Walking the Way of Love: 
A journey through the Baptismal Covenant

Session 5: 
Bless - Dignity and Justice for All

Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.
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Session 5: Dignity and Justice for All

Introduction
In this session, you will be discussing ways we can “Bless” others and the Baptismal Promise to “Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being”. Jesus reached out and healed and blessed others, and called his disciples to do the same. As we strive for justice and peace on the earth, we must maintain this personal connection. Striving for God’s Kingdom requires that we also respect the dignity of each person. The human rights based approach gives us tools to make sure, as we strive for justice and peace, we are doing so collectively respecting each person’s dignity, voice, and power.

Poverty, violence and a lack of access to water, food and shelter are not just tragedies, they are violations of people’s human rights. As we strive to right these wrongs, the ends do not justify the means. The process we use as we strive for justice and peace must respect people’s human rights and dignity. The rights-based approach is a tool we can use to ensure people’s rights are respected throughout the process. Together, participants will be introduced to the human rights approach and discuss ways they can use this approach to bless others, and live out their faith.

General Objective
Explore the rights-based approach as a tool to “Bless” and “Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.”

Specific Objectives
1. Participants will describe the principles of the human rights approach
2. Participants develop ideas for incorporating the rights-based approach into their worship, mission and ministry
Sample Outline

This guide has a variety of materials that you can use (or not use) to facilitate a study of the Way of Love and the Baptismal Covenant. Below is a sample outline of a 90 minute session using the materials provided in this guide. Feel free to use the sample provided, or to develop your own session using the materials in this guide and online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>Opening Prayer</td>
<td>• Open the session in prayer or ask a volunteer to do so</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Ground the session in our faith and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 min.</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>• Welcome everyone to the space and briefly explain the objective this session</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Make sure everyone is on the same page and in agreement with the objectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Share the corresponding Baptismal Covenant Promise and Way of Love step</td>
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<td>5 min.</td>
<td>Preliminary Questions</td>
<td>• Ask participants to separate into pairs and reflect on the preliminary questions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Share opinions and ideas in a low-stakes setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Begin critically reflecting on the subject matter</td>
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<td>o Apply the subject matter to your personal life</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Bible Study</td>
<td>• Share the Bible verses with participants</td>
<td>Bibles</td>
<td>o Share opinions and ideas in a higher-stakes setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have participants respond to the discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>o Reflect critically on the connections between two familiar subjects; the Baptismal Covenant and the Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>• Deliver the presentation on the rights-based approach</td>
<td>Presentation, Computer, Projector, Projector Screen</td>
<td>o Introduce human rights as a tool for fulfilling this promise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Develop a basic understanding of the rights-based approach</td>
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<td>o How do we “do good” while respecting dignity?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o What is the human rights approach?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o What are the principles of a rights-based approach?</td>
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<td>o Connect human rights to a faith commitment</td>
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<td>15 min.</td>
<td>Churches in Action</td>
<td>• Show the video of our churches in action</td>
<td>Churches in Action Video</td>
<td>o Present a concrete example of a church blending this human rights concept with their faith</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask the accompanying discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>o Reflect critically on the connections between familiar and new concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Final Discussion</td>
<td>• Continue with final discussion questions</td>
<td>Journal, notebook or paper</td>
<td>o Think of new ways to apply human rights concepts in our lives and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>Closing Prayer</td>
<td>• Close the session in prayer or ask a volunteer to do so</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Close the session renewing our commitment to our faith</td>
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Baptismal Covenant Promise

*Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.*

**The Way of Love**

*Bless: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve*

**Preliminary Questions**

Ask participants to divide into pairs and answer the following questions. Participants may share with the whole group after discussing in pairs if they like.

1. How do you live out this promise?
2. What does the step *Bless* mean?
3. How does our church live out this promise to *Bless* as a community of faith?

**Bible Study**

Introduce the Bible passages and ask participants the discussion questions.

**Bible Passages**

All Bible passages are taken from the NRSV translation except where otherwise noted.

**Deut 10:17-19**

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

**Isaiah 42:1, 6-7**

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
- my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
- he will bring forth justice to the nations.
I have given you as a covenant to the people,[a]
- a light to the nations,
  to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
- from the prison those who sit in darkness.

**Micah 6:8**

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
Discussion Questions

Lead a discussion of the Scripture passages. Below are sample discussion questions:

1. What is justice? How do we advocate for justice?
2. Why is it important to strive for justice?
3. Is it possible to strive for justice while also disrespecting dignity?

Human Rights Lesson

The following lesson corresponds with the PowerPoint presentation for Session 5. Begin the presentation by asking participants for examples of how someone has tried to help them in ways that were not helpful or made them feel disrespected.

Content:

“Social justice is more than a law that orders the distribution, it is an internal attitude with Christ that draws one another into brotherly and sisterly love.” –Saint Romero

**Paternalism: Disregarding dignity while striving for justice**

Once we make the commitment to strive for justice, we need to find positive ways of doing so. Throughout the study, we’ve explored different forms that takes, from combatting discrimination to putting a focus on the poor and vulnerable. When we take action to help others and advocate for justice, we must also be careful to ensure that we are respecting the dignity of those we try to help.

