

Christian Response to Violence Seminar (Trial Run)

Opening Worship

(borrowed and adapted from *Gods Not Guns Sabbath Worship Guide 2007*
http://www.bradynetwork.org/site/DocServer/SabathGuide_08.pdf?docID=941)

Gathering Song *Wounded World, that Cries for Healing* (TFWS 2177)

Welcome – introduction to this service and to the seminar

Call to Worship (based on Isaiah 2)

Leader: Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, that we may walk the path of the Most High.

People: That we may beat our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning hooks.

Leader: Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more.

People: And none shall be afraid for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.

Leader: We gather today in remembrance of all those who suffer violence.

People: For those who have died, and for those who still live in fear and anger.

Leader: We are a nation at war with ourselves, a people who have forgotten who we are.

People: We gather today to remember that we are each a child of God. We gather to claim our belonging to each other and our commitment to living the way of God's peace.

Leader: Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, that we may walk the path of the Most High.

People: That we may beat our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning hooks.

Leader: Neighbor shall not lift up gun against neighbor. Neither shall they learn violence any more.

All: And none shall be afraid for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.

Invocation

Gracious God,

Inspire us with the gift of shalom, the gift of wholeness and the promise of your presence. Give us wisdom to seek nonviolence as an answer to the violence of our lives and world. Give us courage to seek wholeness in a fractured and divided world, to find reconciliation rather than revenge, to abandon the instruments of violence and death and entrust our lives, our homes and our families to you. May your presence fill us and others with the thirst for unity, wholeness, and the desire to see all people valued as created in your image. May we and others receive your Shalom that we might be faithful instruments of your love. Amen.

(Adapted from Episcopal Peace Fellowship, "Gift of Shalom")

Scriptures

Matthew 5:9-12

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Romans 12:14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good."

Silent Reflection

Song *Goodness is Stronger Than Evil* (TFWS 2219)

Readings (Posted and shared around the room)

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. That is why right, temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant."
Martin Luther King, Jr.

"First keep peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others."
Thomas a Kempis

"We challenge the culture of violence when we ourselves act in the certainty that violence is no longer acceptable, that it's tired and outdated no matter how many cling to it in the stubborn belief that it still works and is still valid."
Gerard Vanderhaar

"If you wish to be brothers, let the arms fall from your hands. One cannot love while holding offensive arms."
Pope Pius VI

"All violence is injustice. Responding to violence with violence is injustice, not only to the other person but also to oneself. Responding to violence with violence resolves nothing; it only escalates violence, anger and hatred. It is only with compassion that we can embrace and disintegrate violence. This is true in relationships between individuals as well as in relationships between nations."
Thich Nhat Hanh

“An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”

M. Gandhi

“My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.”

Desmond Tutu

“The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

Mother Theresa

While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart.”

St. Francis of Assisi

“The way of peace is the way of love. Love is the greatest power on earth. It conquers all things.”

Peace Pilgrim

“Let a man overcome anger by loving kindness; let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome miserliness with generosity; let him overcome lies with truth.”

Buddha

Silence

Song

Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying (TFWS 2193)

Closing Prayer

(Adapted from Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, worship on Martin Luther King Day, 2007)

God of justice, whenever we settle for the way things are instead of the way love would have them to be, forgive us. Whenever we are paralyzed by fear or limited in vision, increase our trust in you. Whenever we offer charity, but fail to work for justice, show us the more excellent way that love requires. Whenever we tire of the struggle and tomorrow feels overwhelming, restore our hope. Whenever we forget those who have gone before us or act as if we are the only ones who are trying, allow us to recognize our arrogance. May the witness of our brothers and sisters Martin, Mohandes, Theresa, Francis, Desmond, and others, encourage us to be dreamers of peace, for all the world’s sake.

Amen.

Benediction

O Holy God, make of us a receiving people.

Let us walk with your feet.

Let us touch with your hands.

Let your voice speak in and through us.

Let your wisdom be transformed into right action within us.

Let us carry forth your spirit into the world.

Let us be at one with You, O God.

And may each who feels as one with You, know also that we are one with every other, until all creation is unified in the light of love.

May you go in peace and in the light of God's love.

(Adapted from a prayer by Bebe Williams, July 10,1994)

CLOSING WORSHIP

Song

It Is Well With My Soul (UMH 377)

Sharing Reflections from Our Day

Contemporary Reading (From *Gods Not Guns Sabbath Worship Guide 2007*)

http://www.bradynetwork.org/site/DocServer/SabbathGuide_08.pdf?docID=941

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds. Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves. Let us be aware of the source of being, common to us all and to all living things. Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion – towards ourselves and towards all living beings. Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other. With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us practice the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth.

Thich N'hat Hanh

***Litany of Commitment to Non-Violence and Peace** (Jennifer Watts)

(from "United For Peace" Worship Resources. http://www.united-church.ca/files/planning/seasons/peace_u4p.pdf)

All:

**Compassionate and loving God,
We stand before you today to renew
our commitment to peace in our hearts,
our homes and our world.**

Right side/North:

We, as members of this faith community,
commit ourselves to peace bearing and peacemaking.
Making peace with the land,

with humanity,
with all creation.

Left side/South:

Like the prophets of old and the prophets of today,
we ask for courage to speak truth to power,
to seek alternatives to violence,
to build peace based on justice,
human rights,
and respect for creation.

Right side/East:

Like countless numbers of people
in our global community
who refuse to give up hope
and instead live their lives as peace bearers and peacemakers,
we ask for your grace to work through us
so that we may bear peace and make peace
in our communities.

All/West:

**We commit to living your love
through the great work of nurturing peace with justice,
today, tomorrow, and always.
Amen.**

Hymn of Commitment

Let There Be Peace on Earth (UMH 431)

Blessing and Benediction

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

SESSION ONE; GOD AND VIOLENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

“Blessed are the peace-makers”, Jesus said, and that commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation is seen by many church people to be essential in the Christian Gospel. It is therefore jarring to some to realize that God is portrayed in some portions of the Bible – particularly the Old Testament – as condoning and even commanding violence.

I. The Conquest of the Promised Land

God’s promise of a land for the Chosen People begins with the story of Abraham in Genesis 12: “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’.”

Unfortunately, while the land is promised by God to Abraham and his descendents, when the children of Israel arrived after their miraculous release from slavery in Egypt, it was already occupied by other peoples who had lived there for many generations. Therefore the Promised Land had to be taken by force. Much of the Book of Joshua is devoted to this story of conquest, and it seems clear from the beginning that God was not only sanctioning but commanding the ensuing slaughter. Jericho was conquered first, and all the inhabitants, men and women alike, were killed (6:21). The same thing happened at Ai (6:26), and the king of Ai, who was captured, was summarily hanged. All this was seen as acts done by the command of and to the glory of God. In fact, in Joshua 11 God actively participated in the battle by sending giant hailstones on the enemy, which killed more men than did the Israelites’ weapons.

