

## What is youth topics?

Topical issues to get young people thinking >>> fun – games, discussion starters, quizzes... >>> for people working with young people >>> sent to you twice a year >>> putting faith into action (youth topics is recommended to be used with young people aged 12-17 >>> feel free to adapt the content to suit the particular age and needs of your group.)

### How to use



- 1 Read it through once to get a feel for the programme.
- 2 Choose what is appropriate for your group.
- 3 Gather up what you will need.
- 4 Give yourself at least 30mins preparation time.
- 5 JUSTice – do it!

## Are you free tonight?

*“You can’t separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless they have freedom.” MALCOLM X*



Believing can be dangerous and expressing a different view or perspective can be a matter of life or death. Thousands of people in many parts of the world are in prison, tortured and face certain death because they may have said or done something that someone does not like. In fact they may be entirely innocent and have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the last decade most governments have introduced new security measures in the name of protecting the population from terrorists but are they making us more secure? People who are willing to speak out in the name of peace or on behalf of poor people are needed more than ever if the world is to become safer for all people.

This issue of *Youth Topics* looks at some of the issues around political and religious freedoms. In particular it asks young people to explore some heroes who have stood up for these rights or freedoms and encourages them to think about the need to protect freedom. It explores the ways people earn freedom, the barriers put in place to freedom and the place of superheroes. It challenges them to think more deeply about something that they may take for granted in a world where many are denied this basic human right.

### Activity 1 ARE YOU FREE TONIGHT?

**Aim** To think about what freedom is and how much freedom we have as young people.

**Resources** paper and pen for each person.

**Action** Read out or put on the projector: OK, so tonight you might have homework to complete for school or college, or perhaps you may have to go work to earn some cash. But, generally, are you free to decide what to do?

**Ask your group these questions** Did you choose what to wear today? Do you decide whether or not to pray and who to pray to? Have you expressed a view? Do you know who you'll vote for in future? Can you go to school?

If your answer to these questions is 'yes', then you are lucky – you are free.

**Discuss** Think about it, even some of those things we might feel obliged to do are actually freedoms. The freedom that learning brings – to find out about the world, to search the internet or read the newspaper, to have a choice of job, to earn an income and independence, are precious benefits we generally take for granted. Yet, for many people around the world, education is an impossible dream.

### Activity 2 CAN YOU EARN YOUR FREEDOM?

**Aim** To explore what it is like to have your freedom removed.

**Resources** 2 ropes and a gag, a selection of food for a feast

**Action** Ask for three volunteers to represent:

- 1 Burma – no political freedom (tie a gag around mouth).
- 2 China – limited religious freedom (tie hands together in prayer).
- 3 Occupied Palestinian Territories – restricted freedom of movement (tie feet together).

The rest of the group represent democracies. Supply food for them which they sit and eat.

Explain that to have their restrictions removed and join in the feast, volunteers must each answer a question:

- 1 Name the leader of Burma's Opposition Party, who won democratic elections in 1990 but has been under almost constant house arrest by the military ever since?
  - a) U Win Tin
  - b) Aung San Suu Kyi
  - c) Zaw Htet Ko Ko
- 2 Roughly how many Christians are imprisoned at any one time in China for practising Christianity?
  - a) 180
  - b) 260
  - c) 300\*
- 3 How many Israeli checkpoints, roadblocks, earth mounds and gates control Palestinian movement within and in and out of the West Bank?
  - a) 480
  - b) 520
  - c) 634\*\*

**Discuss** How did the volunteers feel about being restricted? How did the rest of the group feel? Did they want to help? The good news is that we can use our freedom to help others.

\* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3993857.stm>

\*\* UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 'OCHA Closure update', May 2009, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWBNSF/db900SID/LSGZ-7SEJ4A?OpenDocument>

## Christian World Service (CWS)

CWS works worldwide in 22 countries providing funds for local community projects to tackle poverty and strengthen communities. CWS responds quickly and consistently to humanitarian crises such as the conflict in Pakistan by providing emergency supplies like food, shelter, medicines and clean water through the global network ACT International (Action by Churches Together). CWS also campaigns to tackle the root causes of global poverty and injustice, such as discrimination, lack of access to universally accepted human rights, unfair terms of trade and the lack of political and economic freedom. CWS responds to people's need regardless of race or religion.

### What we believe

CWS believes that all people should be able to live safely without fear of persecution. The right of all people to free political and religious expression is included in international human rights law. CWS partners promote people's basic human rights to the necessities of life like food and water. Many actively campaign for the extension of human rights and the protection of their communities against those who seek to harm or damage their life together. CWS is particularly concerned for the protection of the many refugees and displaced people who fear for the future of their families. Ensuring the adequate protection of human rights for all people is a necessary part of increasing global security.

### yt direct

If you wish to receive Youth Topics twice a year, tel 0800 74 73 72 (Youth Team) or email us at [youth@cws.org.nz](mailto:youth@cws.org.nz) Just say what you want and give us your details.



### Activity 3 WILL YOUR SUPERHERO HELP?

**Aim** To think about the superheroes the media present to us.

**Action** Split the group into 2 teams and ask them to come up with a list of as many superheroes as they can in 2 minutes. The heroes might be traditional (Superman), from television drama (*Heroes* or *Dr Who*) or cartoon heroes (Captain Planet). After 2 minutes, ask each team to read out their list. Which team thought of the most? You could award a prize to the winning team.

#### Discuss

- 1 Look at your lists. What qualities make these people superheroes?
- 2 Name some celebrity heroes. Which of these people's personal qualities do the media focus on?
- 3 If your superhero came to town how could he/she make your place safer?
- 4 Which superhero and celebrity hero qualities are really worth having? Which of these qualities can we realistically aspire to?
- 5 Who are your personal heroes? They might be an inspiring political figure or your next door neighbour. Share your own personal heroes and say why as a lead in to the session.
- 6 You may like to discuss what the difference is between a superhero, a celebrity hero and your personal heroes.

### STORY: WHAT IS THE COST OF FREEDOM?

Nelson Mandela is one of the world's most revered statesmen. He led the struggle to replace the apartheid regime of South Africa with a multi-racial democracy. He spent 28 years in prison on South Africa's Robben Island because his beliefs were incompatible with those of the South African government of the time. Now he is celebrated as one of the world's great superheroes. Through the centuries countless people have suffered torture, arrest or death because their beliefs or actions are unacceptable to the ruling party. Such treatment is considered acceptable in many parts of the world. Since 2001 there have been over 800 people killed outside the law. The use of violence to control dissent is unacceptable and ultimately increases the sense of terror and fear amongst ordinary people. The pain some people are willing to inflict on others is almost unbelievable.



*“When we lose the right to be different, we lose the privilege to be free” NELSON MANDELA.*

### STORY: PHILIPPINES

Ruel Marcial, a member of the United Christian Church of the Philippines (UCCP), testified later that he was interrogated and tortured by the military. They forced him to admit that he was a member of the New People's Army (NPA - a secret communist party) under torture although he was not. Here is his account of his ordeal:

“...I was told to lie face down and the soldiers accused me that I was a member of the NPA. They asked me to tell them where I was hiding my gun. “While they were asking questions, they thrust cogon grass into my genitals and poured water into my mouth. They grilled me for almost two hours about things I knew nothing about. Afterwards, they handcuffed me and brought me to higher ground of the camp...The soldiers continued to ask me questions and poured water into my mouth, burned my thigh with cigarettes and heated wire and poked my genitals with grass. “They cut my hair with a big and long knife. They kicked me, punched me in the stomach and slapped my face. When my face was already swollen, they put salt on it. The soldiers also peeled off my scalp until it bled and poked a gun at my head to make me confess that I was a member of the NPA. They also peeled off three of my toenails. “While I was under torture, I could hear the shouts of Fidel (Paling) from another part of the camp. “They tied my feet to a tree using a chain that looked like a dog leash. They hit my butt with the big and long knife and hit my hands with a bamboo. When I couldn't take it anymore, I said that I am willing to cooperate and show them the camps of the NPA so that they would stop torturing me. Only after I told them that I am willing to cooperate did they stop torturing me. I heard a soldier come in and asked the other soldiers, ‘Who is responsible for this?’ The soldiers who stood guard answered, ‘The underlings of Palparan’”

