

on a justice theme

believes others should learn from the poor.

When there is a belief that all people are somehow connected, the following questions may arise in a group: Are there ways not just to respond to each other's needs, but to take responsibility for one another? Should this be done? To what extent can people really express a responsibility for one another?

•In discussions of social justice, it helps to be aware of some facts — perhaps some statistics on poverty, homelessness, abortion, unemployment. But these discussions tend to thrive only when the human faces behind the statistics are seen.

The concern for social justice seems less remote — and much more urgent — when "the facts" include the stories of real people: unemployed parents whose family life has disintegrated; abused children.

In light of the points above, it seems you don't have to be a Christian to be concerned about justice. The face of a hungry child speaks a universal language.

But if you are a Christian, the discussion of social justice will likely take on a special character.

•For Christians, reflections on justice are often sparked by the Beatitudes or the parable of the Good Samaritan. How Jesus treated victims of prejudice and society's outcasts is likely to

become the model for justice.

Thus, among Christians, a discussion of justice can easily lead to an examination of what the life of Jesus implies for life today.

•Again, among Christians, to speak of the rights and the dignity of human beings is to speak of the image of God in all people. It becomes an exploration of something sacred.

•And, among Christians, discussions about building a just society become more than explorations of kindness or fairness or human compassion. Christians begin to ask how one becomes a participant in God's plan of action for the world.

This brief list of building blocks for discussions of social justice is hardly exhaustive. Many points and questions could be added to it, like this one:

Can social justice really be achieved in this imperfect world?

But I can just see the discussion of that question as it develops among a group of Christians.

They'd begin to talk about whether or not worldly success is the criterion for evaluating our participation in God's work...about the value in all efforts to infuse the world with hope...the sacredness of every life...

(Gibson is editor of Faith Today.)

southern intruder

absolutely no sympathy.

Still, he answered God's call, and he carried out his task with courage and surprising ingenuity, given his background. The collection of sermons which bears Amos' name opens with him preaching in the north's central shrine: Bethel. Here he was sure of a large audience.

He began by denouncing Israel's enemies: Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah. Then, without pausing, he lashed out at Israel. The effect was stunning.

Amos had elicited the people's good will by itemizing the crimes of their enemies. Then he put them in the same category:

"They sell the just man for silver and the poor man for a pair of sandals. They trample the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth, and force the lowly out of the way" (Amos 2:6-7).

The concern shown by Amos for the rights of disadvantaged people is paramount in the sermons of all God's prophets. Thus we read that when the

Israelite people had decided on a fast to obtain God's favor, and nothing happened, they complained: "Why do we fast, and you do not see it?"

God's answer came through the prophet: "(This) is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own" (Isaiah 58:3, 3-5).

If anything, Jesus intensified the call for social justice. His every action was a lesson in love for the poor and the exploited. He linked together the two great commands to love God and love neighbor, and he removed all limits from the concept of "neighbor."

The New Testament writers repeated Jesus' teaching. For them, love of God had to be accompanied by the pursuit of justice.

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FOOD...

...for thought

How can a group of people begin to discuss questions about justice?

"I'd begin by asking what occupations and professions" the group's members are in, said Edward Marciniak, president of the Institute of Urban Life in Chicago. He is well-known for his lectures and writings on the place of Christianity in the workplace.

"I approach it this way because the basic vehicles of justice are in the places we work or are called to," Marciniak said. It is important "to think through the justice issue in terms of" the workplace, he suggested.

"I'm a businessman with a large company," Marciniak continued. The institute "works with established institutions or grass-roots groups to revitalize inner-city neighborhoods."

Because of financial losses two years running, the institute decided to cut back on personnel. The justice issue in that difficult decision was deciding what principles to follow, Marciniak noted. The institute developed three guidelines:

1. To cut back on personnel across the board, from top to bottom, regardless of rank and salary.
2. To explain to employees in a face-to-face discussion why they were being let go.
3. To encourage early retire-

ment by those who qualified for it.

Workplace policies such as these are matters of justice, Marciniak said, "because they deal with relationships between men and women." Discrimination against minority-group members was another workplace issue cited by Marciniak.

He recognizes it is not easy for a solitary employee to take a justice stand. "Change is never easy. You're dealing with habits and unchanged patterns," he said. "Find others who understand the situation and work together," he advised. Finding others of like mind provides "support and motivation" as individuals work for justice, Marciniak said.

Marciniak recalled a time in the early 1950s when he was involved in negotiations to integrate Washington, D.C., hotels. Marciniak was international vice president of the Newspaper Guild then, which included black members.

A new hotel at the time badly wanted business, Marciniak explained. He said the guild told the hotel management: "We'll bring our business but these are our conditions."

The hotel agreed and the guild's annual convention marked the first time blacks were allowed to register in a previously all-white Washington, D.C., hotel.

...for discussion

1. The work of justice begins close to home, according to two people interviewed by our writers this week. What are some ways of acting to foster justice close to home?

2. In this imperfect world, do you believe it is worthwhile to work for justice? Why?

3. What does the word "justice" mean for you?

4. Why does David Gibson say that you don't have to be a Christian to take an active interest in matters of justice, but if you are a Christian your discussions of justice will take on a particular flavor?

SECOND HELPINGS

"How You Can Be a Peacemaker," by Sister Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND. The author of this paperback book writes: "It is easy to grasp the idea of peace. What is difficult is to preserve peace when we have it or to restore it when it is broken or lost." Sister Jegen sees peace issues in broad terms, including "our own peace of heart, peace in a family, peace in a neighborhood or peace between nations." The first part of this 128-page book gives a brief overview of the teaching of Jesus and the church on peace issues. The second part examines ways to promote peacemaking. The accent is on the practical. Each chapter includes questions and suggestions to focus group discussion. (Liguori Publications, 1 Liguori Dr., Liguori, Mo. 63057. \$2.95.)