Some smaller nations tried to avoid this kind of devastating holy war by making a peace treaty with the Israelites, but the price demanded was that they would eternally be Israel’s slaves (Joshua, chapter 9). It took many years for these wars of conquest to finish, but even when they were ended the Book of Joshua tells us that God himself had driven out the peoples from their lands so that the Israelites could have them (13:6)

QUESTION:

1. Does God – the Creator of all that is – really favor some people over others? Why or why not?
2. What does being “The Chosen People” really mean?

II. The Prophetic Punishments

The second form of divine violence is seen in the punishments God wreaks upon those who do not follow divine law. According to Leviticus 26:14-39, these punishments include sickness, defeat in time of war, and famine. In fact, the famines will be so great that parents will be reduced to eating their children!

In Amos chapters 1 and 2 God promises to send terrible punishments upon surrounding nations for their war atrocities, but Israel and Judah are to be punished because they have allowed economic injustice against the poor. But in the book of Hosea, the worst sin of all is identified: the Israelites have been unfaithful to God, like a wanton wife chasing after other gods. The penalty for such infidelity is death: (Deuteronomy 22:22–24) "If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the woman must die. In this way, you will purge Israel of such evil."

Other crimes for which God's Law in the Torah prescribes the death penalty includes:

(A) Religious crimes - sacrificing to other gods (Exodus 22:20), offering a child sacrifice to Moloch (Leviticus 20:1-5), false prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:20-22), necromancy – calling up the spirits of the dead (Leviticus 20:22), witchcraft (Exodus 22:18), blasphemy (Leviticus 24:10-16), working on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14)

(B) Sexual Practices - rape of an engaged women in a field where no one could hear her (Deuteronomy 22:25-27), consensual adultery with an engaged woman (Deuteronomy 22:23-24) or a married woman (Leviticus 20:10), marrying one's mother-in-law (Leviticus 20:14), incest with one's father's wife or one's daughter-in-law (Leviticus 20:11-12), male-on-male intercourse (Leviticus 20:13) and bestiality, with both the human and the animal to be executed (Leviticus 20:15-20). Also, if a bride cannot prove she was a virgin before her wedding night, she may receive the death penalty (Deuteronomy 22:20)

(C) Other Crimes: Murder (Exodus 21:12-14); hitting a parent (Exodus 21:12-14), cursing a parent (Leviticus 20:9), a son disobeying his parent (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), kidnapping (Exodus 21:16), disobeying the decision of a court (Deuteronomy 17:8-13), and false testimony in a lawsuit (Deuteronomy 19:15-21)

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you believe God punishes us for wrong-doing? Can you name some examples?
2. Are God's punishments a form of violence?

III. The Psalms

Psalm 94:1 identifies God as a God of Vengeance. Psalm 58 goes into more detail, praying that God will break the teeth of wrong-doers, and exulting that the righteous shall wade in the blood of sinners. Psalm 109 is intensely personal, asking God to totally destroy those who have lied about the writer.

Perhaps most shocking is Psalm 137, written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This Psalm prays destruction on Judah's enemies, even promising that those who dash out the brains of their babies on the rocks shall be blessed.

In all of these Scriptural passages, God takes violent steps when one of two things happens: either God's honor has been offended, or Israel's well-being is at stake. How are we to interpret these passages?

One way is to see them not as commandments or actions from God, but as human projections on God. It is easy for us to so passionately wish some things to be that we would claim God wants them as well. How much more so would that be true for a people who believed themselves to be chosen as God's especially favored nation!

We see this tendency to attribute human emotions and actions to God in all nations and religions. The Crusaders went to war saying “Deus Vult! God Wills It!” European settlers in North America often took Indian lands and lives, believing this was their divinely-given Manifest Destiny. In the Middle East today there are fanatics who willing give their lives to wreak destruction in the name of Allah.

Another possible response to these Scripture passages is to say that religious understanding evolved through the many centuries of the making of the Bible. It is widely believed that the earliest parts of the Old Testament were developed when folks were more primitive in their thinking. In this scenario Jesus is seen as the one who most fully reveals a corrected understanding of God as compassionate and forgiving.

Both of these responses have some validity, but there are also problems. One, of course, is the tendency to pick and choose those Biblical passages with which we are most comfortable and dismissing the rest. Another problem is that we may be committing the same error, imposing our desired picture of God onto the Divine Mystery. Perhaps God is much greater than our imaginations

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you understand the Biblical passages attributing violence to God/
2. How may we reconcile the Justice of God with the Mercy of God?
3. Are Christians ever justified in being involved in violence? When? Why?

CLOSING PRAYER:

**From earthquake and tempest; from drought, fire, and flood;
from civil strife and violence; from war and murder;
and from dying suddenly and unprepared,
Good Lord, deliver us. Amen. [BCW, 788]**

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

SESSION TWO; GOD AGAINST VIOLENCE IN THE BIBLE

Christians typically through the ages have been against violence, but there are great differences among them about such subjects as war, capital punishment, and even self-defense. Moreover, each faction can find passages in the Bible to support their viewpoint. In the first session of this series, we examined some of the passages, primarily in the Old Testament, that seemed to show God sanctioning and even commanding violence, particularly in the holy wars of the Conquest of the Promised Land, and in punishing those who offended God's sovereignty.

In this session, we wish to consider some of the passages in Scripture – both Old and New Testaments – that speak to God's vision of peace. The stage is set in the two remarkable stories of Creation in chapters one and two of Genesis. As Jerome Creach shows in his recently-published book "Violence in Scripture", other cultures in those days had creation stories showing the gods making the universe through wars, battling evil beings intent only on destruction. The Hebrew stories, on the other hand, show God creating all things peacefully and orderly.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God creates the universe in an orderly fashion, step by step, through his commands. In fact, it seems that God thinks all things that are into being. Logical reasoning, not war-like anger, is the agent of creation. In this process human beings are created "in the image of God"; that is, they are endowed with divine capabilities of reason and imagination, not that they might be involved in wars and acts of domination, but that they might continue to carry out God's intention of creation.

An important aspect of God's creating work is putting things in order and in relationship with one another. The divine mandate to humans, therefore, is to "tend the garden"; that is, to help things grow together. There may be times when destruction is part of the task, but it is for the sake of pruning – improving the garden – rather than simply wreaking violence.

Apparently this stewardship involves even non-violence toward animals. The man and woman are given permission to eat the fruit of the ground and trees – except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is no mention of eating meat, even by animals. Humans and animals are to be vegetarian.

The second story of Creation (Genesis 2:4ff) has significant differences from the first story, but continues the vision that humans are created to continue God's work – for instance, to name the animals, which is using words and reasoning as God did in creating the universe in the first place. And when God punishes Adam and Eve for their transgression, it is done not angrily but to protect the divine order of things.

Creach goes on through his book to argue that the many examples of God's involvement in violence - through the Old Testament in particular – are not done to destroy so much as to restore the original vision of a just and whole creation. God's acts are restorative, not retributive.

For example, when God sends plagues upon Egypt as part of the campaign to free the Hebrews in captivity, and when God destroys the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, the divine violence is aimed to achieve justice and wholeness, not simply to cause bloodshed and heartache for the Egyptians, who are also God's children.

