

Study and Reflection Guide

for Each Episode

in “Living Our Principles”

A 6-part story about The United Methodist Social Principles

Introduction

“Living Our Principles” episodes and accompanying reflection material seek to answer the question:

"Who is our neighbor?"

The narratives and partnership represented in the six episodes illustrate ways people of faith live out their values and convictions when it comes to:

- "The Natural World"
- "The Nurturing Community"
- "The Social Community"
- "Economic Justice"
- "Politics, Power & The World"

A sixth video represents a "best of the best" from the other five episodes.

As people of faith we live in a world not yet fully realized as the realm of God. We believe that by grace God's kingdom is within our reach as we put our faith into action, transforming both the personal body and the body politic, the mind, and the soul into the image and reflection of Christ.

We hope “Living Our Principles” inspires you to create conversation for reflection informed by Christ, who has the power, to stimulate behavior that more fully reflects the Social Principles of our denomination.

This is also an invitation for you to connect with the ministries of the General Board of Church & Society of The United Methodist Church, to share your stories of hope and resilience as to how you and your community are transforming the world for the better.

Episode One: The Natural World

Synopsis: All created things depend on a flourishing natural world to bring about abundance. How do we protect life as stewards of the earth? Many of the stories presented in the film echo a profound, love and respect for the natural world. We meet many people who have gathered to protect their right to the land, and others who embrace creative ways to cultivate the earth's rich gifts and resources. “The Natural World” looks at how in the face of nature's turbulent change communities put their principles into action.

A Reflection on Being Stewards of the Earth

All things were created by God as an act of love. God created the natural world that includes the land we cultivate, the water that sustains life, and the air we breathe. God also filled the earth with creatures of the land, air and sea.

How do you see God's handiwork in the natural world?

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God then granted humankind the task of stewardship over all created things. Stewardship is to take care of the natural world. Oftentimes, we confuse stewardship with ownership. Ownership implies that it is our right to possess that which is owned. How do we treat objects that we own versus objects that belong to someone else? Do we show more care or less care?

We are not left without an example of how to care for creation. We are made in the image of God, and are to share that likeness by caring for the natural world in ways full of compassion and love. We are created in God's image, therefore, we are in relationship with the Creator. We show God's goodness and are to act in ways that glorify and reflect the love of God.

Can you name some examples of how God cares for creation? These examples can come from your life experience and from scripture such as Deuteronomy 17:14-20, 26:4-15; Psalm 104:14-24; Jeremiah 8:18-22; Mark 10: 2-12; Luke 19:45-47; Acts 32:37; Romans 12:14-21; and James 2:1-7.

In what ways do you feel you are connected to the created world?

Are there ways you feel disconnected from the natural world? Does this affect how you relate to the natural world?

Examples of disconnection could be lack of knowledge of how food gets to our tables, or how the raw minerals in our phones and laptops are collected and processed. We know little about the collection of raw materials, and the steps of refining that enable the earth to feed us and support the ways we live.

When you learn more about systems of production do you feel more connected to the natural world that provides the raw material? How do you think we have been disconnected from the earth in the production process?

Economic, political, social and technological developments have increased our population, lengthened and enriched our lives. These developments, however, have led to major problems in many ecosystems. What do these developments say about our relationship with creation? What problems were addressed by "The Natural World"?

In what ways did you see communities and individuals act to address the problems that affect the natural world? Our natural world keeps all things in balance to sustain life. If the natural world suffers, life is threatened. What ways can your community alleviate suffering in your area?

What segment or story in "The Natural World" inspires you the most? Why?

Are there stories or a segment that you would not automatically place in "The Natural World" of the Social Principles?

How do you try to care for the natural world?

Are there any environmental issues that directly affect your community? Has your congregation taken any action to minimize the impact of this issue?

Chapter 1 Kenya--Kennedy Mwita--pastor and farmer

How does the landscape affect agricultural development, education and the decision to produce tobacco?

Does the profit and income generated from tobacco production meet the economic needs of the community and its families? What are the downsides to this form of income generation?

What motivates the community to move from tobacco farming to chili cultivation?

How does the community identify and capitalize on its existing assets to create change?

