



Justice Primer & Study Guide

for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

*... what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

*"We are Disciples of Christ,
a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.
As part of the one Body of Christ,
we welcome all to the Lord's Table
as God has welcomed us."*

(Disciples identity statement, General Board 2008)

This Justice Primer is produced by the Disciples Justice Table. Members of the Justice Table are: Mark Anderson, Ken Brooker Langston, Julia Brown Karimu, Jinsuk Chun, Ron Degges, Patricia Donahoo, Amy Gopp, Timothy James, April Johnson, Huberto Pimentel, Sharon Watkins, Robert Welsh, and Geunhee Yu.

Introduction

Each of the three reflections in this booklet highlights a facet of what it means to be a disciple, a follower of the living Christ. Deep Christian spirituality, true community and a passion for justice together represent our vision as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and give meaning to the “wholeness” we seek in our fragmented world.

- **April Johnson** (*Minister of Reconciliation, Reconciliation Ministry*) helps us see that the spiritual “pulling away” in the manner of Jesus leads to a pouring out of the self.
- **Pat Donahoo** (*Executive Director, Office of Disciples Women*) shows that the true community we long for finds us seeking “to reflect the values provided by God in Jesus Christ . . . celebrating, respecting, and valuing one another. As the body of Christ, true community seeks justice and love for all of God’s people.”
- **Ken Brooker Langston** (*Director, Disciples Center for Public Witness*) reminds us that “justice is . . . when we truly affirm and respect the inherent dignity, worth and equality of each person as a sister or brother created in the image of God and included fully in the family of God.”

A passion for justice is a natural outgrowth of our love of God and neighbor. When we love God fully, we love all God’s children as neighbor. Our spirit recognizes each child of God as part of the true community we share in Christ, and we want for each the same wholeness of life that we want for ourselves.

As you read these brief statements I invite you to imagine a table, an impossibly large table made possible in the Spirit. A table that stretches across the miles and the ages, where Jesus sits as host and all God’s children find a place as cherished members of one family.

Sharon E. Watkins,

General Minister and President



Photo: Christopher Fletcher/Photos.com

Deep Christian Spirituality

“And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone” Matthew 14:23

Couched between the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the miracle of walking on water, we find Jesus “up the mountain” alone praying. In the Old Testament in the book of I Kings we see Elijah, having defeated the prophets of Baal, sitting under a broom tree being nurtured by an angel for a journey that will land him in a cave on Mount Horeb where there he will hear God’s still small voice. Whether we are retreating from our ministry for personal renewal or if we are running from our ministry for finding peace, Jesus still stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. As Christ’s disciples and his namesake – members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) – we have the privilege to inculcate deep Christian spirituality as a mark of our identity.

In his ground-breaking book to the Church 2020 Vision¹, Dick Hamm offers a working definition of Christian spirituality as “. . . a way of life that relates who and what we are to who and what God is as revealed in Jesus Christ and as experienced through the Holy Spirit.” As Disciples our spirit is refreshed by the model and ministry of Jesus that is revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. Christian spirituality deepens our self-understanding as part of the whole family of God. When we give careful attention to God’s revealing of God’s self, our inner life is strengthened so that we may be poured out on behalf of God’s beloved children — all of them. Opening ourselves to God whether intentionally like

Jesus on the mountain or out of necessity like Elijah in the cave, we are inspired to serve God by serving God's people, seeking justice on behalf of the whole family of God.

Cultivating habits of attentiveness to God's nature as it is revealed through spiritual discipline can be counter-cultural. In our fast paced, overstimulated society, a faith where God adapts to our schedule can appear to be more attractive than one that requires our own stillness for discernment for God's will. "The goal of Christian spirituality is not to merely know ourselves, it is to offer ourselves to God: . . . to empty ourselves so that we may be available to hear God's call and to respond . . ."² This spirituality is less reminiscent of the comfort of a country club but bears the resemblance more of a soup kitchen. Deep Christian spirituality emboldens Disciples to feed when there is only bones and broth, to teach where the binding on books is worn, and to speak when evil renders members of God's family speechless.

