‘Thick Description’ and Interfaith Solidarity for Social Justice

Interfaith in Action: Working for Social Justice
Our Whole Society Conference
Vancouver, BC
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Ronald A. Kuipers

Q10: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT TO CHRISTIAN FAITH?

264 responses

- Having and nurturing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as my Saviour
- Following God’s commandments and doing what is right
- Understanding the Bible and applying it to today’s world
- Believing in the Bible and important church teachings
- Performing acts of mercy and charity
- Engaging in life-long discipleship
- Being involved with a community of believers who worship and live out their faith together
- Practicing spiritual disciplines
- Living out the Great Commission by bringing more people to Christ
- Supporting efforts to identify and address systemic injustice

RANK ORDERED
Q12: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE MEANING OF JUSTICE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice means that people are treated fairly</td>
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<td>Justice means that those who break laws are held accountable</td>
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<td>Justice means that the “root causes” of what keeps people in need and powerlessness are addressed</td>
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<td>Justice means that systemic barriers that lead to injustice are dismantled</td>
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<td>Justice means that there is restoration where broken relationships are made right again</td>
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<td>Justice means that people who are in need receive help/aid</td>
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<td>Justice means that people who are otherwise excluded are now included</td>
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<td>Justice means that people get the reward or punishment that they deserve</td>
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Q19: IF YOU HAD TO WRITE A ONE SENTENCE DEFINITION OF “JUSTICE”, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

208 responses

Responses were coded according to the concept in the definition; each code is a unique concept. 37 responses included multiple concepts and were coded more than once. 18 responses (9%) were unable to be coded, for various reasons.

- Nearly one quarter of all respondents (23%, or 47 respondents) included concepts of fairness, equity or equality in their definition of justice. Responses indicated a strong theme of fair or equal treatment without discriminating based on gender, race or ethnicity, or past actions.
- The next highest proportion of respondents (14%, or 29 respondents) defined justice as doing what is right in God’s eyes, or faithful Christian living by doing what God requires.
- All other responses gathered less than 8% (16 or fewer) of respondents.

In total, 28 distinct concepts were identified. The chart on the following page shows the top 18 concepts ranked by number of respondents who included it.
Q28: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE FOLLOWING HELPED OR MOTIVATED YOU TO WORK FOR JUSTICE?

249 Responses

- A clearly articulated vision for pursuing justice
- Seeing the example of others who promote and do justice work
- Hearing stories of justice work
- The work of CRC agencies and offices
- My personal involvement with people who are experiencing
- The work of other faith-based, justice-related agencies
- Becoming directly involved in justice work myself
- The Reformed theological and philosophical tradition
- My congregation’s involvement in works of justice
- Experiencing injustice in my own life
- My congregation’s stated vision for pursuing justice
- Events or conferences that promote justice awareness
- The CRC denomination’s statements on justice

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Q29: WHAT ELSE MAKES YOU INTERESTED OR EXCITED ABOUT WORKING FOR JUSTICE?

82 responses

Respondents were asked what else, besides the options in Question 28, interested or excited them about working for justice. Two other enablers of doing justice emerged as strong themes:

- **Doing justice as an expression of faithful Christian living**, or as an act of fulfilling God's call on our lives.
  
  *“That it is God’s work and that we use our gifts to help others”*
  
  *“Knowing that it is part of extending God's kingdom”*
  
  *“I feel it is our calling as Christians to work for justice”*

- **Seeing the results of working for justice**, or hearing about the positive impact of justice work.
  
  *“Seeing and experiencing positive results from it”*
  
  *“Seeing the difference in the lives of those receiving justice”*
  
  *“Seeing other people’s lives changed”*

Several respondents also indicated that learning more about injustice or becoming aware of injustice around them encouraged them to become involved in justice work. A few respondents indicated that having something specific to do in response to an injustice motivated them to do justice.
1. To what extent does a tension between individual and communal priorities exist in the spiritual self-understanding of our various religious communities? What can people of different faiths learn about their own style of religious comportment by exploring this question together?

2. How can interfaith dialogue and action use, rather than reduce, the variety of ways religious people express a commitment to social justice?

3. How can interfaith action for social justice honour particular religious differences in ways that also encourage religious citizens to move beyond their particular religious enclaves in a spirit of civic co-operation?