

Advocacy – the flavour of the time. But what does it mean?

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The Congregational Chapter held in Nairobi called on all Brothers “to engage in advocacy with the voiceless, the marginalised and all that are oppressed.” Our Oceania Chapter document commits us to “continue to listen, walk and advocate, in a spirit of respectful engagement, with those made poor and those abused.” What does this mean in practice, and how can we go about it?

There are many kinds of advocacy happening in our wider community; people speaking up for those who are disadvantaged – the elderly, the poor, the disabled, those forgotten. Many people do this as part of their paid employment, accompanying these people to appointments with Centrelink, Medicare, doctors, lawyers, and the like. There are also those who advocate on a paid professional basis with politicians on behalf of mining companies, ‘big’ business, workers. These are called *lobbyists*.

When those in the social justice space talk of advocacy, we are generally not speaking of the same sort of work. Mostly what we do is quite different. But in what ways?

The core elements of effective advocacy that I see being practiced in our own Congregation and in many faith-based groups encompass a process something like this:

- A heart-felt passion in response to perceived injustice
- Arising out of personal contact with those affected
- Leading to a disinterested, targeted effort aimed at those in power
- In order to produce systemic change.

The efforts to be successful need to be grounded in good evidence and accompanied by clear, concise, identified, concrete outcomes. These efforts work best when done in partnerships of like-minded people.

The most successful efforts in this age of multi-media and social networking seem to come from the prudent and clever uses of social media that create a groundswell of interest and political/electoral pressure for change. Such sites as **Change.org** (Enables anyone, anywhere to start a petition, mobilize support, and win change in anything from local concerns to global issues), **sumofus.org** (standing together to hold corporations accountable for their actions), **walkfree.org** (fighting to end one of the world's greatest evils: modern slavery), **collectiveshout.org** (against the objectification of women and sexualisation of girls in media, advertising and popular culture), **chilout.org** (Children out of immigration detention), and **avaaz.org** (a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making) are good examples of these sites.

By visiting some of these sites you can get some idea of how they operate. Some are community driven and you can start your own petition; others will send messages seeking support for specific campaigns. In any case, most of them will provide some education on the issues they are currently working on. Many of these sites enable people to subscribe to messages and updates (for free!).

In my wandering around the internet (focused surfing) I came across the article linked below: *Fifty Ways to get Political*

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/4wi9f3r6t247gxo/Fifty%20Ways%20To%20Get%20Political%20copy.doc?dl=0>. Not all the ideas are practical for everyone, but you might find some that are useful. At the end I have added something on writing letters to the editor. In future I will write something about contacting your local politician.

In the meantime, Happy Advocating!!

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