

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Particularly in smaller congregations, Christian education programs sometimes feature intergenerational models for mutual discovery and exploration. Be prepared to receive families with children and grandchildren of all ages. A seeker could be a recent high school or college graduate. A new participant could be a retiree. Activities within this Faith Practice are designed for the entire group, smaller groups, and individuals, providing a variety of ways to express thoughts and feelings. Although they may be inexperienced in matters of doctrine and faith, seekers and new church participants of every age and diverse backgrounds will bring considerable energy, enthusiasm, fresh ideas, and insights to the group. All they are waiting for is your affirmation and encouragement.

The online article “New Member Assimilation,” <http://www.ucc.org/ministers/leaders-box/c19.pdf>, will give you ideas on how to welcome and embrace new church participants and seekers and the perceptions and perspectives they bring.

### About this Exploration

Working for justice is vital in the personal and communal lives of God’s faithful people. God desires and requires the faithful to work for justice. Through working for justice, we creatively level the playing field, break down walls, and nurture environments so that all may experience a whole and holy life. This life is free of oppression, degradation, and exclusion. We encounter stories, interpret scriptures, and participate in activities through which we discover how to engage actively in justice work in the home, church, community, and world.



**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Isaiah 1:1, 10–18**  
**Luke 4:14–21**

## Leader Preparation

One of the longest-operating orbiters in the United States Space Shuttle fleet was *Discovery*. This spacecraft was in service from 1984 to 2011, and it performed a wide range of tasks, such as docking at the International Space Station and the launching of the Hubble Space Telescope. New church participants or seekers bring a pioneering energy and spirit into the group. Although they may be new to a particular faith community, through their previous explorations in mission and service they may be as experienced as *Discovery* was in space travel. Through the diversity of their life experiences and expressions of faith, your group will have one pronounced common interest—a more just and caring world. There is much to be gained by hearing, acknowledging, understanding, and blending their beliefs, ideals, and passions.

Do you remember your first day of school and how it felt to get onto a big yellow bus or to let go of a parent's hand to take the hand of a teacher? The same feelings of fear and uneasiness occur whether it is our first day on the job or an introductory Faith Practice. Put yourself in the shoes of the seeker or new member. Take note of his facial expressions and whether or not he is making eye contact. Is she interacting and contributing or keeping to herself? Perhaps the seeker's perspectives on faith, worship, and ministry are distinctly different from others in the group. Be proactive. Before get-

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 "Smileys" (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** How are you feeling today? Was the tone set by something you read in the paper or heard on the news? Does making a difference by working for justice seem like a real possibility or a nearly impossible task? If someone drew you a "smiley" face—encouraging you to "have a nice day"—would this turn around your day, or make you feel all the more frustrated and discouraged? Since this activity is about sharing feelings, identify your own through prayer and discernment. Prepare to share how it feels to lead this group and what you hope can be accomplished in the weeks ahead.

Many people are familiar with emoticons—those pictures (or icons) that express emotion, such as a smiley face, or a face with a frown. People often insert emoticons in their email and text messages to indicate the mood of a statement, and that can often clarify the message. Try using emoticons to express feelings.

#### **Supplies:**

- paper and pens or pencils
- (option) newspapers or news magazines

The origins of the "smiley" face can be traced back to the 1970s, often referred to as the "me decade." After the social unrest and resulting changes characteristic of the 1960s, people were ready for an extended period of rest, reflection, and increased self-awareness. In unfamiliar settings and situations, seekers and new members may "put on a happy face," though in reality it may be more of a nervous smile. An open forum on the most pressing and urgent social justice issues of the day often adds to this discomfort.

Have each person pair with a partner. Invite the partners to talk with one another about these questions, and have them draw an emoticon to express their feelings.

- What kind of week have you had? What emoticon would you use for that feeling?
- How does it feel to be a part of this new fellowship group?
- Are you a little unsure about being here today?
- What is your comfort level with Bible study?

Discuss the ways this group can become a "safe" place for release and recovery, as Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue (Luke 4:18).

- In our call to serve God, how vital are periods of reflection and self-awareness?
- Think about times when Jesus and the disciples might have set aside time to talk together about their feelings. (There is some evidence of this in the gospels; note Luke 22:39 and the Garden of Gethsemane as a place where Jesus often went to rest and pray.) What do you imagine those conversations were like?
- Before engaging in acts of justice, how important is it to be aware of one's own feelings? How can we balance prayer and discernment with actions representative of our faith?

ting started, take time to speak with everyone. To create an atmosphere of hospitality and warmth, invite more experienced and established church members to join you for refreshments and fellowship.

*Prayer: God of Endless Possibilities, embarking on this mission to which you have called me I feel excitement and anticipation along with some fear and uncertainty. In many ways it is as if I am the seeker and new church participant and it is my first day of school. When difficult questions are asked, will I be able to provide the answers? When disagreements arise, will I be able to mediate a solution? When a participant needs affirmation and support, will I find the right words to say? When leadership skills arise within the group, will I have the humility to step back and let others show us the way? When someone wants to know of my experiences in working for justice, will I be ready and willing to tell the story of my faith journey? As I reach out to you, I am confident that your hand will take mine and that your Spirit will guide me to the right thoughts, words and deeds. Amen.*

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.

- Before engaging in short-term or extended mission activities, how can we make time to get to know other members of the group? In what ways might team building be helpful if any disagreements or conflict situations arise?

Invite the group to identify injustices currently reported in the news. Identify the feelings and needs related to this injustice. If newspapers or news magazines are available, draw corresponding “smileys” (emoticons) on the articles. Form a closing circle and offer prayers of hope and encouragement in response to these feelings and needs. In closing, lift up each participant by name and ask God for a spirit of openness and trust so that thoughts and feelings may be freely shared in the weeks to come.

### 2 Bumper Stickers

**Leader preparation:** Do you put bumper stickers on your vehicle? Recall some of the messages you have publicly displayed throughout the years. Are these reflective of the ways you have grown in your understanding of faith and mission? What issues are you currently feeling the most passionate about? In a sentence or less, what would you like to say about the injustices in this world? Write your own bumper sticker and reflect on the ways you can live up to the statement you have made. Be prepared to share these thoughts and feelings as you facilitate this group

#### Supplies:

- construction paper
- markers
- scissors
- tape
- Bibles
- (optional) website: “Make Stickers,” <http://www.makestickers.com/>

For many of us, our first bumper sticker was a defining moment. Perhaps it was our initial public expression of a political choice, faith preference, or personal interest, or maybe it was just to make someone laugh or get angry. Ask participants to describe a first bumper sticker. With blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and a proliferation of news channels, is this form of communication becoming obsolete?

Invite the participants to design their own bumper stickers with an emphasis on “doing” their faith while raising awareness of an injustice. After time for making bumper stickers, display the group’s creations. Then join hands and form a circle. Speak your messages together, framing them as an address to God (“Caring God,” “Loving God,” “Almighty God,” “Holy God,” “Gracious God”) for world peace, economic justice, equal rights, or universal health care. Ask God to hear your prayer. Silently reflect on these and the specific ways each can act on the messages.

Use these questions for further discussion:

- Do you feel that bumper stickers have a place in a church parking lot? (This link would be a good conversation starter: <http://www.ucc.org/ucnews/aprmay08/independent-film-explores-amer.html>.)
- Read Isaiah 1:10–18. Why did this person of royal descent become so disillusioned with society? If he and his spouse, who was a prophetess, could have made up their own bumper stickers, what might they have said?



- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

- Does your denomination promote and market bumper stickers? (Refer to this link to learn more about a United Church of Christ bumper sticker that was popular in the 1980s: <http://www.ucc.org/change-the-world/>.)

For interested participants, provide these links to websites that promote and advertise denominational bumper stickers:

- <http://reallutherans.net/>
- <http://www.cafepress.com/+united-methodist-church+bumper-stickers>
- <http://www.cafepress.com/+presbyterian+bumper-stickers>



### 3 Telling Our Stories

**Leader preparation:** What have your mission experiences been like? Did you accomplish what you set out to do? Through your efforts were you able to act on an injustice in positive and lasting ways? In doing so, were you able to gain a better understanding of your faith and calling? Take time to write your story and be prepared to share it with the group.

#### Supplies:

- paper
- reporter's notepads
- pencils and pens
- copies of your church's mission statement
- Bibles
- artwork: "Tar Beach II" by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>

Have participants pair up and take turns assuming the role of reporters while a partner tells his or her story. To identify the ways in which a partner worked for justice, the interviewer can ask "who" he or she served, "what" he or she did, "when" he or she did it, "where" he or she did it, "why" he or she did it, and "how" he or she did it. The mission activity may have been community service through school or work, or it may have been an activity sponsored by a scout group or a service organization. Not all mission activities are related to church. Then have the "reporters" tell the stories they heard to the larger group. If your folks have not been on a mission trip or participated in a mission activity, invite them to share about traveling in another culture.

Often new church participants and seekers do not know the stories of the local and wider church. A good way to hear some of these stories and build relationships is by asking the partners to compile a list of four to six questions to use in an interview of a long-time church member. This would be an excellent opportunity to visit with someone who can no longer attend church. What mission trips or activities has that person been involved with? When and where did the trips or activities occur? Who accompanied the person? How did the efforts make the world a more compassionate and caring place?

Share these at the beginning of the next session or at the meeting of a mission, outreach, stewardship, or education-related meeting.

Use these activities for further discussion:

- Role-play Luke 16:19–31. Assigned parts may include Lazarus, the rich person, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, depending on how much detail the group would like to provide. How would you replay this story in a contemporary setting?



- Read the mission statement of your church or organization. In what ways do the experiences the group just shared fit under this umbrella? As a faith community, do our corporate actions and responses bring “good news” and provide “release to the captives” (Luke 4:18)?
- Display “Tar Beach II.” If you could speak with the people in this picture, what stories might they tell about how their faith-based actions have had a positive effect on their environment?

Form a closing circle and begin with a few moments of silence. Relive a past mission experience. *How does it feel to be there again? How would you apply what you discovered today about working for justice?* Close by passing the peace and offering a few encouraging words for one another for the missions we are called to in the week ahead.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Coloring Outside the Lines (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** When was the last time you picked up crayons and a coloring book and had at it? Is there anything more enjoyable than finding a comfortable place on the floor and coloring anywhere but inside the lines with your children and grandchildren? In working for justice, boundaries sometimes need to be crossed to get the message across. Did you ever think and act “outside the lines”? What consequences did your actions have? Was it worth the cost, and would you do the same thing all over again? It will be helpful to think and pray about these questions in preparing to lead this activity.

#### **Supplies:**

- coloring books
- crayons, newsprint
- Bibles
- (optional) artwork: “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker,  
[https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)

Ask participants if they remember their first day of school. Did they bring with them an “I’m going to do what the teacher tells me and not make waves” kind of attitude? If they were given a picture to color and told to “stay within the lines,” is that exactly what they did? Or, were they ready and willing to “buck the system” and “do their own thing”? Invite the participants to describe other times in their lives when staying within the lines was expected, such as at work or in a club or other setting.

Hand out crayons and pictures to color. “Order” participants to “stay inside the lines.” When everyone is finished, invite them to share their pictures with praise for doing their job correctly. If you have to deal with “troublemakers,” you are on your own!

Invite discussion with these or similar questions:

- When we stay within the lines of cultural, societal, and religious expectations, are we less or more likely to be able to identify and respond to the injustices in the world today?



- If Jesus had come back to his home church (Luke 4:16) and “stayed within the lines,” how might he have been received by the hometown crowd (Luke 4:24)?
- In what situations in our country or in the world have people “colored outside the lines” and raised some eyebrows while calling attention to a “captive who needed to be released” (Luke 4:18)?
- If you could invite any biblical character or famous social activist to color outside the lines on the group’s newsprint today, who would it be? Why do you feel this way?

*Option:* Display “Embrace of Peace.” Read and reflect on 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, making an image of people working together to bring comfort, peace, and assurance to someone in need.

### 5 Icebreakers

**Leader preparation:** Depending on the activity and participants’ attitudes, “icebreakers” can either promote cohesiveness and a team spirit or be exercises in total frustration. Reflect on some of your experiences with icebreakers, both positive and negative. Can you effectively lead this group if you are in a bad mood or angry about something? If not, what should you do with these feelings?

#### Supplies:

- a block of ice or a bag of ice cubes frozen together
- beverages
- ice cubes
- a rubber mallet or some other “safe” tool to break the ice
- Bibles

Begin by serving everyone a drink with ice cubes and asking them to share both positive and negative group-building experiences they have had, perhaps at work or school. If an experience has been unpleasant or unproductive, give them the opportunity to do an “ice breaker” of their own by taking a couple of whacks at the block of ice with the mallet to “let off some steam!”

Take turns reading one of the three gospel versions of when Jesus became angry in the temple: Matthew 21:12–13, Mark 11:15–18, or John 2:13–22. Discuss the following questions as a group.

- Why was Jesus angry?
- Who or what was he angry with?
- How did Jesus cool down? (Talking about it with his disciples, family, and friends; going out on the lake in a boat; praying)

Share some personal examples of injustices at church, work, and school and in the local community, and even at play (sporting events). *Is it best to act immediately when we are feeling most passionate, or is it better to pray, talk it out with others, take a walk, take a few deep breaths, and count to ten?*

Ask everyone to look at her or his drinking cup to see if any ice cubes remain. Remind participants that just as it took time for the ice cubes to melt, it takes patience, persistence, and the peace of Christ’s inner presence to break down the walls of injustice.



To close, allow for a few minutes of silent reflection, directing the group to identify a situation of injustice that makes them angry. Evoke an image of Jesus talking to his disciples after he had become angry in the temple. Talk to Jesus, turning the sources—whoever and whatever they are—of this conflict over to God. Pray together, inviting everyone to take a few deep breaths, count to ten, and feel God lifting this burden from their shoulders.

Use the following activities for further discussion:

- Read Luke 22:24–27. Was injustice the source of the disciples' anger as well as a desire to live out the gospel message of Jesus and make their world a better place? Or was it an outgrowth of their personal pride?
- Who are some of the angriest people in the Bible? Compile a list and identify the source of their anger. The same question could be asked about people on television, particularly on cable news programs. Would Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., have agreed to be interviewed on any of these programs?

## 6 Feeding One Another

**Leader preparation:** It's about halfway through Sunday worship service. Hours have passed since breakfast, and you begin to feel some rumblings in your belly. This is a faith practice for people who are hungry, not only for something to eat but also for emotional and spiritual food represented by hospitable attitudes and not-so-random acts of kindness. For breakfast on the day of this activity, try eating your cereal with a long-handled spoon and your eggs with a long-handled fork. You will find it impossible without "a little help from your friends." It is the same with acts of justice. They are much better accomplished with a positive outlook, cooperative spirits, teamwork, and other-centered attitudes.

### Supplies:

- plastic dinnerware
- duct tape
- food that can be served easily with a fork or spoon
- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Sharing refreshments is one of the most traditional and reliable ways to promote conversation and interaction within a group of people who are new to one another. And hospitality is foundational to the Christian faith. This website has a number of good quotations on Christian hospitality: <http://dailychristianquote.com/dcqfellowship.html>.

Begin by sharing one or more of these quotations and by reading any or all of these biblical passages: Proverbs 3:9–10, 22:9, Romans 12:13, and 1 Peter 1:9. *How are we as Christians called to display hospitality? Which of these passages or quotations best represent hospitable attitudes?*

Use the dinnerware and duct tape to make long forks and spoons. Make them long enough so that people are unable to feed themselves. Explain that the utensils must always be held on the end. Challenge the group to figure out a way to "enjoy their refreshments"! If you're really ambitious, you could try the same with drinks and similarly constructed long straws. Then tell the following story.

A man spoke with the Lord about heaven and hell. The Lord said to the man, "Come, I will show you hell." They entered a room where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. Everyone was famished, desper-



ate, and starving. Each held a spoon that reached the pot, but each spoon had a handle so much longer than his or her own arm that it could not be used to get the stew into the mouth. The suffering was terrible.

“Come, now I will show you heaven,” the Lord said after a while. They entered another room, identical to the first—the pot of stew, the group of people, the same long-handled spoons. But there everyone was happy and well-nourished. “I don’t understand,” said the man. “Why are they happy here when they were miserable in the other room and everything was the same?”

The Lord smiled, “Ah, it is simple,” he said. “Here they have learned to feed each other.”

On newsprint or a whiteboard, list the ways your church feeds its members, community, the nation, and the world emotionally, physically and spiritually. Identify local missions and ministries to the hungry and homeless. This would be an appropriate time to invite a minister or lay leader to lead a communion service. Close with a period of silence and personal reflection, asking God to provide the spiritual food that is necessary for acts of advocacy and justice in the week ahead.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Sidewalk Sermonettes (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Go ahead. Clear your driveway or sidewalk, and let your inner child run free with big pieces of chalk. Allow the artist in you to emerge and the opportunity for an admiring public to “ooh” and “aah” at your efforts. The only drawback is that the next downpour will wash away hours worth of effort in a few minutes. Since you will be outside for this activity, check the weather forecast. The feedback from and interaction with those who may be arriving for church and community-related activities is an important part of this experience. Your artists will be echoing Christ’s (and perhaps your church’s) call to radical hospitality, welcoming and affirming all persons into fellowship, “no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.”

