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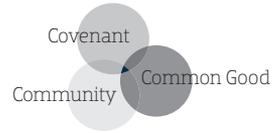
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“What Is This Study, and Where Is it Going?”

> Ephesians 4:11-16

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

This passage is a favorite for pastors and writers who seek to help people combine their spiritual lives with a strong sense of service. Paul speaks here of “equipping the saints for the work of ministry,” and by “saints” he means people who are saved by Christ and called to show Christ’s love through service in the world: in other words,

you and me, and many others like us! One of the main purposes of the church, then, is to help people discern their call to service and to understand more deeply their gifts within the body of Christ (Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:4-20). Accordingly, many churches offer programs to help people identify their spiritual gifts, channel their volunteer time in parish and community service, and hopefully gain a sense of purpose as they serve the Lord.

Serving within the church is important, necessary, and rewarding. Sometimes, however, adult faith development gives short shrift to what we could call a “public component.” The Ephesians passage faith refers to “growing up into Christ,” and we know that Christ himself had an active public ministry, teaching and serving

How does our faith help us serve?

people and crossing literal and figurative boundaries in order to serve. How does our faith help us serve? How does our faith form our judgments about society? Do we feel any sense of responsibility for or solidarity with persons of a lower income level, with persons who are sick, with persons in other countries? **How do we perceive God’s guidance and calling in things like civic and social responsibilities?**

It’s difficult for many pastors to address public issues from the pulpit, and arguably the Sunday sermon isn’t the best place to educate people about social issues, but the Sunday sermon may be the moment that brings the largest number of members together, and many yearn for convincing connection between theology and the issues

of the day. To be sure, social action isn't a key concern in some congregations. One church consultant notes that community ministries and social action committees are sometimes delegated to the associate pastor as "loser" jobs because the senior pastor prefers to engage in "winner" activities and committees with greater visibility.¹

Consequently, we may not always have the chance to appreciate social issues or to think very deeply about the ways our faith influences our views of the world and of people different from us. In the 1980s, a major research project, *The Unchurched American*, concluded from cross-sectional interviews that a refusal of the church to relate its message to social issues kept as many Americans away from membership as were lost to socially concerned churches by reason of stands on social issues.

Unfortunately, **the world is filled with needs that no single one of us could ever begin to address.** For instance, the National Council of Churches has published *A Social Creed for the 21st Century*, calling attention to the earlier Social Creed a century ago, in 1908. The 21st-century creed affirms "a vision of a society that shares more and consumes less, seeks compassion over suspicion and equality over domination, and finds security in joined hands rather than massed arms." In offering a vision of a just world, the creed cites world problems such as forced labor, inadequate wages, disparities between the rich and the poor, the unsustainable overuse of the earth's resources, unclean air and water, and the need for more multilateral diplomacy to deal with international problems.²

Similarly, the bishops of The United Methodist Church noted in a recent statement that our contemporary world faces a “storm” of interrelated forces. Among issues of poverty, for instance, we find economic “systems built upon self-interest and fraud”; a “resource crisis” wherein energy, water, and food are scarce; a “justice/poverty crisis” where the gap widens between rich and poor; a “global health crisis” where preventable diseases such as malaria, TB, and HIV/AIDS are related to poverty; and also a “refugee crisis” wherein millions of people become displaced. Among pressing environmental issues we recognize “the energy crisis” of heavily tapped oil reserves, the “climate crisis” of greenhouse gases, and the “biodiversity crisis” of plant and animal extinction. Among other social issues we discover the “weapons crisis” of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons; the “small arms crisis” of 639 million light weapons and small arms circulating in the world, as well as the illegal small arms trade”; and also the “security crisis” of increasing global military spending, half of which is spent by the U.S.³ The bishops note that these threats are so interrelated that making progress on any single issue is difficult: “We find ourselves overwhelmed by complex webs of brokenness: injustice against migrants, resource scarcity elevated to warfare, energy crises, environmental racism, economic globalization, and violence against the most vulnerable, especially women and girls.”⁴

And yet problems such as these need not discourage us, but instead can and should awaken us to public,

caring aspects of Christian faith. As we learn about global challenges, we should also learn theological truths from scripture and tradition. Those truths, in turn, provide us insight about God and God's world, as well as sustenance for our ongoing Christian growth and ministries.

