



**R A D I C A L  
G R A C E**

**Women's Equality in Faith  
Discussion Guide**

# RADICAL GRACE



## How to use this guide

Please feel free to customize the activities, adding time or removing elements to suit your group's needs. We recommend that whatever discussion style you choose that you begin with the Safe Space creation activity. If you want to do all elements of the guide, allocate around 75 min. (in addition to the film screening).

Certain activities, such as the Safe Space creation, Terminology, and the Meditations, can be done in large or small groups. We recommend that the Reflection, Discussion and Action sections take place in small groups of 3-4 people. This fosters greater intimacy and trust and provides ample time for each participant to engage.

## Structure and Time

Introduction (5 min)

Introduce group leader(s) and welcome participants

Watch Film (80 min)

Safe Space Creation (5 min)

Meditation (10 min)

Reflection in Small Groups (10 min)

Discussion (20 min)

Inspired Action (20 min)

Light reflection (10 min)

## Materials Needed

### For the Discussion Leader:

Pen or Pencil

Paper

A large piece of paper and marker or access to a white/blackboard

A watch to keep time

### For Participants:

Pen or pencils for each person

Paper (one sheet or two for each person)

### Who this guide is for:

This guide was created for religious and faith groups who want to explore the issues of social justice and women's leadership in *Radical Grace* as well as in their own communities.

**The purpose of the guide is to stimulate reflection and discussion**, encouraging users to take action in their communities from a place of depth and authenticity.

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## Meditation

🕒 10 Minutes

After watching the film, lead the whole group in a short meditation. This will help the participants remember what parts of the film struck them the most. It is important that the group leader keep track of time during this exercise.

If you've led a meditation exercise before, feel free to begin it however you wish, bringing in the reflection questions below. If you haven't led one before, simply follow the steps below and read each one aloud. Just remember to take the allotted time for each section. Make sure you leave time for people to ponder each question.

## Meditation to Read Aloud (5 min.)

🕒 5 Minutes

1. Please settle yourself comfortably in your seat. If possible, put both feet on the ground, and your hands in your lap or on your legs. You can meditate with your eyes open or closed, whichever you are most comfortable with. (The leader should pause for 15-30 seconds while everyone gets settled. When the room is quiet, move on to the next question.)
2. Now focus on your breath. Pay attention to your in breath and your out breath. (Pause for 5 seconds) Feel as your lungs empty and fill completely, allowing your abdomen to expand rather than your upper chest. (Pause for 5 seconds). As you breathe, feel the air bring energy to your whole body, from your toes to the top of your head. (Have them practice this quiet breathing for about a minute. When the room seems calm, move on to the next question)
3. Now bring to mind a moment from the film that particularly struck you. (Pause for 10 secs.) Who was in the scene? (Pause for 10 secs.) What was said? (Pause for 10 secs.) Does it remind you of an experience in your own life? (Pause for 10 secs.) While you remember, pay attention to the feelings that come up. (Pause for 1 min. of reflection)
4. Next, reflect on the term "social justice." What do you think of when you hear the term? (Pause for 15 secs.) How have you experienced social justice in your own life or in your community of faith? (Pause for 15 secs.)
5. I would like you to recall a scene from the film that either challenged or reinforced your understanding of social justice. (Pause for 10 secs.) Who was in the scene? What was said? (Pause for 10 secs.) Does it remind you of something that has occurred in your own life? (Pause for 10 secs.) Again, while you remember, pay attention to the feelings that come up. (Pause for 1 min. of reflection.)
6. As we end this meditation, slowly become more aware of your surroundings. (Pause for 5 secs.) Also become more aware of your body. Gently wiggle your toes and fingers. (Pause for 3 secs.) When you are ready, open your eyes.