Submission to the Holy Spirit through intentional 'pulling away' by attention to the scriptures, prayer, solitude, and gathering around the Table of the Lord, our hearts and minds are equipped for the essential work of being the Good News from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.

True Community

True community is part of the identity of the church from its birth (Acts 2). It is also central to the identity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The Acts 2 church expresses true community, given through the Holy Spirit, in how the church exists with one another: having all things in common, selling possessions as anyone had need, and supporting justice for each person. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, the community of believers is identified as the body of Christ where their interrelatedness causes all to rejoice together and all to suffer together because they are so closely bound. As the body of Christ

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the church seeks to reflect this community, living by the example received in Christ and lived out by Christ. This true community creates a sense of belonging, of being at home where all are related to and part of something greater than any individual. To live in true community is to overcome isolation and fragmentation by being interdependent and celebrating the gifts and worth of all individuals as part of the whole people of God. True community focuses on the gifts of each person rather than on his or her differences, shortcomings or deficiencies. Recognizing and affirming these gifts, those on the margins find a place at the center.

True community is experienced especially when all are present at the Table of the household of God — with God as head of the household, and God's children seeking to follow the gracious example set by God, welcoming others as God welcomes. As part of this community of God's household all seek to reflect the values provided by God in Jesus Christ, moving past the needs of safety and comfort to



Shoes for the children of Caminante in the Dominican Republic (Women-to-Women).
Photo: Lonnie Graves/DHM

providing hospitality and generosity to one another. Hebrews 13:1-3 reminds us that by entertaining strangers we may find we have, in fact, entertained God's own messengers. Jesus teaches in Matthew 25:34-46 that in welcoming the stranger we also welcome Christ himself. Hospitality is the welcoming of strangers by affirming the dignity of each person and being open to the diversity of ideas and beliefs reflected. In true community there is space for difference, as well as dissent, without a sense of defensiveness or being on guard. True community uses language of healing and relatedness rather than of protection or separation.

Being part of true community expects that all work in partnership with those elected/appointed to leadership positions. In Mark's account of the feeding of the multitude (Mark 6:31-44) the disciples point out to Jesus that it is late and he should send the people away to get food. Jesus teaches that those who follow him exist in true community by caring for the needs of one another, and responds to their request by saying, "You give them something to eat."

People who live in true community thus live in covenantal relationships celebrating, respecting, and valuing one another. As the body of Christ, true community seeks justice and love for all of God's people.

A Passion for Justice

Grounded in the Biblical vision of shalom (true and full physical, emotional and spiritual wholeness), justice is how we treat each other in community. It becomes a reality when we truly affirm and respect the inherent dignity, worth and equality of each person as a sister or brother created in the image of God and included fully in the family of God.

Scriptures are alive with a passion for justice. Over and over again, the Hebrew prophets clearly communicate God's desire that God's people "do justice,"³ that the righteous "speak up for the powerless,"⁴ that the nation "welcome the stranger,"⁵ and that political leaders "render justice to the oppressed and needy."⁶

We find this same passion for justice in the life and ministry of Jesus. In the tradition of Jubilee economics (where debts were to be forgiven and land was redistributed), our Lord and Savior announced that he came "to preach good news to the poor" and "set at liberty those who are oppressed."⁷ In his Beatitudes, he taught that the reign of God belongs to the poor and to those who

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suffer for the sake of justice.⁸ And he warned that the final judgment will be based on how we, as nations, treat "the least of these": the naked, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, and the imprisoned.⁹

Because of his passion for justice, Jesus not only lifted up the plight of the oppressed, but also uncompromisingly challenged the unjust use of power by religious and political leaders. For this he was denounced and crucified as a revolutionary. Thus, when he died for our sins, he also suffered and



Photo: Eric Brownstone/Photos.com

died in spiritual and political solidarity with history's many victims of violence, injustice, and oppression. But God raised him from the dead, vindicating all aspects of his life—including his passion for justice!

