

A white dove is shown from the side, holding a green olive branch with several leaves. The dove's feet are visible, gripping the branch. The background is a stylized globe of the Earth, showing continents and oceans. The top right corner of the image is a solid blue color.

# Peace Discernment Interim Report

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Recommendation Approved by the 220th General Assembly (2012) By Consensus:

Both the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommend that the 220th General Assembly (2012)

1. Receive the following interim report on the Peace Discernment process entitled "Encountering the Gospel of Peace Anew: An Invitation to Discernment and Witness."
2. Direct that any policy changes from the Peace Discernment Steering Team be brought to the 221st GA (2014) by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy in coordination with the General Assembly Mission Council.
3. Encourage Presbyterians to participate in churchwide discernment on current matters of peace and violence in light of the witness of Jesus Christ and Christian teaching and to encourage congregational, presbytery, college and seminary groups to engage in the process described in the interim report.

Let us pursue  
what  
makes for  
peace. Romans 14:19

# Encountering the Gospel of Peace Anew: An Invitation to Discernment and Witness

## Interim Report of the Peace Discernment Steering Team

These recommendations and interim report are in response to the following referral: *2010 Referral: Item 13-11, On Strengthening the Peacemaking Program (Minutes, 2010, Part I, pp. 65, 67–69, 356 of the printed version; pp. 966–72 of the electronic version).*

### Introduction

“In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage . . . to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.” (*The Book of Confessions, A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4, Lines 65–66, 71*)

“The Church bears witness to Christ when it nourishes the moral life of the nation for the sake of peace in our world.” (*Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling, www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking/, p. 6*)

The 219th General Assembly (2010) directed

the General Assembly Mission Council, through the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, to appoint a five-person steering team, at least one of whom shall be a college student or other young adult, to work with ACSWP and Peacemaking Program representatives to design and implement a broadly participatory four-year process to do the following:

1. Seek clarity as to God’s call to the church to embrace nonviolence as its fundamental response to the challenges of violence, terror, and war; and
2. Identify, explore, and nurture new approaches to active peacemaking and nonviolence, reporting to the 221st General Assembly (2014) with recommendations for policy and action . . . (*Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 68*).

Item 13-11 also asked that an interim report be made to the 220th General Assembly (2012) that would “include specific recommendations of strategy and policy to invite the broader church into the time of discernment, framing the conversation, naming the best partners, and laying out a process to help our congregations to wrestle with these important ethical questions” (*Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 69*).

This interim report is an invitation from the Peace Discernment Steering Team to the whole Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to participate in a time of discernment, looking at peacemaking and nonviolence in the 21st century. We “invite Presbyterians, individually and corporately, across the church into a time of study and reflection on the root causes of violence and responses to it, and on peace, justice, and ministries of peacemaking and justice-seeking that honor the gospel, the history of the church, and the movement of the Holy Spirit as the church attempts to live out Christ’s command to love one another, even those we call our enemies” (*Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 69*).

Words alone cannot contain the horror of violence, the cruelty of sadistic torture, the pain of bullets entering flesh, the burning of white phosphorous on a child's skin, the sight of a beloved spouse splattered against a wall, the loneliness of a young teenager in prison, the fear of a trafficked woman in a cage, the tearing muscles of a naked man on a cross. God knows.

Violence comes in many forms related to power and property, personhood and peoplehood. Evil is larger than violence, but violence is perhaps its clearest marker. Mercifully, God's goodness and grace are larger yet, enduring in unimaginable suffering, strong enough to overcome vengeance and hatred, and their names are sometimes peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Each one of us has encountered violence at some point in our lives, if only on the periphery of it. Any discernment process in this terrain will open difficult doors, and may reintroduce us to an inner victim or tyrant, although more likely both. This is one reason we seek also to reintroduce Jesus of Nazareth as the "Prince of Peace." Christ knows who we are, and his greatest name is Love.

One of the overtures shaping the 219th General Assembly (2010)'s action clearly sought to encourage our church to become a "peace church," not simply opposing particular wars but affirming nonviolence as a basic orientation toward conflict—abroad, at home, and in our everyday lives. The Assembly was not asked to take that position in 2010, but rather to put that basic question of war and violence before the whole church in relation to a wide range of Christian responses to our changing context in our nation and our world. Taking into consideration the other overtures, the Assembly recognized that the church needed to update its thirty-year-old overall policy stance in light of significant international changes that have transformed widely-held notions of what constitutes peace and violence. With that updating, the church's peace programs guided by Assembly policy would, in turn, also be updated.

Why engage in this new exploration of peace now? Because the world has changed

dramatically since 1980, when the 192nd General Assembly (1980) adopted *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* and established the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. The world is much larger (population has grown from 4.5 billion in 1980 to 7 billion today), and it is more connected (through economic globalization and improved communications systems such as the World Wide Web). With the Cold War over, the Berlin Wall fallen, and the Soviet Union no more, what was an East/West ideological divide has given way to a North/South economic divide between rich and poor countries. With this divide has come greater recognition of the presence of structural violence (social and economic injustice) and its role in undermining human dignity.

Terrorism has replaced Communism as the number one threat to U.S. national security, particularly since the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The military budget, never declining much from Cold War levels, is larger than all other programs except Social Security. U.S. military superiority coupled with America's view of itself as exceptional has raised questions about the United States' involvement in the world. Many consider the United States to have become an empire, with military power the key to its domination in many parts of the world. And yet, recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been extremely costly in human and economic terms both for the United States and these countries, and it is not at all clear what they have achieved. This adds to an "increasing sense of the impotence of military might" (p. 11) and the belief that "the main problems of the world will not yield to military solutions," (p. 15) as *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* ([www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking/)) puts it.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that nonviolent direct action can be a powerful, alternative means of responding to conflict, as it has proven successful in struggles for justice, human rights, and self-determination around the world—even overthrowing some of the most brutal dictatorships the world has seen. From the Independence Movement in India to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, from the anticommunist revolutions in Eastern Europe to the role that

peaceful protests played in overturning white minority rule in South Africa, from the role of the churches in delegitimizing violence in Northern Ireland to the “Arab Spring” protests in North Africa and the Middle East and the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya, highlighting the connection between sustainable practices, ecological conservation, and development—there are many examples of nonviolent action producing massive social change.

Indeed, nonviolent direct action is one of ten practices for reducing violence and promoting peace which were identified by an ecumenical group of Christian ethicists brought together by Professor Glen Stassen of Fuller Theological Seminary and later taken up by the 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in its *Resolution on Just Peacemaking and the Call for International Intervention for Humanitarian Rescue*:

1. Support nonviolent direct action.
2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threat.
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.
4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.
5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.
7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.

We seek to build upon the broad understanding of peacemaking put before the church in *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*. We affirm that peace is much more than the absence of

war. It also involves the presence of justice for all people and the health of our planet for all creatures that dwell on it. We also acknowledge the problem of interpersonal violence and affirm the need for peacemaking at all levels of our life together—in our individual lives, families, congregations, communities, nation, and world.

