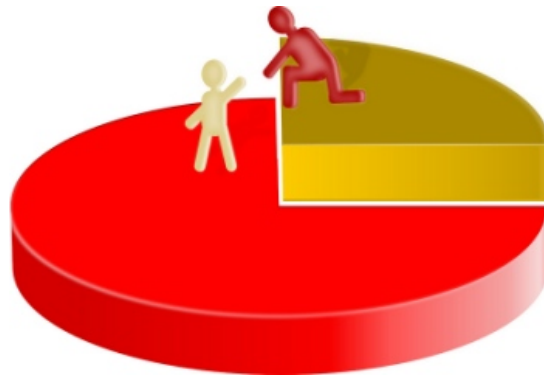


JustMatters

Topical matters for justice seekers.



Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good

For Protestant and Ecumenical groups

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breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

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Welcome to the JustMatters module on economic matters related to the government, the federal budget and the common good! Together we are at an important juncture and are facing a critical question, “*What kind of society do we wish to become?*” Underlying this important values question are lively debates and disagreements about the role of government, what functions we should share together, and how we pay for them.

Design of the Module

This is a popular education curriculum for adult learners. It aims to both draw on experience and encourage reflection. There are many questions listed with each activity. The facilitator will pose these questions, but is not expected to have an answer or to be the expert on any of the questions

Most likely, many people will not even have an opinion on many of the questions – or won’t feel qualified to register an opinion. This module, however, is designed to deeply engage participants as citizens and actors, not as experts. It is designed to engage values – especially Gospel values -- rather than opinions.

A. Mini-Interviews

As part of the preparation for each session, participants will briefly interview a person they do not know on the theme(s) of the module. These should not be viewed as an onerous or weighty assignment. The interview could be a two-minute conversation standing in the line at the grocery store - or more involved. There are different questions for each session. The goals of the interviews are:

- To have participants move outside their own “comfort zone” and talk to a stranger about the topic, gaining an additional perspective or insight.
- To bring additional voices into session conversations.

B. Journaling/Reflection

Participants are encouraged to keep a small journal of their reflections on each of the sessions and the themes or topics covered. These are private and not for sharing, unless a participant eagerly wants to share something in their journal.

C. Web Surfing

Another part of the preparation for each session is web surfing. Several websites with articles to look at are provided in the Participant Packet. If there are a lot of people who are not connected or comfortable with using the internet, encourage them to pair with someone who is for this learning activity. Encourage all participants to engage in this activity in some way.

D. Readings and Books

In addition to the books purchased for the module, there are links to many of the readings, all of which can be obtained for free off the internet. For the purpose of this module, JustFaith Ministries has created a special page where participants can just click and read (or print) the articles

Logistics

Everything needed to facilitate *Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good* is included in the Facilitator Packet. Every session begins with a list of the items needed to prepare for that session and a *Note to Facilitators* that will provide information pertinent to the focus and preparation of the session. There is also a *Note to Participants* for every session in the Participant Packet. These notes will help participants understand and integrate the resource material as well as give them an overview of the agenda for each session.

Creating a Prayerful Environment for Dialogue

The facilitator/s give careful attention to creating an environment where each participant feels free to share his/her ideas and feelings and where each individual is committed to carefully and genuinely considering what each of the other participants has to say. With this in mind, the group some ground rules, or guidelines, for discussion.

Prayer is an integral part of the module process. Each session begins and ends with a prayer experience.

SESSION ONE: Our Experience with Government



Participants have no advance reading for this session.

Items Needed for this Session

- 2-3 copies of Session One-Attachment A (for those who forget to bring the Participant Packet)
- Copies of Session One-Attachment B for all participants
- 1 copy of the Participant Roster (Session One-Attachment C)
- An envelope for each participant
- Two simple signs that say "Completely Agree" and "Totally Disagree", which you will tape at either end of the meeting room
- For prayer: a pillar candle with a holder or base, a Bible with the following passages marked: Exodus 16: 2-3 and Luke 6: 38), matches, and a small (un-sliced) loaf of bread
- Two readers for both the opening and closing prayers facilitator.
- If desired, copies of the reflection questions included in the prayers to give to participants (at the end of the session) for their ongoing reflection.
- Flipchart paper, easel and masking tape

Objectives for Session One

(Objectives for each session are also included in the Participant Packets.)

- Create a safe space to explore personal attitudes and feelings about government
- Learn from one another about your experiences with government and the common good

Facilitator objective: Set a tone of shared responsibility for the group.

