

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Setting

The United Church of Christ is deeply rooted in multiple Christian traditions. Our identity as a multiracial, multicultural, peace with justice, open and affirming, accessible-to-all community of faith gives our practice of working for justice a richness grounded in both history and identity.

### 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

An exciting moment for any teacher or leader is the “aha!” moment when a learner suddenly connects the dots and “gets it.” The discovery of how the entire history of the United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies leads us to be the radically inclusive, justice-seeking denomination that we are today can be one of those moments. This is the journey upon which you now embark.

*Prayer: O, Still Speaking God, thank you for all those who have gone before me, who have made the United Church of Christ who we are, as individuals and as a people of God. I ask that you might make me a vessel of learning and that eyes and hearts might be opened so that we might follow you. In Jesus’ name I pray. 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 Why We Do Justice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity sets the stage for discovering why the United Church of Christ engages in working for justice. The mission that Jesus articulated for himself, grounded in the prophets before him, is the reason for our commitment. By listening to the scriptures and to the words of the UCC Statement of Faith, we begin to understand why we are called to justice work as people of faith.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- copies of the UCC Statement of Faith (found in *The New Century Hymnal*, the *UCC Book of Worship*, or online at <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/statement-of-faith.html>)

Invite participants to read aloud Isaiah 1:1, 10–18 and discuss what it means to them. What other passages does it call to mind? (For example: Isaiah 58, Amos 5:18–24) Then read aloud Luke 4:14–21. *Might this be a mission statement for Jesus? What does this mean for us?*

Now, read aloud and discuss the UCC Statement of Faith. *How do you see it relating to these scriptures or any others? Does it still ring true? What would you add or change?*

### 2 Sharing Our Experiences in the Struggle for Justice

**Leader preparation:** This activity focuses on recent history and the struggle of people of faith to work for justice by protesting injustice and war. It begins by listening to Holly Near’s song “We Are a Gentle, Angry People.” After watching the video of the song, invite group members to share their own experiences of marching for or working for peace and justice.

**Supplies:**

- video: “We Are a Gentle, Angry People,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcT3JKNgqHg>
- photographs of the 1963 March on Washington and any other protest marches, found by using any Internet search engine
- equipment for viewing the video and the photographs

Holly Near wrote this song after the assassination of Harvey Milk, the San Francisco gay rights activist and politician. The original words helped gay and lesbian persons to claim their identities as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) persons at a time when it was clearly dangerous in many places to do so (and as it still is today in some places). The words quickly expanded to claim our identities as people working together for the many issues of justice and peace.

Invite participants to talk about the song, the video, and any photographs you may have brought. Ask questions such as these:

- 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.

- Have you heard the song before? What did it say to you?
- What new lyrics might you write?
- Have you ever participated in a march or protest? What other people of faith participated? What motivated you to participate?
- How do you see these actions connected to your faith?

### 3 Discovering Our Justice Roots

**Leader preparation:** This activity helps participants learn the story of the Amistad incident, which led to the formation of the American Missionary Association (AMA). The AMA was an abolitionist group that is a part of UCC history. Justice work has deep roots in our denomination, and this is one important part of that history. Be sure to visit both websites prior to the session to read the story of the Amistad.

#### Supplies:

- computer access to the Internet, where you will find a short history of the Amistad incident at <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories/blacks-and-the-american.html>
- one of the best accounts of the Amistad incident can be found on the website of the Amistad Research Center: <http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/index.php/the-amistad-event>; see the article by Clifton Johnson

Have the participants read both the brief account on the UCC website and the article by Clifton Johnson. The amazing part of the story is that it demonstrates what can happen when people of faith come together across lines of race and culture on behalf of justice. Invite a discussion about the Amistad incident and why it was so important to the life of our nation. *How did faith inform the decisions and lives of the Americans involved? What can we learn from this story?*

If you live anywhere near Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, you might take a trip to see the replica of the Amistad. That is a good way to understand the story of the Amistad. The ship does occasionally sail to other ports; if you live near a port, you might check to see if it is planning to come to your location.

Those interested in the legal aspects of the Amistad case might also investigate the story from the legal perspective. A good website for that is [http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/amistad/ami\\_act.htm](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/amistad/ami_act.htm). This website also has a good listing of the main characters involved in this case.

Finally, ask everyone to write a few paragraphs of self-reflection, answering these questions:

- When in my life have I felt compelled to work on behalf of a justice issue?
- What was the issue, and why was I moved to activity?
- What justice issues am I so passionate about that I am willing to make personal sacrifices for?



## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Jesus' Mission Statement (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Some say that Luke 4 is Jesus' mission statement. Read it with that idea in mind. (If you have easy access, you might gather copies of business or organizational mission statements for the group to read. If your church has a mission statement, bring copies of it also.) The primary focus of this activity is for participants to write their own mission statement.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- copies of your church's mission statement, if available
- journals or paper and pens or pencils

Tell the participants that some say that Luke 4:14–22 is Jesus' mission statement. If you brought mission statements, look at some to identify the essential elements. A mission statement is very practical in its scope. It focuses on what you will accomplish and how you will do it. It needs to be attainable and measurable. Read aloud the Luke scripture. *What does Jesus include? What might he have left out?* Ask participants to write a mission statement for your group. What are the essential elements? Then invite the participants to write personal mission statements. If the group is willing, share these personal mission statements.

### 5 Taking a Risk at Being the First

**Leader preparation:** This activity helps participants learn about the long history of the UCC in taking the risk to be the first. In each case, the risky action was done out of the conviction that God calls into the ordained ministry whom God chooses, and that to discriminate against those called because of race, gender, or sexuality is being unfaithful. This exercise acquaints the participants with these "firsts" and helps them to empathize with the difficulties of being first.

**Supplies:**

- copies of short biography of Antoinette Brown Blackwell, first woman ordained in the U.S., found at <http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php?action=viewone&id=19>
- copies of short biography of William Johnson, first openly gay person ordained in the U.S., found at <http://www.lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=3>
- copies of short biography of Lemuel Haynes, first African American ordained in the U.S., found at <http://www.powerofchange.org/blog/2010/2/15/lemuel-haynes.html>
- paper and pens or pencils

Being first is never easy. That is certainly true for the first African American ordained in the United States (1785), the first woman ordained in the United States (1853), and the first openly gay person ordained in the United States (1972). All were ordained by the UCC or our predecessor bodies. Have all participants read the short biographies. Then have each participant choose one person and write an imaginative journal entry for the person on the day preceding his or her ordination, trying to imagine the person's emotions, fears, and challenges. Have participants share the journal entries with the whole group.



## 6 Working for Media Justice

**Leader preparation:** The UCC is a pioneer in working for justice, fairness, and access for all to the media, especially the electronic media. In the 1960s, the UCC helped challenge the license of WLBT, a Mississippi television station that refused to employ African Americans or to respond to the needs of the African American community. This established the right of the public to have access to the airwaves. This activity informs the participants about this case and begins a discussion about the right of public access to television and radio.

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- website: “Working for Media Justice in the Digital Age,”  
[http://www.uccmediajustice.org/o/6587/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content\\_item\\_KEY=2511](http://www.uccmediajustice.org/o/6587/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content_item_KEY=2511)

In the 1960s, the UCC assisted African Americans in Jackson, Mississippi, in a legal action challenging the licensing of WLBT, the NBC affiliate in the state capital, which had refused to hire any African Americans in any capacity. It also refused to cover the African American community, which composed 40 percent of the state’s population. The station did not allow that community to respond to its programming, which only presented the white point of view. Through its Office of Communication, the UCC assisted the African American community in challenging the license of WLBT, which resulted in a landmark Civil Rights case that transformed television.

Today media justice is much broader, and the UCC is still working on behalf of public access to the media. Look at the broad-ranging materials provided on the media justice website. Suggest that different participants read and summarize the different kinds of work being done. *How do you feel about the right of the people to have public access to the airwaves? Did the range of some of the issues surprise you? What do you think are the most important media justice issues facing us today?*

## Sending & Serving Activities



## 7 Isaiah Today (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses Isaiah 1:1, 10–18 and prayers of confession to help participants focus on the need to acknowledge that we fall short of what God requires of us when it comes to doing justice.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of *The New Century Hymnal*
- paper and pens or pencils

Read aloud the Isaiah passage; if you have different translations, read them all. *What does this passage mean to us today? How do we fall short? Then read the “Prayers of Confession” found at the back of *The New Century Hymnal* (#834–838). Which of these prayers speak to you? Which trouble you? Now, reflecting on the Isaiah passage and these prayers, write your own prayers.*



## 8 What We Believe

**Leader preparation:** The statement “What We Believe” lists 12 beliefs to which most people in the UCC adhere. Many of them are rooted in our understanding that we are a people called to do justice. Participants are invited to read and respond to each. Finally, they are invited to write their own list.

