

Working for Justice



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Young adults are often more comfortable with diversity than are those in previous generations. Living in a pluralistic and highly connected society, they are able to explore a wide variety of views as they try to discern their values and beliefs, rather than simply accepting those of their parents. They are tinkerers by nature, piecing together their faith from a large variety of sources. Yet, young adults might not be as clear about their own personal values as older adults are. Being exposed to a wide variety of viewpoints and a vast amount of information, they are less likely to spend time reflecting on what they themselves think. In discovering the concepts and practices of working for justice, the openness of young adults is an incredible gift. While older adults may find it harder to escape the standard views of our society, younger adults are more willing to look at issues in the world from a variety of perspectives, challenge the ways things are, and see a place for justice in the world and in their lives.

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 it, 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

As Christians, working for justice is an integral part of our lives. Discovering working for justice is exciting—working for justice engages us with the large global issues of our day and with the minutia of how we live our lives. Invite God to be present in your excitement, your anxiety, and your questions about discovering working for justice and leading a group through this Exploration.

Prayer: God of discovery, open my ears and my eyes and my heart so that in working with young adults I may make new discoveries and deepen my faith. Be present with me and with my group so that together we may uncover wonderful ideas of your call on our lives. 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.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 What Is Working for Justice? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: As you prepare to lead the discussion described in this activity, explore your own views on what working for justice is. Try to answer the questions for yourself. Keep in mind, however, that you are not here to instruct the group in the “correct” answer to these questions. Instead, you are exploring these questions with the group. In a Socratic seminar, the purpose of the leader is to ask guiding questions and create an atmosphere of open-minded inquiry. Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask?

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Lead the group in a Socratic seminar-style discussion of what working for justice means. Begin by brainstorming, asking: *When you think of working for justice, what comes to mind?* Invite participants to feel free to throw into the discussion whatever comes to mind—any words or phrases. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Once the group is ready, ask them to work together to come up with a definition of what working for justice is. You don’t need to come up with a precise, all-encompassing definition; it’s the process that matters, not the product. If necessary, to help the discussion, ask broad, prompting questions, such as:

- How do we work for justice?
- Why do we work for justice?
- When do we work for justice?
- What makes what we’re working for just?

You can also bring up some stories and ask if they are examples of working for justice, and why or why not. Examples that you might suggest include a church housing a homeless encampment, a man collecting signatures for a petition to lower taxes, a family recycling empty soda cans, a group of friends donating the income they don’t spend on necessities, or a woman working at a food bank. If participants think they need more information to know whether the stories are examples of working for justice, work to flesh out what information would be needed. *What determines just work: the motive behind the actions, the effects of the actions, both, or something else?* Encourage discussion among participants.

Conclude the discussion by asking participants to reflect on how the discussion has been for them. *What surprised you or changed your thinking? What will you continue to think about after this discussion? On a scale from 1–5, where would you rank your satisfaction with our description of working for justice?*



- 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 Imagine Justice

Leader preparation: Provide a wide variety of art supplies, including things to make drawings, paintings, collage, sculpture, and abstract pieces. Be creative in gathering supplies; you never know how someone will use something or what will inspire someone.

The artwork used in this activity is from the book *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold. It is a great book with many justice themes. You might be able to find a copy of the book from the public library.

We use many different words for the realm of God: reign of God, kingdom of God, culture of God, Shalom, the kingdom of Heaven. Use whatever words you think the group is most comfortable with but also suggest that there are all these other names. Different names can help us imagine different visions of the realm of God.

Try not to let the discussion get too deep. Keep it reflective rather than analytical so that everyone has time to work on his or her own project. Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>
- (optional) book: *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold
- wide variety of art supplies

Study the image of “Tar Beach II” together in silence. If you have the book, read it together after taking time to study the image. Invite the group to reflect aloud, discussing how the artwork and the book portray an image of the realm of God—that is, the world as it is meant to be. Remind the group that in order to work for justice, we need to have a vision of what we are working toward. What does justice look like? What does a just world look like? This is what the prophets preach about and nudge us toward—the realm of God.

Invite participants to think about their own visions of the realm of God. Using the art supplies, invite each participant to create something that represents her or his vision. You can close by inviting participants to voluntarily share with the group their pieces and a little bit about what they mean to them. Not every piece may be complete, but that’s OK. Our visions of the realm of God aren’t ever complete, either. Encourage participants to keep working on their pieces at home, if they wish.

3 What I’m About

Leader preparation: Write each of the following at the top of one of the sheets of paper: “Pardon to prisoners,” “Recovery of sight to the blind,” “Set free the burdened and battered,” “To announce ‘This is God’s year to act!’” (These phrases are from *The Message*; feel free to use the words from another translation). Hang these sheets of paper around your meeting space. Read the activity and reflect on what each of these phrases means to you. Think of the things you would write on the sheets.

Supplies:

- Bible (*The Message* version, if possible)
- 4 large sheets of paper
- markers



Introduce the scripture by telling the participants that in this passage Jesus tells us, “This is what I’m about. This is what is important; this is what I’m here to do and tell you.” Read or have a participant read aloud Luke 4:14–21.

Invite the participants to each take a marker and, on each of the four sheets of paper you posted, write things they think the statement involves. For example, ask: *What does it mean, in the world today, to “set the burdened and battered free”?* *What does “God’s year” mean?* They can write individual words or phrases. The task is to freely associate, not to create a comprehensive list or definition.

Once everyone has had time to write on all the papers, call the group together around each paper, one at a time. Read what has been written, and reflect on the thoughts as a group. These are the things Jesus came to preach for. This is what God is calling us to do.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Justice History (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity participants share and reflect on their personal history of working for justice. Read the discussion questions below and reflect on them. Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask? Give thanks for all the people who have guided you and all the opportunities you have had to work for justice.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils

Distribute writing materials so that participants can jot down notes, if they wish, as they reflect. Begin by asking participants to reflect individually on their “justice journeys.” Then pose the following questions. Pause between each question to allow time for writing or drawing. You can determine when to pose the next question by seeing how many are finished writing.

- Who first taught you about working for justice?
- In what ways did those people inspire you?
- How have your attitudes toward working for justice changed over time as you’ve matured and learned more about the world?
- What role, if any, has the church and your faith played in this development?
- How do you work for justice?
- In what ways do you work for justice in your daily life?
- In what ways do you work for justice in your relationships, work, education, or volunteer positions?
- What has your experience of working for justice been like?

After posing this series of questions, invite participants to share with the group some their notes and in doing so discuss their personal backgrounds. Close this activity by encouraging participants to be mindful of their whole “justice journey.”



5 A Common Vision

Leader preparation: In this activity you create a group artwork that reflects all of the group's images of the realm of God brought together as a unified image. It might be a good idea to keep this piece to display during later sessions.

Prepare yourself for leading the imaginative exercise in this activity. Do it yourself and imagine yourself facilitating it. What questions are you going to ask, and how are you going to space them?

Provide a wide variety of art supplies, including tools and materials to make drawings, paintings, collage, sculpture, and abstract pieces. Be creative in gathering supplies—you never know how someone will use something or what will inspire someone. Supplies that might be particularly useful in this exercise include tape, a strong glue, and string.

This activity can work well in conjunction with “Imagine Justice,” activity 2 above.

Supplies:

- assorted art supplies, including tape, strong glue, and string

Begin by asking the participants to join you in a brief imaginative exercise. Invite them to close their eyes and imagine what their ideal world would look like—a world without war, hatred, child abuse, rape, pollution. Prompt them with questions such as the following. Give them time to reflect between each prompt.

- What else would not exist in your ideal world?
- What differences are most important to you?
- How do you live with your friends and family in this world?
- How do societies live together in this world?
- How do people live with plants and animals?
- How does imagining this world make you feel?

Conclude this reflection by inviting the participants to spend time creating a piece of art that represents their vision of a just world—the realm of God—using the art supplies provided. Let them know that their creations will be used in a larger project, so they needn't spend too much time on the artwork now.

Once everyone has created something that represents his or her vision, invite everyone briefly to share about their creations. Note commonalities and differences among participants, both in what each talks about when sharing a vision and in how each chooses to express that vision.

Then explain that in working for justice we have to combine our visions. It is very much a common mission—we're all in this together. Many of the ways we work for justice are done on our own. As individuals, we are conscious of the larger world as we go about our daily lives. More often, though, working for justice is done in community. Churches, nonprofits, and political parties all come together around a common vision of how the world should be and then work toward that shared vision. We each carry our own part of that vision, but when we bring the parts together we can see a larger part of God's whole. We each carry a part of that vision, and we each carry a part of the responsibility of creating that world. None of us can fix the world on our own.

Invite the participants, as a group, to combine their creations in a way that creates a larger vision that the group as a whole can affirm. Help the group not simply to heap everything together but to find ways to meaningfully connect all the pieces.



Close with a reflection time. *How did you feel as your personal creation became part of the larger group creation? Did your piece lose something or did it gain something—or both? How was the process of creating together? Did you feel frustrated? Did you feel like someone didn't understand you or your piece?*

Close in prayer: *God, thank you for making our lives richer with the many visions of your world and for making our lives easier with many hands to do the work of creating it. Amen.*

6 Kopf

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of “Kopf” by Joan Miro. It can be purchased at the site listed in supplies, and images are readily available on the Internet. Study the artwork and prepare by reflecting on questions in the activity for yourself. Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Kopf” by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>

Spend a couple minutes together in silence studying “Kopf” by Joan Miro. Then discuss the painting, posing questions such as these.

- What do you see in the painting?
- What emotions do you see in the painting?
- How do you feel looking at the painting?
- Working for justice can bring up all kinds of different, sometimes conflicting, emotions, such as hope, gratitude, anger, despair, playfulness, satisfaction, powerlessness. What are some other emotions you think working for justice can elicit?
- What are some emotional conflicts you see in this image?
- How does this image inform your view of working for justice?

