



Advocate in Place

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This week, the world passed a grim threshold. Over 3 million cases of coronavirus have been confirmed worldwide, and 1/3 of those reported are here in the U.S. The past few months have brought much grief and anxiety. Most of us know people whose lives or livelihoods have been deeply impacted, and many have ourselves been sick or have lost loved ones to the virus or have lost income. The collective grief weighing on us is heavy.

Our lives, our work, our world is forever changed.

Some see a “silver lining” in this crisis. I am not one of them. What I perceive is a gray, ugly cloud devastating our communities, exacerbating inequalities, and exposing the failure of our policies to prepare for this and other threats to the common good. While I don’t assume a silver lining to the pandemic, I pray we can all still find hope and inspiration. We can draw from the example of people persisting in the face of this storm. Certainly frontline doctors, nurses, and direct service providers are foremost examples of courage. I am inspired also to see how teachers, social workers, and food service providers are shifting their work and services online in creative ways.

The ministry of the Church has changed too. Pastors have found ways to lead worship and offer pastoral care using new tools and methods. Funerals, weddings, and ordinations continue to take place. Even “coffee hour” has moved into online chat rooms to build connection and community. New resources and webinars in support of local church ministry are available on ucc.org, thanks to collaborative efforts of UCC staff across the denomination. The prophetic ministry of the church, too, has adapted and is changing due to COVID-19.

The UCC’s [Justice and Peace Action Network](#) (or “JPANet,” our e-advocacy platform) has grown significantly in the past several weeks as record numbers of advocates have sent messages to Congress on issues related to the Coronavirus. Hundreds of letters have been written in support of vulnerable populations in the COVID-19 stimulus bills, in support of the World Health Organization (WHO), to demand a fair census count, to condemn racism against Asian-Americans, and to demand the lifting of sanctions against Iran and Venezuela – just to name a few issues.

National gatherings and advocacy trainings like Ecumenical Advocacy Days have been moved online to raise issues with congressional offices. Each week, webinars, videos, sign-on letters, and online resources are being released by the UCC and partner organizations on a myriad of justice issues related to COVID-19. Public witness has continued in the form of car and bike “marches,” highlighting “people power” amidst social distancing.

I may not be one to point to the “silver lining” in moments like this, but I do notice a light at the end of the tunnel. That light is not based on the belief that this crisis will end, although I know it will. The light piercing into this tunnel is the ray of hope emerging from the work and witness of those “advocating in place” in this time – the illumination that comes as structural inequality is revealed and called out, and as impacted communities are highlighted and given voice.

Let us watch for and be the rays of hope for each other. Let us create and share creative ways to “advocate in place” together. Let us keep working for the “Just World for All” that we want to emerge when this crisis ends.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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