

Voices: Justice looks like fighting for children's best interests

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.

You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudgment. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.

[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

I am a public school teacher, an adoptive mom and a sister of a woman with Down syndrome. I am a Bible-believing woman with a desire to fight for every person to know Jesus' love and to love him in return.

Special education

Growing up, I watched my parents advocate for my sister's education. Quite literally, they fought for her right to be taught how to read.

The public school system thought Angela needed to be taught social skills, but they didn't believe she could learn to read. My parents believed

differently, and Mom would sit in ARD meeting after ARD meeting, advocating for her child's right to be taught *how to read*. ([ARD](#) stands for Admission Review and Dismissal, which determines a child's placement in or release from special education.)

As a public school teacher today, with a passion for enabling children to learn and grow in the least restrictive environment, this blows my mind. Did those teachers forget Angela needed to read a menu, a street sign as she walked home from the park, a label or price tag on a shirt?

I am not naïve. I know she's not going to read Tolstoy. But reading is a part of living life. Justice for Angela included learning how to read. Angela needed an advocate to fight for her.

Adoption

In high school, I had my first personal look at adoption when my music minister's sister adopted a little girl. I knew I would be a part of that world, someday. At age 32, someday arrived, and I became a licensed foster single parent.

After the privilege of fostering five little girls over seven years, I adopted 12-year-old Mia. She is now 13 and a joy of my heart. I would love for her to stay innocent, but I can't allow her to stay innocent and still be prepared for this world.

When Mia first came into my home more than two years ago, people asked me if she "was an illegal," because of her Hispanic heritage.

She has gorgeous, thick, dark brown hair that will do anything she wants. Her huge smile with white flashing teeth makes me smile, because it's bubbling with joy. And, I'm not worried about her like I would be if she was Black. But, I do know she will encounter racism, and we talk about it

regularly. Each time a Black man or woman has been killed, we talk about it again.

It is my job to educate her, to encourage her to stand up for others, to be prepared when someone acts in a threatening way toward her because of her gender or ethnicity or both. I said “when,” not “if.” But I don’t feel like it’s enough.

How do I, as a white woman with white privilege and wealth privilege—and that’s coming from a single mom who is a teacher—talk with my Hispanic daughter about racism, knowing she will experience it, but not as badly as a Black friend, and that she needs to be able to stand up for herself *and* others? I don’t have the answers. All I know is we have to have the conversations.

Justice for Mia includes a loving, safe home and a forever family. Justice for Mia, and all children of minority ethnicities, includes having hard conversations. Our children need an advocate willing to do difficult things.

Public education

I have taught in public schools for 18 years. There have been times when parents and I worked as a team, because they did not know what to do to help their children grasp a difficult academic concept or learn social skills or have strong character qualities.

There are times when I sat in ARDs and handed tissue to parents processing information they knew was coming but was still hard to hear. There are times a test doesn’t show what I know a child can do.

Justice for our children means someone is willing to fight for their best. Our children need an advocate to fight for them.

In Proverbs 31, King Lemuel’s mother taught him well: “Open your mouth,

judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”

We cannot remain silent. We cannot stand by inactively. We must speak up, and we must stand up when someone—anyone—needs us to advocate for them. That is what justice looks like to me.

Alyssa Ross is a public school teacher and advocate for children from hard places. She has been a member of Citizens Church, previously The Village Church Plano campus, for almost eight years. The views expressed are those solely of the author.

[Click here](#) to read the full “Justice looks like...” series.