Many of us have had experiences when someone has helped us out by giving us advice, or sometimes even giving us money or other resources we lack. Sometimes, this help is very welcome, but other times, it can come across as condescending, unhelpful or insulting especially if this “help” comes unsolicited.

**Paternalism** is when we treat people as less than autonomous individuals as if they can’t act for themselves or help themselves. We treat them as if they need us to save them and cannot change their situation without our support. Just as this happens in our personal lives, it plays out on a larger scale when individuals and communities work to support the marginalized. Good intentioned helpers, in a desire to work for justice, often do harm to by making assumptions about those they want to help.

By making decisions for them, deciding what is best for them, or doing work that people are capable of doing for themselves, we disempower them and take away their agency. Books like *When Helping Hurts* and *Toxic Charity* document the way in which churches and aid organizations have propped up systems of poverty and inequality while attempting to help. Not only does this disempower people, it is often ineffective. The truth of the matter is, when we come into a community that isn’t our own, we often don’t know what the people there need and what resources they already have. If we want to help construct an effective solution to problems they face, we should listen to what they have identified as their struggles and solutions to those issues. See below
for more information on how to combat paternalism and construct effective responses while respecting people’s dignity.

Paternalism has been historically common in mission relationships, aid relationships, and acts of charity. When working for justice we must safeguard against paternalism. Like racism, paternalism, is a spiritual disease. It comes from a place of thinking that because I have more material wealth or technical knowledge, I am more. That my decisions or actions are more right, and that I have the power to fix another person (meaning that person does not have that same power).

Some examples of the manifestations of paternalism include:

- Thinking we have power over others or the outcome
- Thinking others need us to act on their behalf
- Disregarding the power of others or of the Holy Spirit

**Respect Dignity while Striving for Justice**

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

- Aboriginal Activists Group, Australia 1970s (Lila Watson)

When we seek to help others, we must check our paternalistic desire to fix them. Instead, we should make a mutual commitment to human rights, liberation and justice. This commitment then repositions individuals not as either helpless and powerless to change their situation or with power and the only ones able to effect change, but as equals working together to make the world a better place. This commitment is not just to helping someone out of poverty, but a commitment to ideals of universal rights and dignity, and justice for all. When we seek to address poverty, violence, injustice, etc., we should work with people, not for them. In doing so, we bless others, and in turn are blessed by others.

Our primary role in relationship is to be present with others, as witnesses, in solidarity, in love, and not to fix things for them. We need to remind ourselves of this and make a conscious effort to notice and correct ourselves when we notice our desire to tell people what to do or do things for them. The best way to begin any conversation about doing good is by asking people what it is that we can do to help. When we reflect on Jesus’s ministry, we see that he does not help those who have not asked for it, and listens to their needs. In Jesus, we see an **incarnational relationship** where God is no longer far away dispensing justice, but has come into the world to walk alongside us, and bless us.

Examples of ways to be in relationship with people are:

- **Share stories and truth**: Get to know each other through sharing of stories of your life and experience.
- **Repent**: Look for opportunities to repent and apologize for the way our actions or actions of your society may have caused harm
• **Pray or worship together:** When we pray and worship God together, we notice our equal identity as children of God

• **Learn together:** When we learn together, we all become students, whether the person is illiterate or a doctor, they are on equal footing as students. Even if you are invited to be a teacher, be sure that in teaching you draw out the knowledge that the students have and that you learn from them, and that you name that learning.

• **Act together:** When invited to act alongside others, join with them as they act.

### The Human Rights Approach

Show the video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozT5DWs4zd4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozT5DWs4zd4).

A concrete example of what this looks like in action is the **human rights approach**, or **rights-based approach**. The human rights approach guards the dignity of each person by encouraging participation, accountability, and equality. It also recognizes injustice not just as a sad reality, but as a violation of human rights. When using this approach, we work with people as equals, not as “those less fortunate”. The goal then, is not just satisfying a need, but strengthening the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights, and duty-bearers to fulfill their obligations and respect, protect and fulfill these rights.

Most of the 20th century was dominated by a **needs-based approach**, which relies on the “privileged” to help the “underprivileged” by providing for their needs. It identifies unfulfilled needs and mobilizes those with more resources to address these needs. One issue with this approach is that it reinforces power dynamics between the rich and the poor, those with power and those without, the global north and the global south, et cetera. By contrast, under the human rights approach, we are all equal in our struggle for human rights. We advocate for the rights of all not just because others are suffering, but because if someone else’s rights are not respected for the simple fact that they are a human being, we have no guarantee that our rights will be respected. Our liberation and dignity is “bound up” with that of all other human beings.

