

SESSION 1: SPEAKING TRUTH & HEALING WITH LOVE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Opening: (Different words popping on screen): Scholar, Theologian, Counselor, Spiritual Guide, Parent, Teacher, Healer, Therapist, Servant of God, Intercessor

We want to add to your calling a new role: Civics Teacher

Let's talk about America, where your religious voice matters – where faith can and should be translated into action to foster civil discourse, democratic values and just policies that reflect the values you hold dear.

Why? Because people of faith, whatever their view, need to be vital participants in American Democracy.

INTERVIEW CLIPS: Voices of Different People — people talking about being religious

Wesley (Union) 2:25

I'd probably say my pastor, my mentor that's in Greensboro, North Carolina and his wife, Reverend Nelson Johnson and Mrs. Joyce Johnson. They have lived a model life for me, in front of me, of what it means to be bearers of your faith in practice and in word. And they've really brought me into their ministry, of the beloved community and that vision that grows from that.

Tony 00:00:00

For me...being a Christian actually... is part of a lifetime of commitment to engaging the world. Being a Christian actually rescues or... delivers [us] from isolationism and exclusivism. Biblically, the history of Abraham and the Patriarchs and Israel and the nation and then the world, as a concern... for God and God's people is an always outgoing, ever-expanding involvement and interaction...with the people of the world.

Clifford 4:37

I remember my associate, the associate minister who's the youth pastor um...was involved in protesting the nuclear, uh... the nuclear buildup in the 80s and one of the things he would do, is he would actually, he and others would protest the company, the building in which my father worked. And he'd walk in and they'd say "hello" to each other in the morning and I just thought that was neat because then we'd talk about it at the kitchen table.

Catherine 1:16

I grew up as sort of a child of a seminary community. My father taught Old Testament and Hebrew in a Presbyterian Seminary in Loyola, Kentucky and one of my earliest memories was of marching with my parents when I was a little girl in Civil Rights marches. And those marches, we were often some of the few white people among the crowd and we ended up in church, usually in a black church, singing hymns, so the marriage of the faith with activism, with being out in the streets and doing something as a group, together, to heal and repair the world was a part of my very early memory. So I think that,

when I think about living the faith and being civically engaged as a faith leader, that was, you know, that was a very strong early influence.

So what is civic engagement? And why is it so important?

(Slides 5-6) (Voice Over)

Civic Engagement is what makes American Democracy work: Citizens engaged in the important issues in the local, state, and national arena.

INTERVIEW CLIPS: Voices of people talking about being civically engaged

Gordon Tucker 2:33

There is a very simple premise with which the Hebrew Bible, and therefore the Christian Bible as well, begins, which is that we're all connected. God didn't create a single flounder; he filled the sea with flounders, and the land with oak trees. What is the message that is being given is that we're all related.

Michael 0:43

I think religion can play a mediating role in change, as a hub of community of people coming together to think about meaning and purpose and reflect on deep theological questions and then go out and engage in the world. Religious communities can play a powerful role, especially in the secular societies, as a keeper of the flame of hope.

Clifford 1:13

My Christian faith encourages me to challenge that low status is a natural and static condition that cannot change and in fact, that conditions of low status can, through our faith and through our action, can be reversed. That, um, persons who are on the margins can move into the center. The voices that are on the margins, or at the lower socially constructed part of social hierarchy, are the most powerful voices with truth that can change the world as we know it.

Lily (Union) 20:01

When I hear religion in the public sphere, my, like, thinking automatically goes to, like, questions of the separation of church and state and for me, there even with wanting to uphold kind of the integrity of that principle, here in the United States is a recognition that religion and politics are always interacting. First recognizing that religion, religious beliefs, faith, spirituality, always have a role to play in how we interact and engage with the world.

Charles Pope DSCF 2005: 00:00:00

I certainly speak to the issues that come into the news. Now that's everything from the moral issues to the social issues. Recently, for example, just to use an illustration for a social issue, um, we have a big water company here in DC and they love to, they're doing huge projects, we've gotta do water

abatements so we're not dumping all our run-off into the river so there's a lot of things upon us we have to work on the anti-coastal watershed. They're bringing up workers from North Carolina; they're bringing workers from everywhere but right here. We're the ones who are paying the water bill... and DC jobs for DC workers, you know through DC taxpayers, you see. So the question is, we've been pressuring the water companies, so I said that one day, at the end of mass, I said..."will you please come and stand with us, we're going to have a meeting."

