



WEEKLY WEDNESDAY DIALOGUES
PART 4 Faith and Social Justice: The Hard Questions
February–March, 2002

This sample curriculum for the Faith and Social Justice component of Weekly Wednesdays includes an overview of: Weekly Wednesday Dialogues, the goals and rationale, and the five sessions (this page). Curricula for the sessions one and three are provided in full.

Rationale: Historically faith systems have struggled with how to respond to the disadvantaged, marginalized, and oppressed. Many movements within religious traditions have worked to dismantle institutional systems of oppression, which have resulted in significant social change.

As levels of sensitivity and awareness have heightened, religions have reexamined their teachings on issues related to inclusion and justice. This reexamination has proved to be both difficult and enlightening for people within the religious traditions and those who have observed the process. Social Justice issues continue to be compelling and challenging, with cogent arguments being made from a variety of perspectives.

Goal of the dialogue program: To provide an environment for honest dialogue on the ways that faith and belief can contribute to building a society of inclusion and justice, and how faith unites and divides us, both within religious communities and between religious communities and society.

SESSION ONE: A Context for the Dialogue

Objectives:

1. To introduce participants to one another and the five-week process;
2. To establish communication guidelines;
3. To define terms.

SESSION TWO: Faith and Justice

Objectives:

1. To consider the theme of justice in the context of faith and religion;
2. To consider a variety of approaches to working for justice.

SESSION THREE: Social Justice

Objective:

1. To actively engage on sensitive topics related to social justice.

SESSION FOUR: Social Justice Issues

Objective:

1. To discuss approaches to social justice issues that divide us.

SESSION FIVE: Burning Questions and Closure

Objectives:

1. To give group members an opportunity to ask questions, share their artifacts, and celebrate the closing of the dialogue;
2. Evaluate Dialogue.

Weekly Wednesdays
Faith and Social Justice: The Hard Questions
Session One Theme: A Context for the Dialogue
Length of Session: 2 ½ hours

Session One Objectives:

- To introduce participants to one another and the five-week process;
- To establish communication guidelines;
- To define terms.

Materials and Supplies Checklist:

- Nametags
- Folders for each participant with resource articles and plain paper
- Water Color Markers
- Communication Guidelines Posters
- Religion/Belief system posters
- Newsprint
- Masking Tape
- Prejudice/Stereotyping/Discrimination worksheets
- Writing Instruments
- Refreshments
- Glue Sticks
- Post-It Notes

Facilitator Preparation:

- Since this is the first session, it is essential that the facilitation team is well-prepared and confident in order to guide the process and achieve the objectives. Each team member must be clear about his/her role during the session. Establish a “lead” facilitator for each module and discuss ways that the co-facilitator will be supportive. One facilitator “leads” the process, and the other monitors the group dynamics.
- The session allows 15 minutes for “gathering” and 2 ½ hours to complete the process. Remember, the process is a GUIDE and it is not necessary to complete ALL of the modules, only the OBJECTIVE of the session. As with the dialogue on Ritual, some modules may be eliminated or carried over to the next session.
- Nametags and folders should be placed on a table near the entrance of the room. If necessary, place signs at different locations at the site to help participants locate the room, restrooms.
- Refreshments should be set up and ready at least 15 minutes before the published starting time. Chairs should be in a large circle; facilitators need to decide where they will sit.
- Be sure that you and your co-facilitator are ready to welcome participants as they come in. Make certain that one facilitator is assigned to welcome latecomers and review what has transpired prior to their arrival.

