

Class Aware: Class and Classism in Congregational Life

Suzanne Zilber, Ph.D. 6th Edition, 2023 www.uufames.org/class-aware

Overview of the 6 Modules

- Each module is 2 hours with a break midway.
- The modules are designed to build on cumulative knowledge and are not designed to be used individually, except for Module 1 and the youth module.
- Some activities can be used as stand-alone experiences.
- Each adult module starts with a chalice lighting reading, review of covenant, and ends with an extinguishing chalice reading.
- Each module ends with a closing circle where participants express an intention for a small action.
- Modules have videoclips accessible for free.
- Most modules end with reading assignments that are all handouts in the curriculum.
- If a participant needs to miss a session, it is possible to share a module complete with handouts and activities by email for them to catch up.

Module 1: Class as Culture

Facilitators introduce their backgrounds and motivation for work on social class. Participants are given an orientation to the full curriculum, agree on a covenant, and share their motivations for participating. The group discusses why class is not discussed enough in the United States. A video clip from People Like Us is shared to begin thinking about class cultural differences and review the strong emotions that class issues can elicit. Participants assess where in childhood they were on the current class hierarchy, where they are now, and where they would want to be. They share their discoveries in a pair. In the large group discussion, the focus is on identifying class indicators – including how things beyond finances are used for others to decide what class a person is in. Participants reflect individually on what messages they got for survival based on their class in childhood and then share in trios and the large group.

Module 2: Classism

Participants discuss their reactions to a pre-reading summarizing differences between working-class culture and professional middle-class cultures in pairs and the large group. Participants discuss reactions to pre-reading statistics handout about income gaps and poverty levels broken out by race, ethnicity, sexual and gender orientation, disability, and age. The group reviews different forms of power and then watches a video that addresses the intersections of race, class and environmental issues, to then review sources of power represented in the speaker's stories. Participants read out loud or pass on readings of definitions of types of classism, including casteism. Facilitators introduce the concept of meritocracy and the readings on meritocracy for the next session.

Module 3: Sources of Economic Inequality in the U.S.

Participants discuss their reactions to the meritocracy readings. Mini-lectures and videos on how capitalism is designed to increase inequality over time, how private equity is destructive, and overall policy contributions to inequality. Concept of racialized capitalism is introduced and the role whiteness plays in perpetrating inequality that hurts whites as well as the groups that white people resent. Video is followed by trio and large group sharing. Participants discuss the main ideas from the book (UU Common Read) *The New Jim Crow*. The history of oppression of whites in poverty is shared with minilecture and video. Group brainstorms on how sexism contributes to inequality.

Module 4: Consequences of and Solutions for Economic Inequality in the U.S.

Facilitators lead a quiz game about U.S. policies and structures that have led to extreme inequality. A moral framework on economies is shared. Participants share what they believe the wage gap should be between an entry level worker and a CEO. Mini-lecture on whether money buys happiness. Participants review and discuss evidence that inequality levels alone harms societies by watching a video with Richard Wilkinson and then discussing in trios and the large group. Participants explore what facilitates and serves as barriers to political action in pairs and in the large group.

Module 5: Classism and Awareness Efforts in our Congregations

Participants discuss their reactions to readings about class in the Unitarian Universalist faith. Facilitators share information on current UU membership and potential to grow the faith through increasing class sensitivity. UUA books *Widening the Circle of Concern* and *Class Action* referenced. Participants review possible domains of congregational classism and then break into groups to examine those domains in the congregation, camp, institute or other UU institution. The groups create skits, role plays or graphics to share what they evaluated and recommend and share with the larger group. Facilitators take and gather notes from groups for follow-up that is sensitive to institutional efforts already underway. People share in pairs about their experiences this session.

Module 6: Cross-Class Activism

Participants share reactions to prior session and to reading about a framework for labeling class divisions. Participants share reactions in pairs and then the large group to a Cross-Class Capacity Tool from *Showing up for Racial Justice (SURJ)*. Participants review how class differences, now specifically including people in poverty and owning-class individuals, impact working in group settings. Participants are invited to discuss political and charitable giving as ways to reduce inequality. Participants read character statements representing stages of class and classism awareness by William Liu. Participants receive a handout with resources for further action and self-education within UU and without. Participants have a longer closing circle for facilitators to express appreciation to participants and to express intentions for action.

Middle and High School Youth Module

Youth are divided into groups with different levels of wealth to spend on materials to keep a “Baby Raw Egg” safe from harm when dropped from a one-story height. Outcomes of the contest and experience are discussed. A list of class privileges relevant to teens is shared while youth gather a bean or bead for each privilege and then line up or don’t to discuss feelings, observations, and new understandings. Youth may be offered any of the handouts from the adult curriculum that the facilitators feel will be useful.