**Supplies:**

- copies of “What We Believe,”  
<http://www.ucc.org/about-us/what-we-believe.html>
- paper and pens or pencils

The list of 12 beliefs is one with which most members of the UCC agree. Many of these statements are rooted in our history and traditions and in our understanding that we are a people called by God to do justice. Read aloud these 12 beliefs and discuss each one. Invite each participant to write a personal list that might be called “I Believe” and to share it with the group.

## 9 All the People of God

**Leader preparation:** This is a team-teaching activity that will require several participants to volunteer beforehand to research the history of several different racial and ethnic groups in the UCC. These volunteers can then teach the other participants about these important groups in our church. If you have members of these groups in your church, they might also share their own oral histories briefly.

**Supplies:**

- computer to access to UCC website for the background information on:  
Japanese Americans, <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories/sho-chiku-bai.html>  
Chinese Americans, <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories-2/chinese-congregationalism.html>  
Native Americans, <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories/american-indians-missions.html>

God has gifted the UCC with people from many different races and cultures. Assign several members of the group to read the histories of Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and Native Americans—and the UCC. Have them create brief oral presentations of these histories. If there are members of your congregation from these groups, invite them to share their own stories. Then the group can discuss these histories. *Were you surprised to learn these stories? What most impressed you?*

### Reflect

Maybe you were surprised to discover some of the rich history of the UCC. What did you know about before? What was new for you? How has this Exploration helped you understand the United Church of Christ? How has it helped you understand your own congregation?

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Setting

Working for justice grows out of the mandate and witness of scripture. As a church that proclaims that God is still speaking, scripture continues to be important to us as we work for justice.

### About this Exploration

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

For many, these two scripture passages and prophets—Micah and Amos—are at the heart of our call to work for justice in the world. This call to work for justice is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian faith and one of the core values of the United Church of Christ, deeply embedded in our theology and our ways of living out of faith, from the earliest days of our predecessor denominations. You might prepare for this Exploration by reading silently the two Bible Focus Passages; read them to yourself, slowly, listening for their message to you. Then read them aloud. Now pray that God will guide you and use you. There’s an old hymn that begins “Breathe on me, Breath of God. Fill me with life anew. . . .” Begin with that prayer and meditate on it for a few minutes, knowing that God will fill you with the inspiration and wisdom you need.

Prayer: *Breathe on me, Breath of God. Fill me with life anew. 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

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 See, Judge, Act (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses scripture and a process developed by Latin American churches that was adapted by South African churches during the time of apartheid. The process seeks to discern what God is calling us, as people of faith, to do about the injustices of the world. This activity consists of three sections. The first, “See,” invites the participants to look at the world around them and identify injustices. The second, “Judge,” invites them to listen to the scriptures and look at the world through God’s eyes. The third, “Act,” invites participants to decide what they must do in light of the earlier discussions. The first section will not need as much time as the second and third sections.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles for all participants
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Divide a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard into three columns. Label the columns “See,” “Judge,” “Act.” In the first section of this process, “See,” invite the participants to look at their local community and the world and to identify injustices. Take care to include both local and global problems. *What seem to be the most pressing issues? What are the most important justice issues in your own community?* List this in the “See” column on the newsprint or whiteboard. In the second section, invite the participants to find a comfortable position and close their eyes in order to focus completely on the reading of the two scriptures, Micah 6:1–8 and Amos 5:18–24. After the reading, pair learners to discuss the scriptures and what they mean to them, or, if the group is small enough, discuss the scripture in the whole group.

Invite the learners to “Judge”—to reflect on what their faith calls them to do about the issues identified in “See.” List their suggestions in the “Judge” column on newsprint or a whiteboard.

The third section, “Act,” is the time for learners to identify actions that they, as individuals or as a community, might take to address some of these issues. They might include lifestyle changes for individuals and families, letter-writing campaigns, educational forums held at the church, and outreach to local college and universities who are working on such issues. Perhaps there would be interest in joining the United Church of Christ Justice and Peace Action Network (go to [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org) find out more). List their ideas in the “Act” column on the newsprint or whiteboard.



with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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



### 2 Using Art and Scripture

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses scripture and art as icons, that is, as ways to enter into an understanding of working for justice as a mandate of scripture. You may want to spend time meditating on the Miro painting “Kopf” before the session. Bring several translations of Amos 5:18–24.

#### **Supplies:**

- “Amos 5:18–24,” Attachment: Activity 2
- artwork: “Kopf” by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>

Invite participants to read aloud from the several different translations of Amos 5:18–24 on the attachment. After each reading, allow time for silent reflection. Then ask learners to view the Miro painting in silence. After a few moments, invite them to share what it evokes. *How does this painting help you relate to the scripture? What do this scripture and this painting say to us as people of faith? How do the painting and the scripture relate to our contemporary situation?*

### 3 Rewriting the Scriptures

**Leader preparation:** This exercise uses Micah 6:1–8, asking the learners to rewrite the final verse of this passage in the first person. Then participants are invited to reflect on each verse and write what it means for them and their lives.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles, various translations
- paper and pen or pencil

Have three different persons read aloud slowly and with feeling Amos 5:18–24. If three versions of the passage are available, have each reading from a different version. See “Amos 5:18–24,” Attachment: Activity 2. Distribute pens and paper. Then read one version verse by verse. After each verse, ask listeners to write their feelings, what words stand out or trouble them, and what had they never heard before.

Invite each participant to rewrite verse 8, replacing the “you” with “me.” Then have them write one or two actions that God requires of them for each of the three mandates: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. Then invite them to go back and replace the “me” with “us” and list what God might require your congregation to do with each of these commands.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Lectio Divina (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses an ancient practice of studying scriptures called Lectio Divina. Read carefully the background piece found on the website of Sisters of St. Clare, which offers a good explanation of the practice: <http://srsclare.com/practice-of-prayer/lectio-divina>.

Prepare a meditation on either Micah 6:1–8 or Amos 5:18–24. Your practice of Lectio Divina might include the following steps:

1. Read/listen deeply to the scripture.
2. Meditate on the passage, allowing it to speak to you.
3. Pray the scripture.
4. Contemplate the scripture, letting go of words and allowing it to permeate you.

#### **Supplies:**

- paper and markers or colored pencils

Ask the group to get comfortable in their seats where they can listen, but not so comfortable that they will fall asleep. Explain that they will hear a scripture passage read four times. Before each reading they will be given instructions to do something. Use the following directions and questions to do the Lectio Divina. Instructions for you are in parentheses.

- Listen to the text. (*Read aloud the scripture you have chosen.*)
- Listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention. Once you are “hooked” by something, you can stop listening to the rest and just focus on what grabbed your attention or spoke to you. (*Read the scripture.*)
- What hooked you?
- Why do you think this particular word or phrase spoke to you today?
- Listen for something that challenges you. (*Read aloud the scripture.*)
- What challenged you?
- Why do you think this particular word or phrase challenged you today?
- Listen this last time and imagine visually this whole passage, the word or phrase that hooked you or the word or phrase that challenged you. (*Read the scripture.*)

Hand out paper and markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons to the group and invite them to respond to the reading with visual imagery. Tell them that their drawings may be literal or abstract. They can reflect a feeling or illustrate a word or phrase. Invite the participants to share their drawings as they are comfortable.



## 5 Photo Exhibit

**Leader preparation:** This activity focuses on the Amos passage, seeking to understand what it meant for the original hearers and what it means for us today. Prepare by reading one or two commentaries on this passage.

### Supplies:

- cameras (can be in smart phones)
- Bibles
- computer with projector to view photographs

Share with the participants what you learned in your study of the commentaries. Invite the group's response. Ask: *What might be a contemporary wording of this passage? What festivals and assemblies might Amos refer to today?* Then look at the last verse and discuss the promise. With these understandings, commission the participants to take cameras with them to photograph how this scripture is lived out today. Then you can have a photo-sharing event. Once these are shared, consider a photo exhibit to share with others, perhaps the whole church.