In what ways does the production of tobacco as a commodity and as a drug benefit farmers and distributors? In what ways does it impede security? Are we aware of other products or commodities that stagnate development of people?

What does this chapter say about the United Methodist Social Principles statements on Water, Soil, Minerals, Plants & Food Safety and Food Justice?

Chapter 2 Democratic Republic of the Congo--Bishop Nkulu Ntambo--health care advocate

"If the church has no vision the people will perish." — Bishop Nkulu Ntambo

What is the relationship between people's health and their environment?

Where do we see an intersection between health and community organizing for change?

How do we respond to fatalistic acceptance of environmental disease by casting a vision for action to decrease the fatalities resulting from diseases such as malaria?

Chapter 3 Nairobi Kenya--Paul Njugana--pastor and community developer

How does our care for the earth influence our values and how do our values motivate us to care for the environment around us?

Chapter 4 Philippines--Union Theological Seminary--Goe-theology and the NCCP

The professors at Union Theological Seminary discuss formation of a geo-theology. How does this theology communicate God's grace, stewardship of creation, and reverence for the sanctity of life? What do these have in common? Where do you see the greatest challenge to ensuring the sanctity of life in the ecosystems both locally and globally?

The presenter explains that plants and fruits are expressions of God's goodness. As you observe the natural world for yourself where do you observe or experience a God who is infused into creation and a God who creates and then stands apart from that good creation? What is the image of God communicated in the story?

Landless farmers are exploited for their skills to cultivate the land in the Philippines. What insecurities do they face and how does this impact their communities?

How does food insecurity affect our stewardship of the global climate, global development, and global security?

In what ways does access to and ownership of land impact access to political power? Do you see this as similar in your own community: that distribution of land and inequity of access to land between the producers and owners leads to disparity in civil rights?

When you map out your own community, who cultivates the land, and are they safeguarded and protected? The Social Principles talk about food justice and small-scale agricultural opportunities. Does sustainable economic development in your community reflect the Social Principles?

The Philippines is a "disaster-prone country" and human-made disasters and armed aggression displace communities while natural and environmental damage affects their world at large. How have those who speak out against these exploitative obstacles to development been treated in your community?

How can our society advocate for those who have been criminalized because they speak out against these forms of oppressions?

Chapter 5 Appalachia--Coal Mining and the community

What are your first impressions of the images of mountain-top removal and strip mining ?

How does our changing a natural landscape affect the environment in our area?

Chapter 6 Democratic Republic of the Congo--Extraction mining and

What resources such as schools, water, housing, jobs are affected by the mining industry?

What can the church do to provide sanctuary, solace, healing, and a public platform for persons to continue to speak out and challenge these injustices?

Episode 2: Nurturing Community

Synopsis: Each person is of sacred worth. Therefore, each community is tasked to care for the most vulnerable because each person is made in the image of God. Vulnerable peoples are often women and children. They live in poverty, and face instability and insecurity. This insecurity can lead to the abuse of

drugs, malnutrition, violence, war, rape, human trafficking and other social ills. Individuals and communities nurture and support those who have suffered at the hands of others. Restoration and healing offer those who are the most vulnerable renewed life.

Bible Study — Sacred Worth

This episode weighs heavily on the soul as it exposes the brutality against and suffering of those persons who are the most vulnerable in our society. Every person is created by God and therefore deemed to be of sacred worth. God's beloved are neglected, abused and live in daily fear.

Allow the following Psalm to be a form of lament as we remember those people we know personally, persons who have shared their stories of being mistreated at the hands of another.

Psalm 55:1-2, 4-6, 8, 12-14a, 20-21

Give ear to my prayer, O God;

do not hide yourself from my supplication.

Attend to me, and answer me;

I am troubled in my complaint.

I am distraught ...

My heart is in anguish within me,

the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Fear and trembling come upon me,

and horror overwhelms me.

And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!

I would fly away and be at rest;

I would hurry to find a shelter for myself

from the raging wind and tempest ...

It is not enemies who taunt me

I could bear that;

it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me

I could hide from them.

But it is you, my equal,

my companion, my familiar friend,

with whom I kept pleasant company ...

