



# TOUCHSTONES

## *Small Group Discussion Guide*

### Justice

**Preparation:** (Read *Touchstones* and the questions.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren’t pessimistic, you don’t understand data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren’t optimistic, you haven’t got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world.” *Paul Hawken*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake), adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the following wisdom story.

#### *Don't Sleep During the Revolution*

Washington Irving was born in Manhattan on April 3, 1783. It was a special week because the residents there learned of the British ceasefire ending the American Revolution. His parents, who immigrated from England, were part of the merchant class. They named him after George Washington, the hero of the just-completed American Revolution. When he was six years old, Irving met George Washington, who was settling into the first U.S. capitol located in New York City. The meeting made a lasting impression on him. Perhaps it’s why Irving, a famous writer, wrote a long-forgotten 5-volume biography of George Washington. We remember him for his short stories *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

*Rip Van Winkle* lived in a small village in the Kaatskills mountains. It was part of the New Netherland, a colony the Dutch founded in 1614. Just 30 years later, the governor surrendered under threat of attack by British troops. The villagers found themselves living in the English colony called New York. Of course, that didn’t matter. They were Dutch, and they would always be Dutch. Of course, this happened long before *Rip Van Winkle* was born. His story began before the Revolutionary War.

Children loved *Rip* because he taught them to fly kites and shoot marbles and helped them when they played sports. He also told long stories about ghosts and witches. He never refused to help a neighbor, like building stone fences, regardless of how hard it was. The woman in the village also admired him because he would run errands and do odd jobs that their husbands wouldn’t. Unfortunately, the one thing he couldn’t do was run his farm. His fences were continually falling down, his cow would

roam the village, and the only thing that grew better than his potatoes and Indian corn were weeds. The only person who was not happy with him was his wife. She nagged him constantly. To escape, he went to a small inn to talk with other men. That inn had a picture posted outside of His Majesty George the Third, the King of England.

One day, Rip fled into the woods with his dog and gun to go hunting. As he walked higher up the mountain, he met a man carrying a keg of liquor. They walked together until they reached a clearing where strange men played a nine-pin bowling game. The man insisted that Rip serve them some of the liquor, which he did. He also drank a little and then more, and then a lot until he was so drunk he just fell asleep.

When he woke up, he thought it was the next morning, but his dog was gone, his rifle was rusted, and his beard, now grey, was more than a foot long. What happened? He returned to the village and learned that everything had changed. At the inn, the picture of King George was gone. In its place was a picture of a man with the name George Washington underneath it. Rip slowly learned that he had been asleep for 20 years and completely missed the American Revolutionary War, which lasted eight years. Though his wife had died, his daughter was now grown and married with a young son. She took him into her home. And as they say, he lived happily ever after.

The story of Rip Van Winkle has long been famous, but it took on added significance during the Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. began talking about Rip Van Winkle in his addresses and sermons. He told a bit of the story and then said, "When he started his quiet sleep America was still under the domination of the British Empire. When he came down, she was a free and independent nation. This incident suggests that the most striking thing about the story of Rip Van Winkle was not that he slept twenty years, but that he slept through a great revolution. While he was peacefully snoring up in the mountain a revolution was taking place which completely changed the face of the world. Rip knew nothing about it. He was asleep. There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a

revolution."

He told this story repeatedly because a revolution for civil rights was taking place, and he needed as many people as possible to help make his dream of a better world come true, the dream of all people being judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. We have not yet realized that dream, so the revolution continues. Don't be like Rip Van Winkle and sleep through the revolution. Help make a difference. Help make the dream come true by working for justice. And don't fall asleep!!!