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- pens and pencils
- artwork: “Shotgun Third Ward”, by John Biggers, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=17101&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401)
- website: “About John Biggers” (painter of Shotgun Third Ward), [http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist\\_bio.cfm?ID=414](http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist_bio.cfm?ID=414)
- paper
- makers
- (optional) sidewalk chalk

Read together Acts 2:44–47. Note that the spirit of togetherness in the early Christian church grew as a result of meeting in the homes of believers. Since any kind of Christian fellowship is our spiritual home, ask each person to envision a dear family member or friend stopping by for a visit. *If you could fashion a welcoming message on the sidewalk just for them, what would it be?* Spread paper around on the floor, and invite the participants to write “sidewalk” messages with markers. If possible, do this part of the activity outside using sidewalk chalk. Select one of Jesus’ sayings from Matthew 25:30 and write it next to these welcoming messages.



Display “Shotgun Third Ward” and tell the story of John Biggers (see “About John Biggers”). Explain that the painting is set in Houston in the historic Third Ward. After quiet reflection and as the group continues to contemplate the picture, ask these questions.

- If the people who had gathered on the sidewalk were expecting you, what message might they write with their chalk?
- Imagine that you are a visitor on a mission project. What are some ways you could become more familiar with the history, culture, needs and expectations unique to this community?
- When reaching out to others, why is it often more important to listen and observe than to speak and act?

To close, form circles around your “sidewalk” messages and read them together. Challenge your group to find specific ways to carry out these messages in the week ahead.



### ③ Perceptions and Perspectives

**Leader preparation:** In any kind of presentation or program, the facilitator/speaker often makes use of outlines and notes. Imagine what it might have been like for someone in biblical times who was trying to prepare a presentation on a faith practice. Your primary source of information would be that which was handed down orally and through tradition. In preparation for this session select a news story on a local, national, or global social justice issue. Then transport yourself into the past when pens, pencils, and paper—and perhaps even papyrus—were not available. Be prepared to tell the story in your own words, as if it had been handed down orally.

#### Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, <http://tinyurl.com/FPART17>
- websites: links to stories and jokes: <http://www.joyfulnoiseletter.com/>, <http://www.christian-jokes.net/>
- Bibles
- newspapers and magazines

Begin with a warmup period. Tell a funny story or joke to one participant and whisper it around the circle. Have the last person retell it to the group. Then compare it to the original version to see if any of the details have. You may want to use one of the links to stories and jokes listed above.

Using the same process, tell your pre-selected news story to a participant and ask that person to send it around the circle. After telling and retelling the story, read the original copy and note the ways it changed. What details were added or left out? Have opinions been mixed with facts?

Read Luke 4:14–21. Ask participants to tell the story of Jesus’ homecoming from several perspectives: his childhood rabbi, a close friend who grew up with him, his mother, a nosy neighbor, a rival from his school days, or a retired Roman official who was visiting the area.

Display “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera. Ask: *How would the following persons describe what is going on in this painting? A capitalist, a socialist, a family farmer, a corporate spokesperson, a person on food stamps, a wealthy person, a person shopping*



at WalMart, a person shopping at a family-run grocery store, a missionary, a member of a large suburban church.

As a group, select a story of social injustice in the news. Identify its root causes and write them on the newsprint or whiteboard. List the people directly and indirectly affected by this issue and how their perspectives may differ from your group's. *How might it be possible to blend these different viewpoints into a workable solution?*

To close, silently open a channel of communication with God asking for focus and the ability to listen in the week ahead. As each person offers up a joy or prayer concern, invite the group to repeat it as an affirmation that they have heard what was being said.

For further discussion, watch this video clip from *Fiddler on the Roof*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWGTjqv19ZA>. *Is Tevye doing a good job of seeing and hearing things from all sides, or is he too focused on his own perspectives?*

Go outside and look at the clouds. Invite each person to talk about what he or she sees in a particular cloud's shape. Discuss how perceptions and perspectives are associated with our life experiences and how our "illusions" need to be balanced by the way other people look at things.

## 9 Scrabble for Justice

**Leader preparation:** Is there anything better than a good old-fashioned board game to promote group building, interaction, lively discussion, and problem solving? Perhaps you could even add conflict resolution to this list, since an honest disagreement or two may occur during this activity. Play a few practice rounds of Scrabble® with friends and family by limiting your word selections to social-justice issues and Christian missions. Following this, pray and reflect on these. Are we making progress in dealing with these issues and eradicating their root causes, or is there a ways to go before we get there?

### Supplies:

- Scrabble® game board (be sure to have enough so that all can play)
- Bibles
- treats

Divide the group into teams of two to three. In the interest of time, hand out more letters than the standard Scrabble® rules allow. Play and score the game as you usually would—with this exception: Any word entry must identify a social justice issue or Christian mission. Upon completion of this activity, add up the points and declare a winning team. Then explain that the treats all belong to the winners, and it will be their choice as to how the treats are distributed. If the victors choose to be generous, you can all enjoy your goodies while considering the following questions.

- How did it feel for someone to have complete control over all the resources?
- Who are the winners and losers in today's world, and how is this determined?
- How much control do we as individuals have over how others are categorized and labeled?
- Read Isaiah 1:1 and 10–18. If Isaiah had made a list of winners and losers, who would have been on each list?



- Take another look at the completed Scrabble® board. How many of these social justice issues and actions occur in your community? Are people generally aware of these, particularly in the local churches?

For closing worship, clear the Scrabble® boards. Have everyone find Galatians 5:22–23 in the Bibles. Give everyone a few moments to read it to themselves, and then ask them to pick one of these “fruits” that will be helpful in their work for justice. Spell these out on the game board with the Scrabble® pieces. During a prayer, ask God to grant you those fruits of the Spirit that will be helpful in your work for justice.

For further discussion, watch the following video by Joe South: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5znh58WITU8>.

- Are his comments about churches and people of faith positive or negative?
- What are some ways we can “seek serenity from God” so that we can “remember who we are” and what we are called to do in working for justice.

### Reflect

Congratulations, crew leader! You have successfully seen your team through the earliest stages of your mission. Everyone in your diverse and talented group of seekers and new church participants has already begun to pull together in their quest to work for justice. Lots of your time and energy has been spent in getting things off to a good start and building a cohesive and committed group. Now the Discovery is in full orbit and the blending of your ideas, insights, perceptions, and perspectives has begun. So take your foot off the accelerator, and let the “G” (group) forces take over. There are lots more mutual endeavors and experiences to share in the journey ahead. Since a launch burns lots of fuel, the scripture focus in your next set of activities will provide you a welcome opportunity to refresh and refuel.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

It still sits on my bookshelf in a prominent place. On the inside cover, my mother's most excellent handwriting is a reminder that this New American Catholic Version of the Bible was given to me by my parents in December of 1966. Seekers and new church participants may have similar stories to tell. Their first Bible may very well be dusted off and brought to this Exploration. In reading, understanding, and applying scripture to our faith practices, encourage everyone to bring his or her favorite Bible, whether it is a brand new King James Version or *The Message* or a New Revised Standard Version with the columns all marked up. No matter each participant's preference, everyone deserves to be treated as a scholar with valuable insights and ideas to share as we support and encourage one another to live what we believe.

### About this Exploration

Scripture asks what does God require of us and answers the question with marching orders and a road map. It admonishes against oppression, reminds us that we are created in the image of God, and demands that we work for a just world rooted in love. In Jesus we see the embodiment of loving justice, which, like an ever-flowing stream, grows to encompass the whole creation. We discover God's disappointment and anger with injustice, God's care for the poor and the disenfranchised, God's zeal for justice as a way of life, and God's expectation that we structure our lives and relationships as did Jesus.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Micah 6:1-8**  
**Amos 5:18-24**

## Leader Preparation

James 2:26 says, “Faith without works is dead.” The Bible was not designed to sit on a shelf and collect dust. In a figurative sense, the same is true of the verses we hear at church on Sunday or contemplate in our daily reading and devotions. If the living Word is stored away in some forgotten place, we close a channel of communication with God. The living Word speaks to and stirs our spirits in reaction and response to the compelling human need that is all around us. Whether the Bible stories in these activities are familiar or unfamiliar, the most important thing is that they may reveal new insights and perspectives and be put to use in the daily lives of your faith practitioners.

A seminary professor was fond of calling his students his “biblical scholars.” His affirmation instilled confidence and a can-do attitude. It is almost a given that there will be a wide variety of approaches, experiences, and comfort levels within the group when it comes to reading and applying scripture. Be careful about taking sides in theological debates, and encourage open, affirming, and respectful dialogue. Remind your group that God has something important to say through each and every one of us. If you are looking for a Bible commentary in a lectionary-based format, the website “The Text This Week” provides useful tools ([www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com)).

There is no substitute, however, for taking out your Bible and simply reading and reflecting on the passages you will work with. As leader of this group, you have the right to claim biblical scholarship. Don’t hesitate to share your interpretations respectfully and then ask for dissenting opinions.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Got Milk? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Do you remember what it was like to be read to as a child? Wasn’t it nice to have the complete and undivided attention of a wise and nurturing adult? Before facilitating this activity, make yourself a favorite beverage. Then recruit a friend or family member to read you one of your favorite Bible stories. You could even reverse traditional roles and have a child read to you. This activity is designed for partners who will take turns being the reader and the one being read to. How comforting it will be for you to set aside distractions and stresses from the past day and simply close your eyes, take a sip, and be embraced by the comfort and assurance of God’s Word delivered by a familiar voice.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- crayons, markers, colored pencils
- (optional) beverages cups, pillows, and sleeping bags

Invite the participants to choose partners and make a comfortable place using available furniture (and, perhaps, the above optional items). Provide beverages, if possible. Have the partners take turns reading John 12:1–8 to each other. Encourage your pairs to use guided meditation techniques, taking deep breaths, and envisioning a quiet and peaceful place. Discuss the experience using one or more of these questions.

- Identify the injustice in this story. Why was Judas upset? Was anyone being treated justly? What do you think Jesus was trying to say about the poor?
- How might it have helped Judas to “chill out” with a favorite beverage?
- What similarities are there between being read to while drinking a beverage and the perfume with which Jesus’ feet were anointed?
- If you could have a character in this Bible story read to you, who would it be? Would the story sound different if another character in the Bible story read it to you?

Hand out paper, crayons, markers, and pencils, and have participants draw the proverbial “glass half full” of a comforting beverage. In the other half of the glass, each participant can write some ways each will figuratively serve those who are under duress or being treated unfairly. For example, a person could spend time listening to someone who is being bullied at school, take to lunch a coworker who is being laid off, offer prayers, support, and encouragement to someone who is ill and lacking health insurance, or advocate for a person with a disability.

For closing worship, form a circle and read one of your favorite Bible stories to the group. Invite everyone to pray, asking God for the faith, hope, trust, and persevering spirit of the characters in these stories. Share the passing of the peace of Christ, mutually encouraging one another to find ways to “share the milk of human kindness” in the week ahead.

Prayer: *Almighty God, each of us hears, understands, and responds to scripture in our own unique way. As I prepare to facilitate this session, open my heart and mind to the movement of your Spirit within this group. Give me the confidence and courage to express what I believe and the patience to hear what others have to say, even and especially if I disagree. Challenge each of us to take those verses we prayerfully consider and put them to immediate use as we seek to be doers of your Living Word. Amen.*

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

### 2 Order in the Court

**Leader preparation:** At any time on any given cable channel, you will probably find an episode of “Law and Order.” If you were an attorney, who would you least like to go up against, Judge Marilyn Milian (“The People’s Court”), Simon Cowell (“American Idol”), or one of the current Supreme Court justices? Read Micah 6:1–8 as if you were in a courtroom setting. God has a case against the people who have broken a covenant and failed to live up to their responsibilities. How will this drama play out? For whom will the jury decide?

**Supplies:**

- something to use as a gavel
- paper
- pencils and pens
- newspapers and magazine
- Bibles
- computer with Internet access and projector to show a YouTube video
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Begin with a general discussion about TV programs that have law and justice themes. *Which one was the all-time best, and which attorney made the most compelling arguments?*

In your learning space, set up a courtroom with places for a judge, a jury, defense and prosecuting attorneys, a defendant, and a plaintiff. Read Micah 6:1–8 together, and assign parts for a role-play. Meet with everyone (except the jurors) for a few moments to practice. The prophet himself could act as the judge. God’s people are the defendants, judging themselves through the breaking of the covenant. God is the plaintiff, and the long list of offenses (verses 10–18) can be used in cross-examination by the prosecution and in closing arguments. A defense could be mounted by appealing to the long history of God’s positive interventions, even when the people have failed to live up to the covenant. The judge will decide when enough evidence has been heard and turn things over to the jury (mountains and hills) for a decision. The jury will then decide if the defendant is guilty and, if so, what sentence will be delivered (verses 6–8).

Follow this “trial” with a general discussion about today’s news headlines and how they are indicative of broken covenants. *If there were to be a trial for each major social injustice of the day, what priority would each be given on the court’s docket?*

Then invite the participants to create a litany of confession. *From the study of the text and the experience of the “trial,” for what do we need to ask forgiveness?* List ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. To make this list into a litany, create a line such as “Forgive us, God” to be said by the group after each item on the list. It is important that this prayer of confession include the belief that God does forgive. Use this litany as a closing prayer and a symbol of the restored covenant between God and God’s people.



### 3 Create a Commentary

**Leader preparation:** In preparing a biblically based lesson, sermon, or presentation, many refer to Bible commentaries. First, read and reflect on Amos 5:18–24 and Micah 6:1–8. Then read some commentaries. If you don't have access to books, do a Google search on these passages. The website "The Text This Week," <http://www.textweek.com/>, offers a variety of commentaries online.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles construction paper
- paper
- markers
- artwork: "Kopf" by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>
- colored pencils and pencils
- hymn: "Amazing Grace" (tune: New Britain), [http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/a/m/a/amazing\\_grace.htm](http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/a/m/a/amazing_grace.htm)
- a computer to play YouTube videos

Welcome your biblical scholars and praise them for their ability to interpret scripture. Assign each person a couple of verses from either the Micah or Amos passage. Spend a few minutes in silent contemplation, with participants taking a few deep breaths to clear their minds from the busyness of the past week. Ask each to read his or her verse several times, letting it speak to the heart.

Explain that a Bible commentary is an author's attempt to explain scripture. Commentaries often give background on the text, such as the cultural or historic setting. Since the original language of the Bible is not English, commentaries often explore the nuances of language interpretation. But commentaries always carry the writer's perspective, and no commentary is perfect. Invite the participants to create a Bible commentary by journaling, reporting, writing in verse, drawing, or acting out the assigned verse(s). *Remember, this is your interpretation. It may be different from another's interpretation, but that is okay.*

Discuss one or more of the following questions.

- In what ways did these verses take you back to a place where you were treated unjustly? What tools did it provide to help others who are being treated in a similar manner?
- In what ways did these verses give you a new outlook and perspective on a social-justice issue that is of interest to you?
- What answers or questions did these verses raise about your faith?
- In what ways did these verses give you any practical suggestions as to how you can live what you believe?

Display "Kopf" by Joan Miro. Ask: *If this piece of artwork represents a human face, how is this person feeling? Which, if any, of the verses we read might change the expression on this face?*

Invite people to share their commentaries. Sing the hymn "Amazing Grace," symbolic of the grace of God that enables us to be interpreters of scripture.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Turning over a New Leaf (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** When the seasons change, it is an excellent time for us to consider making changes in our lives, including the ways we understand and act upon justice issues. A simple arts and crafts project can be symbolic of the desire to travel a different path, to turn over a new leaf to understanding and action. The story of the rich young ruler—as told in Matthew 19:16–30, Mark 10:17–31, and Luke 18:18–30—was an attempt by Jesus to redirect a wealthy man into a whole new way of thinking about keeping God’s commandments. The end of the story leaves us feeling uncertain about whether the message would get through. Would this person really change? Is there a better way to get close to God and focus in on changes that may be in store for you?

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint
- glue
- leaves (real or fabricated from colored construction paper)

Quietly read and reflect on one of the three gospel passages listed above. Then discuss one or more of the following questions.

- What did Jesus want and expect from the rich young ruler?
- Do you believe Jesus wanted him to literally sell everything and lead a life of destitution?
- What might Jesus have been most interested in for this man?

Create a tree on the newsprint, using markers to draw the trunk and branches. Distribute the leaves. Have participants write something on one side from which they need to turn away, something either personal or corporate. This may be an action, a feeling, an attitude, an injustice, and so forth. Then have them turn the leaf over and write “God is forgiving.” Have each participant punch a hole in the top of the leaf, tie yarn or string through the hole, and attach the leaf to the tree so that the leaves can turn over.