My companion laid hands on a friend

and violated a covenant with me^[b]

with speech smoother than butter,

but with a heart set on war;

with words that were softer than oil,

but in fact were drawn swords.

We recognize that poverty makes persons vulnerable to systems that take advantage of their social condition. This vulnerability often leads to unrecognized suffering experienced internally as loss of self-worth and the inevitability of oppression, and externally as exploitation of our social status.

Can you name those who are the most vulnerable in this world? Can you name those persons in your community who may not always be remembered by the community?

How do you feel when you come face to face with one who is suffering or has been pushed to the margins? How do we respond to suffering when we see it?

Read the following passage of the story of the Samaritan Woman at the well: John 4:5-30.

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

Jesus said to her: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

The woman answered him, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her: "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

The woman said to him: "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her: "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him: "I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or "Why are you speaking with her?"

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

They left the city and were on their way to him.

In this scripture do we hear how Jesus responds to those pushed to the margins of society and are suffering? In what way does Jesus respond differently than the Samaritan community and the disciples? What causes Jesus to choose not to judge but to recognize, humanize and care for the needs of this unnamed woman?

As a community of faith we remember that we have the access to power and the potential to create great change in the world. We have the potential to create a culture of caring for those who are suffering. But do we have the political and social will to choose change?

Are there voices from this episode that you were encouraged by? Whose story echoes the truth that Christ came to teach us how to live in community that celebrates the life of all persons?

As a church we believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community. These new forms of communities will encourage the formation of each person as they pursue their fullest potential as individuals and collectively. Are there ways that you work to support and offer healing to persons in your local community?

Central to United Methodists is the understanding that all persons are of sacred worth. Each person is a human being created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ. This renewed personal identity

merits significance because of who Christ is within us. We hold intrinsic value. How were the people in this episode able to restore their human dignity and claim their sacred worth?

We as a church therefore support social climates in which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons and their growth. Who in your community needs some extra support or care? Is there an individual who comes to mind or a group of people who seem to be neglected?

Bible Study Answers and Continued Questions Episode 2

Are there ways that you work to support and offer healing and wholeness to persons in your local community? Where do you see the need for community mending?

Chapter 1 Liberia--post-conflict rebuilding

Children caught in the crossfire are the first victims in any armed conflict; many children face trauma, displacement, rejection, and economic and physical exploitation. What does the film describe as ways to recovery?

What does it mean to disarm our minds toward recovery?

Chapter 2 Democratic Republic of the Congo--sexual violence and survival

What is the effect of sexual violence and rape on family, marriage, women and men?

What are the greatest losses to childhood as a result of sexual violence?

What are the greatest obstacles to overcoming the stigma of rape?

How do we create space for women and children to share their pain and to move from victims to survivors to citizens trusted to create a new nation?

What role did the community play in cultivating healing among girls violated by rape in this chapter?

How do the Social Principles explain the causes and effects of sexually base violence (sexual abuse, sexual harassment, women and men, single person, family violence and abuse, sexual assault) and how do they advocate for nurturing community?

Chapter 3 Sierra Leone--Mary and refugee

What do you hear in Mary's story that encourages you to organize and advocate for change? In what ways does a faith community stand as a symbol and a place of hospitality and refuge and renewed commitment to social change for those who survive systemic violence?

If you could have a face-to-face conversation with Mary, what issue would you discuss? What would you like to know? What would you share with Mary about a time when you felt isolated, trapped and then reconnected with a community?

Chapter 4 Zimbabwe--Beauty--women of strength and purpose

Consider Beauty's story. How do we ensure people can speak in their own voice for the change they would like to see in society?

What are ways we can invite others to join in being part of the transformation of their own community?

What does this require of us? In what ways have we failed to live into this practice?

What are the roles of educators, organizers and mentors in cultivating a desire among people to return to the places they have come from to be change agents of justice?

In what ways can we better approach people who are outside of a circle of comfort?

Shirley speaks eloquently about prophetic accompaniment, reconciliation, forgiveness: practices central to the spirituality of a faith community. In what ways are practicing forgiveness and reconciliation as well as trust and accountability spiritual practices?

