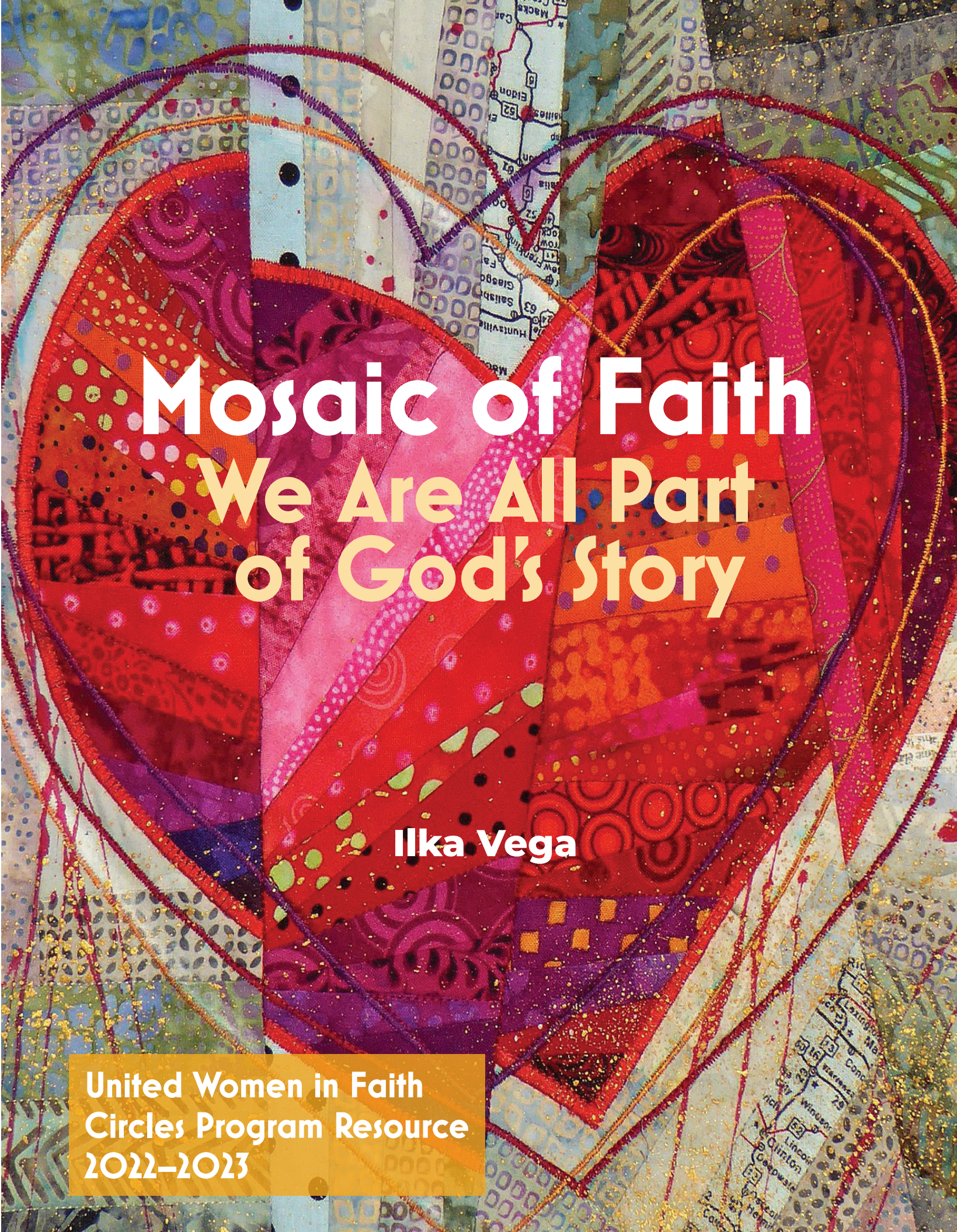


Mosaic of Faith

We Are All Part of God's Story

Ilka Vega

United Women in Faith
Circles Program Resource
2022–2023

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Content direction: Praveena Balasundaram
Author: Ilka Vega
Theological guide: Nora Cunningham
Reviewers: Dionne P. Boissière, Maryann Verghese
Editor: Michelle Okabayashi
Art direction: Rae Grant
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United Women in Faith

Mission

United Women in Faith seeks to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship, and education so that they can inspire, influence, and impact local and global communities.

