

Challenging Empire

SOCIAL JUSTICE WHEEL

A supplementary workshop that may be used in conjunction with *Challenging Empire: Stories and Activities to Transform Your Community* (The United Church of Canada, 2007).



SOCIAL JUSTICE WHEEL (1½–2 hours plus a follow-up session)

Ahead of Time

You will need

- a flipchart, markers, and tape
- copies of the Program/Project Analysis Chart (p. 3), Faith Proclamation Wheel (p. 4), and Continuum of Community Involvement and Social Transformation (p. 5)

Introduction

This activity was originally developed by the Faith in Action Committee of Halifax Presbytery as a tool to assist churches and individuals to examine the relationships they have with others and the needs that exist in the world. The Faith in Action Committee describes it as a tool to enable those seeking a balanced move from faith to proclamation (how faith is expressed in work and action).

The activity has been adapted. It can be used by individuals, church committees, congregations, pastoral charges, presbyteries, or Conferences to reflect on and analyze their ministry. It provides a tool to analyze current social justice initiatives and to discern new initiatives and programs. Challenging empire requires that we continually examine the actions we are involved in and seek long-term engagement with the communities we are working with. The Social Justice Wheel is one tool to assist faith communities in this ministry.

Opening

We sing of God's good news lived out,
a church with purpose:

faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
gifts shared for the good of all,
resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,
fierce love in the face of violence,
human dignity defended,
members of a community held and inspired by God,
corrected and comforted,
instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.

We sing of God's mission.

Excerpt from "A Song of Faith, A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada," 2006.

Opening Prayer

Open our hearts so that we may sing your song, O God—
a song of fierce love, creation's mending, and gifts shared.
We give thanks to you, whose song first danced in our hearts.
We give thanks. Amen.

Step 1: Brainstorming (10 minutes)

Invite your group to brainstorm projects or programs that your church is doing or supporting. Put these up on a flipchart.

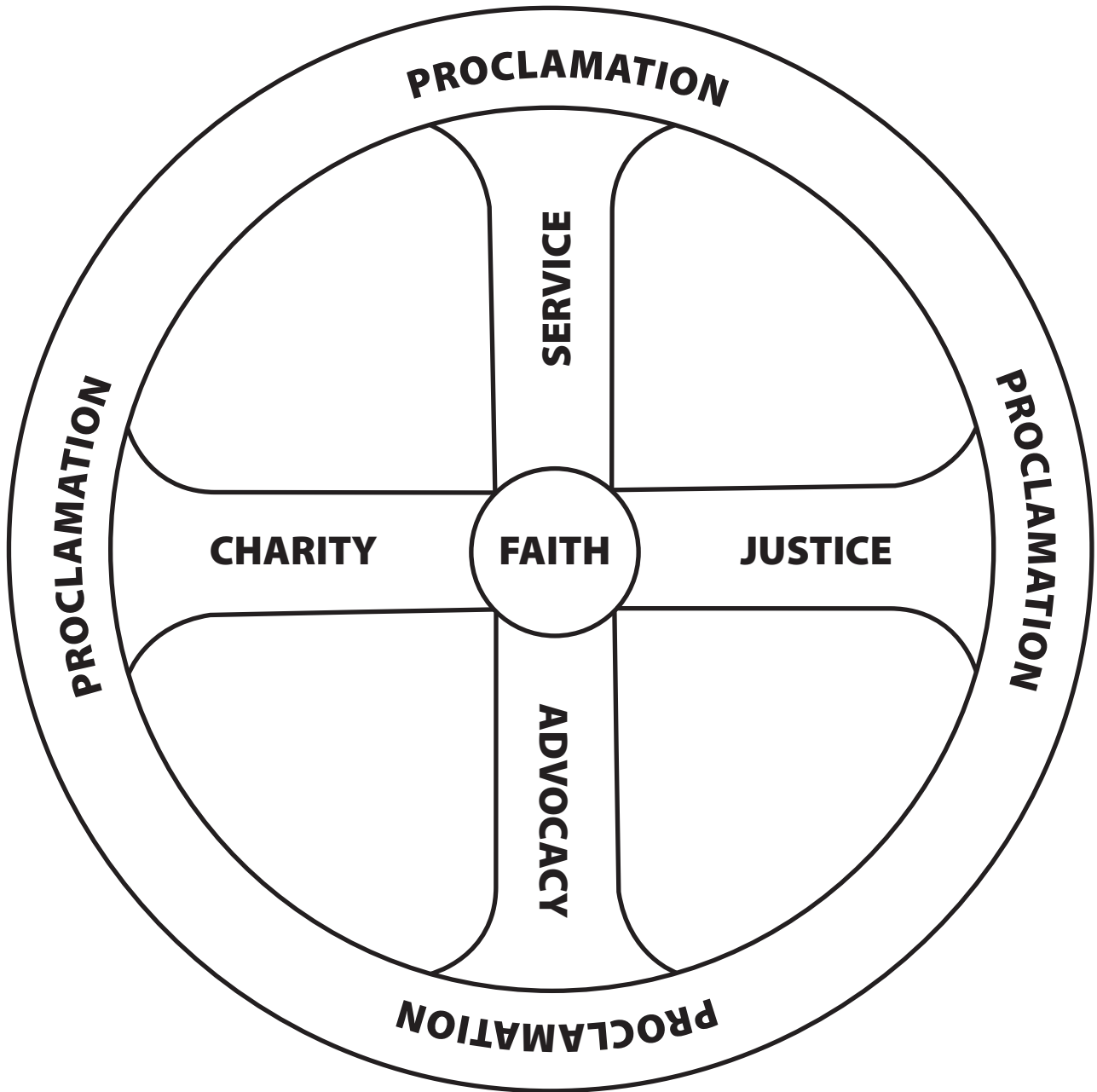
Step 2: Program Analysis (10–15 minutes)

