

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR *THE PROPHETIC IMPERATIVE:*
SOCIAL GOSPEL IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

This discussion guide to *The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice* is designed for simplicity; no special training is required. The guide is divided into nine sections, one for each chapter of Richard S. Gilbert's book. Your group may choose to hold one meeting for each chapter, or you can contract or expand the discussion meetings according to the group's needs. Churches or fellowship groups interested in exploring religious social responsibility with depth and discipline may find this guide useful for examining the congregation's role in social justice issues and critiquing its programs. In addition, this guide provides a process for studying Unitarian Universalist history, theology, and ethics. The discussion guide is built around questions to pose to the group for discussion. Occasionally, participants are asked to spend a few moments in silent reflection on a topic before proceeding with the group discussion. Individual Reflections and Discussion Questions are worded to be addressed directly to the participants.

As you organize your discussion group, it may be helpful to consider the following process suggestions:

- Publicize the discussion group as you would any adult or youth RE program. Be sure to approach any groups or committees that would have a particular interest in the topics included in this series. Have enthusiastic participants give testimonials in your newsletter to attract interest.
- The size of the group can range from two to fifteen or so. Eight to twelve may be ideal. Larger groups will likely need to break into small groups for discussion.
- The length of the meeting time can also vary. You may want to meet for forty-five minutes before Sunday service and/or for two hours over potluck dinner on Friday nights.
- Decide who will lead the discussions: staff or volunteers, consistent or rotating leaders. Good facilitation skills will be important to the success of the experience.
- Agree to some basic group guidelines at the beginning of each meeting (sharing the floor, keeping confidences, etc.)

- Decide whether you want to open and/or close the gathering with a simple ritual such as a brief reading or chalice-lighting.

Good luck!

Living Under the Prophetic Imperative

Note to the Leader

Read and ask participants to read the Introduction and Chapter One in *The Prophetic Imperative* before this meeting.

Objectives

- To develop a feeling of community
- To introduce the theme of a prophetic imperative
- To explore personal motivation for social action

Welcome and Overview

Leader: Take some time at the beginning of this meeting to summarize the program and work out logistics (time and place of meeting, refreshments, etc.) with the group.

Generate a list of guidelines for sharing so that members feel supported and safe to explore issues honestly (e.g., confidentiality means what is shared here is not repeated elsewhere, speaking from personal experience/using “I” statements, etc.).

Individual Reflection

Spend about five minutes thinking about how many hours of the typical week you devote to professional work, to volunteer work, and to leisure.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that we are witnessing the “demonic of privatization” in public life in the United States (or Canada)? Why or why not?
2. What does the term *prophetic imperative* mean to you? Do you agree that freedom implies responsibility? How or how not?
3. In addition to providing a moral framework, what are some of the resources that Unitarian Universalism gives us for addressing social concerns?

4. Is the “Parable of Good Works” an accurate representation of reality? How do you understand systemic change? What are some of the obstacles to becoming involved in social change efforts?
5. Explore the Social Concern Typology. The role of the church in society might be understood as social service, social witness, social education, and/or social action. What percentage of time and effort does your church devote to each of these types of social involvement? What priorities and goals result in this use of resources?
6. Generate a list of principalities and powers, naming some of the social and institutional “evils” that need to be addressed.

Individual Reflection

Take five minutes to list one way that you benefit and one way that you suffer by the existence of each of the powers or systems on the list generated by question 6. Identifying both benefits and sufferings can help us to clarify our motivations for social action and our investment in the status quo.

Discussion Questions

1. Share some of the examples you identified during the Individual Reflection.
2. If social change requires that we “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable,” how can we develop and maintain motivation for social change work given that we both benefit and suffer from the existence of the principalities and powers?
3. Do you experience compassion fatigue? Why or why not? Given that compassion implies that you are working on behalf of others, how does compassion fatigue compare with the exhaustion you might feel when working on issues that affect you directly?
4. How does the sensation of being part of “a great living stream of reformers, a great cloud of witnesses” mitigate the experience of compassion fatigue? What role does community play in energizing you for social justice work?

Before the Next Meeting

Try to call one other member of the group this week to discuss insights or nagging questions that are staying with you throughout the week.

Read Chapter Two.