A primary example of God's vision for the universe is found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). These are basic rules for building and maintaining community, as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago – and as difficult to apply, especially as we now live in an interdependent global community. The Commandments begin with having a unifying vision: recognizing God as the center of life. They then go on to insist on mutual respect as the necessary ingredient for living together: respect for the ties of marriage, for family relationships, for integrity in the legal process, and for the property of others.

In the middle of the Commandments, however, is a seemingly simple rule: "Thou shalt not kill." The problem is, the Old Testament is full of other commands from God to kill. Numerous portions of the Law prescribe capital punishment for a number of sins, ranging from adultery to children "talking back" to their parents. Furthermore, there are various passages telling of God's command to totally wipe out communities and nations that resist the "Chosen People."

Most scholars today, particularly Jewish scholars, agree that the word translated "kill" in the King James Version should more properly be translated "murder". Therefore many modern versions translate this verse as "You shall do no murder". This would exclude legal executions, self-defense and acts of war; it would apply primarily to criminal acts against another in one's own tribe or nation. Christian thought, however, has extended that circle to include all humanity, since all human beings are considered children of God and therefore persons of sacred worth.

Jesus, in fact, offered an even more stringent understanding of the commandment against murder: to hate another person is tantamount to murder in God's eyes. One's inner attitude can therefore be as dangerous to one's own soul as a violent act would be harmful to one's victim.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with Jesus that hatred is tantamount to murder? Why or why not?
2. How can we combine justice and reconciliation toward a wrong-doer?
3. If you were to write Ten Commandments for the modern world, what would you say?

Closing Prayer:

O God, bring our nation and all nations to uphold justice and equity, that poverty, oppression, and violence may vanish and all may know peace and plenty; in the name of Jesus Christ, the ruler of all. Amen. [BCW, 694]

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

SESSION THREE; THE NEW TESTAMENT AND VIOLENCE

We've noted that the words of Jesus seem to contradict those passages of the Old Testament in which God is depicted as sanctioning and even commanding violence. Indeed, much of the New Testament seems determinedly anti-violent. But that may not convey the whole message of the New Testament, which is more nuanced than seems as first evident.

A key passage for discussion is found in Matthew 5:38-48:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.⁴² Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Jesus modeled this instruction in his own life, even to the point of death on the cross. He based this notion of non-violence on God's nature: this form of living marks us as God's children. In so doing, Jesus presented the ultimate truth about violence: it is an affront to God's sovereignty, an act of rebellion as serious as Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience.

The Old Testament certainly sanctioned violence as a legitimate self-defense against violence; in the words of a popular current saying, “the only thing that can stop a bad man with a gun is a good man with a gun.” Jesus' commandment seems to challenge this idea. His followers are to break the circle of violence by refusing to participate in it. Jesus reiterated this idea in a number of ways, for instance saying that following him means to take up a cross (Matthew 16:24). This was all too vivid a metaphor for a conquered people for whom crucifixion was a public spectacle. In fact, in 6 A.D., when Jesus was a child, the Romans crucified 2000 rebels at one time in Sepphoris, Galilee.

Why would Jesus offer such a radical idea? Some authors point out that the inhabitants of Judea and Galilee in Christ's time lived under the harsh authoritarian rule of Rome. They were, for the most part peasant farmers and townspeople, untrained in the ways of war and lacking the weapons of the Roman legions. They were certainly outnumbered; resistance to Rome would unquestionably end in disaster, as every rebellion proved to be. Perhaps, then, Jesus' counsel for non-violence was simply prudent: “You can't win, so don't start the fight. And if the fight comes your way, duck and cover – don't try to resist.”

QUESTIONS:

1. Does Jesus' emphasis on non-resistance to evil mean that one cannot protect himself? How about protecting others, such as one's family?
2. Are there ways of resistance that do not involve violent actions?

Yet Jesus certainly didn't shrink from a fight. By entering Jerusalem as he did on Palm Sunday and cleansing the Temple, he was posing a challenge which the Sanhedrin couldn't ignore. And, since the Jewish legal system couldn't impose the death penalty, Roman military power would inevitably be called in. Jesus was no fool; he was raising a red flag which could only end in death. Yet he also calmly refused to retaliate against those who tormented him. In fact, when Simon Peter tried to protect him the night of his arrest, Jesus rebuked him, told him to put his sword away, and restored the severed ear of the man Peter had cut off (Luke 22:49-51).

Interestingly, Matthew, Mark and Luke report that at his trial Jesus did not complain at his mistreatment, but John tells us that when one of the Sanhedrin guards struck him in the courtroom, Jesus challenged the judges to restrain such actions (John 18:19:23). There may well have been regulations against mistreatment of a prisoner, and Jesus was appealing to those rules.

Paul affirms Jesus' emphasis on non-violence in Romans 12:14: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." This notion seems to have been the standard for Christians through at least the first three centuries of the Church. In fact, it is said that when Constantine was converted and became the first Roman Emperor to be a Christian, he had his entire army baptized, and each man upon going into the water was careful to hold his fighting arm up so as to not have it baptized, for it would mean he could no longer fight in war.

QUESTIONS

1. If Christians in the early Church thought that following Christ meant that one could not be a soldier, how do we justify our modern-day support of the military?
2. What is the justification for supporting our police forces, who may sometimes have to resort to violent methods in protecting the community?

It could be pointed out that some of Jesus' other sayings certainly seem violent enough. For instance, there is Luke 12:51-53:

⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!
⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three;
⁵³they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Some interpretations of this passage indicate that these words are simply a matter of Jesus stating the facts: he was a divisive character – so divisive that he was crucified as a trouble-maker. But the words are disturbing: "I did not come to bring peace on earth."

In other passages Jesus speaks of God's coming judgment, in which evil-doers will be thrown into a fiery place (see the parable of Dives and Lazarus, for example, in Luke 16:19-31). This picture is amplified in other New Testament books, such as Revelation (see Revelation 20:14b-15 "This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.")

Perhaps the most startling image in Revelation is found in chapter 19, where the Word of God, the Lamb that was slain, dressed in a blood-stained robe, rides his horse against the forces of evil and slays them all with the sword that comes from his mouth. There could not be a stronger statement of God through Christ using violence to defeat evil! It certainly seems at the opposite end of the spectrum from praying for one's enemy and turning the other cheek.

Far more numerous in the New Testament are passages that encourage a Christ-like devotion to non-violence. A remarkable short epistle in the New Testament is Paul's letter to Philemon. Apparently Philemon's slave Onesimus had run away. We have no evidence that he did so because he was mistreated, but the law would allow his owner to punish him in any way he wished, even to the point of execution, if he was caught. Onesimus somehow wound up with Paul, and apparently became a Christian. Paulo had to send him back, but paved the way with this small letter.

In it Paul reminds Philemon of how much he owes the apostle, who brought him to faith in Christ. He then says that he has Onesimus with him, and that he would prefer to keep the runaway, whom he regards as a son, but that he respects Philemon so much that he is sending Onesimus back. Then, Paul proposes something incredible: that Philemon receive Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother in Christ!