Post the Program/Project Analysis Chart (below) or provide it as a handout for the group. Ask the group as a whole or in small groups to decide where the projects or programs they have identified fit in the columns. If small groups are used, allow time for the small groups to report to the whole group where they have placed these activities, and to give comments and explanation of differences.

PROGRAM/PROJECT ANALYSIS CHART			
Charity	Service	Advocacy	Justice
We think of charity when we give with some thought and feeling but relatively little contact.	We think of service when we do something that puts us face-to-face with others to do something for them, but we tend to decide what is good for them.	We think of advocacy when we speak on behalf of someone or some group, or help them speak on their own behalf. An advocate listens first.	We think of justice when we work for better conditions or possibilities for equality.

Step 3: Faith Proclamation Wheel (20 minutes)

Introduce the concept of the Faith Proclamation Wheel by posting the following diagram.



This diagram illustrates that all four of the spokes of the wheel—charity, service, advocacy, and justice—are expressions of our faith and move us toward proclamation of our faith in our world.

The Faith Proclamation Wheel is intended to provoke debate and reflection. Encourage discussion about its design, its message, and its validity in your experience of faith in action:

- The diagram assumes that all the spokes have equal value in the wheel and that no one spoke is more important than the other. Each spoke responds to a need that reflects an aspect of our faith. Does this reflect your experience?
- Does a lack of balance in the wheel reflect a lack of completion or balance in how proclamation is manifested? Is balance of response important to you or your group?
- Which spoke is the greatest struggle to be engaged in as an individual or group? Why?
- Which spoke is the easiest to become engaged in as an individual or group? Why?
- The four spokes allow for involvement in proclamation by congregation members according to their time, talents, and life experiences. Do you experience this in your group/community?
- What challenge or learning does this diagram present to you? To the groups you are working with?

Step 4: Continuum of Involvement and Transformation (15–20 minutes)

Review the chart below either in the whole group or in small groups.

CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION				
	Charity (fact of need)	Service (weaknesses)	Advocacy (exploitation)	Justice (change of social norms)
Giving	Money	Money	Money	Empowerment
Relationship	Distant	Temporary	Changes outlook	Develops network
Experience	Immediate satisfaction	Education	Evangelism	Community organization
Focus	On problem	On person	On causes	On system
Social motives	Guilt	Social	Mental	Equity

Introduce the chart by explaining that the presbytery committee that originally created the Faith Proclamation Wheel found it helpful to view their actions along a continuum. The words or descriptions used in the continuum may not fit your experience exactly, but they are a starting point for discussion and reflection.

Ask the group to read the continuum and then ask if there are any comments, agreements, disagreements, or questions that emerge.

