

# Introduction to the UMC Advocacy Coordinator in PA

By Joyce M. Davis

I am thankful for the warm expressions of support and encouragement as I step into the role of Advocacy Coordinator for the United Methodist Church in Pennsylvania, helping to ensure that the values of our church impact all aspects of society and governmental affairs.

The voices of our clergy and laity can have a profound influence as elected officials enact laws, formulate regulations and decide on everything from school funding to street repairs. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church compel us to be engaged in all aspects of society and public life to stand with those who are suffering, oppressed and vulnerable.

*The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016 states:*

*The United Methodist Church believes God's love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. We cannot just be observers. So we care enough about people's lives to risk interpreting God's love, to take a stand, to call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex. The church helps us think and act out a faith perspective, not just responding to all the other 'mind-makers-up' that exist in our society.*

To that end, as I step into my new role, I am working with clergy and laity to schedule a discussion of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church for 6 p.m., Thursday, July 22. This will be the first of regular informational seminars that will allow clergy and laity to question experts on the most pressing topics of our day, from climate change to the minimum wage to the high cost of college tuition to the mental health crisis now gripping our nation.

The first Zoom meeting is entitled, "Understanding the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church," and it will be streamed live from the Facebook page of the Lay Leader of the Susquehanna Conference. It will remain on the Facebook page for later viewing for those unable to participate in real time.

Confirmed participants so far include the Rev. Dr. Kathy Kind, pastor of Camp Hill UMC; Aimee Hong, Senior Executive Director of Education and Engagement; the Rev. Paul McReynolds, Albright-Bethune UMC, as well as Kristi Wilkerson and Sharon Gregory, lay leaders of West Virginia and Western PA, respectively. I will moderate what promises to be an engaging and inspirational event.

Here is a link to register to join the discussion:

[https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_IlbhFJwzTxmsOLTpRcN19Q](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IlbhFJwzTxmsOLTpRcN19Q)

In addition to organizing webinars to inform both laity and clergy the most pressing issues of our day, the Advocacy Coordinator can support the church's public engagement and can help magnify our voices in at least three important ways:

- By connecting our churches to government and community leaders to develop relationships and influence
- By providing opportunities for dialogue and debate on complex issues impacting the church and our communities
- By providing guidance on how to effectively utilize the media for expression of the values of the United Methodist Church to impact community dialogue and legislation

As a journalist located in the state capitol, I am keenly aware of the issues being debated among lawmakers. I not only regularly write about these issues, but I receive dozens of letters and opinion articles each week from people wanting to make their voices heard. Letters to the editor and opinion articles are powerful tools to shape public opinion and impact legislation at the local, state and national levels, and our church leaders should make sure of these tools to broaden our influence and spread Christian values throughout society.

Elected officials from school board directors to U.S. Senators have to stay informed on public discourse, and they and their staffs are compelled to read what people are writing online and in local newspapers. Newspaper websites like that of PennLive and The Patriot-News attract millions of viewers each week. They are major influencers in politics and government, and too often, voices of faith are not represented on their pages.

That's why I am encouraging clergy and laity to use these tools to engage in public discourse to help spread the values of the United Methodist Church in our communities and in the halls of power.

I urge anyone who would like to write an opinion article or letter to the editor to contact me at [jdavis@susumc.org](mailto:jdavis@susumc.org) for information and guidance.

In addition, I will be scheduling a series of webinars to provide practical information on how to write an opinion piece and letter to the editor, as well as on how to influence elected officials and galvanize public support for social change. If you have ideas about topics for future webinars, please do email me with your suggestions.

Finally, let's join in prayer for God's guidance as we seek to use the Advocacy Coordinator role to strengthen our church's relevance and influence in all aspects of society and to be a more powerful force in making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.