

Discussion Series

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In this section of the publication a set of eight discussion processes is presented. These processes are meant to help Catholics in the United States reflect seriously on the principle of "Liberty and Justice for All" while at the same time providing them with an opportunity to share their views on many topics with their Church leaders.

Ideally, a full discussion session (perhaps two hours) should be given to each topic area. Eight individual sessions over a period of time would be desirable. However, if this is impossible, then discussion participants should choose those topics they feel to be most relevant. It is not suggested that a group attempt to cover all the topics in one or two sessions.

Each process is divided into three parts. The first part (General Questions) is meant to give the participants a chance to raise any concerns and observations they have about the topic and its relation to liberty and justice.

The second section (Specific Areas) concerns particular aspects of the topic and calls for reflection on them.

The third section (Recommendation Question) asks what the participants would like to see treated at the 1976 National Conference in Detroit. On the last page of this guide is a "feedback sheet" that should be forwarded with the notes of the group secretary to the NCCB Bicentennial Committee (additional sheets are available from the Committee). These sheets will be used in determining the agenda for the 1976 Conference by identifying the issues people want discussed and indicating the strength of their feelings about them.

The following suggestions are made in an effort to help the processes flow in an effective manner:

1. People are encouraged to keep the discussion focused on the given topic and specifically on its relation to the bicentennial theme of "Liberty and Justice for All." The thrust of this entire program is a Church-wide reflection on the principles of liberty and justice.
2. As indicated earlier, the ideal is to treat only one topic during each session. A series of eight different meetings would best serve the purposes of this process.
3. The General Questions can be discussed by the full group or in small groups depending on size and the wishes of the participants. The second section on Specific Areas will best be handled in small groups. People might read over the various specific areas and meet in groups having similar interests.

The third section, the Recommendation Question, should be handled by the full group. Discussion of "pros" and "cons" should be minimal. People should feel free to express particular issues they want treated at the National Conference. And those issues should be recorded. The leader should then determine the group's response to the issue and record it on the feedback sheets.

NATIONHOOD

In this discussion we want to focus on the *United States* itself. Our specific interest is in what is happening *within* the United States and how the Church is responding to what is happening. We want to consider our own views and values regarding our country and reflect on these in light of the principle of liberty and justice for all.

General Questions

1. When you look within the United States today what events, situations and types of people contradict the principles of freedom and justice as you understand them?
2. When you look at the Church in this country what do you think it does that reinforces and maintains those contradictions?
3. How does the Church in the United States stand against those contradictions and truly express the principles of liberty and justice.

Specific Areas

1. Over the years American Catholics have, by and large, considered themselves patriotic. In recent years our understanding of patriotism has become somewhat clouded. It stretches today in the minds of some from "Love it or leave it" bumper stickers to leaking secret information to the press.
 - What does it mean for you to be patriotic?
 - What should we be proud of as American people?
 - What should we grieve over?
 - How can members of the Church in this country be truly patriotic?
2. "Watergate" has come to mean many things for us today. It has helped many of us examine practices, structures, and values surrounding the American political scene.
 - What Gospel values do you think were violated in "Watergate" and how?
 - Were any Gospel values expressed in "Watergate" and how?
 - Does "Watergate" make it easier or more

difficult for you to celebrate the meaning of the bicentennial?

- What role if any did your parish play in helping your community understand the "Watergate" affair?
3. The American tradition has always called for the separation of Church and state.
 - Do you feel there actually has been such separation?
 - Have you ever felt a tension between your loyalty to the Church and your loyalty as an American citizen?
 - Do you feel the Church and church people should be more involved in the social, political life of the United States?
 4. "Public Enemy Number 1" is inflation. All Americans are feeling its effects. The "bite" has already changed the life styles of many, and will force all of us to become more aware of the things we take for granted.
 - Do you think this period of inflation is having any good effects on the United States? on you personally?
 - What injustices do you see involved in this period of inflation?
 - What kind of role or stance, if any, do you feel the Church should take on inflation?
 - To what Christian values could your parish witness during this time of inflation? How?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, what specific issues would you like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

THE CHURCH

In this section we want to consider the internal workings and activities of the *Church* in the United States. So much has happened in the Church in America over the years and especially in recent times. As the bicentennial of our nation approaches, we have a good opportunity to reflect on the Church and how we feel about it.