Confessions of a Militant Mystic

Objectives

- To understand the integration of spiritual growth and social action
- To share experiences of spirituality and social action

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that social change requires the mobilization of individual energies into communal power? If yes, what individual energies need to be mobilized?
2. Try to think of examples in which communal power brought about social change. Discuss the spiritual, political, and social qualities of that communal power.
3. Is social action a *product* of your faith or a *dimension* of your faith? How might social action affect your spiritual growth?

Individual Reflection

Reflect on Thomas Merton's experience in the shopping district, in which he was suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of love for and connection with the "strangers" all around him. Whether or not you have had similar experiences, consider how public life is an arena of religious experience.

Discussion Questions

1. Share your thoughts from the Individual Reflection with the group.
2. What is the relationship between the spiritual and social aspects of life? Are they opposite in the sense that one is directed inward and the other is directed outward? Or do you imagine the two as interwoven?
3. If public life is an arena of religious experience, can we say that spirituality is a private experience?
4. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of conceiving of spirituality as private and internal?
5. Similarly, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of conceiving of social action as communal and external?

6. How does the concept of self-interest change if we accept David Rhys Williams's statement that "thy neighbor is thyself"? Do our opinions about social justice take on the qualities of convictions when our private selves experience the affront of injustice?
7. As an experiment, try to imagine a selfish, or self-centered, commitment to social justice. How does this idea change your thinking about and commitment to social action work? What activities, spiritual or social, might increase your experience of "thy neighbor" as "thyself"?
8. Susan B. Anthony said, "I pray every single second of my life; not on my knees, but with my work. My prayer is to lift women to equality with men. Work and worship are one with me. I cannot imagine a God of the universe made happy by my getting down on my knees and calling him 'great.'" Compare this statement with Thomas Merton's account of the shopping district experience. Both address the intersection of public life and religious experience. Discuss how they are similar and how they differ. How can work be a "prayer"?
9. The Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, was ratified a century after the birth of Susan B. Anthony. How do you think that a prayer for justice might sustain you (or not) while you work for justice?

Before the Next Meeting

Begin a list of spiritual practices or understandings that have informed or could inform your social justice work.

Visit the UUA website for "Diversity and Justice" at www.uua.org/action.html—explore the linked pages. You may also look at the webpage of Faith in Action: A UUA Department for Diversity and Justice at www.uua.org/faithinaction or the webpage of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee at www.uusc.org to become familiar with their work if you are not already.

Read Chapter Three.

Meriting the Wind We Inherit

Objectives

- To encounter “people of prophetic fire”
- To experience the self as a historical agent
- To consider the experiences of historical figures and apply their insights to participants’ own lives

Discussion Questions

1. Chapter Three suggests that William Ellery Channing was torn between ministering to individual poor people and reforming social conditions and institutions that kept them poor. Do you find yourself drawn toward social service work that ministers directly to individuals or drawn toward social action that attempts to change institutions and systems? How do these two types of work differ in terms of
 - whom they serve?
 - your sense of accomplishment or frustration when you take part?
 - your sense that you are making a tangible difference?
 - your ability to commit to these activities for an extended period of time?
2. Considering these differences as you perceive them, why do you think that you are drawn to take part in some activities and not in others? Can you identify several qualities that must be present in a proposed project in order for you to feel comfortable and committed to taking part?
3. Francis Greenwood Peabody, minister and professor, believed that economic injustice exists because of the moral failings of people. How do you understand this relationship between individual good/evil and corporate or societal good/evil? Does one cause the other? Do they co-create each other? How does the demonic of privatization relate to these concepts?
4. James Luther Adams put forward an associational theory of history, suggesting that history is powerfully shaped by voluntary groupings of people seeking common goals. He believed that society is not transformed by changes in attitude (individual change), but by the mobilization of social power through people working together.

What is the relationship between individual change and institutional change? Must one change before the other can?

5. Chapter Three discusses the historical tension between individual change and institutional change. Where do we begin social justice work? Why? What is the role of an individual in making social justice? Consider some of the historical figures you read about in Chapter Three.
6. Has the primary focus of Unitarian Universalists moved from social service to social action? Why or why not?
7. Is Unitarian Universalism as pioneering a force for social change now as it was early in our history? Why or why not?
8. How do you understand the role of conservatives in Unitarian Universalist history? How about Daniel Webster? John Calhoun? George M. Pullman? P.T. Barnum?
9. What role do you envision Unitarian Universalism playing in the future of social justice work? What kind of inspiration or leadership might this movement provide?