SESSION ONE – Faith and Social Justice: A Context for Dialogue

| | PROCESS | MATERIALS AND NOTES |
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| 15 minutes before the session begins | <p>Module One <i>Objective: To establish a welcoming environment for all participants.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Assign one facilitator to greet the participants as they arrive, to welcome them, make certain that they get a nametag, introduce them to one another, and direct them to the refreshments. b) If they have not completed a registration form, make certain that they do so. Have participants sign in on the newsprint sheets on the wall: | <p>Nametags, refreshments, folders for each participant.</p> <p>Attach newsprint to walls and have markers ready for participants to “sign in.”</p> <p>Signs: Name, Faith is, Social Justice is, I’m passionate about . . .</p> <p><i>Note: Put the “Social Justice is” newsprint up at each session.</i></p> |
| Begin session 30 minutes | <p>Module Two <i>Objectives:</i> <i>To formally welcome participants to the dialogue process and give them an overview of the program.</i></p> <p>Step One:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Present the history of the NCCJ-Cornerstone Collaboration on the Faith-Based Theater Project; b) Review the overall process, emphasizing that this dialogue is an opportunity to engage in a conversation about beliefs and believing among diverse participants, including people who are not affiliated with a religious tradition; c) Present an overview of the session’s agenda; d) Answer any questions from participants. <p>Step Two: Review Communication Guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Facilitator will review the guidelines. (Please note the change in the wording re: confidentiality.) <p>Step Three: Introductory Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Invite each participant to share their name, where born/raised, and complete the following sentence: “In discussing sensitive human-relation topics, the guideline that is the most important to me is . . .” | |

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| | <p>Step Four: Clarifying Questions</p> <p>b) Review definition of and give examples of a Clarifying Question. Stress the difference between just offering an open-ended question and a scope-widening question. The clarifying question IS the human relations question because it requires genuine curiosity about a person or a topic with whom/which you may truly disagree but want to understand.</p> | |
| 30 minutes | <p>Module Three: Religious/Spiritual/Faith Identities</p> <p><i>Objective: To get a sense of participants' experiences with religions/faiths.</i></p> <p>Step One: "Room Mapping"</p> <p>Around the room post signs of religious traditions, agnostic, atheist, unaffiliated/non-believer, spiritual. Pose the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Please move under the sign that represents the religious/faith/spiritual/moral ethical/secular tradition in which you were raised. Share a memory of what was practiced or observed in the group. Consider an early memorable religious experience, either with your own religion or something you observed about religion or religious people. Move to the sign that represents the tradition. Share the experience with the other people in your group who are standing under the sign. Consider a time when you were confused or frustrated by a saying, gesture, or an act, and move to the sign that represents the tradition. Share the experience with the members of your group. Please move under the sign that represents the religious/faith/spiritual/moral/ethical/secular tradition with which you identify today. Share why you have chosen to stand under this sign with the members of your group. Bring the group back together and have a few people share what they learned about themselves in doing the process. | Tape the names of religions around the room. |
| 10 minutes | Break | |

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| 40 minutes | <p>Module Four <i>Definitions of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination</i></p> <p>Note: Facilitators may want to consider dividing the group into three groups if the group is large for this process. If you stay in one group, take each word separately and share examples so that they recognize the distinctions.</p> <p>Step One:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitator will present the NCCJ working definitions of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. Distribute the worksheet relating to the definitions and allow time to complete. Invite participants to share one or two examples of what they have experienced, have held in mind, have acted against someone, or have seen occur. Help them to be clear about which examples are prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. | <p>Worksheet: Consider each of the following words. List a few examples of how these issues affect communication and collaboration between communities of faith.</p> |
| 30 minutes | <p>Module Five: Faith- Wordlist Process</p> <p>Step One:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Invite participants to examine the definition of faith in their folders. Have them circle the one that most closely defines the word “faith” for themselves. Invite participants to share the one they circled and why. How does it impact you and your worldview? If there is time, invite participants to divide into two groups according to the definition they selected—secular and religious. Invite them to discuss the ways that faith contributes to the health and well being of society. Invite them to share ways that faith contributes to divisions in our society. | <p>Definition of Faith</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence a religion or a system of religious beliefs unquestioning belief in God, religious tenets, etc. anything believed complete trust, confidence, or reliance allegiance to some person, or thing; loyalty |
| 15 minutes | <p>Module Six: Closure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Thank participants for their participation. Invite them to consider what they heard from one another and begin thinking about the dynamics of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, and their impact on society. Adjourn. | |

Weekly Wednesdays
Faith and Social Justice: The Hard Questions
Session Three Theme: Social Justice
Length of Session: 2 ½ hours

Session Three Objective: To actively engage on sensitive topics related to social justice.

