

*Just*Faith

*Purpose. From a
new perspective.*

JustFaith Week 8

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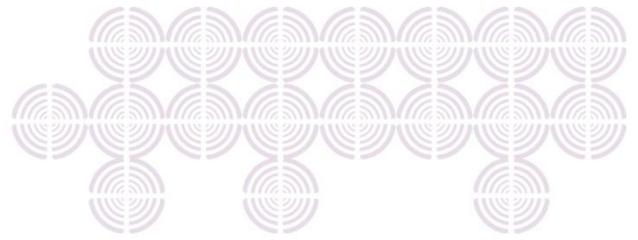


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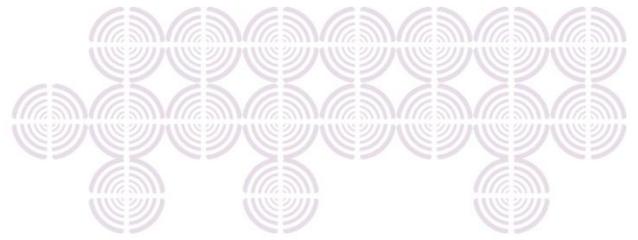


Note to Co-Facilitators

It is possible that someone in your group will say: “We don’t have gangs in our city, so it’s hard for me to relate to these young people in Tattoos on the Heart.” Even if there are not gangs in your community, the reality is that abject poverty exists in the United States that affects many children and young men and women, and these stories are profoundly important, poignant, and disturbing. Even if we do not experience regular drive-by shootings like the children of Camden, New Jersey experience all too often, we cannot turn away from the poverty that exists in our own back yards. By giving a face and voice to extreme poverty, the lived experience of the hell created by all forms of poverty is communicated.

The hope in sharing these readings and videos is to share the challenging and mostly unfamiliar language of justice. Many churches and people of faith can be counted on for charitable giving and works of charity; without demeaning those efforts, they are nonetheless inadequate unless paired with the work of changing systems that create pockets of poverty that exist in Los Angeles and Camden and Anytown, USA. By focusing on the lives of young people in Los Angeles, Father Boyle powerfully communicates the demise they are condemned to, not because they are “bad people” but simply because they are born into struggling communities. If any one of us were born where they were born, we would have before us the same tragic options and outcomes.

The questions are: How do we, as a church and a nation, change the environment in which these children are raised? How do we expand the options for their lives? How do we deconstruct the structures of injustice that the accumulated choices of generations have created? In an important sense, the Biblical narratives provide for us a set of values, insights, and applications that can guide us in contemporary decision-making. It is with earnest conviction that many Christians ask the question “What would Jesus do?” – indeed, the person of Jesus provides a powerful example for challenging social ills. Learning to wrestle with these questions and to discern helpful action and powerful witness is an important aspect of JustFaith. Hold these questions and these stories in prayerful meditation, watching for and listening to how the Holy Spirit leads you to respond.



Week Eight Components

Preparation for Week Eight

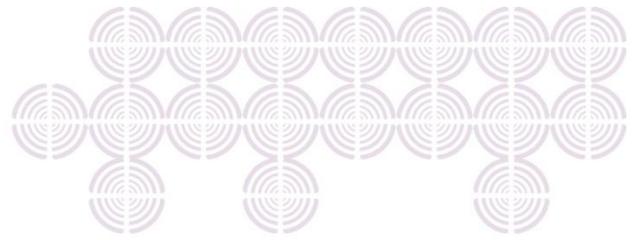
- Review Week Eight session information.
- Copy Week Eight handouts.
- Prepare newsprint or flipchart pages: draw a line down the middle of the page and write the headings “Charity” at the top of one column and “Justice” at the top of the other column. Prepare enough sheets so there will be one for each small group (of 4-5 people). (See Second Half below “Charity and Justice.”)
- Gather prayer items, markers, and masking tape (for above activity).
- Select instrumental music for the opening prayer.

Timing of the Session

Activity	Minutes
Prayer	15
Discuss reading	55
Break	10
Business	5
Discuss charity and justice	35
Discuss denominational resources	25
Closing prayer	5
Total	150

Welcome

Welcome participants and begin with prayer.



Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

- Items needed:* A piece of handmade pottery and a piece of soft modeling clay, Bible marked at Jeremiah 18:1-6
- Symbol(s):* Pottery/clay – We, and the world, are the work of God’s hands.
- Environment:* If possible, play instrumental music in the background.

Introducing the Symbols

(Slowly and deliberately)

When the group has gathered, hold up the clay in the center of the circle, introducing the symbol:

Clay – soft, malleable, receptive, forming . . . Creation.

Bring the pottery into the center of the circle. Hold it up and briefly introduce the symbol:

Pottery – hard, functional, useful, tool . . . Creation.

Place the pottery in the center of the circle.

Call to Prayer

(With quiet reverence)

Hold the clay in one hand and the pottery in the other. Begin by saying:

Oh God, you are the potter. We are the clay...the work of Your hands.