Another issue with the **needs-based approach** is that it responds to *needs*, not *rights*. To understand the difference, think about water. We need water *when we are thirsty*, but we *always* have a right to water. Rights must always be respected, whereas needs are temporary. In addition, when someone needs something, it is not necessarily clear who is at fault and how we can remedy the situation, though the *individual* who needs the water is clearly identified. A rights-based approach labels water a *right*, meaning there are identifiable duty-bearers (principally the state) who are responsible for making sure *all people* can access clean, safe water at all times. This gives victims of human rights violations legal recourse to ensure their rights are respected.

Programs using the human rights approach, therefore, seek to strengthen the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights, and strengthen the capacity of duty-bearers to respect, protect and fulfill rights. It empowers all individuals and institutions to take responsibility for making the world a better place.
Examples of this include:
- International advocacy
- Strategic litigation
- Human rights education

**Key principles of the rights-based approach. (Review from session 1)**
Under the rights-based approach, the ends do not justify the means. Every process must respect people’s rights and ensure that participants in these processes are fully integrated into the decision making process. To this end, the rights-based approach has several key principles. We can remember them with the acronym **PANEL**:

- **Participation (inclusion)**
- **Accountability (and transparency)**
- **Non-discrimination**
- **Equality**
- **Link with human rights**

**Participation (inclusion):** To counteract our paternalistic tendencies, the rights-based approach requires participation in decision making, not only of the leaders of a ministry but by those they seek to serve. Nonprofits and churches should not arrive in a community and give a solution to the people in the community, but rather should work to ensure that the people of the they seek to serve are the primary decision makers in a process. This participation must not be manipulated or coerced, but must be genuine, in which participants *want* to participate and in which their voices are heard. Manipulated participation might be as forceful as threatening participants, or as subtle as paying or otherwise compensating people to participate. Those facing rights violations should define their own struggles and develop their own solutions.

**Accountability (transparency):** Duty-bearers must be held accountable for their actions. This includes government institutions, but also donors, development agencies, nonprofits, etc. Whoever claims to “do good” must show that they are “doing good”. This means not only a lack of corruption, but also evaluating the success of programs. Even the best intentions can produce flawed results, but to ensure that these processes are effective, we must evaluate and improve them. When holding individuals and state institutions accountable (both ourselves and other), we can encourage and participate in repentance and return as discussed in **Session 2**, tailoring the specific ways in which people address sin to the situation at hand.

**Non-discrimination:** The most vulnerable and marginalized are the first to be excluded from development processes and are at a greater risk of human rights violations. Not only does the human rights approach mean we don’t discriminate against others, but that we actively work against discrimination. This means having a “preferential option for the marginalized”, as understood by Liberation Theologians (**Session 3**). We need to work to include those who are most often excluded. Addressing discrimination can take the form of educational campaigns and formation programs (**Session 4**).
Equality: Similar to participation and non-discrimination, equality means all involved are respected and have an equal voice in the process. No one is a helpless beneficiary; everyone participates, and human rights apply to everyone equally.

Link with human rights: The human rights approach, perhaps obviously, must be linked to human rights. It has to address rights violations and respect the principles of human rights (that they are universal, indivisible, interrelated, inalienable, and imprescriptible, etc.). It does this as described above; by helping rights-holders recognize and claim their rights and duty-bearers recognize and fulfill their obligations.
Spotlight Congregation: Sacred Resistance L.A.

Sacred Resistance L.A. is an Episcopalian movement dedicated to resisting oppressive policies and human rights violations of migrants’ rights. It was born as a result of a resolution adopted on December 3, 2016 by the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles.

Background

“We believe that the gospel is an inherently justice-focused message. Jesus organized and educated his followers and through his ministry, advocated clearly and radically for the poor, neglected, oppressed, and persecuted. Therefore, at St. Stephen's, the practice and participation in Sacred Resistance is a preeminent extension of our efforts to live out Jesus' call.”

“We do not shy away from discussion of politics, engagement with current events and policy, or involvement in direct action and advocacy for the advancement of social justice.”

Video

Show the accompanying video: https://youtu.be/i0L5BC41DdE
Optional: Pass out copies of the resolution founding Sacred Resistance L.A.

Questions

1. How does this ministry incorporate human rights into their work?
2. How does this ministry respond to discrimination?
3. What is the new narrative that this ministry constructs?
4. How does this ministry connect this baptismal promise with their work?
5. How is this ministry a blessing to its leaders, participants, and those they serve?

Journal Reflection

Take a time of personal reflection, allowing participants to gather their thoughts by journaling, note taking, or thinking.

Prompt

1. Key ideas that influenced me
2. Where do i see these ideas in my own life
3. How can I use the Rights-based approach?

Final Group Discussion Questions

Continue in group discussion with the following questions:

1. How do we understand the connection between this baptismal promise, Scripture and human rights?
2. How can we apply this in our lives?
3. How can we transform our mission and ministry as a community of faith using these concepts?
Evaluation
To evaluate this series, please ask participants to fill out the online survey on the website (www.cristosal.org/walking-the-way-of-love), or answer these questions:

1. What did you learn that was interesting or new to you?
2. What did you learn or experience that is helpful to you in living your faith?
3. What did you appreciate about the series?
4. What could be improved about the series?