

Peace

Session Focus

This session explores the Christian teaching peace. Peacemaking is not an optional requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers by our Lord Jesus. Jesus, the ultimate peacemaker, told his apostles, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27) We are called by Jesus, through baptism, to be peacemakers in our world.

Learning Objectives

The session on Peace guides learners of all ages to...

- comprehend the influence of the culture of violence on our values, faith, and spirituality and the life of our families, church, and society.
- value and appreciate the significance of Biblical teaching on peace and the responsibility to create a culture of peace at home and around the world
- to live as peacemakers by engaging in action, locally and globally

Session Overview

Part 1. (10 minutes) Gathering & Opening Prayer Service

Part 2. (20 minutes) All Ages Learning Experience: A World in Need of Peace

Part 3. (80-90 minutes) In Depth Learning Experience

- Option 1. Whole Group Format: All participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Groups Format : Participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

Part 4. (20 -25 minutes) Sharing Learning Experiences

Part 5. (10 minutes) Closing Prayer Service

Design Options for In-Depth Learning

Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group

- a group of leaders who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to have one leader work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

Facilitation Tips for this Format:

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Option 2. Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

Facilitation Tips for This Format

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while small group leaders move from table to table assisting.

Materials Needed

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- “Message of Violence” handouts
- One or two sheets of newsprint or poster board and markers for each table group; masking tape to post the newsprint sheets
- A variety of current events magazines with pictures and current newspapers. (You can also ask families to bring a selection of current magazines to the session.)
- Bible

In-Depth Learning Experience

- Handouts
- Supplies for table group activities (see activity descriptions for required supplies): newsprint or poster board, paper, boxes of (washable) markers, boxes of crayons, pens and pencils, large Post-It Notes, large file cards, black fine –tip marker, glue or tape, masking tape, scissors, magazines
- Equipment for visual presentation: multimedia projector and screen
- Bible

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service
- Bible

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session. You can also distribute handouts for the In Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.
- Invite people to share a meal. Depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal.

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session in your own words, using the following text:

This session explores peace. Jesus, the ultimate peacemaker, told his apostles, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:27) We are called by Jesus, through baptism, to be peacemakers in our world, to bring justice, forgiveness, mercy, and love instead of revenge, violence, and hatred.

In this program we are going to identify the things that work against peace, and the influence that the culture of violence has on our faith and values and on the life of our families, church, and society. We are going to look at what Christianity teaches us about peace and the responsibility to create a culture of peace at home and around the world. We are going to find ways to live as peacemakers by engaging in action, locally and globally.

1. Group Formation

Organize people into small groups. For the All Ages Experience and Sharing Learning Experiences, participants will be in the same intergenerational groups of approximately eight people, reflecting the age diversity of the participants.

Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group.

For the In Depth Learning Experience, organize the participants into three types of table groups: family clusters of two or more families, groups of adolescents, and groups of adults.

2. Opening Prayer Service

Gather

God of justice and peace, we see conflict, violence, and war in our world. We pray that you will hasten the day when swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, when people will learn war no more. We come to you for the strength and courage to be peacemakers in our homes, our communities, and our world. We put our trust in you, the source of true peace, and ask that you hear our prayer and give us peace in our time.

Listen

Select one of the following Scripture readings and proclaim it to the assembly:

- Micah 4:1-4
- Isaiah 2:1-5
- Isaiah 11:1-10

Respond

Lord, so many people are in pain . . .

Response: Teach us the way to peace.

When people around us don't agree and think differently . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to listen and understand.

When we see people getting hurt . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to speak up.

When we see people who are hungry and poor . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to give to them like you give to us.

When we see people treated poorly because of their skin color or language . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to be an example of love.

When we see war and conflict around the world . . .

Response: Lord, teach us how to make a difference and bring peace.

When we see pain . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to bring healing.

When we feel down and things don't seem to be going well . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to talk to our friends, our family, and to you.

When we stop and see all you have given us . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to be thankful.

In our lives, our neighborhoods and the world . . .

Response: Lord, teach us to pray and teach us the way to peace.

Lord Jesus Christ, make us ambassadors for peace in all we do each day. Teach us to model peace in our homes, in our community, and in our church. Help us to express your way of peace with strength and conviction. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Go Forth

Conclude by praying together the Peace Prayer of St. Francis.

