FROM
The Pew
TO THE
Public Square

Tools for
The Episcopal
Church
Called
to
Faith, Justice,
and
Movements
for
Community
Change

THE DEPARTMENT OF RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE, AND CREATION CARE
Creating Change

Baptism

In Baptism we make several promises, or have promises made on our behalf that we accept at confirmation. We promise to:

- Resist evil
- Seek and serve Christ in all persons
- Love our neighbors as ourselves
- Strive for justice and peace among all people
- Respect the dignity of every human being

Following Jesus

Jesus worked to restore people to physical and spiritual health but also to heal and restore communities. We can learn from Jesus’ actions of reconciliation and community building.

Jesus of course showed an interest in working at the personal or individual level to restore people to physical or spiritual health. However, this work was always about also restoring people to wholeness in the community. It was never just about individuals.

Jesus worked to protect communities from structural injustice. When Jesus kicks the money changers out of the temple, he shows us that worship of God cannot take place alongside economic exploitation. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus teaches that social justice is the Good News.

Everything Jesus does enacts liberation. Just as Jesus liberated people by exorcising demons, Jesus worked to liberate communities from the evils of hunger, prejudice, and oppression.

Episcopalians understand our Christianity as something that impacts our social and communal lives as well as our private or personal lives. As a result, Episcopalians are called not only to live Christ-like lives personally, but to work for the good of our communities by seeking structural change.
5 WAYS TO ENGAGE

Voting
Voting in national, state, Tribal, and local elections. Educating ourselves about candidates and issues voting rights.

Policy Advocacy
Getting issues on ballots and before lawmakers, such as petitions, legislative outreach, and awareness campaigns.

Direct Action
Using actions such as sit-ins, boycotts, divestment, vigils, marches, and protests to draw attention to an issue or disrupt an unjust system.

Prayer
Transforming evil unjust systems to bring about a just and equitable world through private prayer, public worship, teaching, and preaching.

Mobilizing Resources
Organizing resources of people, time, space, and money to create systemic change that you want to see in your community.
**LEVELS OF CHANGE**

Solutions to systemic issues require engagement at all government levels. Here’s how to find out how to get involved at each one.

Different political decisions in the United States belong to federal, Tribal, state, and local governments. The United States sees decision making power as ultimately vested in the body of citizens. However, all voices are not always heard.

**CIVICS 101**

Effective political engagement for structural change requires some knowledge of how the system works. Taking time to study the mechanics of U.S. government, whether at your local library or with some deep Wikipedia dives, will make your efforts much more effective.

**FOUR LEVELS OF UNITED STATES Government**

1. Federal
   - Deals with concerns impacting the whole country
   - Know your senator's and representative's contact info and contact them and the president by mail, email or by phone to share your stance on these kinds of policy decisions. Deals with things like the military, immigration, and civil rights.

2. Tribal
   - Sovereign nations with unique relationships with federal and state governments
   - Know the structure of your Tribe's decision making and who to contact. Consider seeking appointment or running for office. For residents of Native American Tribes, these governments handle much of what states do, such as education or land use.

3. State
   - Has authority over anything not given to federal government
   - Like with the federal level, know the contact info of your state senator and representative. Things like education and prisons fall under the authority of states.

4. Local
   - Deals with local concerns and those delegated to it by the state
   - Go to council meetings and forums, go to city hall and meet your officials, and consider serving on commissions or running for office. Local governments like counties, towns, and cities are often overlooked in favor of flashier issues related to state and federal politics. However the things that most impact daily life, like police, fire, water, land use, and parks, are overseen by local governments.

**EXAMPLES OF ENGAGEMENT**

VOTING

For those eligible to vote, casting ballots is a critical way to impact politics. While it may seem counterintuitive, the more local an election, the more important it is to vote!
Imagine you come upon someone fallen in a river and save them, only to discover that more people continue to float by needing saving. You can keep saving them one by one, or you can go upriver and see why people keep falling in so that you can work on a solution to the underlying cause of people falling in.

It’s important to see in this scenario that one solution is not better than the other. Both are needed. Without the individual effort of pulling people out of the water, those people will stay stuck and possibly drown. Without work on the underlying structural problem, people will keep falling in.

The point is to help you choose strategies and be clear about what your expectations should be for success at pulling people out of the river or building a bridge to keep people from falling in. And this one among many tools to help you find your strategy.
Gun Violence

By their nature, systemic challenges resist simple solutions. Here are two models for addressing a complex issue. We are using gun violence as the example.

Five Dimension Model

**INTERPERSONAL**
Suicide and domestic violence account for the largest share of gun deaths. Learn to prevent suicides and aid domestic violence victims.

**PERSONAL**
If you are a gun owner, you can learn and use proper gun safety, such as trigger locks, safes, and taking safety courses.

**CULTURAL**
Promote efforts that devalue portrayals of violence (esp. gun violence) and encourage safe and responsible gun use (this includes nonviolent conflict resolution).

**SYSTEMIC**
Work to reduce structural factors that correlate with gun violence, such as high economic inequality and low socioeconomic mobility.

**POLICY**
Support research- and data-driven policy solutions to gun violence, such as broadened criteria for firearm denial.

**ENVIRONMENT**
These are population-focused efforts that change social, physical, and economic environments.

The *social environment* is the immediate culture, people, and institutions that a person interacts with. Changes at this level that could impact gun violence include challenging toxic masculinity or promoting nonviolent conflict resolution.

The *physical environment* includes things like the built world and "natural" world. Changes to this realm may include efforts to put physical obstacles in the way of guns (safes or trigger locks).

The *economic environment* includes how people get necessary and desired resources. Gun violence can be reduced here by reducing socioeconomic lack of mobility, increasing gun costs, or requiring gun owners to have insurance.

Three Dimension Model

**POLICY**
Includes laws, contract language, ordinances, standards, resolutions, zoning, or rules that reduce gun violence. Think of the solutions above as well as policies of private organizations to limit or eliminate guns on their premises.

**SYSTEMS**
A focus on organizational systems, processes, and infrastructure to reduce gun violence. This approach examines the way guns are bought, sold, exchanged, and used. It may take the form of implementing processes to identify signs and risk factors for domestic violence or suicide, and getting potential perpetrators effective help before violence occurs.
1. Build Relationships
   A. This work should involve accompaniment or working with the community. Build relationships with the community so you’re working with them and not just doing things for them.
   B. You can, among other things, get to know local businesses owners, volunteer in schools, attend community meetings, and serve on community boards.
   C. An important way to build relationships is through interfaith, interdenominational, and community organizations.
   F. Think about where your work can have the biggest impact based on what can be accomplished with your skills and resources.

2. Decide on the Issue
   E. After hearing pressing community issues, use data to confirm how many others in your community face them to determine which issue can have the greatest impact.
   D. Use community roundtables, attend local events, or employ community surveys to find out pressing community issues to tackle.

3. Take Action
   G. Consider types of engagement like voting, policy advocacy, direct action, financial/organizational support, and prayer.
   H. Prepare before going forward: Collaborate with, and listen to, affected groups, prepare talking points and data, decide your approach (e.g., nonviolent), and create concrete goals.
   I. Coordinating safe, effective, and legal direct action (protests, vigils, marches, demonstrations) takes extra preparation and planning. First specify aims, talking points, and supporter roles.

4. Further Resources
   Consider attending an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) training.
   You can find further resources from The Episcopal Church at https://episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community
   https://episcopalchurch.org/racial-reconciliation
   https://episcopalchurch.org/social-justice-and-advocacy-engagement
   https://calledtotransformation.org/taking-action/