



A Study Guide for *Faith and Civic Life*

For the Well-Being of All

Session 3:

Assessing the U.S. Constitutional Form of Government

Group Covenant and Guidelines

Sample covenant is based on those written by Dr. Marsha Foster Boyd and the University of Michigan Center for Research on Teaching and Learning and used with permission from Luther Seminary. From the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa.

- I affirm that all have something of value to share or contribute. I also acknowledge that everyone has the chance to speak.
- I will show up as fully as possible.
- I will maintain confidentiality and expect the same in return. I will not share others' stories without their consent.
- I will encourage self-care.
- I listen to understand, not to respond.
- I assume positive intent.
- I am allowed to test issues and not necessarily own them, and I understand others may do the same. Curiosity is encouraged.
- I will both support and challenge others, will expect to be both supported and challenged by others, and will offer explanations if needed.
- I will criticize ideas, not individuals.
- I will avoid assumptions about any member of the group or generalizations about social groups.
- I will not ask individuals to speak on behalf of their social group, as I perceive that group.

Scriptural Reflection: Psalm 46:6-11

The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice; the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations;
I am exalted in the earth.”

Setting the Table – Theological Foundations and Definitions

Power

All power is grounded in God, who is all-powerful and whose sovereignty creates, sustains, and redeems creatures who are not God. Divine power is not a possession but a gift that aims to create power for others. Power is not merely sovereignty or the capacity to control.

What happens when sin enters the picture?

“To the extent that human power is directed solely or primarily toward the control or domination of others, it is a sinful distortion of God’s power. It is sin when power, which is meant to fulfill other creatures, is used instead to destroy the independent power of others, intentionally or unintentionally. Power exercised as domination hollows out those who are subject to it, whereas those in control lose the vitality that allows them to adapt.” (Article 22, page 36-37)

What does this mean?

God's power is always creative, self-giving, and empowering of God's creatures. Sin, in individuals and in systems, distorts power to become coercive and dominating of others. It turns power from something that cares for the well-being of all into protecting power for power's own sake.

How can we tell if a
government is exercising
power in ways that resonate
with God's power?

Self-Determination

Most basically, the ability of people or communities to determine their own objectives and actions in the mutuality of common life, with minimal external compulsion. In terms of political authority, it means that people have the right to freely choose their government within the collective life of a society.

Sharing Power

God's power is always creative, mutual, and self-giving – meaning it is shared freely with God's creatures. A criterion for assessing how a government uses power is to see if it is structured to share power.



**SUNDAY
MORNING**

Table Talk for Today

How do you assess the success of the local, state, federal government in serving the well-being of all?

How can you tell if a particular government or policy is a proper use of power?

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