General Questions

1. When you look at the Church in America what do you feel are its finest expressions of being a Church concerned with the freedom and equality of all?
2. What do you feel are the injustices that exist *within* the Church in America?
3. How could the Church itself be more just and free within itself in order to call for those same values in the larger society?

Specific Areas

1. In the Gospels, Christ frequently refers to the way people live just lives. In recent years, Pope John, Pope Paul, and the Synod of Bishops have written encyclicals and statements to show how this gospel command is present in our lives.
 - Are you aware of these documents?
 - Do you see the principles stated in the

documents manifested in Church policy and actions at all levels?

2. The bishop of a metropolitan diocese has been subsidizing an inner city parish for several years to enable it to keep its school open (about two-thirds of the pupils are non-Catholic) and to develop a health clinic and a day care center. The bishop now observes that the income of the more affluent parishes is stabilizing (and in some cases decreasing) while costs are rising steadily.
 - How do you feel the bishop should react to this situation?
 - What principles do you feel he should use in making his decisions?
3. Throughout the United States the "women's issue" has become a major concern for many. That issue has also surfaced as a dominant development within the Church.
 - What has been the role of woman in the Church in America?
 - What should her role be?
 - How do the Church's traditions regarding women help them grow as persons? hinder their growth as persons?
 - Is the Church presently doing enough to ensure women's growth as persons?
 - If yes, what?
 - If no, what should it do?
4. The Church in the United States owns a great deal of property. This does not mean it has much available monies, but it does mean it possesses great resources in real estate. In light of the immense financial needs of many of the poor in this country and the world, the Church is being asked to reconsider its assets.
 - Do you believe the Church should sell its present real estate holdings?
 - Is the possession of real estate by the Church a source of strength or weakness?
 - How could your parish use its buildings more fully and justly?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, what specific issues concerning the internal workings of the Church would you like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

HUMANKIND

In this discussion we want to focus on the *international* realities of our world. We want to consider our own views and values and discuss the role of the Church in affairs of the "global village."

General Questions

1. When you look around the world today, what events, situations and people contradict the principles of liberty and justice as you understand them?
2. When you look at the Church in the world, what do you think it does that reinforces and maintains those contradictions?

3. What things does the Church do in the world that stand against those contradictions and truly express the principles of liberty and justice?

Specific Areas

1. As we know, the United States is considered a democratic government and a capitalist economic structure; the Soviet Union is considered a totalitarian state and a socialist economic structure; Chile before the coup in 1973 was considered a democratic government and a socialist economic structure. Assuming that all of these concrete systems as lived out have strengths and weaknesses,
 - What kind of political and economic theories do you feel fit best the principle of liberty and justice for all?
 - Why?
2. Two-thirds of the world's people live in nations which are called "developing." Up to one half of these suffer serious hunger and malnutrition. In response to this situation Pope Paul VI said: "No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities."
 - How do you think the Church in America and the United States government should respond to this situation and to the Pope's statement?
 - Would you be willing to have less than others might live a better life?
3. Every year about 200 billion dollars are spent on military weapons by nations around the world. Most evenings we view nations fighting against nation on television. War is a way of life for the human community.
 - Do you think this is inevitable?
 - Would you yourself support a violent revolution to attain a higher level of freedom or social justice?
 - How do you feel about young men who would not fight in Vietnam because they felt the war was immoral?
 - Should the Church advocate total pacifism?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, what specific issues would you like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

ETHNICITY AND RACE

In this section we want to focus on the relationships between individuals in ethnic and racial groupings in our neighborhoods and parishes. The discussion should center on the place of ethnic and racial concerns in the Church.