Thus we believe there is an urgent need today for U.S. Presbyterians to question the extent to which violence and injustice pervade our society and dominate our relations with one another and with other nations. Living in the world's only superpower, spending more on the military than all other developed countries combined, and facing growing poverty at home, we suggest it is time for us to spend more time thinking through:

- our involvement in war, injustice, and environmental degradation;
- our participation in complicated structures of violence and oppression; and
- the purposes and costs of international policing and war in a highly interconnected world.

This brief document invites members, congregations, and all councils and organizations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to prepare to participate in a process of discernment, to “encounter the Gospel of Peace anew.” This is the outline of the process requested by the last General Assembly. And while we are now preparing a guide and resource packet for discernment, our hope is not simply to help the church “count the costs” of grievous wars and violence in our culture, but to “meet the Prince of Peace again, as if for the first time.”

We recognize that this is not the way some Presbyterians see the world and we acknowledge that this open process will be open to much criticism as well as confirmation. In the spirit of inviting diverse conversations that engage the whole church, we have sought an accessible rather than academic approach, yet know that creative thinking requires reliable information—a standard for all conversation partners.

## A Process of Discernment

Discernment is a serious, spiritual task, and one entirely consistent with our historic Presbyterian ethos of public responsibility for the common good. It is both personal, involving our God who “alone is Lord of the conscience,” and communal, involving the church as a community of moral discourse, shaped in the Reformed tradition by an understanding of covenant. Discernment involves clear perception of facts and our relation to them, for the sake of faithful action.

As Presbyterians, we believe that God is the source of truth found throughout creation, even though our perception is distorted by sin or our finitude, which sometimes prompts us to respond to evil through fear, ignorance, and a grasping for power. Discernment is needed to untangle self-interest and to remove blinders so that the church and our individual witness will be open to God and neighbor. It can be a challenging process, both personally and when attempted on a churchwide scale.

Discernment involves slowing down and listening together for God’s voice speaking in our midst. Through discernment, we seek wisdom, clarity, and insight as to what God is calling us to be and do, here and now. In discernment, we try

to see the world through God’s eyes and align our words and actions with God’s will. Discernment was invoked and put to good use by the Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church (2008). The Peace Discernment Steering Team also has experienced its benefits in our own reflections on nonviolence.

There is a fruitful paradox at the heart of discernment: on the one hand, if discernment is to be genuine, it cannot have predetermined outcomes; on the other hand, we never come to discernment with a blank slate, but must always bring ourselves, our values, and our experiences. Authentic discernment involves a fresh encounter with the Spirit of the Living Christ.

So, while nonviolence is a clear option to be presented, our discernment process is open-ended. The outcome of this process is not predetermined. Nor do we expect all Presbyterians to agree with even a consensus view of the best approaches to different kinds of violence and conflict. Yet, just as individual members bring their own experience and conviction, so the faith that we share brings with it a tradition and wisdom about how to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Peace Discernment Steering Team (PDST) proposes the following timeline for engaging the whole Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in a participatory policy-making process on these concerns over the next four years:

October 2011

The PDST consults with Christian ethicists at the Social Ethics Network gathering at San Francisco Theological Seminary.

April 2012

The PDST conducts a “listening project” in Washington, DC, to hear from Presbyterians who are involved in the military/industrial complex, Presbyterian war veterans, military families, and chaplains, as well as members of the diplomatic service and policymakers. PDST also consults with Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at its Convocation of Peacemakers held at Stony Point Center.

May/June 2012

The proposed Peace Discernment Process and selected background pieces are posted on the PC(USA) website. A five-minute video is produced, inviting individuals, churches, and presbyteries to be part of the Peace Discernment Process. The process proposed will include ways to explore and experiment with peacemaking approaches but also emphasize the need to hear all voices and to uncover resources in one's own community.

July 2012

The 220th General Assembly receives the interim report/invitation document from the Peace Discernment Steering Team and its parent bodies. If the Assembly approves this document, it is sent to all councils and agencies of the church for appropriate consideration and response over the next ten months, allowing for analysis of responses and recommendations to be made to the 221st General Assembly (2014).

The Peace Discernment Process is presented at the Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference at Ghost Ranch. Participants are encouraged to involve their congregations and presbyteries in the Peace Discernment Process.

Sept./Oct. 2012

The PDST attempts to engage a broad cross-section of the church by intentionally inviting diverse congregations into conversation, both those that have a history of participating in peacemaking and those that may be new to peacemaking. Sessions are invited to form peace discernment teams in their own congregations to elicit people's personal stories of their encounters with the Prince of Peace in a violent and unjust world. They send a commitment form to their presbytery and to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program declaring their intention. (Goal: At least 15 percent of churches in every presbytery participate.)

At the same time, all presbyteries are invited to schedule one-day peace discernment conversations, facilitated by a member of the Peace Discernment Steering Team or other resource person. These could be held at a church, a college, a camp/conference center, or a military base. Presbyteries contact the Peace Discernment Steering Team to schedule a date and enlist the help of a facilitator. (Goal: A facilitated peace discernment conversation is held in at least 25 percent of presbyteries.)

Nov. 2012-May 2013

Using a small group discernment process developed by the PDST, the congregational peace discernment teams gather for a series of meetings or for a weekend retreat. They submit a summary of their findings (highlighting particularly gripping stories and creative/new peacemaking initiatives) to their presbytery and to the Peace Discernment Steering Team, using a response form provided to them.

Presbyteries hold their facilitated peace discernment conversations and submit a summary of their findings (also highlighting particularly gripping stories and creative/new peacemaking initiatives) to the Peace Discernment Steering Team, using a similar response form provided.

Individuals may also submit personal stories online, via the website, in prose or poetry, art or video.

February 2013

The PDST holds a Peace Convocation for up to 150 “individuals who are engaged in action and reflection on peacemaking and justice seeking, including faculty and students from Presbyterian-related colleges, universities, and seminaries, activists, individuals engaged in nonviolent witness, grassroots persons working for justice and peace, others engaged in peacemaking in congregations, [mid councils], Presbyterian Women, and other Presbyterian-related entities.”

College, university, and seminary representatives are encouraged to involve students and young adults in the peace discernment process and to incorporate peace and justice studies in longer-term curriculum development. Other participants are encouraged to involve their congregations and presbyteries in the Peace Discernment Process if they have not already done so. Keynote speeches and a summary report are posted online.

April–Nov. 2013

The PDST analyzes and distills input from the churchwide Peace Discernment Process, incorporating it into a report and recommendations to the 221st General Assembly (2014). The PDST submits the report and recommendations to ACSWP for approval in January 2014.

June 2014

The PDST presents its report and recommendation to the 221st General Assembly (2014), asking for that Assembly to receive the report for a two-year period of study before final action in 2016. The 221st General Assembly (2014) may affirm the recommendations (and/or amend them) and send them out more formally for responses from the presbyteries. While this is not seen to involve constitutional changes, if the 221st General Assembly (2014) approves significant changes to the church’s stances toward war and violence, it is felt that the presbyteries should again be engaged in a way that may test the recommendations and guide a final decision at the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

July–Dec. 2014

A video and study guide is produced to accompany the peace discernment report and recommendations.

