



# FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

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## **#OCCUPY@10: Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

*Possible pre-viewing question, either for discussion or for individual reflection/note taking before screening the film:*

What are your personal recollections of or experiences with the Occupy movement that emerged from the initial Occupy Wall Street protest on September 17, 2011?

1. Reflecting on her initial impressions of Occupy, Carolyn Klaasen notes that “. . . it didn’t quite fit any of the organizing frameworks that my friends had. . . We spent a lot of late nights discussing [how] this doesn’t quite fit in with what we learned about how to organize communities. How practical is this? Will it bring about change? What is the meaning of this thing?”

By the end of the film, how do she and the other interviewees answer some of these questions? What lessons for organizers do you see in the film or in your own recollections of Occupy?

2. What was the significance of the language of “the 99%” and “the 1%”? What is its significance today?
3. Many interviewees repeatedly echo Rev. Michael Ellick’s observation that Occupy displayed “toxic racism” and a clear “lack of racial analysis.” Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt points to people of color questioning its confrontational and provocative approach to the police as a point that could have pushed the movement to consider that “maybe [it didn’t] apply to everybody in the same way.” But she notes there was not much room for or receptiveness to this kind of challenge.

How do the various interviewees describe or examine this shortcoming of the movement? Have you seen similar problems in organizations or movements of which you’ve been a part? How were they addressed? What remains to be done? Does the experience of Occupy offer any lessons for addressing racism in movements for peace and justice?

4. A recurring theme among many of the interviewees’ comments is about how Occupy engaged with (or didn’t engage with) communities and people of faith. Negative interactions included general hostility and crystallized in an instance of disrespect to a Black church that offered its space to protestors in Oakland.

How did the interviewees understand and navigate these tensions at the time? What is their analysis of this disconnect with the benefit of hindsight? How do they explain the relationship of faith communities with issues of race and racism? What do you make of their assessments? If you have found yourself in a similar situation in the context of a broader social movement, what has been your experience dealing with these kinds of tensions?

5. Consider the significance and the effectiveness of the Wall Street bull refashioned as the golden calf. What did this papier-mâché creation symbolize for the protestors at the time? What ideas did it capture and reflect? Does it provide some inspiration for movements today? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. Rev. Ellick points out that many people in Occupy simply didn't have the analysis of placing race "at the center of an argument around economics and colonialism in America." Nathan Schneider elaborates and notes that people did begin to question how the movement was framed, including its focus on Wall Street and using language of "occupation."

Based on your own experiences with activism for economic justice -- whether with Occupy or any other organization or movement -- what do you make of these analyses and critiques? What are the implications for activists in 2021 and beyond?

7. Rev. Sandhya Rani Jha recalls a class session in which students dismiss the Occupy protests and the 1999 Seattle protests as "flashes in the pan" and lament that the Zapatista movement "didn't have a lasting impact." She recounts how she challenged them, however, to "connect the dots" between those protests and the more recent campaigns for economic justice (e.g., the Wal-Mart workers campaign, the fast food workers campaign, the Poor People's Campaign). Rev. McNatt also insists that current conversations about economic inequality could not, would not be happening as they are if it hadn't been for the work of Occupy.

Do you see the same connections as Rev. Jha does? Do you see connections beyond those she named? What about the ways Rev. McNatt traces current struggles back to Occupy? Are there other places or ways that you can see elements of Occupy in work for economic justice today?

8. Many of the interviewees talk about how the acts of marching and protesting can be a profoundly spiritual experience and create a space that becomes sacred. What has been your experience of these phenomena in your own life and activism? How have you and communities you've been a part of cultivated these kinds of moments and spaces? What has it meant to you and your community to have done this? Why has it mattered?
9. Consider the ways the interviewees recall the personal and spiritual connections they made in Occupy. What did it give them glimpses of? How has this shaped their work and their lives since then? Does it help you to see the possibility of a more just world?
10. Taking inspiration from Rev. McNatt's recollections, engage in a collective reading of Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Consider and discuss its implications for activists today. You can find the full text [here](#), and hear audio of Dr. King reading the letter [here](#).