Conclude by encouraging the participants, as they explore and learn more about working for justice, to be mindful of and reflect on the emotions this raises and on how their emotions affect how they work for justice.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Explore Justice (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Justice is often something we do with our bodies. In this activity, participants use their bodies to express justice issues. This works well as a warm-up activity for groups. Read the activity, and think of different prompts you want to try with the group. During the exercise, try to keep the reflections between each round brief, so that the group has time for several rounds.

Supplies: None

Have the group pair off into partners (you can participate or not as needed). Tell the participants that each is going to be “sculpting” her or his partners into a statue that explores justice issues. The “artist” will use words and light touches to sculpt the “statue,” while the “statue” passively attempts to follow the “artist’s”



direction. Give everyone a prompt to “sculpt,” and give everyone a few minutes to finish the statues.

Once everyone is done, allow each artist to say a few words about his or her piece. Then let the statues release their poses, and ask the group to briefly reflect on the exercise, on similarities or differences between the statues, their experiences as a statue, or their experiences as an artist. After each round, partners switch so that the statues become the artists and the artists the statues. Some suggestions for prompts might be: “working on a justice issue,” “seeing a situation of injustice,” “responding to injustice,” “telling someone about justice,” and “preparing for justice.” You can use any other broad idea that inspires you.

8 Are My Hands Clean?

Leader preparation: Find a recording of the song “Are My Hands Clean?” by Sweet Honey in the Rock. It can be purchased on iTunes or at Amazon.com. Sweet Honey in the Rock is an African American group that performs many justice-related pieces.

Listen to the song, perhaps several times. Read the lyrics. The song lyrics are based on an article by John Cavanaugh, “The Journey of the Blouse: A Global Assembly.” If you can find it, it is a great article that gives much more detail on all the issues brought up in the song. The song is filled with justice issues. As you read the lyrics, make a list. Explore your wardrobe. Where do your clothes come from? They probably don’t have the exact same story as these Sears blouses, but their stories are probably not terribly different. Are your hands clean? What can you do about it? Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask?

Supplies:

- song: “Are My Hands Clean?” by Bernice Johnson Reagon, performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock; audio, <http://www.rhapsody.com/sweet-honey-in-the-rock/live-at-carnegie-hall/are-my-hands-clean>; lyrics, <http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/integrativelearning/learningcommunities/commons/James/AreMyHandsClean.pdf>
- computer with Internet access to display the song lyrics
- music playing equipment
- Bible (*The Message* version, if possible)

Play “Are My Hands Clean?” There is a great deal to follow, so you might want to play it more than once. Display the lyrics for everyone to read along. Discuss the justice issues identified in the song—there are a lot! Ask:

- Are our hands clean?
- We are entrenched in our social structures. How responsible are we for the larger realities of injustice that we play a role in?
- What can we do about it? Are we going to do these things?
- What barriers prevent us from doing these things?
- How can we overcome those barriers?

Read Isaiah 1:1, 10–18, especially emphasizing the line “your hands are bloody.” *What message does God have for us in this scripture?* End in prayer, reading from Isaiah right after “your hands are bloody” to the end of verse 18.



9 How Just Is Your Church?

Leader preparation: In this activity participants discuss how just their church is, using “How Just Is Your Church? A Checklist.” Read the attachment, and print out copies. Fill out the checklist yourself. Research items in the checklist you might not already know about. For example, chances are your pastor may not receive a regular cost-of-living salary increase, and many pastors work far more than 40 hours each week—60 hours per week is not uncommon. Read the activity. Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask?

Supplies:

- “How Just Is Your Church? A Checklist,” Attachment: Activity 9
- Bible (*The Message* version, if possible)

Give participants the checklist, and instruct them to give their church a score of 0–3 on each item, with 0 meaning “not at all” and 3 meaning “entirely.” Once everyone has finished, read each item as a group and talk about why each gave the church the score he or she did. (You might create a composite “average” of the scores to produce a group consensus about working for justice.) For some items, such as statements 6 and 25, you might take a quick tour around the church building, looking for banners, pamphlets, and other clues about how well your church is doing on this. If you have computer access, explore your church’s website as well.

Once you’ve finished discussing how well your church is doing, ask: *What still needs work? Where does our church need to be more just? What can the congregation do about it? What can our pastors and church leadership do about it? What can we do about it? What can you do about it?*

Close by reading aloud Isaiah 1:1, 10–18.

Reflect

How did it go? Think about all the members of your group. What did you learn about them? How do they work together as a group? Think about your experience as a leader. What do you want to keep in mind for future sessions? What have you learned about working for justice? What have you learned about being a leader? Give thanks for the experiences you’ve had and for the participants. Where have you seen God in your time together? Pray for each member of your group—and for yourself—as you continue on in this exploration of working for justice.



Attachment: Activity 9

How Just is Your Church? A Checklist

- ___ 1. My church is a place where all participants are safe and secure.
- ___ 2. Members of the church community are not discriminated against because of their lifestyle choices, such as manner of dress, association with certain people, and nonchurch activities.
- ___ 3. All participants receive equal information and encouragement about church activities.
- ___ 4. My church provides equal access, resources, and activities for all individuals, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, marital status, or lifestyle choice.
- ___ 5. My church serves, is welcoming to, and reaches out to individuals of a wide variety of ages, genders, races, ethnicities, abilities, and sexual orientations.
- ___ 6. My church is vocal about being welcoming for individuals of all ages, genders, races, ethnicities, abilities, and sexual orientations.
- ___ 7. Members of my church community will oppose discriminatory or demeaning speech, materials, and actions in the church.
- ___ 8. When someone demeans or violates the rights of another person, the violator is helped to learn how to change his or her behavior.
- ___ 9. Complaints of harassment or discrimination are taken seriously and addressed responsively.
- ___ 10. In matters related to discipline, all persons are assured of fair, impartial treatment in the determination of guilt and assignment of punishment.
- ___ 11. Members of my church community care about me as a person and try to help me when I am in need.
- ___ 12. My church community welcomes people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, including people not born in the United States.
- ___ 13. I have the liberty to express my beliefs and ideas (political, religious, cultural, or other) without fear of discrimination.
- ___ 14. Diverse voices and perspectives (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, ideological) are respected in church dialogue.
- ___ 15. I have the opportunity to express my culture.
- ___ 16. Members of my church have the opportunity to participate (individually and through associations) in democratic decision-making processes.
- ___ 17. Members of my church have the right to have their concerns about the church listened to and addressed as is reasonable.
- ___ 18. Members of my church encourage one another to learn about societal and global problems related to justice, ecology, poverty, and peace.
- ___ 19. Members of my church encourage one another to organize and take action to address societal and global problems related to justice, ecology, poverty, and peace.
- ___ 20. My church education programs educate on societal and global problems related to justice, ecology, poverty, and peace.
- ___ 21. Church employees are able to take adequate rest time during work days and work reasonable hours under fair-work conditions. They receive reasonable paid vacation time and payment for overtime work. Church employees performing the same jobs are paid the same wages.
- ___ 22. Church employees are paid enough to have a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood.
- ___ 23. In hiring employees my church does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, or sexual orientation.
- ___ 24. At least 20 percent of our church budget goes to justice work and the missions of the larger denomination.
- ___ 25. A visitor would know justice is very important to my church and that my church is very involved in justice work and education.
- ___ 26. My congregation strives to be environmentally and socially conscious in our use of facilities and resources, for example, by buying all-recycled paper and toilet paper, using energy-efficient light bulbs and other energy minimizing strategies, having low-flush toilets and aerated faucets, serving fair-trade coffee, using environmentally friendly cleaning products, using compostable or reusable dishes and utensils, and using clearly labeled recycling and compost bins.

Working for Justice



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Young adults are a very mixed group when it comes to experience with scripture. A few will have grown up in a church where they became very familiar with scripture and consider it an integral part of their lives. Many, however, have grown up unchurched with very little scripture experience, or have had church experiences that left them fairly conflicted about scripture, or have not participated in church since childhood. Young adults may have little sense about why we use this specific ancient text in any special way. They may be repulsed by how scripture is used and interpreted in some Christian spheres to persecute certain groups and condemn others to hell. Yet the central message of scripture—its unequivocal call for us to work for justice—provides an amazing opportunity to connect young adults with scripture as something that is morally compelling and relevant to the world today.

About this Exploration

Scripture asks what God requires 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 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

What is your relationship with scripture? Do you read it frequently? Is it a foundation of your faith life, even though you wish it wouldn't be used to justify some of what it is used for? Or is it more something the tradition uses, so you just go along with it? You might like some parts of scripture, but you'd be just as happy reading Mary Oliver as a spiritual guide. If you're like most people, your relationship with scripture is complicated. What is your church's relationship with scripture? How relevant do you think scripture is to the world today, and in what ways? As you work with the group, be open about your feelings about scripture and talk with participants about theirs. In preparation for this Exploration, read scripture, especially the justice parts. The book *The Poverty & Justice Bible* (American Bible Society, 2009) is an excellent resource. You can learn more about it online at "The Poverty and Justice Bible," <http://www.povertyandjusticebible.org/>. The book is available for purchase on Amazon.com. It uses the Contemporary English Version translation and the commentary is somewhat conservative, but it highlights poverty and justice-themed passages, and the commentary is good at connecting contemporary and biblical justice issues.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Ancient Prophets (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity participants discuss the characteristics of prophets and prophetic speech. Prepare by reading Amos 5:18–24, Micah 6:1–8, and Luke 4:14–21. Reflect on how you would answer the questions asked below. Imagine yourself facilitating this discussion. What questions will you ask? This activity works well paired with Modern Prophets, activity 5 below.