June 2016

The 222nd General Assembly (2016) takes final action.

## The Current Position of the Church

The most comprehensive current policy on matters of international violence and war is *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* (1980), a response to overtures from thirty-one presbyteries. This twenty-seven-page policy was developed by a team of experts over a five-year period and includes two appendices and a study guide. It led to the creation of the very influential Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. Through a special offering, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has raised between \$1 and \$2 million each year since its creation and has developed a host of resources, annual peacemaking conferences, international study tours, and other initiatives. It arranges annually for PC(USA) congregations to host international peacemakers. Approximately 50 percent of Presbyterian congregations have affirmed the Commitment to Peacemaking over this period, with large differences among presbyteries and regions. Some peacemaking funds have supported the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations; other funds, in stipulated proportions, have supported peacemaking activities in congregations and presbyteries.

When the church spoke in 1980, it broadened the Vietnam era concern for individual conscience to affirm that peacemaking was the calling of all believers, particularly to face nuclear and other Cold War dangers, and in ways that would recognize global interdependence and encourage a wide range of church engagement. *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* provides a broad biblical, theological, and ethical basis for Christian peace mission but also identifies some general directions: to reverse the worldwide arms race, examine "conversion of the economy from military to civilian production," and relate peace to justice concerns.

Since that time, careful studies and prophetic statements have addressed the nuclear danger, particular military interventions and their rationale, and the relation of religion, violence, and terrorism. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), since 1986, has held a virtual "nuclear pacifist"

position, opposing first use and retaliation and calling repeatedly for disarmament. "Just peacemaking" categories were introduced in 1996, designed to advance the ecumenical church's thinking beyond the traditional categories of just war, crusade, and pacifism. General Assemblies have also called for responsible withdrawals by the United States from Iraq (2004) and Afghanistan (2010); the 2004 Assembly prophetically and controversially termed the Iraq war "unwise, illegal, and immoral." (The 2008 Assembly "commended for study" a careful ethical assessment of that war entitled "To Repent, To Restore, To Rebuild, and To Reconcile.")

This effort differs from previous studies in seeking broader participation and in focusing more on the example as well as teaching of Jesus and the early church.

This effort, however, returns to an earlier model of church decision-making on war and peace used by our church long before 1980. In proposing a two-stage process for inviting responses, reflecting on them, and then sending out preliminary recommendations to the presbyteries, this process echoes a model used by our church in the 1930s, before World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

In 1936 and 1938, the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in the United States of America affirmed and sent to the presbyteries a proposal to remove just war language from the Westminster Confession, then the only confessional standard for the church. On both occasions, a majority of presbyteries voted for the proposals, but the number did not reach the super majority required for confessional change.

The church changed the nature of its peace witness in The Confession of 1967 in an affirmation that is central to the thinking of *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* and that remains vital today:

God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom among nations which all powers of

government are called to serve and defend. The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This search requires that nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding. Reconciliation among nations becomes particularly urgent as countries develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, diverting their [hu]manpower and resources from constructive uses and risking the annihilation of [hu]mankind. Although nations may serve God's purposes in history, the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling. (*The Book of Confessions*, Section 9.45)

The current position of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), then, tilts strongly toward peace and develops means for peacemaking, but considers wars on a case-by-case basis, often adapting just war criteria to assess justifications for and conduct of hostilities. In ecumenical terms, several of the alternatives to war commended by the Assembly would be considered "just peacemaking," though the Presbyterian policy that goes by the name "just peacemaking" is focused on humanitarian intervention, as in Bosnia or Libya most recently.

The Peace Discernment Process into which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is now being invited is concerned principally with the following questions:

- How can the PC(USA) hasten the day when war and violence are no longer considered acceptable or inevitable means for resolving conflicts? What are the best means for providing protection and security?
- Should the PC(USA) continue to rely on the just war tradition as its basis for restraining war, or have the conditions of modern warfare and the politics and economics of war rendered our historic stance obsolete? Are there new emphases and different biblical alternatives to consider?
- Is the PC(USA) now being called to become a "peace church," not simply opposing particular wars but affirming nonviolence as a basic orientation toward conflict—in our daily lives, in our communities, and in our world? If so, what would the implications of such a stance be for those in the military, those in military industries, and for our witness in society?
- How can Presbyterians help transform complicated structures of injustice and oppression and address the threat of environmental degradation?

# Jesus, the Early Church, and Nonviolence: Recovering a Lost Legacy

## Jesus and Nonviolence

Nonviolence can be thought of as both a means and an end. It is an end in that it refers to the future world we long for—a world free from violence and war, free from hunger and poverty, free from injustice and oppression, and full of God’s love and healing. Jesus called it “the kingdom of God”; Martin Luther King, Jr., called it “the beloved community”; and Walter Wink called it “the domination-free order.” Nonviolence also can be thought of as a means in two ways: as a technique for engaging in conflict and as an ethic or philosophy for living one’s life.

There is a clear predilection for nonviolence in both the example and teaching of Jesus and in the practice of the early church. We say this aware of the tendency to “de-politicize” Jesus and individualize his message; the method of his death stands as a constant reminder that his movement threatened Rome at a time when religion and politics were not separate spheres.

When members of Jesus’ hometown synagogue were so infuriated by his preaching that they drove him out of town, intending to throw him off a cliff, “he passed through the midst of them and went on his way” (Lk 4:30). Jesus didn’t try to run away, nor did he try to defend himself with violence. Instead, he seemed to choose a third response. He stood his ground with courage, faced down the angry mob, and made his way through the crowd without striking one blow.

The Peace Discernment Steering Team follows Walter Wink and other scholars who see in Jesus a third way that resists evil through nonviolent means, an approach that outflanks and reverses aggression, sometimes by choosing to suffer. From this perspective, turning the other cheek, offering more clothing than a coat, and going a second mile are examples of the “weaker” party taking the moral initiative and humanizing one’s opponent, “forcing” him or her to recognize one’s own humanity without resorting to violence. This is a strategy with social and

cultural implications, potentially breaking cycles of subjugation and humiliation, exposing injustice in power dynamics, and neutralizing and undermining the threat of violence. (Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 186-187.)

Without imposing one text or one view on the whole picture of Jesus, the third way interpretation is a way of accounting for a prophetic and nonviolent life that threatened both the Roman and Temple authorities. It does not deny the violent imagery in some of his parables. It presents a Jesus of inner power who, when a Samaritan village refused to host him, refuses his disciples’ idea that he ask God “to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them.” (In contemporary terms, they could have been calling for a missile or divine airstrike to take out that village.) Jesus rebukes them, saying, “You do not know what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them” (Lk 9:51-62, esp. 55-56, NASB). Even when Jesus demonstrated his strong passion for justice and the integrity of God’s sacred house by cleansing the Temple, overturning the tables of the moneychangers and driving them out, he stopped short of violence against persons.

When Jesus was about to be arrested, one of his disciples struck a slave of the high priest with a sword and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched the slave’s ear and healed him. Matthew quotes Jesus saying, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt 26:52, NRSV). Jesus didn’t resort to violence to protect his life or legacy. Instead of taking up the sword, he chose to endure the suffering of the cross with words of forgiveness on his lips, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34, NRSV).

