

## Small Group Exercise: Being a Force of History

**Timing:** about an hour

### Opening

Facilitator welcomes participants.

### Welcome and Purpose of the Group

Facilitator: This is an opportunity to get to know each other, to create a safe place to explore how becoming aware that you are part of human history can strengthen and sustain your work for peace and justice.

**Chalice Lighting:** *Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.* —Reinhold Niebuhr

**Brief Check-In:** Facilitator asks participants to introduce themselves by saying their names and briefly how they are feeling right now about the topic to be considered in this group.

### Topic: Being a Force of History

Facilitator: History is so vast and complex that no one can say with confidence that history is on her side. Yet those who want to move the world in the direction of peace and harmony must think of themselves as a force of history. Maya Angelou challenges us: *History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage, need not be lived again.*

Facilitator asks participants to take turns reading aloud the following quotations:

*This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. . . I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work the more I live.* —George Bernard Shaw

*There is no choice but to immerse oneself in the stream of history, accept one's time-location, breathe in—with shared memories and hopes—the contamination of tradition, become defined as the man of this cause, this party, this emergency.* —William Ernest Hocking

*No task is more important to me than promoting the well-being of all the people.* —Asoka  
(ca. 274-232 BCE)

*I understand history as possibility. . .that could also stop being a possibility.* —Paulo Freire

*To this day, I cannot forget those who suffered with me and died in that clandestine prison. In spite of the humiliation that demanding answers has entailed, I stand with the Guatemalan people. I demand the right to a future built on truth and justice.* —Dianna Ortiz

*Nothing less than a great daring in the face of overwhelming odds can achieve the inner security in which fear cannot possibly survive.* —Howard Thurman

### **Questions for Reflection**

Facilitator asks participants to take turns reading aloud the following questions:

- Which, if any, of the above quotes do you like and why?
- What can you do (or do you do) on a regular basis to be aware of your place in history?
- What connection do you see between awareness of your place in history and your work for peace and justice?

Facilitator invites participants to sit silently together for a minute.

### **Discussion**

Facilitator then leads a discussion of both the quotations and questions, making sure that participants share the time fairly. Each person will have the chance to speak uninterrupted for up to three minutes. Facilitator lets people speak when they're ready, popcorn style, and doesn't call on them. If a person doesn't speak for the whole three minutes, that's okay. When they're done, Facilitator goes on to the next person who wishes to speak. When each person who wants to speak has had an opportunity, Facilitator opens the floor for discussion. Facilitator ends the discussion leaving about five minutes for check-out and closing.

**Brief check-out:** Facilitator asks participants what they liked in the session and what is their most important "take-away."

### **Closing**

*Our chief concern should be to pass on our inheritance sound and whole, the better for our guardianship.* --Rev. John Dietrich

Session by Stephen Shick, November 2014

Quotations from his book *Be the Change: Poems, Prayers and Meditations for Peacemakers and Justice Seekers*. Boston: Skinner House (2009). Available at [www.uuabookstore.org](http://www.uuabookstore.org) or 800-215-9076 and wherever books are sold.

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