Discuss if there are relationships between what you believe God is calling you to do, how your faith is lived out in practice, and how others experience your actions in the wider community.



- Our need to help others fix things is a cultural imperative. It is also addictive. We want to/need to be needed; some of us depend upon others' dependency on us. In the hierarchy of needs, we get caught up all too easily in our own. The "needy" are us.
- Charity has come to be equated with giving "only what we don't really need ourselves" or "trying to help others, without recognizing our own need to be helped." In our consumer society, it is a way to distance oneself materially. Charity or "caritas" (caring deeply) requires us to recognize our interconnectedness, our co-dependency, and to risk our getting involved personally. Then charity, like justice, becomes a liberating and public expression of God's love.

Toward Justice and Right Relationship: A Beginning (The United Church of Canada, 2003), p. 41

Step 5: Working through the Wheel (15–20 minutes)

Ask small groups to each select one of the programs or projects from the brainstorming list and identify where it fits most accurately on the wheel. Then move around the wheel to see different possible approaches to the issue. You might offer the following example from the Halifax Presbytery committee:

We chose the Food Bank as an example. We felt that the Food Bank, as we know it, is essentially Charity, in that it is giving food to people who are or are likely to become hungry, and often involves little more.

We looked, then, for a form that would represent Service. We noted that, for some people who work at the Food Bank and interact with people, it can be a form of Service. We noted that more personal contact was involved, and wondered if there was increasing contact as we moved to other spokes. We also mentioned a Community Kitchen as a possible form of Service. Under Advocacy, we considered helping to organize co-ops, or lobby government. Under Justice, we considered steps to achieve fair wages.

The group also considered how it interacted with people and whether people they were working with felt, or were, truly welcomed in church worship or activities.

Give the groups 10–15 minutes to work their program through the wheel, and then have small groups report back on possible new approaches.

Step 6: Reflecting with the Community (20 minutes and plan follow-up)

After examining the activities you are engaged in as a faith community, you will have an idea of how you are proclaiming your faith. As a result, you may decide to achieve a greater balance among your activities within all categories of the continuum. But an important step in fulfilling proclamation is to listen to how the “good news” of your work is being received by the community you are working with. Adjusting the spokes on the wheel needs to be done through engagement with the community.

This step will require another session to complete. Individual interviews with resource people in your community, a community panel at your church, and/or individual interviews or meetings with people who are involved in the programs you are offering are all ways to engage in the discussion and reflection with the wider community. (For more on a community panel, see *Challenging Empire: Stories and Activities to Transform Your Community*, p. 31.)

As a group, decide how you want to move forward with your discussions with the wider community and plan the steps that facilitate this process. The following questions may help your group reflect on your connection to the community—you can start reflecting on these within your group and then invite community members to help reflect on them as well.

- How do the people you are involved with in your activities view your work now? What values do they identify as guiding your ministry?
- Do they feel they have been listened to and invited to participate in the planning and implementation of the work you are involved in? Are there new opportunities emerging? Do they feel welcome in your congregation?
- What are the possibilities for building partnerships with community members in the initiatives you are involved in?
- What ideas do they have for change? How might the church participate in these?
- How do they respond to the new approach(s) emerging from your reflection (see Step 5 above)?

Step 7: Reflection (10–15 minutes)

Provide time for the group to reflect on this process. You could do this at several different points in your time together. Some of the following questions may be helpful in your reflective process:

- What does it mean to be a community of faith proclaiming in our local communities and our world today? How does this feel to you?
- How has your faith been challenged in this experience?
- Is this process adaptable to other experiences in your life—family, work, volunteer organizations, other areas of the church?
- What are the implications of proclamation in the wider community? How will you respond to new people and groups who want to join your faith community?
- One of the ways to challenge empire is to build communities based on principles of love, justice, and compassion for all. How are your actions contributing to communities of love, justice, and compassion?

Step 8: Evaluation (5–10 minutes)

- What was helpful about this process?
- Are there any steps that need to be added or changed?
- Where might you use this process again?
- Are there other tools that would be more helpful for your group?

Closing Prayer

For all that we do, we pray that your love guides us.
For all that we dream of, we pray for your gifts of courage and insight.
For all that we fear, we pray that the Holy Spirit holds us.
For all that we are, we pray that our love will make a difference.
We pray. We pray. We pray.
Amen.