Before the Next Meeting

Write down the names of historical figures you admire or of individuals in your own life history who have inspired you. List the qualities of being and the actions that you admire and would like to emulate.

Read Chapter Four.

Harnessing Our Deepest Explosions

Objectives

- To demonstrate the relevance of theological understanding for social responsibility
- To help participants develop some theological roots for their social values
- To explore the pragmatic theory of meaning

Individual Reflection

This chapter presents the idea that religion is more than beliefs, which are *intellectual* constructs. If religion is composed of *existential* constructs—that is, meanings, values, and convictions—then theology is the articulation of, reflection upon, and criticism of those meanings, values, and convictions. Choose a social issue and list several meanings, values, and convictions that you associate with this issue. Try to be as specific as possible. For example: The natural world is a source of intense enjoyment and great meaning for me; I value the world as sacred—nature has inherent rights to preservation; therefore, I act out of an eco-justice ethic to be a responsible trustee of that natural world.

Discussion Questions

1. Share with the group the theology that informs your interest in a social issue.
Reflection and articulation of these existential constructs are acts of theologizing about social change work. What is ultimately meaningful to you? Why must you do what you do?
2. Consider how the group conversation regarding meanings, values, and convictions has affected your own beliefs. Do you agree with Sharon Welch that, “a single actor cannot be moral”? How does interaction with the community provide theological resources that have an impact on personal experience? How might it affect your understanding of social justice work?
3. Reinhold Niebuhr said that “man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.” Do you believe that human beings are essentially good but inclined to miss the mark when it comes to

justice? Do you believe that society is ultimately perfectible? That our potential for love can overcome our potential for evil?

4. Can a religious humanist have a theology or is a God concept required?
5. How do you understand concepts such as divinity, ultimate reality, immanence, ground of being, transcendence, or horizontal transcendence? What do you think of the idea of God as a verb, rather than a noun?
6. What is the prophetic view of history? Do you affirm it? Why or why not?
7. How does involvement in social action contribute to your sense of life's meaning?
8. Do you believe that history is fully and radically in human hands or do you believe there is some other force at work besides human power?

Before the Next Meeting

Sharon Welch believes that *divinity* is a “quality of relationships, lives, events, and natural processes that are worthy of worship, that provide orientation, focus and guidance in our lives.” Begin a list of the top ten values, meanings, and convictions that direct your actions.

Read Chapter Five.

A Covenant of Unenforceable Obligations

Objectives

- To develop an ethical posture vis-à-vis social action
- To explore the possibilities in a liberal religious social ethic
- To analyze a social problem ethically
- To begin developing a social responsibility covenant

Discussion Questions

In Chapter Three you learned of Carl Hermann Voss who, in his biography of John Haynes Holmes, wrote of Holmes's apparent unawareness of "the collective egoism of social organisms." Do you believe that social institutions (or social organisms) have a sort of ego or self-interest that goes beyond the self-interest of the individuals within an institution?

Individual Reflection

Read the following excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath*, and spend a few minutes thinking about it.

The owners of the land came onto the land, or more often a spokesman for the owners came.... Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves.... If a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank—or the Company—needs—wants—insists—must have—as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them. These last would take no responsibility for the banks or the companies because they were men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time.... The owner men sat in the cars and explained. You know the land is poor. You've scabbled at it long enough, God knows.

The squatting tenant men nodded and wondered and drew figures in the dust, and yes, they knew, God knows. If the dust only wouldn't fly. If the top would only stay on the soil, it might not be so bad....

Well, it's too late. And the owner men explained the workings and the thinkings of the monster that was stronger than they were.... You see, a bank or a company.... those creatures don't breathe air, don't eat side-meat. They breathe

profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so.... The taxes go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size....

We have to do it. We don't like to do it. But the monster's sick. Something's happened to the monster....

Sure, cried the tenant men, but it's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours....

We're sorry. It's not us. It's the monster. The bank isn't like a man.

Yes, but the bank is only made of men.