General Questions

1. How many generations of your family have lived in the United States? How do you feel about the gradual "washing away" of your ethnic or racial heritage from generation to generation?

2. When you look around your neighborhood or parish, what signs can you point to that reveal an ethnic or racial group is accepted? is not accepted?

3. What could the Church do to help heal the divisions among ethnic and racial groups in the United States? How could the Church better respect the ethnic diversity of groups (Polish, Italian, Mexican, etc.) and serve them more fully?

Specific Areas

1. There are approximately 50 million Catholics in the United States. Five ethnic groups account for most of this number: Italian Catholics (10 million), Irish Catholics (8.3 million), German Catholics (7.6 million), Polish Catholics (5.3 million), French Canadians (5 million). In addition there are over 10 million Spanish-speaking Catholics.
 - Do you agree that the Church should pay special attention to a particular ethnic or racial group?
 - Should the Church in America be considered a "melting pot?"
 - Do you think parish celebrations or parish liturgies should be oriented to a specific ethnic or racial group?
 - What is good about ethnic parishes? What is bad? Should they be preserved? Why or why not?
2. The Catholic Church has spoken out strongly on many concerns, abortion to name one. The Church has even imposed the sanction of excommunication for those participating in an abortion.
 - Do you feel the Church should speak and act as strongly in opposing prejudice and discrimination against ethnic and racial groups?
 - What would be your feelings and response if the Church excommunicated people for their expressed prejudicial and discriminatory actions?
 - Given the general shortage of money today, should the Catholic Church promote Catholic schools primarily for Black, Spanish-speaking, and other minorities rather than for white suburban communities which can often afford decent schooling?
3. In the Black community there has been an effort to regain a sense of African heritage. This is revealed through some forms of distinctive clothing, language, gestures, dance and hair styles. The term "Afro-American" points to a group of people seeing themselves as a mixture of two cultures, two continents, two realities. Some persons have felt this movement to be un-American, almost separatist.
 - Do you feel this effort is un-American or separatist? Why or why not?
 - Why do you think a people tries to regain its heritage and culture? Would you be enriched by a deeper familiarity with your ethnic heritage?
 - Do you agree with the Black community's effort

to express itself differently in the liturgy and other Church activities.

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, are there any specific issues concerning ethnic and racial groupings in the Church that you would like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

This section deals explicitly with the local neighborhood. It should direct our attention to the immediate settings of our daily family lives, those settings that are most familiar and "lived in."

General Questions

1. What, in your opinion, would the "perfect neighborhood" look like? Describe it.
2. What things tend to lessen your sense of "the neighborhood?"
3. Could the local parish do anything to help develop a stronger sense of neighborhood?
4. What are the values of neighborhood for you and your family?

Specific Areas

1. Many of us have experienced dramatic changes in our neighborhoods. Old friends move out, new friends move in, buildings are torn down and shopping malls built, and so on.
 - Over the years what have been the most constructive and destructive changes in your neighborhood?
 - What have you learned from these changes?
 - Did the Church play any role in these changes? If yes, what was it? If no, should it have?
 - What changes do you feel will be coming to your neighborhood in the years ahead? Do you look forward to them or fear them?
2. In a large urban city a 79 year old man carries a knife in his car. When he drives up to his garage in a residential section, he carries his knife to the door. After he parks his car he stands at the edge of his garage holding his knife upright, looks both ways and runs to his house. He goes through this ritual because three months earlier he was robbed and beaten as he tried to enter his house.
 - What are some reasons you believe crime is increasing all over, especially in the suburbs?
 - Are you afraid to be out alone in your own neighborhood?
 - Could you rely on your neighbors to help you if you were ever in need while on the street?
 - Who would you feel was the worse criminal: a person who broke into your house and robbed you of your television set and stereo, or one convicted in the Watergate conspiracy?
3. In many neighborhoods people have gotten together and organized themselves in order to achieve certain benefits, such as brighter street lights, better garbage collection, etc. Generally these organized efforts were started because the

neighbors felt powerless to achieve anything on their own.

