

From The Baptismal Covenant:

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

**“I will, with God’s help.**

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

**“I will, with God’s help.”**

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” —*Matthew 25:37-40*

The Amos Guild engages St. David’s parishioners in social justice<sup>i</sup> advocacy for those members of Christ’s family in the Austin community whose voices go unheard. We seek to offer the opportunity to implement the spiritual gifts and energies of the clergy, the vestry, and all parishioners in answering our baptismal call.

St. David’s ministries advance God’s kingdom on many fronts and on many levels. Doing the work of the church involves both **direct action** (neighbor to neighbor) and **advocacy** to work toward policy changes assuring the quality and dignity of life of all our neighbors. The Amos Guild operates on the **advocacy** front, under the spiritual direction of a clergy person (The Rev. Katie Wright) assigned by the rector.

The 2005 “Envision St. David’s” research, an in-depth discernment of the opinions of parishioners about the future of the parish, identified social justice initiatives as a priority for most parishioners. The final Envision report identified three major objectives under the “Service to Others” category:

- To be called, nurtured, and empowered as a parish to care significantly about the poor and vulnerable
- Improve our awareness of the shared responsibility we have for one another and the connection between faith and social justice
- Improve our ability to connect the spiritual gifts of parishioners to the needs within and outside St. David’s

One of the corresponding seven “Actions” toward Service to Others was:

- Explore and educate on the connection between social justice and service to others

Since implementation of the Envision actions, St. David’s has significantly enhanced its involvement in neighbor-to-neighbor action, through greater staff support and increased participation by parishioners. St. David’s partnerships with Next-to-New, Trinity Center and Warm Heart International have continued. Parish groups such as the Environmental Guild and St. Agnes Guild provide vital services for current needs. Bridge Builders, in particular, provides numerous opportunities for connecting parishioners in **direct action** to serve others.

On the corresponding **advocacy** front, the Amos Guild focuses on social-justice issues that can be solved only by long-term community commitment. Amos Guild meetings are open to any parishioner who wishes to attend. We currently have 71 members, with an additional 64 parishioners opting to receive communications and to participate in occasional advocacy actions. Amos Guild members do not themselves decide what issues to support, but instead conduct periodic listening sessions (sharing the results with the vestry) in which parishioners tell what is of concern to them and to their families. The Amos Guild works with other member organizations of Austin Interfaith<sup>ii</sup>, a non-partisan coalition of congregations, public schools, and workers, to formulate an agenda that guides its community action. The final decision on what to include in the agenda is made by Austin Interfaith committees that include representatives from St. David’s.

The current Austin Interfaith agenda (from <http://www.austininterfaith.org>) includes:

- Good Jobs/Living Wage
- Creative Education for a Creative Economy
- Affordable Health Care
- Community Resources and Neighborhood Safety
- Immigration

- Affordable Housing

The corresponding Amos Guild Statement includes these additional items for efforts within St. David's:

- Supporting members of the St. David's community in finding, keeping and transitioning between jobs in today's work environment.
- Supporting, encouraging, and participating in programs that assist in managing the challenges of life, especially raising children, forming strong relationships with partners and caring for aging parents.

Beginning in 2008, the Amos Guild grew out of an older St. David's social justice committee. Its work with Austin Interfaith is an economical way of providing community advocacy that would be impossible for the parish to reproduce on its own, without significant additional expenditures on staff and support. Austin Interfaith dues of \$6,000 have been included in the St. David's Church budget for the first time in 2014. Dues paid by all member organizations provide a total of about \$80,000 toward the annual Austin Interfaith operating budget of about \$300,000. The remainder comes from grants from other organizations such as HEB, AT&T, Bank of America, and Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

In previous years, the Austin Interfaith membership was approved by the vestry but not funded in the church budget. Instead, collecting donations from parishioners in addition to their annual pledge paid the dues. Similar donations are being solicited this year with the aim of providing an additional \$2,000 from individual parishioners (over and above St. David's dues) to the Austin Interfaith budget.

Over its twenty-year history, Austin Interfaith has had significant impact in our community, including the creation of the Alliance School Initiative, Capital IDEA, a Program for English as a Second Language, the Prime Time After-school Program, and the Summer Youth Employment Program. Recent actions have included helping advance a city resolution in support of unaccompanied minors from Central America, helping secure AISD's commitment to paying federal prevailing wages to bond project construction workers, and helping advance a City Council resolution to prohibit discrimination based on Section 8 housing vouchers. Austin Interfaith provides ongoing leadership development training as well as civic academies teaching citizens about the workings of government; recent academies have concentrated on disseminating knowledge about the city's change to single-member City Council districts.

The Amos Guild and St. David's as a whole, as non-partisan organizations, explicitly follow all laws and IRS regulations controlling political activity by nonprofit institutions (discussed in detail in "The Intersection of Church and State" referenced below).