What are you called to be liberators from, and what do you feel called to be liberators for?

Chapter 5 Philippines- violation of human rights and church response

How can the ecumenical community play a role in activism?

What is the role of the church in societies that may not condone human rights?

We heard that social transformation calls for personal transformation. Therefore what are some ways that individuals and communities can stand up for human rights?

Episode 3: Together in Community

Synopsis: There is power and potential in communities coming together, forming partnerships to meet the needs of those who are most vulnerable in society. This transformation begins with listening to those on the margins to eliminate the prejudices our society perpetuates. Then armed with information, coalitions form to address the needs identified, and advocacy commences. Communities generate renewal as individuals gather and share their education, training and gifts.

Bible Study — Coming Together

Matthew 25: 31- 46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand: ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him: ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’

“And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

“Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’

“Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

”And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

How does this scripture illustrate what God wants to see in our world today? Are you embracing this vision in the society you live in? How so or why not?

What would the world think about Christians if we fully embraced this message of care for all those in need as a general practice that we did without thinking of the cost?

We live in a global society and in this society particular rights and privileges are allotted to groups of people based on manufactured social status. It is often easy to recognize those persons who have been pushed to the margins of society. Please take time to name some of these groups seen in the episode or name groups that you are aware of in your context.

The ways in which a society acts to support, listen to, and to care for the needs of those persons who are the most vulnerable shows the conscience or soul of that society. What are different ways of listening to the needs of those who need greater support in our society? If we as a church believe all persons are valuable and considered equal in the eyes of God, why do we often neglect to allow people to be a catalyst in their own healing?

We must work towards societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained and strengthened. We do this by supporting the basic civil and human rights of all persons, guaranteeing persons equitable access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. This requires more than extending occasional gestures of mercy, and meeting an immediate, obvious need. We are also to take steps to create political and

social action to address the systemic ills of our time. This is at the core of our tradition as followers of Christ.

This gathering around social inequality may seem too big for us to handle as individuals. This episode demonstrates the power and potential of different individuals coming together with their specific skills, gifts and graces, and using what they have to respond to their greatest needs. Hope flourishes in gathering around a shared purpose. This is accomplished by forming partnerships, building bridges and collaborating with those most directly impacted by a social injustice and those who desire to be in solidarity with them.

What social or political movements represent hope for you?

People of faith are present in every system and structure that govern our world. Are there any persons in this film who inspired you? These people are inspirational because they integrate faith with work and change the world.

Chapter 1 Little Rock--Stephen Copley--advocating for living wages

What does it mean to "rise up to meet the challenge of faith"?

Stephen cites Matthew 25. How does raising the minimum wage in Arkansas speak to changing social and economic systems, and also caring for the immediate needs of vulnerable persons and their families?

In what ways does your community understand its core mission to promote acts of mercy and acts of justice?

In what ways does labor earning a fair wage contribute to a deeper sense of dignity and self-worth as well as reflect our commitment to human rights?

What are your first thoughts when you hear the word "unemployed" and "affluent"?

What are your impressions of what unemployed and affluent people need?

Better Community Development (BCD) highlights the need for a multi-layered approach to economic security and well-being. In what ways do you see an incomplete picture of development in your community or the communities you are involved with?

Where have you seen comprehensive development that works globally? What keeps these programs successful?

Partnerships are essential to creating and sustaining change. We cannot bring just social change in isolation. Government and faith communities set a new standard for social change through coalition building. In what ways have you seen church and community come together as one in coalitions in your area? What inhibits our capacity to partner successfully with other organizations? What role does history, economic and racial division, and assumptions about "the other," hinder partnership?

The Social Principles detail the rights of ethnic and racial groups, children, young people, women, the aging, men, immigrants, persons with disabilities, equal rights regardless of sexual orientation. Where do advocacy for human rights and investment in community development support each other?

Chapter 2 Appalachia--Retributive and Restorative Justice

The Social Principles state that all peoples are of infinite worth. Abuse of alcohol and other drugs diminishes our capacity to live abundantly into that sense of infinite worth. In what way does this story remind us of the gradual process in recovery, and the need for continued support for those in recovery from addictions. In what way does the story remind us of the need to reform the prison-industrial system and address alternatives to mass incarceration?

