

PEACE & SOCIAL CHANGE

... With Justice for All



*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil
is for good men (and women) to do nothing.*

—EDMUND BURKE

Our society, having not yet adopted the Four Principles of Peace, promotes social, political, and economic conditions that allow some to thrive at the expense of others. This may show up as relatively invisible norms that stack the deck against people of a certain race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, or other category of our rich diversity. Or it may take the form of outright exploitation or oppression of many for the benefit of a few.

If we want real peace in our lives and in the world, we cannot go along with injustice. We must work for social change, both at the level of root causes and also on a case-by-case basis. Some of us are activists, taking to the streets to protest and call attention to the wrongs we wish

to right. Others of us act quietly, through letter writing, involvement in local projects, and individual action. What is important is that people stand up and say "No!" to the injustices, for they flourish only to the extent we allow them to.

In addition to protesting against the wrongs, we must also work to build new forms and institutions that support the rights of all people to live with freedom, equality, and dignity. This is where we have the chance to be warriors for peace.

64 INFORM YOURSELF

There are many causes to choose from in our work for social change: poverty, human rights abuses, hunger, racism, sexism, and all the other "isms" that discriminate on the basis of identity; the proliferation of nuclear and conventional weapons; sweat-shop economics—the list is long. We can choose to work locally, in our own communities and nation, or for causes around the world.

Our tendency is to see "black and white," "good guys and bad guys" on these kinds of hot topics; the reality is much more complex. That is why we need to inform ourselves from many perspectives.

- Determine what issue calls you to action—where are you drawn to make a difference, to help alleviate suffering?
- Get curious. Ask questions to understand root causes; find out what approaches seem to be most effective in addressing these problems.
- Browse the Internet. Type your keyword into a search engine and scroll through the many items that appear, reading the ones that catch your attention.
- Go to the library or the bookstore for books, newspapers, and magazine articles on your subject.
- Talk with volunteers, professionals, academic experts. Above all, talk directly with those who endure the hardships associated with this issue. Talk also with those on the other side, to understand their point of view and to search for common ground.

- Find organizations in your community that address these concerns—your place of worship is a good place to start. Explore what they are doing, and how you might get involved.
- As you educate yourself, listen for how you can make your unique contribution. Listen for your way to become a warrior for peace.

65 BECOME A HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

To be a human being means to be endowed, as the U.S. Declaration of Independence says, with certain "inalienable rights." Freedom of speech, of religious expression, of association; freedom from slavery, tyranny, oppression—these and many others are our human birthright.

We are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of our color, gender, nationality, age. Every day and in every country human rights are ignored or violated, on purpose or as a by-product of some other action. Peace requires vigilance and action to insure the rights of all, for anyone—individual or group—who is denied their basic rights cannot take their true place in the family of life.

To be an advocate for human rights means to work for the rights of others. It means to speak out, to witness, to watch, and to act so that no one may abuse another with impunity.

- Read the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Discuss it with family and friends, with coworkers, at your place of worship.
- Pick a topic of human rights that particularly interests you—for example, child labor, sex slavery, torture, prisoners of conscience, the death penalty, sweat shops, ethnic cleansing, racial discrimination. Educate yourself on the subject. Find organizations working on that issue, and join them or support their work.
- Follow human rights news. Pick a place where human rights is an ongoing concern and subscribe to an Internet news service that reports on that subject regularly.
- Understand also the universal responsibilities that balance our universal rights—the responsibility to honor life, to respect differences, to be accountable for our actions, to use shared resources

appropriately. Take care to articulate these responsibilities, and live them fully in your daily life. Teach them to your children. See that they are taught in your school system.

- Be vigilant with your own political leaders, bosses at work, religious leaders, and others who hold power over the lives and fates of many, to ensure they act always with the greatest integrity.

66 EXERCISE YOUR OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEMOCRACY

Change—peaceful, democratic change—is possible. Although there are entrenched interests that may seem to have a tight grip on maintaining the status quo for their own benefit, still we know that if people speak and act effectively, things can change.