- Do you feel powerless in getting needed changes in your neighborhood? If yes, why?
- Do you feel that "grass-roots," neighborhood community organizations are a good way for a neighborhood to achieve its goals? Why or why not?
- Should your parish take an active role in organizing your neighborhood for needed improvements? Why or why not?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, are there any specific issues concerning the local neighborhood you would like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

WORK

In this discussion, we want to concentrate on the working-person in the United States and on those conditions surrounding the working-person. We want to focus on those aspects that help and hinder the development of people.

General Questions

1. Is there anything about your job or its products that is harmful to other people? Why? Anything that is beneficial? Why?
2. What aspects about your work help to make you more human? What aspects make you less human?
3. What kinds of work best express the values of justice and freedom? What kinds of work most produce injustice and oppression?

Specific Areas

1. Suppose you work for a pharmaceutical company that makes equipment for abortion and you believe abortion is wrong.
 - What would you do?
 - Have you ever worked in a setting where the product made or the service rendered violated your conscience in any way?
 - What would be some areas of work in which you could not engage because it would violate your conscience?
2. The majority of workers in the United States labor for an employer. The workers earn a certain set wage for 40 hours work a week. The employer, the president of the Board and its members all earn much, much more than the laborer.
 - Do you think it is just for employers and the Board of Directors to make so much more than the laborers? Why or why not?
 - Do you enjoy your work and enter into it with enthusiasm? Or is it "just a job?"
 - Do you fully support the economic system in the United States and are you basically comfortable with your position in it? If not, what would you like to see changed?
3. For many women being a mother and homemaker are full-time jobs. Today some mothers consider home-making a part-time affair and are taking up

other jobs and professions.

- What do you think is the effect of this trend on children?
- As women enter the work force more regularly what will be the effects on the labor situation in the United States?
- Should women receive pay at the same rate as men for performing the same tasks?
- [For men only] How would you feel if your boss were a woman?
- [For women only] How would you feel if you supervised a group of men?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, what specific issues concerning work would you like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

THE FAMILY

The focus of this discussion is the family itself. Since the thrust of all the discussion areas is their relation to liberty and justice, you are asked to reflect on the family especially in light of these two values.

General Questions

1. What aspects of American family life give you reason to rejoice? What aspects trouble you?
2. How does the value of justice apply to the American family? How does the value of freedom apply?
3. What are some of the elements of justice and injustice that you can think of that surround and pervade family life?
4. What are some of the elements of freedom and oppression that you can think of that surround and pervade family life?

Specific Areas

1. People have differing opinions on roles in the family. Some think the father and husband should "wear the pants," be "the bread-winner," while the mother and wife should be the "homemaker" or "housewife;" others feel that those roles should be more interchangeable. For the sake of trying to understand roles in family life, you are asked to
 - a. identify as many of the traditional roles of man and woman in marriage as possible; then
 - b. try to imagine on a normal day all those roles equally shared by both partners; then
 - c. discuss your feeling about the traditional and shared roles.
2. Children are exposed to many violent acts in a normal day — watching T.V., playing with neighbors, urban sights and sounds, strained family relations, and so on. The family either contributes to these violent stimulants or offers an atmosphere of peace.
 - How can family life best provide an atmosphere of peace?
 - How have your families added to the world of violence experienced by your children?

— Since the U.S. tradition has generally opposed much censorship, how can we help young people respond more creatively to violent stimulants?