Lord make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred,

Let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled

As to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

As Jesus welcome his friends with a sign of peace, let us now give each other a sign of peace.

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: A World in Need of Peace (20 minutes)

Involvement Phase of the Pastoral Circle Process

The All Ages Learning Experience is designed to help the participants feel and understand how a particular social issue affects the lives of people and their own lives. The first step in the Pastoral Circle process—and the basis for any action—is Involvement. Through learning activities, we connect the participants with the social issue to be explored, helping them “feel” the issue being analyzed and exposing them to what is happening in their local community or world. This helps the participants “hear” and “think” from a broader perspective. Once people are connected with an issue or situation, they are ready to move to analysis, to ask the “why” questions from a first-hand perspective.

Preparation

Collect a variety of current events magazines with pictures and current newspapers for the family activity. Consider asking families to bring a selection of current magazines to the session.

Materials Needed

- Handout #2
- Newsprint, colored markers, magazines, glue, scissors

Guide the participants through the following process, using Handout #2 as their reference.

Invite the participants to think about and name all the things that work against peace at home, school, and work—for example, meanness, hatred, disrespect, fighting, hateful words. Ask them to name things that work against peace in the community, nation, and world—such as people attacking other people, war. Instruct one group member to write the ideas on the handout.

Explain that groups are now going to create a poster on newsprint of the situations in family life, school, community, nation, and world that are in need of peace. On the top of the newsprint have them write: “A World in Need of Peace” and list the situations. Children can illustrate each item with a picture from a magazine or their own drawing.

Ask each group to share its poster with another table group. Tell them to pay attention to similarities and new ideas.

Invite the participants to think about the images of conflict, violence, and war that they experience through news reports, television shows, movies, magazines, video games, YouTube, Facebook or Instagram. What are the messages they receive about violence through the media?

- The message about violence in television shows...
- The message about violence in movies...
- The message about violence in ads/commercials...
- The message about violence in television news reports...
- The message about violence in video games and other forms of entertainment...
- The message about violence on YouTube...
- The message about violence on Facebook, Instagram, or other social media platforms...

Ask groups to discuss their reactions to the messages about violence in the media using questions such as:

- How do these messages make you feel?
- How do the messages influence and shape your perspective on the world?
- Do you think there is too much violence in the media? Why? Why not?
- Do you think people can become desensitized to violence? Why? Why not?

Hang the posters around the meeting room for all to see. Facilitators should identify common themes on the posters and point these out to the group.

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (80-90 minutes)

Families with Children Learning Experiences

Learning Experience 1: Why Is There a Culture of Violence?

Pastoral Circle Process: Exploration-Analysis

Exploration or analysis, the second phase of the Pastoral Circle Process, helps the participants ask the question of *why*. Why, in the face of human suffering and injustice, do these conditions exist? What role do politics or economics or cultural values play in perpetuating the problem? Exploration broadens the participants' thinking by helping them look for the causes of the injustice; to examine the relationships among politics, economics, and cultural values in our world that perpetuate the injustice; and to analyze the social or structural realities that keep the situation from changing. Exploration helps the participants understand the social issue more thoroughly so they can envision ways to be involved in working for justice.

Preparation

Read Handout #4 "A Culture of Violence" prior to the session. (You may want to give this handout to adult groups.)

Write the thirty causes of violence from Handout #3, "Why Is There Violence in Our World?," on multiple newsprint sheets, or create individual signs with one cause on each sign.

Materials Needed

- Handout #3a for families with children
- Handout #3b for adolescents and adults
- Handout #4 for facilitators
- Newsprint and markers

1. Introductory Presentation

Use the following information to introduce the concept of a culture of violence. Make a brief presentation that is appropriate to the ages of the participants.

Why is living peacefully and creating a peaceful world so difficult? In the United States violence seems to surround us. It comes in many different forms: physical or psychological, nearby or in a distant land, real life or media-created, small conflicts or war between countries. No matter what the form, it is destructive of human life.

We see violence destroying lives, human dignity, and hope. And the fear of violence is both polarizing and paralyzing.

Beyond the violence in our streets is the violence in our hearts. Hostility, hatred, despair and indifference are at the heart of a growing culture of violence. Verbal violence in our families, communications and talk shows contribute to this culture of violence. Pornography assaults the dignity of women and contributes to violence against them. Our social fabric is being torn apart by a

culture of violence that leaves children dead on our streets and families afraid in our homes. Our society seems to be growing numb to human loss and suffering. A nation born in a commitment to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is haunted by death, imprisoned by fear and caught up in the elusive pursuit of protection rather than happiness.”