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## Safe Space Creation

🕒 5 Minutes

*Radical Grace* touches on a variety of issues people may have strong and differing feelings about. **To have a meaningful and deep discussion, it is important to create a safe space where everyone feels comfortable expressing their feelings and opinions.** Before the discussion begins, the group should come up with a series of agreements to help make a safe space. Write the group's ideas on the big sheet of paper or the white board so they can be referenced throughout the discussion. Here are some we recommend:

### **Avoid value judgments of other people's experiences and opinions.**

*Example:* "Your opinion is wrong" or "That's a crazy thing to do."

Instead, hear another person out and express your feelings and opinions without judging what someone else has said.

### **Use "I" statements to avoid speaking for other people.**

*Example:* "You must have been thinking or feeling this way." Instead say, "What you said reminds me of an experience I had. This is how I felt."

### **Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak.**

Individuals should monitor themselves during the discussion, asking if they hear themselves speaking more than others in the group.

Remind participants that silence is not a bad thing and sometimes people need time before sharing their thoughts.

As discussion leader, help create space for people who may not be participating actively. If someone is speaking too frequently, you can open space by saying, "Thanks for that point, NAME. Let's see if other people have things they'd like to share."

Ensuring confidentiality is important, especially when an individual shares a personal experience. Make sure that if a person asks you not to speak about something outside of the group, you do not.

# RADICAL GRACE

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## Reflection in Small Groups

🕒 10 Minutes

Divide into small groups. We recommend breaking into small groups of 3-4 people. This fosters greater intimacy and trust amongst participants.

### Reflection:

After everyone has divided into small groups, have everyone in the group share what came up for them in the meditation. You can ask, “What moments from the film stood out for you? Why?”

## Discussion: Words of inspiration

🕒 20 Minutes

We have created discussion questions based on important quotes that each sister offered during the film, each addressing different themes. You can pick a theme to focus on or allow each small group to pick the one they are most interested in. Many of the topics and questions are interrelated, so feel free to mix and match elements if you are inspired.

Each discussion section has between 2-3 questions. You can either write the questions on the large piece of paper, whiteboard, or copy the following pages and provide relevant sections to each group.

## FAITHFUL MISFITS, UNITE!

Reflect on the quote from Erin Saiz-Hanna of the Nun Justice Coalition, below briefly before moving on to the questions:

*“The majority of Catholics are misfits, according to the hierarchy of the Church. Whether you're divorced or gay or lesbian, or use birth control, whatever it is, a lot of people feel like if there's no hope for the Sisters, then there certainly is no hope for me... We're doing this all together in solidarity. It's been an amazing movement.”*

1. Have you ever felt marginalized in your faith community? Why? Who else is often marginalized in your faith institutions? How can these groups come together to effect change for everyone? How can you help make this happen?
2. Even non-Catholics attended rallies to support the sisters. How can we work together across religious lines to make all of our faith communities more inclusive?
3. Does your faith community make space for those who are not accepted by greater society because of their identity (race, gender, social class, sexuality, etc.)? How can you strengthen this work of inclusion?

**Tip: for more ideas visit <http://equalinfaith.org>**

## DISCUSSION NOTES:

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## SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

Reflect on the quotes from the sisters below briefly before moving on to the questions:

*“I’m feeling very depressed just thinking ‘Oh this is useless. Why are you even trying to reform this?’ I’ve given my life to this Church, and I love this Church. This really broke my heart.” - Sister Chris*

*“I am propping up an organization that doesn’t believe the same stuff I do ... I have found myself moving further and further away from Roman Catholicism. I’m trying to see what that all means.” - Sister Jean*

1. Both Sister Chris and Sister Jean have had moments where they question their work for church reform and their participation in the church. Why do you think they stay?
2. Have you ever questioned whether to remain in your faith community? Do you still question? What would it mean to leave? Why have you stayed?

