

Why Become an Advocate?

The Importance of Advocacy

Advocacy is about speaking up for those whose voices have not been heard. The poor and the marginalized will be forgotten unless someone speaks out for their rights and needs. Wise speech advocates for the rights of the poor and the sick.

Understanding how to be an advocate as a strategic and significant way to create positive change is crucial to being active in the fight against AIDS. The key to advocacy as an American is understanding the importance and value of leveraging your citizenship. We are also called to be advocates as Christians and there is a parallel between your role in society and citizenship as a member of the body of Christ.

Citizenship can be defined as the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community. So by definition, your membership to a community (physical or spiritual) is only as fruitful as your investment in it. Being a good citizen could mean cultivating your community and household, while also contributing to society by using your education and professional skills as a member of that society. As citizens we have a vested interest in the well-being of others because it brings harmony to life and the opportunity to share resources that benefit everyone. When all parties in a citizenship, either local or global, have an equal and just chance to succeed, everyone benefits from the combined gifts, perspectives, and contributions of others.

As believers in Christ, we agree that everyone is loved by God and deserves to be treated as such. Therefore, we must also invest in our citizenship spiritually by calling on God and the church to care for those who are hurting, in need, or isolated. The Bible makes it clear that our citizenship in God's kingdom can be seen by our fruits, or outward response to this membership. As Christians we are all called to be advocates. The quality of our response to Christ is not measured by our righteousness but by our mercy. This is the goal at the heart of advocacy for those affected by AIDS.

A verse in scripture that brings the two ideas of being a follower of Jesus and responding and extending his grace to others can be found in Matthew 9:12-13 (NIV), "Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor; but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice. 'For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" The journey towards Jesus is also the journey towards giving mercy to others in response. Standing in the gap for others and being a voice to the voiceless—such as widows and orphans—is a form of mercy.

Being an advocate makes a difference in the lives of others. Using the influence of your citizenship can be done in creative, simple, and effective ways. The role of Acting on AIDS is to be advocates and train others to advocate. We do this out of a response of discipleship and employ action steps that utilize practical ways to raise awareness on behalf of others.

The following are some tools that can bring clarity to the difference an individual can make as an advocate.



Advocacy is a Privilege and Responsibility

Charitable giving is desperately needed for care of AIDS orphans and widows, but there is more that is required simply because the causes leading to the AIDS pandemic in poor nations are often related to poverty and require structural change in governments and policies.

Governments worldwide can play a major role in both causing and resolving social inequalities that lead to desperate poverty. More than one billion people live on less than a dollar a day. Poverty produces situations where there are few resources for caring for the sick in some communities.

HIV and AIDS are most concentrated in areas of extreme poverty. Those committed to reducing HIV rates and for care for those affected by AIDS must encourage our nation's leaders to adopt policy changes and adequate funding levels for programs that both respond to immediate health care needs and address the structural issues that keep people living in dire straits globally. Americans give generously in instances of crisis such as the Asian tsunami or Hurricane Katrina. We also have the privilege and the responsibility to use our voices to promote justice and mercy for those who are most vulnerable, such as those who have been widowed and orphaned by AIDS.

Faith and Advocacy

Encouraging leadership and holding them accountable to care for the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized is a theme throughout Scripture. Working for just government action by supporting positive legislation in a bipartisan, balanced way allows people of faith to speak out across party and faith tradition lines, and has proven effective in improving policies enacted in Washington.

Government action is not the only mechanism to deal with advocating for those affected by AIDS, but charitable responses, however vital and compassionate, seldom result in lasting structural change if issues of poverty have been supported by unjust policies.

An Invitation to Respond

The responsibility of going to the poor, the diseased, and the marginalized should be primarily for those who claim to have received the mercy of Jesus. The sad truth is that the church has moved slowly at first to respond to this crisis. The AIDS pandemic offers an opportunity for this generation to act on behalf of the destitute like never before. The only way that the situation is hopeless is if no one reacts from those whom have the voices and resources to offer hope. Edmund Burke, an 18th century Scottish statesman and writer, said, *"All that is necessary for evil to succeed is for good men to do nothing."*