Of Jesus' death on the cross, Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "Jesus eloquently affirmed from the cross a higher law. He knew that the old eye-for-an-eye philosophy would leave everyone blind. He did not seek to overcome evil with evil. He overcame evil with good."

While we emphasize the witness of Jesus in this resource for discernment, a fuller discussion would compare his teaching with the broad range of approaches to violence in the Old Testament. During the reigns of kings, for example, we see leaders who exercise power and sovereignty over their own people and wage offensive and defensive war. The prophets (closest models for Jesus) hold the royal figures to moral accounting based on law and teaching received from God in the earliest period of liberation and community formation. There are stories of victory and defeat in warfare, descriptions of captivity and exile, and accounts of battle and its aftermath. In the earlier periods, the people do not have power and face disordered violence, as in the book of Judges; later books describe internal divisions within a Hebrew kingdom and rebellions by vassal states against oppressive empires.

Some scholars have seen the biblical books unfolding a progressive revelation leading from the initial wars in Canaan toward more profound models of faithfulness such as that of the "suffering servant." Others spiritualize the narratives of all-out wars of conquest or de-emphasize the commands to kill women and children as well as male fighters, a style of war sometimes called "holy war" or later in history, "crusade," although some crusading campaigns followed rules of chivalry. Whichever approach to the holy war and sacrificial passages one uses, the Reformed tradition takes the Hebrew Bible very seriously, and we are reluctant to impose one schema upon it.

## **The Early Church and Nonviolence (adapted from 2010 Overture 13-06)**

The history of Christian responses to violence tells a compelling story of the initial embrace of the nonviolent witness of Jesus. Early Christians in Rome refused to engage in any violence because they trusted that their love for fellow citizens would point people to the new day dawning in Jesus Christ (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 14.3; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 8.68, 75; Arnobius, *Against the Nations*, 1.6). The first Christians lived according to a nonviolent code, with frequent martyrdom.

Moreover, taking with utmost seriousness the Hebrew prophets Micah and Isaiah, early Christian theologians asserted that the coming of the Messiah removed the need for members of the beloved community to do anything other than beat their swords into plowshares when it came to matters of violence (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 110; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 5.33; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, 5; cf. also Cyprian, *On the Advantage of Patience*, 14). They did not interpret the violence in their Scriptures (our Old Testament) as giving them license to kill.

Indeed, there is no affirmation of killing or war anywhere in the writings of the early church, nor is there anywhere the idea that Christians making war would make the world a better or safer place. The early writings are replete with prohibitions against killing of any sort, some of which even carried the explicit sanction of forbidding admission to the Eucharist directed at persons engaged in such acts (*Canons of the Synod of Illiberis*, 56; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, Canon 16; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 6.20.16–17). The early Christians would not even watch killings, either by observing the carrying out of legal death sentences or by attending the gladiatorial games (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 30.6, 31.6; Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 35).

Christians today who interpret the apostle Paul as giving divine sanction to violence and war (Rom 13:4) cannot ignore the history of the early church and even Paul's own words immediately before and after that passage about caring for enemies, overcoming evil with good, and fulfilling the law through loving others (Rom 12:20-21 and Rom 13:8-10). Indeed, recent scholarship indicates that the letters of Peter, Paul, and other authors call for Christians to adopt a new behavior toward those who do harm to them (Rom 12:14-21; 1 Pt 3:9-19; James 3:13-4:3). Though generally poor and powerless, these early Christian communities were also vibrant and threatening to the Roman Empire and its institutions of slavery and expansionist war.

The history of the Christian response to violence changed in the fourth century. Following the conversion of Constantine, Christians began to take up arms on behalf of the Roman Empire, sometimes with inducements of money, property, and power. The change was such that while in 303 CE it was forbidden for Christians to serve in the military, by 416 CE only Christians were allowed to serve.

### **The Just War Tradition and Its Changing Contexts**

Christian participation in the wars of the Roman Empire contributed to the creation of the just war doctrine or theory, developed initially by Bishop Augustine of Hippo on ideas from Bishop Ambrose of Milan. The just war theory established the ground rules under which a Christian might be understood to be acting morally—out of love—even when killing another human being.

Even Augustine, who believed that protecting the innocent made killing justifiable, nevertheless taught that a Christian killing in self-defense was immoral. After Augustine, the justification for killing on the part of Christians expanded to include self-defense and even further, to the killing of other Christians, if considered aggressors. This practice has continued until our own times. A concise summary comes from the 1985 resource paper *Presbyterians and*

*Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?* by Dana W. Wilbanks and Ronald H. Stone:

"In just war thinking, criteria have been developed for assessing both when resort to war may be justified and also which means of fighting a war are morally permissible. In considering whether resort to war is justified:

- the purpose for engaging in war must be just;
- it must be carried out by legitimate authority;
- there must be a reasonable prospect that the purpose for going to war can be achieved; and
- war should only be a last resort after other means for resolving the conflict have been exhausted.

In considering whether the means of conducting a war are justified, the criteria of proportionality and discrimination are paramount. Proportionality requires that the means be restrained so that the evils of warfare do not outweigh the moral goods in the justifiable objectives. Discrimination requires that the means of war be directed only at combatants and not non-combatants . . . " (p. 13).

Additional criteria sometimes include proper intention (not revenge or hatred) and the insistence that the tactics used in conducting a war be militarily necessary and conform to international law. Just war concepts are embedded in international law, as in the concept of war crimes, prohibition against torturing prisoners, and the efforts to ban nuclear as well as biological and chemical weapons. The *Presbyterians and Peacemaking* resource, in fact, was part of a churchwide study of militarism, the nuclear arms race, and resistance that led to *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* (1988), which opposed nuclear weapons partly on just war grounds. At the same time, that policy statement by the General Assembly recognized that most acceptance of war is based not on just war thinking, but on often unthinking obedience to the state and political forces; hence various

means of resistance were seen as consistent with Reformed teaching.

The practice of granting exceptions or expansions (and exclusions) to the basic principles of the just war theory has resulted in an ever-expanding definition of just war as weapons technology and cultural patterns have changed over the centuries. Secretive submarine warfare and aerial bombardment, even though defended as a means of ending hostilities, nonetheless virtually eliminate the immunity of noncombatants. It is sometimes argued that each new exception becomes the new standard, which then gets broadened to embrace the next exception, but space prevents a full discussion of the influence of the church on international law and state relations that also shaped just war theory (see John H. Yoder's *When War Is Unjust* (1984).) In principle, however, the church moved from a countercultural nonviolence to accepting the killing of human beings for the sake of public order when certain legal limits were applied.

#### ***Questions for Reflection/Discernment***

- How do we respond to the example of Jesus and the nonviolent church of the first three centuries after seventeen

centuries of trying to restrain violence through just war categories? Is there a third way between fight and flight?