Vision

Turning faith, hope, and love into action on behalf of women, children, and youth around the world.

Purpose

To be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

United
Women
in Faith

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES WENT ON TO THE VILLAGES AROUND CAESAREA PHILIPPI. ON THE WAY HE ASKED THEM, "WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM?"

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Introduction

The purpose of this Program Resource is to rebuild stronger relationships with ourselves, God, our loved ones, and our beloved communities. From the beginning, members of United Women in Faith, formerly United Methodist Women, have come together to take action and be in solidarity with those in need—those at the margins.

We live in times of change and diverse challenges that have fractured many of our relationships with our family members and loved ones, with institutions that we are supposed to trust, perhaps even with our own bodies.

These programs seek to highlight our interconnectedness as children of God, each with a unique gift, each beloved, each an essential part of the body of Christ. The visual of a mosaic exemplifies that interconnectedness and our role in supporting one another as a faith community and as part of all of God's big story.

Reclaiming Our Identity

The programs will center around Mark 8:27–30 as an invitation to reclaim and explore our identity as children of God and as a community of women of faith. Throughout the programs, we will share stories of faith, justice, and sisterhood to inspire and support our learning journey in community.

Jesus' question in this passage, "Who do you say that I am?" is an invitation to dig deep and reflect on how as people of faith—as people of the Messiah—we have a calling to take a stand for justice and liberation in this world.

Just as Jesus challenges his disciples with these important questions, we must ask ourselves difficult questions and wrestle together to answer to God's call. We must look to change our ways and bring the good news to people living in the margins. In this same spirit, we will focus on four main questions in this program year, focusing on one each quarter. The questions will encourage participants to critically engage with Scripture and offer their own answers and questions.

We understand community as mutual accountability and as something that must be built and rebuilt when necessary. In our work of building and rebuilding community, we get to do the work of justice. We must unlearn unhelpful practices and seek to dismantle oppressive systems that deprive people of God's love. To do this, we also work intersectionality towards the liberation of all of God's children, acknowledging the unique way in which the divine is present. Isaiah 66:13 reminds us that God's love is like a mother's love. It is through such love that our efforts of love in action and justice must follow. To strengthen our language for resistance and liberation, the programs will refer to God using the pronouns she/her. You are also welcome to use neutral pronouns or Godself in the application of these programs.

Soul-Care

As we embark on God's work of love and liberation and community building, we must ground ourselves in God's work and actively practice soul-care practices that serve our spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health needs. Understanding ourselves and our soul-care practices in a holistic manner helps us find sustainable ways to better care for ourselves and serve and love those around us. Through engaging in soul-care, we also invite the divine to be more present in our daily routines. Similar to other United Women in Faith programming, our approach to soul-care embraces both self-care and spiritual rejuvenation.

This Program Resource incorporates key values of the United Women in Faith sisterhood through intentional inclusivity and multi-generational sharing as well as a justice-oriented approach to strive to be in continual renewal of our commitment to justice and God's people through intersectional, transformative, and anti-racist learning, unlearning, and action.

HOW TO USE THE PROGRAM RESOURCE

This Program Resource consists of 12 monthly sessions divided into quarterly themes. Each quarter invites us to explore questions of faith, identity, and relationships. In each, we will explore Scripture and activities to put our faith into action.

Each program is structured to check in with participants, engage with Scripture in creative ways, and encourage meaning-making and discussion. Program facilitators are encouraged to read each program in advance as preparation for the session and prepare available materials. We also encourage different people to alternate as facilitators to give everyone a chance to share their leadership and stewardship gifts.

The sessions are between 40 and 60 minutes and generally follow the outline segments below:

- Welcome and Intention Setting
- Living Scripture
- Unpacking
- Hands-On Activity
- Closing and Taking Home

Each session also will include a first-person video story. At the end of each session activities are suggested to be carried out throughout the month. These activities are thematically divided to intentionally focus on spiritual growth, soul-care, community building, and justice seeking. We suggest assigning one theme of activities per week and to ask one group member to be responsible to share the resources and activity reminders each week. It can be one person per month to share the reminders or one person per week.

