

# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE *Public Affairs Religious Liberty Department*



By James G. Lee, Jr.

Our hope is to expand the ministry of the Religious Liberty Department beyond Sabbath work issues and Union dues. Religious Liberty has a much broader perspective and scope than is commonly thought. Ideally, it should balance social justice with the mission of the church.

In the months ahead, we will be working to ensure that the department will be addressing social justice issues in the communities in which we worship and serve.

Our goal is to get into the community and pursue the depth of ministry to which Ellen White referred in her writings; we would be helping the community and the community would respond positively.

In church, when we see each other, our fellowship must go beyond saying "Happy Sabbath." We must show compassion, kindness and caring. Our Religious Liberty/Public Affairs ministry must mean meeting the people and mingling them where they are, as Jesus did (MH 143). Christ won people's confidence as he ministered to their needs, as He showed them that He cared about them. He went to where they were; He didn't wait for them to come to Him.

We are getting more involved with the agenda of the community. When people are hurting in the community, we need to be there to support them. In cities where there are lots of police shootings, we need to partner with the



community and the police department, and help to bring about reconciliation and healing.

Unfortunately, as Adventists, we too often become focused internally, on our beliefs and practices, our activities. These are all good, but they are not our main mission. When we have focused inwardly, community people have recognized this. "You Adventists want us to join your church; you are not concerned about being part of our community," some have said. We need to turn our gaze upward and outward, seeing and meeting with, and ministering to, the people just as Jesus did.

Please be praying and considering how you and your church can become more involved in the community.

Because social justice issues involve a complex, comprehensive range of community challenges, the conference Public Affairs Religious Liberty Department will join forces with Adventist Community Services, the Communication Department and the Health and Temperance Ministry to plan ways to respond to social justice-related needs in the community.



To help emphasize this expanded direction, we are planning an abbreviated "Justice Weekend" on Sept. 9 and 10, 2017. (Venue to be determined.) This day will help foster awareness of some of the many community issues in which we as a church can get involved. The following are just a few of the issues that

will be discussed and resourced on this special weekend:

- **Social Justice and Domestic Violence**
- **Social Justice and Religious Discrimination**
- **Social Justice and Human Trafficking**
- **Social Justice and Community Engagement**
- **Social Justice and Economic Empowerment**
- **Social Justice and Diversity**
- **Social Justice and Health**
- **Social Justice and Immigration**  
(An issue for which we initially have provided training, on May 21, 2017.) ... and much more!

It is time for us to live out our faith by participating more fully in our communities. "*The greatest tragedy of [any] period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.*" – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Let us not be silent!

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