Talk about ways we can turn over a new leaf in responding to the Great Commandment by doing justice in our daily lives. Some of these may include:

- Pray other-centered prayers. Take the headlines from today’s Sunday paper and form them into prayer requests.
- Be more willing to express your thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a prayerful and open manner on the important social issues of the day.
- Volunteer your time and talents for a local service project or organization.
- Research local, national, and international benevolent organizations and make a financial commitment.
- Explore your local church’s mission programs, offer your support, and share new ideas and initiatives.

Ask participants to close their eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine themselves as important parts of God’s dream for a more peaceful and just world. *Imagine taking the place of the rich young ruler in the gospel story and turning over a new leaf by saying “yes” to Jesus.*



### 5 Name that Hymn

**Leader preparation:** In the 1950s and again in the 1970s there was a popular television show called “Name that Tune.” The idea of the game was to be the first person to identify a tune being played by an orchestra. The quicker a contestant named the tune, the more money he or she won. More recent shows along this line are “The Singing Bee” and “Don’t Forget the Lyrics.” In both of these shows the contestants try to remember the lyrics of popular songs. Create an adaption of one of these shows, or a combination of these shows, for your group. You will need to identify someone within or outside the group who can play hymns. One finger will do. Another possibility is to record some hymns before the session and then use them in the activity.

Find a quiet place to read and pray about the three psalms listed below. How do they relate to the happenings in your life and in the world around you?

#### Supplies:

- hymnals
- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- piano or keyboard

Form teams and play a version of “Name that Tune” called “Name that Hymn.” Each team will take turns and determine how many notes they will need to identify a hymn or other song. If they are not successful, then pass it on to the next team with an extra note. Set up a system of descending points corresponding with the number of notes it takes to “Name that Hymn.” For fun, name your teams and keep track of the score on the newsprint. When the hymn or song is identified, try to identify the theme of working for justice within it.

Here are some songs and hymns you might use. Check the topic index under “Justice” in your church’s hymnal for others. Or do an Internet search for songs about justice. Your hymnal may also have a scripture index that identifies the texts on which some of the hymns are based.

“Blowin’ in the Wind”  
 “Oh Freedom”  
 “We Shall Overcome”  
 “O For a World”  
 “Ours the Journey”  
 “God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens”  
 “God of Freedom, God of Justice”  
 “What Does the Lord Require of You?”  
 “Go Down, Moses”  
 “For the Healing of the Nations”  
 “We Are Gentle, Angry People Singing for Our Lives”  
 “Guide My Feet”  
 “Dream God’s Dream”

Close by inviting participants to take turns reading Psalms 35, 58, and 94. Point out that psalms were the original message songs with a religious theme. Encourage everyone to use these psalms for their personal devotions in the coming week. Close by singing a couple of selections from the game you played.



## 6 Rewriting History

**Leader preparation:** Time travel has been a subject of interest, fascination, and speculation since before Christ's birth—particularly for science fiction fans. With the introduction of his novel *The Time Machine*, H.G. Wells may have stoked the fires more than any one reader. Take a trip into the past by looking through a photo album, by watching home movies and videos, by listening to “oldies but goodies,” or by tuning into a classic movie channel. If there was one act or decision from your life that you could change, what would it be? How would this affect the unfolding of your life? Would there be changes in both the good and the not so good things that have happened since? Having learned from past experiences, can you now face the future with confidence and courage?

### Supplies:

- paper, pens or pencils
- Bibles
- hymn: “O God Our Help in Ages Past” (tune: St. Anne), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/o/g/ogohiap.htm>
- (optional) a computer to play YouTube videos

Ask participants what books or movies or television shows they have read or watched about time travel. Just for fun, share the following link, from the movie *Back to the Future*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NMph943tsw>.

Then make your own time machine. Use whatever you can find in your meeting space to build it (tables, chairs, items you can use as knobs and levers). Read together Luke 16:19–25. Then have participants transport themselves into Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus. *If you were one of the primary characters, how would you do things differently? How might this change the outcome of the story?* Have participants journal their experiences.

Gather in a circle and ask everyone to describe how they have rewritten history. Ask them to select any single historic event they would like to change. How would their actions have altered the course of history? Would this have guaranteed a more just and caring world?

Ask participants to silently reflect by closing their eyes, taking deep breaths, and envisioning Jesus sitting in the next chair. *Go back to a place where you felt your own actions were unjust. Through the forgiveness and grace of our Savior, it is time to let go of guilt and regret. If confronted by a similar situation in the future, how will you handle it this time?* As a benediction, sing or speak the words to the hymn “Our God Our Help in Ages Past.”

## Sending & Serving Activities



## 7 Symbol Scramble (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Churches of nearly every tradition are rich with symbols—everything from stained glass windows to crosses to communion tables and places for baptism. Before facilitating this activity, walk through your church and familiarize yourself with the symbols you find. Ask yourself what the chief symbols of your denomination are. Look for Christian symbols in your home. What is the story behind each one? Why are they important to your faith?

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- “Christian Symbols,” Attachment: Activity 7
- Bibles

Distribute the handout with the illustrations of Christian symbols. Remind the group that liturgical colors are also symbols, such as red, purple, white, and green. Share the peace by drawing a fish—*ichthus/ixthus*—on each person’s palm.

If the sanctuary is accessible, send your participants with the handouts to see how many of these symbols they can find. Have them work with partners or in groups of three or four. If you are not meeting in a church, then link as many of these symbols as you can to the places you live, work, play, and worship. Then pose these or similar questions:

- How many symbols did you find?
- What is the most popular/predominant symbol?
- What is your favorite symbol and why? (Note how many people wear a cross as jewelry.)

Together read Matthew 25:34–36. On newsprint or a whiteboard have participants take turns drawing symbols that represent this passage. They can use the symbols from the handout or make up their own. In closing, invite worshipers to focus on one of these symbols and ask God to help him or her become a living symbol of Jesus and his love.

**③ What “Type” Are You?**

**Leader preparation:** The Bible Focus Passages for this Exploration feature two noteworthy prophets. If needed, the following links provide background information (i.e., places of birth, occupation, interests, and the nature of their callings).

- <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/proph5.htm>
- <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01435a.htm>
- <http://biblescripture.net/Amos.html>
- <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/proph11.htm>
- <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10278a.htm>
- <http://biblescripture.net/Micah.html>

We know little about the personalities and temperaments of biblical characters. But we have enough pieces to this puzzle to make educated guesses. For example, there are indications that young Jeremiah was fearful and reluctant and that Moses’ anger regularly got him into trouble. You would think that anyone who was called on to confront the “powers that be” would be working with a bit of an edge. But can we rightly assume this? In this activity, your participants will become psychoanalysts and assign personality types to Amos and Micah. Before leading this activity, ask yourself this question: With my approach, demeanor, and personality, would I make a good prophet? What qualities do I have that would enable me to confront society on some of the major issues of social injustice?

**Supplies:**

- paper
- pens or pencils
- artwork: “Kopf” by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>
- Bibles



Tell the group what you learned about Amos and Micah (some Bibles provide this information as well). Invite them to share anything they know as well. Be sure to point out the qualities that led these two prophets to their callings. Name some contemporary figures that would have what it takes to be a prophet. Share and invite or your participants to share what you know about Type A personalities—“high strung, energetic, focused, determined”—and Type B personalities—“easy going, go with the flow, see what happens.”

According to some websites, Type A personalities are ambitious, rigidly organized, highly status conscious, sensitive, caring for other people, truthful, impatient, always helpful to others, prone to take on more than a person can handle. They also want other people to get to the point, are proactive, and are obsessed with time management. People with Type A personalities are often high-achieving “workaholics” who multitask, push themselves with deadlines, and hate both delays and ambivalence.

Type B personalities are characterized as generally apathetic, patient, relaxed, easy going. They generally have no sense of time schedule, have poor organization skills, and at times lack an overriding sense of urgency. These men and women tend to be sensitive of other people’s feelings.

Working in small groups, decide which of these two personality types best suits a prophet. You may choose from more than one category in putting together your personality profiles. Read together Micah 6:1–8 and Amos 5:18–24. *Are the words spoken by Amos and Micah in these passages more indicative of a Type A or Type B personality?* Then have participants do a rewrite of either the Amos or Micah passage based on their findings. For example, if the prophet is an A personality, a participant can rewrite the passage from the perspective of someone with a B personality.

Read these rewrites aloud and discuss one or more of the following questions.

- If God asked you to be a prophet, would you accept the call?
- What warnings would you issue to the people in your church, community, nation, and throughout the world?
- Do you have what it takes to be a prophet? Do you think Micah or Amos thought they had what it takes to be a prophet?
- When it comes to serving God, should it really matter what type of personality you are?
- Is it a good idea to try to change your personality to suit a particular calling?

Display “Kopf” by Joan Miro. *Is this the face of a prophet? What is this person’s personality type? Would you be open to hearing what this person has to say?*

Close by making a circle and asking for God’s blessings for the ways each will be called to serve others in the week ahead. Ask God specifically for what each person will need to be an effective minister. Together say the Prayer of our Savior.



### 9 Fruit Salad Surprise

**Leader preparation:** Are you hungry for some fruit? Peel yourself a banana or bite into a nice juicy apple and read Galatians 5:22–23. Which of these “fruits of the spirit” best describes you? Would you prefer to work with someone who has like qualities and a similar temperament, or are you drawn to opposites? Reflect



on your experiences with team ministry. How much of your success or lack of success was due to having “good chemistry”? Can this be overcome with a little extra effort and prayer?

Before the session ask participants to bring fruit for a salad. Do not assign a specific fruits.

#### Supplies:

- large bowl and smaller bowls
- serving and eating utensils
- fruit
- Bible
- paper
- markers, colored pencils, and crayons
- masking tape
- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera,  
<http://tinyurl.com/FPart17>
- a computer with Internet access

Mix everyone’s fruit into the large bowl. Fill up the smaller bowls and enjoy. *How does this one compare to other fruit salads you have eaten? If you were hosting a show on the Food Network, what would be your perfect recipe for a fruit salad?* Ask a volunteer to read Galatians 5:22–23, and then discuss one or more of the following questions.

- When a church decides to plan and carry out a mission trip, is it guaranteed that all of these “fruits of the Spirit” will be represented in perfect balance? Is it necessary?
- If not, how does that affect the group’s effectiveness?
- What group-building methods can help develop chemistry and provide more balance?
- What can be done if certain fruits of the spirit are not readily apparent in supervisors and volunteer coordinators? How might you develop a good working relationship in a relatively short period of time?
- In the painting “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, what fruits of the spirit are visible?

## Reflect

Not only have you shaken the dust off those Bibles, but you are now ready to pick yourself up and respond to your calling, even and especially when the going gets tough (Luke 9:3–5). You have also gained confidence in your insights and abilities as biblical scholars. Continued contemplation of the verses featured in these activities may help you grow and evolve as God’s faithful servant and as a doer of justice, whether you are a player in a courtroom drama, a storyteller serving a glass of warm milk, a prophet with a laid-back personality, or a restless time traveler looking to make a difference in the here and now.

Is there such a thing as a “perfectly” balanced mission group or a service project with an “unconditionally” receptive atmosphere? If you want to do something together as a group, it is also essential to do the research and find out as much as you can about the guidance and supervision that will be provided. In other words, no matter the ingredients, you need a bowl and utensils to blend your gifts and talents.

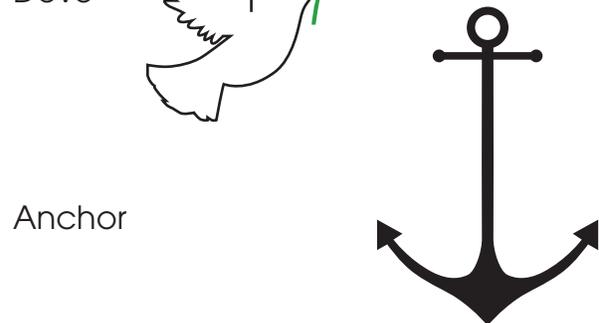
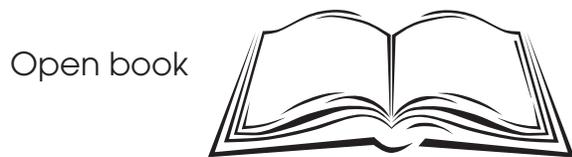
For closing worship, have each participant identify his or her favorite fruit and draw it on a piece of paper. Underneath, each can write the “fruit of the spirit” that best describes him or her. Then mark off an area with masking tape to serve as a giant fruit bowl. Have everyone step inside with their pictures and read Galatians 5:22–23 together. *Focus on a fruit of the spirit you would like to have in greater abundance and ask for God’s help and guidance.*

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Attachment: Activity 7

Christian Symbols



# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

To the seeker or new church participant, disciples may be yesterday's superheroes, willing to lay down their nets, livelihoods, and even their lives to follow Jesus. Some may have limited knowledge of gospel stories, such as those found in Matthew 4:18–22 and Mark 1:16–20. You don't need to know details to admire and aspire to be like Jesus' first followers. In your group, history and biblical commentary may not be nearly as important as some inspiration from well-established models. As you lead participants through this series of activities, challenge them to become disciples as they "come and follow" Jesus on this new path they are seeking.

### About this Exploration

When Jesus bids us come and follow, what does he mean? It means following Jesus in justice work. Disciples are invited to practice their faith by making conscious choices, exploring ideas, and acquiring skills for the lives to which Jesus calls us. The activities in this exploration lead disciples to ask: How do our daily plans and routines show our commitment to working for justice?

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22**  
**John 10:11–18**

## Leader Preparation

A disciple is defined as one who accepts a call and assists in the spreading of a set of beliefs by living them out in mission and ministry. Through the activities in this Exploration, participants will have opportunities to “be the disciple.” In doing so, they will begin to acquire helpful tools and develop useful skills for modern-day discipleship. A daily response to Christ’s call to drop their nets and “come and follow” will reveal to them their continued growth and transformation into willing workers for justice.

On your faith journey, when and where was your sense of calling the strongest? Sometimes in looking back we see our call more clearly than in the present moment. Were your choices and their possible consequences clear and apparent? How much time did you spend in prayer and discernment? Who did you seek out for advice and encouragement? Did some people try to discourage you from saying “yes” to Jesus? If you decided against responding to this call, was there any guilt or regret? If you did accept the call, did things work out the way you expected? Was your mission a success or a failure or somewhere in between? On what basis did you make that determination? As a disciple in your own right, you know full well that dropping your nets can present challenges. As you work through these same questions and concerns with your group, be prepared for thoughts, feelings, reactions,

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### ① It’s God Calling! (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** If God called you on a hotline, what urgent matters would you talk about? Before your meeting, make arrangements for someone to call you on your cell phone. Pretend that it is God calling and that God has something very important for you to do. After hanging up, let everyone know that God wishes them well and will soon be in touch. You might add that God does not need their phone numbers and has a way finding these things out!

**Supplies:**

- pencils or pens
- paper
- Bible or copies of Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22

Read together Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22. *If prophets had cell phones to talk with God, can you imagine what their roaming rates would have been?* Form pairs, and have partners act out a follow-up conversation that God and Jeremiah might have on the phone. *What might God say to address the obvious despair and hopelessness the prophet is feeling for the people and himself?* Have pairs take turns being God and being Jeremiah. If there is time, have partners share their dialogues with the group.

Lead a discussion using one or both of these questions.

- When you look at the state of the world today, what feelings do you have?
- If Jesus walked among us, how might he feel?

Read participants the following quotation from Charles Swindoll: “I am convinced that life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes” (<http://www.self-helpdaily.com/quote-about-attitude/>).

Explain that like Jeremiah, we, too, get overwhelmed by the state of the world. That is why it is important to stay positive and connected with God. *Prayerfully act on your instincts to do good, one day at a time and one situation at a time. Believe that with the right attitude you can and will make a difference.* Invite the participants individually to find a place to take a phone call from God as a follow-up to something they’ve been asked to do. *What’s your attitude been like? What extra help and resources do you need from God?*

### ② Which Follower Would You Follow?

**Leader preparation:** You have probably been to more than your share of meetings. Whether they were church, school, or work related and depending on the leadership, one of two things happened. You stuck to the agenda item by item according to Robert’s Rules of Order and got home in time to catch your favorite television show. Or you traded stories, caught up on things, and had a few laughs, and your agenda grew a whole new set of agendas—and you barely made it home in time to catch the late show. In other words, either a task-oriented drill sergeant named Martha or a laid-back “we’ll take it as it comes” friend, counselor, and confidante named Mary was in charge. If you were called to join a group on a service project or mission trip, which of these models would you prefer from

and opinions as wide-ranging and diverse as the body of Christ Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 12.