Catherine 09:52

I'm thinking right now about the role that some faith leaders in Baltimore have played recently as they have put their bodies on the line, during the marching and riots between the crowds, you know, who were very angry and the police officers and literally stood in the gap between them to try to create a different kind of atmosphere. And that's the kind of role I think that faith leaders have to play. So sometimes it's literally in the streets as it's been in Baltimore, and sometimes its at other kinds of tables of conversation.

Jim Winkler 00:03:35

Movements such as the Civil Rights movement, the women's movement, the peace movement, the anti-apartheid movement, the movement to, for the freedom and dignity of all people, these have been moral and spiritual movements. And I feel I have been blessed to be part of them, and they have changed the world, they've changed the world for the better.

Rob (Union): 26:49: So I think our work is to get the people's theology out into the public square. It's never neutral. It's never just about hanging out and talking. It's always about changing and what Dr. King said is that, and he was talking about the church specifically. He says, you know, we have to choose whether we are going to be a thermometer or a thermostat.

Damico DSCF 4191: 00:00:00

When I think about the church's call to do justice, I think of the passage from Isaiah, where we are called to loose the bonds of injustice and to undo the thongs of the yolk. What that means is that we're not simply called to fill in the gaps that exist in society, simply and always, forever meeting emergency needs. We are called to do that, but we're called to go deeper, we're called as the Prophet Isaiah says to be repairers of the breach, restorers of the streets to live in.

Damico cont'd 00:00:38

And so as the church moves from the sanctuary into the streets, we realize that we're moving out as an act of faithfulness, as an act of repairing that which has become broken, as an act of participating in the restoration of God's good intention for all creation. We know that God wants everyone to...not just thrive, we know that God wants everyone to thrive and not just survive.

(Slides 7-8-9)

And we have a problem. Diminished Democracy. Diminished involvement. Today people, including people of faith, are engaged less than ever before. And that is a great loss. What have we lost? We

have lost a sense of community, of belonging...A Religious community is what brings us together inside our church and outside our church...

SLIDE:

Share with a partner or two (introduce yourself if you have not done so already)

1. What do you see in terms of community when you look at the American landscape?
2. We see Americans engaged less with each other and with society. How would you explain what is happening today in the ways people engage each other and their roles as citizens?

What makes a great church, synagogue or temple?

One feature is a sense of community and of caring for each other. We call that thick social capital and communities of faith are very capable of offering rich and deep relationships to congregants, a place where we can discuss issues that matter in our own lives and issues that affect our country and the world. We think religious settings have the potential to be the perfect antidote for what is ailing America.

INTERVIEW CLIPS: Talk about religious settings being the perfect antidote

Jim 00:00:35

I think that being a leader in the public square certainly means acting on your convictions and your beliefs, being true to the stances of the organizations of which you represent, and faithfully, uh...faithfully explicating those [beliefs]. I also think that it entails and involves some calmness and maturity in the face of a lot of crisis, and keeping focused on the insistence that people's needs, human needs, and care for creation, take priority over the crises of the day. And whether that is perhaps a terrorist attack, such as 9/11 or, you know, any passing crisis of the moment. But rather, I think that being a leader in the public square means you try your best to remain calm and help people remain focused on the prize, keep our eyes on the prize, if you will.

Lily (Union) 40:15/44:04

There's something about this phrase of public sphere that is so powerful for me. There's no such thing without people right? And that in some way, we are all interacting. And so for me, a principle of, like, recognizing that we all do better when we all do better, to quote Paul Wolfstone, or other kind of similar sentiments, is so important. To the extent to which the state is not taking care to make sure everybody is being cared for, is having their, at least their basic needs, and I would aspire to more. Religious leaders have the possibility to influence the dialogue so that that can happen better,

Gordon Tucker 2:10

People do have to know that the basic axiom out there is that if someone disagrees with a stance that you take, [then] that it is political. And when someone agrees with the very same stand, it is moral. The idea that there is some basic hard difference between the political and moral is kind of an absurdity, because politics, which is about what affects the polis. What affects the polis more than heavy moral issues? These are things that religious leaders have to speak about.

Tony 00:01:10

Theologically, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, for me, signifies God coming into the world, God entering into space and time, to engage people, to engage the world. And if... if God engages the world, does not isolate or separate himself from the world, but comes into the world, then that's a model and example, I think, for me as a Christian. And Pentecost is a theological...uh...clarifier for me regarding the relationship of Christians and the church to the world and the holy spirit filled the desires. The Church then went out to the world, bearing witness to God's mighty words and deeds.