Judge Engle explains that drug courts are an accountable alternative to a retributive, criminal-justice system, and that treatment is a better investment than punitive judgment. What are the benefits to drug courts, and what role do you see faith communities having in furthering drug courts in communities?

What additional alternatives to the retributive system of justice do you know of?

What can your faith community do to rebuild lives by going beyond retributive responses to drug abuse?

Chapter 3 Kenya

The Social Principles are clear that all persons are to be treated with dignity and respect including persons living with HIV/AIDS.

How is illness and health spoken about in your religious tradition?

What are your first thoughts when you hear the words health and wholeness and HIV/AIDS?

Anthony illustrates the role of leaders in educating for prevention of disease, promoting healing, inspiring hope. What are the resources you have in your community to speak out in favor of health and wholeness?

The Social Principles state that health care is a basic human right. How does your community advocate for access to health care for all regardless of their social status?

Chapter 4 Nigeria--tolerance and common security

The Social Principles discuss the rights of religious minorities. What are the social, ethnic, religious causes of conflict in Nigeria?

What does it mean to be part of a global community?

Episode 4: Economic Community

Synopsis: The majority of the world's people and nations live in poverty. This inequality leads to extreme vulnerability, insecurity, exploitation and oppression. These stories emphasize how communities and persons work to create a more just, stable society. Transition to a just society ensures that all persons' basic needs are met, jobs are created, and opportunities are secured for the improvement of the quality of life of all persons in the world.

Bible Study — Household

Amos 8:4-8

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
 and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
 saying, "When will the new moon be over
 so that we may sell grain;
 and the Sabbath,
 so that we may offer wheat for sale?
 We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
 and practice deceit with false balances,
 buying the poor for silver

and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,

and all of it rise like the Nile,

and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?

The prophet Amos speaks boldly in this passage. The message is a warning that contains great truth to us today. How are we bringing ruin to the poor of the land today? Does everyone have access to the goods that are for sale? These goods that Amos names are not luxury items bought from a surplus of wealth. They are the essentials required for persons to live. What are some of these goods needed for life?

Isaiah 58: 6-7

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them ...

The world we live in is marked by inequality. In a world of plenty where all people could be fed, many are left without the basics of what they need to survive. Our global economy unchecked disregards and discards the vulnerable. Jesus knew this. Where there were unhoused persons, hungry persons yearning to be fed, Jesus spoke out against this oppression in his public ministry. The poor named here are persons living in abject poverty. The oppressed are those persons growing in debt who cannot escape the pain and suffering of their economic position.

Take time to name some of these people who are left without a name, the poor and those who are oppressed.

Do you feel like you understand how our global economy functions? Do you contribute to the exploitation and oppression of others? Do your actions contribute to their liberation and their capacity to thrive?

Jesus references scriptures from Isaiah to announce that in his telling the truth of the circumstances and the times in which we are living, a new day is also coming and a new society is emerging. A day will come when exploitation of the poor will cease and the oppressed will go free.

But where do we begin, and how can we begin to participate in this bringing forth of economic justice?

The household or *oikos* in Greek. Why do you think it is important to connect this meaning to our global economy?

The household that we are invited to live in as Christians is one where all are welcome. A house is where we have things in common and share what resources we have. We cannot live lives of greed where we

solely benefit from the work of others. This is a vision of all people having their basic needs met. This is a vision of a home where all people are able to share who they are as they reclaim their human dignity.

What stories from this episode showed you that we can change the way the household (global economy) runs today?

What movement are you aware of that tries to put our global household back in order? How do we know the needs and resources that a community possesses? Were there any actions highlighted in the episode that you would not automatically relate to as an economic issue?

The Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father and Mother, who is in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Group: God wills that all people should have abundant life.

Leader: Give us this day our daily bread.

Group: No one should go hungry.

Leader: Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Group: No one should be impoverished by debt.

Leader: Lead us not into temptation.

Group: Help us resist the temptation of greed and self-righteousness or smugness.

Leader: But deliver us from evil.