- In what ways does the church today practice (or fail to practice) Jesus' message of nonviolence?
- How do you understand the current just war tradition of the church? Do you agree with an expectation, or even acceptance, of some amount of war? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about military force being used to keep peace and maintain security? What are the limits to military action and how can they be applied?

# The Challenges of Violence, Terrorism, and War

Since the terror event of 9/11/01, involving four hijacked civilian airplanes and approximately 3,000 civilian casualties, the United States has been engaged in two significant wars and a more recent intervention in Libya. The war in Afghanistan has been a joint operation with NATO member armies as was the recent military intervention in Libya. The war in Iraq was inaugurated without United Nations authorization and involved a “coalition of the willing,” with Great Britain most notable among the U.S. allies. In 2004, the General Assembly called the Iraq war “unwise, immoral, and illegal,” based on a clear rethinking of just war teaching: preemptive war was seen as antithetical to last resort; nonexistent weapons and regime change were not seen as just cause; unilateral action spurned the legitimate authority of the UN; and while military success was assured, democratization through military occupation was seen as a questionable way to achieve a just peace.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars have been extremely costly in both human and economic terms. More than 6,100 U.S. soldiers have been killed and more than 46,000 have been injured. The number of Afghans, Iraqis, and Pakistanis who have died in the fighting are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. War refugees and internally displaced persons number 7.8 million. The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars will cost the United States alone an estimated \$3-4 trillion when current and future veterans’ costs are added up; the costs of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and military activity by other countries involved is estimated to be another \$3 trillion. Most Americans now question whether these military interventions have been worth the enormous cost in lives and national treasure.

For most of our history, the size of the military mirrored the immediate threat or task to which it was directed. In times of war, the United States drafted an army, and when the war was over, most of the army disbanded. This was the case after the American Civil War and after both the First and Second World Wars. But since the end

of the Cold War, the size and capability of our military has increasingly taken on a life of its own, independent of any specific threats. Americans have grown to see it as their right and responsibility to police the world. Without credible threats to the United States itself (as distinct from threats to individual citizens), have we come to value military power for its own sake?

The United States spends more money on its military than the next top-spending seventeen countries combined. It retains some 700 military bases around the world from which to project force, carry on surveillance, and protect oil and other resources. U.S. military intervention has become commonplace since the end of the Cold War—in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Libya, and the list goes on. Hardly a year or two has passed without a significant military action. Living in a state of war has become the rule rather than the exception.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the entire spectrum of our nation’s engagement with the world is becoming more militarized. U.S. military forces are increasingly being used to do things that have not usually been considered part of their job—things like nation building, which had been handled by the State Department and through international diplomacy.

The growth of military spending has been driven, in part, by military manufacturers and a host of contractors and private security companies. President Eisenhower’s prophetic warning about the unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex has become more relevant than ever. However, today the concept has expanded to include the role of congressional leaders, many of whom receive campaign contributions from military contractors or are hired as arms industry lobbyists once they leave public office. Now called the “congressional-military-industrial complex,” or “iron triangle,” it is an interlocking system of mutually reinforcing interests with very little outside oversight. Supported by “political engineering” that

distributes military contracts across many congressional districts, the complex creates and sustains its own bureaucratic momentum and is largely impervious to criticism or serious reform. National Security has become the overarching interest with which the United States approaches the world. Since “the war on terror” began, covert operations, surveillance, and drone missiles have taken on a central role. The growth in the U.S. intelligence community has been staggering.

The Central Intelligence Agency (1949, from the Office of Strategic Services), the National Security Agency (1952), the National Reconnaissance Office (1960), and the Defense Intelligence Agency (1961) are the most acknowledged of U.S. secret services and the basis for pre-1980 descriptions of the United States as a national security state. This description covered not only the growth in Cold War secrecy, but the expansion of executive branch power over the standing army and the particular stewardship of nuclear weaponry.

Since the beginning of “the war on terror,” the growth of new layers of security, secrecy, and cyber-capability suggest a new kind of arms race, and one that is acknowledged to be disproportionate to the threats of terrorism. According to a July 2011 series in *The Washington Post*, some 1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security, and intelligence, with an estimated 854,000 people holding top-secret security clearances.

The United States’ vast military and intelligence establishments go far beyond the intent or imagination of our nation’s Founders, whose views could loosely be called isolationist, opposed to foreign entanglements in John Adams’s words. George Washington himself counseled against a significant standing army: “Overgrown military establishments are under any form of government inauspicious to liberty, and are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican liberty” (*Farewell Address*, September 17, 1796). And James Madison wrote: “Of all enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps,

the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few” ([http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/James\\_Madison](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/James_Madison) or [www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/63859.James\\_Madison](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/63859.James_Madison), quote 33).

What may be most disturbing is how these developments have taken root largely without public debate. As our military spending remains at unprecedented levels, and as the tasks of the military continue to expand, an almost permanent state of war becomes the new normal. Rather than a “peace dividend,” our military planning recently sought “full spectrum dominance,” and is still predicated on maintaining overwhelming superiority.

Within the military itself, however, there are voices for change. One of the more comprehensive comes from Captain Wayne Porter, USN, and Colonel Mark Mykleby, USMC, whose proposal for a new “National Strategic Narrative” was endorsed and summarized by Anne-Marie Slaughter, a professor of international affairs and briefly director of Policy Planning in the State Department. Their proposal is for five shifts in approach:

1. from a dominant position of control to credible influence in a more open geopolitical system;
2. “from containment to sustainment,” based on domestic redevelopment and better modeling of the behavior we seek in other nations;
3. “from deterrence and defense to civilian engagement and competition,” which would reemphasize trade and diplomacy, while still modernizing “a security complex that includes all domestic and foreign policy assets”;
4. “from zero sum to positive sum global politics/economics,” preferring interdependence and universal values to isolation and exclusion of other nations;

5. “from national security to national prosperity and security,” a shift that would involve a new National Prosperity and Security Act to replace the 1947 National Security Act.

In Slaughter’s summary, she sees the officers adjusting the balance between exceptionalism and universalism toward the latter value, still seeking to be “leader of the free world,” but in a healthier and actually less military way ([www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf)).

### ***Questions for Reflection/Discernment***

- Have the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan changed the way you think about war? If so, how? What lessons have you learned from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?
- Do you, in your own life, see signs of a military-industrial-congressional complex supporting our tendency to use force or threat of force?
- What effects do you see in the shift from the citizen-soldier model to the volunteer or professional soldier model with contractor support?
- As Christians, should we expect or encourage our political leaders to show mercy to our nation’s enemies?

# Living in a Culture of Violence and Fear

The fear that drives our military policy also erodes our relationships with one another. This erosion becomes normalized as structural violence. It is evident in practices of suspicion towards the “other” (people from other countries, other racial/ethnic groups, other religions), in practices of wealth accumulation that create and perpetuate economic inequality, and in practices of preemption that cause people and nations to react with force as a first resort.