Paul subtly adds the force of public pressure: he addresses the letter not only to Philemon but also to the church that meets in his house (naming some of the members), and ends by naming his companions who have already read the letter. He promises to repay Philemon for any costs the defection of his slave may have cost – although it is probable that Paul had no funds with which to do that, and may even by that time been in jail himself. And he finishes by saying he looks forward to visiting Philemon, when he certainly would check on how the owner treated Paul's adopted spiritual son.

The Letter to Philemon doesn't overtly attack the custom of slavery, but it does sound its death knell, for how can you treat as a slave someone as a brother or sister? Even more, how could you justify any act of violence against a brother or sister?

For Christians, the primary commandments remain as Jesus said in Matthew 22:36-40: to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love one another as Christ loves us. This is the test of our Christianity. As I John 4 says "7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."

QUESTIONS:

1. What are some ways we can bear effective witness against violence today?
2. Jesus in several passages seems to contradict the Old Testament (“You have heard it said... but I say unto you...”) Does this mean there are parts of the Bible that are not inspired Scripture?
3. How can we reconcile the picture of God as being against violence with the picture of God’s violently punishing evil-doers?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Almighty God, you have made us and all things to serve you, now prepare the world for your rule.

Come quickly to save us, so that wars and violence shall end, and your children may live in peace, honoring one another with justice and love.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. [Book of Common Worship (BCW), 175]

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

SESSION FOUR; ATTITUDES TOWARD VIOLENCE IN THE CHURCH

The relationship of Christianity and violence is the subject of controversy because some of its teachings advocate peace, love, and compassion, whereas other teachings have been used to justify violence and hatred. Peace, compassion and forgiveness of wrongs done by others are key elements of Christian teaching. However, Christians have struggled since the days of the Church Fathers with the question of when the use of force is justified. Such debates have led to concepts such as just war theory. Throughout history, certain teachings from the Old Testament, the New Testament and Christian theology have been used to justify the use of force against heretics, sinners and external enemies.

In his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, critic of religion Sam Harris writes that "...faith inspires violence in at least two ways. First, people often kill other human beings because they believe that the creator of the universe wants them to do it... Second, far greater numbers of people fall into conflict with one another because they define their moral community on the basis of their religious affiliation..."

But Christian theologians point to a strong doctrinal and historical imperative within Christianity against violence, particularly Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which taught nonviolence and "love of enemies". For example, J. Denny Weaver in *Violence in Christian Theology* asserts that Jesus' pacifism was "preserved in the justifiable war doctrine that declares all war as sin even when declaring it occasionally a necessary evil, and in the prohibition of fighting by monastics and clergy as well as in a persistent tradition of Christian pacifism."

Among common examples cited in allegation that Christianity is a violent religion, J. Denny Weaver lists "(the) crusades, the multiple blessings of wars, warrior popes, support for capital punishment, corporal punishment under the guise of 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' justifications of slavery, world-wide colonialism in the name of conversion to Christianity, (and) the systemic violence of women subjected to men". Weaver describes the counter-argument as focusing on "Jesus, the beginning point of Christian faith,... whose Sermon on the Mount taught nonviolence and love of enemies; who nonviolently faced his accusers unto death; whose nonviolent teaching inspired the first centuries of pacifist Christian history and was subsequently preserved in the justifiable war doctrine that declares all war as sin even when declaring it occasionally a necessary evil, and in the prohibition of fighting by monastics and clergy as well as in a persistent tradition of Christian pacifism

In his book *Christianity and Violence*, Miroslav Volf asserts that Christian churches suffer from a "confusion of loyalties". He proposes that "rather than the character of the Christian faith itself, a better explanation of why Christian churches are either impotent in the face of violent conflicts or actively participate in them derives from the proclivities of its adherents which are at odds with the character of the Christian faith." He believes that "(although) explicitly giving ultimate allegiance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, many Christians in fact seem to have an overriding commitment to their respective cultures and ethnic groups."

QUESTIONS:

1. If war is sometimes a “Necessary evil”, is it still a sin?
2. Sam Harris contends that religious people wage war because they think their Creator wishes it, and because they define their moral community on the basis of their religious community. How would you answer him?
3. Are there signs that many American Christians put their loyalty to country ahead of their allegiance to Christ?

THE EARLY CHURCH AND PACIFISM

In the first few centuries of Christianity, many Christians refused to engage in military combat. In fact, there were a number of famous examples of soldiers who became Christians and refused to engage in combat afterward. They were subsequently executed for their refusal to fight. This commitment to pacifism and rejection of military service is attributed to two principles: "(1) the use of force (violence) was seen as antithetical to Jesus' teachings and (2) service in the Roman military required worship of the emperor as a god which was a form of idolatry."

Three famous figures in the early Church expressed well this Christian commitment to pacifism. Origen asserted: "Christians could never slay their enemies. For the more that kings, rulers, and peoples have persecuted them everywhere, the more Christians have increased in number and grown in strength." Clement of Alexandria wrote: "Above all, Christians are not allowed to correct with violence the delinquencies of sins." Tertullian argued forcefully against all forms of violence, considering abortion, warfare and even judicial death penalties to be forms of murder.

QUESTIONS:

1. If Christians are not allowed to use violence to guard against crime and an enemy attack, what would happen to society?
2. If Christians refuse to protect themselves and their nation, should they depend on fellow citizens (who may or not be non-Christians) to defend them?

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH: JUST WAR AND HOLY WAR

The change came when Constantine became the emperor of the Roman Empire in 312 C.E. and the idea of a “just war” came into play. At first, this doctrine dealt with when to wage a war and how such a war should be waged. In the past two hundred years, a third element has been added: how to achieve a just peace, along with the prosecution of war criminals.

The principles of “just war” are:

1. A just war can only be waged as a last resort. All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified.
2. A war is just only if it is waged by a legitimate authority. Even just causes cannot be served by actions taken by individuals or groups who do not constitute an authority sanctioned by whatever the society and outsiders to the society deem legitimate.

3. A just war can only be fought to redress a wrong suffered. For example, self-defense against an armed attack is always considered to be a just cause (although the justice of the cause is not sufficient--see point #4). Further, a just war can only be fought with "right" intentions: the only permissible objective of a just war is to redress the injury.
4. A war can only be just if it is fought with a reasonable chance of success. Deaths and injury incurred in a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable.
5. The ultimate goal of a just war is to re-establish peace. More specifically, the peace established after the war must be preferable to the peace that would have prevailed if the war had not been fought.
6. The violence used in the war must be proportional to the injury suffered. States are prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the limited objective of addressing the injury suffered.
7. The weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Civilians are never permissible targets of war, and every effort must be taken to avoid killing civilians. The deaths of civilians are justified only if they are unavoidable victims of a deliberate attack on a military target.

After World War II, with its use of nuclear weapons, theologians and ethicists have increasingly argued that just war principles no longer can be applied. Atomic bombs and their modern successors – particularly when used on large cities - will inevitably bring civilian deaths.

