

Using Film as a Medium for Advocacy: Facilitating Discussion

Because people connect emotionally with film it is a good way to motivate people to take action! Before that can happen however, it is very important to help people unpack their cinematic experience. Use this guide to help encourage discussion and explore how using their new knowledge the group can promote change to the system and be personally transformed. You should make each screening and discussion your own, so these are guidelines that can be modified where needed.

If Dialogue Stalls

- Ask about what they see as the film's specific mission, goals, and possibilities. Do they see this as a film that can reach a variety of people?
- Propose alternative institutional models to our current corporate and government models to stimulate conversation. Do they think our current models take power and influence away from the populace and give it to the institution's leaders?
- Ask what *they* expect from a forum like this. Are they looking for a more emotional outlet for anxiety or frustration with which the film leaves them, or for suggestions on how they can work to make our world a better place?

Structure

- Moderator outlines ground rules for discussions.
- Moderator introduces Biblical text either before or after questions.
- Moderator poses questions to participants on these topics.
- In groups of 10 or more people, splitting up into smaller groups of 4-5 is usually helpful so that everyone gets a chance to speak.
- If there's time after feelings have been sufficiently explored, action ideas should be discussed at the end.

Moderator Guidelines

- The moderator should facilitate discussion, not lecture or teach.
- You don't have to be an expert to show a film – in fact, it's better if you're not! Rather the movie functions as the "expert" and the facilitator is an equal amongst the other participants in learning and exploring.
- The moderator should never tell a member their thoughts or feelings are wrong. You want people to be *transformed* and to explore their own feelings on the issue, not yours.
- The moderator should encourage respect and guide the conversation in ways that the group has agreed upon through consensus methods.
- Some images in a film may be disturbing to participants. Some ideas or information could be new to others. Leave enough time to digest emotions, or get more information on topics if needed.

Example Ground Rules

- Respect
- Mutuality
- Everyone should feel they can speak if they want to, but no one MUST speak to participate.
- Blatant attacks and hate speech, on corporations and governments are not allowed. For example, "I hate Bush" and "Enron sucks."
- If more time for discussion is needed, an additional meeting time should be set up to allow for discussion and action ideas.

Things to Avoid

- Didactic answers and individual agendas. Try to gear the discussion towards suggestions and experiences.
- Questions about stories in the film. For example, "What happened to the Fox News reporters?" Keep focus on topics.
- All forms of straying and digressing. All topics and conversation should spring from the film, and be grounded in the issues it brings up.

Questions

Note: Refer to the United Church of Christ's "Privatization" resource for further questions and Biblical reflections on this topic.

Please keep in mind these are only suggestions - feel free to create your own or modify them to fit the context of your individual church or group.

1. What story/person did you connect with most strongly and why?
2. How did you feel about the way the World Bank and International Monetary Fund rationalized privatization in these countries?
 - a. Where do you see the greatest difference between the economic theories and the realities of what people are facing as a result of structural adjustment, debt payments, trade liberalization, or privatization?
3. Raise your hands if this was completely new knowledge. If so, did you like how it was presented? If you already knew about the economic concepts and information, what in the film resonated with you in a new way?

Note: There will be different levels of understanding of the topics when each person sees the film. The impact (as well as the emotion) is the strongest when you learn something for the first time. It is good to be aware of the group dynamic when you're screening films within a mixed crowd. Remember, film is a great entry point for folks who have never been involved with advocacy before.

Another way to pose this question, is "What shocked you the most?"

4. Did you realize there are negative effects of privatization in developed countries, such as the United States (health care is a good example)? How do we tend to view developed nations versus developing nations?
5. Can capitalism and democracy co-exist?
 - a. How can corporations be obliged to have a stake in the sharing of their power, and in the social quality of their services?

6. Do you think the World Bank and IMF are the root cause of inequality in the global economy, or is it consumerism, capitalism, or all three?

7. What do you think of free trade agreements? Can you describe how they have impacted your life? How about their impact on poor countries?

8. Who should make the decisions about ownership of the “commons” and how? Consider natural resources (water, land, air, food, etc) and citizen services (education, health, media, police, etc). How should they be managed and maintained?

9. List the top 10 essential life services (such as water sanitation, health care, education, electricity, transportation) that humans need to live a life with dignity, as a child of God. Should these things be guaranteed by our governments? If so, how?

10. “I make plenty of money, but I work hard for it. I put in long hours and worked hard to get where I am so that I can buy the essentials for myself and my family. Why should the government give any guarantees to people who don’t deserve it?” What is your response to this common statement?

Note: Think about disabled workers, the elderly, children, single parents.

Sample Biblical Reflections

Adapted from the United Church of Christ’s “Privatization” resource.

Read Genesis: 41:25–37; 47:13–21

The story of Joseph and the famine gives us insight into how we understand what is going on around us. Although Joseph is considered one of the heroes of the faith in our Judeo-Christian heritage, let us consider this story from a different perspective.