2. What Causes Violence?

Using Handout #3: Why Is There Violence in Our World?, guide table groups through the following process.

Explain to each group that they are to identify three or four specific situations of violence—psychological and physical. Families with children should focus on situations which are closer to the experiences of the children. Adolescents and adults should include at least one situation from each of the following categories: local (family, school, community), national, and international. Groups can use the information from the posters hanging on the walls to find their situations.

Ask groups to determine the causes of violence for each situation using the list of possibilities and adding their own reasons. To determine the causes of violence in a situation they should ask: Why is this happening? What contributes to the situation?

If they use items from the list of causes, they can indicate the appropriate number on the handout under the situation of violence, and then add their own ideas.

Offer this example:

Situation: Gun violence in the U.S.

Causes: #5 (unhealthy ways to express anger), #10 (hatred), #15 (revenge), #23 (availability and access to weapons), #28 (media glorification of violence)

Compile a list of the situations and the causes of violence from the table groups. Post the newsprint sheets or individual signs with the thirteen causes from Handout #3a or the thirty causes from Handout #3b, “Why Is There Violence in Our World?” in the front of the room.

Ask each group to share one or more situations and the causes they identified. Write key words from each situation with the causes on newsprint. Post these around the room. Try to get at least one situation from each table group.

3. Analysis of Causes

Use the following key points to introduce the concept of a culture of violence. Connect the ideas generated by the groups on the posters with your presentation. For more family-friendly language, use ideas from the children’s list below.

There is no simple explanation for the violence in our world. Church leaders have identified the following causes:

- Erosion of moral values, including less respect for human life.

- Anger, intolerance, racism, unfair judgments and aggression, often reflected in our language, our entertainment, our driving, our competitive behavior, and the way we treat our environment.
- Using violence to deal with some of our most difficult social problems (e.g., the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia).
- Underlying cultural values that help to create the environment where violence grows (e.g., greed for possessions, competition)
- Discrimination, poverty, hunger, and hopelessness which leave too many without a stake in society and a place in our community.
- Addiction and self-destructive behavior.
- Deterioration of family life and the loss of community.
- Availability of weapons and the militarization of life.
- Rise of gangs and increasing youth violence.
- Deadly conflict and war driven by divisions of religion, race, tribe, or political position.

From the perspective of children, some of the contributing causes of violence include:

- Not listening to each other.
- Not respecting other people.
- Getting angry and hurting other people.
- Not forgiving the other person.
- Not solving our problems peacefully.
- Judging other people unfairly.
- Getting revenge for something someone did to us.
- Hating other people or groups.
- Using guns to solve problems.
- Not respecting human life.
- Seeing too much violence on TV.
- Not knowing the difference between right and wrong.
- Not taking responsibility for one's actions.
- Not taking responsibility for one's actions.

Ask the participants to briefly discuss their thoughts and feelings about what they have just experienced. Use one or two of the following questions for table group sharing:

Family Groups Questions

- What do you think are the most important reasons people don't live peacefully with each other—in your family and in our world?
- How can your family's life become more peaceful?
- How can our world become more peaceful?

Adolescent and Adult Groups Questions

- What did you discover about the causes of violence?
- What surprised you about the causes of violence? Did you see connections among the causes?
- Do you think there are alternatives to violence, things that we can do to eliminate violence as a "solution" to problems?

Learning Experience 2: What do the Scriptures Say about Peace?

Pastoral Circle Process: Reflection

Reflection, the third phase of the Pastoral Circle process, engages the participants in exploring a social issue from the perspective of faith—the Bible and the living response of the Christian community to the issue—locally, nationally, and globally. This step involves the participants in examining what the Christian faith says about a particular social issue. It involves them in exploring what the Christian community is doing about social issues and what motivates its response. Reflection calls forth not just an intellectual assent to faith, but a commitment to incorporate a faith response within one’s own life. The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation challenges old ways of thinking and responding by raising new questions, suggesting new insights, and opening people up to new action possibilities.

1. A Biblical Vision of Peace: Micah 4:1 – 4

Preparation

To become more familiar with the Biblical vision of peace, facilitators should read Handout #7: Reflections on Jesus and Peace from the *Challenge of Peace*.

