

*Just*Faith

JustFaith:

## Overview and Sample Session



[www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org)

(502) 429-0865

In partnership with



## Encouraging a Culture of Care

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***When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening." You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.***

-Matthew 16:2-3

JustFaith is a transformative process that inspires small groups of faithful Christians to embrace the gospel vision of justice and peace, inviting them into right relationship with God, neighbor, and all of Creation. These relationships are the focus and the locus of personal and social transformation. This includes the relationship of participants to their own faith journey, the deepening bonds within each small community of faith, and the broadening of relationships with those who are poor and vulnerable. Through prayerful reflection, study, dialogue, and encounter, participants explore the signs of the times together as they open their hearts to the Spirit of Jesus in our midst.

In a landmark letter addressed to the whole human family, Pope Francis presented a new paradigm for engaging the Christian message in our time. In the face of an unfolding environmental and human catastrophe, whose effects are felt acutely by the most impoverished among us, he has strengthened the bridge between environmental and human concerns. True to the Biblical vision of God's world restored, he has challenged all of us to undergo an "ecological conversion."

***...social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society.***

-*Laudato Si'* 231

JustFaith embraces the integration of this eco-social justice paradigm, linking the cry of Creation with the cries of the world's poorest. These links between planet and people are affirmed throughout the 24-session process.

Integrating the paradigm of *Laudato Si'* with wisdom and voices from other traditions, this program is designed for use in diverse Christian contexts. At various points throughout the process, Catholic, Protestant, and ecumenical groups have the option to adapt and integrate prayer, rituals, and references that reflect the unique gifts of their own traditions.

***Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.***

-Earth Charter

## **An Unfolding Process**

The JustFaith journey of 24 sessions unfolds in four phases. Phase themes are as follows:

<b>Phase 1: Sessions 1-6</b>	<b>Compassion for People and the Planet</b>
<b>Phase 2: Sessions 7-12</b>	<b>Poverty at Home and Abroad</b>
<b>Phase 3: Sessions 13-18</b>	<b>Personal and Structural Biases</b>
<b>Phase 4: Sessions 19-24</b>	<b>From Violence to Nonviolence: A New Way</b>

Each session includes prayer and dialogue. Some sessions also integrate videos or guest speakers into the process.

## **Retreats and Discernment**

Opening and closing retreats are vital components of the JustFaith process. The opening retreat encourages the deepening of community within the group. Building a sense of trust and companionship is a critical element in the transformative journey. The closing retreat invites participants to review and celebrate their journey together.

Four to six weeks after the closing retreat, the group re-gathers for a discernment day. This allows participants to revisit their experience and share the challenges and the call to integrate this process into their ongoing discipleship journey.

## **Immersion Experiences**

Each phase of the program includes an immersion experience in which participants leave the confines of their regular meeting space to encounter people, stories, and realities on the margins of their community. These visits offer the opportunity to be with (rather than do for) people, and to learn from (rather than learn about) realities that impact lives as well as the quality of life in the local community.

## **Spiritual Practices**

JustFaith offers a spiritual practice for each phase. These practices encourage a deeper integration and practical engagement of the phase themes.

## **Resources: Books, DVDs and Online Material**

A variety of books, DVDs, and online resources offer participants a broader understanding of the issues they explore. Through study, reflection, and dialogue, participants examine the implications and connections between faith and lifestyle. Facilitators and participants have access to online resources through the JustFaith webpage.

## **Co-facilitation Team**

Ideally JustFaith is led by a team of two co-facilitators who coordinate the process and cultivate respectful dialogue within the group. Co-facilitators share and delegate responsibility for different parts of the process.

## **Prayer and Ritual**

A culture of care grows by cultivating reverence. We experience the presence of the Spirit when we risk opening our hearts to listen and share our stories and struggles; prayer and ritual serve as gateways to this deeper dialogue. Each session opens and closes in prayer. The session outlines offer a framework for prayers that often include rituals and symbols.

## **Building a Caring Community**

The JustFaith process invites people to explore difficult questions together. This involves risk and vulnerability, as well as moments of great insight, joy, and spiritual growth. Inevitably, there will be growing pains as people wrestle with personal, social, religious, and political perspectives in the light of the Gospel. Heart-sharing and active listening are important practices to nurture throughout the process. Ideally, each JustFaith group blossoms into a caring, small community of faith that encourages a broader and deeper culture of care.