Materials and Supplies Checklist:

- Nametags
- Folders
- Water color markers
- Agree, Disagree, I Struggle with Posters
- Communication guidelines posters
- Newsprint
- Masking Tape
- Writing Instruments
- Evaluations

Hospitality and Room set up:

- Nametags and folders should be placed on a table near the entrance of the room. If necessary, place signs at different locations at the site to help participants locate the room. Locate the restrooms at the site.
- Refreshments should be set up and ready at least 15 minutes before the published starting time. Chairs should be placed in a large circle and facilitators need to decide where they will sit. Materials and supplies should be placed in close proximity to the facilitators.
- Be sure that you and your co-facilitator are ready to welcome participants as they come in. When you begin the process, make certain that one facilitator is assigned to be alert to latecomers and to welcome them and review what has transpired prior to their arrival.
- Facilitators should consider the statements carefully for Module Three, adding and deleting where appropriate.

SESSION THREE—Faith and Social Justice: A Context for Dialogue

| | PROCESS | MATERIALS AND NOTES |
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| 15 minutes before the session begins | <p>Module One Objective: To establish a welcoming environment for all participants.</p> <p>Step One: Hospitality Assign one facilitator to greet the participants as they arrive, to welcome them, make certain that they get a nametag, are introduced to one another, and are directed to the refreshments.</p> | |
| 15 minutes | <p>Module Two: Reconnect Step One: Group Discussion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Welcome participants and make any announcements that need to be made. Invite participants to share any thoughts they have had about the theme of the previous session. | |
| 60 minutes | <p>Module Three: Social Justice Issues Step One:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Place signs around the room: I Agree; I Disagree; I struggle with . . . b) Tell participants that you will be reading a series of statements, and they will be invited to move around the room and stand under the signs that apply to their response. c) Read the statements slowly, allowing time for participants to move to their location. Remind them that this is a silent exercise. d) Ask them to look at who is standing where. e) Before they sit down, ask if anyone has a statement he/she would like to propose inviting participants to make one or two more moves. | Signs: I Agree; I Disagree; I Struggle With . . . |

STATEMENTS:

- Faith traditions need to take responsibility for their role in either consciously or unconsciously sowing seeds of hate and suspicion of those who are different.
 - I am upset about the recent decisions by faith communities to deny domestic partner insurance coverage.
 - I believe that life begins with conception.
 - The emphasis of the government’s faith-based initiatives concerns me.
 - Women should be able to assume leadership positions in religious traditions.
 - Religious communities have lost many followers because of their position that homosexuality is evil and/or unnatural.
 - Segregation exists within faith communities.
 - One can be a believer or follower of a faith tradition and still support the death penalty.
 - I support the retention of a chaplain of the House of Representatives.
 - I believe that interracial relationships strengthen our society.
 - I believe that moments of silence for prayer should be allowed in public schools.
 - I believe that schools should be required to eliminate the use of Indian mascots for their sports teams.
 - Civil rights laws should apply to religions and religious institutions.
 - I struggle with my religious tradition’s public statements.
 - I believe in assisted suicide for terminally ill people.
 - I have no problem that the words “under God” are in the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - I believe that interfaith marriages weaken religious institutions.
- f) Debrief the exercise. 1) Which statements were the most challenging for you and why? 2) What statement did you personally identify with and why? 3) How do you deal with the dilemma to try to be consistent and congruent with your belief or ethical/moral system when faced with personal or political challenges?

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| | <p>Step Two: Clarifying Questions:</p> <p>a) Facilitator will say: “As you took part in this exercise, you may have noticed that a group member responded to one of the issues in a way that surprised you. This is your opportunity to ask one another questions that will help you to understand WHY they responded in the way that they did. Please consider what you observed and say (Name) I was surprised that you responded to (statement) in the way that you did. Could you please say something about your choice?</p> <p>b) Allow this process to proceed and invite people to engage around the concepts being presented.</p> | |
| 10 minutes | Break | |
| 30 minutes | <p>Module Four: What is Social Justice? Note: Remember to invite participants to keep a running “social justice” sheet of newsprint Step One: Sentence Completion Exercise</p> <p>a) Invite participants to complete the following sentence: When I think about social justice what comes to my mind is . . . because . . .</p> <p>b) Facilitators will keep track of the comments on a small note pad, not on newsprint.</p> <p>c) Invite any commentary or questions.</p> | |
| 5 minutes | <p>Closure</p> <p>a) Thank participants for their participation and answer any questions.</p> <p>b) Encourage participants to look for articles that relate to religion and social justice issues and to bring them in to share.</p> | |