Supplies:

- Bible (*The Message* version, if possible)

Read Amos 5:18–24 and Micah 6:1–8 to the group. Pose these questions:

- On the basis of these two readings, what does it mean to be a prophet or to speak prophetically?
- What makes speech prophetic?
- What sorts of things do prophets speak about?
- What sort of personality did Old Testament prophets have?
- What are similarities and differences between Old Testament and modern-day prophets?
- Prophets have been described as "big picture people." They see the greater scheme of things when others seem to look more narrowly. What do you think of that description?

Read aloud Luke 4:14–21. Then lead a discussion of the passage, asking questions such as these:

- How did Jesus see himself as part of the tradition of Jewish prophets?
- What relevance do the words of these ancient prophets have for the world today?
- In what ways do these words speak to you?
- If these prophets were around today, what would they say?

2 Seek Justice, Love Kindness, and Walk Humbly

Leader preparation: Set up three prayer/meditation stations around the room. Provide a large sheet of newsprint at each station. At one station write "Seek Justice," at another station write "Love Kindness," and at the third station write "Walk Humbly." Be creative in setting up the stations. You can use tables and chairs, coffee tables and pillows, or beanbags at the stations, or you could just have standing stations. Use simple decorations at each station, such as images or objects you think reflect the theme of a station. Provide writing materials at each station. If you think your group might have difficulty knowing what to do in the space, provide prompts to meditate on at each station. Prompt with questions such as: *What does "loving kindness" mean to you? Who are the people who best exemplify kindness in your life? Where are you called to be more kind in your life?* Invite participants to listen for God's voice through these words and to share with God the responses the words prompt in them.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for your Word, spoken in scripture and still spoken among us today. Be with us on this journey as we explore your call for us to work with you for a just world. 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.

Supplies:

- Bible
- 3 large sheets of newsprint
- writing and drawing materials
- tables, chairs, beanbags, decorations, or other objects for the stations

Read Micah 6:1–8 as a group, and then invite the participants to wander through the stations as they wish. As they pause in each station, ask them to write or draw on the sheets of paper images or thoughts that come to mind in response to the prompt written on the paper. Call participants back into a whole group to reflect on their experiences at the stations. As a group, review what was written at each station. What did the participants experience? How do they feel called by these words?

3 Justice Mural

Leader preparation: In this activity the group creates a large mural that shows justice scriptures from throughout the Bible. It would be great if this piece could be hung somewhere to share with the larger church community or used in worship. Gather supplies for the project. Look for magazines such as *Time*, *Sojourners*, or *National Geographic* that show images of people and situations from all over the world. Provide a Bible concordance to help participants find scripture references for justice.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Bible concordance
- (optional) computer with Internet access to use as a concordance
- paint, markers, pencils, and other art supplies
- large sheet of butcher paper
- tape and glue
- magazines for collage

As a group, use the concordance to find scripture references to justice. Invite everyone to select a favorite verse that has to do with justice—each participant can pick as many as she or he wants. Work together to create a mural covered with these verses, and surround the verses with images, colors, symbols, and magazine photos that these passages evoke.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 On Trial: Justice Debate (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity the group reads Micah 6:1–16 as a trial brought by God against God’s people and reflects on what that trial would look like today. Collect the supplies, read the activity and the scripture, and reflect on how you would answer the questions raised.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Introduce the activity by explaining that Micah 6 uses a literary technique frequently utilized by Old Testament prophets: bringing the people of Israel to trial



for their crimes against God. Through the voice of the prophet Micah, God charges the people with abandoning its side of their covenant with God. “I’ve always been faithful,” God charges. “I’ve always done my part; but look at what you’ve been up to!”

Assign the following parts for a dramatization of the scripture: Judge (God), Plaintiff (Micah), and Defendant (Israel). Assign the readers their parts to read aloud as if pleading their case in a court room:

Judge: verses 1 and 2
 Plaintiff: verses 3–5
 Defendant: verses 6–7
 Plaintiff: verses 8–12
 Judge: verses 13–16

After the dramatic reading ask: *What if God were holding this trial today?* Divide a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard into two columns: Accusations and Defense. Then, brainstorm together: *What would be the accusations? What could we say in defense?* Write the group’s ideas in the appropriate columns on the newsprint or whiteboard. In the scripture, after Micah begins reading the charges, the people quickly try to figure out how they can improve God’s attitude: *What would make you forget about all of this, God? We can sacrifice many animals, God, and give you lots of oil. Would the people try to plea bargain like this today? What would it sound like?* Conclude by discussing: *What should be the verdict and, if applicable, the sentence?*

End by reading Micah 7:18–20 to the group.

5 Modern Prophets

Leader preparation: Prepare to sing the song “Profetiza, Pueblo Mío.” Music and lyrics can be found in some hymnals as well as online. This activity works well when paired with “Ancient Prophets,” activity 1 above. In this activity, participants reflect on modern-day prophets, both personal guides in the learners’ lives and public figures who had positive effect on them. Read the activity and reflect on the questions for yourself. Who are your prophets, and what role do they play in your life? Imagine yourself leading the discussion. What questions will you ask? If the group has difficulty thinking of modern-day prophets, here is a brief list, at least some of whom are familiar to most people:

Mahatma Gandhi	Winona LaDuke	Oscar Romero
Rachel Carson	Cesar Chavez	Nelson Mandela
Bono	Jim Wallis	Martin Luther King, Jr.
Dorothy Day	Harvey Milk	Dr. Paul Farmer
Gene Robinson	Desmond Tutu	Greg Mortenson
Ella Josephine Baker	Father Damien	

Supplies:

- hymn: “Profetiza, Pueblo Mío” (“You Shall Prophesy, All My People”); audio, http://img.uua.org/stj/1016_ProfetizaPuebloMio.mp3; sheet music with lyrics, http://books.google.com/books?id=Go_nGV-vxqYC&pg=PA1016&lpg=PA1016&dq=uua+profetiza+pueblo+mio&source=bl&ots=2xyynn1VbMz&sig=-APy2ETek4tLMOHNyoeUGJRqDSc&hl=en&ei=0nMmTabOCYvSsAOVgfGVBO&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false



As a group, discuss these questions:

- Who are the prophets of today?
- Who in our world speaks truth to power?
- Who reprimands society for its sins and challenges us to new ways of being?
- What do these people do?
- What have they worked for? How?
- Is being a prophet the same as working for justice?
- Is everyone who works for justice a prophet?

Point out to the group that many biblical prophets were more like local community activists and not large continental figures. They were individuals in their communities challenging their fellow citizens and local politicians. *Who are figures like these in our communities?* Then follow up by asking:

- Who are our personal prophets? Think of people in your life and public figures.
- Who first taught you to think about working for justice?
- Who stirs up your life when you find yourself stuck in old patterns and habits?
- Who are the prophets of your church community?
- Who are some prophets in your city?
- In what ways are you a prophet?
- In what ways are you called to be a prophet?

Close by singing “Profetiza, Pueblo Mío” together in English or Spanish.

6 Bible Debate

Leader preparation: In this activity you take the position that the Bible isn’t so concerned about justice. You will argue that justice is secondary to other concerns, like holding the correct theology, ensuring your eternal reward, or being successful in life. You could also argue that working for justice doesn’t really matter, because God is going to fix it all for us. In addition, you could assert that it is far less important to work for individuals’ rights than to save their eternal souls. The participants will argue against you. They can argue that justice is not only the core of the Bible but also something we should actively strive for in our lives. Feel free to modify and change your angle of attack as you see fit. To prepare, consider the arguments the participants are going to make. How will you respond? It could be helpful to use the Internet to research some people who make the arguments you are going to be making, such as various “prosperity” preachers. Make sure to find Bible verses that back up your argument. During the debate, really get into arguing “your” position. It will encourage learners to push back that much harder and end up making the activity more fun for everyone.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Bible concordance
- (optional) computers with Internet access

Explain to the participants that you are going to hold a debate. This is not a formal debate with timed statements, but more of a back-and-forth between the two sides. Explain that the learners are to argue that justice is the core of the Bible’s message and something to which we should dedicate our lives. You’ve already prepared for your side of the debate, so give participants time to prepare. Help



them by giving them a sense of what your initial position is going to be so that they can work on counter arguments. Distribute Bibles. If possible, provide participants access the Internet for further research.

Introduce the debate by making an opening statement of your position. Have the participants respond. Argue back against their response. Get a lively discussion flowing. Try to push them. Both teams should cite the Bible. End by reflecting on the discussion.

- What did you learn?
- How did the debate feel to you?
- Are there ways you think differently about the Bible now than before the debate?
- In what ways did either side give ground?
- What views on the Bible and justice do you take away from the debate?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Mission Statement (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the scriptures identified, and then reflect on the questions below. Write your own mission statement.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens or pencils

Read Micah 6:8–12 with the group. Explain that in this scripture God condemns humanity for its sins and gives a sort of “mission statement” to humanity. Distribute two separate sheets of paper to the participants. On one sheet invite each to write a personal mission statement. On the other sheet have each write a reflection on ways he or she has failed to live up to that mission statement. “To seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God” is what God requires of us as a whole. *What does God require of you as an individual? In what ways are you called right now in your life to work for justice? In what ways have you failed in this?* Give participants time to reflect and write their statements. Once participants are done, invite volunteers to share with the group, as they feel comfortable. Remind them that mission statements are never finished products; much of what is expected of us changes all the time.

Remind the participants that despite all the transgressions Micah lists, he ends by talking of God’s compassion and love. Read Micah 7:18–20 to the group.

Encourage all to keep their mission statements. Each might hang the statement somewhere he or she will be reminded of what is required.

8 Our Whole Lives

Leader preparation: In this activity participants will reflect on how they may work for justice constantly, in the context of Amos 5:18–24, in every facet of their lives. Read the passage for yourself. Reflect on your daily routine. At every moment of your day, how are you affecting the world around you? How are you working for justice? The explanation and questions provided are only a guide; think about what you are going to share and the questions you are going to ask



participants. Gather the supplies. For the blue paper, find something beautiful, perhaps hand-made paper in different shades or prints and textures rather than just using regular construction or butcher paper. Find music for “Come, Share the Spirit” by Vicki Vogel Schmidt. It can be found both in many hymnals and online.

Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “Come, Share the Spirit,” https://www.thrivent.com/magazine/music/collection2/files/vicky_Come_Share.mp3
- blue paper
- scissors
- clear packing tape

Read aloud Amos 5:18–24, and remind the group that, to God, justice is an ever-flowing stream. Justice is something we do 24/7, not a faucet we turn on or off when it’s convenient. The people Amos was addressing were very good at occasionally being religious. They were good when it came time to worship publicly. In their daily lives they preferred mostly to turn “off” justice. God wants us to be wholly alive all the time, not just when it’s easy. God desires that we will be Christian in all parts of our lives, not only on Sundays. Every decision we make in our daily lives can be an affirmation of hope or a resignation to the status quo.

Ask the group to imagine their week ahead. *Where are you called to make changes in your daily lives? Where are you called to live for justice instead of just going about your lives taking the path of least resistance?* Discuss the ways in which simple decisions we make throughout the day can significantly impact those around us, as well as those on the other side of the world.

Pass around a few sheets of blue paper and scissors. Ask everyone to cut out a few water-droplet shapes to tape to items we use regularly, such as keys or cell phones. These will help to remind us that working for justice is something we are doing right now, always, like an ever-flowing stream.

End in prayer: *Help us remember, God, that right now, at this moment, what we are doing matters. Prompt us, God. Wake us up. Shake us out of our stuck places. Remind us of the incredible, powerful effect the choices we make can have on the lives of others. Throughout our days, remind us of your call to live for justice. Amen.*

9 Our Prophetic Voices

Leader preparation: In this activity participants rewrite Micah 6 as if God were speaking today. Read Micah 6, and reflect on how you hear God’s voice through this piece.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and writing materials or markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Read Micah 6 with the group. Then invite participants, working together, to rewrite Micah as it would be written if God were speaking through them today instead of through Micah thousands of years ago. *What would God condemn society for today? How would God tell society to make amends? How would society respond?* Have a scribe write as everyone else dictates. Don’t worry about beautiful prose or even a logical flow. What is important is the process. Afterward, read aloud what you have written as a group. What messages does it have for you as individuals, as a group, or as a church?

Reflect

Where have you seen God in this session? In what new ways have you experienced scripture? What have you learned about scripture? Think of each member of the group and reflect on what his or her relationship with scripture seems to be. What are you taking away from this Exploration of working for justice with scripture? What do you think each group member is taking away? What do you want to keep in mind for future sessions? Pray for each member of your group, yourself, and God's continued presence as you explore working for justice.

Working for Justice



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Jesus and the original disciples were all young adults. Young adults are more comfortable being in places of uncertainty and transition than older adults—they are less likely to be stuck in the rut of a lifestyle that has been comfortably carved out for years. As such, young adults are more open to Jesus' call to follow his example in living a life of discipleship dedicated to working for justice. Young adults are still figuring out who they are and how they want to live their lives. As such, they often have far less concrete ideas about what it means to be a disciple or how they are called to be disciples than older adults might.

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

What does discipleship mean to you? How do you experience Jesus' call to live a life of love and justice? What has your discipleship journey been like, and who has guided you on it? What does it mean to be disciples together, and what does it mean to be a leader guiding people on their own discipleship journeys? What is your relationship with the word "discipleship"? Does it feel like a word that means mindlessly following a leader, or does it feel like a word about a dynamic relationship?

Prayer: God, we are all struggling to be your disciples and to live lives that exemplify the love of Jesus and his passion for a just world. Give us the courage and faith to make difficult decisions and live with uncertainty. Help me to honor and guide all of us wherever we are on our own discipleship journeys. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Like Sheep (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 10:11–18. Read the questions below and reflect on them for yourself. Imagine leading this discussion. What questions will you ask?

Supplies:

- Bible

Read aloud Jeremiah 14:7–10 and 19–22. Some people say that being disciples means being like sheep. Ask: *What do you think of when you think of being like sheep?* Explain to the group that sheep's herd mentality and quickness to flee gives them the reputation of being exceedingly dumb animals. Research has determined, though, that sheep are just below pigs in terms of intelligence, are known to have some problem-solving abilities, and are fairly emotionally intelligent. Both Jesus and the author of John would likely not have thought of sheep as unintelligent. Jesus and the author of John also knew that although humans are fairly intelligent, they are also very easily socially influenced. That's why it is illegal to shout "fire!" in a crowded theater.

What does it mean that we are following the Good Shepherd? Are we shepherds, sheep, or both—and in what ways? Part of being a disciple is being a good follower, but it also means being a good role model. Ideally, role models are people who live their lives with such joy and integrity that other people are inspired to make changes in their own lives. If people see others in their social circle composting, for example, they are more likely to start to compost themselves, although they would never have had the initiative themselves. Lead a discussion about shepherds and sheep using questions such as these.

- In what ways does our "following the crowd" nature work against justice?
- In what ways does it work for justice?
- How do you model discipleship in your life?
- How does others' modeling of good discipleship help you be a better disciple?
- How can this community work to be good shepherds of one another in helping guide each other toward being better disciples?

2 "Embrace of Peace"

Leader preparation: Study "Embrace of Peace" by George Tooker, and read the questions in the activity. If you're interested, you can learn more about the artist online at <http://www.haberarts.com/gtooker.htm>.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Embrace of Peace" by George Tooker, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

Display "Embrace of Peace," and invite the participants to spend a few minutes studying the painting in silence together. Ask: *What do you see in the image? What is happening? What emotions do you see in the image? What emotions does the image bring up in you? What are some stories that might be behind what is happening in this image?*

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.

The image is named after the passing of the peace in worship services in Catholic churches. Tooker, who was gay, was very involved in the gay and civil rights movements. Discuss the image using questions such as these.

- How does knowing about the artist inform or change your understanding of the image?
- How does this image inform our views of working for justice?
- How does it inform our ideas of reconciliation or discipleship?

③ The Story of Stuff

Leader preparation: In this activity the group watches a movie and responds to it within the context of John 10:11–18. Watch the movie yourself. Plan to show at least the first 8 minutes to the group, but decide where to stop the movie beforehand. Explore the website that accompanies the movie, “The Story of Stuff Project,” www.storyofstuff.com. There you can find lists of many other resources for learning about the justice issues addressed in the movie: individual vs. corporate rights; the environmental and social impacts of deforestation, mining, and water use; indigenous rights; globalization and inequality; toxins and environmental health; labor rights; women’s rights; and consumerism and the media; as well as on solutions to these challenges. Make preparations to have the technology to show the movie and test it out beforehand.

Supplies:

- film: *The Story of Stuff*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM
- computer with Internet access
- equipment to project the movie

Watch the first 8 minutes of *The Story of Stuff*. Ask: *How does the movie make you feel? Guilty? Defensive? Angry? Powerless? What other thoughts did you have watching?*

Next, read aloud or have someone read aloud John 10:11–18. Ask questions such as these.

- What would it really look like if we treated all people as God’s sheep, as our brothers and sisters, and not only those in our “pen”?
- In what ways would we need to lay down the lives we are living to do so?
- What would our lives look like?
- If Jesus had been raised in today’s Western society, how would he live?

Close by inviting participants to reflect as they go throughout their days this week on this question: *How are the choices I make affecting all of God’s people?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 **4 Really, Really Mad (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read Jeremiah 14:7–10 and 19–22, perhaps more than once, until you feel like you have a grasp of the story.

Supplies:

- Bible

Invite the group to respond to these statements:

- Raise your hand if you are frustrated with the way things are in the world.
- Raise two hands if you sometimes get really, really angry about things that are happening in the world. Why?
- Raise your hand if you get really frustrated and angry with God about the way things are in the world.
- Raise your hand if you think God ought to just come and fix everything. Really, God made it. If it doesn't work, it's up to God to fix!
- How often do we feel or think things like this?

Read Jeremiah 14:7–10 and 19–22 together. Explain that Jeremiah was a prophet who was very unhappy with what he saw as God's way of doing things. "I know we're sinful, God! But we try to follow your way! You're our God, and we're your people, so why are things going so badly for us? You're supposed to fix them, God! Pay attention and come help us out!"

Ask: *When have you felt like this?* Explain that there isn't really an answer to cries like Jeremiah's, to cries from those interned during the Holocaust, to cries from people in Sudan, or to people living in the street right outside our church. We know that God offers us many messages of hope. Sometimes, in the middle of injustice, it doesn't always seem like enough. It's always important to try to stay hopeful, but sometimes we just need to take all our anger and despair to God, and scream in God's face—because God can take it. God doesn't just want our praises. God wants our real, whole selves. Sometimes our real selves are really angry.

Close by encouraging participants, in their work for justice, to take their anger and despair to God and give God a good telling to. God can take it.

5 Family

Leader preparation: In this activity participants will reflect on Jesus' call to his disciples to widen their circles of caring. Read the activity and reflect on the questions asked.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- color markers

Read aloud Luke 8:10–21 and Luke 9:59–62. Give participants a few moments to reflect on these passages before discussing them. *What did you hear in the scriptures? How do you feel about what you heard?* Suggest to your participants that Jesus called his followers to break open the box of traditional society to create a new society of compassion, sharing, forgiveness, and equality. In his society, there was no room for airtight, blood-tie-based family structures. When we focus all our love and attention and only think of the needs of a few people, we fail to care for all of God’s family. Explain that today we live in even smaller circles. We have our nuclear family and perhaps a few close friends, on whom we focus almost all of our energy and caring. The precious moments when we truly act in community as a wider family are few and far between. We have to hoard away wealth to create elaborate safety nets for ourselves since we don’t have a larger community as a safety net, and individualistic lifestyles require a ton of energy and duplication of goods, which is also environmentally atrocious and rather unfair for the Third World. Many scholars, such as Amy-Jill Levine and Julie Hanlon Rubio, argue that what was unique about Jesus and early Christianity from other Jewish communities was their attempt to widen notions of family to create strongly supportive communities in which community members could care for one another as well as meet the needs of the surrounding society. Jesus asks us to break out of our tempting system of limiting ourselves only to our immediate relatives and closest friends, serving and seeing only them as family, and thereby neglecting and sometimes even oppressing the rest of our family. *How might Jesus’ call to radical welcome extend to the group you think of as your family? If people acted as if everyone were family, would there be justice issues in the world?*

Distribute paper and markers. Have each participant draw a “bull’s eye” with six concentric circles on the paper. Have them label each ring from the center (1) out, with these terms: (1) Family, (2) Extended family and close friends, (3) Local community, (4) Region, (5) Nation, (6) Global community. Have participants write names and draw pictures to represent how each of these relationships is going for them.

