

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

Testimonies must seek the reconciling and restoring purposes of God.

By Andrew Bolton, Leicester, England, with support
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Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

—Proverbs 31:8–9 NRSV

We were visiting the office of a US senator through Zoom and met with Andrew, a staff member. Steve, a bishop, had organized us. Meghan, a pastor, capably presided. A new Jewish friend joined us from St. Louis, Missouri, USA. Jim, from the mission center leadership team, was with us as usual.

After introductions, one of us made our “ask”—in this particular visit we wanted the senator to support draft legislation S1 “For the People Act”—about fair voting. Three of us told stories about why this was important for us. We had some discussion and then repeated our “ask” as we finished. Steve followed up with an email.

We were informed by the careful research and training given by the Quaker Friends Committee on National Legislation (www.fcnl.org). We courteously spoke truth to power to let our concerns be known. We were there to bear witness of the equal Worth of All Persons—all citizens should have easy access to fair voting, no matter their race, class, or ethnicity.

I love that I can write or speak to politicians in the USA, the United Kingdom, and other democracies, and no one comes for me at midnight to beat me up or imprison me. How dare we not speak up!

Why do I and others in Community of Christ regularly and passionately exercise our stewardship of citizenship?

We are a testimony-telling people. We don’t recite creeds; instead, we tell personal stories of how we have experienced God’s love. When I first met church people as a young adult, I loved hearing testimonies of God’s reality in their lives. The people were ordinary but authentic, and they told stories of God’s loving reality. I was moved and touched. I grew in faith to the point I wanted to be baptized.

Speaking truth to power on behalf of, and with those wronged, is an extension of our testimony tradition in Community of Christ. It is the stewardship of citizenship. The first act of justice is to listen to the pain, see the hurt and suffering. The second act is doing something. This includes speaking respectfully to those who can change things. Moses in the burning-bush experience heard the Spirit say this:

“I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians. ...So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

—Exodus 3:7–8, 10 NRSV

God saw, heard, and came down to deliver the suffering Israelites and said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh.” God feels the pain of those suffering today and sends us now to Pharaoh to say, “Let my suffering people go!” Other prophets spoke truth to power, Nathan to King David, John the Baptist to King Herod, Jesus to Pilate, Paul to King Agrippa. This is our task as a prophetic people. All we need is compassion and courage. Noted Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann writes in *The Prophetic Imagination*:

Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness.

Where does courage come from? The Holy Spirit who calls us! Another word for Holy Spirit is Comforter—from the Latin *com forte*, which means “with strength.” So the Holy Spirit is present to strengthen us and give us courage.

The second source of courage is the support of others. The best way I have found to visit politicians, or their staff members, is to go with someone else, ideally several people, who feel the same as I. To go with victims and support their story is very powerful.

If we can go with members of other faiths, even better. Have a single issue. Make sure you are well-researched, using reputable sources like the Quaker organization FCNL.

We organize our roles and practice what each of us will say. We follow up. We visit again on the same or another issue of concern.

It is very important is to be non-partisan. We are not supporting this or that political party. We are equally critical of all politicians when the Worth of All Persons or the Sacredness of Creation is violated. I like what Martin Luther King Jr. wrote:

The church must be reminded once again that it is not to be the master or the servant of the state, but the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and critic of the state... never its tool.

—A Knock at Midnight

We are to be the conscience of those who govern us, a guide and critic. Our consciences are informed by our Enduring Principles, especially the equal Worth of All Persons and the Sacredness of Creation.

We also write letters and emails and make telephone calls in the same spirit of civility and concern. Petitioning lawmakers involves being informed by careful research, the example of Jesus, and the Enduring Principles. This is a way of preaching the gospel, testifying of the Worth of All Persons and the Sacredness of Creation. Speaking truth to power with kindness and firmness is to act nonviolently for justice in our troubled world.

All our voices must speak up for the poor, the marginalized, and the “cause of Zion.” This includes sharing, when possible, with lawmakers in our nations as we promote the principles of the kingdom of God on Earth.

So, go to “Pharaoh” and “courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:3b).



If you want help or start something where you live and serve, please contact Steve Kellogg (stevenkellogg@gmail.com) or Andrew Bolton (abolton2@live.com).