Violence pervades American culture. Examples abound:

- A young teenager lives in a drug-infested neighborhood where warring gangs fight over turf. He is caught in the crossfire on his way to school and killed outside his home.
- A wife leaves her husband and seeks the safety of a battered women’s shelter after the last beating left her hospitalized with stitches and a concussion.
- About 30,000 people are killed by firearms each year in the United States, including suicides, with thousands more wounded.
- In the United States, one in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
- On average, children’s cartoons contain large amounts of violence, as do adult television crime shows and movies, including horror movies.
- Popular video games for boys especially include “first-person shooter” games with constant killing and destruction.
- Many sports involve partly ritualized and partly controlled violence, sometimes simulated in the case of professional wrestling, but often bloody in cage fighting and other extreme combat.

- A man is convicted of armed robbery and sent to prison, where he is then raped repeatedly with the tacit acceptance of the guards.
- A young woman assembling U.S. cell phone components for sixty hours a week for four years in a free trade zone becomes profoundly depressed and jumps to her death from a dormitory window.

While direct physical violence may be more visible and attract more attention, there is another form of violence that is far more widespread in the world and arguably does far more harm over time. It is known as structural violence and refers to social and economic structures that oppress and impoverish people, preventing them from meeting their basic human needs and realizing their full human potential.

Corporate-led globalization has resulted in a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The world’s income distribution resembles the shape of a champagne glass, with the top 20 percent of the world’s people who live in the world’s wealthiest countries receiving 83 percent of the world’s income. The next 20 percent receive 10 percent of the world’s income. The remaining 60 percent of the world’s people share the 7 percent of world income that is left.

From this global perspective, Americans are among the richest 20 percent of the world’s population. (Consider that 40 percent of the world’s people attempt to live on less than \$2 a day.) Most Americans live on much more than that. But within the United States there is also a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The U.S. economic and political system has enabled 1 percent of Americans to take in almost a quarter of our nation’s income every year and to control over 40 percent of our nation’s wealth. This growing economic inequality is becoming untenable. Millions in the United States are not working. Millions more have lost their homes to foreclosure. Retirees and those nearing retirement see their retirement savings plummet

every time the stock market takes a dive. Poverty in the United States is the highest it has been in fifty years!

Some Americans have taken to the streets, calling for change. They are no longer willing to give their consent and cooperation to a system that allows so much wealth and power to be concentrated in the hands of 1 percent of the population. The protesters say they represent “the 99 percent.”

Global economic inequality is nothing new. In 1948, George Kennan, head of the U.S. State Department planning staff, wrote the following in a secret policy planning study:

We have about 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population. . . . In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. . . . To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. . . . We should cease to talk about vague and . . . unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

How do we “maintain this position of disparity”? What does it mean to “deal in straight power concepts”? Enter the military-industrial complex. Thomas L. Friedman, the foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*, explains it this way: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the first designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines Corps.”

We maintain our privileged economic position in the world through U.S. military might, as well as through military aid and weapons sales to governments around the world. The United States is the largest supplier of arms in the world. In many cases, these weapons are used by militaries against their own people in order to maintain a stable environment for corporate investments. Militarization makes corporate-led globalization possible.

Examples of structural violence also include the patterns of inequality and exclusion called the “isms” of racism, sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism, as well as homophobia. These patterns operate at interlocking levels—institutionalized (policies and practices), interpersonal (group and individual), and cultural (social norms and valuing).

Most Americans know that the “isms” exist, but the common discourse in our country narrowly addresses discrimination that happens at the interpersonal level—when someone makes a blatantly derogatory comment or is accused of doing so. This myopic focus stymies people's understanding of the more insidious institutional and cultural forms of the isms that crush the human spirit and deny people access to adequate food, water, shelter, education, health care and self-determination. So while the theories of oppression have become much more nuanced (e.g., critical race theory and Chester M. Pierce's work on “microaggressions”) and reveal how the isms perpetuate deeply entrenched power disparities, most Americans are both unfamiliar with how the isms operate and unaware of their exacting toll.

Yet, these forms of oppression do cause harm. We dehumanize ourselves and degrade others by unconsciously supporting patterns that pin our opportunities for well-being on our neighbors' marginalization. In each case, structural violence prevents us from fulfilling our Christian calling to be in authentic loving relationships with our neighbors, near and far.

The structural violence of injustice and oppression often leads to the violence of revolt

and rebellion that then leads to the retaliatory violence of government repression, which then only compounds the structural violence of injustice and oppression and leads to further revolt followed by yet more repression. This dynamic is the spiral of violence, to which Martin Luther King, Jr., referred when he said: “The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. . . . Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that” (*Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*, Harper and Row, 1967).

Matters of social and economic justice hold a central place in the Bible. These issues are found all through the Hebrew prophets. Jesus talks more about wealth and poverty than almost any other issue. Indeed, if we tried to cut out all the references to the rich and the poor in the Bible, our Scriptures would be left in shreds.

A central theme of Jesus’ public ministry, empowered by God’s Spirit, was about nonviolent liberation—freeing people from spiritual, physical, social, and economic forms of bondage. His healings, for example, often also involved restoration to community and recognition of a measure of personal identity. It was good news for the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed, the landless and enslaved—all people marginalized or excluded by the culture. This good news extended beyond the nation of Israel to include Gentiles as well. But Jesus’ radically inclusive message of liberation for all, while welcomed by the poor and the outcast as a sign of hope, was rejected by those in power. The leaders of his own people collaborated with the Roman government to have him executed.

Jesus’ teachings ran counter to the popular theologies of Jesus’ day and our day, theologies which suggest that poverty and suffering are consequences of unrighteousness, indications of God’s judgment, while material wealth and physical well-being are consequences of righteousness, indications of God’s blessing. Jesus turned this thinking upside down. His words challenge us to look critically at our lives, to take a second look at our priorities. The whole law and the prophets are summed up in love of God and love of neighbor, Jesus tells us (Mt 22:34-40). That law of love, applied to situations of everyday life, serves as the central criterion for the Last Judgment.

We are also doing violence to the earth and its creatures. We are destroying ecosystems, depleting precious natural resources, and causing a massive extinction of species. We are now using natural resources like fresh water faster than the earth can replenish them. And we are generating waste products like greenhouse gases that are altering the ecology of the entire planet. Global climate change is causing more extreme (and destructive) weather events to occur. Floods and droughts are becoming more severe. Glaciers and ice caps are melting, sea levels and ocean temperatures are rising, and coral reefs are dying. In the book *Tropic of Chaos* (2011), Christian Parenti warns that climate change is creating desperate refugees and the potential for serious violence in many regions.

The challenge of our culture is that there seems increasingly to be a deficit of empathy, a surplus of fear, and a willingness to sacrifice the future for the present. Some of the factors listed at the beginning of this reflection section may contribute to that lack of empathy and the related lack of community and feelings of powerlessness. As followers of Jesus, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is incumbent upon us to treat others with respect and dignity and to ensure that their basic human needs are met.

### ***Questions for Reflection/Discernment***

- How have your experiences with violence and/or war affected you, your faith, and/or your views about peacemaking?
- How is discrimination against particular populations within our society (sexism, racism, classism, ethnic or religious prejudice, etc.) a form of violence? How would you define “structural violence”?
- How do cultural practices such as violence in entertainment media impact us? Do you think they lead to greater violence or to more passivity? Why? Are we in some sense bullied and disempowered by the world of fantasy?
- Are economic practices of unemployment, poverty-level wages, and work without health or retirement benefits forms of structural violence?