End by encouraging participants, as they walk through the coming days, to challenge who they think of as family and try to expand who they have a responsibility to care for. This could mean opening up home to host a dinner. It could also mean choosing to buy something fair trade instead of a usual commercial product.

6 “Guide My Feet”

Leader preparation: Learn the song “Guide My Feet,” and make preparations for the group to be able to sing it.

Supplies:

- song: “Guide My Feet,” <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>;
- lyrics, <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>

Invite the group to sing “Guide My Feet.” Then, have participants reflect on these questions:

- What does this song say about being a disciple and working for justice?
- Think about each verse individually. Some versions include “while I wheel this race” in the last verse. What does this say about the inclusiveness of being a disciple?
- What emotions does the song create in you?
- How can these words and music inspire you to work for justice?

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Discipleship (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read Luke 14:25–35 and the questions below. Spend time reflecting on your own discipleship.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read aloud Luke 14:25–35, and reflect together as a group on this text, using questions such as these.

- What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?
- What sort of life does Jesus demand of us?
- What does this have to do with working for justice?
- In Jesus' day, salt was used for flavor, preservative, and purification. What does it mean when Jesus calls his disciples the "salt of the earth"?
- When Jesus talks about following him being different from building a house or a king going into battle, what does he mean?
- Luke 14:33 says, "Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple" (*The Message*). What does this say about being a disciple and working for justice? How many of us have the courage to do this?
- Are we called to give up things of value to us or even our entire lifestyles for the sake of justice?
- What does God really expect of us?

8 Earth Stewardship

Leader preparation: In this activity the group calculates both their personal ecological and carbon footprints, that is, the amount of the planet their lifestyle takes up, and the amount of carbon their lifestyle emits. There are several different calculators available on the Internet. A really good one for ecological footprints can be found at "Global Footprint Network." Try that and the others in the Supplies list. Decide which ones you'll use with your group. Read the activity and reflect on how you would answer the questions and how you are going to guide this discussion. If you don't have access to computers or Internet at church, you could ask participants to calculate their footprints before the session. This activity works well paired with *The Story of Stuff*, activity 3 above.

Supplies:

- Bible
- computers with Internet access
- online calculator to calculate individual ecological or carbon footprint
 - "Global Footprint Network," <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/calculators/>
 - "Ecological Footprint," <http://myfootprint.org/>
 - "Cool Climate Network," <http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/>
 - "Carbon Footprint," <http://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>

Ask the group to explain what ecological and carbon footprints are, and distinguish between the two. Invite them to try to estimate their own, either as a percentage of what the average person's is or as how many earths it would take to support their lifestyle.

Read aloud Ezekiel 34:17–18 and ask: *What does being a disciple and working for justice have to do with living ecologically responsible lifestyles?* Invite participants to each calculate their ecological and carbon footprints using the websites listed above.

Discuss as a group:

- What effects do our carbon and ecological footprints have on the rest of the world?
- What can we all do to live more environmentally and socially friendly lives?
- Most of you have probably noticed that a large part of your carbon footprint is from air travel. If Jesus were around today, what would his carbon footprint be? Would it be small, or would it be very large because he would work for justice by flying all over the world?
- When is it OK, if ever, to take plane flights?
- How much should we give up, in terms of possessions, daily perks, and conveniences, for the sake of living just lives?
- What does being a follower of Jesus demand of us? How much is reasonable for God to expect of us?
- What sort of concrete changes are you willing to commit make?

9 Persecution

Leader preparation: Read the activity below, watch the video, and read the scripture. Reflect on the questions asked and prepare yourself to lead the discussion. Set up the technology to show the YouTube video to the group.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and projection device
- video: “Jay Bakker’s Speech on Gay Marriage,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s30ZKjNfRIU>
- equipment to show online video

Begin by reading aloud Luke 21:12–19. Briefly discuss these statements with the group: Being a disciple has often meant being persecuted. Where are times and places where Christians have been persecuted for their beliefs or for their work? As disciples, Jesus also calls us to stand with the persecuted and oppressed and to join them in their struggle for equality.

Tell the group that you’re going to show them a clip from a sermon given by Jay Bakker, the son of Jim Bakker (a prominent televangelist who retired amidst a sex and financial scandal). Lead a discussion of the video and the issue using questions such as the following.

- What happens in this video?
- What does it mean to stand up for the oppressed?
- Who are the persecuted in our world today?
- What can we do as individuals to stand with them?
- What can we do as a church to stand with them?
- When are times in your life when you have been persecuted?

- When are times in your life when you've seen others persecuted and done nothing?
- When are times when you've stood with people who are being persecuted?
- How are you, as an individual, being called in your daily life to stand with the persecuted?
- How might this expose you to persecution or ridicule?
- What do we risk in standing up for the oppressed?

Reflect

Where was your group at the beginning of this Exploration? Where are they now? How have their views and your views of discipleship and working for justice been challenged or changed? Where did people get stuck? What changes have you all made in how you live your lives? How have each of you been shepherds for one another?

Working for Justice



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Far more accepting of diversity than other generations, many young adults are uncomfortable with a Christian tradition that has often been oppressive and dogmatic. Young adults may dislike the word “tradition” because it suggests a church that is unchanging, irrelevant for the modern world, and, even if welcoming in word, not welcoming in action to young people. On the other hand, young adults can be proud of the long history of Christian involvement in justice, from women’s rights, abolitionism, and the Civil Rights movement to the contemporary gay rights and environmental justice movements. The strong Christian tradition of working for justice is something young adults can be proud to claim and is something that can make Christianity as an identity more appealing, helping young adults feel more connected with the church.

About this Exploration

In working for justice, as in everything, our past is our 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

What thoughts and feelings does the word “tradition” evoke in you? What is your relationship with your church and your denomination? Where does the Christian tradition enrich you? Where does it frustrate you? Where are you proud of church tradition and where are you ashamed of it?

Prayer: God, thank you for those who have gone before and whose striving for justice helped create the world we live in. Guide us as we explore together the Christian tradition of working for justice, and help us as we strive to continue that tradition. 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.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Christian Tradition (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the activity and reflect on the questions asked. Imagine how you are going to facilitate this discussion.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Begin the discussion by brainstorming words that come to mind when you say “Christian tradition.” Invite participants to brainstorm words associated with Christian tradition as you write them on the newsprint or whiteboard. Then, as a group, discuss these questions:

- What does the Christian tradition mean to you?
- What emotions does it make you feel?
- Do you feel any conflicting emotions, like shame or pride?
- How can we feel two seemingly opposite emotions about something at the same time?
- In what ways does the Christian tradition inspire you?
- In what ways does the Christian tradition make you want to keep quiet about being Christian?
- How are you grateful for the Christian tradition?
- Where do you see the Christian tradition of working for justice at play in your church today?

Conclude the discussion by acknowledging that, as Christians, we come from a long, rich, and diverse tradition. Although that tradition sometimes leaves us confused about how to think of ourselves as Christians, it can also help center and ground us in something larger than ourselves.

2 A Holy Temple

Leader preparation: Gather magazines to use in creating a collage. Find national and international news magazines, such as *Time*, *Sojourners* and *National Geographic*, so you have pictures of a diversity of people. Find a piece of paper large enough for a collage created by the whole group, and cut it in the shape of a house. Read the scripture and reflect on the questions below.

Supplies:

- Bible
- magazines for making a collage
- glue
- large piece of paper
- scissors

Begin by reading aloud Ephesians 2:11–22. Explain that this text tells us that God is using all of us as bricks, with the prophets and apostles as the foundation and Christ as the cornerstone, to build a holy temple that is God’s home and our home. This home is what the Christian church strives to be, a place where all people can come together, reconciled in their uniqueness, on equal standing before God and with one another, to become a part of God’s temple, Christ’s body. *In what ways has the church succeeded at this? In what ways has the church failed at this?*



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

Invite the group to create a collage using images of many different kinds of people: races, nationalities, social classes, lifestyles, ages, abilities, and genders. Ask participants to look for images from groups hostile to one another and from “in” groups and “out” groups. After the collage is created, close by encouraging all to work toward a vision of reconciliation and taking down barriers.

3 I Go to a Church, But . . .

Leader preparation: Before you lead this activity, read the questions below and try to answer them for yourself. Prepare to lead a discussion on these ideas.

Supplies: None

Begin by asking the group:

- How many of you are open about your Christian faith?
- How many of you tell your friends you go to church?
- Do you tell acquaintances or colleagues?
- Is there anyone you don't tell? Why?
- How many of you, even if your friends know you go to a church, ever actually talk about your church or your faith life with unchurched friends?
- How many of you would ever wear a cross or other symbol that could mark you as religious?
- When you do tell people of your faith, is there any way in which you qualify it? How?
- Why do you consider yourself a Christian, if you do?
- What does that mean to you?
- How is the history of Christianity relevant to your day-to-day life?
- How is the history of Christianity relevant to the practices of your church?
- What makes it easy to talk about your tradition of going to church?
- When political candidates are willing to have their faith tradition exposed and discussed, how does that influence your thoughts about those candidates?
- How does their talking about faith influence your conversations with friends and colleagues?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Where Is God? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Before you lead this activity, read Psalm 34:15–22 and reflect on the questions below.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Psalm 34:15–22 with the group. For reflection, pose these or similar questions:

- In what ways are these verses comforting? In what ways are they not?
- What does this passage say about what God does?
- What parts of this passage do you find especially meaningful?



