

# *Just* ~~FAITH~~ **MATTERS**



## **Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good**

**Facilitator Packet  
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**SAMPLE MATERIAL**

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**Living Solidarity:  
Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good**

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**“Every individual and every community shares in and is responsible for promoting the common good. Faithful to their ethical and religious vocation, communities of believers should take the lead in asking whether [the] human family has adequate means at its disposal to achieve the global common good.”**

*Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems  
in the Context of Global Public Authority,  
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican City, October 2011*

**“The teachings of the Church insist that government has a moral function: protecting human rights and securing basic justice for all members of the commonwealth. Society as a whole and in all its diversity is responsible for building up the common good. But it is the government's role to guarantee the minimum conditions that make this rich social activity possible, namely, human rights and justice. This obligation also falls on individual citizens as they choose their representatives and participate in shaping public opinion.”**

*Economic Justice For All, (#122), U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986*



## **Living Solidarity: Government, the Federal Budget and the Common Good**

Welcome to the JustMatters module on economic matters related to the government, the federal budget and the common good! Together we are at an important juncture and are facing a critical question, “*What kind of society do we wish to become?*” Underlying this important values question are lively debates and disagreements about the role of government, what functions we should share together, and how we pay for them.

This is a popular education curriculum for adult learners. It aims to both draw on experience and encourage reflection. There are many questions listed with each activity. The facilitator will be responsible for posing the questions but is not expected to have an answer or to be the expert on any of the questions.

Most likely, many people will not have an opinion on many of the questions – or won’t feel qualified to register an opinion. This module, however, is designed to deeply engage all participants as citizens and actors, not as experts. It is designed to engage values - especially Gospel values - rather than opinions.

In Session Seven, there is a structured mini-debate. This should be a spirited but not acrimonious activity. It is important to keep the tone fun and informative.

### **Features of the Module Design**

#### **A. Mini-Interviews**

As part of the preparation for each session, participants will briefly interview a person they do not know on the theme(s) of the module. These should not be viewed as an onerous or weighty assignment. The interview could be a two-minute conversation standing in the line at the grocery store - or more involved. There are different questions for each session. The goals of the interviews are:

- To have participants move outside their own “comfort zone” and talk to a stranger about the topic, gaining an additional perspective or insight.
- To bring additional voices into session conversations.

#### **B. Journaling/Reflection**

Participants will be expected to keep a small journal of their reflections on each of the sessions and the themes or topics covered. These are private and not for sharing, unless a participant eagerly wants to share something in their journal

### C. Web Surfing

Another part of the preparation for each session is web surfing. Several websites with articles to look at are provided in the Participant Packet. If a participant does not have easy access to the internet or is not comfortable with using the internet, s/he can pair with someone who is for this learning activity. All participants are encouraged to engage in this activity in some way.

### **Creating a Prayerful Environment for Dialogue**

The facilitator and participants must give careful attention to creating an environment where each person feels free to share his/her ideas and feelings and where each person is committed to carefully and genuinely considering what each of the other participants has to say. With this in mind, the group will develop some ground rules or guidelines for discussion.

Prayer is an integral part of the JustMatters process. Each session begins and ends with a prayer experience.



**Living Solidarity:  
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**SESSION ONE: Our Experience with Government**



**Participants have no advance reading for this session.**

**Note**

This first session will be used primarily to get to know one another. Writer and organizational consultant, Meg Wheatley, says you cannot be afraid of someone whose story you know, and learning more of each other's stories will build trust for some of the difficult discussions that lie ahead.

A great deal of this session is aimed at getting people to describe their own experiences and attitudes. Another important objective of this session is to “set the tone” for dialogue.

**Objectives for Session One**

- Create a safe space to explore personal attitudes and feelings about government
- Learn from one another about your experiences with government and the common good

**Session One Outline and Notes**

**Welcome and Opening Prayer**

The goal of this popular education curriculum is to move beyond reflexive biases and myths and to create a space for thoughtful dialogue, not debate, about the role of government and how to pay for it. Participants are not here to change each other's minds, but to be deepened by one another's experiences.

Too much authority has been ceded to economists and those whom we consider “experts” on the economy. It is vital that all of us engage the conversation and bring our values to conversations about the economy. Catholic social teaching, like most faith traditions, reminds us that we are responsible for ourselves AND for the common good. One of the

ways in which we do this is through government that we hold together. To the extent there are things we don't like about government, we are responsible for fixing it. Being informed and engaged about the government and budget issues is part of our civic and religious responsibility.