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we Disciples can share in the Biblical witness to and passion for justice. Whenever we struggle against the demonic powers of personal and institutional racism; whenever we call upon our nations to legally receive the stranger as a welcome and valued member of our increasingly diverse national families; whenever we work to protect God's creation from those activities that threaten it; whenever we stand up for the equality of women and men; whenever we work to overcome the exclusion and domination of any person or group; whenever we struggle to recognize basic human rights of the immigrant community as we seek for a reformed immigration laws that supports immigrants' whole families and brings justice to all; whenever we advocate for public policy that helps bring health, wholeness and well-being to all God's children; whenever we, as the diverse but united body of Christ, come together as true equals around the Lord's Table —whenever we do these things, we do them as Bible-believing, Spirit-led and Table-fed Disciples of Christ who share in our Lord and Savior's undying passion for justice.

Conclusion

We, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) along with all churches and all persons of faith, are called "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God."¹⁰ Our capacity to affect social change and pave paths of justice is unrivaled. Propelled by our faith to take action while grounded in deep spirituality, we strive to be the peace in the world that we have experienced in Christ. We have learned that peacemaking and justice-seeking are most effective when carried out by peaceable people and communities who actively nurture their own spirits and open themselves to God's Holy Spirit. As bodies of Christ connected by the Body of Christ, we are concerned with forming and inspiring true, beloved communities where poverty, racism, sexism, classicism, exclusion, violence and injustice do not exist. Our salvation is inextricably bound in the salvation of one another—this we know.

Thus, we are indeed called to be a movement for wholeness in an extremely fragmented world.

As early followers of the Jesus movement, who met together in voluntary associations to share a meal, share stories, and share community, we Disciples share Communion. To share of ourselves, we share our own wounds, suffering, wrongdoing and fear. Out of brokenness and our own sense of injustice emerges wholeness and holiness. This is the mystery of our faith. Love shared not out of perfection, but out of messiness, confusion and self-absorption. Communion at our Lord's Table is learning to love one another as we gather around a common meal, regardless of age, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, political affiliation, disability, or name. This is the Feast of Justice to which we welcome all as God has welcomed us.

This struggle and pursuit for justice is powerless, however, without the peaceable presence of the love of God through Jesus Christ, felt in the guts of our innermost being as the Holy Spirit, pulsing through our veins and flowing through and out of our bodies into the world. We are the agents of God's justice and love as modeled in the scriptures. We have captured, and have been captured by the Biblical vision! We are the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the imperfect but earnest embodiment of the Love that makes for justice in a world mired in anguish and oppression. We believe in the ubiquitous and reconciling presence of God even in the face of anguish and division. We proclaim the Good News that Love truly does drive out fear, and that we will make it through the tyranny of Good Friday injustice and arise on Easter, awe-struck at the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord to resurrect and transform.

We are a Church who understands and is passionate about what the Lord requires of us: to do justice.

Amy Gopp

*Executive Director,
Week of Compassion*

¹ Hamm, Richard L., *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, Chalice Press, 2001, p. 46

² Hamm. *Ibid.*, p. 53

³ Micah 6:8.

⁴ Proverbs 31:8-9.

⁵ Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34.

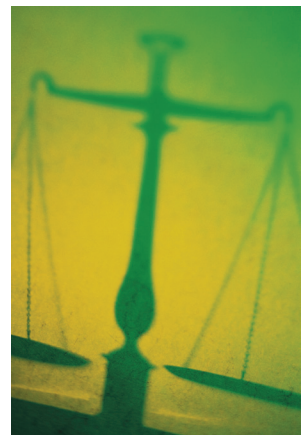
⁶ Psalms 82:3-4.

⁷ Luke 4:18-19.

⁸ Matthew 5:3-10; see also Luke 6:20-26.