Pledge service and A Call to Prayer and Self-Denial service are included after the monthly programs.

PROGRAM SETUP AND SUPPLIES

Participants and program facilitators can make use of different safe spaces where they feel comfortable engaging with the activities and conversation. As part of the setup we recommend sitting in circles to encourage equal participation. Meetings will preferably take place in quiet environments. This could be a room in your local church or community center, someone's home, or another space that is accessible to participants where people feel welcomed. Keep in mind that some sessions will require the use of screens for playing videos as well as tables for different activities and crafts.

Materials for every program:

- Internet connection
- Projector/screen for playing videos
- Extra Bibles
- Any needed printouts
- Scissors
- Pens
- White paper
- Calming sensory items such as images of nature, relaxing background sounds, soft fabrics or textures

Participants should bring to every program:

- Notebook/journal for notetaking, recording their thoughts, etc.
- Bible
- Pen/pencil

ONLINE ADAPTATIONS

When it's necessary to meet online for a program or to offer a hybrid option, we recommend using a space with access to a computer, screen or projector, speakers, and a microphone, if possible. Zoom or other free software can be used for virtual meetings for the programs. When small groups are suggested, virtual participants can be split into breakout rooms to facilitate sharing. Where Zoom or video call software may not be accessible for participants, facilitators can discuss offering a phone number to connect to the virtual meeting. A list of needed supplies may also be shared prior to each session so participants can gather them in advance as well as any links for media and additional resources.

As part of creating safe spaces, we encourage checking in at the beginning of each session through the suggested activities. However, there may also be other ways that the group prefers. We want to encourage these programs to be a place where people can share from their own worldviews and ask questions with the knowledge that we are all a work in progress, a mosaic of faith in the need of each other to take shape.

Note: For a digital version of the Program Resource go to **uwfaith.mn.co** and purchase it right from there. If you are already on MN you can go to the Resources section in Mighty Networks to purchase it.



Outline of the Programs

Each quarter will focus on a different question as we explore our identity as children of God.

First Quarter | Fall 2022: Who do you say that I am?

- September: Who Do You Say That I Am?
- October: God Is Not Neutral Towards Injustice
- November: World Thank Offering: Life-Giving Creation and Transformation

Second Quarter | Winter 2022-2023: Who am I that I should go_____?

- December: Answering the Call
- January: On Our Journeys to and with Christ
- February: Reconnecting with Our Sacred Bodies

Third Quarter | Spring 2023: Who are we through Christ?

- March: Growing Seeds
- April: Peacemakers and Justice Seekers
- May: Bold Women of Faith

Fourth Quarter | Summer 2023: Are we our siblings' keepers?
Rebuilding community through the work of justice and liberation

- June: Faith in Action Dismantles Oppressive Structures
- July: Healing Together
- August: Working in Community Towards Liberation



About the Author

ILKA VEGA

Originally from Ciudad, Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas, borderlands, Ilka Vega holds a B.A. in Sustainability, Culture, and Social Justice and is currently finishing a master of science in Innovation, Human Development, and Sustainability at the University of Geneva. Vega has worked for more than 10 years with NGOs in the United States, Mexico, and Switzerland in the areas of immigration, racial justice, and climate-action capacity building. Vega began her advocacy and community organizing efforts with United Methodist Women while still in high school at Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso. She currently serves in United Women in Faith's Charter for Racial Justice. Vega is passionate about music, intersectionality, and the intersections of faith and social and environmental justice.

