



## RELIGION & RACE

General Commission on Religion and Race

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### Session 2: How Long?

*We wait for your coming  
We wait for new life  
We wait in our despairing  
We wait through the strife.  
But how long? How long?*

By Mark A. Miller

#### Watch the Video Clip (5 – 7 minutes)

Listen to Mark's words of introduction and listen to the song. Listen to the song a second time. Feel free to sing along, joining in with the chorus. If you have purchased the songbook *Roll Down, Justice!*, a reproducible congregational box of the song is found on page 85.

#### Mark Miller's Reflection

How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

How long, O God, must we feel like outsiders, strangers in a strange land, a people held captive by fear, abuse of power, prejudice and unjust institutions? How long, O God, must we be in fear for our children who are growing up in a world of terror and violence?

How many people in our country need to be killed by guns until we muster the will and the courage to stop the madness? We long for your justice, for your peace, O God, we long to be released from these shackles of fear and injustice...and until that time, we cry out with the psalmist, "How long?"

#### Moment of Meditation (3 – 5 minutes)

Sit in a rocking chair (if able to have one in the study). In silence, just rock. Rock for one minute without interacting with the group (no words, no eye contact ... observe silence even if someone asks a question). You may use other gestures (putting your head in your hands, leaning your head back and staring at the ceiling). But keep rocking.

At the end of the minute, ask the group if any one of them wondered to herself or himself, "How long is our study leader going to sit in the chair and just rock?" "What's going on?" "What's next?" "Can I have a turn in that rocking chair?"

Ask members to write down or think about things for which they have waited? And things for which they are currently waiting?

### **Discuss the Scripture - Psalm 137 (10 minutes)**

Have the Scripture read aloud from two or three biblical translations. Invite members to share with the group any experience they have with the text. For example, some may remember that reggae singer Bob Marley had a hit song based on this Scripture or they may recall learning a song based on this Scripture in vacation Bible school.

If time permits, ask for one or two persons to share a story when they felt the despair of waiting, of feeling abandoned, of struggling to make a living, or to make a life in what seemed to be a "foreign land."

### **Connect with the Justice Challenges (20 minutes)**

Play the video again – the introduction and the song. Encourage the group to sing along with the video.

Have printed copies for each person (or place onscreen or newsprint or read aloud) the following questions. Ask the group members to ponder the questions in light of justice issues that are important to them. Then invite them to write a response to one or more of these questions and be prepared to share something with the group from the reflection. [Allow 10 minutes for this exercise; if people have finished writing and reflecting before then, call the group back together.]

- What do you fear?
- What angers you?
- What one thing makes your heart heavy?
- Where or how do you feel as an outsider?

Allow time for people to share their justice issues. Be prepared for disagreement. Remind those who are speaking that this is not a time to argue or to attempt to change someone else's position or understanding of a justice challenge. [Allow 5 minutes.]

Ask people to go back to their notes and go back to the Scripture and write a short "lament" about the concern that hurts their hearts the most. Explain that a "lament" is a way of expressing sorrow, describing frustration and protesting against injustice.

### **Confession (2 – 3 minutes)**

Invite two or three persons to take turns sitting in the rocking chair and reading their laments aloud. After each reading, pause for a moment of silent reflection. Explain to the group that they do not have to respond to each lament, only to listen and empathize with each reader.

### **Prayer of Intercession (2 – 3 minutes)**

If persons are able, gather in a circle. Lead the group in this prayer:  
Lord Jesus, you have shown us the way to be your people. Our hearts ache and break for the absence of justice in many areas in our lives. In this moment, we confess that we have not seen all that needed to be seen; we have not marched as we could have and protested as loudly as we could have; we have not been all that you want us to be. Forgive us.

Be with those whom need your justice and your intervention in this time and place in their lives. We lift up \_\_\_\_\_ (encourage people to speak aloud the areas of injustice and the people for whom they are interceding).

### **Closing (2 – 3 minutes)**

Play the video one more time and sing along. Offer a prayer of benediction and an invitation to see God in every face that we meet in the coming week.

### **Extending the Study**

Commit to praying (even more) for justice. Lift up the names of those in your life who are drum majors for justice.

Do a media watch and make note of the stories that fanned the flames of hate and the ones that offered solutions in the midst of pain.

Hold a song service for justice Use this song. Identify other hymns and songs that can be shared to encourage action and strengthen the resolve of those who seek to do God's will in making right the wrongs of the community and of the world.