# New Directions for Peacemaking: Nonviolent Action, Conflict Transformation, and Reconciliation

During the past twenty years, the field of peacemaking and conflict transformation has taken off. Peace and conflict studies programs in colleges and universities have been established in increasing numbers across the United States and the world. There are now four hundred such programs globally, several in the sixty-six colleges and universities affiliated with the PC(USA). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proliferated, helping to strengthen civil society. Think tanks, research centers, and foundations, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the U.S. Institute of Peace, the International Crisis Group, Search for Common Ground, and the Oxford Research Group, have developed innovative methods of conflict analysis and intervention. More than one thousand organizations work explicitly on peace and conflict issues globally.

Methods of conflict prevention, conflict management, diplomatic peacemaking, and post-conflict peace building have been developed significantly. We have seen a greater acceptance of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in the international community as well as the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC). More conflicts are being ended through negotiation rather than victory by one adversary over another. More post-conflict countries are forming Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Civil society and women, in particular, are increasingly seen as important actors in peace building.

Additionally, there is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which represents a push to strengthen the international community's commitment to intervening to prevent and stop genocides, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The R2P concept and the concept of smart power (taking ideas from both "soft," or diplomatic/economic power, and "hard" military power) have been used to justify the limited Libya intervention and to argue for intervention in Syria and Iran. Thus, while seeking to raise the bar for the internal conduct of nations regarding human

rights, there is a danger of lowering the bar for the acceptance of various kinds of intervention: cyberwar, drone strikes, black ops, and psychological warfare. Governments seeking to justify war will always demonize opponents and heighten fears; a key task for Christians is to test the arguments to ensure that they don't import new holy war justifications. As explicit Christian references are reduced in U.S. culture, idolatrous religious claims for and by "the nation" may well increase. In such contexts, the need for Christian analysis of motivations and methods for protecting people will also increase.

Since the end of the Cold War, conflicts between nation-states have actually been declining in number. But at the same time, the number of conflicts within nation-states has surged. Some of these intrastate conflicts have been predominantly violent in nature, coinciding with a dramatic uptick in the proliferation of small arms and other light weapons being used by a variety of armed actors (the state, paramilitaries, insurgent groups, and the like). Other intrastate conflicts have been predominantly nonviolent in character, with populations undermining the power of their governments using methods of nonviolent resistance such as street marches, mass rallies, strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience. Repressive governments, in turn, may use techniques of both counterterrorism and counterinsurgency against nonviolent leaders and their communities, prompting forms of anonymous and collective leadership.

A recent study ("Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," by Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth) published in *International Security* compared the effectiveness of violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns in conflicts between nonstate and state actors between 1900 and 2006. The study found that "major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for violent resistance campaigns."

Nonviolent struggle has proven to be a powerful means of wielding power in a variety of conflicts. The nonviolent “people power” revolution in the Philippines brought down the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. Prodemocracy movements in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia ousted communist regimes in 1989. The antiapartheid movement in South Africa, supported by international economic pressure, brought an end to white minority rule. A nonviolent student movement in Serbia ousted Slobodan Milosevic in the year 2000. Christians participated in these movements for social change, using methods of nonviolent action reminiscent of the civil rights movement that changed the United States. Then, in early 2011, Arabs all across North Africa and the Middle East took to the streets calling for freedom and democracy in what has become known as the Arab Spring. Their struggles continue, despite violent repression and civil war in some states.

Nonviolent people power movements have shown themselves capable of overthrowing dictators, thwarting coups d’état, defending against invasions and occupations, challenging unjust systems, promoting human rights, and resisting genocide. Jesus’ third way of nonviolent action may not work in all circumstances, but the historical record shows that it is a powerful means of engaging in conflict and can be used successfully in struggles for justice, human rights, and self-determination.

In addition, at the individual and community levels there are new models for engaging in active peacemaking and working for justice, including the use of social media technologies for advocacy and organizing, nonviolent communication, consensus decision-making processes, restorative justice, nonviolent accompaniment, conflict resolution techniques, artistic expressions, and methods of church-based community organizing.

As followers of Jesus, it is incumbent upon us to examine the common acceptance of and even reliance on violence as a response to conflict and to consider exploring and risking nonviolent alternatives. The founding document of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program also said that “the church must struggle against the cynicism that regards [the pursuit of peace] as idealistic

rather than realistic. It must find a central purpose in the intention to make peace. Peacemaking is an indispensable ingredient of the church’s mission. It is not peripheral or secondary but essential to the church’s faithfulness to Christ in our time.” The fact is, church-based initiatives have had demonstrably successful results, appealing to the best in individuals and groups, and finding God present and full of new life.

### ***Questions for Reflection/Discernment***

- Have you ever been offered an opportunity to take a bold stand for peace? If so, how did you respond? If not, do you wish you could have such an opportunity?
- New forms of just peacemaking and nonviolence include accompaniment (where persons from outside a situation protect persons and communities under threat), truth and reconciliation commissions (an alternative to taking revenge), public expressions of confession and repentance by leaders, citizen diplomacy, shared reconstruction projects, as well as demonstrations and forms of large-scale noncooperation with undemocratic regimes. How effective can such measures be, and how essential is it for the church to encourage them?
- Peace efforts based in international law usually involve the United Nations to develop and implement diplomatic consensus, although NATO and other regional bodies are sometimes also involved. How important are efforts at international policing or humanitarian intervention, and how different are these from wars initiated by individual nations?
- How could the PC(USA) do a more effective job of teaching nonviolence to its members? What other characteristics would mark a “peace church” stance in today’s world?

# Discerning God's Call to Presbyterian Peacemakers in the 21st Century

Presbyterians today face a difficult dilemma. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who we know as the Prince of Peace, calls us to embrace nonviolence and reconciliation. And yet, the world around us persists in doing violence—in response to conflict, in social and economic relationships, and in relation to the earth. Overall, rather than seeing nonviolent responses to conflict, we see many who have embraced the myth of redemptive violence. How much do we, too, put our faith and trust in military power, disregarding Scripture like Psalm 33? Instead of pursuing social and economic justice in our relationships with others, have we not also been seduced by materialism, consumerism, and an American way of life that is unsustainable, except by structural violence? Instead of making the lifestyle and policy changes necessary to protect planet Earth from severe climate change, we still seem culturally addicted to nonrenewable resources and the power relations necessary to obtain them.

In initial conversations with military and diplomatic leaders, veterans, and chaplains in Washington, DC, and New York, members of the Peace Discernment Steering Team have met persons who have devoted their careers to protecting the United States, sometimes at extreme personal risk, sometimes putting others in harm's way, and always with a commitment to serve that deserves respect. Some disagree profoundly with the emphasis of this study on nonviolent alternatives, while also disagreeing with some of the military actions and occupations in which they have been involved. Every congregation or college will have a range of viewpoints and experience on national security matters, and some have explored these in the context of peacemaking ministries in the past.

