**Courageous Advocacy – Summary of the full document**

**Written by Caroline Weir Global Neighbours Programme Coordinator Christian Aid**

I have always been challenged by the quote widely attributed to Dom Helder Camara, the former Archbishop of Recife in Brazil: *‘When I feed the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist.’* The prophetic voice - the asking ‘why’ people are hungry, even if that makes you unpopular - is an important part of a Christian response. Compassion is important, but more is needed. Jesus identified with the poor and the marginalised. The understanding of the causes of suffering and the righteous anger this engenders is the first stage of a Christian response. It is the beginning of empathy and understanding. It is the start of action and response. It is also a more enquiry-led educational activity than thinking of new ways to raise money. Page 4

The concern for social action has the potential to develop into a rather depressing aspect of education and there is some evidence that concern about social issues such as climate change can raise anxiety levels in young people. As such, it is important that courageous advocacy is framed in terms of hope and aspiration. Courageous advocacy is about creating the confidence that we can make a real change in the face of some of the seemingly insurmountable giants the world faces. P4

**Courageous Advocacy**

By way of a working definition, when using the term ‘courageous advocacy’ **we are referring to the act of speaking out against an issue of injustice, often on behalf of those whose voice is not heard.** Speaking out, at whatever level this takes place, requires an element (and sometimes a great deal) of courage! Becoming a courageous advocate for change, therefore, must involve being informed about an issue and it must move beyond simply knowing, to saying and doing. **Educating for courageous advocacy must embody an ethos of action-taking, challenging injustice and becoming agents of change in the transformation of ourselves, our relationships and our communities from the local level to the global.** P6

**A theological basis for courageous advocacy**

The Christian gospel is, at its heart, a message of hope for all people and all situations. Living in the light of resurrection hope, we seek to ‘step back’ to try to catch a glimpse of God’s view of reality, a hopeful vision of the future from a God who can do ‘immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine’ (Ephesians 3:20). God invites us to join in with this vision as we work towards the building of his kingdom here on earth. God’s heart for justice and vision of human flourishing are plain to see in the justice thread that runs throughout the biblical narrative. From early in the Hebrew scriptures, God’s vision for his people is evident. Embedded in the instructions God gave to his people in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is God’s heart that all, including the disadvantaged, should have the opportunity to flourish. God’s care for the weak and the vulnerable is clear in his instructions that the orphan, the widow, the fatherless and the foreigner should not be mistreated or taken advantage of but should, in fact, be cared for. The call of God’s prophets echoes this vision as God’s people are called to repentance and a recalibration of their treatment of the poor and vulnerable. God longs for a world where ‘justice rolls like a river’ (Amos 5:24) and that is what we too are called towards. This justice thread continues to weave its tapestry through the New Testament as Jesus ushers in God’s kingdom. Jesus welcomed the outsider and spoke up for those who were marginalised and ignored. Again and again, we read of life-changing encounters for individuals on the fringes of society when they met with Jesus: those with disabilities, leprosy sufferers, the Samaritan woman whose behaviour meant she visited the well to draw water when others were not around, dishonest tax collectors seen as traitors to the Romans. These marginalised neighbours were the very people Jesus invited to dinner. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25 onward) is powerful, well known and regularly used in schools and in wider society. It is often used to explore values such as ‘kindness’ and ‘compassion’ in school: the focus is normally on responding to need when you come across it, but it is worth revisiting why Jesus told this parable. He was asked by ‘an expert in law’ the question, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ His use of a Samaritan (neither racially or religiously pure in the eyes of the original audience) as the main protagonist - in a parable to teach about what love of neighbour truly looks like - speaks volumes about Jesus’ desire to speak up for the ‘voiceless’. Jesus’ heart for courageous advocacy is unmistakable. He risks public ridicule to speak up for the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), highlighting the injustice about to be brought upon her by people who needed to do some self-examination before passing judgement on others. By empowering young people and adults within our schools to claim their voice and take their place as active global citizens, we join in with kingdom building and God’s redemptive work in the world, which can be transformative for all involved as we ‘tap into’ God’s reality and his vision for the future of his world where justice and mercy will reign. P7