- With what parts do you disagree?
- Where do you think God is when people cry out to God?
- Where is God when there is an injustice?
- Where is God among people struggling to work for justice?
- In what ways do you experience God in your life?
- How are your experiences with God similar or different to the psalmist's experience?
- Where do you think God has been in the history of injustice and the history of working for justice in the church?



5 “Shotgun Third Ward”

Leader preparation: Obtain “Shotgun Third Ward” by John Biggers, and study the painting. Then read the activity and reflect on the questions asked. It might be helpful to read about the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, in which four African American girls were killed. A good source is the Wikipedia article on the bombing, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_Street_Baptist_Church_bombing.

Biggers painted “Shotgun Third Ward” three years after the bombing. The bombing may have been on his mind as he composed his painting. The painting portrays a scene from the neighborhood where Biggers lived, the Third Ward, a traditionally African American community in Houston, Texas. Although today it is rapidly gentrifying, at the time of the painting it was a center of poverty, police brutality, and Black Panther activism. You can learn more about the artist here: http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist_bio.cfm?ID=414.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Shotgun Third Ward” by John Biggers, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401

Invite the participants to study the image in silence. Then discuss:

- What do you see happening in this painting?
- What emotions do you see on the faces of the different people in the painting?
- What emotions does the painting evoke in you?
- What symbols do you notice in the painting?
- What significance is there for you that it is a church that is burning?

Discuss the justice issues participants see in the image. Some examples might be the availability of public services, such as police and firefighters; others might be poverty, race, and segregation. Offer background information on the painting and the artist. How has the larger church community participated in and responded to scenes like this? Think positively and negatively. One relevant example might be the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, and the church's response.

Conclude by asking participants how this painting and this discussion might affect how they think of working for justice. *How might this painting and the bombing relate to our own congregation or denomination?*



6 “Don’t Be Political”

Leader preparation: One complaint churches often hear in trying to work for justice is that they’re “being political.” Some believe that churches aren’t supposed to be political—that’s why we have the separation of church and state. Politics can be divisive, and churches don’t want to cause division, especially within their own congregations. Working for justice is working to address the root causes of poverty, oppression, and other forms of injustice. Because political processes are how we organize and live together, working for justice is inherently political. Because most churches are tax-exempt organizations, though, there are some legal limits on their political activities. It would be good to familiarize yourself with the specific restrictions, if you are not already, because this is likely to come up in the discussion. You can find information on this issue on the website of the United Church of Christ, at <http://www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote/pdfs/guideline2pp.pdf>.

Supplies:

- color markers and newsprint or whiteboard

On newsprint or a whiteboard, draw an outline of a person and label that person “Jesus.” Invite the participants to describe Jesus and his ministry. Have each person write a word or phrase somewhere on the outline. Use one color when describing Jesus’ interaction with his disciples, another color for his interaction with crowds, and another color for his interaction with religious and political figures. *In what ways do you think Jesus was political?*

Now draw an outline of a church. Invite the participants to describe the church’s ministry. You might want to use the same color scheme as was used to describe Jesus: one color for relationships within the church, another color for relationships in the community, and another color for interactions with religious or political institutions. Suggest some political matters relevant to your participants’ lives, such as where people can legally park near the church, laws or ordinances that govern accessibility (the Americans with Disability Act), the church’s tax-exempt status, or the location of polling places.

Draw an imaginary line across the space where you are meeting. Designate one end to be “Yes,” and the other end to be “No.” The middle would be the most uncertain area. Invite the participants to place themselves along this continuum in response to the following questions. After each question, encourage those who are willing to explain why they answered the question as they did. Remind the group that this is a dialogue, not an argument.

- Was Jesus political?
- Has the church been historically political?
- Should churches ever “get political”?
- Should churches ever work to support a specific politician?
- Should churches ever take a stand on a specific referendum, such as marriage rights, a school levy, funding for homelessness programs, or progressive tax reform?
- Should churches ever take a stand on specific issues, such as regulation of greenhouse gases or migrant-worker rights?
- Could being politically active make a church less welcoming?
- What should churches do when members disagree with the church’s justice work because they consider it political?



- In what ways have churches been “political” historically? Consider emancipation, women’s suffrage, the Civil Rights movement, and farm workers’ rights.
- Is the Bible or Jesus political?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Breaking Down Barriers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Before you lead this activity, read Ephesians 2:11–22 and study the description of the activity. Reflect personally on the scripture and on how you would answer the questions below.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper
- masking tape
- (optional) building blocks

Begin by reading Ephesians 2:11–22 with the group. Explain that this scripture tells us that God is going to make a new humanity from all the shattered pieces. We build walls between us, walls of religion, race, gender, class, nationality, sexuality. And God tears them all down. Distribute paper and invite the participants to use each piece of paper as a building block. Ask participants to write on each “block” a different wall of hostility, suspicion, and otherness that we create. Post these “blocks” on the wall. If available, use building blocks to create a wall, adding one block for each wall named. Ask: *Where are these walls being broken down? Where is reconciliation happening? Where has it happened in the past?*

Have participants brainstorm a list of all the places where society has moved forward in breaking down walls and building a new, better humanity. Some examples might be the nearly complete disappearance of racism against Eastern Europeans, the Civil Rights movement, improvements in gender equality, the disability rights movement, and recent strides in marriage equality. Ask participants to consider events occurring throughout the world, such as the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain.

You remember what it is like to be outsiders, God reminds us—you were outsiders before Christ made you insiders. Point out that we’ve all been outsiders at some times in our lives. Then discuss this concept with questions such as these.

- When have you been an outsider?
- In what ways are you still sometimes an outsider? What does that feel like?
- In what ways are you an insider?
- The chances are that all of us are far wealthier than the vast majority of the world, holding citizenship in one of the wealthiest countries. We are insiders in many ways. How does it feel to be that kind of an insider?
- What can we do to tear down walls—walls in our own lives, in our own relationships, and in our larger society?
- How can we work toward reconciliation?



8 How Many Roads

Leader preparation: Find an audio recording of “Blowin’ in the Wind,” or print out the lyrics and find someone to play guitar.

Work through the reflection parts of this activity for yourself beforehand. Give thanks for the opportunities you have and places where you are living out the dreams of those who have gone before.

Supplies:

- song: “Blowin’ in the Wind” by Bob Dylan; a good recording by Peter, Paul & Mary, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t4g_1VoGw4; lyrics, <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/blowin-in-the-wind>
- writing materials

Play the song “Blowin’ in the Wind” by Bob Dylan, inviting participants simply to listen. The world we live in today is a world our ancestors envisioned, and it is this way because the people who held those visions dedicated their lives toward them. The lives we live today were once visions that seemed nearly unimaginable at the time. It is really easy in working for justice to get overwhelmed by the vastness of the problem and the seemingly insurmountable distance between where we are and where we hope to be.

Distribute paper and pens or pencils. Invite participants to reflect on their lives by writing or drawing in response to these or similar questions.

- Where do you live, and what do you do? Are you in a position that someone of your race/ethnicity/gender/sexual orientation could not have been in a generation ago?
- Are there people around you playing important roles in your life—parents, friends, pastors, teachers, or spouses—who are living lives they could not have lived in a past generation?
- Think ahead twenty or thirty years from now. What visions for justice do you have that seem nearly unimaginable?

Invite volunteers to share what they’ve written down. Point out that sometimes we need to take a break from looking at the road ahead, to look behind us at our predecessors and remember that the world in which we live today is their nearly unimaginable vision. Conclude by singing “Blowin’ in the Wind” again.

9 Church Leaders Panel

Leader preparation: Talk with your pastor and long-time members of your church to find those who have been integral in moving your church forward in working for justice. For example, there may be persons who fought to have your church become an Open and Affirming congregation or a Just Peace church. Perhaps your congregation has struggled with the issue of women elders or children at the communion table or inclusive language or recycling. Perhaps members of your congregation organized your church to work with the Civil Rights or United Farm Workers’ movement.

Who in your church stands out as having been a leader in similar, perhaps controversial, efforts? Invite them to be a member of a panel or to give a brief presentation of their involvement. What struggles did they encounter? What support did they receive? How long did they work at their advocacy issue? Talk with them yourself beforehand so you have a good idea what they have to offer to the group.

Plan with the speakers to leave time for the group to ask questions. Snacks are a great thing to bring to any meeting, but they are especially good when you invite guests. Invite participants to bring snacks to share to this meeting or bring them yourself. Be sensitive to any food allergies. Be sure to introduce everyone, and remember to write your guests thank-you notes afterward.

Supplies:

- invited guests
- snacks and drinks

Invite a few members of your church to talk with your group and share ideas and stories about their work. Invite the speakers to describe what they think is important about their work. You or your participants might pose questions such as:

- How did you get involved in that work?
- What was your initial vision, and how did it change over time?
- What was the reaction of the church to your work?
- How did you get people to join your vision?
- What unexpected roadblocks or blessings came up?
- What advice or suggestions do you have for people interested in working for justice in the church?

Reflect

How has your relationship with the Christian tradition been expanded, challenged, or changed? What have you learned about your participants, your church, and Christian tradition? Spend time reflecting on the journey of each group member through this Exploration. How has everyone grown? What has worked really well? What hasn't been working? Your group is who it is today because of things other people did in the past; give thanks for all those who have gone before who enriched your life and your understanding of working for justice.