Personal Message

I'm so grateful for the legacy of United Methodist Women and all the bold and inspiring women that have mentored me since my high school years at Lydia Patterson Institute and nurtured in me the love and language of social and environmental justice. To the many women in this journey that always invited me and challenged me to be better, I want to invite you and challenge you to continue growing our spirituality and work of justice together in this new chapter as United Women in Faith. Our community of faith is a unique intergenerational space of women who love God, themselves, and their communities. It is out of love that we seek justice and strive to build a beloved community where the love of God can be manifested to all her children and creation. Unlearning, relearning, and putting our faith into action is not always easy, but through God's grace and with a committed sisterhood in Christ may we seek to do God's work of love, justice, and liberation. Special thanks to Praveena Balasundaram and the reviewing team for all their work and support and to my mom, Miriam Vega, and grandmother, Susana Vega, for all their love and spiritual guidance. Thank you again for your love and for being my family in Christ.

CALL TO PRAYER AND SELF-DENIAL 2023

Because we believe . . . that racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

—CHARTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

OVERVIEW

This year's Call to Prayer and Self-Denial offering will support the ongoing racial justice work of United Women in Faith's national office. Your gift supports both our campaign to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and our long-standing work building members' capacity to implement the Charter for Racial Justice at all levels of the organization. In giving, you are showing your support for United Women in Faith's long-standing commitment to advance racial justice in the church and in the world. Our foremothers authored the Charter for Racial Justice because they believed; in 2023, United Women in Faith continue to believe.

PREPARATION

Whether you are planning to gather in-person, to meet online, or to engage in a hybrid gathering, please take time to prepare before the session by reading through the full session, gathering the necessary materials, and designating leadership roles for different parts of the program.

Review the United Women in Faith's Racial Justice Timeline and choose two to three events from the timeline that you think would be particularly relevant to your group. Do a bit of background research on these events and be prepared to share what you learned with the group during the Called to Justice—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow activity.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES (DIGITAL OR PHYSICAL):

- Bible
- A way to play music for the songs listed on the following pages
- Audio and video capabilities to show YouTube videos and play recorded songs
- Racial Justice Timeline (found online at **umwmissionresources.org/downloads/RJTimeline.pdf**)
- United Women in Faith for Racial Justice video (found online at: **tinyurl.com/c68pku58**)
- Charter for Racial Justice (found online at: **uwfaith.org/what-we-do/serve-and-advocate/racial-justice**)

Worship Center

If gathering in person, consider incorporating elements that remind you of the joy and specialness of children and youth (e.g., children's toys or a children's Bible). Whether in person or online, you might also want to add some of the materials that will be used in the program, such as a printout of relevant pages of the Racial Justice Timeline or a copy of the theme Scripture.

TIME

Listed times are approximations only. Please adjust the flow and timing based on the needs of your group.

WELCOME | 5 MINUTES

Jesus Christ was very clear about the importance of children and youth. When the disciples tried to dismiss young children as distractions to Jesus' mission, Jesus offered them a strong word of correction, insisting that not only would he warmly welcome these children, but that, indeed, the children were of the Kingdom of God itself (Mark 10:13–16; Matthew 19:13–15; Luke 18:15–17).

Yet, in the world we now inhabit, beloved children of God are regularly pushed into harm's way, funneled away from educational success and toward the criminal justice system. As we begin today's program, let's recall the basic truth of our Christian faith: We are all beloved children of God.

Opening Song

"Child of God" by Mark Miller[1]
There are various arrangements of this song, including those sung by the composer himself.
Tune: **youtu.be/MYZ79kSC6_I**

INTRODUCTION

The school-to-prison pipeline is a term used to describe the policies and practices that reroute children and youth—especially children and youth of color—away from educational success and towards the criminal justice system. Many institutions contribute to this harmful pattern, including schools, police departments, court systems, jails, and prisons. Like mass incarceration and other expressions of the criminalization of communities of color, the school-to-prison pipeline has emerged from a combination of structural issues, such as the overall increase of school-based police, working in tandem with everyday racism, such as the implicit adultification bias, which falsely assumes Black girls to be older, more mature, and less in need of protection than they actually are.[2]

It is a testament to the deep and insidious nature of racism that it spares no one, not even the youngest among us. The Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights reports that racial disparities in discipline can be seen as early as preschool: Black students are 18.2% of preschool enrollment, but 38.2% of students expelled from preschool.[3]

The work of racial justice remains an urgent call-to-action for all women of faith.