A call to courageous advocacy is therefore vital to the outworking of a Christian vision of human flourishing and the offer of life in all its fullness for all. This call can be seen in the four basic elements that run through the Church of England’s vision for education and form an ‘ecology’ of the fullness of life, rooted firmly in the belief that each person is created in the image of God and that this is where an individual’s ultimate worth lies. P8

**Called Connected, Committed**

Being courageous advocates for change begins with called, connected and committed school leaders who make decisions based on a clear moral purpose about what education is for: **called** leadership marked by integrity and honesty; **connected** leadership centred around interdependence, compassion and humble servant leadership; and finally, leadership that is c**ommitted** to the flourishing of all members of the school community. It is the living of your Christian vision into being every day that will inspire the whole school community to dare to embrace the possibility of a more hopeful vision of the world than they can currently imagine. This, in turn, leads to courageous action to make this hopeful vision a reality. P10

**Courageous advocacy: Challenging injustice**

*‘There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.’* Desmond Tutu

Schools have always taught pupils about the work of charities and have sought to support charitable causes through fundraising. Courageous advocacy and social action seek to move beyond ‘simple solutions’ (fundraising – on its own – is unlikely to solve underlying injustices that keep people poor) to ask ‘why?’ and ‘what can be done about it?’. We must consider the structural causes of poverty and look at the complexities that cause injustice in order that we might tackle root causes rather than simply soothing symptoms alone. Teaching and learning needs to get underneath the problem of injustice to be tackled, recognising that pupils may raise questions that are not always easy to answer but it is that very critical thinking, reasoning and questioning that need to take place. It is natural that when pupils learn about issues of injustice, they want to act to change things and it is important to support them in working this out in practice. As educators we must consider how to channel this righteous ‘table turning’ anger in constructive ways that harness the energy of youth but never patronise or put limits on their passion. P11

**Types of Courageous Advocacy** p12

1. Awareness raising 2. Community influencing 3. Lifestyle changes 4. Consumer power 5. Engaging with decisionmakers

**Postscript: Courageous advocacy, Coronavirus and racial injustice**

The academic year 2020/21 was one that shook our comfortable Western lives. At a school level it meant that speakers from charities and other agencies were not able to visit schools. Many of those staple fundraising activities, from cake sales to food collections for Harvest festivals, had to cease. Schools, as always, responded by being innovative and imaginative in their practices. But at another level it highlighted the vital importance of courageous advocacy being central to the vision and values of the Church school.

Coronavirus came as a huge shock to us all and overnight it challenged our attitudes and behaviours. In many ways we had come to believe that we were in control of our lives and that we had an instant cure for every problem that life presents. Coronavirus was a reminder that we cannot eliminate every misfortune and that when misfortune does strike it is rarely the fault of those it befalls. We learned first-hand that those with the least power, the least money, the voiceless, are those that tend to suffer most. This is a truth already well known to those in much of the Majority World.

The death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement it re-ignited brought into sharp focus that injustice is complex, that it is structural and that we all must start by listening to and learning from the voices of the black community to examine our understanding and our attitudes. We must not forget that this is a global issue, and that historical injustices underpin the inequality that we see today - in our country and across the world. The climate crisis, for example, is not just an environmental challenge, but an issue of justice: those who are most affected by the impacts of climate change are the ones who have done the least to contribute to the problem .

Nowhere is a revaluation of our colonial past more prescient than in our consideration of what it means to be a global neighbour. These events that have shaken our world are surely an opportunity to reset and rethink. To quote Ruth Valerio writing for development agency Tearfund: *‘One day, we will make it out of this crisis. But what sort of world do we want there to be on the other side? Can we repent of the world we have created, and instead look to build one without such a huge gap between rich and poor – a world where we live in harmony with creation, in which we understand that the well-being of one is bound up with the well-being of all? In Christ, there is always hope. We can let that hope motivate how we live our lives today as we hold on to God our rock. And, with the love of Christ in our hearts, let us continue to reach out with compassion and determination.’* P17

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| * How do you enable pupils to go beyond a sense of compassion to a concern for justice? * How do you structure opportunities for pupils to talk about, discuss and challenge injustice and inequality? * Do you give pupils regular opportunities to engage in social action projects that they themselves have identified or do you direct or select those opportunities for them? * How comfortable are you with the idea of pupils ‘speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves’ and the action being driven by pupils rather than adults? How willing are you to ‘relinquish control’ and allow this to happen? |