

SEEDS OF JUSTICE

Organizing Your Church to Transform the World

A Study Guide for Congregations

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How to Use this Guide

Seeds of Justice is not a book to simply read, or engage with alone. It is a guidebook for committed people of faith to begin to make changes in their churches and communities. This guide is meant to help members of small groups, bible studies, or ministries take what they are reading and put it into action together.

The guide is laid out as five sessions of discussion followed by a final session of group reflection and planning. By the end of reading the book and holding these meetings together, your team should have a vision and action plan to begin to transform your church into a true agent of Gospel justice.

Each session is designed to be roughly an hour long, and includes two to three chapters of the book which should be read ahead of time, an opening prayer, general discussion questions, a group exercise, and, in some cases, a follow up assignment. Together, these should deepen your understanding of the tools and principles of congregational organizing, build your skills to effectively do this work in your church and neighborhood, and help you begin taking action.

You can meet weekly or at any other interval that makes sense for your community. If you want to meet less regularly and for longer times, say two hours every other week, that is fine too. Ideally, you should meet in person since many of the exercises will be less impactful over the phone, but your team should do what will work best for you.

To build group leadership and responsibility, I suggest rotating facilitators from week to week. Again, you should feel free to use the prayers and discussion questions that are provided to substitute or add your own. The spirit may move your group to a different set of questions, and, if so, go with it! I do suggest trying to get to each session's exercise if possible.

To stay up to date on further resources, tools, and opportunities, you can visit www.AlexTindalWiesendanger.com

May God bless you and your church on your journey!

Session I

Read: Introduction and Chapter 1.

Pray

God of Justice, you call us to bring your good news to the poor, the oppressed and the prisoner. Give us the vision to see the structures that make your people suffer. Give us ears to hear your voice calling us to act. And give us the courage to stand as prophetic witnesses to your Kingdom. Amen.

Discussion Questions

When was the first time you remember becoming aware of injustice? How did you feel?

Did the distinction between charity and justice make sense to you? What questions do you still have?

Activity: The Charity Justice Spectrum

What you will need: flip chart or butcher paper, markers, post it notes, pens/pencils

Give each member of your group a stack of post-its. You can also work in pairs or small teams. On each post it, write an outward facing ministry that your congregation engages in, so one post-it might say “food bank” or another might say “letter writing campaign.”

On several pieces of flip chart or butcher paper, draw a long, horizontal line. On one end write “Charity” and on the other end write “Justice”

Using the criteria for charity and justice on page 7 now place each of your ministry post-its along the spectrum where you think it belongs. Try to be honest with yourselves. For each ministry ask, “is the major focus of this ministry addressing the direct needs of individuals (even a large number of individuals) or changing the system that creates these needs?”

A word about the middle. There are some ministries that have aspects of both charity and justice. Perhaps while meeting a direct need (such as feeding the hungry) you also include educational materials about expanding access to the SNAP program. Some of these can sit in the middle of the spectrum, but ask yourself how much of the energy of the ministry, in terms of time and money are focused on each aspect

As a group, look at your final spectrum. Is it in balance? Or does your church favor one over the other?

Discuss what this means for the life of your congregation. Are we, in the words of Pope Pius XI, “exempting ourselves with gifts of charity from the great duties imposed by injustice”?

Follow Up Assignment

Reflect on some of the issues that your congregation is currently addressing through charitable means. How might you approach them from a justice perspective? Do a little research. Are there any groups or organizations already doing such work?

Session II

Read: Chapters 2 and 3.

Pray:

Lord Jesus, you were so powerful that even when you overturned the tables at the heart of the Roman Empire's power, they could not publicly attack you. Give us the courage to become powerful for your Kingdom's sake. Give us the wisdom to build our power through mutuality with others. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Before reading these chapters, did you think of yourself as power hungry? Why or why not? How has that changed after this reading?

What is the cost of not becoming powerful?

If power is organized people and organized money, how much potential power does our church possess? What would our community look like if we wielded that power?

Activity

As a group, brainstorm all the ways you see power used in your church, in your local community, on the news, etc. Group them based on what form of power is being employed (guns, butter, magic, or relational power/power with). What do you notice about the groupings?

Which forms of power do we see used most often?

How do the forms differ from each other?

How does this impact the way we see power?

Session III

Read: Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Pray:

O God, you exist in small whispering sounds. Inspire us, like Jesus, to listen closely for your voice, especially in those closest to injustice. Give us the wisdom to seek more to hear others than share our own ideas, that your will may come through our mutual conversations. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Think of all the charity and justice ministries that your church does. Did they begin by listening to directly affected people? Do directly affected people make decisions about them? How would the ministries look different if they did?

What outreach ministries does your church currently engage in? How might they offer opportunities for relationship building and organizing?

Activity

Fishbowl role play of a one-on-one.

