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**Touchstones Project**

**Small Group Discussion Guide**

**Activism**

**Preparation:** (Read the *Touchstones Journal* on the theme and the questions below.)

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

**Opening Words:** “Activism is not limited to the grand gestures or the large-scale movements; it begins with the small acts of kindness and compassion we show to one another every day. It is about recognizing that our individual actions, when combined, can create a ripple effect that can bring about real and lasting change. Never underestimate the power of your voice, your actions, and your ability to inspire others.” *Malala Yousafzai*

**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 needs, and to help one another.

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind 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 your time limit.

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

*Wisdom Story: Children’s Movement for Peace* by Touchstones

Colombia, a country in South America, has had armed conflict since their civil war, *The Violence,* in the 1950s, through ongoing battles with rebels that began in the 1960s and continued by drug- and gang-related violence in the 1980s.

This violence was the world in which Mayerly Sánchez, born in 1984, and her older sister, Yeimi, were growing up. Earlier, her parents, José Manuel and Hilda, and thousands of other refugees fled the rebel conflict in rural areas. They built a small, mud-brick house with three rooms on empty land in Soacha, a neighborhood outside Columbia’s capital city, Bogotá. They and their neighbors were poor, but they had electricity, running water, and some paved roads.

Mayerly’s life changed when World Vision, an international aid organization, sponsored her and other children. With the help of World Vision, Mayerly, just seven, her next-door neighbor and best friend, Milton, and others started a children’s peace club to steer kids away from drugs, crime, and violence. They organized soccer games and invited gang members to join in. They put on plays about peace, first for families and later for the entire community. Mayerly did not know it at the time, but she was becoming an activist, a person who works to make the world a better place.

At 15, Milton, probably under pressure, joined a youth gang. On January 28, 1996, he was stabbed several times in a fight with another gang and died. Mayerly was devastated. Milton had been like a brother to her. She promised to do something to change things, although she wasn’t sure what.

Mayerly worked even harder for the children’s peace club. Then, UNICEF invited her and other youth leaders in Colombia to a children’s peace-building conference. Following this, Mayerly and others created the *Children’s Movement for Peace* (*Movimiento de los Niňos por La Paz*). She and 24 other Colombian teenagers drafted the *Children’s Mandate for Peace and Rights*. It listed 12 rights for children, like the right to education, justice, and peace, and the right to love and family. Mayerly and other teenagers campaigned to

encourage children to vote. On a special ballot on October 25, 1996, 2,700,000 Colombian children voted for their right to peace and more. A year later, nearly ten million adults voted for a *Citizens’ Mandate for Peace* (*El Mandato Ciudadano por la Paz*), which called for peace, life, and liberty.

In 1998, and for the next three years, the *Children’s Movement for Peace*, with Mayerly as a spokesperson, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although they didn’t win, Mayerly and other youth leaders from Colombia went to a conference at The Hague in the Netherlands. It was the *Hague Appeal for Peace*, and the youth were there to discuss the plight of children in Colombia.

In 2001, when Mayerly was 16, the *Children’s Movement for Peace* was awarded the *World’s Children’s Prize* by one of the world’s most extensive education programs empowering children to become changemakers. This award coincided with the United Nations launching its *Decade for the Culture of Peace.*

Mayerly is still an activist. Following her college education with journalism and marketing degrees, she went to work for World Vision. She is still working to create a better world for children, including her daughters, Maria Jose and Isabella.

Sources: Tapestry of Faith, World Vision, World’s Children’s Prize, and Global Peace Warriors

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group

Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl as follows. Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

“Activism without spirituality is often fueled by anger and despair. Spirituality without activism is often empty and disconnected from the world. The true path lies in their integration.” Thich Nhat Hanh

“I think that another word for activism is… imagination. Because it’s about this idea of being able to envision a world that doesn’t yet exist.” Eddie Ndopu

“My activism pays the rent on being alive and being here on the planet. If I weren’t active politically, I would feel as if I were sitting back eating at the banquet without washing the dishes or preparing the food.” Alice Walker

“Activism is the oxygen of democracy.” John F. Kennedy

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” Elie Wiesel

“I think …the job of an activist is …to …create …a new world order that is really equitable and that is really fair and that’s just and sustainable.” Eddie Ndopu

“Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.” Kerry Washington

“Activism is not about waiting for the right moment; it’s about creating the right moment.” Ai Weiwei

