

Why Participate in Together Baton Rouge (TBR)?

1. Our Christian responsibility is to follow the teachings of Jesus who said that God's will was for us to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus' ministry shows that he was concerned not only with spiritual health but also physical health as evidenced by the many healings he preformed. For Jesus, loving your neighbor was not passive but active. Jesus did not simply wish for his neighbors to be well, he actively worked to help make their lives better and criticized others who refused to use their political power to help improve the lives of the less fortunate in their communities.
2. Communities have always sought to improve through the passage of laws, rules and regulations. These constitute our public policy. Unfortunately, the disadvantaged in the community often don't have the political influence to change those policies that hold them at a disadvantage. Historically we have seen this in the disparities in housing, education, voting rights and many other areas. Loving our neighbors means that we cannot ignore public policies that work to disadvantage or oppress our neighbors. We know that there is little if any evidence that merely praying that things will improve will produce any tangible results.
3. Public policy is often shaped by forces that benefit economically from these policies and who have the financial and political resources to secure their privileged status. A single individual or even an entire congregation has little chance of changing this situation. Only by joining forces with other faith based organizations will we have enough influence to bring about positive change. The methods of TBR do not include endorsing individual candidates or parties, or by making campaign contributions. TBR does try to inform elected officials and candidates about what is important to their members, help formulate solutions to problems in our community, and hold elected officials accountable to their constituents. Letting elected officials know that their job depends on listening to their constituents is effective. Lobbying for improving the lives of our neighbors is consistent with the teaching of Jesus. If some good people had not been willing to lobby for what they thought was right, women wouldn't have the right to vote, equal pay for equal work would be even less a reality, we would still live in the worst of the pre-civil rights era, African-Americans would not have the right to vote easily if at all, and many more Americans would

be doomed to live in poverty without a chance for a decent education or the privileges that we who are more affluent enjoy. It is our duty as Christians to be faithful to what Jesus called us to do.

4. TBR is, at the present time, the largest and most effective faith based organization working in our community. There simply is no viable alternative. They have the organizational skills and leadership which are necessary to efficiently address the issues which member organizations decide are important. Working through TBR provides resources to identify problems, organize community wide groups interested in working on these issues, access relevant information, and bring the issues to the attention of people throughout our community. This saves our members an enormous amount of time and effort, allows us to get a much wider perspective on issues and get to know others in our community who share our desire to make things better for all our citizens.
5. Our church has for many decades been courageous in following the teachings of Jesus. We were among the very first to permit women deacons, to be accepting of people different from us, to reject the bigotry and racism we see around us even today. Those decisions were made by careful and sometimes contentious discernment by our church about being true to our Christian calling. Back then, we chose to be faithful regardless of what other people might have thought of us.
6. If UBC does not participate in TBR, it will send a clear and unmistakable message to our community that we, as a church, are not only unwilling to participate in working to address the problems in our community, but are also unwilling to support others in their efforts to do so. Our church will be perceived as just another rich white church that professes the importance of loving your neighbor but refuses to actually do it publicly. When someone asks if our church is partnering with others in our community who are working for social justice, how will we answer, and will we be proud, or embarrassed, with that answer? The image of our church in the community affects our Christian witness. Will we be seen as a church that continues our tradition of doing what Jesus called us to do, even when it is not popular or fashionable to some people, or will UBC be seen as another church that M L King wrote about in his *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*?
7. UBC has ministered to our community in many ways, notably through Highland Elementary School, and gifts to the homeless and the Food Bank. Many of our individual members are engaged in ministry and

service which are not supported formally through the church budget. While these activities are admirable, they do not address the systemic problems for many in our community such as lack of access to health care facilities and healthy food, equal justice for everyone, and tax reform. It is admirable to volunteer to help paint and clean the neighborhood elementary school. Is it not more important to try and solve the problem of why the school system does not have the resources to keep the school in good repair, and pay its teachers a decent wage?

8. We believe that to engage in the sometimes difficult task of loving others as ourselves means working to improve the lives of the disadvantaged in our community and thus is consistent with the teachings of Jesus to obey the Greatest Commandment. For those of us who have been involved in TBR, one of the most enriching aspects is working with others from different religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, most of whom we would likely have never gotten to know otherwise, and doing so for the common good of our community. Please come join us.