3. A couple married for 15 years, with two children, ages 11 and 8, comes to the conclusion that they are no longer compatible nor happy with each other. They argue often, do not speak to each other for days, and take it out on the children. They talk about what to do and decide to stay together "for the sake of the kids."
 - How do you feel about their decision?
 - Would their separation help or hurt the children more?
 - Would it help or hurt the couple more?
4. Raising children and getting along with parents stand out as important concerns in family life. Many questions could be discussed on this topic. Below are only a few:
 - What are the major problems you face in raising your children today?
 - [For young people] How could parents better help you grow as persons?
 - Can the Church help parents and children in this process of development? How?
 - What could an entire family do to live a more just and peaceful life?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, what specific issues concerning the family would you like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

PERSONHOOD

This section centers its attention specifically on the *person*, the impact our society and Church have on him or her, and the ability he or she has for growth in the United States. It is clear that all acts of justice and injustice, freedom and oppression affect the individual. Some acts, however, appear more directly related to the individual person than others. We hope you will discover these areas and discuss them here.

General Questions

1. What are the ways society in the United States has promoted and revered the human person? How has society in the United States shown disrespect for and blocked the growth of the human person?
2. What are the ways the Church in America has promoted and revered the human person? How has the Church in America shown disrespect for and blocked the growth of the human person?
3. What experiences have you had that made you feel most like a complete human person? What experiences have made you feel least human?
4. What things could happen in our society and in our Church to better promote human dignity and worth for the individual person?

Specific Areas

1. Educators, counselors and social workers all encounter many people who do not feel good about

themselves. They have poor self-images. Suicide, often caused by bad feelings about oneself, is one of the highest causes of death in the country.

- Why do you think some people develop poor self-images and others develop strong, positive self-images?
- People often express a sense of *powerlessness* over the forces surrounding their lives. Do you think that experience influences the way people feel about themselves?
- We live in a "success" culture. Why is success so important? Is failure bad for us? Does success make us feel good about ourselves and failure bad about ourselves?
- [Optional] How do you feel about yourself? Why?
- Can the Church and your parish help people develop more of a positive self-image? If so, how?

2. Imagine that the term "woman" is the generic term for humanity. Imagine that "man" is obviously included when mention is made of "women." When we use the word "women" in this imaginary scene we often mean men also. Imagine that everything you have ever read and heard all your life uses female pronouns — she, her — meaning both women and men. You have no men senators in Washington. Women are the leaders of the nation and of its institutions. The man's place is in the home and the woman's place is to be the breadwinner, provider and protector of the family.
- How do you feel about this imaginary scene?
 - Do you think the language we use in relation to women and men makes any difference. If so, how?
 - How have traditional roles promoted personal growth for men and women? How have those roles blocked that growth?

- What new roles for both men and women could promote their personal growth in the future?

3. In the last seven years two issues have dominated our thinking about the respect for life movement. They are the Vietnam War and abortion. Many people have supported or opposed both.
- What are the similarities between these two issues? What are the differences?
 - Are there other issues besides Vietnam and abortion that should be considered part of respect for life? What are they?
 - How can the Church in the United States more fully express its commitment to the concept of respect for life?
 - How can respect for life be more fully developed in your parish? in your home?
4. Health is an essential fact of our lives. Given the high cost of health-care today, many people cannot receive the kind of health attention they need.
- Do you believe that health-care is a right that can be demanded or a service that should be paid for?
 - Education is a right Americans have. For much of it the government pays. Is health as much a right as education? Should the government pay for health as it does for education?
 - Is sickness dehumanizing?

Recommendation Question

In light of this discussion, what specific issues regarding the person would you like the 1976 Bicentennial Conference to consider?

This discussion series was produced by Sr. Francis Borgia Rothleubber, O.S.F., President of the School Sisters of St. Francis of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Dr. Dale Olen, Program Coordinator for the Justice and Peace Center at Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Numerous suggestions for this series were furnished by representatives of over fifty national Catholic organizations who met with the Bishops' Bicentennial Committee on September 20-21, 1974.