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” Elie Wiesel

“Get up, stand up, Stand up for your rights. Get up, stand up, Don’t give up the fight.” Bob Marley

“Activism is my art. It’s how I express myself and make a difference in the world.” Shepard Fairey

“Advocacy is not a luxury. It’s a necessity. We advocate for our survival.” Eddie Ndopu

“I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being, first and foremost, and as such I’m for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.” Malcolm X

“Our job is to grow the flame of equality and justice…. When people own and contribute to social change, they become guardians of that progress, and they’ll do whatever it takes to safeguard it and nurture it.” Angélique Kidjo

“I didn’t wake up and decide to become an activist. But you couldn’t help notice the inequities, the injustices. It was all around you.” Yuri Kochiyama

“Quiet activism is fine, but people are also needed on the front lines. Let’s be sure we affirm all kinds of actions for justice and peace.” Jane Vennard

“Life has an elegance that far exceeds anything we might devise. Perhaps the wisdom lies in knowing when to sit back and wait for it to unfold. Too hasty an activism may lead to lesser outcomes and, more important, may cause us to trust ourselves rather than learning to trust life.” Rachel Naomi Remen

“Understanding that all acts of peace or violence begin in our minds, learning to keep the peace in our own hearts is one of the highest forms of activism.” Joel & Michelle Levey

“Every act of gratitude is incomplete unless it issues in a sending forth to do works that will make for justice.” Maria Harris

“Service was as much a part of my upbringing as eating breakfast and going to school. It isn’t something that you do in your spare time. It was ...the very purpose of life. In that context, you’re not obligated to win. You’re obligated to keep trying.” Marian Wright Edelman

“Spirituality and activism go hand in hand, for they are both born out of the desire to heal and transform ourselves and the world around us.” Bell Hooks

“Life being what it is, if we don’t make a difference by trying, we’ll make a difference by not trying.” William Sloane Coffin

“The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys his own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom….” Thomas Merton

“We are all in need of communities in which to face the dark times in which we live, to speak and listen to our pain for the world. We need to learn together how to use the energy of our fear and sorrow to mobilize ourselves….” Miriam Greenspan

“Many of us didn’t choose to become activists. We were activated. We could not stand to sit on the sidelines while our people were brutalized so needlessly. Cori Bush

“Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.” Dolores Huerta

“I have referred to myself as an accidental activist on more than one occasion.” Joan Blades

“An activist is someone who makes an effort to see problems that are not being addressed and then makes an effort to make their voice heard.” Joanne Woodward

“Do you force your kids to pay attention to what’s going on, or do you let them live their lives outside of it? My hope is that my child is a strong activist.” Eddie Vedder

“I think I was a born civil rights activist. I can’t stand the smashing of a community. It’s not fair and it’s not right.” Pauley Perrette

“True activism is not merely about raising your voice; it is about using your voice as a catalyst for meaningful action. It is about standing up for justice, equality, and human rights, and refusing to be silent in the face of injustice. Activism is the embodiment of hope and the belief that we have the power to create a better world.” Desmond Tutu

**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:** “The path of activism is not an easy one. It is filled with obstacles, setbacks, and moments of doubt. But remember, every great movement in history started with just a few individuals who dared to challenge the status quo. It is in those moments of adversity that our true strength and resilience are tested. Stay true to your convictions, stand firm in your beliefs, and never give up on the pursuit of a more just and equitable world.” *Nelson Mandela*

**Living the Questions**

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

1. How do you feel about activism? Why? What passions animate your life? Do any relate to justice making? How?
2. On a continuum between spirituality and activism, where would you place yourself? Why? Per bell hooks, “activism and spirituality go hand in hand.” Do you agree? How can each support the other?
3. Have you been involved in social justice efforts? What did you value about the experiences? What did you struggle with?
4. Have you participated in community service projects? What is an example? How did you feel about it? Do you prefer these to activism? Why or why not?
5. How do art, culture, creative expressions, and symbols contribute to social change?
6. How do different generations approach activism? What can older activists learn from younger ones, and vice versa?
7. What are the roles and responsibilities of allies in supporting activist movements and marginalized communities?
8. How can we sustain activism and avoid burnout or compassion fatigue?
9. What value do you place on secondary activism, those actions that can support activists either directly or indirectly? What are some examples?
10. Should your congregation be involved in activism? If no, why not? If yes, how?

**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.*