## 6 When There Is No Water to Roll

**Leader preparation:** Access to clean, affordable water is a justice issue for millions of God's people. Without water there is no life; yet water is increasingly privatized, droughts envelope parts of the world, and wars and civil strife restrict access to water. This activity looks at this 21st century justice issue and relates it to the Amos scripture. The UCC is one of 36 denominational partners that make up Church World Service (CWS). CWS developed a campaign called "Water for All." You can access those resources and information at: [http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=action\\_what\\_water\\_main](http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=action_what_water_main).

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- website: "Water for All," [http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=action\\_what\\_water\\_main](http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=action_what_water_main)
- Bibles
- (optional) website: "Water Footprint Network" (to calculate your water footprint), <http://www.waterfootprint.org/index.php?page=cal/WaterFootprintCalculator>

Read aloud Amos 5:18–24, with the powerful image of flowing water. Visualize this scripture without that image. We take water for granted—all we have to do is turn on our taps. Look at the Church World Service website, which focuses us on the problem of access to clean, affordable water that millions of people face. As a group, choose one of the resources to study. *From your study together, what action might you take? How can you help "justice roll down like water"?*

*Option:* Invite the participants to calculate their individual water footprints, that is, the water required to produce the goods and services consumed by a person. Check out the calculator on the "Water Footprint Network" website.



## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Scripture Exchange (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Before this session identify several of your favorite scriptures related to justice. You may want to use a Bible concordance to help you think of some passages. Be prepared with a list of possible scriptures for the group to consider.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- (optional) Bible concordance (several online if you have access to the Internet)
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Most of us have our favorite scriptures, including some that call us to work for justice. Invite the participants each to name two or three scriptures that speak to their heart concerning justice and explain why these passages speak to them. List these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Close with a time of prayer.

Doing justice, seeking peace, and building community are central to the identity of the United Church of Christ. The UCC published several Bible studies on justice. You can download these from [http://www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy\\_resources/jwm-bible-studies.html](http://www.ucc.org/justice/advocacy_resources/jwm-bible-studies.html).

### 8 Roll Down Like Waters

**Leader preparation:** One of the most memorable images in scripture is the one found in Amos 5:18–24. This activity invites participants to listen to that passage and view short video clips of some of the world’s largest and most magnificent waterfalls. This is followed by a discussion engendered by this video and the scripture.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giXJc0kbIHs&feature=related> or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6L8845utZI4> (use any Internet search engine to find others)
- Bibles
- (optional) website: “Let Justice Roll—Living Wage Campaign,” <http://letjusticeroll.org/content/about-let-justice-roll>

Read aloud Amos 5:18–24, which has a beautiful image of justice. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., used this image in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech: “We will not be satisfied until ‘justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.’” Then watch a brief videoclip of one of the world’s largest and most beautiful waterfalls. *How does this help you to understand the scripture differently? What are key connections between the video images of water and the description by Amos? What difference does it make to know that Amos lived in a dry desert land?*



*Option:* The UCC Justice and Witness Ministries is a member organization in the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign. Check out this initiative at <http://letjusticeroll.org/content/about-let-justice-roll>. Your group might find some resources and some ways to take action to let justice roll.

## 9 God Is Still Speaking

**Leader preparation:** This activity allows participants to create their own “God Is Still Speaking” campaign by identifying scriptures and contemporary examples of working for justice. You will use magazines, newspapers, copies of favorite scripture, and any “God Is Still Speaking” posters, bumper stickers, or materials your church might have.

**Supplies:**

- “God Is Still Speaking” posters, bumper stickers or other supplies, found at <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/>
- scripture passages focusing on justice
- poster board, glue, scissors

The “God Is Still Speaking” initiative has drawn members of the UCC together to testify to God’s work in the world today. Invite the participants to share how they know that God is still speaking in our world today. Using all the ideas generated by the group, have each participant create a “God Is Still Speaking” poster. Encourage them to use quotations from scripture and some evidence (newspaper pictures or headlines, magazine photos, or something from your church newsletter) showing that God is, indeed, still at work healing a broken world.

## Reflect

Over and over again scripture reminds us that God requires us to work for justice. It’s not optional or part-time work, but the work of our faith. What new scriptures did you discover that help you on this journey? What new ways to read or meditate upon scriptures did you discover?

Attachment: Activity 2

**Amos 5:18–24**

***The Message (MSG)***

<sup>18–20</sup>Woe to all of you who want God’s  
Judgment Day!  
Why would you want to see God, want him to  
come?  
When God comes, it will be bad news before  
it’s good news,  
the worst of times, not the best of times.  
Here’s what it’s like: A man runs from a lion  
right into the jaws of a bear.  
A woman goes home after a hard day’s work  
and is raped by a neighbor.  
At God’s coming we face hard reality, not  
fantasy—  
a black cloud with no silver lining.

<sup>21–24</sup>“I can’t stand your religious meetings.  
I’m fed up with your conferences and  
conventions.  
I want nothing to do with your religion projects,  
your pretentious slogans and goals.  
I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes,  
your public relations and image making.  
I’ve had all I can take of your noisy ego-music.  
When was the last time you sang to me?  
Do you know what I want?  
I want justice—oceans of it.  
I want fairness—rivers of it.  
That’s what I want. That’s all I want.

**Contemporary English Version (CEV)**

***When the LORD Judges***

<sup>18</sup>You look forward to the day  
when the LORD comes to judge.  
But you are in for trouble!  
It won’t be a time of sunshine;  
all will be darkness.  
<sup>19</sup>You will run from a lion,  
only to meet a bear.  
You will escape to your house,  
rest your hand on the wall,  
and be bitten by a snake.  
<sup>20</sup>The day when the LORD judges  
will be dark, very dark,  
without a ray of light.

***What the LORD Demands***

<sup>21</sup>I, the LORD, hate and despise  
your religious celebrations  
and your times of worship.  
<sup>22</sup>I won’t accept your offerings  
or animal sacrifices—  
not even your very best.  
<sup>23</sup>No more of your noisy songs!  
I won’t listen  
when you play your harps.  
<sup>24</sup>But let justice and fairness  
flow like a river  
that never runs dry.

*continued*

**Attachment: Activity 2 (continued)**

**Amos 5:18–24**

**New International Version (NIV)**

***The Day of the LORD***

<sup>18</sup>Woe to you who long  
for the day of the LORD!  
Why do you long for the day of the LORD?  
That day will be darkness, not light.  
<sup>19</sup>It will be as though a man fled from a lion  
only to meet a bear,  
as though he entered his house  
and rested his hand on the wall  
only to have a snake bite him.  
<sup>20</sup>Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not  
light—

pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?  
<sup>21</sup>"I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.  
<sup>22</sup>Even though you bring me burnt offerings  
and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.  
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them."  
<sup>23</sup>Away with the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps.  
<sup>24</sup>But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

**New King James Version (NKJV)**

<sup>18</sup>Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!  
For what good is the day of the LORD to you?  
It will be darkness, and not light.  
<sup>19</sup>It will be as though a man fled from a lion,  
And a bear met him!  
Or as though he went into the house,  
Leaned his hand on the wall,  
And a serpent bit him!  
<sup>20</sup>Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not  
light?  
Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

<sup>21</sup>"I hate, I despise your feast days,  
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.  
<sup>22</sup>Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your  
grain offerings,  
I will not accept them,  
Nor will I regard your fattened peace offer-  
ings.  
<sup>23</sup>Take away from Me the noise of your songs,  
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed  
instruments.  
<sup>24</sup>But let justice run down like water,  
And righteousness like a mighty stream."

**New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

***The Day of the LORD a Dark Day***

<sup>18</sup>Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!  
Why do you want the day of the LORD?  
It is darkness, not light;  
<sup>19</sup>as if someone fled from a lion,  
and was met by a bear;  
or went into the house and rested a hand  
against the wall,  
and was bitten by a snake.  
<sup>20</sup>Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,  
and gloom with no brightness in it?

<sup>21</sup>I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your solemn  
assemblies.  
<sup>22</sup>Even though you offer me your burnt-  
offerings and grain-offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted  
animals  
I will not look upon.  
<sup>23</sup>Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
<sup>24</sup>But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing  
stream.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Setting

Following Jesus closely inevitably leads to working for justice. The history of the United Church of Christ (UCC) is rich with examples of people who took discipleship seriously, challenged injustice, and transformed the world.