In the story, Joseph has endeared himself to Pharaoh because of his industry, guile, and loyalty. Pharaoh has a troubling dream and approaches Joseph to interpret it (Gen. 41:1–24). Joseph tells Pharaoh that the dream is intended to warn him of an impending seven-year famine. Joseph further interprets the dream to mean that Pharaoh is to store up grain against that crisis, and Pharaoh agrees to the plan (Gen. 41:25–37).

The dream becomes reality, and in the midst of the subsequent famine, the Israelites are forced to come to Pharaoh for help.

Joseph, on behalf of Pharaoh, uses the leverage he has gained by having the only food in the area, to buy all the land and make the Israelites slaves (Gen. 47). This story gives us the backdrop for the bondage and oppression of the Israelites. It also provides the prelude to the freeing of the slaves and exodus. But it also can offer another insight. Consider what happens here. This story portrays how control of a basic necessity for life can provide unmitigated power over the lives of others. It shows how that power leads to the oppression of others. One can argue that Joseph just uses his own considerable intellectual resources, and the people who did not prepare suffer the consequences for not being ready for possible disasters.

However, such arguments run counter to our understanding of human compassion and love for our neighbor. Seen from this perspective, the commodification of basic

life necessities holds remarkable parallels to the biblical story. We see today how the contemporary “pharaohs” of the world have used the rules of the global economy to appropriate large shares of the world’s resources so that people have to come to them to buy necessities of life.

Just as Joseph extracted an unjust price for food, so corporations have been able to reap lucrative profits from selling what should be a human right—the access to adequate water, electricity, transportation, education, or health care to sustain life.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14–26

In this well-known passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul writes about the church as the body of Christ. Paul’s description may also be read as an exploration of the concept of community itself, and the community Paul describes is not unlike twenty-first century communities across the United States. The body is a metaphor for the connectedness of the member parts and for mutual dependence, each one with needs and each able to serve the others. Paul emphasizes the importance of unity and a sense of belonging in the midst of a wide diversity of roles and gifts. Paul’s community embodies responsibility and caring, especially for the least privileged and most vulnerable.

Historically, in the United States, our society has protected the needs of the whole community, the body, with public services paid for with taxes and regulated by law. While the Bible never specifically names things such as electricity as an institutional part of community (because agrarian societies in biblical times had no electricity) our Christian theology of mutual support, care, and nurturing has caused people of faith to support public systems that enrich all the members for the mutual benefit of all.

Brainstorming Session for Action

- As followers of Christ, it is our responsibility to discern the will of God for appropriate Christian responses within our specific community in our specific time.
- Working against the forces of an oppressive global economic system, corrupt government, degradation of the earth, and discrimination may look different in New York City than in Lincoln, Nebraska.
- It is best to brainstorm action steps in community in a large group session.
- Always incorporate Biblical reflection into an action brainstorming session.
- Focus attention on both systemic and personal changes that we can work towards.
- You may want to write all the suggestions on a large sheet of paper first, and then choose just one or two achievable goals your groups wants to work on.
- Channeling emotions of hopelessness, sadness, or anger into positive action is an important reason why we need to do follow up actions after we’ve seen a moving film.
- To implement a good action plan, you need clear timelines, and attainable, measurable goals. Instead of a goal that says: “We will educate our community about free trade”, think of saying: “By March, we will transition our church’s coffee consumption to all fair-trade brands.” Or “We will host an educational event at church in June, aiming for 75 participants, on the benefits on fair trade coffee.”
- Plan follow up meetings to keep each other accountable!

Part One: Brainstorming for Systemic Change

How can we impact the larger systems and the parts of the global economy that oppress people throughout the world?

If dialogue stalls during the action brainstorming session, below are some suggestions to get folks thinking. Only use these if the group can not come up with their own ideas.

- Use the resources of resistance already in place: participate in rallies and protest corporate policies; complain loudly and in writing; support activist groups; keep watching, keep thinking, and keep fighting!
- Write an op-ed or letter to the editor for your local paper.
- Keep track of corporate donations to political campaigns – raise questions on campaign donations at a town hall meeting with candidates running for publicly elected offices.
- Hold elected officials accountable by asking questions on the global economy during campaigns and town hall meetings.
- Write your Congressional representatives or plan a face to face meeting in their office to express concerns on the issues raised in the film.
- Write World Bank and IMF officials.
- Join the Jubilee Campaign to support debt cancellation without harmful conditionalities through the Jubilee Act in Congress. www.jubileeusa.org

Part Two: Brainstorming for Personal Transformation

Note: Engaging in local actions increases personalizes the movement.

How can we make changes in our lifestyle and our personal spending habits to impact the larger systems and the parts of the global economy that oppress people throughout the world?

If dialogue stalls during the action brainstorming session, below are some suggestions to get folks thinking. Only use these if the group can not come up with their own ideas.

- Create a process that sets and grades standards of business practices so your church members can make choices according to their personal values. (www.greenpages.org)
- Invest in socially responsible mutual funds.
- Donate to charities that work in countries to build sustainable development projects and alternatives to World Bank and IMF projects.
- Buy locally and fairly traded products whenever possible.
- Support unions and worker cooperatives.
- Become a Jubilee Congregation – engaging your home church in activism and education surrounding debt and conditionalities. www.jubileeusa.org
- Live simply, buy less.