### DISCUSSION NOTES:

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## FINDING OUR FOREMOTHERS IN FAITH

Reflect on the quote from Sister Chris below briefly before moving on to the questions:

*“Women leaders from early Christianity don’t show up in the literary records so much, because almost all of the literary records were written by men, but where you will find evidence is in the archaeology. These tombs are speaking beyond the grave to say, ‘Yes we were here. Yes we were witnessing to Jesus, and yes, our leadership was valid.’”*

- Sister Chris

1. Sister Chris led a pilgrimage to archaeological sites in Rome to retrieve the history of women’s leadership in the early Church. Are there women in your faith tradition whose stories have disappeared? How can you learn more about them? How will you share their stories with your community?

*Sister Chris loves this mosaic of Saints Peter and Pudenciana arm in arm, because it depicts “a gender balanced idea of ministry.”*



2. What do you know about the ways women and men worked together in the history of your faith? How can you learn more? What does gender-balanced leadership look like to you today?

**Tip: share women’s stories on social media using #EqualInFaith and #ForemothersInFaith**

### DISCUSSION NOTES:

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## TAKING A LEAP OF FAITH

Reflect on the quote from the sisters below briefly before moving on to the questions:

*“Setting out to reform the Church, I think that’s a pretty big task. I mean this would be risky. We could lose everything by speaking out.”* - Sister Jean’s friend, responding to Jean’s call to challenge patriarchy in the Catholic Church

*“I think that we are all afraid, because it has so much to do with our sense of who we are.”* - Sister Jean

1. Does it feel scary to challenge injustices in your faith community? Why? How can you find support to do this challenging work?

*“It has always been my hope that the censure went away. But then I realized, let [the Vatican] toss me out. That’s not changing who I am. I’m still going to be a Sister of Social Service in my heart after all these years.”* - Sister Simone

2. Sister Simone’s faith lives in her heart, not in the dictates of religious authorities. Do you ever let others define your faith? How can you reclaim it?
3. She finds strength not only in herself, but in her community, the Sister of Social Service. Do you draw strength from your personal faith community? Are you seeking a community to draw strength from?

### DISCUSSION NOTES:

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## EMBODYING OUR FAITH VALUES AMIDST OPPRESSION

Reflect on the quotes from the sisters below briefly before moving on to the questions:

***“How do we challenge our own religious leaders when they are not being true to the values of Jesus?” - Sister Chris***

When the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops came out against the Affordable Care Act, Sister Simone invited Catholic sisters to sign a letter affirming health care as a faith value. Their “nuns letter” played a pivotal role for Catholic lawmakers who voted for the bill.

1. What do you see your religious leaders saying or doing that does not accord with your faith values? How can you act to embody and promote inclusive, socially just values within your faith tradition? How can you challenge the oppressive rhetoric from religious leaders in your faith community? In broader society?

***The Vatican named Sister Simone’s organization, NETWORK, in their investigation because the sisters had spoken in opposition to the U.S. Bishops on Healthcare Reform. “They want to, for political reasons, keep our voice silent.” - Sister Simone***

2. Do people with institutional power in your faith community act to silence those whose views differ from their own? How?

Rather than being silenced, the sisters of NETWORK leveraged the press from the Vatican investigations to launch their Nuns on the Bus Tour. Their voices were louder than ever.

3. In your own work to create an inclusive faith community, what are your challenges? How can you turn these into opportunities?

### DISCUSSION NOTES:

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## INSPIRED ACTION: LOVE AND JUSTICE

**Option 1:** The facilitator(s) present the group with ways to take action.

Invite participants to join you in advancing women's equality in your faith community or across faith communities. Plan next steps and have participants sign up to join in. Share your actions at [www.radicalgracefilm.com/engage](http://www.radicalgracefilm.com/engage) or on social media using [#RadicalGrace](#).

**Option 2:** Invite the group to come up with ways to take action.

- Ask participants: What are you inspired to do? Provide about 5 minutes for participants to reflect individually.
- Invite participants to share their ideas. Write ideas on a whiteboard or piece of butcher paper.
- Review the ideas. Ask participants to identify activities they would like to participate in.
- Choose actions: The facilitator(s) may encourage the selection of a single action that the larger group will participate in collectively. Be sure to gather contact information from all interested parties.
- Invite participants to self organize by sharing contact information with each other and planning a time to meet based on shared action items.
- Share your plans at [www.radicalgracefilm.com/engage](http://www.radicalgracefilm.com/engage) or on social media using [#RadicalGrace](#).