*Prayer: Gentle and Persistent God, you are knocking at the door to my heart. Like those first disciples Jesus called, you are now calling me to a specific task that will require my time, talents, and treasure. In leading this group, help me to remember the lessons I have learned in discipleship and to freely share my own experiences. Give me the focus to hear and affirm my group's desires to love and serve you and others to the best of their ability. May I encourage and facilitate the goals they have set for themselves in mission and ministry and calm any fears and uncertainties that may be holding them back. I pray this in your Precious Name. Amen.*

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

your lead disciple? Through discussion and worship, you will now have the opportunity to answer that question and anticipate how it may affect the attitudes and outlooks you bring to your call as disciples of Jesus.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- song: “Singing for Our Lives” by Holly Near; words on Holly Near website, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21a>; video <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21b>

Take a survey of the sports participants in your group have played. Read aloud Luke 10:38–42, and have participants decide whether they would elect a Mary or a Martha to be the team captain and then explain why. Ask the group to name some people with leadership qualities. On newsprint or a whiteboard assign them to one of these three categories: (1) Martha, (2) Mary, or (3) Mary-and-Martha hybrid.

Divide participants into two groups, and have groups role-play a mission team called to work on a house for a local Habitat for Humanity. Mary is in charge of one group, and Martha the other. Describe the differences in how each group approached the task. After groups have performed their role-plays for all the participants, reflect on the following questions:

- Was Jesus more like Mary or Martha? In what ways did his leadership style reflect a little of both?
- In this gospel story, was Jesus playing favorites?
- What kind of leadership style is best for church groups?

Close by affirming the leadership characteristics that are in each member of your group

For further discussion, watch the video of Holly Near singing “Singing for Our Lives.” Listen carefully to the lyrics. This song grows out of the gay community’s response to the assassination of Harvey Milk and San Francisco mayor George Moscone in 1978. It has become an anthem for persons who seek inclusivity and diversity. Is Holly Near more like Mary or Martha? Why did this situation call for her to employ this leadership style?

### ③ If God Worked for AAA

**Leader preparation:** How do you get from point A to point B? Do you prefer to “Google” it, “Map Quest” it, or use a GPS? In the days before we got our travel directions online, a visit to the American Automobile Association (AAA) or some other auto club was in order. Guidance came in the form of a booklet of maps marked up with a yellow highlight pen. Have you ever been so lost that only God’s grace got you to where you were going? In preparation for this activity, reflect on those times in your life when the directions God gave you stood out above all the others. Then ask God to provide you with a sense of direction in leading this activity.

Gather maps of all kinds: world, local, national, and state. You may be able to print these from the Internet.



**Supplies:**

- red and blue markers
- Bibles
- song: “Guide My Feet” African American traditional (tune: Guide My Feet); video, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>; words and music, <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>
- newspapers and magazines
- photographs and keepsakes from family vacations
- computer with Internet access
- maps: world, state, national, local

Open by talking about family vacations and sharing memorabilia. Invite participants to share about any significant family vacation or an important artifact. Read aloud John 10:11–18, and have participants visualize what it would be like to dwell in green pastures under the care of the Good Shepherd. *What does the Good Shepherd look like? What does his voice sound like and the touch of his hand feel like?* Explain that even though God has determined the best route for us, we sheep, in our stubborn, restless ways, sometimes set out for greener pastures of our own choosing. Then, explore these questions:

- Name one place you would like to travel to in the United States and one place you would like to travel to in the world. Briefly explain why.
- Name one place in the United States and one place in the world where God might want to send you. What gifts and talents would you bring to this place, and how would you put them to use?
- Could these places be one and the same or is this possible?

Have participants mark in red on your maps the places they want to go. Then have them use newspapers and magazines to identify the locales and the situations where social injustices are most pronounced and the needs are the greatest. Mark these on a map in blue.

*What are some reasons that we are reluctant to accompany our Shepherd to certain pastures? Some of these could include fear of the unknown, lack of self-confidence, prioritizing our own wants and needs, the disapproval of family members, life circumstances and the lack of resources and opportunity.*

Invite the group to spend time in quiet reflection. *Revisit a pasture to which the Shepherd has been trying to lead you. It does not have to necessarily be halfway across the world or halfway across the country. It could be a part of your own community that you have been avoiding.*

In closing, sing or recite the words to the song “Guide My Feet.”



## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 The Wheels on the Bus Go? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** How did you get to school? Were you one of those kids who “had to walk five miles in the snow”? Or were you the poor unfortunate on the very end of a long bus route? If someone offered to transport you and your group to a mission or service project sight unseen, would you go and bravely lead the way? Since it is more than likely that these opportunities for ministry will come to us, we may all have to answer these questions at one time or another as workers for justice.

#### **Supplies:**

- paper
- pencils or pens
- Bibles
- song: “The Wheel on the Bus”; lyrics, <http://www.kididdles.com/lyrics/b014.html>
- (optional) a computer with Internet access

Invite the participants to draw a picture of how they got to school, including the significant persons who accompanied or transported them. These pictures can be as simple as stick figures or more elaborate portraits. Then have participants tell the stories depicted in these pictures, describing how this experience heightened an awareness of the world outside of the home. *What new social situation did you face? What did you learn about relating to persons other than family, friends, and neighbors?*

Aside from the occasional excursion by boat and fetching a donkey for the Savior to ride into Jerusalem, the gospels say very little about how Jesus and the disciples traveled about. Read aloud Matthew 4:18–22 or Mark 1:16–20. Then have the group, in quiet reflection, close their eyes and imagine Jesus in their presence. He has just driven a bus into the church parking lot, opened the doors, and asked your group to hop aboard and find their seats. *Where is he taking you? Will there be time for worship, praise, and fellowship? What kind of work will you be doing to assist people in need? What kinds of resources and specific skills will you need to bring?*

After everyone slowly opens their eyes, ask volunteers to share where the bus has taken them and what they did when they were there. Here are some additional questions to consider.

- In what ways other than transporting people to church might a church bus or van be used?
- If transportation is available, what service project would the group like to attempt during one of the scheduled meeting times?

Invite the group to sing the children’s song “The Wheels on the Bus.” Rewrite the lyrics as a group to include places the church bus may go, people that may get on the church bus, and the mission that the church bus serves.

For further discussion, have participants follow these links to read online articles:

- “Desegregation busing in the United States,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desegregation\\_busing\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desegregation_busing_in_the_United_States)



- “The Legacy of School Busing,” <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1853532>

Ask: *In what ways did these articles heighten an awareness and respect for racial and cultural diversity? What might it be important to do before taking a church bus and ministries into neighborhoods with which we are unfamiliar?*



## 5 Missed Opportunities or Alternate Routes?

**Leader preparation:** Unlike the route mandated by orange barrels and temporary road signs, sometimes we choose to set out on a different path. Things got progressively worse for Jonah when he chose an alternate route, running from his call to minister to the people of Nineveh (see Jonah 1–2). In response, God sent a “great wind on the sea” and “a great fish” to correct his course. After being tossed from a ship and landing in the belly of that great fish, Jonah began to realize that “going the back way” led to a stronger faith and a “peace that passeth all understanding.” Reflect on a time when you felt lost and alone, yet God remained as active and interested as ever, if not even more so. God does the same for us as God did for Jonah and corrects our courses, no matter which route we have chosen to reach our destination.

### Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)

On a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard, draw a map. Put the place where you are meeting in the center of the map. All around the map add the participants’ places of residence. Draw in their preferred routes to your meeting place. Get as much advice and input as you can, inviting critiques of your map-drawing skills. Ask the group for alternate routes, and draw those in with a different color marker. You will probably end up with quite the mess. When we choose a path different from the one God has set out for us, we can get ourselves into a mess. Talk about missed opportunities. *What was lost and what was gained by taking the alternate route? In what ways was God able to correct your course? Did you end up where you were supposed to be all along?*

Invite the group to study “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker. After sufficient time for reflection, begin a discussion using questions such as these:

- When you made a wrong turn and found yourself to be in an unfamiliar place, were there people there to help you find your way?
- Who were these people?
- In what ways did they embrace you and set you back on the right path with their help and guidance?

## 6 Simon/Simone Says

**Leader preparation:** Did you ever play “Simon Says” with your friends? If so, how well did you follow instructions? The answer to that question will be a good indicator of how quickly you were eliminated from the competition. Think back on some of the Simons and Simones you have followed. What lessons did you learn from their leadership? What leadership skills were they able to bring out in you?



**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- song: “Singing for Our Lives” by Holly Near; words on Holly Near website, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21a>; video, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21b>
- small prizes (check with your church school for leftover awards)
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- large piece of newsprint (may need several taped together) or butcher paper
- masking tape

Greet one another with the peace of Christ. Invite the group to play a game of “Simon Says.” Remind everyone to display a Christ-like attitude in the game, and note that there will be prizes awarded. Turn the tables in this game. When someone is eliminated, let that person pick a prize. This way the last person standing will get the last pick.

After the game, have the participants name some people they would readily follow. In one column on newsprint or a whiteboard, make a list of the leadership qualities of these people. *Would they be as gracious and humble as the winner of your game?* In a second column, list undesirable qualities. *What attitudes or actions would cause you not to want to follow someone or listen to their instructions?* Pose these questions for discussion:

- Describe a time when you have participated in a service or mission project. In your description include the quality of leadership in that project.
- Imagine a situation in which the leadership is less than inspirational and sometimes disruptive and divisive. What might you do about it?
- Why is good leadership important to the team and the people who are being served?
- If a team leader is acting bossy or disrespectful to the people you are serving, what could you do?

Ask for a volunteer to lie down on a big piece of newsprint; trace around this person. Then ask everyone to write excellent leadership qualities within the outline. Tape this figure on the wall. Name the leaders in your church, community, nation, and world, and offer prayers for them. Read aloud Matthew 20:25–28, and close with a prayer asking God for these qualities to emerge within each of the participants and for a calling where they will be put to good use.

For further discussion, ask participants what leadership qualities are present in the song “Singing for Our Lives.” *How is the singer trying to inspire people to discipleship?*



## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Heaven on Earth (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** On a piece of paper draw a response to this question: What does heaven look like? Two of the most-often-used metaphors would have us believe that heaven has “streets of gold” and “pearly gates.” These on-line articles offer perspectives on this imagery: “Are the Streets of Heaven Really Paved with Gold?” [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1870323/are\\_the\\_streets\\_of\\_heaven\\_really\\_paved.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1870323/are_the_streets_of_heaven_really_paved.html); and “‘Pearly Gates and ‘Streets of Gold’: Misinterpreted Bible Passages #2,” <http://www.jasonstaples.com/blog/2009/most-misinterpreted-bible-passages-2-pearly-gates-and-streets-of-gold-19>.

By taking on the role of realtors, participants may have the opportunity to offer their own expressions and impressions as to what heaven will be like.

#### Supplies:

- paper
- pens, pencils, colored pencils
- markers
- real estate ads
- Bible
- (optional) artwork: “The Peaceable Kingdom,” either by Edward Hicks or John August Swanson, <http://www.ucc.org/the-pilgrim-press/pdfs/ITW-Poster-Set-2.pdf>

For this activity, everyone gets a temporary realtor’s license (unless, of course, there are realtors by profession already present). Have participants use the real estate ads to describe a home in heaven and try to sell it. Participants can work with a partner or in a small group or by themselves. When everyone is finished, let each person make a pitch to sell his or her heavenly home.

In Matthew 13, Jesus gives several parables that describe the kingdom of heaven: someone who sowed good seed in a field; mustard seed, yeast, treasure hidden in a field; merchant in search of fine pearls; and net thrown into the sea. *How might these images fit into the descriptions of the heavenly homes? What adaptations would you make in your heavenly real estate ad in light of these images?*

*Option:* Look at the artwork “The Peaceable Kingdom.” (You can find this image by Edward Hicks easily through an Internet search engine.) *How do these images compare with “streets of gold” or “the pearly gates”? Which image is more indicative of a cooperative and selfless spirit?*



### 8 A Resting Place

**Leader preparation:** What ministries have you been called to? Make a list of the ways you serve your church, denomination, and community. Put an asterisk next to those that were done approximately at the same time. Did it ever get to be too much to handle and you had to step back? Among active people who are responsive to Christ’s call, “burn out” is an ongoing concern.

John 10:11–18 creates an image of a caring and nurturing Shepherd who will go so far as to “lay down his life” for his flock. The Shepherd “knows his own” and “they know him.” Because Jesus understands our strengths and limitations, we are sometimes “made to lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2) for our own



good. In this activity, you will be asked for a few moments to set aside the busyness of your daily lives and simply lay down to let God take care of you.

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles
- “Signs of Burnout,” Attachment: Activity 8
- sleeping bags, blankets, pillows

Invite the group to name signs of someone who is burned out. List their ideas in one column on newsprint or a whiteboard. Compare their list with the list on the attachment. In a second column, list possible ways to relieve stress. After some initial discussion, read together Matthew 11:29–30 and Psalm 23.

If possible, close by moving to a carpeted area indoors or a grassy area outdoors. Spread out sleeping bags, blankets, pillows, and so forth. Provide comfortable chairs for people who are not able to lie down and extra pillows for individuals in wheelchairs. As participants relax, read aloud the following.

Settle in, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. Look up at the sky and the clouds, or imagine the same. Imagine the Good Shepherd who provides rest and renewal. Now begin to feel any stress or burden lift off your shoulders and into Jesus’ strong arms where “we shall find rest for our souls for his yoke is easy and his burden is light” (Matthew 11:29–30).



## 9 Goldfishing for People

**Leader preparation:** If you were washed up onto a desert island and could choose one snack food, what would it be? Recall some times when you helped to right a wrong by offering your help, support, and encouragement. Was bringing food an essential part of the process? Did sharing snacks make it easier to break barriers and establish communication? As you look over this activity, treat yourself to your favorite “munchies.”

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- goldfish crackers
- grapes and bowls to serve them
- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15625&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15625&store_id=1401)
- candles

Begin with a general conversation about fishing. Have you ever gone fishing? How well did you do it? What are the best places to fish? What is the biggest fish you’ve ever caught? Share some good fish stories. Then read aloud Matthew 4:18–22, and have participants reflect on these questions.

- In what ways is working for justice “fishing for people”?
- Name ways you can bring persons closer to Christ by serving them in their time of need. In what ways does offering food break the ice?
- In what ways can mission or service projects lead participants to make a commitment to Christ?

- If you were given a big bowl of goldfish crackers to take it out into the community to fish for people, where would you go and what would you do with it?

Light candles and set out goldfish crackers and grapes. Read John 21:1–7 together, and have participants imagine themselves on a beach with Jesus cooking fish for the group. Pass around the crackers and grapes.

Display “The Sower” by Van Gogh. Invite people to share their reflections on this painting, and then ask: *What might this imply about sowing in a spiritual sense? By sharing a meal of fish with others, just like Jesus did with his disciples, what kind of seeds will you sow and what kind of harvest will you reap?*

## Reflect

Perhaps this set of activities took you back to those times you accepted Christ’s offer to “come and follow.” Whether you were traveling along God’s chosen path or on an alternate route, along the way you discovered newfound strengths and untapped gifts and talents within yourself. By guiding and nurturing your group of new seekers and beginners, you invited them to go through this same process of trial and error. Discipleship is not for the faint of heart. When people drop their nets and follow Jesus, their lives will never be the same. There are challenges to meet, setbacks to work through, and successes to celebrate in mission and ministry. At any given moment, the combined actions of Jesus’ modern-day disciples working together in a spirit of harmony and cooperation throughout the world will bring us one step closer to fairness and justice for all of God’s children.

Attachment: Activity 8

**Signs of Burnout**

- Chronic fatigue—exhaustion, tiredness, a sense of being physically run down
- No energy to be consistently productive; loss of motivation
- Disillusioned about the tasks
- Being disengaged
- Blunted emotions
- Anger at those making demands
- Self-criticism for putting up with the demands
- Cynicism, negativity
- Sense of being besieged
- Exploding easily at seemingly inconsequential things
- Frequent headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, or other physical complaints
- Weight loss or gain
- Sleeplessness and depression
- Shortness of breath
- Suspiciousness
- Feelings of helplessness
- Increased degree of risk taking
- Irritability or impatience with others
- Lack satisfaction from achievements

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Although seekers and participants may form new groups, they still bring with them traditions from their personal and church families. They may even be familiar with the traditions of the church they are exploring. The stories they tell and the experiences they share will help lay the foundation for new traditions. The way things go in Christian fellowship, something new can appear to be old and established, and something old and established can appear to be new. Anything goes when ideas and ideals are blended. When these group dynamics begin to occur, those who are commissioned by Jesus Christ commit to “going and making disciples of all nations,” as they are exhorted by Paul get to work “breaking down dividing walls of hostility.”

### About this Exploration

In working for justice, as in everything, past is prologue. Christian tradition calls the church to confess its participation in the creation and perpetuation of injustice. It also calls us to celebrate as Christian people who claim and test our heritage through doing the work of justice. Grounded in this history, we follow God’s leading and discover new ways to practice our faith working for justice.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Psalm 34:15–22**  
**Ephesians 2:11–22**

## Leader Preparation

The best way to prepare for the activities in this Exploration is to examine and reflect on your own traditions. Go through photo albums and memorabilia. Speak with family members and friends who took you to church. Talk with Sunday school teachers who read you Bible stories and taught you scripture verses to memorize. Looking back will help you open your mind and heart to what lies ahead in preparation for the plans God has made for you as an agent of positive and lasting change.

