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioner Christopher Epps in his testimony before the Senate hearing in June.

“Here we are four years later, it’s still working,” Epps said.

The millions of dollars in savings that have resulted from Mississippi’s reforms are icing on the cake.

As a United Methodist pastor, I find the moral price tag of solitary confinement too high to pay.

Prisoners in prolonged isolation typically suffer from sleep disturbances, compulsive cleaning and pacing, paranoid ideas and free-floating anxiety.

Those with pre-existing mental illness, which in some facilities is nearly half the population, frequently have psychological breakdowns, self-mutilate or attempt suicide.

I am encouraged that people of faith are speaking out against this cruel practice. In fact, the day before the Senate hearing, hundreds of people of faith joined a 23-hour fast organized by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

Here in Texas, the Sunset Advisory Commission’s review of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and the State Senate Committee on Criminal Justice’s interim charge to study solitary confinement are prime opportunities for all of us to make our voices heard on the overuse of solitary confinement and to advocate for alternatives, like those that have been successfully used in Mississippi and Maine.

The Rev. Elford is the senior pastor at Austin’s University United Methodist Church; jelford2409@yahoo.com.

Spokesperson 101

Engaging the media means you may be called on to be a spokesperson on behalf of your organization, campaign or church.

The best spokespeople

- **Have something newsworthy to say.** They are familiar with the outlet interviewing them and tailor their remarks to fit the outlet's readers or viewers. When crafting answers, they try to anticipate the reporter's agenda.
- **Demonstrate their expertise.** They always know more than the reporter about the subject at hand, are up-to-date on current issues and news in the field, and use their expertise to become a valued resource. They share their knowledge with reporters to help improve the quality of the resulting story.
- **Are accessible, candid and honest.** Good spokespeople never try to mislead or confuse a reporter. They know that their relationships with reporters begin and end with their credibility. It's okay not to have all the answers. Never make something up. Instead, try to find out and get back to the reporter before deadline.
- **Recognize that relationships with the media are a two-way street.** Good spokespeople understand that relationships with reporters are built over the long term, and are just as accessible when news is bad as when it is good. In fact, by participating in a negative story, they can sometimes turn it around.
- **Speak as a person of faith but don't preach.** Speaking for your community of faith invites you to share how your faith informs your response to the issue being discussed. Let the audience know how being a disciple of Jesus Christ informs and shapes your activism and advocacy. Take the time to simplify theological language into common terms. For example, if your addiction ministry at its heart offers people an opportunity for redemption and transformation you may want to tell a reporter, "Jesus teaches me as his follower that all persons deserves as many chances as it takes to become addiction free and turn their life around. That's what our faith asks of us and that's what this organization is all about."

Before the Interview

- **Know the medium.** Never take media calls cold. Instead, find out why they are calling, determine their deadline and call back after you've prepared for the discussion. Before you pick up the telephone to return a reporter's call or sit down in front of a camera, become familiar with the outlet, identify the audience, clarify the topics to be covered and know what the reporter expects from you. Chances are you instinctually know this information if this is one of your

local news sources or a well-known national outlet. If not, take a few minutes to research past articles or segments, and/or contact an associate in the market for key local information.

- **Update yourself on the issues.** Knowing how the issues impact your local community and exactly why it's relevant to an outlet's audience is important whether you are working to end homelessness or starting a campaign to limit underage drinking.
- **Prepare your answers.** If you know the topics to be covered, you can anticipate the questions in advance, and prepare your answers accordingly. The key is to know your messages and concentrate on delivering them, not just answering the specific question asked. The questions aren't the important part. Only your answers will make it into the story, not the reporter's questions.

Good answers always begin with a general statement that gives print reporters the main message and allows broadcast reporters to edit your answer into a cohesive sound bite. This statement is the most important part of the answer and should be delivered first. Next, find the best, most relevant statistic or fact to support the point.

Finally, use an example to add color and depth to your answer. Examples give journalists the human interest they need to make a better story. Using your own examples may win you more space in the resulting story.

The average sound bite aired on television and radio today is less than eight seconds long. The average newspaper quotation is one or two sentences. The trick is to learn how to formulate an answer that will both meet the reporter's need for news and interpretation and satisfy your agenda.

Prepare for an interview by determining the 2-3 messages (at most) that you want to communicate. Refine them, put them into your own words, and make them memorable.

During the Interview

- **Keep answers brief and never ramble.** Stick to the point and don't be afraid to repeat key messages.
- **Use anecdotes, images, metaphors and colorful phrases.** Personalize your messages by using anecdotes from your own experiences. Anecdotes illustrate the point and humanize you as a spokesperson. Good sound bites often have a ring to them
- **Avoid jargon.** Simply put, avoid using acronyms, insider terms and jargon. Focus on common language and human interest. For example, say "The United Methodist Church" rather than "UMC" and avoid agency acronyms.