## Phase 1: Session 1

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## Introductions: To Each Other and to Compassion

### Session Overview and Materials

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#### Session Checklist

##### For the group:

- Small bowl of water
- Large pillar candle and matches
- Bible
- Reflective music
- DVD: *JustFaith Program Introductory Video*
- DVD player and TV
- Computer with Internet access, digital projector and speakers
- Snacks (optional)
- Snack sign-up sheet (optional)
- Name tags (optional)

##### For each participant:

- Books: *Compassion* and *Tattoos on the Heart*
- Phase 1 Notes to Participants*
- Name tags (optional)

Section	Timing
Opening Prayer	10 minutes
Personal Introductions	50 minutes
BREAK	10 minutes
Business Items	10 minutes
Reconnecting with Compassion	35 minutes
Compassion Dialogue	30 minutes
Closing Prayer	5 minutes

## Session Notes for the Co-Facilitators

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Greetings and blessings! Many thanks for your commitment to co-facilitating.

JustFaith unfolds in the context of a small community of faith. It is essential, therefore, to encourage an environment of mutual trust and respect, where group members are empowered to support each other throughout this process. Your thoughtful attention to the prayers, retreats, Group Guidelines, dialogue, and even break times can help cultivate an environment of care. The efforts you make to encourage relationships will foster this gradual and important process of community-building.

This program challenges participants to see with new eyes the relationship between our faith and the suffering of people and our planet. It also invites participants to be open to new and creative choices for living a more compassionate, faith-filled life.

When your group gathers for the first time, participants may not know each other, so this first session includes time for personal introductions. Use name tags for the first few sessions, if necessary. Take your time with the opening and closing prayers; they help create the space and atmosphere for building community and orient the group to the movement of the Spirit. Although snacks are optional, we strongly encourage you to offer them during the break and to rotate who brings snacks to each session. Sharing conversation over a light snack is an organic, informal way to build relationships.

Each session guide includes a Note for Co-Facilitators and script for the session; feel free to adapt your script using the general content that is provided. Read through each session guide well in advance and take time to prepare for each session. Remember that you are a facilitator-participant and are not expected to have answers to questions that come up during discussions. Everyone is on a journey of discovery.

Know that the JustFaith Ministries staff is most grateful for your commitment. As a reminder, we are available to assist you, if needed, and look forward to working with you throughout the program.

***Important Note:*** Please log in to your JustFaith Ministries account to access resources and materials for your program. Regularly visit your account to keep up-to-date. Remind participants to log in for their program materials.

## Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

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- Items needed: A small bowl of water, a pillar candle, matches, two copies of the meditation for the co-facilitators to use, and a Bible marked at Luke 4: 14-21
- Environment: Arrange the chairs in a circle around a small table. Place the pillar candle and bowl of water on the table.
- Set up the TV and DVD player to show the *JustFaith Introduction* DVD.
- Invite participants to wear name tags, if necessary.
- Lower the lights in the room. Play reflective background music as people arrive. Sit side-by-side with your co-facilitator.

Welcome everyone warmly with these or similar words:

**Welcome! Thank you for making the commitment to walk together through this process. During this first meeting, we will spend time getting to know each other and learning more about the JustFaith journey. Let us begin with prayer.**

### *Introduce the Symbols*

Light the candle. Hold up the candle and introduce the symbol with these words:

**Fire – light and heat, passion and pain, danger and fear...Pentecost.**

Replace the lighted candle on the prayer table. Hold up the bowl of water and offer these words:

**Water – life and death, drought and flood, beginnings and endings...Baptism.**

### *Call to Prayer*

Dip your fingers into the bowl of water and make a silent sign of the cross. Pass the bowl and invite everyone to repeat the gesture. As the bowl moves around the circle, slowly pray these words:

**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.**

Return the bowl to the prayer table.

## *Scripture Reading*

Read Luke 4:14-21 slowly and reflectively. Pause for brief reflection.

Repeat verses 18-19. Pause briefly.

Re-read verse 21. Pause briefly.

## *Meditation – The Fire of Peace*

Read this meditatively (slowly, pausing between sections), alternating voices between facilitators.