In this series of activities, you will assume the role of the character Tevye as he sings “Tradition” from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRdfX7ut8gw>). According to Tevye, in Anatevka there are traditions for everything: how to sleep, how to eat, how to work, how to wear clothes. In other words, the Anatevkans continue to live what they believe to be true. Like our great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents, we also live out of cultural, social, and religious traditions. This historical, moral, and ethical context provides the foundation for us to grow and evolve into effective and persistent seekers of justice, developing and establishing new traditions that will be handed down for generations to come.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Send/Receive (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** How do you really feel when your e-mail inbox is full? Are you excited that you have new things to read from friends and acquaintances, or do you let out a groan knowing you have to sort through five-dozen messages because you are nearing your computer’s capacity? There was a day and time when “you’ve got mail” meant your carrier had just put something in the box. Opening a message from your inbox or reading a quick text message does not have the look, feel, sound, and smell of unsealing an envelope and pulling out a hand-written note or card. The intent of this activity is to provide opportunities to correspond with those who are working for justice globally, nationally, or locally. Denominational websites can be a useful source of contact information.

Participants may also commit to writing letters to other members of the group, providing support and encouragement to be seekers of justice. As a warm-up, write a note or send a card to someone you know in ministry, expressing your affirmation and appreciation, and offering your ongoing prayers and support.

#### Supplies:

- letter-writing paper or note cards
- pens and pencils
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles
- (optional) computer with Internet access

As a group, talk about the last time each participant received a real, personal card or letter and what it meant to receive it. Perhaps it was a birthday or a sympathy card; maybe it was a thank you note. *How did this compare to the last e-mail you received? How did it feel to know that someone took time to buy the card, add a signature, seal the envelope, attach a stamp, and get it to the post office? As an issue of justice, who gets left out if the only means of communication is through the Internet?*

Invite the participants to write personal letters of encouragement to individuals who work for justice. Have them identify missionaries through the denominational contact information. Have them identify family, friends, and church members engaged in justice work. Young people in high school and college are sometimes involved in the community as volunteers, perhaps even to fulfill required hours for community service. Pastors in local churches, international exchange programs, or denominational ministries would appreciate receiving a letter of support—even a simple thank you. Participants could also send greetings to local workers for justice at homeless shelters, food pantries, crisis intervention centers, Habitat for Humanity projects, community clinics, or the Salvation Army. Perhaps you know someone, even a next door neighbor, who has volunteered at the hospital for over ten years. As a group, brainstorm ideas and list them on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Participants’ letters can be general in composition. *Explain who you are, where you are from, what you do, and why you are writing. You could also mention that you are a minister on a common mission (1 Peter 2:9) to bring justice, peace, and wholeness to God’s world.* Participants could choose a partner and exchange addresses so that notes or cards can be sent to each other during the week.

As a group, compose on the newsprint or whiteboard a note of support and encouragement from God, our source of hope and comfort.

Prayer: *O God, our help in ages past, and our hope for years to come, thank you for the wise and wonderful people who nurtured me in my faith through their cherished traditions. Thank you for worn and weathered hands that took hold of mine and led me to a sanctuary where I could worship you and to a church school where I could learn about you. Thank you for the extended and helping hands that invited me on a mission or service project. Thank you for folded hands that taught me to pray and to believe that my prayers would help shape this world into a more compassionate and caring place. Instill in my heart this same desire and passion as I extend a welcoming and affirming hand to seekers and new church participants of all ages, interests, and backgrounds. I pray this in the name of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.*

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

### 2 Daily Missions

**Leader preparation:** For my father and grandfather, working at a steel mill was their daily call and mission. It provided a roof over our heads, clothed and fed us, and helped to pay for our education. Their spirits were fed by a strong faith and by going to mass whenever it was possible. Their attitudes and approaches were formed by devotion and dedication to the quality of their work and the respect, commitment, and loyalty displayed to coworkers. This activity provides an opportunity for the group to recall, lift up, and honor the vocational calling of a relative or friend, living or deceased.

Take time to remember the vocations of your parents and grandparents, and reflect on your own employment history. What positive effects do your daily efforts have on family, coworkers, and community? Do you give yourself enough credit for your hard work? Are you happy with what you are doing, or do you feel a certain restlessness to explore new options? Is it time to talk and pray with someone about this?

#### Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Greet your “co-laborers in Christ” and ask everyone to do the same. Take a few moments to find out how everyone’s week went. Invite participants to tell stories of hard-working loved ones on their daily missions of work. Not everyone has a job (work for which they are paid), but everyone has a vocation, a calling. For some it is to be a stay at home parent; for others it may be to be a volunteer; for others the vocation and job are the same, doing what they feel called to do, such as educators, ministers, or accountants. Ask participants to identify ways they can minister to others in the places where they pursue a vocation, such as work, school, neighborhood, or volunteer scene. List these ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Highlight the top ten ways one can represent Christ and work for justice in these places. As a group, compose a daily prayer for working people, and write that on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Form a circle. Ask each participant to name his or her vocation or job, and offer thanks to God for all their gifts, talents, and daily efforts. Pray together the prayer you wrote for working people.



### 3 Treasures in the Attic

**Leader preparation:** What board games do you like to play? The title of this activity brings to mind a game we played with our children called “Jewels in the Attic.” The game board was in the form of a house. Players made their way through rooms seeking clues. Reaching the top, the winner would be rewarded with a “jewel,” something of great value. In your basement, attic, garage, or closets, go on a treasure hunt of your own. What you find may bring back the meaning or importance affiliated with relationships, significant events, lessons learned, wisdom gained, and periods of deep personal spiritual and emotional growth. Bring these with you. If you have time, ask some other participants to do the same. All too often we lock away these symbols where they are easily forgotten. It is time to release these rich and rewarding memories by bringing your treasures to this activity.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>
- song: “Singing for Our Lives” by Holly Near; words on Holly Near website, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21a>; video, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21b>
- index cards

Share the peace of Christ and greet one another “with your whole hearts as valuable treasures” (Matthew 6:21). Display your treasures, and tell the stories connected with them. Invite others to tell stories of some of their treasures (even if they didn’t bring anything to show to the group). Items on display may inspire of memory someone else has of a treasure at home or stored at their parents’ home. Then pose these or similar questions:

- Now that you have “rescued” this treasure, what do you plan to do with it?
- In what ways can the things we treasure be symbols of our desire to “be near to the brokenhearted” and help to “rescue them from their troubles” (Psalm 34:17–18)?

Display “Tar Beach II.” Have participants count the treasures in this painting and describe why each object might be a treasure. Ask participants to identify ways our treasures can be shared with someone who feels the world has not been just or fair lately.

Listen to or read the lyrics for the song “Singing for Our Lives.” *If people you know are angry and hurt, what treasure would you give them from your house to change their attitudes and outlooks?*

Together, read and reflect on Psalm 34:15–22. Have participants copy verses 17 and 18 on index cards. *If you are planning to give a treasure away, attach this card to it.*

In closing, ask participants to close their eyes, imagine a bright shining jewel, and find the face of Jesus in it. As a benediction, read Luke 12:32–34 together.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Laying the Foundation (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** One of the funniest Christian clowning skits I have ever seen involved a rather incompetent team of carpenters. Every time they attempted to raise the walls of a church, it all came tumbling down. Finally, in exasperation, the crew leader held up a sign asking, “Is there a Carpenter in the house?” Have you ever taken part in a mission trip or service project where all your best-laid plans fell apart? Did the work you were promised never materialize? Was there little or no supervision once you arrived? Instead of having an opportunity to put your faith into action, did you stand around a lot being bored and grumbling? These are among the many reasons why it is important to lay a solid foundation for such an endeavor. Do the research, allow plenty of time for preparation and planning, get to know one another through group building activities, and seek the support and involvement of your church and other sponsoring organizations. In this activity, your group will have the opportunity to practice planning for a mission trip.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- building blocks (perhaps from the church nursery), books, hymnals, paper plates and cups (or anything that can be stacked)
- “Laying the Foundation for a Mission Trip,” Attachment: Activity 4
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Divide the group into teams of three to four participants. Have each team read Jesus’ parable about the wise and foolish builder (Matthew 7:24–27) and develop a skit or mime to illustrate the scripture. Then invite each team to perform for the rest of the group.

Then provide each team with an identical set of stacking materials, such as building blocks, books from the church library, hymnals from the sanctuary, or paper plates and cups from the kitchen. See which team can build the highest structure before it collapses. Ask: *What did you learn about working with a team to accomplish a goal?*

Invite the group to lay the foundation for planning a mission trip. Use the attachment “Laying the Foundation for a Mission Trip” as a working document.

Together, read aloud Matthew 7:24–27. Have participants silently reflect on those times when missions were successful and when they were not. *What lessons did you learn when things did not turn out the way you anticipated?*

## 5 We’re Glad to Have Done It That Way Before

**Leader preparation:** When people have tried to do new things, especially in churches, they often hear, “We’ve never done it that way before!” Some seasoned workers for social justice might tell you that they are “glad to have done it that way before.” Invite persons in leadership positions who helped plan and participate in service projects or participants from previous mission trips to come to your group and tell their stories. Ask members of the team who crafted your mission statement how they went about their business. Welcome long-time community activists who have been at the cutting edge of social change. Be prepared to share some of your own experiences in working for justice.

**Supplies:**

- invited guests
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles
- glasses
- water in a pitcher
- a loaf of uncut bread

Invite your guests to tell their stories. In what specific ways have their ministries helped to lay a foundation for those who desire to work for justice in the present and in the future? List their answers on the bottom of a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Their stories and ideas will lay a foundation for the group’s discussion. Build on that foundation by asking the group to add their own experiences, ideas, and perspectives. Put each idea in a building block on top of the foundation. At the very top, write “All to the glory and praise of God.”

Ask for two volunteers, one to read John 6:56–58 and the other to read John 7:37–39. Explain that no matter what we do, where we do it, and how we do it, we are to be “living water” and provide “daily bread” in service to God and others. This water is an ever-flowing stream from past to present to future. When it comes to



God's big picture, we all have important things to share and roles to play. Serve one another water and bread. Pray together for those who go on mission trips and for those who host mission trips that all involved may know God's grace

## 6 "Just" Pot Luck

**Leader preparation:** A mainstay of Christian fellowship is the potluck meal. This tried-and-true approach invites people to "stick around" after church to visit. Even in the smallest churches, there is a great a variety of home cooking and plenty for everyone to eat. Since we are all sisters and brothers in Christ, what if we were to invite some of our extended family to share in this bounty of blessings? Dig out your favorite covered-dish recipes, and ask your group to do the same. Depending on the time of day you plan to have your potluck, these can be breakfast, brunch, lunch, appetizer, or dinner recipes. When you speak with participants about this, ask them to consider this question: If your church were to serve a room full of invited guests, persons you have never met before, what would you make for them? You can even begin to assemble your own group recipe book.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint and markers or whiteboard
- covered dishes for potluck meal
- plates, cups, and utensils
- beverages

Invite the group to participate in a potluck meal. Depending on when your group meets, this could be a breakfast, brunch, or simply appetizers. When everyone has been served, offer a blessing by taking turns and completing this statement: "Bountiful God, I praise and thank you for potlucks because . . ." While you are eating, talk about having another potluck. *What would be like to invite guests from the community, perhaps persons from a local homeless shelter, neighbors who are going through a difficult time, or residents from a care facility without family or friends, or another congregation that is struggling to keep its doors open?* Think about taking the potluck to the place where the people are rather than expecting people to come to you. *How might you involve the whole church in your plans?* List the group's ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Read Isaiah 25:6–9 together. Then have participants close their eyes and imagine a potluck meal arranged by God. At God's table there will be room for all and nobody will go hungry. At God's table there will be no more pain and suffering. At God's table each person will be able to see the faces and hear the voices of loved ones who have gone to be with God. Then revisit your table blessing by saying again, "Bountiful God, I praise and thank you for potlucks because . . ."

## Sending & Serving Activities



## 7 Time Out (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Do you remember when your parents gave you that look and said, "Time out"? It usually meant that you were not following instructions or not getting with the program, or maybe you simply needed some alone time to think things over. Much of this activity will be devoted to individual prayer and reflection, so take a "time out" of your own. Find your favorite hiding place and share some quiet moments with God. Set aside competing thoughts



and distractions. Put aside petitions and praises and simply feel the embrace of God's loving arms. God loves to have your complete and undivided attention, even if it only for a few moments each day.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper

Make sure that there is an empty chair in your meeting area. In your best parental voice, tell everyone to stop talking and quickly find a seat. Point to the empty chair and warn that they are still not too old for a "time out." Discuss what things got them into the kind of trouble that, as a child, resulted in being put in time out or, as an adolescent, resulted in being grounded. *As an adult, what benefits do you see in time out?* List these ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Ask: *What things distract us from our relationship to God?* List these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Then read Psalm 34:15–22 together. Distribute paper, and ask the participants to divide the paper into two columns. In one column, have them write things that distract them. In the second column, have them write what they might do to be more responsive to God's call and "be near to the brokenhearted and save the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

Explain that one of the great traditions of the historical church is contemplative silence and that you are going to lead them through a time of such silence.

Quietly ask participants to relax and sit in quiet contemplation, feeling God's embrace. Keep your voice low. Invite them to take a few deep breaths and block out anything that is competing for their attention. Allow time for each step; do not hurry. *Imagine sharing hugs with the people who have most helped you to grow in your faith. Let any distractions drift in and out of your awareness and put your full focus on the index card and what you have asked the Holy Spirit of the Living God to help you with.*

Close by saying the Prayer of our Savior, stopping briefly to emphasize "Your will be done!"



### 8 Who Wants to Be A Millionaire—a Philanthropist?

**Leader preparation:** A million dollars sure isn't worth what it used to be. Yet you've got to admit that it would still be a thrill if Howie Mandel (host of "Deal or No Deal") said, "You made a good deal," or Meredith Vieira (host of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?") announced that you answered the last question correctly. What would you do if someone handed you a check for a million dollars? How much of it would you save, spend, and give away? Here is an opportunity to make all members of your group millionaires. Through this simulated allocation and distribution of funds, they will have the opportunity to answer this question: "If someone gave you a million dollars, what would you do with it?"

*Note:* If you need to make your own money, here are some useful links:

- [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_5103208\\_make-printable-play-money.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_5103208_make-printable-play-money.html)
- <http://freestuff4kids.net/2007/02/12/printable-play-money>

Feel free to add some zeros. There is no such thing as a million-dollar bill (unless you are playing the game of "Life"), but you have permission to use them for this activity. Just don't try to spend it at the mall!

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- play money
- Bible
- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt17>
- a recent financial report of the church
- (optional) video: Tevye singing “If I Were a Rich Man,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBHZFYpQ6nc>

Greet people with the excitement and enthusiasm of a game show by asking, “Who wants to be a millionaire?” Invite the participants to name their favorite game shows and game show hosts. Announce that you, “Wink” (fill in your last name), have declared them all to be winners, and then distribute the equivalent of one million dollars to each one. (You could also give each a phony check for the same.) There is only one condition. Each will have to give his or her million away to his or her preferred social-justice cause. Have participants work individually or with partners to make a list of the ministries, programs, and causes that will benefit. List these on newsprint or a whiteboard, and then narrow the list to just a few. Compare this list with the missions and ministries your church supports (as reported on the church’s financial statement). *Would you like to add one or more from your list? What percent of the church budget, both revenue and expenditures, are related to mission and outreach?*

Read aloud the story of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18–23. After everyone is comfortable with the details of the story, ask: *If the rich young ruler had just won a million dollars on “Deal or No Deal,” would Jesus have expected him to give up every last cent? What are we supposed to do with our wealth?*

Display Diego Rivera’s “Vendedora de Piñas.” Ask: *In dollars and cents, how much do you think these pineapples are worth? How much do you think they are worth to this woman? To her, would giving up the pineapples be like giving up the million dollars you just won? What difference is there between giving away one million pretend dollars and giving ten percent (a tithe) of your income?*

*Option:* In a spirit of celebration for the generosity of your millionaires, show the video from *Fiddler on the Roof* in which Tevye sings “If I Were a Rich Man.” Invite everyone to dance and sing with Tevye, if they would like. This is a joyful affirmation of giving and a recognition that individual tithes and offerings support acts of justice in the face of injustice.

Close by making a circle and joining hands. Invite each person to fill in the blank: “Generous God, I am thankful for \_\_\_\_\_, which is worth more than a million dollars to me!”