Facilitators should also read this reflection by Walter Brueggemann on Micah 4:1 – 4 and its challenges for all.

“ . . . Micah proposes a radical alternative for the ordering of society. . . . This is a remarkable scenario, which envisions a complete reordering of international power. Micah offers a vision of the nations submitting to the torah of Yahweh. And when that submission has been made, there can be disarmament, some will not have what rightly belongs to another. Disarmament is not a commitment in a vacuum, but is part of the justice-making process. The other side of the issue, in this poem, is the willingness to settle for a peasant standard of living, content with vine and fig tree. So peace envisioned here requires of a shift of economic priorities, which permits the end of greed, the end of rapacious taxes, the end of exploitation either by strong parties or by ruthless governments.

“The poem envisions a changed system. But it also presumes a changed set of social priorities and social appetites. It anticipates nothing less than the dismantling of the presently known world for the sake of an alternative world not yet embodied.

“The poem is a part of Micah’s vision of justice. The justice of which Micah speaks requires two elements:

- a) A firm and clear critique of what is going on. Micah sees clearly that what is going on is the rapaciousness of the strong against the weak, all in the name of the war system. Micah does not flinch. But we may also be sure that in his time, or in ours, such a massive critique will be mightily resisted.
- b) A poetic scenario of an alternative way to order society around the gifts of God. . . . It is this act of liberated hope that gives credibility to the critique. For unless there is an alternative around which to rally, then one should not knock the only game in town. But the poetry of 4:1-4 asserts that the present way is not the only game in town. Prophetic faith invites Israel to an alternative.”

(Walter Brueggemann, "Voices of the Night—Against Justice," in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly* by Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas Groome)

Materials Needed

- Handout #5

Invite participants to explore the passage from Micah (Micah 4:1-4) using dramatic reading. Handout #5: The Bible Teaches . . . Peace includes the Scripture passage. Use multiple readers, assigning each reader several lines.

Have participants discuss in their table groups what God is saying through Micah about peace.

2. What Jesus Teaches

Preparation

Use Handout #6 and Handout #8 to add a quote from the Bible to each of the ten key points.

Materials Needed

- Handouts #6 and #8

Using the statements below, briefly summarize the teachings of Jesus and the Bible on peace. Try to involve multiple leaders in sharing a key point and quote. Write the key points on newsprint for all to see or create PowerPoint slides for each key point.

1. **We are to love God, neighbor, and self.** Jesus' teaching on peace begins with the Great Commandment: love of God, neighbor, and self.
2. **We are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.** Jesus greatly expands the understanding of love, overturning popular wisdom by telling his followers that they are to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. He challenges them to love without expecting anything in return.
3. **We are to forgive constantly without counting how often.** Jesus tells Peter that forgiving seven times is not enough. We are to forgive others seventy-seven times, a number so large as to mean that we should never tire of forgiving someone.
4. **We should not repay evil with evil. Only love overcomes evil.** Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, builds upon Jesus' teaching when he writes: "Bless those who persecute you..." (Romans 12:14) and "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).
5. **We are to respect every human being.** At the center of the Christian teachings on peace is the dignity of the human person. Each human life is sacred. Respect for life must guide everything we do.
6. **We are to value kindness and compassion over anger and vengeance.** Christianity teaches an ethic which cherishes life, puts people before things, and values kindness and compassion over anger and vengeance.

- 7. We are called to live the virtues of peace in our daily lives:** faith and hope, courage and compassion, humility and kindness, patience and perseverance, civility and charity. The Christian tradition emphasizes that peacemaking is first a matter of the heart. We need to nurture peaceable virtues.

Select one of the following activities to conclude this learning experience. Families can work alone or with other families at table groups.

Option 1. What Would Jesus Say?

Materials Needed

- One sheet of newsprint and markers for each table group
- Handouts #6 and #8

Ask each family or table group to work together to review the Scripture readings and then apply them to different situations of violence—local, national, and international—that were identified and analyzed in the previous activities. Groups should complete a sentence such as:

“In this situation of violence (*name the situation*), Jesus would say...”

or

“The world chooses violence (*name the situation*), but I say...”

Instruct each group to write their own “Sermon” using different techniques, such as creating a TV or radio commercial modeled on popular commercials, a rap song, a letter to the nation that would appear in national newspapers, or a top ten list of things Jesus would say about violence today.