Pass the clay to the person seated on the right, the pottery to the person seated on the left. Invite the participants to hold each for a brief moment and pray silently before passing the symbol to the next person.

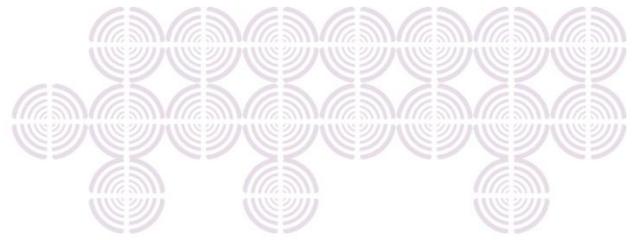
As the symbols move around the circle, pray aloud:

Jesus, in your name we gather. You are here in our midst.

In the presence of your Spirit, we become your body

to listen, to share, to learn, to care, and to pray for one another.

Move within us. Move among us.



Spirit of Compassion, bind us to one another.

Propel us out into your world to be your compassionate justice.

When the pottery and clay have gone around the circle, ask two participants to hold one of the items.

Scripture Reading

Read Jeremiah 18:1-6. Pause for silent reflection.

After a minute of silence, offer these words for further reflection:

Just as the potter can mold the clay into new forms and reshape it for new purposes, so can God remake and reshape our lives to fit the new purposes that the Holy Spirit has for us. But how do we know what those purposes are? How can we discern what the Master Potter has in mind for us? Just as Jeremiah was sent to hear God's voice by observing the potter, we too can know God's will by listening and looking and seeking the hand of the potter in the world around us.

Repeat verses 5 and 6 from Jeremiah. Pause for a brief moment of silence.

Distribute **Week 8 Participant Handout A**. Read the meditation slowly, pausing between each line.

Prayer of the Heart

Leader: **Let us take prayer to heart. Echo this simple prayer adapted from Jeremiah, line by line:**

Can I not do with you, just as the potter has done?

All: Can I not do with you, just as the potter has done?

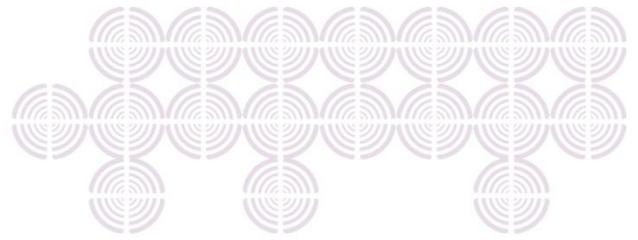
Leader: **Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.**

All: Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.

Leader: **Mold us into disciples, filled with compassion and love.**

All: Mold us into disciples, filled with compassion and love.

Leader: **Let this prayer echo in our hearts.**



Rite of Blessing

Leader: **Holy Spirit, inspire our thoughts. May we speak your truth.
May our hearts be opened. Together, we say, *Amen.***

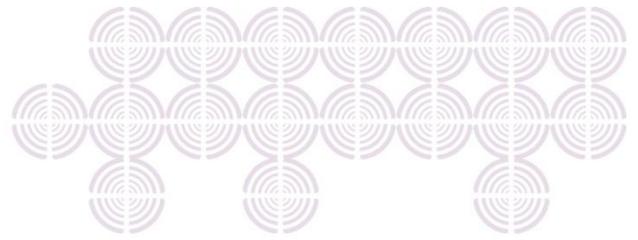
First Half (55 minutes)

Discussion Questions

- Tattoos on the Heart, pages 129-212

This final discussion of Father Boyle's book centers around the author's overall message and the nature of kinship. Be sure to cover the last question; it allows participants to discuss any fears or anxieties they may have around upcoming immersion experiences.

1. On page 130, the author writes, "Allowing folks into my jurisdiction requires that I dismantle what I have set up to keep them out." First, how do you understand his use of the word *jurisdiction*? Then discuss: Who are the people or groups of people that I exclude from the scope of those I care about? What would I need to dismantle in order to include them in my jurisdiction?
2. Recall a time when you took pure delight in someone, something or a situation. What would it take to be mindful to experience this type of delight in the world each day? If taking delight each day were a spiritual practice for you, how might it shift your consciousness over time?
3. On page 186, the author talks about wanting "to lean into the challenge of intractable problems with as tender a heart" as he can. In your understanding of working to address systemic injustice, why might it be essential to keep a tender heart in approaching such long term, intractable social problems?
4. The author states on page 187: "With kinship as the goal, other essential things fall into place; without it, no justice, no peace." How do you understand kinship after reading about Father Boyle's experiences? How might kinship lead to justice?
5. Ask someone to read the bottom half of page 190. Pause for a moment of silent reflection and then ask: Where are the margins in your community that you could move closer to so that the margin might be blurred, if not erased?
6. Where are the pockets of poverty in your community? What are churches, social service agencies and the municipal, state and federal government doing to address poverty in your community?
7. There are four immersion experiences during JustFaith where there will be opportunities to look into the eyes of a poor person. What concerns you about these experiences? What are you anxious about? What are you hoping for?