Source: [Touchstones](#)

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

#### **Readings from the Common Bowl**

"Quick reminder: Kindness and justice are not synonymous. Be kind. And advocate and work for justice. Lives depend on it." Bernice King

"If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound up together, we can walk together." Lilla Watson

"Environmental justice ... goes something like this: no community should be saddled with more environmental burdens and less environmental benefits than any other." Majora Carter

"You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know." William Wilberforce

"Justice is not a matter of opinion but an imperative of the soul." Simon Wiesenthal

"We need the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, the courage to fight for social justice. In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, and just hoping to land

on something. But that's the struggle. To live is to wrestle with despair, yet never allow despair to have the last word." Cornel West

"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"The beauty of anti-racism is that you don't have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself." Ijeoma Oluo

"Restorative justice is not a soft option. It takes courage to face the truth about the harm that has been done and the suffering that has been caused. It takes courage to face the truth about oneself." Howard Zehr

"If you're calling for an end to unrest, but not calling out police brutality, not calling for health care as a human right, not calling for an end to housing discrimination, all you're asking for is the continuation of quiet oppression." Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

"The absence of economic justice and opportunity undermines the very fabric of a just society." Bernie Sanders

"The first duty of society is justice." Alexander Hamilton

"We can either have democracy ...or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Louis D. Brandeis, Associate Justice

"It is the spirit and not the form of law that keeps justice alive." Earl Warren, Chief Justice

"There is a court of law, young man, not a court of justice." Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Associate Justice

"There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts." Mahatma Gandhi

"Sometimes justice was all about the small victories." Susan Dennard

We make our fervent pleas for the high road of justice, and then we tread unflinchingly the low road of injustice. This strange dichotomy, this agonizing gulf between the *ought* and the *is*, represents the tragic theme of man's earthly pilgrimage." Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Economic justice is not a partisan issue; it is a human rights imperative that transcends political divides." Yanis Varoufakis

"When we identify where our privilege intersects with somebody else's oppression, we'll find our opportunities to make real change." Ijeoma Oluo

"Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained." Helen Keller

"Unlike a lot of people, I don't feel powerless. I know I can do something. But anyone can do something. It's not about being special. It's about deciding to do it—to dive into work for peace and justice and care for everybody on the planet." Patch Adams

"I've finally gotten to a point in my life where I'm not afraid to speak. Where my shadow no longer haunts me. And I don't want to lose that freedom—not again. I can't go backward. I'd rather be shot dead screaming for justice than die alone in a prison of my own making." Tahereh Mafi

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Martin Luther King Jr.

“Environmental justice is social justice in action, recognizing the interconnectedness of our communities and the shared responsibility we have to protect our planet for all generations.” Van Jones

“Restorative justice is an invitation to look beyond traditional responses to wrongdoing, and to consider the needs and responsibilities of all those affected—victims, offenders, and community.” Kay Pranis

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“Justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other—that my liberty depends on you being free too.” Barack Obama

“A democracy cannot thrive where power remains unchecked and justice is reserved for a select few. Ignoring these cries and failing to respond to this movement is simply not an option — for peace cannot exist where justice is not served.” John Lewis

“Justice is doing for others what we would want done for us.” Gary Haugen

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.” Nelson Mandela

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** “True peace does not exist until there is justice, restoration, forgiveness. Peacemaking doesn’t mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring

injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free.” *Shane Claiborne*

### **Living the Questions**

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Does the moral arc of the universe bend toward justice. Why or why not?
2. Do people with privilege fail to see the oppression and injustice that exists in society? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe that equity and compassion should be used in the justice system? What value would they add?
4. What grade would you give the criminal justice system? Why?
5. Do you think a restorative justice approach is more effective than one based on retribution? Why or why not?
6. In what ways does environmental degradation and climate change intersect with issues of justice?
7. What justice issues are especially important to you? Why?
8. How do our laws promote justice? How do they institutionalize privilege/injustice?
9. To what extent does economic inequality affect justice in society? How can this be addressed?
10. Is it important for UU congregations to work for justice? Why or why not?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you

are now as a result of the time spent together  
and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice** (Elizabeth Selle Jones)

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of  
truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of  
commitment. These we carry in our hearts until  
we are together again.*

**Closing Words**

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our  
benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*