

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream...

JUSTICE AND THE CHURCH: AMOS COMMISSION 101



“We believe that salvation and social change cannot be separated from one another. We believe that God loved the world as a whole when he gave his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. We believe that the saving act of God is directed not only at individuals but at the whole creation. If the sin of Adam is responsible for corruption and evil in the world, if this original sin is responsible for the chaos in the world, for the wars and rumours of wars, for injustices and oppressive systems, for economic exploitation, then the saving act of Jesus must deal with this whole spectrum of the consequences of the original sin. It must deal with both the spiritual and the political socio-economic realities of the world in which we live.” *From Evangelical Witness In South Africa*

How Should The Church “Do Justice”?

The prophets called on communities of faith to “do justice” and “love kindness.” Local congregations often focus on direct service and acts of charity, but many are reluctant to address underlying imbalances and abuses of power that constitute injustice. How can the local congregation build a well-rounded approach to mission—one that includes both acts of charity and acts of justice? How can the church empower its members to participate effectively in the public policy debate? How can congregation communicate with each other and the secular community on complex or divisive public policy issues?

The Amos Commission is a resource to help congregations build justice ministries that model United Methodist principles of inclusiveness, theological integrity and discernment.

The Amos Commission Approach

Established in 2004 by the Austin District, the Amos Commission’s mission is to empower and equip members of each United Methodist congregation in the district to influence public policy in pursuit of justice for all people.

Examples of the Amos Commission’s work in its first two years of existence include:

- Hosting a nonpartisan issue forum on school financing and tax reform prior to the Texas Legislature’s Special Session;
- Encouraging United Methodists to support expansion of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); and
- Offering workshops that have explored the differences between charity and justice ministries and the biblical foundations for our work.

The Amos Commission Speakers’ Bureau responds to requests from local churches that are seeking to understand the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of working for justice through the church. In 2005, ten congregations requested presentations from the Amos Commission. At this time University UMC, Manchaca UMC, Lake Travis UMC, Tarrytown UMC, and First UMC, Austin have groups offering events and opportunities for members to get involved in changing social policy. In this new year the District Amos Commission is looking forward to creating several different workshops for the congregations:

1. How to have open, honest conversations on issues
2. how to learn about a social justice issue using our United Methodist Wesleyan Quadrilateral
3. how to choose an issue and participate in ‘hands on’ experiences that deepen awareness and lead toward action
4. preaching workshops for clergy

The Present Challenge to Theology in the Church

Daily we are presented with an array of concerns that challenge our proclamation of God's reign over all of human existence.

Of crucial importance are concerns generated by great human struggles for dignity, liberation, and fulfillment—aspirations that are inherent elements in God's design for creation. These concerns are borne by theologies that express the heart cries of the downtrodden and the aroused indignation of the compassionate.

The perils of nuclear destruction, terrorism, war, poverty, violence, and injustice confront us. Injustices linked to race, gender, class, and age are widespread in our times. Misuse of natural resources and disregard for the fragile balances in our environment contradict our calling to care for God's creation. Secularism pervades high-technology civilizations, hindering human awareness of the spiritual depths of existence.

We seek an authentic Christian response to these realities that the healing and redeeming work of God might be present in our words and deeds. Too often, theology is used to support practices that are unjust. We look for answers that are in harmony with the gospel and do not claim exemption from critical assessment.

*From **The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2004.***

Amos Commission FAQ

Can my local congregation set up an "Amos Commission"? How would it be different from the Church and Society Commission?

Any local congregation can establish an Amos Commission. The Amos Commission might be a separate group from the Church and Society Commission, or it might be a subset of C&S that is particularly concerned with public policy.

Does the Amos Commission take positions on issues?

At the district level, the Amos Commission takes positions on a few public policy issues that are of special concern to United Methodists such as children's health. More often, we help congregations and individuals think through the issues, outline processes for issue discussion, and provide resources.

Who does the District Amos Commission work with?

We collaborate with other faith groups as well as secular organizations that share our concerns and interests. Some of the faith groups we work with include Texas Impact, the Baptist Christian Life Commission, and the Texas Conference of Churches. Some of the other organizations we work with include Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas and the Center for Public Policy Priorities.

Is the Amos Commission based on a national model?

As far as we know, the Austin District Amos Commission is the first body of its kind. We have had many requests for information about our model from other United Methodist bodies and other Christian denominations throughout Texas and in other states.



For More Information

To find out more about the Austin District Amos Commission or setting up an Amos Commission in your congregation, contact Rev. Mimi Raper at 512.478.5684 x 214 or mimi@fumcaustin.org.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

*From Martin Luther King, Jr., **Letter from Birmingham City Jail***