No, you're wrong there—quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it.

—John Steinbeck
The Grapes of Wrath

Discussion Questions

1. Who is ethically responsible in this story?
2. Do you agree with the idea that a group cannot transcend itself, but an individual can transcend selfish self-interest?
3. Chapter Three suggests that ethical relations are possible between persons but only political relations are possible between groups. What does this suggest in terms of strategies for social change?
4. Professor Garrett Hardin has presented a provocative problem in moral reflection and social action in his "Lifeboat Ethics" dilemma. He says that approximately two-thirds of the world is poor and that about one-third is rich. "Metaphorically speaking," he writes,

Each rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other, much more crowded lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some other way to benefit from the "goodies" on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do? This is the central problem of "the ethics of a lifeboat."

First we must acknowledge that each lifeboat is effectively limited in capacity. The land of every nation has a limited carrying capacity.... Here we sit, say 50 people in a lifeboat. To be generous, let us assume our boat has a capacity of 10 more, making 60.... The 50 of us in the lifeboat see 100 others swimming in the

water outside, asking for admission to the boat, or for handouts. How shall we respond to their calls? There are several possibilities.

One. We may be tempted to try to live by the Christian ideal of being “our brother’s keeper,” or by the Marxist ideal of “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” Since the needs of all are the same, we take all the needy into our boat, making a total of 150 in a boat with a capacity of 60. The boat is swamped, and everyone drowns. Complete justice, complete catastrophe.

Two. Since the boat has an unused excess capacity of 10, we admit just 10 more to it. This has the disadvantage of getting rid of the safety factor, for which action we will sooner or later pay dearly. Moreover, which 10 do we let in? “First come, first served”? The best 10? The neediest 10? How do we discriminate? And what do we say to the 90 who are excluded?

Three. Admit no more to the boat and preserve the small safety factor. Survival of the people in the lifeboat is then possible (though we shall have to be on guard against boarding parties). The last solution is abhorrent to many people. It is unjust, they say. Let us grant that it is.

“I feel guilty about my good luck,” some say. The reply to this is simple: Such a selfless action might satisfy the conscience of those who are addicted to guilt but it would not change the ethics of the lifeboat. The needy person to whom a guilt-addict yields his place will not himself feel guilty about his sudden good luck. (If he did he would not climb aboard.) The net result of conscience-stricken people relinquishing their unjustly held positions is the elimination of their kind of conscience from the lifeboat. The lifeboat, as it were, purifies itself of guilt. The ethics of the lifeboat persist, unchanged by such momentary aberrations.... This then is the basic metaphor within which we must work out our solutions.

—Garrett Hardin
“Lifeboat Ethics”

Do you agree that Hardin’s metaphor is accurate? Why or why not? For example: Do you agree with Hardin’s underlying premise that there are not enough resources to save all the people? If you disagree with the metaphor, how would you change it?

5. Within the context of Hardin’s metaphor (or an altered metaphor) what theological principles would apply to the decision-making process? What ethical principles would apply? How do you apply them?
6. Chapter Five suggests that a Unitarian Universalist social responsibility covenant would contain six component formulations. The first of these is that we become human beings by making promises and keeping commitments. Creedlessness implies a personal responsibility to formulate a credo with social implications and responsibilities. What commitments would you like to make to your religious

community, and what promises would you like your community to make to you?
What impact do these issues have on social justice?

7. The second formulation is that the Unitarian Universalist covenant is with all being, with creative, sustaining, transforming powers, interpreted theistically or humanistically. Gratitude generates responsibility. How would you characterize your personal relationship and your community's relationship with these powers? What promises/commitments would you like to make in this realm? How can you act to make this an example of right relationship?
8. A religious community can be devoted to interests that transcend the self and the group, that encompass humanity and the natural environment. How would you name several of these transcendent interests?
9. The Unitarian Universalist covenant is especially directed toward the deprived and the powerless, focused on returning to them what is justly theirs. What would you like to return? What has been unjustly taken and how are you and your congregation implicated in that taking?
10. To what sorts of social and political powers do you and/or your congregation have access? Some constituencies are uniquely able to make decisions affecting many. How can you/your congregation help in empowering the powerless? James Luther Adams wrote that "authentic power is the capacity to respond to the covenant." To help focus this, you might consider the powerless constituencies in your geographical neighborhood.
11. Having a vocation means that we are called to be responsible to humanity, not just to our profession. Chapter Five suggests that Unitarian Universalism can be a prophetic community of free and disciplined men and women working toward the Beloved Community or, as Bonhoeffer describes vocation, the whole person, being responsible for/responding to the whole of reality. What is your vocation, in this sense? How might you describe the vocation or call of your congregation regarding the whole?