Reader A: **To pray is more dangerous than throwing a torch into a dry woodland.**

Reader B: **In a burning forest, you can run for cover...but if you begin to pray, there is no escape, no place you can hide from the raging fire of God.**

Reader A: **That is what happened to the saints when they prayed. All of them will testify that their encounter with God was like gold being tested in a furnace, seven times refined.**

Reader B: **Teresa of Avila warns: “authentic prayer changes us...unmasks us...strips us.”**

Reader A: **What she means is that sitting in the presence of a passionate God purges away all the dross, all the impurities of selfishness, pride, falsehood, hypocrisy, meanness, until only pure gold remains.**

Reader B: **It’s no wonder, then, that many kneel just outside the furnace door—close enough to keep warm, far enough to keep from getting consumed—and call it prayer. Certainly, this is a comforting and consoling exercise, but it is not prayer.**

Reader A: **The ancient desert elders said it this way: “Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said, ‘Abba, as much as I am able, I practice a small rule, all the little fasts, some prayer and meditation, remain quiet, and as much as possible I keep my thoughts clean. What else should I do?’**

**The old man stood up and stretched out his hands toward heaven, and his fingers became like torches of flame. He said, ‘If you wish, you can be turned into fire.’”**

Reader B: **And there’s the crux: Do you wish? Do you wish to be turned into fire?**

**By praying this prayer, you have already stepped into the furnace. But to melt into pure gold, you must hold fast as the temperature inside continues to rise.**

**Reader A: To be turned into fire, you must believe that if you knock, God will answer.**

**Reader B: To be turned into fire, you must move toward a forgiving heart, working through any legitimate anger against those who have hurt or harmed you.**

**Reader A: To be turned into fire, you must be patient and persistent, knowing that God will give you what God knows you need in God's good time.**

**Reader B: To be turned into fire, you must pray for daily bread.**

**Reader A: To be turned into fire, you must spend time with God, getting to know and love what God fashioned in your mother's womb.**

**Reader B: To be turned into fire, you must give without counting the cost, "good measure, pressed down and running over."**

**Reader A: To be turned into fire, you must act on what you pray; your life must be consistent with the word of God. You cannot pray to be forgiven, but harbor resentment; you cannot pray that God's reign may come on earth, but fail to do all in your power to eradicate poverty, stand against injustice, and protect human rights.**

**Reader B: How do you know if you're becoming fire? How do you know if you're melting into pure gold?**

**Reader A: Blessed are the pure ones, Jesus said, for they shall see God. And Mechtild of Magdeburg said, "The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw all things in God, and God in all things."**

**Reader B: Turning into fire, melting into pure gold, then, has something to do with seeing God in every man and woman, in all created things, and transforming into a person so transparent that others see the flame of God shining through you.**

**Reader A: May each of us dance in the flames of love until we become burning love itself.**

*Adapted from Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, "Introduction" in The Fire of Peace (Pax Christi, 1992). Used with permission for JustFaith sessions only.*

Pause for a moment of silent reflection.

## ***Prayer of the Heart***

Leader: **Let us take this prayer from Psalm 95 to heart. Echo this simple prayer, line by line. Then echo the whole prayer.** *(Adapted from Psalm 95:8)*

Leader:	All:
<b>Oh that today...</b>	Oh that today...
<b>You hear God's voice,</b>	You hear God's voice,
<b>Harden not your heart.</b>	Harden not your heart.

Leader: **Oh that today you hear God's voice, harden not your heart.**

All: Oh that today you hear God's voice, harden not your heart.

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

## ***(Optional) Rite of Blessing***

Invite participants to follow you as you mark a cross on your forehead, lips, and heart:

**Bless with me the thoughts, the words, and the stirrings of our hearts that we will share in dialogue**

(Cross forehead) **Holy Spirit, inspire our thoughts...**

(Cross lips) **May we speak your truth...**

(Cross heart) **May our hearts be opened.**

**AMEN.**

## **Personal Introductions (50 minutes)**

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Invite each person to briefly share his or her responses to the questions in the Welcome Letter. Offer an approximate time for sharing based on the size of the group, and keep close track of time. Assure participants that this is only an introduction and that the group will have plenty of time to share more throughout the program. Post the questions on flipchart paper, if desired.

- Please spend a minute giving some background on your family and work.
- Briefly describe one of your most joyful experiences.
- Briefly describe one of your most difficult experiences, *if you choose*.
- Why did you decide to participate in JustFaith this year?
- What do you hope to get from this experience?

## **BREAK** (10 minutes)

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Invite participants to share refreshments (if prepared) and continue the process of getting to know each other.

