Faith in Action

How Social Gospel reformers connected belief with social change

USH.C.2.2.B "Explain how the Social Gospel movement emphasized the application of Christian principles of social justice to societal problems, such as poverty, inequality, and injustice."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two Christian principles in the passage, circle three problems reformers wanted to address, and number two actions they proposed. Use your marks to trace how a belief led to action.

More Than a Helping Hand

1 On a winter morning in a crowded American city around 1900, a church volunteer might carry coal to a family whose wages could not cover heat. But many Christians in the Social Gospel movement asked a larger question: Why were so many families cold in the first place? They believed Jesus' teaching to love one's neighbor applied not only to personal kindness but also to the way society was organized. Poverty, in their view, was not always a person's fault. Low pay, unsafe work, and costly housing could trap people even when they worked hard.

2 Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister who worked in New York City, saw how poverty affected the people near his church. He argued that Christians should seek a fairer social order, not simply offer help after hardship struck. For example, a congregation could feed hungry neighbors while also urging city leaders to improve sanitation in crowded neighborhoods. Cleaner streets and reliable waste removal would protect many families at once, including those who never entered a church. This approach connected a Christian duty to care for others with public action against conditions that caused suffering.

3 The movement also addressed inequality at work. Minister Washington Gladden supported workers' right to organize and argued that employers had moral duties toward employees. When workers bargained together for fair pay, they could challenge an imbalance of power that a single worker could not easily change. Social Gospel reformers did not all agree on every policy, and their efforts did not end poverty or injustice. Still, their central claim was bold: Christian faith should shape decisions about wages, housing, and public health, not remain inside church walls. Social justice meant changing unfair conditions as well as helping individuals who faced them.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Social Gospel reformers think carrying coal to one family was not enough to address poverty?

2. How would urging city leaders to improve sanitation put a Christian duty into action?

3. How did Gladden's support for workers organizing address inequality rather than offer individual charity?

4. The passage says Christian faith should not remain inside church walls. How do two actions in the passage support that claim?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town around 1900 where children from low-income families miss school because they work long shifts. In four or five sentences, explain how a Social Gospel reformer might apply a Christian principle to this problem. Include an immediate act of help, a proposed change to local conditions, and why that change addresses injustice.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.2.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two Christian principles in the passage, circle three problems reformers wanted to address, and number two actions they proposed. Use your marks to trace how a belief led to action. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Social Gospel reformers think carrying coal to one family was not enough to address poverty?	**They believed conditions such as low pay and costly housing could keep working families poor, so Christians should address those conditions as well as help one family.**
2	How would urging city leaders to improve sanitation put a Christian duty into action?	**It would turn the duty to care for others into public action that protected many families from harmful living conditions.**
3	How did Gladden's support for workers organizing address inequality rather than offer individual charity?	**Organizing let workers bargain together for fair pay and challenge the imbalance of power between workers and employers.**
4	The passage says Christian faith should not remain inside church walls. How do two actions in the passage support that claim?	**Urging city leaders to improve sanitation would protect a whole neighborhood, while organizing workers could help them win fair pay. Both apply Christian concern for others to public problems.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A Social Gospel reformer might say that loving one's neighbor means caring about children's chances to learn. A church could provide meals to families whose children work to help pay for food. The reformer could also urge local leaders to limit children's work hours so they could attend school. That change would address an unfair condition affecting many children, rather than help only the families who received meals.

Accept explanations that accurately connect Christian care for others to action against poverty, inequality, or injustice. For Part 3, the proposed change should address a condition affecting multiple children, not only provide immediate aid.