*Let the Stones cry out. National Council of Churches in the Philippines March 2007*

\*Jovito Palparan is a former army major general and now congressman who according to human rights groups has promoted extrajudicial killings and supported the abuse of human rights in the Philippines.

### Activity 4 STOLEN FREEDOM

**Aim** To explore different reasons for persecution and how damaging these can be to people.

**Resources** The Philippines story, paper, pens, magazines, newspapers, scissors and glue.

**Discuss** Ask them to imagine what it was like for Ruel or Berlin experiencing torture and talk about what his family and friends might be thinking. Together identify possible reasons for governments or others to use torture: fear, ignorance, power, insecurity, political etc; and what they might lose or gain from such actions. Can people be tortured in New Zealand? Ask young people to write down some examples of when they have felt persecuted or treated unfairly. Talk about how they felt and whether or not anyone stood up for them.

**Action** In a group sketch, write and paste images and words onto the paper that reflect situations where people are not free. Try to identify what freedoms they are missing out on eg freedom from torture, freedom to express religious beliefs, freedom to speak out politically.

### Activity 5 WANTED: A SUPERHERO TO SAVE THE WORLD

**Aim** To design a hero worthy of saving the world.

**Resources** Pens and paper and creativity.

**Action** Ask your group the following question: If you could have any superpower (eg. Ability to feed the world, travel at speed) which would you choose and why? Once everyone has answered ask the group which superpower they think the world needs. Get them to design a superhero with this power. If it is a big group split into smaller ones.

**Discuss** What is the name for your superhero, what is their mission (how is he/she going to save the world)? what is their costume? Do they have a logo? What equipment will they need?

### Activity 6 HIDDEN TALENTS

**Aim** To explore what the Bible says about our talents and how we can use them for the greater good.

**Resources** Bible, pens and poster paper.

**Action** Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Point out that we all have different talents, and no one talent is better than another: Each has a part to play in making a difference but what if we are not aware of talents we have that could be used to help others?

With this in mind, stick a sheet of paper onto everyone's back. Provide pens. Allow time for everyone to write on each other's paper one talent they see in that person. This might be something physical (eg. good at cooking) or a quality (eg. good listener).

Afterwards, let people read their talents and think about how they could or already do use their talents to make a difference. Could they team up with people with different talents to support or cheer others up? Could they use their talents to work for the protection of people without freedom by writing letters or campaigning for their release? Encourage people to keep their list of talents and to read them regularly to remind themselves what, as a part of a bigger whole, they have to offer the world.

**Prayer starter** Jesus didn't keep quiet when he saw how the chains of religious rules tied people down. So, if we're serious about our faith, we should also practice speaking out for freedom and the protection of human rights.

### What to do now

- 1 If you feel strongly then tell others about what you have learnt. Use these resources or other stories to do a presentation at your church, school or in a public space challenging people to respect the freedom they have or to take action to help those without freedom get it back. You may like to research the life of Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma for example.

who are working to help communities in the Aklan province access their basic human rights in the Philippines.

- 3 Hold a debate on the topic: The World Needs more Superheroes. Invite local personalities to take part. Alternatively organise a quiz night as a fundraiser for Developers. For more information on Developers see @world Autumn 2009, available from CWS.

- 2 Organise a sponsored event with the money going to help CWS partner, the Developers Foundation,