

Passionate Discipleship

Six Foundations

A Canadian Baptist Youth Initiative

Foundation #4

“GLOCAL” COMPASSION



FOUNDATION #4

Passionate Disciples are Engaged in *Glocal* Compassion

Writing a chapter about social justice and compassion is a necessary but challenging task for me. It's challenging because it is difficult for youth ministry leaders (myself included) to move from an "entertainment" style of youth ministry to an outward-focused "take-care-of-the-oppressed" approach. For many years our youth groups have been places where we entice and excite students with fun games, activities and programs. To change our approach, we (as youth workers) really need to change ourselves. We need to recognize that social justice is not another program to create but should be part of the fabric of who we are as followers of Jesus. One writer put it this way:

If we are to resist the urge to make justice into another church program, then we must overturn this split between the personal and the social. We must go from preaching 'accept Christ as your personal saviour' to 'you are invited to enter a relationship with God through Christ that changes everything.' We must go from being justified, to being justice-ified. Justice should no longer be something we do, but who we are.¹

Humble Beginnings

For justice to be "who we are," we must allow our hearts, minds and souls to be renewed. One of the questions we need to ask is: "Where do we begin?" I'd like to suggest the following ideas:

1) Start with a Posture of Humility

In evangelical circles, one of the mistakes we sometimes make is to think we are ushering in something new that no one has ever thought of before. Oh, the arrogance! If anything, we need to repent of thinking that a Christian approach to justice and compassion is better than others. As you begin, be open to learning from others and be very open to learning from those outside the four walls of your church. Take the posture of a humble learner versus a prideful do-gooder.

2) Pray and Watch – Start Local

Take some time as a group (a month at minimum) to pray for God's leading in the creating of a new thing in your context. As you pray, watch for opportunities that arise via people inside and outside of your group. Pray for wisdom as you try to match needs with the giftings of your group. You may come upon a worthy need but recognize that your group does not have the gifts to meet the need. Frederick Buechner's quote regarding vocation may be a helpful guide:

¹ Fitch, David, *Justice-ified by Faith*, available at:

http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/06/justiceified_by.html .

The vocation for you is the one in which your deep gladness and the world's deep need meet. When you are doing what you are happiest doing, it must also be something that not only makes you happy but that the world needs to have done (Abernethy, 2006, Question / Answer 25).

As you pray and watch and see what needs to be done, make sure you start in your local community. The short-term mission trip has become a popular endeavour for many youth groups, but I urge you to think and serve locally first.

3) Be Faithful

Once you have found meaningful, local ways to be ambassadors of justice and compassion, stay faithful to them. Too often we are tempted to be “one-hit wonders” in the area of service. We serve at the local soup kitchen once a month and wear our service like a badge of honour, but we may never actually get to know and form friendships with the poor. The challenge is for us to be faithful in a place long enough to be the presence of Christ in that place. Shane Claiborne, a social activist who has become an inspiration to many in the evangelical church, puts it this way:

I believe that the great tragedy of the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor, but that they do not know the poor. Yet if we are called to live the new community for which Christ was crucified, we cannot remain strangers to one another. Jesus demands that we live in a very different way (Claiborne, 2000, paragraph 4).

Grow with a Global Perspective

Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM), the mission organization of Canadian Baptists, encourages churches to “Start Local, Go Global” – to make sure their mission has both a local and global perspective. Another word coined more recently to capture this image is “glocal.”² Once you have begun a humble, local and faithful approach to justice and compassion in your youth ministry, I would encourage you to take some steps to make a glocal difference. This might include the following:

1) Understanding How Your Local Choices Make a Global Impact

North Americans of all ages are waking up to the truth that their consumer choices make a difference in whether people are treated fairly or unjustly in the world. Is it strange that the people of God, who worship a God of justice and mercy, are not leading the way in this movement?

As we seek to raise up passionate disciples, the challenge for us is to help our students make choices that make the world a better place for all. Fortunately, there are plenty of organizations that are making a difference, and there is bound to be a local organization or club in your neighbourhood that is going green, making fair-trade choices or buying local rather than buying from the big box stores.