Invite each group to share their work with another group and post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Option 2. Post-It Note Messages

Materials Needed

- Handouts #6 and #8
- Large size Post-It Notes and a fine-tip black marker for each table group

Direct each group to review the different situations of violence—local, national, and international—that were identified and analyzed in the previous activities. These should already be posted on newsprint around the room.

Ask each group to identify ten situations of violence they want to address with the message of Jesus and the Bible.

Instruct the groups to review the Scripture readings on the handout and find at least one message of peace that applies to each of the ten situations.

Ask group members to compose a Post-It Note message of peace that addresses each situation of violence. The message of peace can be a word or short phrase such as “love your enemies,”

“forgiveness,” and “respect for life.” More than one message can be addressed to a situation of violence.

Direct group members to attach the Post-It Note messages of peace to the appropriate situations of violence.

Option 3. Building Blocks of Peace

Materials Needed

- Handouts #6 and #8
- Half sheets of white copier paper, large size Post-It Notes, or large file cards to represent “building blocks”
- Newsprint or poster board, glue or tape, and colored markers

Give each group at least ten pieces of the “building blocks” with more available if groups need more. Ask groups to review the Scripture readings on the handouts, and compose messages of peace—one word or short phrases, such as “love your enemies,” “forgiveness,” and “respect for life.” Groups should write one word or phrase on a “building block” after they review each Scripture passage.

Direct each group to apply their building blocks to different situations of violence—local, national, and international—that were identified and analyzed in the previous activities. For each building block of peace, find one situation that it would overcome. Groups can apply more than one building to a situation of violence. For example:

Building Block: “Respect for others”

It overcomes . . . Ridiculing or picking on someone because of how they look or talk or because of what they say or believe.

Building Block: “Forgiving others”

It overcomes . . . Being angry or getting revenge because someone hurt you.

Instruct groups to create a wall of peace. Have them attach the building blocks to the newsprint or poster board and under each block write on the paper what violence it overcomes. Group members can decorate their wall of peace.

Here is an example:

Wall of Peace

Building Block	Building Bloc	Building Block	Building Block
It overcomes...	It overcomes...	It overcomes...	It overcomes...

Building Block	Building Block	Building Block	Building Block
It overcomes...	It overcomes...	It overcomes...	It overcomes...

Invite groups to share their completed work with another group or family, and then post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Option 4. Pictures of Peace

Materials Needed

- Handouts #6 and #8
- Large sheets of drawing paper such as newsprint or poster board, colored markers or crayons, pencils, scissors, glue, and a variety of magazines with pictures

Ask parents to review the Scripture readings with the children.

Instruct parents and children to compose messages of peace—one word or short phrases such as “love your enemies,” “forgiveness,” and “respect for life,” and write these on a piece of paper.

Explain to the children that they are to create pictures for an art gallery dedicated to peace. They should draw or select pictures which portray a peaceful resolution of a situation of violence that they talked about or learned about. Their picture should show what it would be like if we lived the message of peace given to us by Jesus. They can draw pictures, write key words or Scripture passages, and cut out photos, ads, or headlines from magazines.

Invite families share their work with others, and then post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Learning Experience Three: How Can We Become Peacemakers?

Pastoral Circle Process: Action

Preparation

Create an Action for Peace Projects Booklet with ideas and projects that you want individuals, families, or the entire church community to adopt. These can include a local, national, and international program that you want the entire church community to adopt, providing a focus for action and giving everyone an opportunity to work together to make a difference. Research local, national, and international organizations involved in peace-making for ideas.

1. Creating a Culture of Peace

Materials Needed

- Your Action for Peace Projects handout or booklet

Offer a brief presentation the ways people can become peacemakers using the following ideas.

- *pray* for peace in our hearts and our world
- *listen* to hear the pain, anger and frustration that comes with and from violence
- *examine* our own attitudes and actions for how they contribute to or diminish violence in our society
- *confront* the violence in our hearts and lives
- be an *advocate* for:
 - curbing the easy availability of *deadly weapon*
 - supporting community approaches to *crime prevention and law enforcement*, including community policing, neighborhood partnerships with police and greater citizen involvement
 - pursuing swift and effective *justice* without vengeance

- support for efforts to attack *root causes* of crime and violence -- including poverty, substance abuse, lack of opportunity, racism, and family disintegration
- promoting more *personal responsibility* and broader social responsibility in our policies and programs
- *building bridges* and promoting solidarity across racial and economic lines
- pursuing *economic justice*, especially employment
- working for legislation that *empowers parents* to choose and afford schools that reflect their values
- overcoming the tragedy of *family violence* and confronting all forms of violence against women
- promoting education, research, and training in *nonviolence*
- respond to *victims* of violence, hearing their anguish and defending their dignity
- *strengthening families* by putting the needs of children and families first in our national priorities
- continuing to work for *global disarmament*, including curbs on arms sales, and a ban on the export of land mines.