### 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

When we examine the list of “firsts” in UCC history—first U.S. denomination to ordain an African American, first U.S. denomination to ordain a woman, first U.S. denomination to ordain an openly gay man—we are humbled and encouraged. When we look at our ancestors involved in the abolition of slavery, in the movement to take the social gospel seriously, in starting hospitals to serve poor immigrants, we are inspired to continue in that powerful tradition of spreading God’s love to all. This Exploration helps us to learn and to understand this history and may inspire us to heed the call of the prophets and Jesus.

*Prayer: O God of love and justice, we give you thanks for your call and for all those who have followed it and challenged injustice wherever it might be. Bless our learning and give us the courage to be agents of transformation in our time. 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 Building on a Scriptural Foundation (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity focuses on John 10:11–18, in which Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. If you need to, research about sheep ahead of time to share with the participants.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- paper and pens or pencils
- “Facts about Sheep,” Attachment: Activity 1

Read aloud John 10:11–18. It’s a well-known passage, but in our contemporary settings, many don’t know much about sheep. Shepherding was a common way of life in biblical times. People who heard Jesus speak of sheep and being the Good Shepherd could easily identify with that image. Distribute the attachment, “Facts about Sheep.” Many people think that sheep are dumb, but the facts say differently. Talk about the characteristics of sheep. With that in mind, what are the characteristics of the good shepherd? Since many people are not familiar with sheep and shepherding, invite the participants to think of images from a contemporary setting to substitute for the image of sheep. *How would you rewrite this passage for contemporary life?* Have participants share their rewrites.

### 2 UCC Calendar of Prayer

**Leader preparation:** Visit the UCC website ([www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)) to look at the Calendar of Prayer for the week or month that you are using this activity. Find a map to locate the places mentioned in the prayer calendar.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- UCC Calendar of Prayer, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/calendar>
- a digital projector
- a world atlas

The UCC Calendar of Prayer is a daily resource that helps focus the prayer life of the church on those following Jesus’ call. Some days it focuses on local congregations; other days it focuses on missionaries working around the world. As a group, study the Calendar of Prayer online. Talk about the mission lifted up for the day, and then pray the prayer for the day.

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.

### 3 Understanding the History of UCC Farm Worker Ministry

**Leader preparation:** View the video on Cesar Chavez prior to the session, and collect any other materials on him that you deem helpful. The UCC has a historic relationship with the Farm Workers Movement, including adjourning the General Synod in 1973 and sending a delegation to California at the request of Cesar Chavez, whose followers were physically threatened by growers.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- video: 5-minute video on Cesar Chavez and United Farm Workers, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7GCCBIgFaQ>
- copies of UCC page on farm workers, found at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/farmworkers/>

This activity helps participants find out about the work of the farm workers in their struggle for justice and equality in the United States. The 5-minute video provides general background information.

After viewing the video, invite the participants to discuss what they learned. *Why is Cesar Chavez such an important historical figure in our nation and for our church? What passages of scripture come to mind as you think about the farm workers? (For example: Matthew 20:1–16, Workers in Vineyard; Matthew 25:45, the Great Judgment) On the UCC website, read how the UCC is working with farm workers today. Are there farm workers in your community? What issues do they face?*

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Jeremiah and Justice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity invites the review of Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22 and the plea for mercy from God; it also provides an opportunity for participants to find contemporary examples of where we fall short.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Jeremiah was not a popular prophet because he listed the shortcomings of the people of God. Read aloud Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22. Ask such as these:

- What in this passage makes you uncomfortable?
- What about it makes you uncomfortable?
- What angers or saddens you?

Then have participants make a list of our shortcomings today. *What idols do we have? Where do we not find healing?* You might want to end with a prayer for God's mercy.



## 5 Standing for Something

**Leader preparation:** This activity focuses on a sermon given by Rev. John Thomas, former UCC General Minister and President, on the role of the church in contemporary society. Read the sermon and develop your own list of discussion starters, although there are a few here as well. Consider inviting your pastor to join the group for this discussion.

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- sermon: “Standing for Something,” <http://www.ucc.org/news/john-thomasa-unite.html>

Part of our UCC heritage is our willingness to take risks on behalf of justice and inclusion. In this sermon, The Rev. Dr. John Thomas, the former General Minister and President, raises the question of how we take such risks in the world today. Rev. Thomas says, “A church in conflict that stands for something is better than a happy and comfortable church that stands for nothing.” *How do you respond to that statement? His sermon lists many times when the UCC has taken the road less traveled. When has your congregation taken this road? What was the issue? What was the outcome? What are some ways that congregations can deal with conflict? When have you been proud of a stand that the UCC or your local church has taken? When have you been troubled? What has this sermon made you think differently about?*

## 6 Created in the Image of God

**Leader preparation:** Being a disciple of Christ means being willing to work to make the world more like the world God sees. Rev. Harold Wilke, an ordained UCC minister, had no arms. He felt God’s call to ministry and realized that many people with disabilities are invisible to the church and to the world. This activity focuses on Harold Wilke as a way of opening the eyes and minds of participants to the needs of people with disabilities.

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- Rev. Harold Wilke’s obituary, found at <http://dis-obit.blogspot.com/2003/02/rev-harold-h-wilke-1914-2003.html>
- “In Memoriam: Harold’s Friends,” <http://www.uccdm.org/2006/11/11/remembering-the-rev-dr-harold-h-wilke/>
- (optional) wheelchair
- “How Do We Become A2A?” <http://www.uccdm.org/>

Harold Wilke was created in the image of God and was born without arms. Through a lifetime of ministry, he helped others and the church see those who are often invisible—people with disabilities. As a result of his work, he was invited to give the invocation at the White House for the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. He also helped churches realize how inaccessible many of church buildings are. Read the short obituary of Rev. Wilke and the tributes of his UCC friends and colleagues.

Invite the group to take an accessibility tour of your church building. If a wheelchair is available, you might have a member of the group use it throughout tour. Have participants look at your church’s bulletins and other written materials. *Are these materials accessible for persons with visual limitations? What arrangements*



are there for people with hearing difficulties? What accommodations does your church provide for people with mental illness? Make a list of how the church might become an “accessible-to-all” congregation. Create a plan to help the church become an A2A (Accessible to All) congregation.

An excellent resource to help congregations take action to become accessible to all is “Anybody, Everybody, Christ’s Body,” which can be downloaded from the UCC Disabilities Ministries website, <http://www.uccdm.org/>.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 This Little Light of Mine (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This is an old-fashioned hymn sing of a well-known song. Sing it with gusto a few times. Encourage participants to make up their own verses.

#### **Supplies:**

- “This Little Light of Mine,” Attachment: Activity 7
- video: Bruce Springsteen singing “This Little Light of Mine,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ6SAryPyQk&feature=related>

Working for justice is hard work, requiring us to confront evil and insensitivity. Sometimes it’s good simply to find joy in music together. “This Little Light of Mine” was a favorite of many Civil Rights activists. Sing this hymn with gusto and add your own words.

### 8 Fair Trade Coffee

**Leader preparation:** Discipleship takes many forms. A more recent form of discipleship relates to consumer choice. We can examine our own consumer choices, one of which is the coffee or tea we serve at home and at church. Many churches now serve fair trade coffee, that is, coffee sold by a company that pays the growers a fair wage for their work. This activity looks at what fair trade coffee is and whether your church serves it, encouraging the use of it both at church and at home.

#### **Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- website: “UCC Coffee Project,” <http://www.ucc.org/justice/coffee-project/>

Introduce the idea of fair trade products. Fair trade is an organized social movement and market-based approach that aims to help producers in developing countries to make better trading conditions and promote sustainability. The movement advocates the payment of a higher price to exporters as well as higher social and environmental standards. It focuses in particular on exports from developing countries to developed countries, most notably handicrafts, coffee, cocoa, sugar, tea, bananas, honey, cotton, wine, fresh fruit, chocolate, flowers and gold. Find out what the participants know about fair trade and their experience with fair trade products. Look at the UCC website on fair trade coffee. There are links to a newsletter of UCC churches that serve fair trade coffee and monitor



what is happening to growers around the world; there is also a link to Equal Exchange, a cooperative of growers that sells fair trade coffee. Does your church already serve fair trade coffee? If not, develop a marketing plan to convince it to do so. *Which coffee sellers in your neighborhood sell fair trade products? What does your favorite coffee house serve? Have you thought about selling coffee to your church members?* Perhaps participants might reach out to other churches to encourage them to providing fair trade coffee.

### 9 Letter from a Birmingham Jail

**Leader preparation:** One of Dr. King's most powerful writings was his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," which was addressed to white pastors in Birmingham who had counseled him to slow down in his civil rights work in that city. Study the letter so that you can lead this activity.

#### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," found at [http://www.bu.edu/irsd/Ec326\\_2004/material\\_2004/Letter%20from%20Birmingham%20Jail.htm](http://www.bu.edu/irsd/Ec326_2004/material_2004/Letter%20from%20Birmingham%20Jail.htm)

We can learn discipleship from those who have sacrificed much for their beliefs. Martin Luther King, Jr., was one such disciple. One of his most powerful writings is his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," which was addressed to white pastors who had asked him to slow down in his push for justice in Birmingham. Read the letter aloud and discuss it. *How relevant is it today? What in the letter surprised you? What was its tone?* Remember for participants that it was written from jail. Remember that it was written to pastors who were supportive of civil rights for African Americans but wanted King to slow down. *From whom might we in the church receive such a letter today? Why? How would you respond to such a letter? How do you think our church should?*

## Reflect

Discipleship is not easy, yet it is our call from God. Which story in this session inspired you the most? In what ways are you energized to work for justice in our world? Where do you find your own call to discipleship?

Attachment: Activity 1

## Facts about Sheep

- Sheep have a high degree of independence at birth.
- Sheep flock together—they like to be with a group. Sheep are social animals, but the most important reason they like to flock together is for protection. Sheep are timid, nervous, and easily frightened animals and for the most part defenseless against such predators as coyotes and wild dogs. Their only means of survival is to flock together in large numbers and to run away from predators. If a predator is threatening the flock, this is not the time to act independently.
- Sheep don't like to walk in water or move through narrow openings. They prefer to move into the wind and uphill than down wind and downhill.
- Sheep see in color. The average sheep has a field of vision of 270 degrees.
- They have a poor depth perception. For this reason, sheep will avoid shadows or harsh contrasts between light and dark. They will move toward the light.
- Sheep have an excellent sense of hearing. They are more sensitive to high frequency noise than people and get scared by loud noises.
- When sheep are on their backs, they will need to be helped because they can't get up from that position.
- Sheep can remember the faces of more than 50 other sheep for up to two years. They can even recognize a familiar human face. They may be nearly as good as people at distinguishing faces in a crowd.

Attachment: Activity 7

### **This Little Light of Mine**

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Hide it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine.  
Hide it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine.  
Hide it under a bushel, NO! I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Let it shine 'til Jesus comes, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine 'til Jesus comes, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine 'til Jesus comes, I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

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# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Setting

Working for justice is an important part of the Christian tradition and is central to the identity of the United Church of Christ. This Exploration invites the participants to find their place in that tradition.

### 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

Sharing the traditions of the faith while opening the doors to contemporary practices is the challenge of any educator. Yet, it is this combination of old and new that can make faith come alive. Through this Exploration you have the opportunity to help participants bridge the past and the future.

*Prayer: Ever-living God, I thank you for the connecting work that you give me to do. Now I ask that you will touch each participant in a special kind of way. Open them to the past as well as to your future. In the name of Jesus, the one who is that bridge for us all. 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 Focus on Scripture (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity has participants reflect on the biblical passages for this Exploration and how they are foundational for working for justice.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and crayons or colored pencils

Invite participants to read aloud Psalm 34:15–22 and Ephesians 2:11–22. *In our nation’s history, what hostility walls have divided us? What about your community’s history? What about your congregation’s history? What walls of hostility still divide us?* Consider the issues of race, sexuality, and social class, as well as issues such as abortion and right to life, the death penalty, and the content of political platforms (liberal and conservative). *Who are the righteous and the brokenhearted today?* As participants talk and reflect on these passages and questions, invite them to draw pictures (abstract or concrete) inspired by these texts. Then, ask participants to share the pictures and what is going on in the artwork. Use these pictures to create a Justice Art Gallery. As you continue this study of “Working for Justice,” you may want to add to this Gallery. If other groups in your congregation are also using this *Faith Practice* resource, invite them to add their art work as well. God speaks to us in many ways: conversation, Bible study, prayer, and art.

### 2 Learning Our United Church of Christ Roots

**Leader preparation:** This activity seeks to help participants learn about the history of the United Church of Christ. It uses a brief polity course found on the UCC website and encourages participants to help teach this material by giving brief oral presentations of the material and information. “A Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ” tells our story beginning with our origins in the small community that followed Jesus 20 centuries ago and continuing to the present. Learn about the Reformation—a protest movement against the abuse of authority by church leaders; the rediscovery by Luther and Calvin of the Bible’s teaching that salvation is not earned but is a gift; the epic journey of the Pilgrims from England to the shores of North America; the waves of emigration by German and Hungarian Protestants seeking spiritual and political freedom; the beginning of the first Christian anti-slavery movement in history; the 20th-century movement to reunite the divided branches of Christ’s church, and, as a result of that movement, the union of several traditions of Protestant Christianity into the United Church of Christ in 1957.

#### Supplies:

- website: “Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/short-course/>
- computer with Internet access and a digital projector

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

Invite the participants to investigate the UCC website and the “Short Course.” If it is possible to get participants to do some homework, assign participants to take one section. Have them read their section prior to the session, and then provide a 2–3 minute oral presentation to share what they read.

### ③ Firsts

**Leader preparation:** The UCC has a rich tradition of taking risks on behalf of justice and inclusion. This activity uses the UCC website “UCC Firsts” to examine some times when our ancestors in the faith took those risks.

**Supplies:**

- website: “UCC Firsts,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/ucc-firsts.html>
- computer with Internet access and a digital projector

You can do this as a group exploration, or invite individuals to go the UCC website on their own to learn the amazing history of firsts and memorable moments in the history of the UCC and its predecessor denominations. Then play a version of the old television game “What’s My Line?” and call it “Who Am I?” Have someone in the group choose one of the characters in the timeline on the website. Choose three people to be the panelists. Panelists can only ask the character questions that can be answered by yes or no. If the character responds “Yes,” the panelist may ask another question. If the response is “No,” the next panelist gets a turn. A panelist may ask up to four consecutive “Yes” questions before he or she has to guess who the character is.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### ④ The Lord’s Prayer (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** One of the central and most widely used prayers, the prayer of Jesus, most commonly called The Lord’s Prayer, is a nearly universally spoken prayer within the Christian tradition. This activity focuses on that prayer as one means of thinking about and looking at how we can work for justice.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Use the version of the prayer of Jesus that is common in your congregation. You might write in on newsprint or a whiteboard. Guide a line-by-line study of this prayer to make connections to working for justice.

- We pray “on earth, as it is in heaven.” What does that mean, and how does it relate to the call to work for justice?
- The line “give us this day our daily bread” reminds us of the story of God providing manna for the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. When have we hoarded more than a day’s portion? In what ways have we neglected the daily needs of others?



- Some pray “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Others pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive our trespassers.” Still others pray “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Think of praying the Lord’s Prayer each of these ways. Let us think together about what difference the different words. What does forgiveness mean? What do the differing translations mean to you? Which has more meaning for you? Why? For what do we need to be forgiven? When have we been complicit in situations of injustice? From whom do we need to seek forgiveness for this? How might you rewrite this line?
- “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” reminds us that injustice is an evil. When have we participated in that kind of evil? When have we worked against the temptation to be oppressors through our attitudes and actions?

What does each line teach about working for justice? Pray the prayer together.

### 5 “Guide My Feet”

**Leader preparation:** This activity focuses on an African American spiritual, which was adapted and used during the Civil Rights movement. There is an historic connection between the church and the Civil Rights movement, with many of the movement’s leaders emerging from the church.

#### **Supplies:**

- song: “Guide My Feet”; YouTube video: <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>; words and music: <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>; *The New Century Hymnal* #497
- paper and pens or pencils

Singing has a long association with justice movements not just in the United States, but around the world. Singing spread a message that was difficult for many to hear and served as an empowering drive for nonviolent protest. Music often became the battle cry of a movement. Introduce the song “Guide My Feet” as one that became popular as a freedom song. Watch the YouTube video of this song. This song is included in *The New Century Hymnal* (#497). Invite the group to sing along. *Why do you think this was used in the Civil Rights movement?* An alternative verse, “Wheel with me . . .,” was written by a fifth grader. *What new verse(s) might you add?*

### 6 Anniversary Video

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses a 4½-minute video about the history of the UCC. It gives a sense of who we are; it focuses not only on the historical facts, but also on the ethos, that is, the fundamental values that make the UCC what it is. You might view it yourself first. Plan for the group to make a short video history of your church. This activity could take place over several weeks, perhaps in conjunction with a celebration of an historical event in your church or district.