See the **Recommended Resources** at the end of this chapter to get you started.

2) Making a Trip Outside of Your Country

² Roberts describes glocal as: “today's seamless integration between the local and global, a comprehensive connectedness produced by travel, business, and communications.” (Roberts, 2007, paragraph 2)

Once your group has taken some intentional steps to live out justice and compassion in your local context, you may then choose to go somewhere in the world and get a firsthand perspective of the global village. Visit CBM's website at www.cbmin.org or contact the STM department at stm@cbmin.org to see what opportunities may be available for your group. Wherever you go, make sure the trip is more than an opportunity for travel and global shopping. Yes, the trip should have a sense of fun and adventure, but the foundation and purpose of the trip should be justice and compassion. Wouldn't it be incredible if these trips "messed up" our students in such a way that they would think twice before they participated in future global trips that were solely based on vacation and self-indulgence?

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, cultivating this outward-focused mindset is a challenging task for youth workers and youth groups. The way of Jesus was always a way that valued justice and mercy. If we can help our students (and ourselves) become more aware of local and global needs AND if we can actually find meaningful places to be ambassadors of justice and compassion, then we will be giving our students a way of life – one with the potential to stay with them for a lifetime. May God grant us wisdom and courage to do so for the sake of our souls and our world.

We're looking for real life examples of this! Please send your stories and photos to:
communications@cbmin.org

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:

1. How can your youth group walk the way of humility as they serve their community? What does your group need to repent of (in a life-giving way, not a shame-driven way) before they endeavour to be a blessing in the community?
2. Think of a time when you've been faithful to a ministry. Why is it so hard? Name and be aware of these challenges.
3. Have a discussion with your group regarding this statement: "How can you live simply so that others may simply live?"
4. Who are models of justice and compassion in your sphere of influence? Do we have Canadian Baptist role models? Perhaps your group will be a future role model!
5. As you are asking questions and seeking direction, remember to look for big picture issues of justice and compassion versus getting distracted by superficial issues (e.g. rather than focusing on the issue of abortion in your city or town, take a step back and try to look into the bigger issues that lead to an increasing abortion rate – poverty, loneliness, or injustice). The following quote is insightful:

CHARITY VS. SOCIAL JUSTICE

Archbishop Hélder Câmara made the distinction between charity and justice in a pithy sentence: "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist."

Systemic injustice is what we are struggling against. Policies of trade and finance are biased in favour of those who have wealth and influence. This works against the poor, the have-nots, the nobodies – the great majority of the world's population.

Charity is based on justice. But charity is often seen as mere alms, and as such is incomplete.

It is therefore necessary to try to improve unjust systems, in addition to donating some of our wealth.

When a destructive system is creating victims in the millions, can we limit ourselves to rescuing them in ones and twos? We must locally do what we can to help work for systemic change, or justice. This is the foundation of charity (Gerwing, 2000).

Recommended Resources:

Abernethy, B. (2006). *Interview: Frederick Buechner*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week936/interview.html> .

Canadian Baptist Ministries. *Live it Out*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.cbmin.org/cbm/live-it-out1>.

Claiborne, S. (2000). *Downward Mobility in an Upscale World*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/newmonastics/claiborne_downwardmobility.shtml

Gerwing, A. (2000). *Charity versus Social Justice*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from <http://www.socialjustice.ws/socialjustice/index.shtml>

McFague, S. (2001). *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis.

Roberts, B. (2007). *We Aren't About Weekends*. Retrieved June 16, 2010, from http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2007/01/we_arent_about_weekends.html

Spurlock, M. (2007). *What Would Jesus Buy* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warrior Poets.

Other websites to consider:

- www.simpleliving.org (consider getting the Claiborne/Campolo DVD called "Simply Enough")
- www.buynothingchristmas.org
- www.tenthousandvillages.ca
- www.justshirts.ca
- www.newdream.org
- www.conversationweek.org
- www.global-mindshift.org
- www.sojourners.com
- www.grist.org

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