**Starting a (Church) Family Tradition**

**Leader preparation:** As a child we always had Christmas Eve dinner at Grandpa’s house. It featured some unusual vegetarian fare, such as sauerkraut soup, and was rooted in Slovak traditions. My cousins and I were more interested in the unconsecrated wafers we dipped in honey and the stack of presents under the tree. My children have asked about this and other family traditions from time to time, and we established a few of our own along the way. In reflection, ask yourself: In what specific ways do you still celebrate the way your grandparents and your parents did? Do your children carry on some of the rituals that they learned from you? Why is this important?

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- stories, pictures, and memorabilia related to family traditions
- “Affirmations of Faith Old and New,” Attachment: Activity 9
- video: clip from *Fiddler on the Roof* in which Tevye sings about “Tradition,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRdfX7ut8gw>

Welcome participants and invite them to share a tradition of the early Christians and greet one another with a handshake, embrace, or the mark of a Christian symbol such as the *ichthus* (fish). Invite participants to describe some of their family traditions, both old and new.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22 together. *In what ways did the acceptance of Gentiles lead to the blending of new rituals, doctrines, and traditions in the early Christian church? Talk about the traditions in the churches you’ve attended. If you changed churches, did those traditions change as well? When did you witness or participate in the beginning of a new tradition?*

In small groups, have participants discuss establishing new traditions in your congregation that emphasize working for justice. These could include holding a bake sale and craft show to benefit a woman’s shelter, hosting a neighborhood meal for those in need, taking up a monthly collection of nonperishable goods for the local food pantry, or offering a Christmas concert featuring the talents of local musicians who will donate the proceeds to the Salvation Army. Ask each group to design a poster to promote a new tradition.

Show the clip from *Fiddler on the Roof* in which Tevye sings about “Tradition.” Keep in mind that in this musical, Tevye proved to be a rather open-minded fellow, ready to begin new traditions while still honoring the old ones, even though it was not easy.

## Reflect

Okay, Tevye! You have officially danced your way through this set of activities. By your actions, past, present and future, you have responded and will continue to respond to God’s call. You are the comma after the prophet Micah’s invitation to practice your faith by “doing justice and loving kindness” (Micah 6:1–8). Not only have you handed down your faith traditions and started new ones, but you have carried them out in your thoughts, words, and deeds. So don’t despair or be discouraged when the injustices all around us seem overwhelming. As one who works and advocates for justice, those insights and approaches that are uniquely yours have already begun to take root and will impact generations to come in most positive and lasting ways.

Explain that through our many traditions, we honor and praise “Jesus Christ the cornerstone of the foundation laid by prophets and apostles” (Ephesians 2:20). Another ancient tradition of the Christian church is the Apostles’ Creed, a statement of faith. Some churches have written more contemporary affirmations of faith. Distribute the handout, and invite discussion on the similarities and differences among the three affirmations of faith

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**Attachment: Activity 9**

**Affirmations of Faith Old and New**

**United Church of Christ Statement of Faith**

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit,  
who is made known to us in Jesus our  
brother,  
and to whose deeds we testify:

God calls the worlds into being,  
creates humankind in the divine image,  
and sets before us the ways of life and  
death.

God seeks in holy love to save all people  
from aimlessness and sin.

God judges all humanity and all nations  
by that will of righteousness  
declared through prophets and  
apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our  
crucified and risen Lord,

God has come to us  
and shared our common lot,  
conquering sin and death  
and reconciling the whole creation to its  
Creator.

God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit,  
creating and renewing the church of  
Jesus Christ,  
binding in covenant faithful people of all  
ages, tongues, and races.

God calls us into the church  
to accept the cost and joy of  
discipleship,  
to be servants in the service of the whole  
human family,  
to proclaim the gospel to all the world  
and resist the powers of evil,  
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at  
his table,  
to join him in his passion and victory.

God promises to all who trust in the  
gospel  
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,  
courage in the struggle for justice and  
peace,  
the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and  
rejoicing,  
and eternal life in that kingdom which  
has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be  
unto God. Amen.

**Attachment: Activity 9** *(continued)*

**A Disciples Affirmation**

As members of the Christian Church,

We confess that Jesus is the Christ,  
the Son of the living God,  
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of  
the world.

In Christ's name and by his grace  
we accept our mission of witness  
and service to all people.

We rejoice in God,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and in the covenant of love  
which binds us to God and one another.

Through baptism into Christ  
we enter into newness of life  
and are made one with the whole  
people of God.

In the communion of the Holy Spirit  
we are joined together in discipleship  
and in obedience to Christ.

At the table of the Lord  
we celebrate with thanksgiving  
the saving acts and presence of Christ.

Within the universal church,  
we receive the gift of ministry  
and the light of scripture.

In the bonds of Christian faith  
we yield ourselves to God  
that we may serve the One  
whose kingdom has no end.

Blessing, glory and honor  
be to God forever. Amen.

Preamble to the Design for the Christian  
Church (Disciples of Christ)

**The Apostles' Creed**

*Developed between the second  
and ninth centuries*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our  
Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the  
Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated on the right hand of  
the Father.

He will come again to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

New people bring energy, enthusiasm, and excitement to any situation along with an infusion of fresh ideas and approaches. Don't you wish you could bottle it up and save some for more established groups and programs? With this set of activities, just plug in the participants and turn them loose. With their motivation and desire, seekers and new church participants are on a mission to grow in their faith and share it with others by "telling the story of Jesus and his love" in thought, word, and deed. So if your batteries are running low, get those jumper cables out and tap into a reliable and renewable energy source. Enjoy the experiences of practicing your faith with this enthusiastic and idealistic bunch. And don't be surprised when their leadership skills begin to emerge in exciting and unexpected ways.

### About this Exploration

All are created in the image of God, children of God, unique and diverse in our own context. Jesus imagined a different reality from the one in which he lived; Jesus imagined the realm of God, rooted in love and justice. When working for justice, we see the face of God in others around us. God is angered by injustice, and we are called to respond. When we explore context and mission, we wake up to the just and unjust realities of our local communities and world—and are called to action.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Proverbs 22:1-2,  
8-9, 22-23  
Romans 13:8-14**

## Leader Preparation

“We’re on a mission from God,” Elwood Blues said to his brother Jake in the classic film *The Blues Brothers* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzOHq5WbQ8k>). Like the participants in your group, they had gifts to share, were filled with energy and determination, and had a singular focus on responding to their calling to save the Catholic home where they were raised. This set of activities provides opportunities for the practice and practical application of identifying and carrying out our own mission from God.

During the exploration of any of faith practice, leadership skills may begin to emerge. One of the most challenging and unpredictable things for a group facilitator is to “get the ball rolling” and step aside as others begin to step forward to take the lead. But isn’t that what happened to the disciples on Pentecost? Jesus stepped back and sent a helper and advocate to set them free from their doubts, fears, inhibitions, and guilt. Paul, who definitely fit the definition of a “man on a mission,” recognized that we all have a calling to the ministry within the “body of Christ.” When your group has that look that says they are on a mission and begins to run on all cylinders, the best thing you can do as a leader is affirm and applaud their efforts and step back.

Prayer: *Affirming and energizing God, when I lead this group, it feels like I am*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Rainbow Streams (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** On a mission trip to Vermont our team witnessed a spectacular double rainbow streaming into the mountains. People pulled to the side of the road to take pictures. Have you ever seen a rainbow that took your breath away? Were you able to grab your camera before it disappeared? Some of our most memorable photographs are the ones we take and keep in our imaginations. The next time a seemingly endless string of dreary overcast days dampens your spirits, crack open your internal photo album, release one of those rainbows, and see what a difference it will make.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- paper
- markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- tape
- (optional) song: “This Little Light of Mine,” [http://makingmusicfun.net/html/f\\_printit\\_free\\_printable\\_sheet\\_music/this-little-light-of-mine-piano-solo.htm](http://makingmusicfun.net/html/f_printit_free_printable_sheet_music/this-little-light-of-mine-piano-solo.htm)

Distribute paper and markers or crayons, and invite the participants to draw the most beautiful rainbow they have ever seen. As they work, have them tell the stories that go along with those rainbows. Where were they? What were they doing at the time they noticed the rainbow? Why is that particular rainbow memorable? Explain that just as God’s rainbow of hope extends to us, we are like rainbows projecting an “armor of light that helps to lay aside works of darkness” (Romans 13:12). Invite persons to share current news stories of events that cry out for the hope and light of acts for justice. Envision your spectrums of light streaming into those situations. Imagine your reds bringing passion and excitement; your oranges bringing dynamic energy, vitality, and healing; your yellows bringing happiness and optimism; your greens bringing generosity; your indigos bringing deep thinking and personal insights; and your blues bringing loyalty and reassurance. All these qualities are gifts from God and, if channeled properly to the right time and place, could be some of your greatest assets on a “mission from God.”

Consider these questions together:

- When you are on a mission, when is it better to be energetic and excited, and when is it better to be calm and reassuring?
- How might you balance being too passionate or too laid back while serving God and others?
- There are occasions when you will travel to unfamiliar places on a mission trip. Until you really get to know the people you are serving, why might it be beneficial to hold in check your outward responses and reactions?

To close, display all the rainbows participants drew, and ask that each participant imagine one specific person or situation that needs light. Pray silently about this. Then read Romans 13:8–14 together.

If you know the words to “This Little Light of Mine,” you could sing it in closing. If someone knows it, that person could line it out for everyone to follow along.

on a mission. Thank you for giving me the gifts, talents, and the opportunity to do this. Grant me the foresight and patience to channel and release the energy and ideas that this group brings. Instill in me the gift of discernment so that I can decide whether it is time to take the lead or stand back and let the leadership skills of others emerge. Remind all of us that we are on a mission and working toward the same goal: a just world filled with hope and endless possibilities for all your children. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

### 2 Scattered Seeds

**Leader preparation:** Scattered seeds that grow into wildflowers are often caught up in shifting winds. That image can readily represent the Holy Spirit of the Living God. The only guarantee is that the seeds we scatter in mission will produce a harvest somewhere, sometime. It is all in the hands of the One who provides the sun and the rain, and our co-laborers who clear the weeds. To prepare for this activity, go for a walk on your favorite trail, or visit a local greenhouse or florist. Find a patch of wildflowers, and then "ooh" and "aah" at the brilliance and the beauty of God's handiwork. You are also God's beautiful flower, ready to bring hope and encouragement to anyone in need.

#### Supplies:

- wildflower seeds
- Bibles
- watering can
- song: "All Good Gifts," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33U8saXFV4E>, or "We Plough the Fields and Scatter" (tune: Wir Pflugen), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/w/e/p/weplowtf.htm>

Meet outside. Explain that this is truly a group activity, and everyone has a part to play. The results will not be immediately realized. Read Matthew 6:28. Pass around the packet of seeds, pouring some into the hands of the person next to you saying, "Learn from the wildflowers." Then scatter the seeds where you choose. As a symbol of the "living" water represented by Jesus, take turns watering the seeds.

Talk about those mission experiences when it took time for the results to fully blossom. *Were you discouraged at first? How did you work your way through these feelings and keep your focus? Did other "missionaries" step in and take over, tending to the seeds you scattered? How did it feel when everything came into full bloom?*

For closing, listen to "All Good Gifts," a song from *Godspell*, or "We Plough the Fields and Scatter." Silently reflect on seeds you planted that have not yet come into full bloom. Ask God to continue to "feed and water" these seeds.

### 3 Little Boxes That Don't Look the Same

**Leader preparation:** "Home is where the heart is," or so the saying goes. What sets your home apart from the others in the neighborhood? Is it the color of paint? Is it the design, the size, the landscaping? What are the distinct qualities and characteristics of the people who live in all those homes? A group of diverse individuals become a family on a mission from God. They don't look, feel, think, and act the same, but they have one important thing in common: a spirit of hospitality. Think of the people you call "neighbor." Their home may not be the same as yours because, for instance, you are Protestant and they are Catholic. Perhaps their children go to a private school while yours attend a public school. They are blue collar while you are white collar. They play country music at their family picnics, and you roll down the car windows and turn up the volume on your rock and roll. Yet you are like one big family, picking up newspapers and mail for one another, taking care of pets, and babysitting kids. Their door is always open to you as yours is to them.

**Supplies:**

- markers, scissors
- glue
- duct tape or masking tape
- boxes of all shapes and sizes
- index cards
- pens and pencils
- Bibles

Have participants, in teams of two or three, design and build houses with various-size boxes. Somewhere on the house, each team should write these words from Romans 8:9–10: “Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor.” Upon completion, form a parade of homes. Ask the builders what is special and endearing about each house, making it so much more than “a little box on the hillside.” Talk about the ways we can be good neighbors, even and especially to people outside of our neighborhoods. *Rather than a “home being where the heart is,” what is it within our hearts that helps to make others feel at home?*

Hand out index cards, and ask each participant to list the ways he or she practices hospitality. On the other side, each can write the ways he or she would like to be more hospitable. Suggest participants put the cards in their homes. In closing, pray that in our diversity, whenever we are called to a ministry and mission, God will grant us a common spirit of hospitality.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 And the Good News Is . . . (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Even when we are refreshed, energetic, and ready for a productive day, bad news in the morning can knock the wind right out of our sails. Do you feel that we are surrounded more by negatives than positives? Pick up a morning paper and count headlines. Keep a tally during the nightly news. Some church participants spend more time wringing their hands over the things that are going wrong rather than recognizing and affirming the things going right. Are optimists more effective workers for justice than pessimists? Will someone with a glass that is half full be a more effective minister than one with a glass that is half empty? Perhaps this activity will give you a better idea of how to answer these questions.

**Supplies:**

- paper, pens, and pencils
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles

Ask the participants to rate the past week on a scale from 1 (stellar, outstanding) to 5 (worst ever). Invite volunteers to explain why they chose a particular number. *In what ways does the daily news affect your outlook for the day ahead? What stories capture your attention the most? Church attendance often increases during a crisis. How do the happenings in the world affect your faith? How does the way you live affect what you believe—and vice versa?* Invite people to name current events at the global, national, and local levels. List them on newsprint or a whiteboard. Mark the positive events with one color and the negative events with another. Then tally the results.



If the negatives outnumber the positives, would participants say this provides an accurate picture? *Are the publishers—even the news media—just trying to sell their product? When your team is on a mission from God, does a negative or positive working environment have an effect on morale? If you are not feeling hopeful about the ministry to which you are called, what can you do to change your outlook?*

*Suppose the headlines written about a mission trip or service project you took part in were negative. Take some deep, cleansing breaths and fill yourselves with the presence and possibilities of the Advocate and Comforter, God's Holy Spirit. Now redirect your thoughts and change your attitudes and actions for a different outlook and outcome.*

Close by reading Proverbs 22:22–23. “God is still speaking” by being active and involved in all of creation. Hateful, hurtful, discouraging things may write the headlines, or the crawls at the bottom of the TV screen, but God controls the big picture.

## 5 Laugh with Me

**Leader preparation:** “Laugh and the world laughs with you. Cry and you cry alone.” Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote these words after she had comforted a grieving widow on the way to the governor’s inaugural ball in Madison, Wisconsin. You can read the whole poem online at: [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What\\_is\\_the\\_Poem\\_Laugh\\_and\\_the\\_worldLaughs\\_with\\_you\\_weep\\_and\\_you\\_weep\\_alone](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_Poem_Laugh_and_the_worldLaughs_with_you_weep_and_you_weep_alone).

Those of us who have either been laughed at or witnessed others being bullied and teased know all too well that there are exceptions to this well-known saying. The way we use humor is a justice issue. There is a fine line between lifting people’s spirits and hurting their feelings. Humor may also play a part in drawing attention to and acting on issues of social injustice. This is a good time to examine the role humor plays in your life. In what ways does your use of humor enhance or detract from the ministries to which you are called? Have you been able to let go of those times people made fun of you? If not, spend time in prayer and let God heal your hurts. Talk to someone you trust and release those pent-up feelings.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access

*Note:* Use these online articles to help determine what is offensive and what is not.

- “Workplace Humor: How to Reduce Stress with Inoffensive Office Humor,” <http://stress.about.com/od/workplacestress/a/officehumor.htm>
- [http://www.apwa.net/publications/reporter/reporteronline/index.asp?DISPLAY=ISSUE&ISSUE\\_DATE=122006&ARTICLE\\_NUMBER=1396](http://www.apwa.net/publications/reporter/reporteronline/index.asp?DISPLAY=ISSUE&ISSUE_DATE=122006&ARTICLE_NUMBER=1396)

Did Jesus laugh? There are gospel stories that indicate that he did (John 2:1–11, Mark 9:34–37). Sometimes laughter was at the expense of Jesus and the disciples (Matthew 27:27–31, Mark 15:16–20). *Have you ever seen an artist’s portrayal of laughing Jesus?* Have participants imagine themselves to be with Jesus and his disciples, sitting under a large shade tree at the end of a long hard day, laughing off the disagreements, hurts, rejections, and stresses. Then invite group members to share any funny stories and jokes they want to share.

