



Art & Poverty: An Invitation to Something More September 21st, 2020

Dear friends,

We humans are built for community. During this time of social distancing, it's crucial that we remain connected, holding one another in love and support. It's for this reason that **each week during the COVID-19 crisis, we'll be sending you a short resource** to use in a virtual meeting held over the phone or via video conferencing. This weekly resource is a great tool to stay connected with your current and past JFM small groups. It is also a great resource to use individually, or with groups of friends or family to stay connected and engaged in a meaningful way. These reflections will provide a time to pray together, check in with one another, and have conversation around a short passage.

In the meantime, we're offering tips and tools for facilitating all of our current programs through videoconferencing. While we hope that this weekly resource will spiritually sustain your community while in quarantine, [now is also the perfect time to start one of our regular programs](#). The call to seek justice is just as important now as ever!

Last but not least, generosity is, at its core, a benefit to everyone. When you donate today, your gift helps us sustain individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#). Also, please feel free to [forward this resource](#) to friends and family!

Thank you for continuing to care for one another during this time of heightened anxiety. Know that we are praying for you!

Stay well,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short reflection before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer.

Prayer for Community

Almighty God, you have created all people and all of creation.

We give you thanks for this gift we're invited to engage with hope, joy and love as your disciples.

Open our hearts and our eyes to see our communities as you would have us to see them.

Help us to find courage to sit and hear others when so often we want to be heard first.

You are good and you are gracious, O God.
Let us see all people as children of you,
who created us all.

It is in the name Jesus Christ, we pray.
Amen.

Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church¹

¹ <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/prayer-for-community>



Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

Ask these open-ended questions. If you're by yourself, journal about them.

Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?

Reflection (15 minutes or so)

Before you meet with your small group, ask them to listen to this short interview with Dre Urhahn from NPR's TED Radio Hour. You can click on the link below to listen to the interview or read the transcript.²

Dre Urhahn: How Can Public Art Projects Transform Rough Neighborhoods?

<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/562877158>

² **Helpful Note:** In this interview the artists talk about a "favela" which is defined as a "slum" or "shanty-town". You can find a fuller description in the following link, but we also encourage you to ask yourself questions about how terms come to be, how they shape the identity of a community, and how a community defines itself. Read the full description here: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/favela>



Read the following reflection:

Art: An Invitation to Something More

As an artist and JustFaith graduate who recently completed the JustFaith Series, I find myself thinking about what role art has in addressing poverty. What is the dynamic among access to art, the creative individuals that live in marginalized communities, and how art can be a platform to empower and change communities from the inside out? How am I called as a Christian and person of conscience to creatively advocate and stand in solidarity with my brothers and sisters who have been systematically disenfranchised?

We live in a world where access to the arts is often based on income or a commitment from a community. Art is often seen as an addition, luxury, or excess-- a program at risk when schools face possible budget cuts. I can remember sitting in my art education courses as a young college student and my professors making sure we were prepared to advocate for the very real, tangible benefits of school art programs.

It struck me the other day that this mentality about art has parallels within the world of food pantries. How we stock the shelves of a food pantry can say a lot about how we value people. When cans of nearly expired (or already expired) food lines the shelves it seems we are saying “well, this is good enough³.” It may seem good enough to put food in a food pantry, but what about the quality of the food? This same line of thinking is found when it comes to the arts. It’s not a necessity, so access to the arts has in some ways become limited to those with the means to access them. It may seem good enough to provide for basic needs, but what about resources that help individuals enrich their lives?.

A dear friend of mine said to me as we were discussing this that “God didn’t just create the world to be functional; God also made it beautiful. God saw that ‘...it was good’.” Is “good enough” for the poor really good enough if God is so very generous? Why aren’t we stacking community pantries with art supplies along with bread and milk? The arts improve mental health⁴, academic testing scores, and

³ It is also important to note that food pantries rely a great deal on donations. Sometimes donations are from individuals or businesses who are trying to clear items that are near expiration (or at times already expired).

