

# A VOICE

...for *ALL* our children

HOW TO ADVOCATE  
FOR QUALITY  
EDUCATION



South Carolina United Methodist  
Children in Poverty Task Force





Dear SC United Methodists,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ. As we celebrate the season of Advent, we remember the birth of the Christ child even as we wait expectantly for Christ's return. Long ago, "the Word became flesh and lived among us," first as a child of humble means born to parents dependent on the compassion of strangers.



In this Advent season, people of faith in South Carolina have a unique opportunity to exercise a ministry of compassion to children whom we may not even know by advocating with state lawmakers to address the needed changes in funding for public education.

The Task Force for the Pan-Methodist Campaign for Children in Poverty has prepared a resource packet to equip you and members of your congregation to make a difference in the lives of South Carolina's children. I encourage you to share your hopes and concerns with your legislators at this crucial time.

May God bless you as you seek to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ and to partner with him in transforming the world.

In Christ,

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

***You can make  
a difference in  
the life of a child!***



# Blueprint for a Congregational Response

**Purpose:** To have each South Carolina congregation informed about the continuing plight of many of our children in public schools and how the SC Supreme Court's recent ruling mandates the SC Legislature to change how our schools are funded and that this funding be equitable. Also, to have our congregations become advocates for our legislators to make action on this mandate a priority.

Begin by asking the Administrative Council to review the history of the "Corridor of Shame" lawsuit and the SC Supreme Court's recent ruling and act on the request by the SC Carolina Annual Conference Initiative for Children in Poverty to become an advocate for legislative action on how our schools are funded.

The Administrative Council may name a task force including: clergy, laity, parents, local elected officials and interested individuals to plan an event to highlight the plight of children attending public schools in rural counties.

Identify the timely importance of urging our SC General Assembly to support and provide equitable funding for public K-12 education in all counties and the longterm value to citizens (all ages, all stages) and to SC as a whole. Legislators return to Columbia in early January and budget committees in the House and Senate begin preparing the new budget.

## Suggestions for the Task Force:

- Assess the interests and needs of the intended audience.
- If an educational event is to be held, decide if it will be for the local church family or community-based.
- Identify the appropriate format for the intended audience:
  - a. Town hall meeting with presentations from a panel
  - b. Church meeting, bulletin insert, or mailing of a fact sheet
  - c. School-based meeting, PTO style including school board members
  - d. Session with your state legislative delegation
- Appoint people to assume responsibility for every aspect of the event, including:
  - a. Select a day and time that will not exclude the intended audience.  
If a state legislator is to be invited, contact her/him for available times/dates before setting the event date.
  - b. Location (consider size, staging, parking, accessibility, cost)
  - c. Advertisement (print and social digital media, email, websites, posters, direct mailings and individual contacts).
  - d. Invite the local media (television, radio and print) to attend and publicize the event.
  - e. Prior to the event, provide invited speakers and panel members with talking points, copies of the history of the "Corridor of Shame," the SC Supreme Court's decision, and any related articles that may be helpful.
- Strive to build ongoing support and communication with local and state elected officials. Make available contact information of local state legislators and any other pertinent persons for your congregations and at any educational events.

# Equitable School Funding: Synopsis of the Abbeville vs. The State of South Carolina Court Ruling

The South Carolina Supreme Court issued a landmark decision November 12, 2014, declaring that our state's legislature has failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide an opportunity for even a "minimally adequate education" to children who, by accident of birth, were not being offered an education. The children, whose educational lives were at stake, live in some of the most impoverished areas of our state, many of whose lives were sadly portrayed in the documentary "Corridor of Shame." The Abbeville vs. The State of South Carolina ruling was intended to end 21 years of court battles between the plaintiff school districts and their children against the State.

The facts are largely undisputed. Approximately 90 percent of these children live in areas where "generational poverty" predominates. Their parents, grandparents and prior generations of their families lived in similar circumstances and conditions and suffered the same fates. While the state argued that poverty was the cause of their educational failures, the Court found that this was not an excuse for failing to offer them educational opportunities. In finding that "South Carolina's educational funding scheme is a fractured formula denying students in the Plaintiff Districts the constitutionally required opportunity," the Court made the following findings:

We follow the example set in *Brown* and its progeny, and apply that reasoning to the instant case. The measurable inputs and outputs show that the Defendants have failed to provide students in the Plaintiff Districts the requisite constitutional opportunity.

..."Inadequate transportation fails to convey children to school or home in a manner conducive to even minimal academic achievement. Students in the Plaintiff Districts receive instruction in many cases from a corps of unprepared teachers. Students in these districts are grouped by economic class into what amounts to no more than educational ghettos, rated by the Department of Education's guidelines as substandard. Large percentages of the students in the Plaintiff Districts - over half in some instance - are unable to meet minimal benchmarks on standardized tests, but are nonetheless pushed through the system to "graduate."

... [T]he evidence demonstrates that there is a clear disconnect between spending and results. This Court cannot suggest methods of fixing the problem, but we can recognize a constitutional violation when we see one

... A focus on poverty within the Plaintiff Districts likely would yield higher dividends than a focus on perhaps any other variable.