Explain that appropriate laughter can relieve stress. But sometimes laughter comes at the expense of someone else, even if we don’t know that person. Jokes or



stories that focus on age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or social class are harmful. The use of humor can be a way of communicating messages that would otherwise be found to be offensive or hurtful. In mission situations, especially when different languages are involved, one must be very careful about using humor. *When we find ourselves ministering to others in new situations, how important is it to take time to learn the culture of the setting before introducing humor?*

Read Psalm 126:1–3 together. Explain that in our most difficult moments, when it feels like we are crying alone, God is working to restore happiness within our hearts and will be there to laugh with us. Then read together this excerpt from Luke 6:21: “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” Tell participants to lift up the names of persons for whom they wish joy and laughter in the coming week. Before leaving, share the passing of the peace and lots of smiles. *If there has someone you offended with your humor, quietly ask God for forgiveness, let go of it, and move on. Just because you made a mistake does not mean you should stop trying to bring joy into the lives of others!*

### ⑥ Keep a Lid on It

**Leader preparation:** As your group of seekers and new church participants has grown to know one another, chances are that there have been a few “friendly” debates involving political, social, and theological issues. This is inevitable when you are passionate about working for justice. These disagreements reflect the diversity of experiences and thoughts within your group. The key is balancing that passion and energy with restraint, patience, and mutual respect. Whenever people are called to a mission, their outlooks and opinions will come right along with them. Pray for and affirm all the persons in your group, especially those to whom you feel least connected and with whom you are uncomfortable, especially when you find yourself disagreeing with them.

Send out a notice before this session asking each participant to bring a favorite hat to the session.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles
- masking tape
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- hats (provide extras for those who may not bring one)

When everyone shows up, have a parade to show off the hats. Be adventurous—take it outside your meeting area. Take turns telling the stories associated with these hats. Then declare that in this activity, everyone should wear their hats and “keep a lid on it.”

After the parade, with everyone continuing to wear their hats, discuss these questions:

- When is expressing your political and religious opinions appropriate?
- How do your friendly and not so friendly debates affect attitudes and approaches to what you are doing?
- In mission and ministry with others, when might there be an appropriate time or situation to share such opinions?
- When do you need to keep a lid on it?



Have everyone take their lids (hats) off and talk respectfully about the political and social issues they deem most important. *Are there specific situations where you need to be especially careful before expressing these issues?* (Homelessness and Habitat for Humanity, hunger, health care and free clinics, education and after school programs, war and peace and disabled veterans, family planning, social security and those who are on fixed incomes, interfaith ministries) List suggestions on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Read Romans 13:8–10 together. Pray silently, asking God to open hearts and minds to thoughts and feelings that are different from your own. Pray for restraint when someone’s viewpoints really get under your skin. Pray for God to give each of us the right words to engage this person in constructive dialogue. Pray for less divisiveness in our public, political, and religious forums. Have each participant write Matthew 7:1 on a piece of masking tape: “Judge not lest you be judged.” Have each then place that tape on the inside of his or her hat. Suggest that each participant should also carry the saying inside of his or her heart while striving to treat others with love and respect, no matter how each feels about another’s opinions and outlooks.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Keeping Body and Soul Together (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** “Let’s go shopping!” means any number of things. If you’re low on food supplies, a trip to the grocery store is in order. If it’s time for the school year to begin, you may be visiting the mall or one of the “marts” for clothing and supplies. If it’s the day after Thanksgiving, your alarm clock may awaken you to all those Black Friday deals on gifts for loved ones. Many of us make up shopping lists so nothing will be forgotten. There are far too many people in this world who can make up lists of essentials, but who do not have the resources to purchase every item on them. For some, nonessential items must be eliminated! What if you were forced to choose between a quart of milk or orange juice, bread or cereal, vegetables or fruit, eggs or meat? This activity will take you to a time and place when these difficult decisions are a daily occurrence rather than an occasional inconvenience.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- “Understanding Poverty,” Attachment: Activity 7

Announce that it is “time to go shopping!” Form small groups, and have each group identify five essentials to get a person through one day and also five essential monthly expenses. Bring the small groups together. Make three columns on newsprint or whiteboard. Using the groups’ lists, compile a top five list in each of the two categories. In the third column, make a list of occasional expenses, such as medical bills, car maintenance and repair, taxes, and so forth. What is the group’s best estimate of the monthly cost of what is on the list? Distribute the attachment “Understanding Poverty.” Based on this information, how might a family living in poverty amend the group’s list?

*If you had enough money to pay every utility bill except one, which bill would you choose not to pay? If one member of the family had to go without health insurance to make ends meet, which one would make this sacrifice?*



Then ask: *What is the meaning of the phrase “Keeping Body and Soul Together”?* Point out that throughout the world—including in North America—on a daily basis individuals and families make difficult choices about their money, their food, and their health.

Explain that there is a difference between charity and justice. Both are important. Charity tackles the immediate situation and serves those in need. Food pantries are one example of charity. Justice goes to the root of the problem and involves working for a systemic social change. Advocating for a fair living wage is working for justice. Ask: *In what ways might we be able to address the situation of poverty? Does our church collect donations to food pantries? Are these food offerings balanced and nutritious? How might your church assist with rent and utility expenses?*

Have the group read and reflect on Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23. *Rich or poor, we are all equals in the eyes of the One who created us. Visualize someone you know who struggles to make hard daily choices about his or her needs. Pray for new ideas and approaches to “sharing bread” with that person, and commit to following up on these in the coming week.*

Say together the Prayer of our Savior. Pause for a moment after “give us this day our daily bread” to acknowledge that we are all dependent upon God to fill our basic needs.

## 8 A Week’s Worth of Working for Justice

**Leader preparation:** Although most of them won’t be considered headline news, injustices occur all around us in our daily lives. Can any story be more compelling and significant than the coworker who was just laid off from work, or the neighbor who has to choose between buying groceries and filling a prescription? These are the unwritten headlines that demand our prayers, support, and encouragement. In advance, ask every member in your group to record in a small notebook any random or not so random acts of kindness he or she witnesses throughout the week. Here are some examples—build and expand on these as you choose:

- Coming to the aid of someone who just dropped a bag of groceries
- Letting someone else have the parking place that just opened up
- Cutting the grass or shoveling snow for a neighbor
- Buying a cup of coffee for someone who needs to talk
- Standing up for a classmate or coworker who is being bullied and harassed
- Offering a compliment or any other words of encouragement
- Giving a smile

At the end of a week in the life of your group, you may be surprised at the number of good things happening right under your noses. You may also find that when the world’s injustices seem overwhelming, there are people all around “living honorably and putting on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12–13).

### **Supplies:**

- makers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper
- pens and pencils
- Bibles
- (optional) flashlights
- (optional) computer with Internet access



Without naming names, invite each participant to share one act of kindness he or she witnessed. Count up the acts all the participants identified in their notebooks, and add them up for a grand total. Write the number on the newsprint or whiteboard, and then draw a circle around the total with exclamation points. Talk about the good things quietly being done by workers and advocates for justice in your church and community.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Take a few moments and connect one or more of these virtues to the individual acts of justice in your notebook: patience, kindness, humility, selflessness, gentleness, truthfulness, faithfulness, hopefulness, and endurance. Then turn off the lights, turn on the flashlights, and read some of these to the whole group.

Keeping the flashlights on, read together Matthew 5:16 as a benediction: “Let your light so shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in Heaven.”

### 9 Penny and a Prayer

**Leader preparation:** The Fellowship of Christ’s Community is an ecumenical ministry sponsored by the Central Presbyterian Church in Zanesville, Ohio, and the Muskingum Valley Presbytery. Its mission is to “reach out to those with special needs who may not have received the Good News of Jesus Christ, and gather these people into a community of followers of Jesus who tells us, ‘You will always have the poor with you’” (Matthew 26:6). This ministry was started by the Rev. Bill Briggs, along with three other members of Central Presbyterian and three residents of the community. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and surrounding areas, the fellowship wanted to join other faith communities in offering support. Since their resources were limited, Rev. Briggs developed a stewardship program called “Penny and a Prayer.” Each penny that was put into a bank in support of this cause was accompanied by a prayer. Altogether there were 7,100 prayers to go along with the \$71 raised for the victims of Katrina’s wrath. Similar projects benefited the purchasing of sleep nets for Africa and the ongoing missions in Haiti. This activity offers an opportunity for your group to participate in a similar project.

#### Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- small self-adhesive color dots
- contact paper or construction paper
- scissors, tape
- containers to use for banks

Tell the story of the Fellowship of Christ’s Community. Talk about the times you saved your coins for the offering plate or a charity or cause you believed in. Devise your own version of “Penny and a Prayer,” and decide what kind mission and ministry you would like to support. This may be a local, national, or global project. Examples might be: buy enough food for a Thanksgiving basket in June, work on a Habitat for Humanity house, buy an animal through Heifer International.

Invite the group to brainstorm their ideas. Record these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Give each person three colored dots and have them vote for their preferences. They may use each dot on a separate item, use all three to vote for one item, or some other combination. When all have voted, look at the top three to five choices. When consensus is reached on one item, decide if you want this to be a penny project, a quarter project, a dollar project, or some other amount of



money. *Will this be a group project, or will you invite the congregation to participate with you? What is the timeline for your project? What is your goal?*

To make banks, participants can choose from a variety of recycled containers, such as oleo tubs, cottage cheese tubs, milk cartons, lunch meat containers, and so forth. A container can be covered with decorated construction paper or contact paper to make them more like little banks.

Close with a prayer of dedication, and invite the group to sing the doxology used in your worship services.

### Reflect

Just like at the end of an epic movie, upon completion of working through justice issues of the kind in this set of activities, you may feel like standing up and applauding. You are beginning to know and understand the core beliefs that drive and motivate these seekers and new church participants. In the process of applying their faith as willing workers for justice, leadership qualities as diverse and varied as each person have begun to emerge. In a way, you are all experiencing a series of Pentecost moments that will give the confidence to carry out the “missions from God” to which you are called. For your willingness to say yes to God and take on the role of facilitator and enabler, step back and pat yourself on the back. You are doing one of the best things you can do by believing in and affirming the God-given gifts and talents in others.

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Attachment: Activity 7

## Understanding Poverty

### Groceries

According to the Money Central website, groceries make up approximately 7.5 percent of the monthly budget. In dollars, a family with four people spends an average of \$540 a month, as of 2010, on groceries reports the Family Resource website.

The bottom 20 percent of earners spend an average of 12 percent of their annual income on food, the middle-level earners spend an average of 9 percent of their income on food, and the higher-income-level earners spend an average 6 percent of their annual income on food.

### Housing

The average family in the United States spends about 32 percent of its monthly income on housing. This includes rent or mortgage payments, property taxes, repairs and furnishings.

### Transportation

The average family spends about 18 percent of its income each month on transportation. This includes car payments as well as gasoline, maintenance and public transportation.

### Other

Health care and entertainment each receive about 5 percent of the average family’s budget each month, and clothing is close behind at 4 percent. Most families spend around 3 percent on cash contributions and 2 percent on education. Alcohol, tobacco, and personal care products round out the budget, at around 1 percent each.

2011 Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines

Persons in Family	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$10,890	\$13,600	\$12,540
2	14,710	18,380	16,930
3	18,530	23,160	21,320
4	22,350	27,940	25,710
5	26,170	32,720	30,100
6	29,990	37,500	34,490
7	33,810	42,280	38,880
8	37,630	47,060	43,270
For each additional person, add	3,820	4,780	4,390

Source: *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 13 (January 20, 2011), 3637–3638.

Source: "Average Family Budget Percentages," Average Family Budget Percentages | eHow.com, [http://www.ehow.com/facts\\_5036326\\_average-family-budget-percentages.html#ixzz1tctAXkWi](http://www.ehow.com/facts_5036326_average-family-budget-percentages.html#ixzz1tctAXkWi). Note: This website did not define an "average" family.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Do you remember when the original *Star Wars* movie came out? You can hear the theme song online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjMNNpIksaI>. Some of your group will recall where they went to see it and who they saw it with. Others will reminisce about watching the video and playing with their light sabers and figurines. Others will tell about hearing their parents talk about the movie. “In a galaxy (not so) far, far away,” we will soon be watching another prequel or sequel to one of our favorite science fiction stories. Isn’t it exciting to think about the future and what it may hold? Seekers and new church participants may be adventurous sorts who tend to look forward instead of backward. Do not miss a single opportunity to bring out and encourage the idealism, cutting-edge thinking, and creative energy within your group. It was this same restless, futuristic spirit that brought us the actions and words of prophets as well as our Savior’s encouraging words that he “would be with us always to the end of the ages” (Matthew 28:20).

### About this Exploration

Imagine a world where all are in right relationship with God, with other human beings, and all of God’s creation. Jesus calls us to help create this future where we live out God’s love in all that we are and all that we do. We do justice because we are inspired by God’s vision of healing and reconciliation, restoration and wholeness, and abundance for all. As a people of hope, we accept the call to be God’s hands and feet. In this future and vision exploration, we are challenged to stay focused on this hope as we live out God’s call to do justice.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Isaiah 58:1-14**  
**Matthew 25:31-46**

## Leader Preparation

How do you feel about the world today? Are you hopeful and encouraged, or feeling a little down and discouraged? How are things in *your* world? On your faith journey, are you satisfied with the direction you are headed, or are you feeling a little restless and unsettled? Before you look to the future with your group, spend time re-connecting with God in the present through prayer and discernment. Set all conflicting thoughts aside, turn off the noise and distractions, and open up a channel to Divine communication. Feel the overwhelming reassurance of a love that is complete and unconditional. Re-envision what God has planned for you on the next stage in your life.

George Bernard Shaw bemoaned the fact that “history repeats itself” and that we are sometimes “incapable of learning from the experience.” In this series of activities, we will attempt to relive and learn from history, gaining a whole new understanding of what it means to “have dominion over all the earth” (Genesis 1:28). It is our hope that today and in all our tomorrows, we will be able to envision the face of our still-speaking God looking over all creation saying, “It is very good.”

Prayer: *Eternal God, when your servant Abraham looked at the stars, he saw an endless line of descendants living in a land you prepared for them. When I look at the stars, I see endless possibilities to bring justice and peace to your people in all nations and*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Life Maps (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** A good way to reflect on where you have been and where you are going is to draw a life map. This “long and winding road” may feature your birthplace, churches and schools attended, work sites, important family events, memorable vacations, as well as staying true to the faith, notable mission trips, and service projects. When you reach the present place and time, extend your route and become a time traveler. What new and exciting things might you experience with your family, church family, and friends in the next few years? Where might you be working a decade from now? Will you still be worshipping at the same church? What doors will be opened to you as God puts your gifts and talents to work?

**Supplies:**

- poster board, newsprint, or large pieces of paper
- markers, colored pencils, crayons

Share the peace of Christ with one another. Take a few moments to talk about the places you’ve been and the interesting things you have done in the past week.

Invite the participants to draw their life maps. Explain that sometimes reflecting on past events and decisions helps us see patterns in our lives. It can also help us think about the direction we want to go in the future. Use poster board or newsprint so that your mapmakers have plenty of room to custom design their life journeys, past, present, and future. The idea of a life map is to make a visual representation of your life. The only skills you need are memory and imagination.

Have the participants think about the path their lives have taken. *How would you represent that path? With a straight line, a spiral, a curved line, a smooth or bumpy line, steps, with forks in the road? What major decisions did you make (fork in the road)?* Since there is limited time, suggest that they think about life in four-to-five year segments, dividing each segment into two parts. That might help condense their drawings. Encourage them to use colors, words, pictures, or symbols. They might include names of significant people and places in each segment. Have each put an asterisk next to any significant events that resulted from saying yes to God, such as a career choice or the choice of a significant other, a decision to volunteer or take a mission trip, a choice of tithing or spending money in other ways.

Have the participants project this life map into the future. *What decisions are you facing in the next four-to-five year segment? Starting a family, continuing education, moving, retirement, career change, increase or loss of income?* The participants may only have time to begin this project. Encourage them to continue working on their life maps at home. Invite those who are willing to share their maps with the rest of the group.

Ask everyone to stand over his or her map and reflect on the future course plotted. *Where have you included God’s guiding in your thinking?* Offer a prayer asking God for strength on the journey and for openness to taking a path directed by God.

places. When I begin to doubt the direction this world is going, don't let me even think one thought about giving up. Grant me the confidence, determination, and strength to use my gifts and talents and do my small, yet significant part on this day that you have made and in all my days to come. Through the advocacy and comfort of your Holy Spirit, reassure and remind me that one person can and does make a difference. Amen.

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

### 2 Re-creating Mr. Rogers

**Leader preparation:** From 1968 through 2001, Fred Rogers hosted the television show "Mister Rogers's Neighborhood." A gentle, soft-spoken man, he always wore a cardigan sweater. Could any of us find a more accepting, affirming, caring, and nurturing person to be re-made into?

Just for fun, you might contact members of the group and ask them to wear a cardigan sweater and sneakers. Then search your closets for the one sweater your dad wore for those early tee times and the one your mom wrapped herself up in on those cold winter mornings. In your group, at church, at home, at school and at work, how will you create a comfortable and welcoming neighborhood with your attitude and actions?