REFLECT AND IMAGINE | 20 MINUTES

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

—Isaiah 61:1–3a (NRSV)

Have you ever found yourself saying with a reluctant sigh, "Well, it is what it is"?

Sometimes, this is true.

But, often, we have been taught to accept as inevitable and unchangeable structures and systems of violence that are fundamentally unacceptable to God.

Mass incarceration. Structural racism. The school-to-prison pipeline. And so much more.

Mass incarceration:

- The United States imprisons an unusually large portion of its population.
- Starting in the 1970s, incarceration rates rose dramatically.
- Over the next forty years, there was a 500% increase in the number of people incarcerated.
- Currently, more than 2 million people are held in state and federal prisons, jails, juvenile detention facilities, and immigration detention centers.[4]

In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, the text we just read together. Jesus, like the prophets before him, invites us to imagine a world that is radically different from the one we now inhabit—a world where people who have been incarcerated are set free, a world where all of us together live in "the year of the Lord's favor."

For the next few minutes, we will engage our holy imagination and wonder together at the invitation of the Scripture we just read: What would it mean to live together in holy freedom? What gifts would you and your community receive if we were to undo the system of mass incarceration? What gifts would you and your community receive if we were to treat children as children, extraordinarily loved and deeply valued, each one a beloved child of God?

What if we were to think in a more Gospel-grounded way about this question of justice—no longer focusing on a paradigm of punishment, but instead talking about preventing harm and repairing hurt, tending to the needs of those who have been injured and working with those who have caused the injury to create real transformation? What if we imagined a world in which we were all growing together—none of us absolutely perfect, none of us abjectly unworthy, all of us together children of God? What if justice were . . . just?

Adaptation note: If you are gathered in a large group, either online or in-person, consider breaking into small groups (approximately four or five people per group) for both this discussion and the subsequent activity.

Allow the group a moment to think about this question. Then, ask participants to briefly share their reflections with a neighbor.

After sharing, ask the whole group: Is this easy for our group to imagine? Or difficult? Why? If we can't get to the world we imagine, completely, can we take one small step closer?

Invite the group to think about the choices that our communities make regularly:

- Who does our criminal justice system target based on their race and ethnicity? How much change would need to happen to undo the racial disparities in discipline in our school systems? Police departments? Courts? Jails, prisons, and detention centers?
- How much money does our community allocate to educate children and youth, to support struggling members of the community, to care for those who are unemployed, sick, or otherwise in need? What additional resources would we have for that work if we redirected funds spent on harmful systems of punishment and incarceration?

Discuss your answers with one another.

ACTIVITY: CALLED TO JUSTICE—YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

25 MINUTES

Part 1: Our History

Throughout history, women have been told to accept the unacceptable because "it is what it is" or "the system will never change." Abolitionists, suffragists, and civil rights leaders were all told that change was "impossible." Thankfully, they resisted the false idol of inevitability and persisted in their holy, justice-seeking work. In so doing, they created space for us to be here, today.

Share the events you researched from the Racial Justice Timeline with the group.

Discuss:

- Why was this event significant for women at the time?
- Does it still have ramifications today?
- How does the story in these pages intersect with your own life story?

Part 2: Our Present

Watch this brief video, United Women in Faith for Racial Justice found online at **tinyurl.com/c68pku58.** It features members of United Women in Faith speaking out about racial justice.

Invite each member of your group to take a few minutes to write silently:

- Why are you committed to racial justice?
- How does this commitment connect with your faith in Jesus Christ?

After a few minutes, invite members of the group to share their statements aloud with one another if they feel comfortable doing so.

Part 3: Our Future

The book of James reminds us that faith and action are inextricably linked to one another:

"Someone might claim, 'You have faith and I have action.' But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action" (James 2:18, CEB).

It is not enough to say we believe in racial justice; we must show our commitment with our actions. Challenging racism requires courage, forthrightness, and care. How will you live your commitment to racial justice in your own context/community? How can you support local efforts to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and address other pressing racial justice issues in your community? Explore ways that your unit can join in supporting existing racial justice efforts in your community and/or state.