... Teachers in the Plaintiff Districts were too often unprepared, under educated themselves, and failed far more often State teacher certification tests.

... The "State's education system fails to provide school districts with the resources necessary to meet the minimally-adequate standard. In addition, the cost of the educational package in South Carolina is based on a convergence of outmoded and outdated policy considerations that fail the students of the Plaintiff Districts. Though the evidence demonstrates the intersection of statutes and ever increasing funding streams, it does not show, at least to this Court, a comprehensive effort by the Defendants to determine the demands of providing the constitutionally mandated educational opportunity throughout the State. In our opinion, without that determination, it is near impossible for the Defendants to meet their constitutional obligation."

... It is time for the Defendants to take a broader look at the principal causes for the unfortunate performance of students in the Plaintiff Districts, beyond mere funding. Fixing the violation identified in this case will require lengthy and difficult discussions regarding the wisdom of continuing to enact multiple statutes which have no demonstrated effect on educational problems, or attempting to address deficiencies through underfunded and structurally impaired programming.



In short, the SC Supreme Court found, based on the evidence produced in a trial that lasted 102 days over a two-year period between 2003 and 2004, that these children were not being provided the opportunity for a minimally adequate education or, as stated by both sides at trial, “a chance at life.” The court directed the parties to work together to devise “specific, planned remedial measures” to remedy the constitutional violation.

In concluding, the Court stated that, “the winner here is not the Plaintiff Districts, but fittingly, the students in those districts and throughout the State. Further, there is no loser. The substance of our finding today places before the parties a new opportunity, resting solidly on this Court’s precedent, but leaning forward towards a conversation unencumbered by blame. The Defendants and the Plaintiff Districts must identify the problems facing students in the Plaintiff Districts, and can solve those problems through cooperatively designing a strategy to address critical concerns and cure the constitutional deficiency evident in this case.

and that” [t]housands of South Carolina’s school children—the quintessential future of our state—have been denied this opportunity due to no more than historical accident.”



So the next steps are for the citizens of South Carolina and their state elected officials to determine what inputs are needed to educate the children, i.e., transportation, facilities, time on task (e.g., after school, summer school, full year?), qualified teachers, early childhood initiatives, parental involvement, challenging curriculum, or other research-supported initiatives that have been proven to work. Then the State must determine how to develop consistent funding over time. The State has never devised a “system” that addresses the needs of these children and has not honored its basic funding obligations even under current law. The Court instructed the parties, led by the State, to do that.

## A Guide to Connection with Local Legislators

South Carolina’s legislature has two houses – The Senate and The House. You can find your Senator and Representative at the following link by typing in your home address:

<http://www.scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php>

This link will also give you your US Congressional members as well.

From there, simply click on the name to contact your Legislator by email, or you can use the attached PDF file to contact them via mail, phone or email. This list also gives local and Columbia based contact information.

When does the legislature meet? Well, they start in January and go until June. There is no definite length of time they must meet, but they must vote if they want to extend past the first Thursday in June. This may give you some guidelines as to the best place to contact your state Legislator.

If you need a general guide to how the legislature works, the student page has helpful, easy to understand explanations of the entire process.

<http://www.scstatehouse.gov/studentpage/index.html>

# 10 Tips for Effective Advocacy

## 2015 South Carolina Early Childhood Common Agenda

- 1 Always identify yourself. Let your legislator know who you are, where you're from and why this issue is important to you.
- 2 Be genuine. Be yourself. Follow your passion, instincts and core beliefs.
- 3 Keep it simple and specific. Don't overwhelm your legislator with several, unrelated appeals. Prioritize requests and suggest a clear action step in response to your concerns (e.g. introduce, co-sponsor or oppose a bill).
- 4 Be polite. A positive response is more likely when you are calm and courteous in your approach.
- 5 Don't vilify your opponents. Present a thoughtful case in your favor and allow legislators to decide for themselves.
- 6 Tell the truth. Be sure that any information you present accurately portrays the issue at hand.
- 7 Leave something behind. A fact sheet or other educational piece allows the legislator and his/her staff to review relevant information after your meeting.
- 8 Use social media. Facebook, Twitter and other social media can help you garner support and share messaging with a vast audience.
- 9 Be patient. Legislative action is often a long process. Don't expect immediate results.
- 10 Provide a timely follow-up. A short letter or e-mail still goes a long way.

# Tips for a Successful Visit with Your Legislator

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As a member of a United Methodist Church you are the voice for children in your community and across the state. There are 1,040 United Methodist Churches in South Carolina and your voice, along with over 240,000 other members makes up The South Carolina United Methodist Annual Conference. As a person of faith and a voter you have the responsibility to talk with your elected officials regarding issues that affect your community. The South Carolina General Assembly will convene on Tuesday Jan. 13, 2015.