Many of us who live in democratic countries, especially the United States, take democracy for granted. We complain about all the things that are wrong, but we neglect to take the actions open to us to fix them. Yet in a flourishing democracy, we have three essential tools for social change: speaking out, acting together, and choosing our leaders.

- Pick one issue of public policy that interests you passionately. Educate yourself about it.
- Go to public forums where this issue is being discussed or decided. Speak your mind. Listen to other views respectfully. Try to build consensus around points of common ground.
- Write letters to the editor or articles for publication; go on the radio or public access television to get your views across. Invite responses, open the door for dialogue.
- Find organizations working on this issue, and join their efforts.
- Question candidates for public office about their stand on your issue. Educate them; lobby them. If you don't find someone you like, consider running for office yourself, or find someone who would represent your views.
- Vote! Make your voice heard in every election, no matter how small the office.

67 TAKE A PERSONAL PRIVILEGE INVENTORY

Many of us live in a state of greater privilege than someone else, or some other group. We may have more money, connections, or status due to a variety of factors (race, gender, class, religion, education level) that make it easier for us to succeed in the world than for others who lack our resources. Privilege usually translates into power.

We do not need to feel guilty about our privilege. We do need, however, to acknowledge and understand it. Then we can use it as a gift, to serve others, in the search for social justice.

- 1 Take the following self-inventory, to understand your own relative privilege—and lack thereof. On the chart following, for each item in the horizontal line, place a dot on the upward scale to indicate where you have greater privilege than others (1 being the least; 5 being the most).
- 2 Place a dot on the downward scale to show where you have less privilege than others (again, 1 being the least and 5 being the most). On any one item, you may have both greater and lesser privilege than others, depending on what category of others you are considering.
- 3 Now connect the dots. This will give you a graphic view of your state of personal privilege. Examine this graph to see what information emerges for you.
- 4 Take some action on that information, to use your special privilege to help others.

PERSONAL PRIVILEGE INVENTORY

5	
4	
3	
2	
1	
	Race Class Gender Wealth Education Ethnicity Work Religion Other (specify)
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

68 EMPOWER THE POWERLESS

From your Personal Privilege Inventory you may have found areas where you have more access and power in society than others. There are other people, by virtue of the various factors noted, that have less power in society. Think how you can help them become more powerful.

Empowering others means providing opportunities; it does not mean giving something away or doing something for someone that they can do for themselves. Empowering others means helping them work for their own goals, not imposing your goals on them. It means opening doors, encouraging, supporting others on their journey toward dignity and equality.

- Be a tutor to help teach a young child with learning disabilities how to read; a refugee how to pass the citizenship test; a school dropout how to practice a trade.
- Make a job available for someone who might otherwise have difficulty finding work; select an often passed-over candidate for a promotion; encourage job-training programs at your workplace.
- Support an ethnic or racial group in its struggle for justice and the opportunity to participate fully in society as first class citizens.
- Volunteer your time at a legal aid project, a battered woman's shelter, a free medical clinic, an adult literacy program, an indigenous rights organization, a mental health facility, a homeless shelter.
- Give to a scholarship fund for Third World students, striving artists, the rural poor, or any other group of students often overlooked in the scholarship process.
- Coach sports at a youth center; support the Special Olympics, or advocate for recreational sports programs for the physically challenged.

69 BE A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

Some people and groups in society are so powerless that they have no real voice. Their needs get drowned out by the majority or dominant group in the culture. They are not represented in places of

power, so their concerns are not considered. They are marginalized in the economic, social, and political fabric of society and may need someone to speak for them in places where they cannot speak for themselves.

Others, by virtue of their identity group, are looked down upon by those in power. They are the butt of jokes and belittling comments. They are referred to in demeaning or patronizing terms. They too need someone to speak on their behalf, especially when they are not present to do so for themselves.

Giving voice to the voiceless means standing up for their rights in settings where you have more power and presence than they. It means confronting inappropriate behavior and insisting on respectful treatment for those who are considered "less than," "not like us," or "not good enough."