“What kind of society do we wish to become?” We will now begin to engage that conversation!

### **Opening Prayer – lead by facilitator**

Facilitator and one participant each read one of the following two sentences, to draw people into stillness:

***Let us be still!***

***Let us be quiet!***

Pause

***Listen to the quiet sound of your own breathing...***

***The give and the take of life...***

***The breath upon which all life depends.***

Pause

***Catch your breath ...***

***remember the FREE gift...***

***of life... of water... of air.***

Pause

***Let us acknowledge, with living flame...***

***the Source of All Breath...***

***the Giver of Life whose air, water, fire, earth and worlds we share...***

***the Presence at the heart of our lives.***

Volunteer reader lights the pillar candle (holding it up) while the facilitator offers the following questions for silent reflection:

***Whose world is it anyway?***

***Who's REALLY in charge after all?***

Pause

Volunteer places the lit candle on the prayer table and takes the loaf of bread and places it beside the candle while the facilitator says:

***Let us listen to the story of hungry people in the wilderness.***

**Read Exodus 16:2-3.**

Pause

Offer the following questions for quiet reflection:

*Where does it all come from - the source of life, the resources for living?*

*Who is it all for?*

Pause

Conclude with this thanksgiving:

*Giver of Life,*

*Accept our thankful hearts*

*for the abundance of life which you so freely share.*

*Amen.*

### **Introductions**

Begin with each person stating their name, parish/church, and one or two things about what they do.

After everyone has done this, go around a second time, asking everyone to say their name again and to speak for 1 to 2 minutes about this question: *What were you raised to think about government and the role of government?*

### **Group Guidelines and Role of Facilitator**

The guidelines offered were created for JustFaith groups so they may look familiar to many of participants. They are offered as a starting point for conversation about the guidelines the group will adopt to assure positive, respectful, and productive discussions.

The facilitator will ask if there are behaviors listed (in the handout of group guidelines) that they want to change and if there are behaviors not listed that they would like to see added. The list will be amended as suggested. If needed, the list will be revised and copies of the adjusted guidelines distributed at the next session.

### **Group Brainstorm: Economic Signs of the Times**

These next two activities are designed to ground the group's conversations in their own stories. For many people, topics like "government" or "taxes" are highly controversial. Before tackling these directly, this activity will be used to get participants to think more broadly and personally about financial security (or insecurity) and the state of the economy.

This is a brainstorm exercise and, therefore, is designed to elicit brief responses to the question posed and to create a list of ideas without a lot of conversation.

### **Impacts of the Great Recession**

Participants will pair off and respond to these questions: *Is the economic downturn touching you or someone you love? How so? Do you fear it could touch you?*

After each member of the pair has had a chance to talk, each participant will have the opportunity to share some of their thoughts. However, no one is obliged to comment.

## Break

## Announcements

### Personal Survey

Participants will have 8-9 minutes to complete a personal survey about the economy. The survey will ask for your opinions and impressions and your knowledge of government, taxes and budget issues. The survey will not be shared with anyone. Once you are finished, you will put the survey in the envelope, seal it and write your name on it. The facilitator will collect all the envelopes and give them back to you during the last session. At that time, you will have an opportunity to share with others, if you like, but there will be no pressure to do so.

### Discussion

This is an open-ended discussion about the government and your individual experiences.

Types of questions for this discussion:

- Has the economic crisis led you to rethink the role of government?
- Are there systems or structures that mitigate against effective government?
- What are examples of government functioning well that we can think of?
- What are specific examples of government mis-functioning? Why is this happening?
- What would lead to greater trust in government?

### Closing Prayer – lead by facilitator

Call everyone to a moment of silence.

Ask the reader to hold up the loaf of bread while facilitator offers the following questions for quiet reflection:

***Who is hungry this day?***

***What are we hungry for...***

***food, dignity, friendship, hope, meaning,  
a share in the promise of abundant life...?***

Invite participants to briefly name the hunger, the hungry people, or hungry places in their world.

Pause after everyone has spoken.

Ask participants this reflection question:

***What or who prevents you - and us - from sharing in God's abundance?***

Pass the loaf of bread around the group, inviting everyone to break off a piece.  
As the loaf is being shared, read ***Luke 6: 38***.