Here are a few tips on having a successful meeting with your legislators and/or other elected officials regarding public education:

## Getting Started

- Find out who your legislators are by going to <http://scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php>
- Contact their office to make an appointment:
  - Local officials – district, city, or county office
  - State officials – office at the State Capitol
  - National officials – district office or Congressional office in Washington, D.C.
- Be prepared to meet with an aide if the legislator is not available. Aides, especially senior staff, have a great deal of responsibility to research issues and brief the legislator. They are often able to influence the legislator's positions and priorities. Be sure to get the names of any staff members with whom you speak or meet.
- Be prepared! It is acceptable to refer to notes and bring supporting handouts, graphics and charts. Familiarize yourself with the talking points and goals of the Children in Poverty Task Force; you can print these directly from our website, [www.umcsc.org](http://www.umcsc.org). Print these position statements and plan to give a copy to your legislator at the end of your meeting.
- **You do not have to be an expert.** It is enough to be aware of the key points of an issue. It is more important to your legislator that you are using your voice to bring attention to the issues.

## At the Meeting

- Arrive a few minutes early, but be prepared to wait.
- Dress neatly in business attire.
- If you are taking a group to the meeting, identify a leader in advance and persons who will speak on each issue.
- The leader should state the purpose of the meeting, briefly describe Children in Poverty Task Force and share the South Carolina United Methodist's priorities. Others in the group can discuss the priorities.
- If you are aware of a connection the legislator has to the United Methodist Church be sure to mention it.
- **Stick to the agenda** and remember that you are representing the views of the Methodist Church. No personal business should be discussed during these meetings.
- **Avoid argument.** If the Legislator disagrees with you, stand up for yourself, debate the issue, but do not become over-argumentative. Keep trying to emphasize the positives of your standpoint.
- If you can, get a commitment of support for the Children in Poverty Task Force's priorities from the legislator. If the legislator is "on board" with Task Forces issues, solicit his/her suggestions as to actions Children in Poverty Task Force may take to advance our issues.
- Expect the meeting to last 15-20 minutes unless the legislator initiates a longer conversation. Allow the legislator to ask questions, offer their viewpoint, and voting record.
- If you cannot answer questions, commit to finding the answer and either follow-up yourself or notify the Children in Poverty Task Force so that someone can follow-up.
- Wrap up the meeting on a positive note and with sincere thanks for their time.

## After the Meeting

- Follow-up with a personal thank-you note when you return home.
- Let us know how the meeting went and if there is any follow-up required. Email [mbrodie@umcsc.org](mailto:mbrodie@umcsc.org)

Thank you for helping The Children in Poverty Task Force be the best that it can be! With your support and teamwork we can accomplish our goals for children in South Carolina.

# Theological Foundations

**Genesis 1:27:** God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

**Mark 9:36-37:** [Jesus] took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

**Mark 10:13-16:** People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

**Social Creed:** The United Methodist Social Creed is a statement of belief on relationships between God and God’s creation, including humanity.

- <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-social-creed>
- Book of Discipline: Creed is found on Page 141 in ¶166.

**Social Principles:** The Social Principles are an explanation of the United Methodist Social Creed. The Social Principles operate as a means to how to live together as the church and how to live individually through witness.

- <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/social-principles-social-creed>
- Book of Discipline: Part V, Social Principles (Pages 103-140, ¶¶160-165)

## **The Social Principles that include education are as follows:**

All of the information is from the following website: <http://umc-gbcs.org/social-principles>

- ¶161.II—The Nurturing Community--- “We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in individuals.”
  - ¶161.L—“Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received.”
- ¶162.III—The Social Community “We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection.”
  - ¶162 A. Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons- Called to equality in education
  - ¶162 C. Rights of Children- “we support the development of school systems and innovative methods of education designed to assist every child toward complete fulfillment as an individual person of worth. All children have the right to quality education”
- ¶163 IV—The Economic Community – We support policies that seek for quality education.
- ¶164 V—The Political Community -- Recognize that the government is a means and a vehicle in ordering society
  - ¶164 E. Education—“We believe that every person has the right to education.”
- ¶165.VI. The World Community—We are called to encourage all government representatives to seek justice properly and to find equality in all situations.

**Theological Reasoning:** We are all God’s children. God calls us into relationship and because of our relationship with God we are called to be in relationship with God’s creation. We are called to exemplify the Gospel of Christ in the world. We do this by advocating for those who are marginalized and neglected. Through baptism, children become our own and we promise to help raise and nurture the child in Christian love and teaching. Thus, we are called to love and equip every child as if the child were our own, so why wouldn’t we do this in our education system as well? Would you want your child to receive anything less than a quality education? We are called to teach every child they are of sacred worth and to help them know they are loved, but when we don’t seek quality education for all then we are failing our children and failing to say they are loved. Instead we are neglecting them if we are not fighting for their rights to education. We must seek to help all of the children in our state because as God’s children, they are our children, too. We are called to advocate for the children to help them receive a quality education. We are called to fight for the best education for our children so that they are able to grow up knowing that they are of value and can succeed through the opportunity for education. Give God’s children a chance and fight for their educational rights! Be the voice for all of God’s children and raise awareness for quality education!