Choose one member of your group to act as a congregation member that you are going to do a one-on-one with. The person should still be themselves, but not know anything about your justice work, *Seeds of Justice*, etc. The rest of your group should practice the one-on-one conversation (you will each take turns in roles, but, for the sake of the role play, pretend that you are one person holding one continuous conversation)

- One person should set up the time to meet and then sit down and start the conversation (explain what the one-on-one is, restate your credential, and ask a first question).
- The next participant should take over and learn the person's story. Ask questions to learn what the person really cares about. Other members of the group can suggest questions as well.
- After you think you have a good understanding of what motivates the person you are speaking with, the third participant should take over and transition the conversation. Share a vision of how your church could make a difference when you organize yourselves for power. Answer questions the person may have. Once you have communicated this, invite the person into action. Perhaps suggest joining a team which will hold one-on-ones for the next two months with every member of the church.

Debrief: how did the conversation go? What felt awkward? What felt meaningful? What was different than a normal conversation? How did you do at following the structure of the conversation?

Follow Up Assignment

Before your next meeting, every member of your group should hold one full one-on-one meeting with a member of their church or community. Talk over who you will each talk to, so you avoid having several of you call the same person. Afterwards, fill out the one-on-one report form in Appendix A, page 194 and bring it to your next meeting.

Session IV

Read: Chapters 7, 8, and 9.

Pray

Lord God, you make the stone that the builder rejects the corner stone of your temple. Help us to see and call out the leadership in others that you see. Open us to hear your call on our own leadership. Give us the courage to challenge ourselves, our congregation members and our whole church in love to become who you call us to be. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

How did your one-on-ones from last week go?

Reflect on the definition and traits of a leader. Do they make sense for you? Who are the indigenous and potential leaders you see in your church?

Have you ever been guilty of confusing education, articulateness or anything else for leadership? What were the results? What do those misidentifications reveal about us?

Where can you see yourself or your church needing one of the agitations shared in Chapter 8?

How does it feel to think about agitating someone or being agitated?

Activity

Go through the Powerful Congregation checklist in Appendix D on page 205 as a team. Discuss each item

Does your church do this? To what extent?

Which of these would be hardest to implement at your church? Which would be easiest? Why?

Make a plan! What aspects of becoming a powerful congregation could you start doing now? Who would you need to talk to about it?

Follow Up Assignment

Draft a short job description to be a part of your social justice team or a different ministry that you are a part of. Feel free to refer to the examples in Appendix C on pages 203-204. You can share these with each other now or save them for use in your planning and visioning meeting.

Session V

Read: Chapters 10, 11, and 12

Pray

Lord Jesus, you came not to bring peace, but the sword. Set us on fire to stand up for your justice, regardless of what other people think. Give us the clarity to leave behind our own self-righteousness and seek only to do the most good for your people. Amen.

Discussion

Have you ever felt or been told that conflict was “un-Christian”? How could you respond to this idea now?

How do you feel when you imagine yourself and your church engaging in some of the types of actions described in Chapter 10?

Read through pages 168-176 again. Are there ways that you or your church avoid the responsibility of moving with power laid out here? What happens when we subscribe to these temptations?

Do your justice efforts generally move from a strategic plan? Why or why not?

Activity

Have the night’s facilitator choose a current concern of your congregation. Practice creating a strategy together. On a flip chart or butcher paper chart out:

- The Problem
- The Issue
- The Target
- What the target wants? What the target needs? Who the targets key public relationships are?
- Who are your allies and enemies?
- What tactics could you employ to influence your target?

Debrief: How did it feel to create a strategy? What did you learn through this process?

Session VI

Creating Your Congregational Plan

Pray:

Assess Your Church

Refer back to the charity/justice exercise you did in Session I and the Powerful Congregation exercise that you did in Session IV.

How ready for or engaged in justice work is your congregation already?

What current ministries could you build on to become a powerful congregation?

How much did your congregation meet the guidelines of becoming a powerful congregation?

Would you say you could begin an organizing process now or is there more preparatory work needed?

Assess Your Team

Share your job descriptions for your team that you worked on after Session IV. Ask yourselves seriously how close your current team matches these descriptions. Are you willing to commit to the new job descriptions you have developed?

Think about your congregation. Do you have enough people on your team? Do you reflect your full congregation?

Does your team represent congregational leadership? Are there other key leaders within your congregation who need to be on board?

Make a Plan

Did you find that your congregation and team are ready to begin a full organizing drive? If so, use the planning guide in Appendix C (page 197-200) to begin creating your plan.

If not, what one-on-ones do you need to do to get your church or your team ready? Who will do them?

Does your team or your church need additional training? Is there a local organizing group that you can partner with?

Follow Up!

A plan is only as good as the follow up and execution. Make sure that every task you have identified has a person committed to doing it. Set a follow up meeting where you can report back on all of them.

Good luck!