Clifford 00:50/10:20

So, the organizations that are...seem to be at all capable of giving, of helping to give voice to low income persons currently in the United States are two types of organizations...labor organizations and faith-based organizations. And people who participated were being nurtured, and their faith was being nurtured by what we were doing. And it was becoming; it wasn't separate from church, it was enlarging the church for them. And, this to me, became also a source of encouragement, of renewal for me, because I was sensing that we were not only changing the public square and the Presbyterian denomination, but we were also enriching the spiritual journey for the people that were involved.

Milgrom DSCF 4197: 00:00:00

One of my professors, Rabbi Larry Hoffman taught us that if the cries outside are not heard within, the cries within will not be heard on high. So to be a full devotional Jewish person is to create a synagogue, to create a world in which the cries outside are very much heard within the sanctuary. That's what it means to be a whole human being, a whole Jewish person, and a sacred Jewish community.

(Slides 14-24)

More than money trying to influence politicians, America needs places to gather together, teach and engage and learn about all that is happening inside as well as outside the walls of the sanctuary — and to act on what we believe.

We know this could feel overwhelming, to take on another role as a religious leader, yet we know that religious communities have a critically constructive role to play. The health and vitality of religious life in America depends on a healthy and vital America. What we want to say is simple: As a religious leader, in addition to all of your other responsibilities, you can help guide, inspire, and motivate your community to engage in civil discourse and promote democratic participation as people of faith committed to the future of America.

INTERVIEW CLIPS**Jim 00:02:51**

So, I found that if you can establish that sense of personal connection and community then you can deal with a lot of difficult issues, not necessarily in order to find an agreement, sometimes that happens, but so that people could set forth their views without feeling that they were going to get hammered for what they had to say.

Clifford 1:41

And we are, and we are changing this by, we are on the inside of it and we are rebuilding it. And in ten years, in twenty years, uh...it's going to be different. And um that this shell of the old, it can't really, mm, it can't really shut down this process, because the rebuilding is happening inside of it. And we are the inside. And also within this idea of building the new out of the shell of the old, the shell, it has kind of a spiral to it, and that's what social justice ministry is doing from generation to generation. It's building on itself...it's gradually, although there are thresholds where we make great jumps, we are building something that we ourselves have constructed from what people have done before.

Pessy 11:05

My favorite polemic passage and it's telling a story about the hyperies who went into the temple and God said to him "my son bless me" and it's this beautiful passage where the priest basically tells God, you should be good and kind of your people...and a compassionate god. And that always resonated to me because I think that very often when we pray its...what we're...we are reacting to God and there is something very powerful in saying we can actually shape God, and we can impact God and we can a bring godliness, whether it's through prayers, whether it's through blessings, or whether it's through the work that we do.

(Slides 25-26)

Please return to your partners and think together about these questions:

1. Can I imagine myself as a religious leader who can help those whom I serve bring their religious beliefs into the public square and engage in directing America's future?
2. What skills and resources do I want to acquire to be the effective civics educator that my community needs?

Catherine 18:19

The text that roots me is Isaiah 58. It's sort of the complete meal (laughs) of prayer and it roots the personal faith in one's own spiritual life and connection to God with the work of justice in the world and with the charge for all of us, to be repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in.

Damico DSCF 4195: 00:00:00

Some congregations find it difficult to move from feeding people who are poor to working to end hunger and poverty, that cause people to be hungry. But as I've looked at this in congregations, one thing that I've noticed is that often, we feel that we're stepping away from people and from face-to-face relationships when we begin talking about public policy advocacy or other forms of public action. In reality, we need to see these on a continuum, face-to-face, feeding of others who are poor and common meals that we may share together connect us one to another, and then we can move from there, together, into shared advocacy.

Damico cont'd 00:00:48

It's not to oppose charity and justice but rather to look at them across a continuum because you know there are ways of doing justice, where you're doing justice for someone, rather than doing justice

with someone. And in charitable circumstances, where we're sharing what we have — where we're sharing food or clothing — there are also different ways that we can engage in that kind of ministry. We can impose it upon someone, doing onto someone, whether or not they want what we're offering. Or we can inquire, how can we be helpful? And that changes the dynamic from doing for, to being a partner with.

Welcome to Speaking Truth and Healing with love in the public square