OFFERING AND CLOSING | 10 MINUTES

Offering

If you are meeting in-person, you might pass a collection basket at this time. If you are meeting online, you might ask participants to donate online by visiting **uwfaith.org/give.**

Closing Reflection

What do you need to do to strengthen yourself for the work ahead? Do you need more patience? More fierceness? More kindness? More clarity? More support? More healing? More determination? Pray for the strength that you need to continue in the work of racial justice—work to which God has called us all.

Song Selection

"One Foot/Lead with Love" by Melanie DeMore[5]
youtube.com/channel/UCXNHK482HVQRmSsBsTzdkmQ

Closing Litany

Invite your gathered community to engage in a shared litany, recalling the words of our Charter for Racial Justice.

All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That God is the Creator of all people, and all are God's children in one family;
All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ;
All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That racism denies the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus Christ;
All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That racism robs all human beings of their wholeness and is used as a justification for social, economic, environmental, and political exploitation;

All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That we must declare before God and before one another that we have sinned against our [siblings] of other races in thought, in word, and in deed;

All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That in our common humanity in creation, all [people] are made in God's image, and all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God;

All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That our strength lies in our racial and cultural diversity and that we must work toward a world in which each person's value is respected and nurtured;

All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: That our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings, and new relationships, and must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures, and practices of both church and state;

All: Because we believe . . .

Leader: We commit ourselves as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed, and to struggle for the rights and the self-determination of every person and group of persons.

All: Because we believe . . . we commit!

ONLINE OPTION: If you are gathering on Zoom, you might want to try these PowerPoint slides: Visit United Women in Faith "Shop and Download" on **uwfaith.org** to access resources.

Optional Going-Deeper Activity: Distribute copies of (or links to) the Charter for Racial Justice as a takeaway. Ask members to study it individually in a spirit of prayer and openness. When your group gathers next, reflect together on what parts of the Charter resonated most for members of the group. Where did we each see the call of the Charter intersect with current events and/or with our own experiences?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Jones is United Women in Faith Executive for Racial Justice.

Endnotes

1. CCLI Song # 7052931 Mark A. Miller © 2015 Choristers Guild CCLI License # 11221925
2. Rebecca Epstein, Jamila J. Blake, and Thalia González, "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood," Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law, Accessed March 25, 2022, genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf.
3. "An Overview of Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Public Schools for the 2017-18 School Year," US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, accessed March 25, 2022, slide 7, www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-exclusionary-school-discipline.pdf.
4. Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020," Prison Policy Initiative, accessed March 19, 2022, prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html.
5. "One Foot/Lead with Love." Words & Music: Melanie DeMore. © 2016 Melanie DeMore. Licensed for free, non-commercial distribution through Creative Commons. Sheet music for "One Foot/Lead with Love" is available here: www.justicechoir.org/songbook/. There is no cost to download the PDF, but you are invited to donate to support the songwriters if you are able. You can also find the song on Justice Choir's Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/channel/UCXNHK482HVQRmSsBsTzdkmQ

United Women in Faith Digital Resources

Come and experience your favorite print resources in an online digital platform, connect with your sisters, and make new friends!

Joining the community is free! Go to uwfaith.mn.co to join your sisters or subscribe to one of the paid resources.

uwfaith.org

United Women in Faith



The all-new United Women in Faith Circles Program Resource shows how we can answer our calling today as women of passion committed to helping women, children, and youth.

As we live into a new name, we will celebrate our identity in Christ and our need for one another, building community that is founded on inclusion and action.

The programs are grounded in Mark 8:27–30 as an invitation to reclaim and explore our identity as children of God and as a community of women of faith. Through the lens of this passage, we will use one of four guiding questions to focus our study in each quarter of the year:

- **Who do you say that I am?**
- **Who am I that I should go _____?**
- **Who are we through Christ?**
- **Are we our siblings' keepers?**

Monthly Bible studies, reflections, program activities, as well as weekly activities to do on your own between each program session will help guide us through this year as we look at who we are in Christ and what that means for how we live in community as United Women in Faith members called to action in local and global communities.

Again, this year you will have an opportunity to experience this resource in an online platform via Mighty Networks. Come and participate in local programs to grow your faith, participate in action, and connect with sisters!

United Women in Faith

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