Before the Next Meeting

Read Chapter Six.

In Defense of Church “Interference” in Society

Objectives

- To probe the meaning of the voluntary association in social transformation
- To understand the church as a voluntary association
- To discuss the meaning of congregational action

Individual Reflection

Read the following article, “Against Church Institutional Social Action” by Paul H. Beattie, and spend a few minutes thinking about Paul Beattie’s arguments.

Unitarian Universalist churches and their National Association should not take institutional social action. Passing resolutions, maintaining a lobbyist in Washington, DC, publishing books largely on just one side of the political spectrum, funding questionable social projects, are activities both ineffectual and detrimental to the liberal way in religion. Here is the case against social action in the church and a plea for effective social involvement.

1. For almost two thousand years Roman Catholics and Protestants have sought in various ways to reform society—with very little success. Just like the prophets of ancient Israel, the Christian social prophets have achieved “moral superiority” without effectively changing society. We should not model our way in religion on these outmoded and often authoritarian organizational patterns.
2. In a democratic society it is not necessary for the church as an institution to intervene in the affairs of the state. The church is not an effective agency for change. The most effective vehicles for social change are the myriad of voluntary associations that have focused purposes—as do organizations like the Civil Liberties Union or the Urban League. Reform-minded Unitarian Universalists should join and support these specialized organizations or found new ones instead of trying to impose their own views on their co-religionists. Very often moral fervor in the church bleeds off energy that could be better expended in political parties and voluntary associations.
3. If there is an answer to a problem, then it is not difficult in a democratic society to develop a trial of the proposed solution to a social problem. If we are the “rational” way in religion, then let us concentrate on dialogue and education. Political acrimony in the church makes a true educational experience impossible. The search for truth is undermined. The essence of our religious tradition is its non-creedal affirmation. Building on that, let us create a uniquely inclusive ground for dialogue in a society that has become splintered into endless pressure groups. To take institutional social action is a violation of our historic tradition for it is in effect to establish a

creed. To be a religious liberal is not necessarily to be a political liberal. We have to decide whether we genuinely want both Republicans and Democrats, as well as other political points of view, in our church. In recent years many of our churches and the national association have established a social creed that excludes even moderate political conservatives.

4. The politically turbulent church or religious assembly is not a place of healing. Psychotherapy recognizes that human beings need non-threatening situations in which to grow and change. If we want to help people to change their values we should not involve them in acrimonious debate and vote taking—rather what is needed is an inclusive and non-threatening community in which ideas and emotions can be explored. Let us provide a setting in which individuals can grow in wisdom and compassion so that they can go out into society and work for those causes they cherish. To create such a community is a challenge that is not being met in the wider American society—whereas political pressure groups are widespread. In addition we should remember that the great Unitarian Universalist tradition of social involvement is the story of individuals who worked for social change, not through their churches, but through voluntary associations in the wider democratic society.
5. There are ways that are proper to our tradition for stimulating social change. The free pulpit should try to convince people of new social possibilities—but religious liberals should never be compelled to support causes their conscience questions. If we are committed to convincing individuals about new social responsibilities, we should not force a vote to overwhelm those who have not been convinced. The free forum—just like the free pulpit—can be a stimulus to action. In addition we should create, locally and nationally, organizations which take social action—but only in the names of those Unitarians and Universalists who have chosen to join them and to contribute to them. Let us not raid common funds collected in the name of religious liberalism to support the political causes of a few or a bare majority. The now defunct Fellowship for Social Justice was an organization that allowed those religious liberals to act who were committed to specific social goals without writing a social creed for all Unitarian Universalists. In addition we should also have a humanitarian social service agency that is non-political and non-controversial for the purpose of helping people to help themselves. Such a service agency should develop programs on the basis of a widely shared Unitarian Universalist consensus. Its programs should be based largely on technological help for backward peoples or for the disadvantaged—and should not be committed to divisive political or social theories. We need a service agency that creates a trial school room in a ghetto, aids a region to grow a larger food harvest—along with population control measures, rather than a service agency which is committed to a particular doctrine of “political empowerment.” Our service agency should form its program so

that it is not politically sectarian, so that it is representative of a non-creedal religious liberalism.