⁹ Matthew 25:31-46.

¹⁰ Micah 6:8



Study Guide

Each of the following three sessions of study for the Justice Primer are estimated at 60-minutes. You can use them as they are outlined or modify them to suit your context.

Patricia Donahoo

Executive Director, Office of Disciples Women

Micah 6:8 (NRSV). . . what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8 (NIV) And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8 (CEV) The Lord God has told us what is right and what he demands: "See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God."

Micah 6:8 (The Message) But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously.

Micah 6:8 (NKJV) He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

(Disciples identity statement, General Board 2008)

"We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one Body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."

(Disciples vision)

To be a faithful, growing church, that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice.

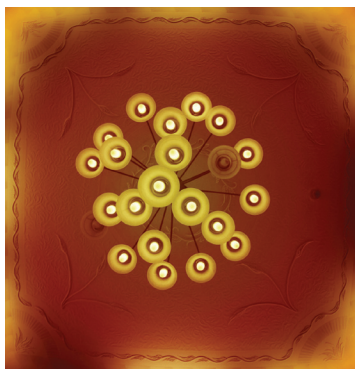


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Session One

Deep Christian Spirituality

"And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone."

Matthew 14:23

As you begin the first study on Deep Christian Spirituality, take 5 minutes to read Micah 6:8 in a variety of translations and the "Introduction" to the Justice Primer inviting the group to consider the following questions:

- What does it mean to be a disciple, a follower of the living Christ?
- How do we seek wholeness in a fragmented world?
- How big is your table?
- What is true community?
- What is deep Christian spirituality?
- What is justice and how do we develop a passion for it?

Next read the scripture and section of Justice Primer. Allow approximately 5 minutes to discuss questions 2 and 3.

- Read "Deep Christian Spirituality" in Justice Primer.
- Where do you find a place to pray alone?
- What have been your most meaningful moments of renewal?

Invite the group to take time to enter into silent time. You can pray if you wish but it is not necessary. Try to be completely aware of your surroundings; don't zone out but in silence be fully present and aware. Pay attention to where your mind wanders when you are in a time of silence. (5 minutes)

Allow 10 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- Share with one another your experience of silent time.
- How would you describe Jesus' spirituality? Explain.
- How does having a close relationship with God prepare you to serve and love God's children?
- How can you be attentive to God? When or

where have you felt closest to God? What made God's presence so real?

Invite participants to draw a picture of a time or place when they have felt close to God. Include who was there and what the circumstances were. Ask: "Did you call on God or did you notice God was already there?" (10 minutes)

Allow 5 minutes to discuss the following questions:

8. What gets in the way of being open to God?
9. How can you offer yourself to God?

Invite group to describe a time when they served in a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, or some other act of servant ministry. Ask: "Did this experience bring you closer to God or was it an act of being responsive to the needs of others on a purely practical level?" (10 minutes)

Close by gathering around the Table of the Lord. As you share the bread and the cup, offer one word or one phrase about what it means to feel the presence of God. (10 minutes)

Session Two

True Community

"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." Acts 2:44-45

Begin by reading scripture and section of Justice Primer. Allow approximately 5 minutes to discuss questions 2 and 3.

1. Read "True Community" in Justice Primer.
2. What would prevent you from selling your possessions to provide for the needs of others?
3. What prevents today's Church from having all things in common?

Allow 10 minutes for this activity. Think about what possessions are your most prized. Which possessions would be most difficult to part with? Why? What is it about them that gives them value? What would it take to convince you to sell them for the good of someone else? Share your stories with one another.

Allow 10 minutes to discuss the following questions:

4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. How closely bound are you to other believers? Are you

more closely bound to some than others? What makes the difference?

5. What does it mean to belong? How is belonging different from membership?
6. Have you ever felt you belonged to a group until someone else made it clear that you did not? What effect does it have on you to be on the outside of a group?