**Inspiration: Need help thinking of ideas for action items? Here are a few:**

- Host a film screening in another community you are a part of
- Write a letter to the editor about gender justice in religion
- Partner with a local faith community group to host an event about women's rights/rites
- Partner with members of other faith communities to host an Equal In Faith prayer service. Resources at <http://equalinfaith.org/prayer-resources>
- Have other ideas to include? Tell us and we'll add them

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Participate in initiatives & organizations working to create a more just and inclusive faith community. Here are some of Radical Grace partner organizations:

## Multifaith:

- **The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)** is a nonprofit educational center committed to theological, ethical, and ritual development by and for women. Founded in 1983, WATER's mission is to use feminist religious values to create social change. [www.waterwomensalliance.org](http://www.waterwomensalliance.org)
- **Equal in Faith** was founded in 2013 by an interfaith coalition of women. We want to ignite a conversation about maintaining what we value in our religious traditions while transforming them into more inclusive, equitable and welcoming communities. <http://equalinfaith.org>

## Catholic:

- **FutureChurch** seeks changes that will provide all Roman Catholics the opportunity to participate fully in Church life and leadership. [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org)
- **Women's Ordination Conference** works for women's ordination as priests and bishops into a renewed priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. [www.womensordination.org](http://www.womensordination.org)
- **Call to Action** educates, inspires and activates Catholics to act for justice and build inclusive communities through a lens of anti-racism and anti-oppression principles. <http://cta-usa.org>
- **Visit Women Church Convergence** to find even more organizations working to build to build just social and ecclesial structures at [www.women-churchconvergence.org](http://www.women-churchconvergence.org)

## Evangelical:

- **The Sojourners Women & Girls Campaign** champions policies at home and abroad that fortify women's health and dignity through eliminating gender discrimination and abuse, increasing economic empowerment, and supporting women's leadership in the church and beyond. <https://sojo.net/join/campaigns/women-girls>

## Muslim:

- **Muslims for Progressive Values** is a faith-based, grassroots, human rights organization that embodies and advocates for the traditional Qur'anic values of social justice and equality for all, for the 21st Century. <http://www.mpvusa.org>
- **The Muslim American Leadership Alliance** is a civil rights organization committed to promoting individual freedom and celebrating Muslim-American heritage. <https://www.malanational.org/>

## Jewish

- **Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance** seeks to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual and political opportunities for women within the framework of halakha. We serve as a resource for those seeking advice, support or information regarding the role of women in Orthodoxy. <https://www.jofa.org>

## Mormon

- **Ordain Women** aspires to create a space for Mormon women to articulate issues of gender inequality they may be hesitant to raise alone. <http://ordainwomen.org>

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## Light Reflection Closing

🕒 10 Minutes

Gather back as a single group and return to your meditation position. When you are settled, read the quote from Sister Chris below and reflection questions with the group:

Reflecting on her community organizing work, Sister Chris says *“I think we are emerging from a long dark night... We have been carrying a light on behalf of a God, who is inclusive, who loves, who welcomes...”* (Pause for 5 sec)

Light is an important symbol of hope and renewal for many faith traditions. How has the film helped shine light on struggles you are facing in your own life or in your community? (Pause for 10 sec) Where is your light guiding you? (Pause for 5 sec) Who is it asking you to help?

After reading these questions, have individuals share their thoughts with the rest of the group.

### REFLECTION NOTES:

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Learn more and get involved with our partner organizations



**CALL TO ACTION**  
Inspire Catholics, Transform Church

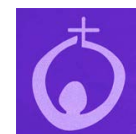


Women's + Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual

**sojourners**  
*Faith in Action for Social Justice*



**GROUNDSWELL**



Women-Church  
Convergence