Group: Liberate all people from unjust systems and structures.

ALL: For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

Bible Study Answers and Continued Questions Episode 4

Chapter 1 Detroit--Faith Fowler--community development and advocacy

The struggle for economic justice is the fight for our neighbors' well-being. Knowing this, what answers come to mind when you look at personal and communal plans for social change? In what ways in this story are the different needs of the neighbor revealed?

Faith Fowler talks about the importance of a needs assessment, asking persons most directly impacted by an injustice what they want and need, but not expecting every program to meet every need. Our role may be to fill an existing gap. What are examples in your community where gaps need to be filled and responses need not duplicate each other?

What are the strengths of this model of micro-enterprise?

How does recovery from addictions and recovery from living in poverty lead to economic stability and development?

How do those working in vulnerable communities balance the needs of sustained personal healing from trauma with expanding community hospitality?

What is the role of mentors and change agents as leaders in community?

How is this ethic of personal grace and hospitality essential for economic development that represents the assets and the needs of the diverse members of a community?

What does it cost to be in relationship for and with all people?

As leaders how do we create a liberating vision to encourage people to see that change is possible?

Chapter 2 Oklahoma--Restorative Justice

Which is a priority for you: prevention of drug offenses and drug possession, or behavioral health management for abusers, or incarceration?

How does criminalization of addictions and a prison-industrial complex perpetuate poverty?

How does a for-profit prison system devalue life? What is the image of life affirmed by for-profit prisons?

How does an affirmation of a person's intrinsic worth allow for personal transformation?

With a commercialization of prisons and a cradle-to-prison pipeline, what kind of investment in social systems does this reflect for children and youths?

How does the privatization of the prison-industrial complex challenge restorative-justice practices? How does a focus on what rule was broken? Who did it? What do they deserve? Versus: What harm was done? Who was harmed? Who should be held accountable? And how do we make it right? What are the limits and the strengths of each system of accountability?

How can faith leaders collaborate with corporations and private industry to address legislative reform?

How does this collaboration benefit corporations?

Chapter 3: Liberia--Sexual exploitation and economics

Following decades of civil war and economic stagnation and the long-term impacts of war, women and children live in economic deprivation. How do gender roles and hardships or oppressions toward

persons based on gender, and access to education and employment in the informal economy perpetuate structural oppression of women?

The story of the sex worker reminds us that life on the streets is not always a choice, and that when family structures and emotional support systems are lost people are forced to seek alternatives. In what ways can a community provide economic security to this young girl who lost her father in the seventh grade during the civil war in Liberia?

What forms of development are the most effective to raise up global and local change? What is the role of the media, Internet and corporations in being good global stewards?

What makes Clarice's outreach to women so successful?

Chapter 4: Democratic Republic of the Congo--Economic security

In what way do education and micro-lending programs liberate persons from economic oppression?

How is micro-lending a first step in finding liberation personally and communally from the web of poverty?

What experience do you have or what knowledge have you gained around micro-lending and its ability to grow a community? How sustainable an option is micro-lending in your social context and community?

Chapter 5: Appalachia--Economics, memory and a different future

In what ways does generational poverty challenge the conscience of a nation and a faith community?

In what ways does our national amnesia toward what has been considered expendable communities create complacency and resignation among people of goodwill?

What does this say about our political will and our ability for people not only to survive but to thrive in their own communities?

Episode 5: Politics, Power & the World

Synopsis: Politics and power shape the world that we live in. People of faith cannot ignore the political arena. In this episode we hear from persons who chose to take public office because of their faith. We are reminded that people of faith are joining advocacy groups to construct a unified voice for social change.

Matthew 13: 31-35 and 44-46

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

"I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

"The kingdom of heaven is like ..." this phrase reminds us of the hope that has begun and is to come. The world to come will be completely reconciled to God. In Jesus' earthly ministry he used parables like these to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven will be like, and how we are to contribute to the vision of what the kingdom will be.

We are to be like Jesus sowing seeds. The kingdom is something to treasure and long for. Doing acts of mercy and justice that contribute in small ways to the kingdom of heaven on Earth. A person who is kingdom-minded holds on to hope that inspires to action as we begin to see change occurring as the kingdom is a clear and present reality.