HOLY WAR

In the Middle Ages, a new development came in Christian thought about violence: the concept of "holy war". In 1095, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II declared that some wars could be deemed as not only a just war, but could, in certain cases, rise to the level of a holy war Jill Claster in her book *Sacred Violence* characterizes this as a "remarkable transformation in the ideology of war", shifting the justification of war from being not only "just" but "spiritually beneficial".

The Christian concept of Holy War moved a culture formally dedicated to fulfilling the injunction to 'love thy neighbor as thyself' to a point where it sanctioned the use of violence against the alien both outside and inside society. The religious sanctioning of the concept of "holy war" was a turning point in Christian attitudes towards violence; Pope Gregory VII then made the Holy War possible by drastically altering the attitude of the church towards war. Hitherto a knight could obtain remission of sins only by giving up arms, but Urban invited him to gain forgiveness 'in and through the exercise of his martial skills'.

A Holy War was defined by the Roman Catholic Church as "war that is not only just, but justifying; that is, a war that confers positive spiritual merit on those who fight in it" By the 12th century, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: "The knight of Christ may strike with confidence and die yet more confidently; for he serves Christ when he strikes, and saves himself when he falls.... When he inflicts death, it is to Christ's profit, and when he suffers death, it is his own gain."

Increasingly, stories of violence in the Bible were used to justify total war. The Biblical account of Joshua and the Battle of Jericho was used to justify the genocide of Catholics during the

Cromwellian conquest of Ireland. Daniel Chirot in his study entitled *Why Some Wars Become Genocidal and Others Don't* interprets 1 Samuel 15:1-3 as "the sentiment, so clearly expressed, that because a historical wrong was committed, justice demands genocidal retribution." This understanding was also used by New World settlers against Native American tribes.

QUESTIONS:

1. Would a "holy war" be justified to protect a helpless minority against a genocidal regime- such as to protect European Jews from a Nazi Holocaust? Or to defend America after Pearl Harbor from a Japan seemingly devoted to our extinction?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Note: the non-bold parts may be led by different members of the group)
The Promise of God's Reign

Arise, shine, for your light has come; and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you,
though darkness covers the earth and dark night is over the nations.

Refrain: The Lord will be our everlasting light; and God will be our glory.

But upon you the LORD will rise, and the glory of the LORD will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light; and rulers to the brightness of your dawn.

Refrain: The Lord will be our everlasting light; and God will be our glory.

No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders.
You will name your walls Salvation, and all your gates Praise.

Refrain: The Lord will be our everlasting light; and God will be our glory.

No more will the sun be your light by day, nor by night will you need the brightness of the moon,
for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

Refrain: The Lord will be our everlasting light; and God will be our glory. Amen.

[*Book of Common Worship*, 581]

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE
SESSION FIVE;
ATTITUDES TOWARD VIOLENCE IN THE CHURCH - 2

THE CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTENCE

The Middle Ages also brought a resurgence of the early Church's commitment to pacifism. In Europe various Anabaptist groups insisted that one could not use violence even to protect his own life. Many of their adherents were slaughtered by Lutherans, Calvinists and Roman Catholics. Descendants of these groups are among us today as Mennonites, Amish and the Church of the Brethren.

In England in the 1700s John Woolman led a number of Christian pacifists to form the Society of Friends, often called the Quakers. They not only refused to engage in war but refused to pay that portion of their taxes that would fund the military.

In this century, Mohandas K. Gandhi captured world attention with his non-violent challenges to societal injustices, first in South Africa and then in India. His form of pacifism was not withdrawal from any kind of engagement with a sinful world, but an active confrontation with officialdom that often led to violent repression by police and military forces, and incarceration. But for Gandhi and his followers, suffering violence and imprisonment was itself a form of witness, and a moral victory.

A classic example of Gandhi's teaching was shown in the Salt March of 1930. In a tropical climate, the use of salt is important to all people for survival itself. The British who ruled India at the time, however, closely controlled the salt trade and levied taxes on it. Gandhi led his followers to an ocean beach, where they began heating the sea water and drying salt out of it. The British sent troops in, unsuccessfully, to break up the protest, which only led to more Indians joining in. Then the British arrested and imprisoned Gandhi and his closest followers, which only led to more Indian support. Finally, the British had to give in and not only release Gandhi but also abolished their salt tax.

In the U.S., Gandhi's theories and example became the inspiration for the Civil Rights movement, most notably led by African-Americans like Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King, Jr. Beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and continuing with non-violent confrontations in cities like Birmingham and Selma, King became the public face of groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. As with his mentor Gandhi, King and his cohorts courted opportunities to be jailed, knowing that this would prick the consciences of many other Americans and lead to the eradication of discriminatory laws and policies.

QUESTION:

1. Is it ever justifiable for Christians to break the laws of their nation or state?
2. What are the rules that should govern non-violent resistance?

CHRISTIAN REALISM

Christian Realism is a philosophical perspective developed by the American theologian in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Niebuhr argued that the Kingdom of God cannot be realized on earth because of the innately corrupt tendencies of society. Because of the injustices that arise on earth, a person is inevitably forced to compromise the ideal of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Niebuhr argued that human perfectibility was an illusion, highlighting the sinfulness of humanity at a time when the world was confronted by the horrors of experiences such World War II, the reigns of both Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, and the Holocaust. The movement was in part a reaction to the Social Gospel movement. Numerous political figures have been influenced by Christian realism, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Hillary Clinton, Jimmy Carter, Barack Obama, Madeleine Albright, and John McCain.

Christian Realism exerted a strong influence on American foreign and domestic policy in the Cold War era. Many members of the neoconservative movement have claimed to inherit Niebuhr's philosophy; however others argue that neo-conservatism neglects Niebuhr's commitment to social justice

Niebuhr's) emphasis on sin startled a generation, brought up on optimistic convictions of human innocence and perfectibility. Nothing had prepared Americans for Hitler and Stalin, the Holocaust, concentration camps and gulags. Human nature was evidently as capable of depravity as of virtue.

Traditionally, the idea of the frailty of man led to the demand for obedience to ordained authority. But Niebuhr rejected that ancient conservative argument. Ordained authority, he showed, is all the more subject to the temptations of self-interest, self-deception and self-righteousness. Power must be balanced by power.

Niebuhr maintained that elements of self-interest and pride lurk even in the best of human actions. He also recognized that a special synergy of selfishness operates in collectivities like nations. His critique of Americans' belief in their country's innocence and exceptionalism — the idea that we are a redeemer nation going abroad never to conquer, only to liberate — is still relevant today.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that modern war cannot be just? Why or why not?
2. What can counter violence other than violence?
3. \What is your Christian response to violence?

CLOSING PRAYER: (A litany)

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." We celebrate and give thanks for the life and witness for those who through the ages have been brave to answer Christ's call to peace-making:

Who proclaimed a vision of all people living together, and bore witness to the power of nonviolence,

We gather, to remember their words, their commitment, and their lives - and to rededicate ourselves to addressing the evil of violence -

Which claimed their lives and continues to plague our country and the world.

About 32,000 Americans die by guns alone each year in the United States; 60% are by suicide, 36% by homicide, and nearly 4% by accidental shootings, often in the home.

And we grieve.

Eighty-seven people on average are killed by guns every day, including eight children;

And our hearts break.