- Do not allow prejudicial, stereotypical, or belittling speech about others to pass unchallenged. Confront all instances of "hate speech," whether subtle or overt. Refuse to allow slurs to be made about others, even in jest.
- Represent the interests of the voiceless in settings where they are either not present or not allowed a full voice. Do this even if you do not necessarily agree with their position.
- Make the invisible visible in any setting where decisions are being made that will affect them. Bring the uninvited to the party, the voiceless into the conversation. You can do this by actually including people from the disempowered groups in settings where important things are happening, or by speaking on their behalf.

70 PRACTICE MORAL WITNESS AND SOLIDARITY

Ultimately, social justice is about morality. What is right and wrong in how we treat each other? To act for social change is to be a witness for what is morally and ethically correct in our human relationships.

To witness for something means to stand up and be counted. We may practice silent witness—holding a silent, candlelit vigil in honor of some oppressed individual or group—or we may practice active witness though showing up and speaking up for the marginalized and vulnerable among us. The power of witness is tremendous. It has

a great effect in getting people's attention and changing hearts, including our own as the one who witnesses. To witness is to say, "I am here; I will not be moved; I see; I take notice; I hold you accountable."

Solidarity means that we recognize our oneness with the oppressed. What happens to them happens to us. We stand with them to give support, to let them know they are not alone, to share and thereby ease the burden of their suffering.

- Again, pick the issue of your choice, the individuals or group you wish to stand with. Find a way to be physically present to them in a time of need. Let your presence speak your values.
- Align yourself with the experience of the ones you have chosen to witness for. Live as they live, suffer with them; leave your privilege at the door for a while, and put yourself in their shoes.
- Ask yourself the hard questions. How far you will go to protect the rights of those you are in solidarity with? Will you put your body on the line for them? Your freedom? Your life? There are no right or wrong answers; what's important is to know where you stand and what your limits are.
- Be attentive that your advocacy on behalf of others does not cast the perpetrators as inhuman demons, thereby increasing hostility and "us versus them" thinking. Think of the perpetrators of injustice with compassion; you can feel compassion for the person without condoning the behavior. Even those guilty of committing the worst evil acts are human beings in need of compassion. Their suffering is also great, because they have become so disconnected from their true and natural selves.

71 WORK FROM THE BOTTOM UP AND THE TOP DOWN

Social change, to be lasting, must occur through the whole fabric of society. The motivation for change comes from two directions: either there is a compelling vision of where we want to go, or there is so much hurt that we want it to stop—or both. Since the ones on "top" in any society rarely feel the pain, in a sincere way, of those without power, that motivation will usually come from the grassroots, or bottom up.

The bottom up approach to social justice is strong; it is democracy at its best. It involves people in shaping their own destiny; it empowers people to work together for common cause; it informs and engages people in acts of shared meaning; it builds community; it airs the underside of public life, bringing into the light that which needs to be changed. It also can be very effective.

Change from the bottom up is even more effective when met by change from the top down. For true transformation, this meeting point is necessary. While the momentum for social change will usually come from the grassroots, still, in every powerful institution there are individuals who do have a vision for a better way and who do feel the hurt of the people. As they become more visible and credible, much is possible.

- Find your grassroots allies for community action. Help articulate a compelling vision for a better future, and express the pain of the current situation in ways that can be truly heard and understood.
- Seek out those in the top levels of political, economic, and social institutions who share that vision. Make common cause with them. Help them to help you by avoiding blame, finger pointing, and the casting of those at the top as the enemy. Consider how you can work together.
- Explore the meeting point of the top down and bottom up approaches. Who is in the middle? What institutions can influence both the people and those who hold the power? How can you best work with and through them?
- Realize that there is great power—and powerlessness—in each position of the system: top, bottom, and middle. Seek to change situations of "power over" to ones of "power with," so that everyone can share in the benefits of change.

72 WORK WITH OTHERS FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Lasting social change needs to happen at three levels: the political (decision-making arena); the social (the hearts and minds of the

people); and the structural (the institutions that define the structure of society). The structural level is the hardest to change because there is great inertia and a strong habit of beliefs and behaviors that support the status quo.

