

# Priorities Discernment: Resources for Centering

*FCNL encourages you to engage with the priorities process in whatever way is most appropriate to your gathering. As you gather in worshipful consideration of FCNL's legislative priorities for the coming two years, we offer these queries and readings as an optional resource to help ground and center your group.*

Friends' belief in "that of God in every person" must be more than just a deterrent to violence and war. If all are created in God's image and God is present in some capacity in everyone we meet, then to treat any person as less than human or less than equally deserving of basic justice and human dignity is to deny and mistreat that of God in them. **What public policies best advance the aspiration to recognize that of God in every person? How should the call to unselfish living and the instruction to "consider others better than yourselves" and to "look not only to your interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3,4) shape our response to injustice in the world?**

We are mindful that our nation has a special responsibility to redress the consequences of our history of slavery and genocide, together with ongoing race-based discrimination and oppression. With each priority, we strive to identify, expose and work to eliminate institutional racism, institutional sexism, and other forms of systemic discrimination. **How could the choices we are contemplating affect those who have been harmed by systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and/or internal racism? To what degree have privilege, class, stereotypes, assumptions, and our ability to include other perspectives affected this decision making process?**

"Gandhi believed Jesus when he said to turn the other cheek. Gandhi brought down the British Empire, deeply injured the caste system, and changed the world. Mother Teresa believed Jesus when he said everybody was priceless, even the ugly ones, even the smelly ones, and Mother Teresa changed the world by showing them that a human being can be selfless ... Can you imagine if Christians actually believed that God was trying to rescue us from the pit of our own self-addictions? Can you imagine? Can you imagine what Americans would do if they understood that over half the world was living in poverty? Do you think they would change the way they live, the products they purchase, and the politicians they elect? **If we believed the right things, the true things, there wouldn't be very many problems on earth. But the trouble with deep belief is that it costs something. And there is something inside me, some selfish beast of a subtle thing that doesn't like the truth at all because it carries responsibility, and if I actually believe these things, I have to do something about them.**"

— Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*

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**Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

— Matthew 6:33

Consider what seeking the kingdom of God means in the context of public policy. What societal conditions and public policies are inconsistent with truth as Friends understand it? What areas need focus to increase agreement with God's character, values, and intentions? **What would the world be like if God was fully in charge, if God's values were fully embraced and God's intentions fully expressed?**

Friends seek to perceive truth and know God through worship, study, and service. We seek to live in faithful agreement and cooperation with our understanding of God's desires and intentions for all things—a way of living Jesus often called the kingdom of God. **What do you think of as “the kingdom of God”? What does Jesus teach about God's kingdom? (Suggested readings: Matthew 10:7, Mark 12:34, Luke 17:21, John 18:36)**

Time and again, the Bible tells stories of people who listened to God but were ignored by society's leaders. During the period of Israel's and Judah's monarchies, the prophets often spoke or wrote to call on their kings to rule with justice and faithfulness to God's intentions. New Testament Christians were instructed both to speak and to live prophetically as a way of challenging authorities to do what was right. **In what areas do we need to call upon government to more fully embrace truth and justice?**

**“To live in that state of tension which enables us to be at the same time critic and friend of the government, to study its workings sufficiently, to be able to help religious insight become political action, remains part of our duty and call. And withal and beyond all, to maintain an abiding faith in the power of good to overcome evil, to live in that way of loving service for which we all most deeply yearn: nothing less than this kind of energetic commitment of our whole lives can satisfy the inner sanctuary of the human spirit.”**

— Clarence Pickett, American Friends Service Committee Executive Secretary, 1929–1950

“How can someone experience the Divine Presence and remain forever silent? How does a person encounter the Eternal One's prophetic call upon one's life and yet not think about the implications of that call? How does an individual meet Christ in worship, but then have nothing to say about the friendship that emerges from that meeting? **How can we survey the social and cultural terrain of our day without asking what response faith demands to the surrounding landscape?**”

— Jay Marshall, former dean of Earlham School of Religion