Working for Justice



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Sometimes called idealistic, young adults can embrace a vision and work for it with a great deal of energy and passion. Growing up in a connected world, young adults are often conscious of global affairs and eager to learn about and respond to need in their local communities and the broader world. Western youth often have more money, power, and possessions than the vast majority of the world, simply by virtue of living where they do. Because of the places they frequent within our society, however, they are less inclined to see themselves in positions to provide financial support or to make lifestyle sacrifices that could make significant differences in the world.

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

Each person brings his or her own specific context to this group and to justice work. We all come from our own unique backgrounds, with our own unique knowledge and perspectives on the world, with our own skills and talents, and with our own calls to the mission of working for justice. When we come together, we can share and challenge and enrich each others' contexts. What context do you bring? What is your role in the wider mission of working for justice?

Prayer: *God, thank you for every person in his or her uniqueness. Help us come together in all our diversity around our common mission—your cry for justice for all the world. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Who Are You? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Before you lead this activity, read through it and answer the questions for yourself. Reflect on how you are going to facilitate this discussion.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils

Begin by inviting participants to each take a few moments to write down all the identifying information about themselves that they can: age, race, ethnicity, country, state, city of origin, education level, gender, sexual orientation, political identity, religious affiliation, family status, and socioeconomic status. Point out that each participant has written down the context in which they work for justice. Then lead a discussion using questions such as the following.

- Where are you in your life and in the world?
- How does this context affect the ways you go about working for justice?
- How does it affect the sorts of justice issues you work with?
- How does it affect how much of your energy, time, and resources you devote towards working for justice?
- How is your context conducive to working for justice and how is it not?
- How does it affect your perspective on working for justice?

2 Singing for Our Lives

Leader preparation: Make preparations for the group to sing "We Are a Gentle, Angry People" by Holly Near. (The song is also known as "Singing for Our Lives.") Holly Near wrote "We are a Gentle, Angry People" after the assassination of Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone in 1978, and it has since become an unofficial anthem of the LBGT equality movement. Learn more about Harvey Milk and the assassinations at the Wikipedia article on Harvey Milk, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_milk.

Supplies:

- song: "We Are a Gentle, Angry People" by Holly Near, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21b>; lyrics, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21a>

Begin by playing or singing "We Are a Gentle, Angry People." After singing, lead a discussion about the song and working for justice.

- What does it mean to be a "gentle, angry people"?
- Why are we "singing for our lives"?
- What are the emotions in this song?
- What does this song accomplish?
- How does this song inform your view of working for justice?
- Why are songs like this so powerful and important for movements?
- What are other movements that have been associated with important songs?

Give the group background on the song and the assassinations of Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone. Many people believe that LGBT equality should be



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.

one of the main missions of the church today. Use these or similar questions to encourage discussion.

- How does this song support that mission?
- How does your church support it?
- What do you do to support it?
- What are other missions of the world today?
- How can we be gentle, angry people in striving towards justice in these missions?

3 Mission Statement

Leader preparation: Make copies of your church’s mission statement and any other organizational mission statements that have to do with working for justice.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of mission statements
- paper and pens or pencils

Talk about the key elements of a mission statement. Invite participants to read aloud several different mission statements. Follow this sharing by asking a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23. Then ask participants to reflect on their own mission statements. Pass out writing materials and encourage them to write out mission statements for how they work for justice in their lives. Some ideas for what might be in their statements are their personal answers to questions such as these:

- Why do they work for justice?
- What is it about justice that really matters to you?
- How do you try to live a just lifestyle?
- How do you try to live out justice in your relationships?
- What are justice issues that you are particularly concerned with?
- How do the teachings from Proverbs inform your sense of mission?

Invite volunteers to share their mission statements. Encourage participants to take the personal mission statements home to keep somewhere they can in the future review what they’ve written.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Missions (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Imagine all the justice issues in the world. This is our job, and it can seem like a lot to tackle—sometimes simply overwhelming! Give thanks to God for all the people of many different talents who are working to combat all these injustices. Read through the activity and prepare to lead the discussion.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the group to name all the justice issues they can think of as you (or a participant) write them on the board. Write small, because there are many issues.



Then invite the group to imagine ways they could work on each one of these. *Which specific justice issues do each of you feel called to work on? What about those issues is compelling?* Remind the group that while there are many issues on the board—and the number of issues might seem overwhelming at times—there are many more people than “just us” working on them. Give thanks as a group for all the different people called to work for justice and for the calls each member of the group feels towards specific issues.



5 Pineapples

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera. Print out a copy of the Global Issues article on pineapples for each participant. Read through the article yourself to select the parts of it you want to use and for the group to read.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, <http://www.art.com/products/p10381686-sa-i797560/diego-rivera-vendedora-de-pinas.htm>
- copies of the Global Issues article “Pineapples,” <http://www.globalissues.org/article/789/pineapples>

Invite the participants to study “Vendedora de Piñas” for a few moments. Then ask them to start discussing the justice issues they see in this image. Some issues that might come up are fair trade, free trade, child labor, women’s rights, environmental concerns in the growing of fruits, and U.S. involvement in South and Central America. *How does this image invite us to work for justice in our own lives?* Pass out the Global Issues article on pineapples, and invite participants to read through it. Ask: *Why do people buy pineapples, and all sorts of other products, that are harmful to workers and the environment? What are some ways we can make changes to this system?*

6 Justice Panel

Leader preparation: Find members of your church who have had extensive involvement in justice work. Ideally, try to find one person who has done work on international issues and another who has done local work. Make sure that the work they have done has had a justice component rather than being primarily charity work. Invite these members to come talk about their work with the group. Talk with them yourself beforehand, so you have a good idea what they have to offer to the group. Invite the speakers to share what they think is important, but here are some questions to prompt them:

- How did they get involved in their work?
- What is something unexpected that they learned in their work?
- How has their work affected their daily lives?
- What advice or suggestions do they have for people interested in working for justice locally/abroad?

Snacks are a great thing to bring to any meeting, but they are especially good when you’re inviting guests. Invite participants to bring snacks to share to this meeting or bring them yourself. Remember to write your guests thank-you notes afterward!

Supplies:

- snacks and drinks



Introduce the group to your speakers, and invite the speakers to share about their work. After the presentations, encourage participants to ask questions.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Schedules (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Before you lead, carefully read the activity. Read and think about Romans 13:8–14. Create your own weekly schedule, and reflect on how you would answer the questions below.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens or pencils

Ask participants to write out their weekly schedules, making columns for each day on a sheet of paper and writing out the sorts of things they are generally doing on those days. Advise participants that these schedules don't need to be precise. What is important is that participants think about how they spend their time.

Read aloud Romans 13:8–14. Following the reading, ask such questions as the following.

- Where in your schedules are you working for justice?
- Where are the daily activities things that make the world a more just place?
- Where are you working against justice?
- Where are you “dozing off, oblivious to God”?
- Are there any places where you are absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you don't have time for God?

Read aloud Romans 13:8–14 again. Invite participants to rewrite their weekly schedules. After time for rewriting, ask these or similar questions.

- Many obligations such as work or school can't be changed in the short term, but are there any of these things you would like to change in the long term?
- What can or should you change?
- Where can you change the activities you are doing—or the way you are doing them—to make more time for God and justice?

8 Justice Project

Leader preparation: Make arrangements for your group to work on a short-term project that has something to do with working for justice. Church members are a good resource for finding a project. Be sure that the project is more about justice than charity. Try to find a project near your meeting location or where most participants live so it will be easy for participants to get to.

Supplies: None

Together, select a project that has something to do with working for justice. Work on this project as a group. Afterward, spend some time reflecting together on the experience.

- What are the justice issues that the organization you were working with works on?
- What effect do you think the organization you were helping has?
- What were your experiences doing the work?

9 Justice around the World

Leader preparation: For the most part, this is a take-home activity that encourages participants to learn more about justice issues around the world. Explore the suggested sites and decide where you need to learn more about justice. Read the questions below and reflect on them for yourself.

Supplies:

- Internet access

In the week ahead, invite participants to identify at least three areas of justice or of the world that they are lacking in knowledge of and need to read and learn more about. (You could send this out as an e-mail to your learners.) Suggest that they seek out writers and reporters with firsthand knowledge. Advise participants to try to find stories that do more than list the facts but that also help connect them with the people affected by the issue. Suggest participants imagine meeting people whom this issue is directly affecting and being invited to their homes or to a meal together. *What would you have to say to them? What would they have to say to you? How does your life affect the life of these individuals, and how does their lives affect yours?*

Some good resources to suggest to the group are:

- “Global Issues,” <http://www.globalissues.org/>. This is a great source for basic information on just about every justice issue everywhere in the world. It also connects you with more in-depth information sources on the topics.
- “World Vision Report,” <http://www.worldvisionreport.org/>. This site provides weekly radio stories that connect you with the lives of individuals dealing with justice issues all over the world.

At the end of the week, reflect together on questions such as these:

- What have each of you been learning about?
- How has what you’ve been learning made you feel?
- Has it made an impact on the way you think about life and faith?
- Has it prompted you to take action in any ways or make changes in your life?
- Are there more areas that this exploration has made you want to learn more about?

Reflect

What context did you come to these sessions from? What context did each participant bring to the group? How are your contexts shared and where are they different? How did each of your contexts contribute to a common mission? Where did the group work really well and where did you run into problems? Give thanks for the unique talents each member brings to this group and to working for justice.

Copyright ©2012 The Pilgrim Press. Permission is granted for use by a single congregation for one (1) year from the purchase date of the subscription. No part of this download may be reproduced or transmitted—beyond the group using these materials—in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the written permission from the publisher.

Working for Justice



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Young adults, living in a place of change, are far more likely to embrace change in the larger world, because they are more comfortable with the discomfort of change. Young adults are living through a social breakdown of traditional systems/institutions. The old expectations of going to college, marrying, getting a job right out of college, and settling down and raising a family (in that order) are no longer the only path or even a possible path in many cases. Young adults are often very uncertain about what the future holds for them. Although this can be very uncomfortable for some, others find such uncertainty liberating. Young adults have not been provided with the supports their parents had. While historically they may have been considered to be socially and politically apathetic, this is no longer the case. Young adults are invested in the future and less invested in the status quo than older generations. They may be far more willing to envision a different and more just future.

