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Linking communities of faith across Wisconsin to work for justice.

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Frequently Asked Questions about WISDOM

1. What is WISDOM? What do we do?

WISDOM is a network of grassroots, faith-based organizations. WISDOM and its local organizations have three primary goals:

- To build a powerful, values-based community that bridges the divides of race, class, religious denomination, geography and partisan political affiliation;
- To develop the leadership capacities of its members, and especially to encourage the leadership capacity of members who belong to groups that have been marginalized by the larger society;
- To build the capacity to be able to bring about real, effective systemic change that aligns with our shared values on the local, state and even national levels.

2. What are WISDOM's shared values?

WISDOM's values are best summed up in our Prophetic Declaration, which grew out of reflection and discussion with members around the state. Some of the values lifted up are:

- The God-given **dignity and infinite worth of each** and every human life That we are each and all part of a sacred community;
- That our faith calls us to work for **justice and liberation**, and against oppression and inequity;
- That we are called to be **stewards of the natural world** in all its bounty and diversity;
- That there needs to be **shared abundance** for all, not poverty amidst affluence

WISDOM and its leaders are continually engaged in discussions to better clarify the values that unite us, learning respectfully from every tradition that is represented.

3. How are decisions made in WISDOM?

WISDOM is intentional about the principle of subsidiarity. We believe that ordinary people can and should have a voice in the political, social, economic, and environmental decisions that most affect their lives. WISDOM believes this to be true of its own organizations'

internal workings. Decision-making is as decentralized and as participatory as possible. WISDOM, on every level, works to build consensus among its members. A goal is to give as much authority as possible to those who are most affected.

Local WISDOM organizations each have their own Board of Directors, their own budget and their own issue agenda. WISDOM leaders come together periodically through the year to share best practices and to arrive at decisions on shared issue agendas, e.g. Criminal Justice Reform, Immigration, Transit or other matters of shared interest.

4. Who can participate in WISDOM?

WISDOM is a network of local organizations. Normally, a congregation or individual first joins with one of the local groups and, through that, participates in WISDOM.

WISDOM groups are interfaith. In all, member congregations represent 19 different religious traditions. Most WISDOM organizations also have provisions for individuals to become members if their congregation is not yet a member. Though most WISDOM members are people of faith, and faith values lie at the heart of our mission, all people of good will are welcome to belong.

5. What is WISDOM's relationship to the Gamaliel Foundation?

Gamaliel is an international network of organizations like WISDOM. Gamaliel has members in 17 states, as well as in South Africa and Great Britain. WISDOM's staff and leadership have a voice in the governance of Gamaliel, which provides national-level leadership training programs and which facilitates organizing among states on some issues that have a national level.

6. Is WISDOM political?

Yes. To be political is to engage in the process of making decisions that will affect the life of the whole community. WISDOM believes that faith communities have a right and a responsibility to express their values in the public arena, to fight for resources to be allocated equitably, for rules to promote fairness, and for policies that ensure opportunity for all people. Those are all political issues.

7. Does WISDOM participate in partisan politics or support political parties or political candidates?

No. WISDOM does not engage in partisanship politics. WISDOM members are diverse in their political party affiliation, or lack thereof. WISDOM organizations engage in civil conversations with legislators and community leaders from all political persuasions, and do not hesitate to hold any of them accountable for their stewardship of the public's trust. As a 501(c)(3) organization, issue discussion and advocacy is legitimate and protected by law, but support or opposition to any political candidate or party is strictly forbidden.

8. How does faith-based community organizing fit with our social concerns ministry?

Traditionally, churches and volunteers have done much good work, often making heroic

efforts to alleviate suffering. They have cooked meals for the hungry, offered beds to the homeless, staffed food pantries, tutored and mentored young people, and have generously directed dollars to disaster relief. Congregation-based community organizing seeks to go beyond charity work to bring about real and enduring change to our communities. WISDOM believes that we need to engage systems, that is, to work to eliminate root causes of poverty and inequity, not just try to treat their symptoms.

9. What about money? How is WISDOM funded and where does the money go?

The majority of WISDOM's income comes through grassroots efforts by the local organizations. There are four sources of income:

- Member congregations pay dues to their local organization. Dues range from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars per year, depending on the size and the capacity of the congregation. The goal is that no congregation is excluded because of its finances, but also that every member makes a meaningful contribution and is a full owner of the organization.
- Each local organization has one or two fundraising events each year, e.g. a dinner, or a breakfast, and these are usually accompanied by a Yearbook that includes ads.
- Local organizations also have individual sustaining members or donors. Some of these give through a monthly automatic funds transfer; others periodically write a check. Some of the individual donors are members of member congregations; others are people who wish to be individual members of the organization.
- Grants. Local organizations receive some support from foundations. WISDOM also receives some foundation support, and occasionally is able to raise enough that it can share some of it with the local groups. In general: Congregations and individuals support the local organizations. The local organizations support WISDOM's central operations. WISDOM pays an annual membership fee to Gamaliel. Most of the money that is raised goes to pay for community organizers and for leadership training. On the local level, organizers help to recruit and train new leaders, to identify issues and help organize effective campaigns, and to build strong organizations. On the state level, WISDOM staff work to coordinate training and issue work, and to build new member organizations. Nationally, Gamaliel conducts training for organizers and for volunteer leaders.

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