



Catholic Social Thought and Advocacy

For Catholic political responsibility,¹ advocacy is one invaluable instrument in our hands. “Advocacy offers us an opportunity to bring the realities of our sisters and brothers facing injustice throughout the world to those who hold positions of power in our government.”²

Advocacy takes many forms: public education through social and other media; individual meetings and other communications with elected officials or their staffs; mobilization of Catholic organization members; testimony before public bodies; publication of research; consultation with state and local officials; comments on proposed local, state, or federal regulations; and participation in coalitions.

In all Catholic advocacy efforts, there should be a close connection between what we do for people in need on the services side (e.g. Catholic charities, health care, schools, housing) and what we want to accomplish as advocates. There are seven questions to ask and answer in developing an agenda:

1. What advocacy issues are rooted in our ministries and in the experience of those we serve?
2. What issues do our Catholic social justice and peace traditions address, providing principles that ground specific policy applications?
3. On what issues can we make a significant difference? Examples might be where the issue is closely contested; where the moral voice can be persuasive; or where Catholic ministries have a pertinent viewpoint and telling points to make from our experience.
4. What issues particularly impact the poor and vulnerable people whom we serve?
5. On what issues can we develop effective coalitions—with other Catholic organizations, with other faith communities, and with others in the civic community?
6. What can really be achieved on an issue? And, in tension with this, where do Catholics need to

be outspoken and prophetic even if the issue is judged to be “a lost cause”—at least in the short term?

7. What issues will affect the mission and work of our ministries, for example, legislation requiring staff or volunteers to report undocumented persons to the civil authorities or violating our medical/moral principles?

It is important that organizations keep a manageable list of advocacy issues on which they commit their staff and volunteers. These seven questions can help in this winnowing process so that energies are focused and advocates are not seen as “social gadflies” who issue statement after statement often disconnected from the service and ministries upon which the credibility of Catholic advocacy is founded. Organizations must be concerned not to be used by the political left or right, by Republicans or Democrats, for their partisan purposes. The focus must remain centered on the needs of the poor and vulnerable and the means to be *effective* advocates on their behalf in the light of the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching.

Catholic advocates and all Catholic ministries are called to a strong prophetic advocacy for the poor and vulnerable rooted in a tradition of careful but passionate advocacy in the face of many complex challenges locally, nationally, and globally. This is not for the faint-hearted, but standing with the poor never has been—from the days of the prophets to the time of Jesus to the present moment.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Fred Kammer, SJ, “Catholic Social Thought and Politics,” *JustSouth Quarterly*, Summer 2016, p. 3.
- ² Ignatian Solidarity Network, *School and Community Training Guide: Ignatian Advocacy 101*, at <https://ignatiansolidarity.net/advocacy/>