Schedule for this Session

Activity	Minutes
Welcome and Prayer	15
Introductions	30
Group Guidelines and Role of Facilitator	15
Signs of the Times	5
Impacts of the Recession	25
Break	10
Announcements	10
Personal Survey	10
Discussion of Activity	25
Closing Prayer	5
Total Time	150 minutes

Note to Facilitators

Writer and organizational consultant, Meg Wheatley, says you cannot be afraid of someone whose story you know, and learning more of each other's stories will build trust. This session helps participants to know one another.

This session allows people to describe their own experiences and attitudes, beginning with a neutral and open-ended question: "What were you raised to think about government and the role of government?"

Another important objective is "setting the tone." In addition to doing so with your words, voice and gestures, mention "About Your Facilitators" (Participants Packet, 5-6).

It is important that all questions and conversation are free of judgment or attack. The tone of respect for different points of view is critical in this session. As facilitator, you are the keeper of the tone and trust as the group embarks on these discussions.

Also, over the course of the first seven sessions, people may suggest possible activities (e.g., "We should read XX." or "Let's discuss XY issue."). Facilitators are encouraged to have a flipchart and paper on which to keep a running list of these suggestions. This will be useful for the discussion in the closing session, Session

Eight.

Session One Outline and Notes

Welcome and Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

Facilitators may use the following or similar words to welcome participants and begin the *Living Solidarity* program:

Welcome to the JustFaith Ministries program, *Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good*. The goal of this popular education curriculum is to move beyond reflexive biases and myths and to create a space for thoughtful dialogue about the role of government and how to pay for it. We are not here to change each other's minds, but to be deepened by one another's experiences.

Too much power has been ceded to economists and those we consider experts on the economy. It is vital that all of us engage the conversation and bring our values to conversations about the economy. Scripture reminds us that we are responsible both for ourselves and for the common good. One of the ways in which we do this is through government that we hold together. To the extent there are things we don't like about government, we are responsible for fixing it. Being informed and engaged about the government and budget issues is part of our civic and religious responsibility.

"What kind of society do we wish to become?" We will now begin to engage that conversation!

Opening Prayer:

Invite everyone to sit quietly in a comfortable position. Place items (candle, Bible, and a small, un-sliced loaf of bread) on a designated prayer table in a prominent place.

Reading alternately, draw the group into stillness:

Let us be still.

Let us breathe.

Pause

Listen to the quiet sound of your own breathing...

The give and the take of life...

The breath upon which all life depends.

Pause

***As you catch your breath, remember the gifts...
of life... of water... of air.***

Pause

***We lift up our hearts to the Source of all breath...
the Holy One, Creator of all life.***

One reader lights the pillar candle while the other reader offers the following questions for silent reflection:

Whose world is it anyway?

Who's REALLY in charge after all?

Pause

One reader places the lit candle on the prayer table; takes the loaf of bread and places it beside the candle while the other reader says:

Let us listen to the story of hungry people in the wilderness.

Read **Exodus 16:2-3.**

Pause

Offer the following questions for quiet reflection:

Where does it all come from - the resources for living?

Who is it all for?

Pause

Conclude with this thanksgiving:

Giver of Life,

Accept our heartfelt thanks

for the abundance of life which you so freely share.

Amen.

Introductions (30 minutes)

Depending on the group, facilitators might want to begin this segment with some version of the following: You may have been together before as a JustFaith Ministries group. / We have been together before. / We have new members. /

You may have forgotten the name of that wonderful person sitting across from you. Let's begin with each person stating your name, parish/church/organization, and one or two things about what you do.

After everyone has done this, go around a second time, asking everyone to say their name again and to speak for 1 to 2 minutes about this question: *What were you raised to think about government and the role of government?*

Note: This is a good time to get people to practice the art of short answers. Facilitators can begin, modeling model what short answers look like!

Group Guidelines and Role of Facilitator (15 minutes)

The Group Guidelines are in the Participant Packet with Session One and are included in this document as **Session One-Attachment A**. Distribute copies of the Guidelines to anyone who forgot to bring their Participant Packet.

Give the group one minute to look over the guidelines. Then ask if the group wishes to make any changes. Amend the list as suggested. Then ask: Can we agree to commit to these guidelines and hold each other accountable to these behaviors? (If needed, redo the list and distribute copies of the adjusted guidelines at the next session.)

Group Brainstorm: Signs of the Times (5 minutes)

This activity and the one following are designed to ground the group's conversations in their own stories. For many people, topics like "government" or "taxes" are highly controversial. Before tackling these directly, use the following activity to think more broadly and personally about financial security (or insecurity) and the state of the economy.