#### **Supplies:**

- video: “UCC@50 Yesterday’s Visionaries, Today’s Voice,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yst7Ov176I>
- video camera or phone with video capability
- computer with Internet access and a digital projector



Show the video, which was developed for the 50th anniversary of the UCC in 2007. After viewing, ask: *What surprised you? What did you not know about the UCC?*

Begin to plan your own video for the history of your congregation. *What do you want to include in your script?* It's been said that "history is written by the winners." That implies that the way we remember history is based more on the accounts of those who triumphed than those who lost. As the group writes its video script, make sure they are aware of biases that may slant the story. Be sure they include more than one viewpoint on any event, such as a significant justice decision made by the congregation. Make sure the video includes the hard stories in the church's history as well as the good stories. The video should be as honest as possible. *Was there a time when people left the congregation over an issue? What was that issue? How did that impact the congregation's witness? Where can you get photos, and who should you interview?* The group will need a writing team as well as a video team. Participants will need to plan where and when to shoot it. Then, using the script, the group will make its own video to tell the history of the church.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 God of Grace and God of Glory (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity has participants study a hymn written by Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, founding pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City. First, read the words out loud together, perhaps with different individuals taking turns. Talk about the words and what they mean to you. Then, if you have accompaniment, invite the group sing it together. Note especially verse 3, which was written out of Dr. Fosdick's opposition to war.

#### **Supplies:**

- hymn: "God of Grace and God of Glory," *The New Century Hymnal* #436
- video: the hymn with processional, organ, and choir,  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc7\\_GLCRLkI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc7_GLCRLkI)
- video: the hymn with organ,  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWPH7vPGfbw&feature=related>
- (optional) accompanist

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969) was a prophetic preacher and founding pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City. Riverside Church, affiliated with both the UCC and the American Baptist Churches, calls itself an "interdenominational, interracial, and international" congregation. Fosdick was known as a champion of civil liberties. Fosdick's most famous hymn was "God of Grace and God of Glory." He wrote the hymn for the opening worship service of that great church. The line "for the facing of this hour" might have referred to the Great Depression. (There are videos available to help you.) After singing Fosdick's hymn as a group, lead a discussion about the words of the hymn. Verse 3 has sometimes been omitted from hymnals because of its opposition to war. What might you include in a modern-day verse for this hymn?



## 8 Faith and Repentance

**Leader preparation:** Queen Liliuokalani (pronounced Lee-lee-wuh-kuh-lah-nee) was the last Hawaiian monarch; she was overthrown by American planters and businessmen in 1893. These persons met in the basement of a Congregational Church to plan the coup. She had been a member of the Congregational Church, but when she was placed under house arrest, her church abandoned her. She never abandoned God, however, and wrote a beautiful hymn, “O Kou Aloha No” (“The Queen’s Prayer”), #580 in *The New Century Hymnal*. This activity looks at this sad moment in our church’s history and at the faith that this woman shared. You may wish to invite a pianist to join you so that you may sing this beautiful hymn.

### Supplies:

- song: “O Kou Aloha No” (“The Queen’s Prayer”), *The New Century Hymnal* #580
- brief biography of Queen Liliuokalani, found at <http://www.aloha-hawaii.com/hawaii/queen+liliuokalani/>

Queen Liliuokalani was the last monarch of the Hawaiian nation. She was overthrown by American planters and put under house arrest. She had long been a member of the Congregational Church, which had sent missionaries to Hawaii in 1819. But she was never visited by her church after she was jailed. Her faith was undeterred, however, and she wrote a beautiful hymn. Listen to the hymn and read the words together. *What can we learn from this story? The church has often played a part in injustice. What other moments you can think of for which the church must repent? In 1993, 100 years later, the General Minister and President of the UCC went to Hawaii and apologized to the Hawaiian people. How can we make amends for past mistakes?*



## 9 Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

**Leader preparation:** One of the most well-known prayers in the world is the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. This activity looks at that prayer and invites participants to use it to help lead them into working for justice. Provide printed copies of the prayer, and then view the video of the prayer. Then discuss what it means and how it can be used.

### Supplies:

- “Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi,” Attachment: Activity 9
- computer with Internet access
- video: Prayer of St. Francis by Sarah MacLachlan, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VSYuar6oF8&feature=related>

## Reflect

Part of our ancient Christian tradition is working for justice, a legacy that continues through the years and into the future. It seems there will always be the need for the church of work for justice. What has inspired you in these traditions? What lessons have you learned from them?

This prayer of St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most well-known and loved prayers of all time. Read it aloud. Then watch the video of the prayer. Share your own responses to the prayer. *What part touches you the most? What inspires you? This prayer is often used as a daily prayer during Advent or Lent. Why is that?*

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Attachment: Activity 9

**Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled  
as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Setting

The story of the people of God is always contextual and always rooted in God's mission in a broken world. The United Church of Christ grew out of a particular context and engages in particular mission. This Exploration helps to focus on this context and mission.

### 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

There is no more important task for people of faith than discerning God's mission in the world—and our role in bringing it about. This is sacred work. You might reflect on the global and local community around you and your church. These are the worlds into which God is calling you and the participants.

*Prayer: O God of love and justice, you call to me and to each of your children. You call us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. You call us into the brokenness to share your love and your desire of abundant life for all. Allow us to be your vehicles. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Session Development

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

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Grounding Mission in Scripture (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This session is intended to help the group find the biblical mandate for working for justice, identify justice issues in the group's contexts; and connect these to the larger justice issues of our nation and world.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- (optional) website: “Bible Gateway,” [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)
- (optional) website: “UCC Justice and Witness,” <http://www.ucc.org/justice/issues.html>

Invite the group to study Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23 and Romans 13:8–14. If possible, provide a variety of translations so that the participants can compare them. One translation to consider is Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. You can find that along with other translations at “Bible Gateway.”

Invite the participants to describe what these passages mean to them. Then have them think about current events in the world, the nation, and their community. *What is going now on that connects to those passages written long ago? For instance, where are there instances today of loving our neighbors as ourselves? Where is that missing?*

*Option:* If you have access to a computer, go to “UCC Justice and Witness.” There you will find a list of justice issues on which the UCC is working, including: civil and human rights, peacemaking, justice for women, justice for children, sexuality and justice, racial justice, environment (integrity of all creation), economic justice, and global concerns. *How do these issues correspond to the stories you found in your local community? In what ways are they related? In what ways are the issues connected? Do you think the UCC is addressing real issues and problems? Why or why not?*

### 2 Loving Our Neighbors

**Leader preparation:** Immigration is a hotly debated topic in the United States. The issue has divided communities and set neighbor against neighbor. Check out the “UCC Justice and Witness Ministries” website that offers many resources for exploration and study of this important issue. What stand would your congregation take on an immigration issue in your community? Plan to set guidelines for the conversation so that people can disagree without being disagreeable.

**Supplies:**

- website: “UCC Justice and Witness” website on immigration, <http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration/>
- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Read aloud Leviticus 19:33–34. Then share with participants the following quotation from the “UCC Justice and Witness” website:



- 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.

In a world becoming increasingly globalized, more people are leaving their homelands to seek better lives and opportunities in new countries. Their reasons for leaving are diverse and complex: economic necessity, war, or persecution. The U.S. has long been a nation of immigrants, and we have consistently been conflicted about this. We gratefully welcome immigrants and their contributions, and we exclude them, discriminate against them and, at times, inflict grave harm upon them.

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors. The Bible is unambiguous in calling us to welcome aliens and strangers in our land, and to love them as we love ourselves. In these times, let us listen to the voice of the still-speaking God. We will learn how to respond to these new sisters and brothers residing among us.

Invite your group to identify issues related to immigration in your community. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. These might include: housing, access to employment, education, deportation, access to medical care. Divide into smaller groups, and have each group choose an issue from the list. Have each group write a Christian response statement to their issue. *As Christians, what do we see as our mandate related to this issue?* When all have completed their statements, have groups read them to all participants.



### 3 Discerning God's Mission in the World

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses a painting by artist John Biggers. You can find information about the artist online at [http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist\\_bio.cfm?ID=414](http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist_bio.cfm?ID=414). The scene depicted is Houston in the historic Third Ward, but it could be set in many of the wards of New Orleans or other inner city communities. There is both pain and joy in the picture, and participants are called to find both.