Pick a person from the episode and write down what you think they would say the "kingdom of heaven is like ..."

Does this hope of the kingdom make our faith personal or public?

If it is public, how do our faith convictions create ethical implications for the world we are to build?

Has your church taught you the importance of civic responsibilities?

Do you think the political arena allows for change?

What are some ways you can be a political actor?

Has your church community ever taken political action?

When was this action and what did it look like?

Are there any political movements that The United Methodist Church has been a part of historically?

Please name one story from these episodes that reminds you that change is possible.

What are some inequities that infringe upon people's basic human rights and human dignity?

How do we speak out against corruption in the government today? Are there examples of speaking out in the episode?

Do their actions give you courage or motivate you to address other issues in your community?

Chapter: U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar

How do our ethics as people of faith inform our positions on war and peace?

If we understood that every ethical decision and political action we took was recorded, would we make the same decisions? Why or why not?

Where may there be a tension between our personal affirmation of faith and our public stance on the day's political decisions?

Sen. Lugar refers several times to the United Methodist Social Creed as well as the United Methodist Social Principles as sources that inform his ethical discernment on public policy. How does our faith affect our understanding of weapons of mass destruction and commitment toward working with other nations to dismantle, convert, eradicate weapons of mass destruction as a way to securing peace?

What are our beliefs on the ethical implication of a country relying on weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, biological/chemical, cyber?

What role does the public have in influencing decision makers to create solutions that do not rely on a politics of war but on a politics of development, dignity, environmental sustainability, and peace building?

Chapter 2: Rep. Satur Ocampo

Rep. Ocampo describes his journey from journalist and political activist during a regime of martial law. He describes his multiple detentions and incarcerations as a political prisoner, and the falsified charges against him as a leading figure in the human-rights movement in the Philippines. He calls the church to hold governments accountable for their abuse of human rights, and their denial of free speech and dissent.

How do we work to pressure governments to be accountable to norms for human rights that go beyond their own political aspirations or agendas?

In what ways do people of faith continue to advocate for freedom of speech and human rights around the world?

Are there other leaders you know whose journey resembles Rep. Ocampo's?

Chapter 3: Emira Woods

How do we encourage women in leadership globally? How would women leaders shift the dynamics of what we consider priorities for communities to flourish, such as development, housing, education, employment, health care, climate justice?

In which areas do you see women most vocal and effective in instigating social change?

Where do you see women's organizations and women bringing social change both locally and globally?

Emira talks about the changing nature of leadership. What styles of leadership promote social change and growth, and what styles maintain the status quo?

How can we be more informed about the legislative dialogue and decisions that our governments are considering that affect other countries?

Where are we generating spaces for intergenerational collaboration for political response?

Chapter 4: Rep. Emanuel Cleaver

We often do not see political figures as spiritual leaders. If we did not remember that political leaders often have spiritual motivation for their actions, how would we see them motivated to bring social change?

Is spiritual motivation a deficit or an asset to informing political decisions and commitments?

In what way is legislation like the children's health-care bill informed by the Social Principles? How do we show people what we believe without adopting a pharisaic posture toward their beliefs?

In what ways has the church been silent or meek and followed public opinion over its own convictions?

In what ways are policies such as Social Security a theological issue?

What are the core social issues that are theological in nature for you?

Is it possible to share theological commitments and still differ as voters on different sides of the aisle on an issue?

We know that in the end God's peace and justice will prevail. What role do we play as persons of faith?

Chapter 5: Zimbabwe

When a nation has undergone severe conflict and trauma, what is the role of faith communities in evaluating civil responsibility, promoting national healing from the wounds of political violence? What is the role of faith communities in mediation, challenging the conscience of business, the academy?

How does the church bring justice into being by promoting reconciliation, and by taking people to places they both physically and psychologically do not want to go to?

How can industry and faith communities avoid complicity with policies that would abuse a nation's own people?

What are your impressions of Lloyd's story? What is the major learning you can apply to your own life and community?

How do the Political and World Community sections of the Social Principles affect you?

Episode 6: A Selection of Stories