End with the following prayer of commendation:  
***As it is with God's world, may it be with our lives...  
blessed, broken, shared ... for the well-being of all.***

***Amen.***



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**SESSION TWO: The Common Good and Government**



**Note**

Session Two begins to introduce information about the role of government and its connection with Gospel values and Catholic social teaching. It is designed to lay a values framework for subsequent discussions. This values thread will be held throughout all discussions.

This session introduces the concept of “the commons” which probably will be new for most people. The commons is an old concept that is being revived as a way to talk about the stuff we hold together but that no one owns.

**Learning Objectives**

- Review some key principles or themes of Catholic social teaching as they relate to economic life and the common good
- Prepare for subsequent discussions about the role of government, government budgets and taxation that are grounded in religious teachings
- Introduce the concept of the commons or commonwealth

**Session Two Outline and Notes**

**Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Session Two will begin by continuing to get to know one another. Participants will introduce themselves in a way that is connected to the topic. During this session you also will be introduced to the concept of “the commons.”

**Opening Prayer**

Ask three readers to slowly read these three phrases, to draw people into stillness:

***Be still!***

***Be quiet!***

***Be ready to receive the gift of this moment!***

Pause

Facilitator continues with these words:

***Put yourself into a receptive position:  
rest you hands on your lap  
with your palms upturned  
as though you were receiving a gift.***

Open the bible and read **Exodus 16: 4 - 5.**

Pause

Offer this question for quiet reflection:

***To whom do the earth and all her bounty really belong?***

Pause

Invite everyone to take out a dollar bill and examine it for a moment. Then offer these questions for reflection:

***What is money for?  
What does it tell us about value, or worth, or God?***

Pause

With the marker, write (in bold letters) on one side of the manila envelope, the phrase:  
***“IN GOD WE TRUST”***

Pass the manila envelope around the group, and ask everyone to put their dollar bill into it. Then put the envelope back on the prayer table.

Conclude with this invocation:

***Source of All Life,  
We depend upon your generous abundance to feed our bodies and nourish our souls.  
May we be free to live up to our name ... as children of an outpouring God. Amen.***

## **Introduction**

Following a reading that is done aloud, everyone will be given a few moments of silence to think of one or two ways that government has touched their life in the last 24 hours. The facilitator will start this segment by sharing a personal example or two about him/herself. Then each of the participants will share their own personal examples in no more than 1-2 minutes. (The amount of time will vary depending on the size of the group.)

## Catholic Social Teaching and the Economy

The group will do a brief examination of six principles or themes of Catholic social teaching. Some of these may be familiar to you; some may not. Most will be recognized as themes in all faith traditions.

Each principle/theme will be read aloud and then participants will be given time to quietly reflect on each particular principle. After all the principles have been read, participants will be given the opportunity to share with the group one or two of the principles that have particular personal meaning for them.

## Break

## Announcements

### An Introduction to The Commons

The group will begin to explore the concept of the commons or “common wealth.” The commons offers an important framework for understanding the role of government.

Participants will consider the main sources of wealth and security in their life and be invited to draw or write their responses. Responses will be shared in pairs and then with group, as each person desires.

The group will then discuss the readings for this session using open-ended, opinion questions that do not have a “correct” answer.

### Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Call everyone to a moment of silence.

With a marker, write (in bold letters) on the other side of the manila envelope (used in the opening prayer) with the dollar bills the word: **“COMMON-WEALTH”**.

Share this reflection:

***The word “ALMS” or “ALMS GIVING”  
is rooted in the Greek word for being compassionate.  
Giving alms, being compassionate,  
is NOT optional for disciples of Jesus.***

Read **Matthew 6: 2 - 3**.

Then share the following:

***Giving alms is our tithe, our “love tax,” freely given to those most in need.  
Let us silently call to mind the people in need in our community.***

Pause

***Let us name those people!***

As participants speak the names of needy people or populations, write those names on the envelope.

Pause

***Let us silently call to mind the people who serve them.***

Pause

***Let us now name those ministries and agencies that extend compassionate care.***

As participants speak the names of caring ministries and agencies, again, write those names on the envelope.

After everyone has spoken, offer the following:

***Glory to You, Source of All Being!***

***May your love never be withheld,***

***but flow freely,***

***like a merciful rain***

***for a parched people.***

Pause

***Amen.***

Invite everyone to add to the common-wealth collection.  
Share this love tithe with one of the agencies listed.