Break (10 minutes)

Business Items (5 minutes)

1. Assign reading for next week: Compassion, pages 47-84; Cloud of Witnesses, “Dorothy Day,” pages 9-14; and “Note to Participants for Week Nine.”
2. Distribute “Note to Participants for Week Nine”.
3. Remind participants to fill out their evaluations following each session.

Second Half (60 minutes)

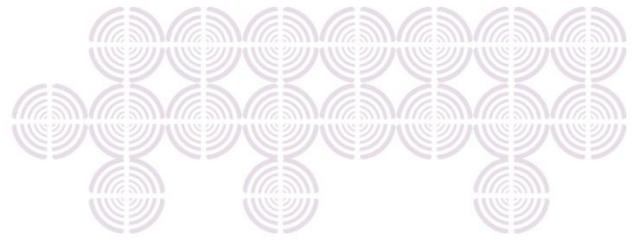
Part I: Understanding Charity and Justice (35 minutes)

This component will help participants review the differences between charity and justice. Prior to this session, prepare flipchart paper as described in the preparation list above.

Review the story that was in this week’s Note to Participants. Tell participants that this story illustrates a crucial difference between charity and justice. The villagers pulling children out of the river are doing an essential and life-saving service. However, their efforts will never cease as more struggling and drowning children come down the river. The villager who suggests going upstream to find out why children are in the river is taking the first steps toward justice—understanding the situation well enough to begin addressing the root cause. Both activities are necessary and vital.

Distribute **Week 8: Participant Handout B** and ask the whole group to look at the different types of general responses identified as charity and justice as well as specific responses to homelessness that come from using the lens of charity and the lens of justice. Ask the group to discuss how charity and justice differ, drawing on the information in the section labeled “General Responses.” Allow time for all to respond. (10 minutes)

Divide into small groups of four or five people. Ask the groups to respond to the bottom section of the handout and come up with two different lists of possible responses to hunger (or another social issue of local importance that the group might wish to explore): one list for acts of charity and one list for acts of justice. Ask the groups to be prepared to share their lists with the larger group. Give each group a marker and a sheet of newsprint; ask them to summarize their ideas on the newsprint and to select a spokesperson to present their ideas to the large group. (15 minutes)



Invite each small group to hang the newsprint with masking tape for all to see and to give a short report highlighting their ideas. To help clarify the distinction between charity and justice at the end of each report, ask if anyone has questions regarding whether an action idea is listed in the correct column. Based on the response, draw arrows, if necessary, moving ideas from one column to the other. (10 minutes)

Part II: Church Resources that Support Justice Ministry (25 minutes)

Ask participants to share what they found when they researched their own denomination's social teaching. If multiple denominations or nondenominational traditions are represented in your group, it may be helpful to organize the sharing by tradition.

Ask participants what their church provides as support for doing justice ministry, especially with the poor and marginalized (including declarations from leadership, creeds, policies, pastoral letters, etc.). What scripture passages are referred to in these church documents?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Removing the Symbol

Pick up the clay and, with these words of blessing, remove it from the circle:

May our lives and this world be formed by God's promised reign.

Pick up the pottery and, with these words, remove it from the circle:

May we become vessels of justice, mercy, and compassion.

A Circle of Prayer

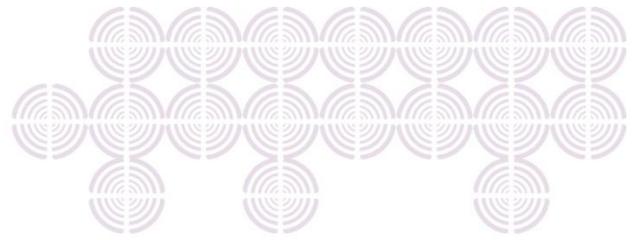
Ask the group to form a tight circle and link hands. Invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it with the group:

We are disciples on a journey.

We are the body of Christ, broken for this world.

Let us quietly pray for one another. (Pause)

If someone has a concern, a word of encouragement, or a short prayer to offer, please do so.



Words to Live By

Leader: **Let us again take this prayer from Jeremiah to heart:**

Can I not do with you, just as the potter has done?

All: Can I not do with you, just as the potter has done?

Leader: **Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.**

All: Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.

Leader: **Mold us Lord, to be your disciples and friends of the poor.**

All: Mold us Lord, to be your disciples and friends of the poor.

Leader: **May this prayer echo in our hearts throughout the week, as we walk, while we work, as we rest, and when we pray for one another. Call to mind those who are suffering, in despair or fear.**

A Sign of God's Peace

Leader: **Now we share in the peace for which our world hungers.**

With a sign of peace we affirm one another for the journey ahead.

May we extend God's peace to all!