⁴ Can Art Be Medicine? Art and Healing.Org. 2020
https://www.artandhealing.org/can-art-be-medicine/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw-uH6BRDQARIsAI3I-UdHhvHYCQ8ajurWn9l80UbayNUPn5-DZvWoWmKeeWfvGLQOkdcmFVQaAj1FEALw_wcB



help revitalize communities from the inside out⁵, so why am I not advocating for this more? Why do I settle for washing feet with water when I could be washing feet with perfume⁶? Why do I limit my generosity to necessities when God's love and grace extends beyond necessity? What if I loved my neighbor as myself and committed to ensuring that my neighbor's body, mind and soul are as healthy as my own?

More importantly... what if communities had resources to let their creative minds lay claim to their stories, victories and identities? What if communities that are publicly defined by crime and schools with low testing scores were instead defined by artists' expressions of their triumphs, resilience and beauty? The act of beautifying our spaces is an act akin to God's creating the Garden of Eden...beautiful and teaming with life.

So, this JustFaith graduate has an invitation to her JustFaith Family. Let's advocate beyond the necessities. Let's ensure that our brothers and sisters have access to that which enriches their lives and breaks barriers.

Melissa Brown
JustFaith Graduate
JustFaith Development Associate
September, 2020

Let us pause for silent meditation.

Pause for 30 seconds.

Then ask:

- What stood out to you about Dre Urhahn and Jeroen Koolhaas' time while painting buildings in favelas in Rio? What about their time in North Philadelphia?
- Urhahn and Koolhaas always involved the community in the process of creation - how does a community's ownership of the creative process impact that community?
- JustFaith Graduate Melissa Brown reflected on how she and others may live into a mentality of "good enough" when God invites us into a more extravagant form of solidarity that seeks to nourish the body, mind and soul. How can you intentionally

⁵ 5 Ways Art Can Help Alleviate Poverty. The Borgen Project. 2020.
<https://borgenproject.org/5-ways-art-can-help-alleviate-poverty/>

⁶ Luke 7:36-50



support and advocate for holistic, extravagant, *and* practical nourishment for ourselves and our neighbors? ??

Optional: You can share the following links with your small group if they would like to see more examples of the artists work, hear from the local community, and more.

Videos from Mural Arts Philadelphia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX7UytDfnFU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBYjhlHa0dM>

Mural Gallery and Videos

<https://www.muralarts.org/artworks/philly-painting/>

Urhahn and Koolhaas' TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/haas_hahn_how_painting_can_transform_communities

Announcements (10 minutes-ish)

- Remind participants that today's conversation offered only a brief insight into a huge topic. If they would like to take a deeper dive into this subject matter, they should consider the JustFaith Series.
- Let participants know that the materials for this gathering were free, put together by the JustFaith Ministries staff in order to equip more people for the work of peace and justice. In order to support the creation of more resources and programs, participants are encouraged to donate to JustFaith Ministries through justfaith.org.
- JustFaith Ministries is currently hosting a monthly webinar series called "Acting for Justice While Sheltering in Place," in which an expert on a justice-related topic will offer tips for taking action during COVID-19. Visit the [JustFaith Ministries Facebook page](#) for more information on times and topics.
- Are there any opportunities for action or advocacy happening in your community this week? Invite participants to share ways to support the work of local groups working for justice.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes-ish)

Then say: Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.

Pause for 30 seconds

Let's pray.

Pause for silence.

May the light of your soul guide you.

May the light of your soul bless the work

You do with the secret love and warmth of your heart.

May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.

May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those

Who work with you and to those who see and receive your work.

May your work never weary you.

May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement.

May you be present in what you do.

May you never become lost in the bland absences.

May the day never burden you.

May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams,

Possibilities and promises.

May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.

May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.

May your soul calm, console and renew you.

“Benediction For Living A Creative Life”

John O'Donohue

Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom.

Then, 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 of our neighbors.

If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.



Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world. Amen.