The Amos Guild seeks to listen to all St. David's parishioners. We are sensitive to the views of those who may feel uncomfortable about public advocacy. We share the sentiments expressed in the following excerpt from "Not only with our lips, but in our lives" (reference below):

- Because political engagement often arouses strong feelings and the possibility of conflict, we urge our churches to become sanctuaries for careful listening and for candid, respectful speech. We are called to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). The Church can be a sign to the world of unity in the midst of difference. Although Christians share a commitment to justice, we may disagree regarding the best way to implement it and may hold quite different political views. Nevertheless, we seek to explore the common values that we share and to create a space in which to understand our differences. We know that all of us are equally welcome at God's Table and equally beloved by God.
- We confess the temptation to dodge divisive topics among ourselves. Fears of being impolite, unpopular, or of "rocking the boat" may prevent us from naming essential truths. We also confess the temptation to avoid confronting systemic evils from which we benefit or which may seem too powerful to confront and overcome.

We would add to the above "speak the truth in love" that we also listen to one another in love. The Amos Guild mission is difficult in its requirement of a long-term commitment to advocacy work that produces results slowly and only in small increments of progress. The issues we work on are specified by grassroots input from the parish and allied organizations. The partnership with Austin Interfaith provides the support that allows St. David's to work on big and complex issues that would be impossible for the parish to handle alone.

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**Suggestions for additional reading:**

“The Intersection of Church and State” by The Rev. Leslie K. Sterling,  
<http://www.diocesewma.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/The-Intersection-of-Church-and-State-Leslie-Sterling.pdf>

“Politics in the Church” by Jon Paulien,  
<https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2011/08/politics-in-the-church>

“The Intersection of Faith, the Episcopal Church, and Politics” by Pat McCaughan,  
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2012/10/11/the-intersection-of-faith-the-episcopal-church-and-politics/>

“Scared to Talk Politics in Church?” by Brian D. McLaren,  
<http://sojo.net/magazine/2004/09/scared-talk-politics-church>

“Why We Should Do Politics like Episcopalians” by Greg Garrett,  
<http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Why-Politics-Episcopalians-Greg-Garrett-08-28-2012.html>

“Not only with our lips, but in our lives’: The church and Social Justice” by Social Justice Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, <http://www.diocesewma.org/parish-clergy-resources/social-justice-commission-of-the-diocese-of-western-ma-resources-links/>

*The Bible in the Public Square: Reading the Signs of the Times* by Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jonathan A. Draper (Jul 1, 2008), available at:  
[http://www.amazon.com/The-Bible-Public-Square-Reading/dp/080063859X/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1410541981&sr=8-2&keywords=the+bible+in+the+public+square](http://www.amazon.com/The-Bible-Public-Square-Reading/dp/080063859X/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1410541981&sr=8-2&keywords=the+bible+in+the+public+square)

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<sup>i</sup> *The New Oxford American Dictionary* defines social justice as “justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.”

<sup>ii</sup> **Austin Interfaith Member Institutions:**

Abiding Love Lutheran Church  
Brazos Interfaith Immigration Network  
Carpenters Local 1266  
Central Presbyterian Church  
Congregation Beth Israel  
Congregational Church of Austin  
Ebenezer Baptist Church  
Education Austin  
Equal Justice Center  
First Unitarian Universalist Church  
Foundation Communities  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
Iron Workers Local 482  
Journey Imperfect Faith Church  
LiUNA  
Mt. Olive Baptist Church  
Oak Creek Village Tenants Association  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church  
Painters & Allied Trades, Local 1779  
Painters & Allied Trades (Waco)  
Plumbing & Pipe Fitters, Local 286  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church  
San Francisco de Asis Episcopal Church

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San Jose Catholic Church  
Sheet Metal Workers Local 67  
Sierra Club of Austin  
St. Albert the Great Catholic Church  
St. David's Episcopal Church  
St. Ignatius Martyr Catholic Church  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
St. John's United Methodist Church  
St. John's Lutheran Church  
St. Julian of Norwich Episcopal Church  
St. Thomas More Catholic Church  
Taxi Drivers Association  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Texas Drought Project  
Travis Heights Elementary  
Trinity United Methodist Church  
University United Methodist Church  
Wildflower Unitarian Universalist Church  
Workers Defense Project

**Austin Interfaith Staff:**

Jacob Cortes, lead organizer  
Jeanette Hargreaves, organizer intern

Austin Interfaith is a member institution of the Industrial Areas Foundation (from <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org>):

Founded in 1940, the Industrial Areas Foundation is the nation's largest and longest-standing network of local faith and community-based organizations.

The IAF partners with religious congregations and civic organizations at the local level to build broad-based organizing projects, which create new capacity in a community for leadership development, citizen-led action and relationships across the lines that often divide our communities.

The IAF created the modern model of faith- and broad-based organizing and is widely recognized as having the strongest track record in the nation for citizen leadership development and for helping congregations and other civic organizations act on their missions to achieve lasting change in the world.

The IAF, which includes the West/Southwest IAF and Metro IAF, currently works with thousands of religious congregations, non-profits, civic organizations and unions, in more than sixty-five cities across the United States and in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and Germany.