The resource you are now reading aims to help us grow in socially conscious kinds of faithfulness. A generation ago, one large empirical study, to be quoted in our final session, concluded that church members who became active in public life most often share three characteristics:

- A strong hope for social justice.
- Support by a cluster of a few friends who sustain them against public disappointments.
- A willingness to stay in public life long enough to learn the skills – the ups and downs – of citizen effort.

All three characteristics can be decisively cultivated in the community of a local congregation of Christians.⁵

The Developers of This Curriculum

The Center for the Congregation in Public Life (CCPL) at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School offers resources to congregations engaged in outreach and social justice ministry. While seminaries that train future clergy frequently require courses in Christian social ethics, congregations have few resources that provide a foundation in Christian tradition for addressing public life. Because our world today is faced with pressing issues

like those just listed, the CCPL seeks “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” with training that is enduring, comprehensive, and focused on the best practices in outreach and social ministry.

Faithful Citizen: Living Responsibly in a Global Society⁶ is a multi-media resource that will assist Christians in moving beyond individual concerns and act responsibly for the common good. Designed as a six-week adult study, Faithful Citizen addresses the interlocking global challenges of economics, ecology, security, and health.

Faithful Citizen will discuss these challenges using three concepts from the Christian tradition – **covenant,**

community, and the

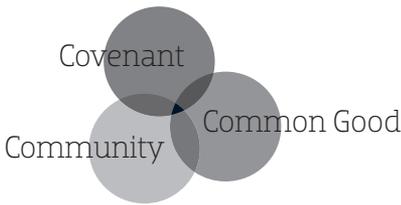
common good. One of

the greatest strengths of American culture is also a potential weakness – our tradition of individualism.

We Americans cherish our

individual freedoms and become upset when, for instance, we perceive that government is interfering in our lives and when our personal values are being threatened.

On the other hand, the preamble to our Constitution affirms the need for justice in society, domestic peace, security (“common defense”), and the promotion of “the general welfare.” Although “the blessings of liberty” are individual, they are secured through a concern for the common good. Faithful Citizen will help Christians balance excessive individualism with ideas about how to



think and act responsibly in our national society, and also in our global society.

The Design of the Curriculum

We are indebted to two authors who have articulated important aspects of our journey. Robert Bellah, primary author of the famous book *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 2008) has challenged us as Americans to recover civic virtue: that concern for the public good that our founders saw as essential to the survival of democracy. He and his co-authors identify the loss of civic virtue as a major casualty of our individualism.

We are also indebted to Eric Mount, Jr., author of *Covenant, Community, and the Common Good: An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1999). Mount has stretched this idea of civic virtue to include theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. He suggests that these Christian virtues are, properly understood, also civic virtues. He describes our religious faith as an “audacious openness” to others that, in turn, broadens our faith perspective beyond the simply individualistic to embrace the needs and stories of others.

Faithful Citizen includes two resources:

- This Leader Guide, which includes a DVD with two segments for each session (12 total)
- A Study Guide

We hope these sessions will help a variety of persons:

- **Volunteers** in various social ministry programs in churches
- **Regular attendees of adult studies** who may not be active in the social ministry of the church but who do support it and wish it to succeed
- **College and seminary students** with particular interest in social justice ministries

These are the topics that will be explored in this course:

Session One: Global Society

“Why worry about the world’s troubles? I’ve got enough of my own!”

- DVD Segment 1A: Why Not Go It Alone?
- DVD Segment 1B: Individualism and the Community

Session Two: Global Economy

“Is my job going to China?”

- DVD Segment 2A: Experiencing the Big Box World
- DVD Segment 2B: Reforming Our Economic Life

Session Three: Global Ecology

“I’ve changed my light bulbs. Now what?”

- DVD Segment 3A: Ecology and Faith
- DVD Segment 3B: How Much Is Enough?

Session Four: Global Security

“Why don’t I feel safe? And besides, why do they hate us?”