Once you've equipped yourself with the information to be a reliable source, also recognize that being a good spokesperson takes preparation and practice.

Engaging Elected Officials



Elected officials at the national, state and local levels often make important decisions that directly or indirectly affect the community you serve. These same elected officials depend on hearing from their constituents, i.e. real people, instead of just lobbyists. Even legislators in Washington, D.C., want to know how an issue is being played out back home before developing their position.

It is imperative that your elected officials at all levels of government hear from you, as well as from members of your circles of influence, including family members, friends, colleagues in ministry, other members of the community and most importantly those affected by legislation. You should encourage these individuals and groups to communicate with their elected officials about issues affecting your ministry and your local community.

There are wide ranges of communication methods that can be utilized to effectively engage your elected official(s), including:

- Writing personalized letters or emails directly to your elected official
- Placing calls to your elected officials' regional/state or D.C. office
- Use www.action.umc-gbcs.org and other GBCS advocacy tools (contact GBCS Communications for help and ideas)
- Participating in one-on-one or joint meetings with your elected official or members of his/her staff
- Attending town hall meetings or other comment sessions or hosting your own, such as an Open Forum, luncheon or dinner
- Writing letters to the editor or opinion editorials for submission to the major daily papers in your city or state and the hometown paper(s) of your elected officials

Make an Appointment

All Congressional offices, local District offices and in Washington, D.C., require a written appointment request. Some Members of Congress do offer “walk-in” meeting times in their local offices, but an appointment request is still highly recommended.

Appointment requests can be mailed, but faxing them will get a faster response. Members’ contact information, phone and fax numbers can be found on their websites.

Remember that meeting a Member of Congress doesn’t require a trip to Washington, D.C. Check the Congressional calendar and discuss opportunities to meet with your Member in a local District office with the member’s scheduler.

Prepare for the Meeting

- Plan to discuss no more than two issues. Meetings are scheduled to last from 15-45 minutes.
- Learn everything you can about your issue.
- Learn everything you can about points in opposition to your standpoint and be ready to argue against them.
- If you have any supporting handouts, charts or graphics, bring them with you. Consider taking extra copies in case staff members request them.
- Find out where your legislator stands and has voted on your issue.

At the Meeting

- Arrive about 10 minutes before the appointment time. Dress neatly in business attire. Be courteous and respectful. Relax.
- Do not be upset if you end up meeting with the legislator’s staff. They are often more knowledgeable of individual issues than the legislators themselves, and they WILL inform the legislator of your views and requests.
- Introduce yourself to the legislator or their staff members: tell them who you are and where you live. Warm them up: Try to start by complimenting something the legislator has done recently; the legislator’s vote on an issue, a bill he or she sponsored, etc. After a minute or two of such “small talk,” state your standpoint on the issue(s) you came to discuss.
- No matter how passionately you feel about the issue, do not “rant-and-rave.” Nothing diminishes your credibility more than an “in your face” demeanor.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your points in detail.
- If the legislator disagrees with you, stand up for yourself, debate the issues, but do not become over-argumentative. Keep trying to emphasize the positives of your standpoint. Always try to end the conversation on a positive note.



- If the legislator allows, take photos of your meeting to document the event.
- Again, how do I speak authentically as a United Methodist and person of faith in a way that strengthens my interaction and doesn't hinder it?

After the Meeting

Always send a follow-up letter or email thanking your legislator and/or staff members. Also include any additional information you may have offered to provide in support of your issue. The follow-up message is important because it confirms your commitment to your cause and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your representative.

Post the photos and reflections of your meeting on Facebook and/or a blog such as Justice Matters (<http://umc-gbcs.org/blog>).

Sample of Letter to an Elected Official

The Honorable Mr./Ms. _____

Legislative Office Address

Washington, DC

Date

Dear Senator _____:

I have recently been informed that Congress is considering funding for medically accurate, age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in public schools. As a clergy member of The United Methodist Church and a constituent, I want you to know that sexuality education is a moral issue.

Young people need medically accurate information about sexuality. Without it, they turn to less reliable sources of information, such as the media and friends, which puts them at unnecessary risk for disease and unintended pregnancy. Comprehensive sexuality education not only teaches young people about anatomy, pregnancy, and disease prevention, but it also prepares them for healthy relationships, dating, marriage, and parenting.

Comprehensive sexuality education provides young people with the skills and knowledge they need to be responsible and discerning in their decision-making. Research shows that teaching both abstinence and contraception is the most effective sexuality education for young people. Youths who receive comprehensive sexuality education are more likely to delay mature sexual behaviors and use protection correctly and consistently if they do become sexually active.

Please ensure that effective comprehensive sexuality education receives sufficient funding.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,
Reverend Jane Doe

Address