Review the peacemaking ideas in your Peace Action Projects Booklet and point out the many ways people can work for peace.

2. Guest Presenter: Advocates for Peace

Preparation

Invite an advocate or advocates for peace and social justice from the local community to share their thoughts about the importance of working for peace. Ask them to prepare the following information:

- The kind of work they are doing and how it promotes peace locally, nationally, and/or internationally.
- The reasons they are personally involved in this work/ministry.
- The characteristics of the people they are serving.
- The role they think the Christian community should be playing in this and other situations of violence, and
- The ways that people can get involved in their work.

Introduce the speaker(s) and invite them to share their thoughts on peace. Allow time for the participants to ask questions.

Adolescent & Adult Learning Experiences

Learning Experience 1. Why Is There a Culture of Violence?

This session can be found under the Families with Children Learning Experiences.

Learning Experience 2. What do the Scriptures Say about Peace?

Pastoral Circle Process: Reflection

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To become more familiar with the Biblical vision of peace, facilitators should read Handout #7: Reflections on Jesus and Peace from the *Challenge of Peace*.

Facilitators should also read this reflection by Walter Brueggemann on Micah 4:1 – 4 and its challenges for all.

“ . . . Micah proposes a radical alternative for the ordering of society. . . . This is a remarkable scenario, which envisions a complete reordering of international power. Micah offers a vision of the nations submitting to the torah of Yahweh. And when that submission has been made, there can be disarmament, some will not have what rightly belongs to another. Disarmament is not a commitment in a vacuum, but is part of the justice-making process. The other side of the issue, in this poem, is the willingness to settle for a peasant standard of living, content with vine and fig tree. So peace envisioned here requires of a shift of economic priorities, which permits the end of greed, the end of rapacious taxes, the end of exploitation either by strong parties or by ruthless governments.

“The poem envisions a changed system. But it also presumes a changed set of social priorities and social appetites. It anticipates nothing less than the dismantling of the presently known world for the sake of an alternative world not yet embodied.

“The poem is a part of Micah’s vision of justice. The justice of which Micah speaks requires two elements:

a) A firm and clear critique of what is going on. Micah sees clearly that what is going on is the rapaciousness of the strong against the weak, all in the name of the war system. Micah does not flinch. But we may also be sure that in his time, or in ours, such a massive critique will be mightily resisted.

b) A poetic scenario of an alternative way to order society around the gifts of God. . . . It is this act of liberated hope that gives credibility to the critique. For unless there is an alternative around which to rally, then one should not knock the only game in town. But the poetry of 4:1-4 asserts that the present way is not the only game in town. Prophetic faith invites Israel to an alternative.”

(Walter Brueggemann, “Voices of the Night—Against Justice,” in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly* by Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas Groome)

Materials Needed

- Handout #5

Invite participants to explore the passage from Micah (Micah 4:1-4) using dramatic reading. Handout #5: The Bible Teaches . . . Peace includes the Scripture passage. Use multiple readers, assigning each reader several lines.

Have participants discuss in their table groups what God is saying through Micah about peace.

2. What Jesus Teaches

Preparation

Use Handout #6 and Handout #8 to add a quote from the Bible to each of the ten key points.

Materials Needed

- Handouts #6 and #8

Using the statements below, briefly summarize the teachings of Jesus and the Bible on peace. Try to involve multiple leaders in sharing a key point and quote. Write the key points on newsprint for all to see or create PowerPoint slides for each key point.