#### **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](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401)
- newspapers, magazines with pictures of variety of places in city, state, nation and world
- Bibles

Invite the participants to study the painting. Encourage them to look at every corner of the picture. Look for details. Look for faces. Once they have “lived” with it, ask questions such as these:

- Who are the people in the painting?
- What stories can you imagine about them?
- What do you see in the buildings?
- What seems to be bringing the people together?
- What emotions do you imagine they have?

Now have participants look through the pictures and stories of newspapers and magazines. Lead a discussion of with questions such as these:

- What stories do you see about people living in poor communities?



- How do they compare with the painting?
- Now think about your local community?
- How does it compare with the painting and the newspaper photographs?
- How can your congregation better understand the rich complexities of other communities?
- How do we train ourselves to look for the strengths, as well as the weaknesses?

Finally, read aloud Zechariah 8:3–8. Ask participants how this passage fits with this activity.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Bible Remix (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Social networking, such as Facebook and Twitter, has become an international reality. While often used for sharing lightweight, fun information, recently Twitter played a major role in the revolutions in Egypt and elsewhere throughout the Middle East and Africa. This activity invites participants to “tweet” the scriptures. Make sure everyone understands what a tweet is and how to compose one.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- pens, paper
- (optional) cell phones
- (optional) computer with Internet access

Read Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23 and Romans 13:8–14 together. Discuss what each means for us today. *How do they relate?* Ask about the Facebook and Twitter habits of the participants. Twitter is a real-time information network that uses small bursts of information called tweets. Each tweet is 140 characters long. Invite those who tweet to explain this to those who may be unfamiliar with Twitter.

Check out the UCC on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/unitedchurch>. Look through the tweets to find messages from the UCC JWM (Justice and Witness Ministries). *What is the current stream? Do any of these tweets relate to the two scriptures?*

Invite participants to tweet a mission message related to the scriptures you read, or rewrite key ideas from the two scriptures using Twitter format (no more than 140 letters/characters). Share each of the rewrites. If you have participants who are live on Twitter, suggest that they send out their scripture tweets to people who are following them.



## 5 Using the Lens of Farm Work

**Leader preparation:** This activity invites the participants to focus on Van Gogh's painting "The Sower." The purpose of this activity is to discuss the role of farm workers in our world today. The activity also visits the website of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a Florida-based group that pushes for justice for tomato pickers. In 2001 this group came to the UCC General Synod meeting in Kansas City and asked support for a boycott of Taco Bell, which was a large consumer of tomatoes. The General Synod agreed, and this was the first step in an ongoing drive to get justice for these farm workers.

### 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](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15625&store_id=1401)
- computer with Internet access
- website: "Coalition of Immokalee Workers," <http://www.ciw-online.org/>
- UCC Justice and Witness Ministries resources related to farm workers, found at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/farmworkers/>

Van Gogh's "The Sower" was painted near the end of the 19th century. Provide plenty of time for the participants to study the painting. Once they have "lived" with it, ask questions such as:

- From this painting, what might you infer about farming during that time?
- How does the farm worker look?
- What do the colors of the painting tell you?

Now, contrast that with the photographs you find on the Coalition of Immokalee Workers website. Ask such questions as these:

- How do you think farming has changed?
- What issues might farmers then have faced?
- What issues do you see that farm workers now face?
- Are they the same? Similar? Largely different?

The UCC JWM farm worker website suggests these two activities that you could use with your group: say a prayer for the hardworking people who plant and harvest our crops, and present a Mission Moment to educate the congregation about the realities of a farm worker's life.

## 6 UCC Statement of Mission (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The UCC Statement of Mission was written in 1987 by a cross section of members from the United Church of Christ. This activity examines that statement and allows the participants to rewrite it for the 21st century.

### Supplies:

- copies of the UCC Statement of Mission, found at <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/statement-of-mission.html>
- paper and pens or pencils



Out of the Christian tradition, our UCC predecessor denominations, and our own experience of God's call comes a more recent understanding of working for justice. Read the UCC Statement of Mission, written nearly a quarter of a century ago. *How do you think this statement holds up in today's world?* Invite participants to write their own version of this statement for today and for the next fifty years. What would they keep? Is there anything they might leave out now? What needs to be added? What language needs to be modified to make it more relevant? Do this either as a whole group or as small groups. When the statements are finished, invite participants to share their versions. Make a plan for publishing the group's statement, perhaps in the church newsletter. *Would you be willing to present this statement to the governing board for adoption by the congregation? How might such a statement direct your congregation's efforts in working for justice?*

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Charity and Justice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity focuses the attention of participants on the justice work of your local congregation by looking at the bulletins and newsletters in order to identify the justice work already underway. It then invites participants to discern between charity work and justice work. For example, building a Habitat home is charity work; advocating for local fair housing initiatives is justice work.

**Supplies:**

- church bulletins and newsletters
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

One way to identify the work for justice of our local congregations is to examine their budget, bulletins, and newsletters. Help the group distinguish between charity work and justice work. Justice refers more to the concept of moral rightness, whereas charity refers more to the giving of help to those who are in need. Charity deals with the immediate need, whereas justice works toward addressing the root cause of the problem. Both efforts are important. The difference might be summed up in the Chinese proverb: Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

Make two lists, one of the justice work of the church and one of the charity work of the church. How are they different? Most congregations do more charity work than justice work. Think together and plan on how your congregation might become more involved in working for justice.

### 8 God's Context: Creation

**Leader preparation:** The most obvious context in which we live is the environment, that is, God's creation. The UCC has been involved in the stewardship of our environment for more than two decades. This includes encouraging churches and members to become "green" as well as doing groundbreaking environmental justice work. This activity helps participants learn some of this history and then encourages them to move from understanding the context to embracing the mission.

**Supplies:**

- copies of the UCC webpage on environmental racism, found at <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/environmental-racism.html>
- copies of the UCC webpage on the green church movement, found at <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/just-green-congregations.html>

We are called by God to act on our faith, grounded in wonder, reverence, love, and respect for all of God's creation. Clearly, however, God's creation is groaning under the burden of injustice, greed, and arrogance. Our poor choices have consequences. For more than two decades, the UCC has worked on environmental issues. Read about our work to end environmental racism. Then take a look at how we are urging our members and congregations to be good stewards of God's creation. *What does the phrase "environmental racism" mean to you? Is your congregation involved in the green church movement? How can you be more involved, collectively and individually?* Perhaps the group might design an Earth Day activity for the whole congregation.

## 9 Reaching the World

**Leader preparation:** This activity invites participants to view several brief video interviews with global mission personnel who work around the world on behalf of the UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It would be helpful to encourage participants to view these at home before the session so that they can suggest their favorite for the group to view together.

**Supplies:**

- computers with access to UCC website at <http://globalministries.org/resources/multimedia-resources/index/>

Our context and often our mission are right outside our doors; sometimes they are halfway around the world. Working for justice can mean working in other countries, as partners in their work to heal a broken world. View a few of the short interviews found on the UCC Global Ministries website. Find your favorite to suggest to the group, then the group can view the favorites together. *What did you learn about this larger context and God's mission for us in the world? In what ways did this whet your appetite to find out more about our global working for justice? What are you going to do about it? Can you think of ways to encourage others to get involved in this work?*

## Reflect

Context is critical to understanding God's mission for us in the world. What did you learn from this Exploration? How can you stretch your own understanding of God's mission, which includes the call to work for justice?

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Setting

Followers of Jesus are called to be bearers of hope in a world desperately in need of hope. It is only with hope, grounded in faith in a loving God, that we can go forward into the future with confidence.

### About this Exploration

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

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

## Leader Preparation

As people of faith and followers of Jesus, we are called to be bearers of hope in this world. This Exploration is one way of kindling our sacred imagination so that we might see God’s dreams for the world and all in it. How is your imagination activated? Perhaps you might begin by looking at the painting “Peaceable Kingdom” or imagining yourself walking deep in the woods or by the beach. Perhaps you might pray aloud using the word “hope.” You may want to use the following prayer or use your own vehicle for getting close to God.

*Prayer: Spirit of God, Spirit of life, clear a path for us into your future and allow us to feel your presence with us every step of the way. In your holy name we pray. 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 Centering Ourselves with Scripture and Prayer (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity helps to center participants in the scriptural call into God’s shalom. By reading the scriptures together and praying for justice, participants may be able to focus on God’s personal call to action.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- “Prayer for Justice,” *The New Century Hymnal* #863

Invite the participants to read together Matthew 25:31–46 and Isaiah 58:1–14. Pose these or similar questions for discussion: *How do these speak to you? What in them makes you uncomfortable? What did you notice for the first time? What do they demand?* Now read together, perhaps responsively, the “Prayer for Justice” in *The New Century Hymnal* (#863). Allow a few moments of silence at the end of the prayer. Then invite responses to the prayer.