We know that inertia can be overcome when there is enough momentum. Momentum comes from joining forces, building movements and cooperative alliances. We also know that large-scale action, to be effective, must be well organized and free from the infighting and power struggles that sap such efforts.

- Find your social change partners. Join with organizations that are doing the kind of work you support.
- Be daring in your choice of allies. Build revolutionary partnerships—look for individuals and groups that you might never have thought of as logical partners, perhaps those who occupy a position far from yours on the spectrum. Sometimes the most effective links are the ones that seem the least likely, where people have to come from great distances to find their common interests.
- Build alliances, coalitions, and movements. Joined forces are more powerful than individual ones.
- Seek out the institutions that can most effect change—those that shape the lives of many, such as the media, the educational process, religion, business associations, political parties. Work within these systems for the structural changes that will replace a culture of discrimination, abuse of power, and lack of respect with one that is empowering and inclusive of all.
- Be patient yet persistent. Social change—building a culture of peace—takes time and sustained effort. Support one another in remaining hopeful and in trusting the ultimate success of your mission.



REVIEW

Practice the Four Principles of Peace and Social Change

COMMUNITY

Honor the dignity of all, and work for social justice.

COOPERATION

Find allies and partners in the search for structural change.

NONVIOLENCE

Keep the dialogue going, especially with those you see as oppressors.

WITNESS

Be a living witness for peace.



GETTING INVOLVED

A lot of people notice the injustices of our society but never seem to find the time or energy to do something concrete about them. The man in this story was like that for a long time, until one day he got motivated to action. By involving his friends and colleagues, he was able to catalyze meaningful change in his community.

Some people turn away when they see the homeless on the streets, with their shopping carts and cardboard tents. Not me—I always stop on my way to work and say, “Hello, how’re you doing?” and offer spare change. I’ve come close to losing my own home through financial difficulties, so I understand how vulnerable we all can be.

I never thought of myself as an activist, though, until my city passed a set of anti-loitering and panhandling laws. It seems the powerful business interests in town didn’t want the tourists scared away by the street people. Through Sam, who regularly “camps out” in the alley beside my office building, I met several homeless folks and a variety of people from social service agencies and good samaritan groups serving them. What was missing was an interest from the private sector.

I began talking to my colleagues at work and in my business associations. I was surprised to find several people who wanted to get involved, but didn’t know how. Together we started the Shelter Committee, a vehicle for exploring the root causes of the growing problem of homelessness in our community. Our research plus our credibility allowed us to be a link between the various groups addressing the needs of the homeless and those making the public policies—and, of course, with the homeless themselves, who were always included in our discussions.

A year of active coalition building resulted in a sharp increase in available low-cost housing, a special fund for preventing families from losing their homes, and the repeal of the more odious anti-homeless laws. There are still too many people with no place to call home, but at least we’ve made a start.



RESOURCE GUIDE

Check within your local community for groups involved in the social justice, change, and activist topics that interest you. Here are some suggestions:

PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Worldwide campaigning movement to promote human rights. AI and its members take action to free prisoners of conscience; ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture, and other cruel treatment of prisoners; and end political killings and “disappearances.”

NEW YORK, NY; PHONE: 212-807-8400;

E-MAIL: admin-us@aiusa.org; WEB SITE: www.aiusa.org

THE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

An independent, interfaith, nonprofit organization responding to war, racism, and global economic injustice, helping people find alternatives that incorporate justice and reconciliation into an active quest for peace in everyday lives.

ST. LOUIS, MO; PHONE: 314-533-4445; FAX: 314-715-6455;

E-MAIL: ipj@ipj-ppj.org; WEB SITE: www.ipj-ppj.org

PEACE ACTION

A national membership, grassroots peace and disarmament organization. Peace Action is committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, redirection of excessive Pentagon spending, an end to global weapon sales, and non-military resolutions to international conflicts.

WASHINGTON, DC; PHONE: 202-862-9740; FAX: 202-862-9762;

E-MAIL: jbridgman@peace-action.org;

WEB SITE: www.peace-action.org