- DVD Segment 4A: 9-11
- DVD Segment 4B: Shaping a Secure World

Session Five: Global Health

“Why risk getting shots if plenty of other people refuse to be immunized?”

- DVD Segment 5A: Fast Food and Health
- DVD Segment 5B: World Health Challenges

Session Six: Civic Virtue

“How can we teach citizenship when we don’t even have time to eat together?”

- DVD Segment 6A: Volunteering to Help the Homeless
- DVD Segment 6B: Practicing Citizenship

Teaching and Learning Tips

The questions in the mind of any good newspaper reporter are also good questions for anyone leading adult education. These questions, it is hoped, will stimulate any teacher as she or he approaches this curriculum:

- Who are the teachers and learners?
- What is to be taught and learned?
- When will the learning take place?
- Where will the learning take place?

- How will the learning take place?
- Why is this study important? (What is the need that it is addressing?)

Begin at the end with your planning. Know why your church or organization is using this curriculum. What is the need that it hopes to address? Do volunteers in your programs need deeper theological and spiritual equipping? Is your congregation considering any new outreach program that this curriculum may nurture and stimulate? Are individuals seeking new ways to engage their faith?

As preparation for teaching, purchase and read all six sessions of the Faithful Citizen Study Guide. Once you have gained an overview of the entire curriculum, weekly sessions can easily be reviewed by reading the highlighted text, sidebars, and material in shaded boxes.

The following suggestions will help you to focus your attention on particular needs and opportunities for your group.

1. Week by week, thoughtfully review the material for that particular session in both Study Guide and Leader Guide. Pay attention to each session's Focus and Bible Background, located on the first page of each Leader Guide session. Use these to anchor your preparations and as a tool to evaluate each session.
2. Think through how much time you have for the session. Calculate, based upon your reading of the session, whether or not you should split the session over two weeks.

3. Imagine how you will lead this group. Will you use lecture, presentation, small groups? What will be considered “homework” and what will be covered in the group?
4. Think about the configuration of the room you are using. What can you do to make participants as comfortable as possible?
5. Determine what materials you will need and identify the items each person should have or bring to each session.
6. Watch both video segments for the session, using the DVD. Before the session, test your video equipment to make sure it works.
7. Decide whether you would like to invite specific people to the session who could give personal testimony or expertise about the issues discussed. Think through the amount of time you will want this person to use.
8. Review the suggested discussion questions for each session, highlighting items you think might be especially relevant for your group. After the review, note additional issues and questions that arise for you that are not included in the suggested Study Guide and add those items to your teaching plan.
9. At the end of each session of the Study Guide you will find a list titled Suggestions for Further Reading. You may find this to be a helpful supplement for your preparation, as well as a resource for participants who wish to dig deeper into a topic.

Last Words

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). We often read this verse in an individualistic, otherworldly way: I believe in Jesus and so I’m going to heaven; you need to believe in Jesus so you (as an individual) can go to heaven, too! We might overlook or downplay that first part, God so loved the world. We cannot ignore that which God loves. In the following lessons we will read several scriptures that will help us broaden our view of the world and our responsibilities therein. The eternal life God offers the world is not only the guarantee of heaven – amazing and wonderful as that is – but also **the life-power that redeems everyday, problem-ridden human existence**. That life-power, in turn, is very often granted through the prayers, outreach, and service of God’s faithful people. Through these sessions, let us think about several ways that we can increase our love for God’s world, in Christ’s name.

Endnotes

¹ Lyle E. Schaller, *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 130. His distinction of “winner” and “loser” roles reflects typical congregations’ perceptions of the roles of senior and associate pastors, as well as the dynamics of those staff positions.

² “A Social Creed for the 21st Century,” approved November 7, 2007, U.S.A. by the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches U.S.A. and Church World Service, from News from the National Council of Churches: http://www.nccusa.org/news/ga2007_socialcreed.html.

³ The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, *God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2009, 2010), 19.

⁴ *God’s Renewed Creation*, 19-20.

⁵ Donald W. Shriver, Jr., Karl A. Ostrom, *Is There Hope for the City?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).

⁶ The phrase “faithful citizen” comes from Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).