### 2 Embrace of Peace

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses the painting “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker to focus on inclusion and love, key components in the community of faith. Jesus said that we are to love the Lord our God with all our strength, soul, and mind and our neighbor as ourselves. This painting helps focus us on this commandment.

**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](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)
- “Ejector,” God Is Still Speaking commercial, found at <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/ads/ejector.html>

This painting is by George Tooker, a living American artist. Many of his paintings show a feeling of alienation and are done from the viewpoint of an outsider. His art reminds us that we all know the agony of loneliness; we all have felt forgotten or misunderstood. Yet his paintings also remind us of the ability we all have to love and be loved. After the death of his long-time companion, Tooker became involved with the Catholic Church. The passing of the peace is a traditional part of the Eucharist in the mass. Spend time looking at the painting to sense the feeling of it. *How does it make you feel? What do you see? Where do you see yourself in the painting? Who are you? What does the embrace of peace mean to you?*

View the God Is Still Speaking commercial “Ejector.” The tag line is: “No matter where you are on life’s journey, you’re welcome here.” If your congregation includes passing the peace as part of your service of worship, invite response from the participants to this practice. *In what ways does this include or exclude people? How do visitors respond to this practice? In your vision of the church 20 or 50 years from now, how would you imagine this scene? As you work for justice, how might the composition of your congregation change?*

- 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.

### 3 Interfaith Tool Kit

**Leader preparation:** The future (as well as the present) holds the possibility of people of different faiths working together for justice. This activity focuses on an “Interfaith Tool Kit” developed to find ways to begin this important work. Download copies. It will help if participants read it ahead of time so that the discussion can focus on how this might be relevant and useful in your church and your community.

**Supplies:**

- copies of “Interfaith Tool Kit,” found at <http://www.globalministries.org/news/mee/interfaith-toolkit.html>

If your congregation already works with congregations of other faiths, find out what that history has been. Then ask questions such as these:

- What obstacles were overcome in order to work together?
- What issue prompted the collaboration?
- In what ways might you enhance those relationships?
- How might you expand this work to other faith communities?
- What other justice issues, such as homelessness or hunger, might reach across faith lines?
- Who are your neighbors? How well do you know them—and they you?
- If your congregation is not involved in work with other faiths, what strategy might you pursue to make it happen in your church?

Together study the “Interfaith Tool Kit.” This resource is an ecumenical project developed by the Presbyterian Church USA in cooperation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Into the Future with God (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** As we live into God’s future, it’s good to remember God’s promise to be with us always. It is good to remember that this is the same God who breathed creation into life. This activity uses two hymns in *The New Century Hymnal* to remind participants of God’s presence throughout history and then invite them to envision God’s presence in the future.

**Supplies:**

- *The New Century Hymnal*, hymns #556 and #581
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Invite participants to read the words of “God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens” (#556) and “Lead Us from Death to Life” (#581) in *The New Century Hymnal*. Talk about the poetry of these hymns and what they tell us about the God of creation as well as what God’s dream for the future might be. Then have the group share their dreams for the future, using phrases that might be used in poems or





hymns. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. *How do you see God's faithfulness in this future? How does creation fit into this future? How are justice and peace a part of this new creation?*

Invite the participants to create a new verse to one of the hymns using their ideas listed on the newsprint or whiteboard.

### 5 Sacred Conversation on Race

**Leader preparation:** In May 2008, the United Church of Christ Collegium of Officers invited pastors across the nation to preach on race, "in the hope of inaugurating a sacred conversation in the coming months that is urgently needed in our churches, in our homes, and in the halls of power." Those conversations still continue.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- website: "Sacred Conversations on Race," <http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation/>

Dr. King talked about the Beloved Community as an inclusive community committed to sharing God's love and God's desire for an abundant life for all of God's creation. As a group use the prayer resources for "Creating the Beloved Community."

What steps might your group take to sponsor a communitywide Conversation on Race?

### 6 "Dream God's Dream"

**Leader preparation:** This song by Brian Sirchio is a musical way of imagining God's future for us. Listen to it. Invite a pianist or singer to join this activity to teach it to the participants.

**Supplies:**

- song: "Dream God's Dream"; YouTube video: <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19>; words: <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19a>
- (optional) piano or keyboard and accompanist

Brian Sirchio's song "Dream God's Dream" imagines God's future. Sirchio is a member of the UCC. Watch the video together. Then have a singer or pianist lead the participants in singing the song a few times. Focus on the words of the song. Participants can identify what images speak to them. Ask participants to share what the song makes them feel.



## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Writing a Justice Litany (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Perhaps you and your group have been thinking about, listening to, and watching justice. This is an opportunity for the group to write a litany for justice that might be offered to your whole congregation.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Together, read Matthew 25:31–46 and Isaiah 58:1–14. Then allow for a few moments of silence as all meditate on these passages. Invite the participants to close their eyes and breathe in deeply. Then ask them to say aloud words or phrases that come to them from the scriptures or from the other activities. List these on newsprint or a whiteboard. Then, as a group, begin to craft a litany for justice. Tell participants to allow the Holy Spirit to use them. Start by designing the refrain, perhaps by using a verse or chorus from “Dream God’s Dream” (see Activity 6). The next step might be to list the key ideas or directions from the passages and think together about how to form these into a litany.



### 8 Anyone Can Fly

**Leader preparation:** This activity is based on the artwork of Faith Ringgold, an American painter, quilter, and writer. You can learn more about her at [www.faithringgold.com](http://www.faithringgold.com), where you can also find the song “Anyone Can Fly.” This song is meant to accompany her piece “Tar Beach II.” Spend time viewing “Tar Beach II.” It is rich in images. You may want to use the song as well. You might want to also use the children’s book *Tar Beach*, which is short enough to read during a session and would help to explain the artwork. It would be a wonderful addition to any church’s library.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPAr16>
- computer with Internet access
- song: “Anyone Can Fly,” found at <http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/songpg1.htm>
- (optional) children’s book *Tar Beach*, available at book stores and your local library

Invite participants to study “Tar Beach II” and, if available, hear the children’s book *Tar Beach* read aloud. The book tells the story of Cassie Louise Lightfoot, eight years old in 1939, who has a dream: to be free to go wherever she wants for the rest of her life. One night, up on “tar beach”—the rooftop of her family’s Harlem apartment building—her dream comes true. The stars lift her up, and she flies over the city. She claims the buildings as her own—even the union building, so her father won’t have to worry anymore about not being allowed to join just because his father was not a member. As Cassie learns, anyone can fly: “All you need is somewhere to go you can’t get to any other way. The next thing you know, you’re flying above the stars.”



Encourage the participants to get close to the artwork so that the richness of its detail emerges. *What are the images in the poster that speak to God's future? What feelings does this picture elicit from you? How does it relate to the image of Isaiah 58?*



## 9 The Abundant Life

**Leader preparation:** This activity uses a painting by Diego Rivera, the great Mexican artist, to help participants focus on the promise of abundant life for the people of God. Spend time with the painting. You might do a little research on Diego Rivera, who was a human rights advocate and whose paintings often paid tribute to workers. Gather magazines for participants to make a collage of their own depicting the abundant life.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt17>
- magazines with photographs
- poster board, glue, and scissors

Describe the work of Diego Rivera, the great Mexican painter. Display his “Vendedora de Piñas.” Invite the participants to study the painting and then ask questions such as:

- What do you see in this work?
- What do you think its message is?
- How do the colors make you feel?
- What do you think is the story behind the painting?
- How might this painting be used to understand God’s promise of the abundant life, a life where we live in a spirit of abundance rather than one of scarcity?
- What might this message be for our present day?
- This painting has also been considered as a depiction of the opposite of abundance. Why would anyone say that?

Invite the group to create a collage showing the abundant life—not the abundant life of material wealth but the abundant life of spiritual wealth. Use pictures and words from the magazines.

## Reflect

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is near.” How does that promise help guide us into the future? Some have said they believe the translators should have said the “kin-dom of God.” What do you think they mean? What do you think of this term? How does it fit with the activities of this exploration? What do you think such a kin-dom look like to you? What hope does this promise give you for the future?

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