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- daily newspapers
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- video: "Mister Rogers's Neighborhood Intro Theme," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w9xk4hUKoQ&feature=related>
- (optional) cardigan sweaters and tennis shoes

Greet one another in a neighborly way. In his metaphorical poem "Mending Wall" Robert Frost quoted a seventeenth century proverb: "Good fences make good neighbors." Invite conversation about this statement. Do you agree or disagree? Describe a "Drabble" cartoon by Kevin Fagan that depicted two neighbors' yards divided by a fence topped with barbed wire. Then introduce the character of Mr. Rogers. Describe him for those who may not be familiar with the television program or with Fred Rogers. Show the video clip of "Mister Roger's Neighborhood." *Why were children able to relate so well to this man? Talk about other television images of neighbors. How are they depicted? How do those images compare with your neighbor relations? There was a time—and in some places still is—when the whole neighborhood raised all the children in the area. How might positive neighborly attitudes help us be more effective workers for justice?*

Read Matthew 25:31–46 together. *What if the village that raised our children was global in nature? As a group, use newsprint to draw a picture of the world as one big neighborhood. Have them include at least one aspect of the scripture reading in their artistic interpretation. Then read the news headlines, and have participants answer these questions: How would this headline read differently if it had occurred in Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood? What does our faith call us to do in the future as we create neighborhoods, both locally and globally?*

Close by have participants complete this statement: Today will be a beautiful day in my neighborhood because . . ." Tell group members to quietly reflect on the ways to recreate Mr. Rogers in the week ahead. The cardigan sweater and tennis shoes may be returned to the closet, but our spirits will continue to be dressed in the unconditional love and acceptance his life and ministry represented.



### ③ If They Were Alive Today (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In a 1968 song recorded by Dion, he asked: “Has anyone seen our old friends Abraham, Martin, and John?” He was referring to Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Kennedy. Would the world to which they witnessed be a step closer to world peace? Would noticeable progress have been made in one of the most honorable and just battles that was ever waged, the war on poverty? Have we begun to realize King’s dream that little children in every nation “will not be judged on the color of their skin”? Where were you when the lives of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy were senselessly and violently ended? If you were not yet born or too young to understand, when did you first become aware of these passionate and prophetic voices? If Abraham, Martin, John, and Bobby were with us today and able to stare into a crystal ball, what kind of future would they envision for us?

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint
- “Who Said It?” Attachment: Activity 3
- song: “Dream God’s Dream” by Bryan Sirchio; video, <http://video.search.yahoo.com/video/play?ei=utf-8&n=21&tnr=20&c=5&p=YouTube+Dream+God%27s+Dream+Schiro&vid=9aff0cd8e7b44576869b895c7eda3722&dt=1307664000&l=249&turl=http%3A%2F%2Fts2.mm.bing.net%2Fvideos%2Fthumbnail.aspx%3Fq%3D4808186366525473%26jd%3D5f695fa304062528fd6e6ae396bd59ef%26bid%3DFcjuqWRdpO79gg%26bn%3DLargeThumb%26url%3Dhttp%253a%252f%252fwww.youtube.com%252fwatch%253fv%253dL6RbIRGodrA&rurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DL6RbIRGodrA&tit=Slideshow+to+Bryan+Sirchio%26%2339%3Bs+Dream+God%26%2339%3Bs+Dream.wmv&sigr=11a2v4m55&newfp=1>

Ask: *Where did you first hear about Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Robert Kennedy?* Have participants share their experiences and stories about Martin, John, and Bobby, and invite others to do the same. These men had prophetic voices. Distribute the handout “Who Said It?” Participants can work alone or with others. Here are the answers: 1. J. Kennedy; 2. Jesus; 3. Lincoln; 4. R. Kennedy; 5. Jesus; 6. King; 7. J. Kennedy; 8. R. Kennedy; 9. Lincoln; 10. King. Ask: *Who are the prophetic voices of today?*

Read Isaiah 58:1–14 together. Ask participants to share their thoughts about how we can best respond to the prophet’s exhortations. *In what ways would your responses further the dreams of Abraham, Martin, John, and Bobby or contemporary prophetic voices?* Silently pray for the strength and vision for each to follow through on his or her plans.

Listen to the song “Dream God’s Dream.” And pray that God’s dream will become our dream.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Mountain High, Valley Low (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** How are you with heights? If you are cleaning leaves out of the guttering, do you break out in a cold sweat? Would mountain climbing to you be standing on top of a hill with your sled? Explaining how the prophets envisioned things, a seminary professor once drew a series of mountains with stick figures on the top of each one to represent the prophets. Then he explained that looking out over the horizon, the prophet could only see the peaks and not into the valleys below. In other words, the prophets could see major events (peaks) but not the series of minor events (valleys) that led up to these. In the life of the church, what major events do you see unfolding in the years ahead? What part will you play in the valleys of your daily life?

#### Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles

Greet everyone by first name along with the phrase “prophet of God and visionary.” On newsprint or a whiteboard, draw a mountain peak with the prophet Isaiah standing on top. Explain that he could see peaks with significant events to come but would not recognize or understand the daily happenings that led up to these. *Become Isaiah and stand on top of your favorite high place for awhile.* Ask if anyone is into mountain climbing and, if so, to share what the experience of reaching the top is like. Talk about the difference between “mountain top” and “valley” experiences and allow people time to share about both.

*From the perspectives you gain through the valleys of daily living, what future do you see for your family, our church, our nation, and our world in generations to come? Read aloud Isaiah 65:17–25, verse by verse, and have participants decide whether the prophet’s vision matches theirs. To what important events will this vision lead in the years to come?*

*Imagine yourself to be Isaiah at home, at church, at school, at work, and at play. As a prophet, how would your attitudes and actions be changed? In silence ask God’s Holy Spirit to put a little bit of the heart of Isaiah into your heart.*

### 5 The Church of the Future

**Leader preparation:** A popular movie and television genre is that of science fiction. It is imaginary but with more or less plausible depictions of future society. The book of Revelation provides an image of the future as well. Let your creative imagination run wild, like that kid who watched Saturday morning cartoons. Go ahead! Take a box of crayons, and design your own Church of the Future.

#### Supplies:

- paper
- crayons
- Bibles
- song: “Guide My Feet,” African American traditional (tune: Guide My Feet); video, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>; words and music, <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>



Pretend it is the year 2100. Share the peace of Christ in a futuristic way. Distribute paper and crayons or markers. Divide the paper in half. On one half have the participants draw a picture of their church now. On the other half have them draw and color an image of the church of the future. *What it will really be like to worship 50, 100, or even 200 years from now?* Organize an art show so your artists can explain their masterpieces.

Read Isaiah 58:1–14 together. Then lead a discussion using questions such as the following.

- Will the kinds of injustices Isaiah describes be eliminated by the year your church of the future opens its doors?
- If so, will the world finally be at peace?
- If not, what new injustices will have replaced the old ones?
- How active will your church be in combating these injustices, and how will they go about it?
- What can your church do now to address what might be these future issues?
- What will your services or worship be like?
- Will they always be held in the sanctuary, or will they sometimes feature service projects and take place in the community?

Have participants close their eyes and envision themselves as members of the church of the future. *How will you carry the message of compassion and social justice to this new world in which you live? If you were suddenly returned to the present day, what ideas from “The Church of the Future” would you bring back with you?*

Read Isaiah 58:13–14 again. Sing or speak the words to the song “Guide My Feet.” *Considering what kind of technology may be available in the future, with God guiding and leading us, will we still be using our feet?*



## 6 Danger, Danger!

**Leader preparation:** One of my favorite “futuristic” television programs was “Lost in Space.” Knowing that program was on that evening motivated me through my least favorite elementary school class—gym. Two of the show’s primary characters were Will Robinson, a “child prodigy in electronics,” and the Robot, “a class M-3 model B9, General Utility Non-Theorizing Environmental Control Robot.” A memorable line from the series occurred when the Robot warned Will of an imminent threat saying, “Danger, danger, Will Robinson!” When did your sense of well-being and personal safety last feel threatened? How did you react and respond? How did God’s presence help you to feel safe and secure?

### Supplies:

- newsprint
- paper
- markers and colored pencils
- Bibles
- video: “Lost in Space Best Tribute,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OepIWKoX3DM&feature=related>
- “Signs on the Road to Justice,” Attachment: Activity 6

Show the video from “Lost in Space” or a video from some other futuristic television program, such as “Star Trek” or “Stargate SG-1.” Then invite the group to name dangerous situations in which they found themselves. What was their immediate reaction? How did that affect how they viewed the future? On news-



print or a whiteboard, list dangerous situations that may arise in working for justice. *Where might these activities take place? How can you plan and prepare for personal safety?* Include caring for and seeing to spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.

Distribute the handout “Signs on the Road to Justice.” *In working for justice, when might each of these signs be helpful or necessary?* Explain, for example, that on future mission trips or service projects you will want to STOP and pray for guidance and safe keeping. If you are working too hard and too fast, you will want to SLOW DOWN a bit. If someone you are serving vehemently disagrees with you, you should YIELD until cooler heads prevail, even if this person is clearly in the wrong. Invite the group to create new signs for the future road to justice.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 My Mission Statement (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** To define or redefine the purpose for its existence, an organization often appoints a committee to write a mission statement. A mission statement makes a clear statement about purpose of the organization as well as its values. Sometimes, a mission statement will answer the question “Whom do we serve?” As a warm up, take time to ponder your calling. If you were asked to write a mission statement about your life and calling at this very moment, what would it say?

**Supplies:**

- “Mission Statements,” Attachment: Activity 7
- copy of your church’s mission statement
- paper and pens or pencils

Begin by asking if anyone has helped write a mission statement. Invite them to share their recollections, including what kind of organization it was and its primary goals and objectives. *What was difficult in the process? What were the road-blocks? What was positive about the experience? In what ways did the effort raise awareness and increase the effectiveness of the organization?*

Explain that an effective mission statement describes the main purpose of an organization or your ministry or church. It explains what you do, why you do it, and who your clients and constituencies are. Distribute copies of your church’s mission statement and the handout “Mission Statements.” Examine these statements to discover what, why, and who are identified in each.

Invite the participants to consider these or similar questions:

- Who am I? What makes me distinctive and unique?
- For what purpose did God create me?
- What are my assets including specific gifts and talents?
- How can I use my assets to fulfill the purpose to which I have been called?
- What do I seek to accomplish with my life?
- How can my efforts help bring justice and peace to this world.

Then have each participant write a personal mission statement. Tell participants to try to condense the mission statement into one or two sentences, beginning with “As a follower of Jesus Christ, my mission is . . .”



Invite those who are willing to share their mission statements with the group. Just as organizations and groups change and evolve, so do individuals. The purposes to which you were called may look very different ten years from now. Suggest participants keep what was written and safely store it away in a private time capsule to be opened at some future time and place. You could even find a place in your church for all of these time capsules and decide on a date to open them all together.



### ③ Light Sabers for Justice

**Leader preparation:** When the original *Star Wars* came out in 1977, all the kids had to have a light saber. The light saber was “capable of cutting through most anything except another light saber.” In the hands of a Jedi, they are almost unstoppable. In the hands of a follower of Jesus, the “light that shines before others so that they may see your good works” (Matthew 5:16) cuts through selfishness, greed, self-righteousness, intolerance, and cruelty. This activity may turn any aspiring Jedi—past, present, or future—into a disciple ready to take on our sinful and selfish ways.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- glue or tape
- scissors
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: “Kopf” by Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>.
- candle or flashlight for each participant
- video: “Every Lightsaber Ignition & Retraction,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ey3g6BmuTI>

Show the video of light sabers, “Every Lightsaber Ignition & Retraction.” Have the participants close their eyes as someone slowly reads Matthew 5:16. Then envision a different kind of light saber that is powered by the light of scripture. This weapon’s only casualty will be social injustices and their root causes.

On newsprint or a whiteboard, create a list of contemporary injustices. Give each person a large piece of paper, such as a sheet of newsprint or a double sheet of newspaper, and have them make a light saber. On the saber, after it is rolled into a tube, print the scripture Matthew 5:16.

Display “Kopf” by Miro. *Do you see the face of a victim of injustice in this painting? Could this also be the face of a regret and guilt-filled perpetrator? How can you shed light on the lives of victims and perpetrators so they can see the grace of Jesus Christ can make their lives hope-filled and brand new?*

Form a circle and light the candles or turn on the flashlights. Have participants focus on the light and imagine the presence of the Holy Spirit, active in the dancing of the flames. Ask them to imagine that fire representing the energy and passion for justice within each person’s inner spirit. Close by asking God for the courage and strength to wield the light saber you just made as an advocate for others in your daily lives.



## ⑨ We Only Serve Our Glasses Half Full

**Leader preparation:** Is your glass half empty or half full? There is the spirit of an optimist and a pessimist inside each of us. When it comes to identifying and acting on matters of social justice, a balanced outlook is a plus. It is an exhausting and time consuming process to invest energy and emotion into the causes and issues you care about the most. It's more than okay to be cautious and realistic about expectations and outcomes. But without a hopeful spirit that runs free like the wind and the flames of Pentecost, we will not be able to sustain our efforts and achieve the goals that we have prayerfully set.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt17>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- beverages
- cups
- current newspapers and magazines

Serve one another the beverages, filling the glasses half full. Do the same with any requests for refills. Talk about your week. *Has it been half full or half empty? Based on previous weeks, is there a trend?*

Display “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera. *By her facial expression, would you say this woman’s glass is half empty, half full, or somewhere in between? On what do you base your thought?*

On the newsprint or whiteboard, create a half-empty and a half-full column. Then have participants search the newspapers and magazines for stories. Come to a consensus regarding each story. Is it half empty or half full? Repeat the activity focusing on issues specific to your local community.

Read one or more of these passages: Matthew 26:11, Mark 14:7, or John 12:8. *When Jesus makes these statements, do you think he is feeling half empty or half full? If you had been one of his disciples, how would you have felt after hearing them? In what ways can working for justice help us turn our perspective from half empty to half full?*

Close with a prayer partner. Talk freely about the things that discourage you. Pray for each other that God’s Spirit helps transform your perspective from half empty to half full.

## Reflect

Your consistent and steady leadership helped create an environment where images of a more just and peaceful world were encouraged and hopes and dreams were shared. Today may lead to individual and corporate acts of justice tomorrow. In your group’s own unique ways, you acknowledged the importance of re-creating history in the days to come rather than reliving the mistakes that have been made in days past.

**Attachment: Activity 3**

**Who Said It?**

Where do the following quotations come from?

**a.** Jesus

**b.** John F. Kennedy

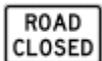
**c.** Martin Luther King, Jr.

**d.** Robert Kennedy

<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Who said it?</b>	<b>Agree, but...</b>	<b>Disagree, but...</b>	<b>Implication for the Future</b>
1. Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.				
2. Good people do good things because of the good in their hearts. Bad people do bad things because of the evil in their hearts. Your words show what is in your heart.				
3. Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable—a most sacred right—a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world.				
4. I believe that, as long as there is plenty, poverty is evil.				
5. What will you gain, if you own the whole world but destroy yourself?				
6. Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better.				
7. Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has so joined together, let no man put asunder.				
8. It is not enough to understand, or to see clearly. The future will be shaped in the arena of human activity, by those willing to commit their minds and their bodies to the task.				
9. America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves				
10. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.				

Attachment: Activity 6

Signs on the Road to Justice



**Attachment: Activity 7**

## Mission Statements

**3M:** 3M's commitment is to actively contribute to sustainable development through environmental protection, social responsibility and economic progress. To us, that means meeting the needs of society today, while respecting the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

**Charles Schwab:** To help everyone be financially fit.

**Google:** To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

**Microsoft:** To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential.

**Nike:** To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.

**Skype:** To be destructive but in the cause of making the world a better place.

**Starbucks:** Establish Starbucks as the premier purveyor of the finest coffee in the world while maintaining our uncompromising principles while we grow.

**Walgreen:** To be the most trusted, convenient multichannel provider and advisor of innovative pharmacy, health and wellness solutions, and consumer goods and services in communities across America. A destination where health and happiness come together to help people get well, stay well and live well.

### **United Church of Christ**

As people of the United Church of Christ, affirming our Statement of Faith, we seek within the Church Universal to participate in God's mission and to follow the way of the crucified and risen Christ.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called and commit ourselves:

- To praise God, confess our sin, and joyfully accept God's forgiveness;
- To proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our suffering world;
- To embody God's Love for all people;
- To hear and give voice to creation's cry for justice and peace;
- To name and confront the powers of evil within and among us;
- To repent our silence and complicity with the forces of chaos and death;
- To preach and teach with the power of the living Word;
- To join oppressed and troubled people in the struggle for liberation;
- To work for justice, healing, and wholeness of life;
- To embrace the unity of Christ's church;
- To discern and celebrate the present and coming reign of God.