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Discussion Questions

1. Is there a difference between the separation of church and state and the separation of religion and politics? If so, what is it? How do you react to the proposed model of the church?
2. What is the social responsibility program of your congregation? Examine it in terms of the Social Concern Typology.
3. Should the congregation act, speak out, and/or interfere? What do *act*, *speak out*, and *interfere* mean? Are they the same?
4. What arguments might there be against church involvement in politics? Debate the pros and cons.

Before the Next Meeting

Read Chapter Seven.

Congregational Mobilization for Justice

Objectives

- To understand the diversity of ways in which the church can engage in social action
- To analyze the social responsibility program of the congregation
- To stimulate a congregational review of the social responsibility program

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the church models presented in Chapter Seven describe your congregation?
Give examples of why.
2. Does your congregation have a healthy “community of moral discourse”?
3. Evaluate your congregation’s social responsibility program in terms of the four dimensions of religious life in the church that were presented in Chapter Six:
 - The church as a worshipping community out of a spiritual core
 - The church as a caring community in which a mutual ministry operates to meet personal needs
 - The church as a community of lifespan religious education
 - The church as a community of moral discourse and social action
4. A review of your social responsibility program might have these three goals:
 - To evaluate past successes/limitations
 - To involve the congregation with social responsibility programs by increasing familiarity with the program and inviting input
 - To plan for future improvementsWhat other goals would a review have?
5. Outline the steps necessary in running a congregational review of your program. How would a review of your congregation’s social responsibility program evaluate the program’s relevance and success in each of the above categories? For each step you propose, list:
 - human resources needed (i.e., who would need to do it)

- other resources needed (i.e., information, money, access to publicity, etc.)
- time line (how long it might take realistically to complete the action step)
- results/outcome desired (written report, verbal report to congregation, recommendations for future efforts, etc.)

Before the Next Meeting

Read Chapter Eight.

Write your own Social Ten Commandments (values that apply to society at large) for next time.

Ten Commandments for Social Action

Objectives

- To determine participants' roles as change agents
- To hone analytical skills

Individual Reflection

List ten social principles that constitute a social ethic for you.

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan and imagine yourself in each character's role.

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

—Luke 10:25-37

Discussion Questions

1. With whom in this story do you most closely identify? Why?
2. At what point in this story is the critical injustice?
3. What would your impulse be if you were the Samaritan? Would you pass by on the side of the road? Retell the story widely? Set up first aid stations along the road? Make the

road safe by policing it? Arrest the robbers and punish them? Restore the thieves to the community? Question a society that produces thieves?

4. Did the Good Samaritan engage in social education, social service, social witness, or social action? What was your response?

Individual Reflection

Values have seven criteria:

- They are freely chosen.
- They are chosen from among alternatives.
- They are chosen reflectively, deliberately.
- They are prized and cherished; you feel good about them.
- You are willing to affirm them publicly.
- You act upon them.
- Your action on your values forms a consistent pattern of behavior.

—adapted from Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe, and Howard
Kirschenbaum

Values Clarification

Evaluate a social value to which you feel committed according to these criteria.

Before the Next Meeting

Read Chapter Nine.

To Change the World

Objectives

- To analyze the historical, theological, ethical, political, and strategic content of the Rochester case study
- To synthesize learnings and apply them to your own congregation
- To plan next steps

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the impact the First Unitarian Church in Rochester had on the social responsibility program described in Chapter Nine.
2. Attempt to identify the underlying theological beliefs and ethical commitments of the Rochester congregation.
3. Discuss the functions of the Social Responsibility Council and how it supported and enacted the theoretical underpinnings of the program.
4. How does the Rochester experience/situation correspond (or not) to your congregation?
5. Summarize what you learned from this discussion group. What is the unfinished agenda for the group? For the participants? Where do you want to go from here?