Guns kill some 1,000 people each day in the developing world;

And we mourn.

An American child is twelve times more likely to die by a gun than are the children who live in all twenty-five industrialized nations combined;

And we weep.

The annual economic cost of gun violence in America is estimated to be \$174 billion. Medical costs, decimated families, the court system, our jails and prisons, and security measures in airports, schools, and public buildings all contribute to this sum;

And sorrow sweeps over us.

Since John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, more Americans have died by gun fire within our own country than American servicemen and women who were killed in all our wars since the Revolution;

And we pray.

Faced with such violence,

We grieve for those are killed and those whose lives are forever changed; we seek to comfort for those who have lost loved ones; we pray for a change of heart for those who resort to violence.

Faced with gun violence, may we:

Educate; Organize; Advocate; and in all the ways we can, work for that day when weapons of destruction are transformed into instruments of healing.

May it be so.

May we so do.

(Written by The Rev. W. Mark Koenig, Coordinator, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, with revisions. Statistics are from the Centers of Disease Control, the Pew Research Center, and the U.S. Census Bureau)

FEAR AND VIOLENCE

by Gene Mace and Miley Palmer

SESSION I

INTRODUCTION

In one week in January, 2015, there were news stories about three terrorists motivated by religious fundamentalism killing several staffers of a magazine in France, a deranged father throwing his child off a bridge to her death as horrified police tried in vain to stop him, an elderly man in a nursing home dying after a police officer shot him five times with beanbags because he would not put down a shoehorn he was brandishing, and a mother shot to death in a grocery store when he toddler reached into her purse and fired a loaded pistol she carried routinely in public. The stories vary greatly in terms of their circumstances and causes, but they share at least one characteristic in common: one or more lives came to a violent end.

We in the faith communities have a duty to proactively respond in efforts to diminish this violence. Particularly we who are Christian are called by one we call “the Prince of Peace” to be peace-makers. This duty involves, among other things, efforts to implement and support legal efforts to regulate the responsible use of guns. We need, though, to keep in mind that laws do not change one’s heart and mind. Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed out that “laws will not make another person love me as a brother, but they may keep him from beating me to death.” Laws have real value and we need to support them. However, our primary faith duty is to focus on the spiritual level of living, for this is what will bring real and deep change to people.

Our primary spiritual task in dealing with destructive behaviors relates to identifying and dealing with the dynamics that underlie those behaviors. In the medical world, a primary duty is to treat the underlying disease that precipitates symptoms. Using this model, we would identify abnormal fear as a disease that is revealed in violent behaviors in which various tools such as guns are used. The primary spiritual task is to focus on the disease. This does not imply that we ignore the behavioral level or the tools used in those behaviors. We need to deal with the behavioral level and tools used in those behaviors. We also need to respond to those dynamics in our culture that exalt and praise violence in many parts of business, entertainment and other aspects of living. However, in this segment of dealing with violence we will focus on fear. Our goal will be to consider how to identify and support the creative potential of fear and diminish its destructive dynamics. In addition, Christianity has a number of important statements to this end, which we must examine.

Fear: A significant driving factor in violence

Fear is a significant factor in all acts of violence – but it is not the only factor nor does it always erupt in violence. Fear can be destructive – but it can under some circumstances be helpful. In fact, fear is important to our survival; it warns us of danger and prompts us to act.

As we begin our consideration of fear it is well to think about how we use the term. In general, we use several words as being alike in meaning: fright, scared and afraid. We tend to think of them as being interchangeable. We are afraid or scared of any number of threatening things such as being attacked by a wild animal. Fright is more commonly used in reference to things that startle us. Fear, as used here, refers to a primordial, underlying dynamic emotion that is induced by a perceived threat.

An interesting sidelight relates to the use of fear in the Bible. In the more archaic understanding “fear of the Lord” was and is perceived as being afraid of doing something to offend God who will then punish us. But in many biblical passages fear is used in the sense of reverential awe, i.e. to honor and respect. The Psalmist says that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 19:23 tells us that “The fear of the Lord is life indeed.” Fear in this sense is one of the most positive attitudes possible, a requisite to healthy spiritual living.

Fear is an emotion innate to all living beings. It is a “natural” dynamic that arises from the perception of danger. In the human family it begins at birth. Prior to birth we are in a protected environment in which we only receive with no demands or responsibilities imposed upon us. In the process of birth we are thrust into an environment that imposes perceived threat which evokes a drive to survive. We experience the pain of separation and physical discomfort and we have no sense of anyone or anything other than ourselves and our stress. We experience being alone and at the mercy of a threatening environment. This instills a basic life stance that might be called *cosmic paranoia*.

Paranoia is an “idea of reference.” This is a point of view based on a judgment that everything that happens refers specifically to the person of reference. In popular usage we think of paranoia in its negative sense that people or situations are plotting harm for us, but it can also involve thoughts that people and situations specifically refer to us in positive ways. Attaching *cosmic* to paranoia adds a sense that the whole universe is involved in reference to us and our status. Cosmic paranoia at birth addresses our birth orientation with a sense that we are all that is and all that happens relates to us, period. We are the center and essence of all being. We are “god,” “the Master of our Fate, the Captain of our Soul”.

The negative components of cosmic paranoia are the nearest that I can come to speaking of “original sin.” It is an “original” life stance that never totally leaves us throughout our life. This concept was first alluded to in the second century by an early bishop, Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, further developed it in the 5th century. Article 7 of the United Methodist Church’s Articles of Religion says “Original sin ... is the corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.”

As we consider sin, please think in other than the traditional distorted definition of sin which focuses on the judgmental terms of one’s being morally good or bad. Think of sin in terms of dynamics that are

destructive of life and separation from the very essence of our being. It is more than something one does; it reaches more deeply into what one is.

Hopefully, as we grow we come to realize that there are beings other than us and that we are not the focus of all that happens. We come to understand that we are part of a world that contains benevolence – which includes benevolent beings that assist our being. This is probably the nearest that we can come to a realistic understanding of God, i.e. the essence of our being. Ideally our mother is the first image of God for us, but as we grow older, we understand that God is greater than any person or anything else in the universe, greater than anything we can imagine.

Paul Tillich referred to God as the Ground of Being. In this view God is not a being. Beings are finite. Being itself – God – is infinite and is the essence of all being. Faith communities should present messages that help us understand and incorporate the benevolence that we call God into our personal world and being. As we incorporate this divine benevolence into our being we become aware that we are not alone, that we are not the center of being and that all is not hostile to us. Even though we are not God – i.e. the ground and center of being – we are part of God.

Sin is a state of being separated from God, i.e. alienated from the reality of life, even though God is the very origin and basis of our being. Though we live in God, we try to become our own “god” and wind up living in various states of fear that can be very destructive of ourselves and others. It is important to keep in mind that this is part of all of us and not just the “bad guys” who do things that shock us. As Paul says “All have sinned and fallen short of His glory.”