Provide a sheet of paper for each person in the group and have them write their name at the top. Pass the sheets of paper around the group and have each member of the group write a one word or one phrase affirmation of that person. If you prefer you might prefer to draw a representation of encouragement. Return the papers to the person whose name is at the top and allow a few moments in silence to reflect on what was shared. (10 minutes)

Allow 5 minutes to discuss the following questions:

7. How have you offered 'welcome' to someone else? How have you been welcomed? What is said or done that makes a place or experience welcoming? What makes a place or experience unwelcoming?
8. What do you find most difficult about welcoming someone who is very different from yourself? Is it easier or harder than someone who has a lot in common with you?

Read Matthew 25:34-46 and ask group to consider, "How is welcoming a stranger the same as welcoming Christ himself?" (Allow 10 minutes to read scripture and answer the following questions.)

9. How can you help someone while affirming their dignity? When have you seen a person's dignity denied/ignored? How could it have been handled better?
10. Is it easier to embrace diversity of ethnicity and background than diversity of beliefs, theology, philosophy, and/or ideas? Why?

Close by gathering around the Table of the Lord. As you serve one another the bread and the cup, offer a blessing about the gift the person you serve brings to this community. (10 minutes)



Session Three

A Passion for Justice

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” Proverbs 31:8-9

Begin by reading scripture and section of Justice Primer. Allow approximately 5 minutes to discuss questions 2, 3, and 4.

1. Read “A Passion for Justice” in Justice Primer.
2. What is justice? How is it lived out? What are some examples of acts of justice?
3. Have you ever actively sought justice? For yourself? For someone else?
4. What is it that moves you to stand up for what is right? Something or someone close and personal? Something on a national scale? A global injustice?

Invite the group to consider what it is like to seek justice in different circumstances. Allow 10 minutes for discussion.

If you have been wrongly accused or you are fired without reason.

If your child is bullied at school.

If government programs or budgets put a group or class of people in financial jeopardy.

If a foreign government allows their citizens to be tortured or killed.

When would you seek justice? What’s the difference?

Allow 10 minutes to discuss the following questions:

5. When did Jesus seek justice? What was it that called his attention to the injustice? Did he notice on his own or did someone else bring it to his attention?
6. Read Matthew 25:31-46. What does this passage tell us about our focus on justice? Who are the people who suffer injustice? What should our response be?

Remind the group that Jesus challenged the use of power by religious and political leaders and sought to relieve the oppressed from their difficult existence. He was also crucified as a revolutionary. Ask: “How

concerned are you about the possible repercussions of speaking out against power? When you consider acts of injustice, are you fearful of what might happen to you if you speak out?” (10 minutes)

Allow 10 minutes to discuss the following questions:

7. What injustice do you see around you? Is there injustice against groups of people? Based on race? Gender? Sexual orientation? Age? Beliefs?
8. Is there injustice through exclusion or domination? Through lack of availability of human necessities?
9. You have heard and probably sung “They’ll know we are Christians by our love”. Do you think people would recognize us as Christians by the way we show love through speaking out and moving against injustice? What can we do about justice issues to show that we are Christians?

Close by gathering around the Table of the Lord. As you conclude your study, take a few minutes to consider that impossibly large table Dr. Watkins mentioned in the introduction of the Justice Primer. As a gift of God through the Holy Spirit we have been given this table that spans space and time, where Jesus is the host, and each of God’s children finds a safe place where justice abounds. May we each ask of ourselves: “What does the Lord require of me?” May each of us do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Invite those gathered to hear again these words from the “Conclusion” of the Justice Primer, “We proclaim the Good News that Love truly does drive out fear, and that we will make it through the tyranny of Good Friday injustice and arise on Easter, awe-struck at the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord to resurrect and transform.” As you share at the table, remember the grace of God represented in our lives and the meaning of all the tables around which we gather.

As you serve one another the bread and the cup, pray for those who lack the basic necessities of bread and clean water. (15 minutes)



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