Beneath the particular campaigns and strategic threats, mature Christians in military and

policymaking circles know they are exercising life and death responsibility on an ongoing basis. They understand the military to be a response to violence and evil in the world, not a cause of it. They pray for wisdom to make the right decisions and forgiveness for their part in any avoidable tragedies. They value the understanding and moral support of the church and find it difficult to consider Jesus' life and teachings as possibly advocating a position of nonviolence. Yet, in seeking to limit violence as much as possible, their just war positions share some common ground with those who would limit all wars. Both oppose sanctifying national interests or demonizing enemies or calling for unnecessary sacrifices. At West Point, for example, some of the team were told of the dangers of "realism" (as nationalistic self-interest) and of a new emphasis on principles even with training in counterinsurgency, drones, and cyberwarfare. These are voices the church needs to hear, even if it is time to help shift our society more toward peace.

The Peace Discernment Steering Team asks if it is time for Presbyterians in the United States to reclaim greater responsibility for our own actions and those taken in our name. Napoleon aptly pointed out that "the world suffers a lot. Not because of the violence of bad people, but because of the silence of good people!" As a church and as a society, should we learn to move from violence to nonviolence, from war-making to peacemaking, from a permanent war economy to a sustainable peace economy, from being citizens of an empire to members of God's peaceable kingdom? What are the true dangers we face, the security we long for, and the liberty that comes with "justice for all"? How do we better align ourselves with God's vision of justice and peace? How can we hasten the day when humankind no longer considers violence and war acceptable or inevitable means of resolving conflicts?

While we do not presume to know what the Spirit is calling the PC(USA) to be and to do in this particular historical moment, we strongly affirm that “the Church is sent to be Christ’s faithful evangelist . . . participating in God’s mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ’s just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world” (*Book of Order*, F-1.0302(d)). “The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life” (*Book of Order*, F-1.0301).

We invite you to join with us on this adventure, to help us explore hard choices, to hear many voices, to discern God’s calling for us as Presbyterian peacemakers in the twenty-first century.

### ***The Peace Discernment Steering Team***

Members of the Peace Discernment Steering Team are **the Rev. J. Mark Davidson** (chair), pastor, Church of Reconciliation, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; **Dr. Kathryn Poethig**, associate professor of global studies, California State Monterey Bay; **Shaya Gregory Poku**, program associate for Sub-Saharan Africa, Search for Common Ground, Washington, D.C.; **Jessica Hawkinson**, M.Div. student, Princeton Theological Seminary, and former staff of the Presbyterian UN Office; **Shaheen Amjad-Ali**, lecturer in world religions, Metropolitan State University, St. Paul, Minnesota; **the Reverend Craig Hunter**, pastor, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Denton, Texas.

The steering team is being staffed by **the Reverend Christian T. Iosso**, Ph.D., coordinator of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), and **the Reverend Roger Scott Powers**, a part-time consultant with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program who also serves as pastor of Light Street Presbyterian Church (Baltimore) and co-moderator of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

## Selected Resources for Further Study

### Particularly on Nonviolence and Recent Christian Analysis of War

#### **General Assembly Social Witness Policy on Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of Creation**

*Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* (1980)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking-believers-calling-text/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking-believers-calling-text/))

*Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* (1988)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/christian-obedience-nuclear-age/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/christian-obedience-nuclear-age/))

*Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice* (1990) ([www.pcusa.org/resource/restoring-creation-ecology-and-justice-study-guide/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/restoring-creation-ecology-and-justice-study-guide/))

*Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development* (1996)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/hope-global-future/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/hope-global-future/))

*Just Peacemaking and the Call for International Intervention for Humanitarian Rescue* (1998)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/resolution-just-peacemaking-and-call-international/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/resolution-just-peacemaking-and-call-international/))

*Iraq and Beyond* (2003)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/iraq-and-beyond/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/iraq-and-beyond/))

*Violence, Religion, and Terrorism* (2004)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/resolution-violence-religion-and-terrorism/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/resolution-violence-religion-and-terrorism/))

*Iraq: Our Responsibility and the Future* (2004)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/iraq-our-responsibility-future/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/iraq-our-responsibility-future/))

*A Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century* (2008) ([www.pcusa.org/resource/new-social-creed/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/new-social-creed/))

*Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call* (2010)  
([www.pcusa.org/resource/gun-violence-gospel-values-mobilizing-response-god/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/gun-violence-gospel-values-mobilizing-response-god/))

#### **Ecumenical Documents**

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. *Christian Understanding of War in an Age of Terror(ism)* (2011).  
([www.brethren.org/peace/nccddownloads.html](http://www.brethren.org/peace/nccddownloads.html))

World Council of Churches. *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* (2011).  
([www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace\\_English.pdf](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace_English.pdf))

#### **Web Resources on Nonviolent Action**

The Albert Einstein Institution  
([www.aeinstein.org/](http://www.aeinstein.org/))

International Center on Nonviolent Conflict  
([www.nonviolent-conflict.org/](http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/))

Presbyterian Peacemaking Program  
(<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/peacemaking/>)

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship  
([www.presbypeacefellowship.org/](http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/))

Waging Nonviolence  
(<http://wagingnonviolence.org/>)

#### **Videos Depicting Nonviolent Action**

*Gandhi* (1982)

*Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years: 1954–1965* (1997)

*A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (2000)

*Bringing Down a Dictator* (2002)

*The Singing Revolution* (2007)

*Orange Revolution* (2007)

*The Power of Forgiveness* (2007)

*How to Start a Revolution* (2011)

(Note: War films are much better known and often address particular wars, such as *Saving Private Ryan*, a recent film on World War II, *Apocalypse Now* or *Full Metal Jacket* on Vietnam, and *The Hurt Locker* or *Stop Loss* on the second Iraq War.)

## Books

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- Chernus, Ira. *American Nonviolence: The History of An Idea*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.
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- Gioseffi, Daniela. *Women on War: An International Anthology of Writings from Antiquity to the Present*. 2nd ed. New York: Feminist Press/City University, 2003.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.
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- Johnson, James Turner. *Can Modern War Be Just?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Strength to Love*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1963.
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- Long, Jr., Edward LeRoy. *Facing Terrorism: Responding as Christians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
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- May, William F. *Testing the National Covenant: Fears and Appetites in American Politics*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011.
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Wink, Walter. *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Winn, Albert Curry. *Ain't Gonna Study War No More: Biblical Ambiguity and the Abolition of War*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

Yoder, John Howard. *What Would You Do?* Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992.

Note: There are many notable books on war, from Sun Tzu, Julius Caesar, and U. S. Grant forward. A listing of best nonfiction war books that includes recent war memoirs by women can be found at:  
[www.goodreads.com/list/show/824.Best\\_Non\\_fiction\\_War\\_Books?page=2](http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/824.Best_Non_fiction_War_Books?page=2)

Clearly also there are many novels that might be noted, such as *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, *Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, and more recent works. Our sampling here is to provide titles less known but with more church-related reflection.



Guide our feet  
into the way of  
peace.

—Luke 1:79



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