Another aspect of our condition is the corporate nature of sin. We live in a good world, God’s world, yet society is in many ways fallen away from God. Economic injustices, racial and class prejudices, and the greed which leads to war are only some examples of the larger aspect of corporate sin. In addition, the news every day provides fresh examples of how even religious intolerance can lead to violence and alienation. In all of these cases, fear plays a foundational role.

Nonetheless, fear is an essential part of all living. At times it is even our friend. It is important to keep in mind that even in very healthy persons there remain elements of that original fear of being alone in a threatening environment. Our cosmic paranoia fear shows up particularly during times when we experience stress in life. It is a friend, though, at those times when genuine threats confront us. Let us now think about the fears we face.

Fears may be divided into two groups: Environmental fears and Psychological fears.

Environmental fears are realistic, i.e. related to a concrete, dangerous situation. These fears are our friends that call for a creative response to danger. They are helpful in preventing injury and death.

Psychological fears relate to internal dynamics that are not supported by external events or settings.

These fears tend to short-circuit our thinking and civilized moral responses. They tend to ignite emotional reactions rather than thoughtful responses and often erupt in violent behaviors.

Let us look at some of the basic fears of life and how they are realistic (environmental) fears or internal (psychological) fears. Think of terms of how they are creative or destructive of living. As we look at these “basic fears” let’s think of them in terms of how they assist or hinder living and growing on personal as well as social levels. In this way we avoid a tendency to descend into judgmental stances of “good” and “bad” which are very subjective and related to one’s own unique life presuppositions. Keep in mind that what is good for you may be bad for me. Now let’s look at some of the basic fears of life. As we consider them it is best to evaluate them in terms of how they enhance or diminish living.

(“Basic Fears” handout is presented to participants.)

- **Fear of extinction:** This is the primary existential anxiety in all normal human beings. It involves a sense that our very being could be eliminated and we would no longer exist.
- **Fear of mutilation:** This relates to having one’s bodily structure violated, i.e. having one’s body damaged, invaded or destroyed. It often focuses on possible attacks by dangerous animals or humans.
- **Fear of losing one’s autonomy:** This involves anxiety about becoming immobilized, paralyzed, entrapped or imprisoned. It relates to a sense of becoming controlled or overwhelmed by external circumstances and may be physical or social.
- **Fear of separation from others:** This relates to a sense of rejection, abandonment and loss of connection with others. In this one has a sense of not being valued by others and in essence becoming a non-person.
- **Fear of ego death:** This carries with it a sense of humiliation and shame resulting in a profound sense of self-disapproval. It includes a sense of one not being loveable or capable of worth. Religious bigotry and intolerance often express the fear of ego-death on a cosmic level.
- **Fear of powerlessness:** This relates to a sense of one’s inability to meet demands or expectations that one perceives others to want. It carries with it a sense of lacking the tools or resources to meet situations one faces. It can result in one grasping and utilizing what are perceived as more powerful tools to meet the situation, e.g. guns.
- **Fear of the unknown:** Life is never totally predictable. Healthy life may not be predictable but it is trustworthy because we know we are in God’s hands. Unhealthy life may be more predictable, but it can be destructive because we keep making the same mistakes again and again.

These fears are all innate to life and can be defined as natural. They all have creative and destructive potential depending on how one responds to them. Creative responses assist and enhance living for the person and those around her/him. Destructive responses prompt withdrawal from living or various forms of violence toward oneself and others.

DISCUSSION:

- 1. As you look at this list of fears, which do you think is obviously visible in our society today?***
- 2. In what way are these fears creative or positive?***
- 3. In what way are they destructive?***
- 4. Matthew 10:32 says that “perfect love casts out fear;” what does this mean?***
- 5. What are some ways we can teach our children and youth to overcome destructive fears?***

SESSION II
HUMAN FUNCTIONING: OUR PROCESS
FOR RESPONDING TO EVENTS

(“Human Functioning Process” handout is presented.)

We meet life via a process that begins with events that we filter through our basic life presuppositions and functional dynamics. Our presuppositions evaluate these events and assign a personal meaning for them. This established meaning prompts emotional responses, i.e. feelings. These feelings ignite our thinking process to determine behaviors which deal with the event in a manner that we consider to best assist our well-being.

Basic life presuppositions

From the beginning in our life we begin processing what happens to us. This includes the various events that occur in our living and training. We are born with some personality predispositions that modify how we integrate learning from these events and teachings. From this learning we develop principles upon which we establish ideas of meaning about future events. These meanings vary from being quite conscious to being deeply unconscious. Often these perceptions occur very rapidly with little, if any, conscious thinking involved. They are quite automatic and ignite feelings before one is fully aware of what is happening. To understand this, think about someone coming up and slapping you in the face. You have an immediate emotional reaction. In normal settings you do not hold off your emotions and think a bit about what it means and then decide how to feel about it. Your basic life learning has already established meaning for this happening and you have an immediate emotional/feeling reaction.

Feelings: Emotional, affective responses to fear.

It is important to be clear about these things we call feelings. So let us strive to identify the dynamics of this term. From this we can understand more about how they impact our being and how to creatively deal with them. The first thing to say about feelings is that they are affective, i.e. emotional, responses that are part of our very being. True feelings are emotional responses such as happiness, love, fright and anger. They are windows into our soul telling us what is going on inside of us. Psychotherapy begins with looking into the feelings behind our behaviors.

Several rules apply to the true definition of feelings:

- Feelings are neither good nor bad. They just are.
- Feelings are our own and it cannot be said that we do not feel what we feel
- Feelings are not subject to being challenged as wrong.
- Feelings are not controllable.
 - They happen to us before we are aware of them.
 - We only control what we do with them.

The term “feelings” can be used in a number of ways, not all of them helpful. In one common misuse of the term we sometimes employ it in an attempt to avoid being challenged for ideas and attitudes that we erroneously call feelings. Additionally, it may imply that we can’t help doing what we do. This can be a not-so-subtle attempt to avoid responsibility for ideas and attitudes that we often have. In addition to avoiding responsibility, we may be intimating that we are unable to change those things that we call feelings. It is like having a free card to get out of jail. Let’s look at how we use the term, feelings, to address our speculations, life presuppositions and desires which are always subject to challenge as being in error.

(“Feelings” handout is presented.)

At this point we will look at and discuss our use of the term “feelings” and how to be more able to more accurately identify and talk about feelings.

Thinking evaluative responses

Suppose an event has occurred and been evaluated through our presuppositions and have evoked our affective responses (feelings). Now comes the time to consider a response to the event. This calls for thinking to evaluate what happened and consider what to do next. Ideally, we would consider the dynamics of what has happened, review possible actions for response, consider the potential results those actions and make a decision about what is the most creative and appropriate action for this occasion. Sometimes this can happen quickly. Other times it takes considerable time to complete the process. Unfortunately, our feelings can take over and short-circuit the process. We often react to our feelings so rapidly that we don’t fully consider possible creative responses to what has happened. This often results in destructive behavior.

Behaviors

Behaviors are our action responses in life. This is where “the rubber hits the road” in response to what has impacted us. When we experience fearful feelings we respond in actions that strive to protect us from the perceived danger. This tends to inspire what is identified as a “Fight or Flight” response. Fight involves behaviors that approach the source of danger. Flight involves behaviors that strive to retreat from the source of danger. Any given situation can inspire either fight or flight.