About this Exploration

Imagine a world where all are in right relationship with God, with other human beings, and with 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 Exploration about future and vision, we are challenged to stay focused on this hope as we live out God's call to do justice.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Matthew 25:31–46
Isaiah 58:1–14

Leader Preparation

The pundits have a great deal to say about what our world will look like in five, twenty, fifty years. The stories they tell vary, though some tell of a post-global warming environmental collapse leading to either a return to pre-industrial society or to a highly technological, entirely globalized dystopia where people fight tooth and nail to get ahead and nearly all human interaction has been replaced by virtual communication. How do you envision the future? God also has a vision for the future—a world God is creating with us, a world of love and justice, equality and peace.

Prayer: God, give us the courage, energy, and faith to live into the new world you are creating. Help us to faithfully fulfill our role as partners in your creation. 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.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 The Kingdom of God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 25:31–46, Luke 17:20–24, and Matthew 19:16–30. In light of these scriptures, reflect on the questions below. Imagine yourself leading this discussion. What questions will you ask? We use many different words for the realm of God: “reign of God,” “kingdom of God,” “culture of God,” “Shalom,” “kingdom of Heaven.” Use the words you think the group is most comfortable with, but consider letting participants know that there are all these other names. Different names can help us imagine different visions of the realm of God.

Supplies:

- Bible

Begin by asking volunteers to read aloud Matthew 25:31–46, Luke 17:20–24, and Matthew 19:16–30. Then, lead a discussion using questions such as the following.

- What is the “kingdom of heaven”?
- Is it a real thing we can reach?
- Is it a place or a way of being?
- Is it now or sometime in the future?
- What does Jesus seem to think about it?
- What does it mean to you?
- How do these scripture readings inform your view?
- How does the idea of the “kingdom of heaven” inform your justice work? How might it?

2 The Sower

Leader preparation: Obtain “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh, and study the image. Also, read Mark 4:1–9, Isaiah 2:4, and Matthew 13:31–32, and reflect on the questions below. Make sure you are prepared to lead a discussion about the painting.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15625&store_id=1401
- Bible

Study the “The Sower” in silence together for a couple minutes. Then discuss the painting, using questions such as these:

- What do you see in the image?
- What emotions does the image bring up in you?
- How does the artist use color and light? (You might mention that in Van Gogh paintings, color often expresses a symbolic meaning: yellow indicates faith, and blue often indicates divinity.)
- How is the image hopeful?
- What time of day do you think it is?
- What do you think this painting says about working for justice?

- 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.

Ask volunteers to read aloud Mark 4:1–9, Isaiah 2:4, and Matthew 13:31–32. Then ask: *What do these verses lend to our understanding of this painting—if anything?*

3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Leader preparation: Print out copies for each participant of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Read the declaration yourself, and then read and reflect on the questions below. If you want to know more about this declaration, find more about it out at the Wikipedia article “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_declaration_of_human_rights.

Supplies:

- copies of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>
- Isaiah 58:1–14

Pass out the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” for everyone to read. Explain that this document is a secular conception of what a just world would look like. Then lead a discussion using questions such as these.

- What parts do you agree with? Disagree with?
- Are there things you would add to it?
- The document includes many ideas about the kinds of government and societal structures that are necessary for human rights to be preserved. Where do you find that in the document?
- Are there other types of just social structures you can imagine?
- How far away are we from the ideals of this document?
- Is it possible for human societies to achieve these ideals; and if it is possible, will we ever? Why or why not?

Read Isaiah 58:1–14 together, and then ask:

- What are similarities and differences between the goals of this document and God’s plans for humanity?
- What would God’s Declaration of Human Rights look like?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 God Says So (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 58:1–14 and, as you are doing so, imagine that it is being addressed directly to you. Read the questions below and rewrite the scripture for yourself.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pens or pencils

Read Isaiah 58:1–14 together. Ask participants to imagine what they would think if this scripture were being written to them personally about their lives right now. Pass out writing supplies, and have participants rewrite this message of admonition and hope so that it addresses their lives specifically. As they write, have them consider these questions: *What does God have to say to you? Where are*



you falling short in your lives? What does the future that these words are promising look like for you?

After ample time for writing, invite participants to share any part of their re-creation of scripture, if they feel comfortable doing so.

5 Dream God's Dream

Leader preparation: Make preparations for your group to be able to sing “Dream God’s Dream” by Bryan Sirchio. After listening to the song yourself, read and reflect on the questions below.

Supplies:

- song: “Dream God’s Dream” by Bryan Sircho, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lko1jccEGNc>; lyrics, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19a>
- accompaniment on guitar or piano, if possible

Sing “Dream God’s Dream” together. After singing the song, lead a discussion using questions such as these.

- What sort of vision does the song present?
- What are the emotions in the song?
- Why do you think the songwriter wrote this song?
- What phrases in the song stood out for you?
- What would the world look like if “God’s dream” were a reality?
- What would you add to the song?
- How does this song inspire you to work for justice?

Conclude the activity by singing the song again.

6 Imagine

Leader preparation: Listen to “Imagine” by John Lennon, and reflect on the questions below. Make preparations to play and sing “Imagine” by John Lennon with the group.

Supplies:

- song: “Imagine” by John Lennon, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VM0Z75KEd_o
- copies of lyrics to “Imagine,” http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/j/john_lennon/imagine.html

Begin by playing “Imagine” by John Lennon, and invite participants to simply listen to the recording. Then, pass out copies of the lyrics for participants to read. Lead a discussion of the song using questions such as the following.

- What sort of world is the song envisioning?
- What emotions does it bring up in you?
- Think of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Why do you think imagining or dreaming is so powerful for people?
- What role does the speech play in working for justice?

Conclude the activity by playing “Imagine” again. This time, encourage participants to sing along.



Sending & Serving Activities

7 The Church of the Future (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Many people are uncertain about what the future holds for religion and the church. What future do you see for the church? What future do you want for the church? Reflect on the list of questions below, and imagine how you will facilitate this discussion.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils

In the past decade, many people have been talking about what the church is going to look like in the coming decades. As you lead a discussion of this topic, use questions such as the following to prompt participants' ideas.

- What do you want the church to look like in the coming years?
- What role should churches play in society?
- What sort of programs should churches have?
- How should churches be structured?
- What would a church look like that would be relevant to your life and that you would be proud to attend?
- What role should the church play in justice?
- What justice issues should the church work on?

Pass out writing materials, and ask each participant to jot his or her ideas down (or draw a picture or write a poem or song). Then come together as a group to share participants' ideas about the future of the church.

8 Sabbath Economics

Leader preparation: Print out copies of the "Sabbath Economics" handout cited in the Supplies list (print only the first two pages). As you prepare to lead this conversation, consider the following:

- Although money is an integral part of how we structure our lives and an important part of how we live out our faith, we often shy away from talking about money, even at church or with close friends. Emphasize that while you are not asking your group members to share the details of their finances, it is important to consider how we to structure our financial lives in a way that witnesses to our faith.
- Most young adults are likely to think that they don't have very much to give. Very few young adults tithe to their churches or other religious organizations, and young adults generally donate very little of their income to charity.
- Chances are that most young adults in your group will spend more money on "nonessentials" each year than the majority of the world earns in a year (<http://www.globalrichlist.com>). If they spend only \$2.00 a year on "nonessentials," they are spending more than what 85 percent of the world makes in a year! That much money can make a huge difference.

**Supplies:**

- “Sabbath Economics” handout, <http://www.bcm-net.org/sites/bcm-net.org/files/Sabbath%20Economics%20Sevenfold%20Covenant%20Explanation.pdf>
- Bible

Distribute the “Sabbath Economics” handout, and give everyone time to look over it. Structure your discussion around the three main headings: “Surplus Capital,” “Negative Capital,” and “Giving.” In addition to the questions on the handout, you might also ask the following:

- What is our relationship with money?
- How much of our income should we give away?
- How much money do we have to give?
- There’s a saying that you can tell what matters to persons by looking at their checkbooks and calendars. What would someone looking at your checkbook (or bank or credit card statement) say is important to you?
- How do our perceptions of what we “need” compare with those of people in other parts of the world?
- How can we structure our financial lives to create the sort of future we want to live into?

Read aloud Matthew 25:31–46. Then ask: *What does God have to say about our financial lives?* Conclude the discussion by asking everyone what it has been like to talk about money. Prompt their comments with questions such as the following.

- What emotions did talking about money bring up?
- What can this say about the role of money in our lives?
- What are ways we can move towards having healthier relationships with money?

9 Your Future

Leader preparation: Gather art supplies for participants to use. Also, bring magazines and glue for making a collage. Young adults who are less confident about their artistic abilities may feel more confident about creating a collage. As you read through the activity, imagine your own future.

Supplies:

- art paper and a variety of paints, markers, pencils, and crayons
- magazines, scissors, glue

Invite everyone to imagine what their futures will look like. They can think ahead five, ten, twenty, or even fifty years—any length of time into the future. Then lead a discussion of the future with questions such as these.

- What do your life look like in the future you imagine?
- Where are you living?
- What sort of lifestyle do you have?
- What are your relationships, achievements, and goals?
- How are you working for justice—as special projects or as a lifestyle?



Invite each participant to paint or draw her or his future using the supplies provided. Ask them, in particular, to express where working for justice is in this future life. After time for creating artwork, ask volunteers to share their pieces with the group.

Reflect

How has your group changed over the course of your meeting? Reflect on what the future holds for your group and each of the participants. How has this exploration had an effect on that future? How has it had an effect on your future? What have you learned about working for justice? Where are you anxious about the future? Where are you hopeful?