Use flipchart paper to take notes during this activity. Write down the responses to both questions. Note: Brainstorm exercises are designed to elicit brief responses to a question to create a list of ideas without a lot of conversation.

Ask: What are the "economic signs of the times"?

Be sure to add something about your personal insecurity and some examples of local and national insecurity, e.g.:

- Unemployment
- Budget cuts
- Foreclosure

- Rising costs

Impacts of the Great Recession (25 minutes)

Ask participants to pair off with someone. Ask each person, in turn, to take about three minutes to respond to these questions:

- *Is the economic downturn touching you or someone you love? How so?*
- *Do you fear it could touch you? If so, how?*

After each member of the pair has had a chance to share, bring the full group back together. Ask a few volunteers to briefly share their thoughts/reflection. Remind the group of the Guidelines and that no one is obliged to comment.

Break (10 minutes)

Have the copy of the Participant Roster and a pen at a table. Be sure each participant takes a minute during break to fill out this form.

Announcements (10 minutes)

- Several readings for the ***Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good*** program are online. The link to these online readings is located at the top of the Table of Contents page of the Participant Packet. The readings are provided in this way in order to keep the costs of the program reasonable.
- The final evaluation will be done online. Encourage participants to take a few notes during the course of the module about the books, the film you will watch, the activities and the conversations and to use these notes when it comes time to complete the evaluation.
- Readings for Session Two
 - "Being a Civil Voice in Uncivil Times"* (link on web reading page)
 - Ron Sider, *Fixing the Moral Deficit*, Chapters One and Two.
 - Walter Brueggemann *"The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity"* (a link on the web reading page)
 - "Three Forks of the Commons"* (link on web reading page)

- Refer participants to the opening pages of their Participant Packet where it references mini-interviews and keeping a journal. Stress the importance of these two parts of the program design, sharing that doing both will enhance their experience and their learning. Tell participants that the mini-interview questions aim to lay a ground work for the next session and that the journaling/reflection questions are opportunities to reflect on the previous session.
- Ask each participant to **bring one dollar bill** to contribute during prayer at the next session.

Personal Survey (10 minutes)

Begin this segment by giving each participant a copy of the "Personal Survey" (Session One-Attachment B) and one empty envelope. Tell participants the following: You will have 8-9 minutes to complete the survey. The survey will ask for your opinions and impressions and your knowledge of government, taxes and budget issues. The survey will not be shared with anyone. Once you are finished, put the survey in the envelope you were given, seal it and write your name on it. I will collect all the envelopes and give them back to you during the last session. At that time, you will have an opportunity to share with others if you like, but there will be no pressure to do so.

It is important for facilitators to watch the clock and collect the envelopes after 8-9 minutes. (Be sure to keep these envelopes with the other materials for this program so that you can return them to the participants during Session Eight.)

Discussion (25 minutes)

Note that this discussion is intended to further draw out people's experience and questions. Facilitators might also want to remind people that you are the facilitator, not the expert.

Share the following with participants: Our opening conversations got us thinking about the economy and our own stories of financial security and insecurity. Some people feel that the government has a role to play in addressing these issues. I am going to facilitate an open-ended discussion about the government. We have twenty-five minutes. The main objective here is to hear more from one another about our individual experiences.

Note: You will not have time for all of these questions. That is okay. Choose those you think are most thought-provoking and relevant to your group.

Questions for discussion:

- Has the economic crisis led you to rethink the role of government?
- Are there systems or structures that mitigate against effective government?
- What are examples of government functioning well that we can think of?
- What are specific examples of government malfunctioning? Why is this happening?
- What would lead to greater trust in government?

Bring the discussion to a close by restating that the goal of this program is not to debate or to change minds, but to be deepened by one another's experiences.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Call everyone to a moment of silence.

One reader holds up the loaf of bread while the other offers the following questions for quiet reflection:

Who is hungry this day?

Who is hungry for . . .

***food . . . dignity . . . friendship, hope, meaning,
a share in the promise of abundant life...?***

Invite participants to briefly name the hunger, the hungry people, or hungry places in their world.

Pause after everyone has spoken.

Pass the loaf of bread around the group, inviting everyone to break off a piece and hold it. When all have a piece of bread, invite them to eat while listening to a reading of **Luke 6: 38**.

After reading, eat your piece of bread before sharing the final prayer:

Giving and receiving;

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SAMPLE MATERIAL

***Blessing and sharing;
As it is in heaven,
So may it be on earth.***

Amen.