## **Business Items** (10 minutes)

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1. Ask participants to take one copy each of *Compassion*, *Tattoos on the Heart*, *Cloud of Witnesses*, and *Phase 1 Notes to Participants* at the end of the session. Ask participants to read the session preparation notes for every session and bring the packet with them to all Phase 1 sessions. Pages 1 and 2 of the *Notes* contain the session readings. Encourage participants to keep all of their *Notes* and other handouts in a folder throughout this process.
2. If you have not set the dates already, propose dates for the Opening Retreat and the Immersion Experience at the end of Phase 1. Ask participants to email the coordinating facilitator their availability for these events and finalize the dates via email. If the dates are already set, make sure everyone has them in their calendars. More details will be given in Session 2.
3. Circulate snack sign-up sheet, if desired.

## **Reconnecting with Compassion** (35 minutes)

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Introduce the DVD with these or similar words:

**This DVD provides a brief overview of JustFaith, a process designed to help us explore how we might better embody great love and compassion as a people who live simply, nonviolently, and in solidarity people at the margins.**

After viewing the DVD, invite participants to share a brief response to the DVD (5 minutes).

Because much of Phase 1 will focus on the meaning of compassion, show the TED Talk by Krista Tippett, “Reconnecting with Compassion” (16 minutes).

TED Talks are used regularly throughout the program. If participants are unfamiliar with TED Talks, tell them that TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design and is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). Krista Tippett hosts the national public radio program *On Being* (formerly *Speaking of Faith*), which addresses questions such as: What does it mean to be human? And how do we want to live?

Access the TED Talk through your online facilitator account.

After viewing, offer one or two of the following questions:

- What images or words come to mind when you hear the word “compassion”?

- How do you respond to Tippett's statement about the definition of tolerance and its limits in civil society?
- Tippett painted a broad landscape of the meaning and application of compassion in our world. Which of these images or ideas resonate with you? Why?

## Compassion Dialogue (30 minutes)

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Read aloud slowly:

**Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.** (Luke 6: 36)

Another co-facilitator reads aloud, slowly:

**The word *compassion* generally evokes positive feelings. We like to think of ourselves as compassionate people who are basically good, gentle, and understanding. We more or less assume that compassion is a natural response to human suffering. Who does not feel compassion for a poor old man, a hungry child, a paralyzed soldier, a fearful girl? It seems almost impossible to imagine that compassion does not belong among our most self-evident human qualities. Do we not feel deeply offended when someone accuses us of lacking compassion? Does that not sound as if we are accused of a lack of humanity? Indeed, we immediately identify being compassionate with being human. An uncompassionate human being seems as inconceivable as a nonhuman human being.**

Nouwen, McNeill, Morrison, *Compassion* (New York: Image, 1982), 3.

In groups of two or three, take turns sharing your response to these questions (20 minutes). Write them on a white board or flipchart paper, if you wish:

- When have you experienced or witnessed compassion? How do these experiences of compassion make you feel?
- What are the risks, costs, and challenges of being a compassionate person in today's world?

In the large group, invite each group to share a few responses.

Conclude by sharing that key themes of the JustFaith journey are compassion and the invitation to live more compassionately.

## Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

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Invite participants to stay after prayer to share additional refreshments and to join in cleaning up. Remind everyone to pick up their books and handouts as they leave and to read both from the books and the Session 2 Preparation in the *Notes to Participants*.

Invite a minute of silence before closing in prayer.

### ***Return to the Symbols used in the Opening Prayer***

Hold up the lighted candle and share these words:

**Spirit of Jesus, kindle in us a passion for your Peace.**

Replace the candle on the prayer table. Hold up the bowl of water and share these words:

**Heart of Christ, deepen in us a thirst for your Justice.**

Replace the bowl of water on the table.

### ***A Circle of Prayer***

Invite the group to stand, form a tight circle, and link hands.

In these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

**We are disciples on a journey.**

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

**We hold one another as we carry the concerns and intercessions of our neighbors.**

**If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.**

### ***Words to Live By***

Leader: **Let us again take the Psalm to heart. Repeat this prayer after me:**

**Oh, that today you hear God's voice...**

All: Oh, that today you hear God's voice....

Leader: **...harden not your heart.**

All: ...harden not your heart.

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.

## *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!**

Invite participants to exchange a sign of peace with one another.

SAMPLE