- 8. We are to love God, neighbor, and self.** Jesus’ teaching on peace begins with the Great Commandment: love of God, neighbor, and self.
- 9. We are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.** Jesus greatly expands the understanding of love, overturning popular wisdom by telling his followers that they are to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. He challenges them to love without expecting anything in return.
- 10. We are to forgive constantly without counting how often.** Jesus tells Peter that forgiving seven times is not enough. We are to forgive others seventy-seven times, a number so large as to mean that we should never tire of forgiving someone.
- 11. We should not repay evil with evil. Only love overcomes evil.** Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, builds upon Jesus’ teaching when he writes: “Bless those who persecute you...” (Romans 12:14) and “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).
- 12. We are to respect every human being.** At the center of the Christian teachings on peace is the dignity of the human person. Each human life is sacred. Respect for life must guide everything we do.

13. We are to value kindness and compassion over anger and vengeance. Christianity teaches an ethic which cherishes life, puts people before things, and values kindness and compassion over anger and vengeance.

14. We are called to live the virtues of peace in our daily lives: faith and hope, courage and compassion, humility and kindness, patience and perseverance, civility and charity. The Christian tradition emphasizes that peacemaking is first a matter of the heart. We need to nurture peaceable virtues.

Select one of the following activities to conclude this learning experience. Families can work alone or with other families at table groups.

Option 1. What Would Jesus Say?

Materials Needed

- One sheet of newsprint and markers for each table group
- Handouts #6 and #8

Ask each family or table group to work together to review the Scripture readings on the handouts, and then apply them to different situations of violence—local, national, and international—that were identified and analyzed in the previous activities. Groups should complete a sentence such as:

“In this situation of violence (*name the situation*), Jesus would say...”

or

“The world chooses violence (*name the situation*), but I say...”

Instruct each group to write their own “Sermon” using different techniques, such as creating a TV or radio commercial modeled on popular commercials, a rap song, a letter to the nation that would appear in national newspapers, or a top ten list of things Jesus would say about violence today.

Invite each group to share their work with another group and post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Option 2. Post-It Note Messages

Materials Needed

- Handouts #6 and #8
- Large size Post-It Notes and a fine-tip black marker for each table group

Direct each group to review the different situations of violence—local, national, and international—that were identified and analyzed in the previous activities. These should already be posted on newsprint around the room.

Ask each group to identify ten situations of violence they want to address with the message of Jesus and the Bible.

Instruct the groups to review the Scripture readings and find at least one message of peace that applies to each of the ten situations.

Ask group members to compose a Post-It Note message of peace that addresses each situation of violence. The message of peace can be a word or short phrase such as “love your enemies,” “forgiveness,” and “respect for life.” More than one message can be addressed to a situation of violence.

Direct group members to attach the Post-It Note messages of peace to the appropriate situations of violence.

Option 3. A Peaceful World

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Handouts #6 and #8

Ask groups to apply the Scripture readings to two situations of violence that were identified and analyzed in the previous activities.

Invite them to imagine several alternatives to violence based on the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. Use the following questions to stimulate their imagination.

- If we took seriously the teachings of Jesus and the Bible, how could this situation be different?
- How could this be resolved peacefully?
- What options, other than violence, are available?

Instruct participants to use the handouts to search for the wisdom of Jesus and the Bible for each situation of violence.

Have groups record their answers on newsprint with the heading, “Peaceful World,” at the top of the sheet. Groups should use a “bubble format” by placing the situation they are addressing in the center bubble and then compose alternatives in the outside bubbles. See the diagram below.

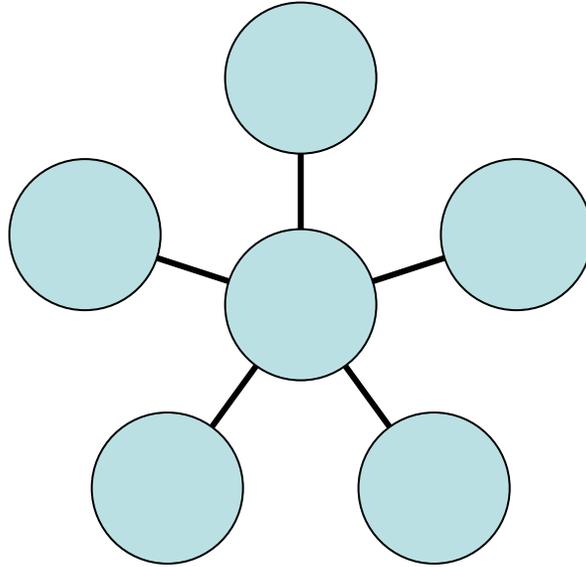
Example

Situation:

Violence and war between two peoples or countries who have hated each other for decades.

Applying the Wisdom of Jesus and the Christian community:

- Addressing grievances and finding peaceful solutions
- Forgiving each other for past violence and crimes against each other
- Respecting the rights of the other people
- Understanding each other better, e.g., each other’s needs for security or for economic wellbeing
- Appealing to reason and responsibility, rather than reaction and violence



Invite groups to share their diagrams with another group and then post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (20-25 minutes)

Materials Needed

- Handout #10
- Instrumental music

Ask participants to gather in the same intergenerational groups from the All Ages Learning Experience. Identify one or two people from each group to present their group's project from "What does Jesus and the Bible Say about Peace?" If the presentation involves the whole group, identify a coordinator who will gather the group to come up to the front for the presentation.

Instruct them to make short presentations. If you have a very large group you can ask just a few groups to volunteer to share their work.

Present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to identify the situations and causes of violence in our world and how the message of the Jesus and the Bible offer a different approach. Please share your reflections on the following questions.

- What is the most important lesson you have learned?
- Why do you think the message of Jesus on peace is important for us as Christians and for our world today?

Allow several minutes for small group sharing, and if time allows, ask for responses from the groups.

Give each parent, adolescent, and adult participant a copy of Handout #10: Pledge of Nonviolence. Give them several minutes to develop one action idea for each pledge statement that they will put into practice. They should use what they learned in the session and the ideas in the Action for Peace handout. Play instrumental music in the background while they complete the Pledge.

Invite participants to post the pledge on the refrigerator or other prominent place in their home to remind them of their commitment to be peacemakers.

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)

Preparation

Ask each family and individual adult or adolescent participant to write one prayer petition for peace using a simple format such as, "We pray for..." or "Jesus, we ask you to..." Participants should write their prayer petition inside the dove on Handout#11: Praying for Peace.

Find seven people to be readers. See their brief parts below.

Materials Needed

- Handout #11
- Candles and firestick

Gather

All powerful and ever living God,
we praise and thank you through Jesus Christ our Lord
for your presence and action in the world.

In the midst of conflict and division,
we know it is you who turns our minds to thoughts of peace.
Your Spirit changes our hearts:
enemies begin to speak to one another,
those who were estranged join hands in friendship,
and nations seek the way of peace together.

Your Spirit is at work when understanding puts an end to strife,
when hatred is quenched by mercy,
and vengeance gives way to forgiveness.

For this we should never cease
to thank and praise you Amen.

Listen

Pledge of Nonviolence

Use seven different readers, one for each statement. As each statement is read, have one person light a candle and bring it the prayer table. Ask everyone to stand to take the pledge.

Reader 1: To Respect Self and Others—To respect myself, to affirm others, and to avoid uncaring criticism, hateful words, physical attacks and self-destructive behavior.

Response: I can and I will.

Reader 2: To Communicate Better—To share my feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express my anger, and to work at solving problems peacefully.

Response: I can and I will.

Reader 3: To Listen—To listen carefully to one another, especially those who disagree with me, and to consider others' feelings and needs rather than insist on having my own way.

Response: I can and I will.

Reader 4: To Forgive—To apologize and make amends when I have hurt another; to forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

Response: I can and I will.

Reader 5: To Respect Nature—To treat the environment and all living things, including our pets, with respect and care.

Response: I can and I will.

Reader 6: To Play Creatively—To select entertainment and toys that support our family's values and to avoid entertainment that makes violence look exciting, funny, or acceptable.

Response: I can and I will.

Reader 7: To Be Courageous—To challenge violence in all forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, at school, at work, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly.

Response: I can and I will.

Respond

Participant Prayer Petitions

Lead the group in voicing their petitions using a simple format such as, "We pray for..." or "Jesus, we ask you to..." Invite everyone to respond with:

Grant us your peace, O Lord.

Go Forth

Loving God, you sent Jesus to show us how to live nonviolently. Jesus, you listened carefully to everyone. You cared about the feelings of others. You forgave those who hurt you. Your heart went out to people no one else cared about. Jesus, send us your Spirit to help each of us be truthful whenever we find violence or injustice around us. We make our prayer, counting on your mercy and love to help us live peacefully. Amen.

Ask people to leave their doves on the tables and later create a Peace Wall in a prominent place in the church building, posting all of the doves.