One’s response to a perceived danger varies in intensity with one’s understanding of the force of the danger and one’s general stance in meeting life. A heightened sense of danger prompts heightened affective responses which tend to overwhelm one’s thinking ability. People who have a more aggressive life stance tend to confront the perceived source of danger. This approach does not necessarily involve attempts to attack and destroy the source of danger. The Gospel injunction to “turn the other cheek” confronts the danger without taking flight or fighting. People who have a more passive life stance tend to withdraw from the perceived source of danger. Fight and flight can each be creative or destructive. In the loftier spiritual/religious communities the primary goal in life is to be as creative with as little

destruction as possible. It would be good if we could be fully creative without any destruction involved. Of course, life is not always so simple and clear-cut as to make that possible in all situations.

A major goal in most Christian faith communities is to help develop skills to slow down emotional responses to perceived danger, instead training persons to develop a pattern of overriding the emotional reaction control and interjecting time for thinking before acting. An example of this skill is to be seen in a fellow who bought a new Cadillac convertible which had been his dream for years. As he drove into his driveway, he cut the corner too short and wound up with the rear fender crushed by a large rock the he installed to keep people off his grass. He spoke of how he had trained himself to always ask first, "What can I learn from this event." In our political culture we encourage our leaders to stop, think and utilize peace-making efforts instead of automatically reacting to perceived threats by making war or retreating to appeasement. Attack and withdrawal are not the only means for dealing with perceived danger.

DISCUSSION:

Consider some scenarios of threat and fight or flight responses. Examples:

- 1. You are in a convenience store when the sound of gunfire at the check-out is heard;*
- 2. You are in a fender-bender and the other driver comes toward you with a ball-bat in hand;*
- 3. On a less threatening level, you are approached by a panhandler in the church parking lot who keeps pressing you for a donation, demanding more than you offer and asking if you are a Christian.*
- 4. Would your answers to any of these questions be different if you were accompanied by a child or by a dependent older person? How?*

SESSION III HELPING PEOPLE DEAL WITH FEAR

To work at changing our responses to fear it is important to look clearly at the behavioral responses of our fearful feelings. There is a strong tendency to respond defensively to our behaviors – even denying them – rather than facing and acknowledging them. Defensive reactions involve efforts to justify what we have done. Creative responses involve understanding the basis of our responses. To do this, we must clearly face our behaviors and acknowledge them. This is the real essence of confession, which is an integral part of Christian worship. Confession is not a matter wallowing in guilt. It clearly acknowledges, “This is what I did.” Guilt can be helpful in prompting us to face our behaviors, but it does not help us to creatively learn from our behaviors.

In working to understand our responses to fear there are three points for focus:

- Behaviors
- Feelings
- Life suppositions which are often quite unconscious to the person

The process of helping create positive change works backward from identifying behaviors to identifying the feelings that prompt the behaviors. This then helps the person identify and understand the life underlying presuppositions that set the stage for reaction. At this point a person can make decisions about changing or keeping these life presuppositions. Understanding and changing one’s life presuppositions will work toward changing our affective responses to life situations. This results in different affective (feeling) responses which then move us toward healthier, more creative behavior. The ultimate focus in helping people to be creative rather than destructive in life is to change their basic presuppositions.

As we work toward more creative responses to fear, there are a number of approaches that we can use with ourselves or with others in dealing with the fears that we face in life. While these are techniques used in therapy, they are not exclusive to the therapeutic realm. When fears reach the level of pathology that disrupts life, people need to see well-skilled therapists. However, in our lives there are levels of fear that we as individuals and the Christian community can utilize to help ourselves and others to live more creative lives. In essence, they are good practices to develop on friendship and community support. In 1986 one therapist, William Schofield, wrote a book that he titled Psychotherapy, the Purchase of Friendship in which he posited the idea that psychotherapy involves dynamics of friendship. Friends are important factors in keeping us sane. Our faith does not call all of us to become therapists, but it does call us all to be friendly and therapeutic in our relationships.

Let us consider some of the ways to help people develop more creative life presuppositions and behaviors. There are a number of relational approaches to utilize:

- Strive to understand the person and what that person is doing and feeling.

- Keep in mind that it is more important to be with the person than to do something. Sometimes it is more helpful to “Don’t just do something, stand there.”
- Help the person tap into their own creative potential for evaluating the situation and developing more viable responses. You will be asked for advice and will be tempted to give it. This can develop dependence on you and short-circuit the person’s present and future learning. The goal is to help people arrive at their own creative conclusion rather than ours. In this, people do not have to remember what they were told because their conclusions are part of them.
- Keep in mind that the person is responsible for his/her own conclusions. You are not responsible for his/her conclusions. Giving advice tends to keep you responsible for what a person does in response to your advice.
- In working to understand the person ask “what” and “how” questions rather than “why” questions. “Why” questions ask for a rational justification of one’s actions. “How” and “what” get to the realm of data about what happened and how the person reacted. The goal is to help people call forth their inner wisdom and inspire them to use that wisdom in creative responses rather falling prey to destructive reactions. This requires us to believe that people can solve their own problems.
- Of course, for Christians, we believe we have some powerful tools to help us in this task: faith and prayer, the wisdom of Scripture, the strengthening that comes from being part of a redemptive community, and – above all – the power of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives.

When working with others, our responses need to be creative, supportive and realistically evaluative of the situation. The goal is to inspire the person to use her/his rational and environmental resources to evaluate and deal with the situation. The intent is to help the person learn from the event rather than just reacting on an emotional level.

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Do you think that many people feel that they can turn to the Church for help with their fears? Why or why not?*
- 2. In what way does your faith enable you to help others?*
- 3. Why is confidentiality important in helping others?*
- 4. How can faith communities help people feel that they are not alone and at the mercy of a hostile environment?*

SESSION IV

The community of faith has many powerful messages that can be proclaimed to assist this process. This is not an exhaustive list but it addresses significant messages:

- You are not alone.
- You are loved.
- You do not have to be perfect to be of worth.
- Forgiveness is always available to you.
- Redemption is always possible.
- This life is valuable and dear.

These messages are – or ought to be – reinforced by the churches regularly, not least in the corporate worship of the church. Acts of praise, confession and assurance of forgiveness, and commitment all remind us of the eternal worth of each soul. Add to this the expressions of genuine fellowship that are available in the many activities of the church, and we realize the power that communities of faith offer.

John Wesley maintained that “Solitary religion is the Devil’s religion.” By that he did not mean that private prayer and Bible study are useless, but that we have a need for the community of faith that can be met in no other way. Of course, we also ought to remember theologian Karl Barth’s comment that while many people are met by God in the church, many others make their last stand against God in the church. That is, some folks substitute busyness and good deeds for a genuine openness to the Divine.

Our task as persons of faith is to make these messages an integral part of our being and acting, just as the congregation is embody them. Our first task is to hear the fears of people. Until we truly hear them we do not have any basis for pronouncing judgments about their presuppositions or behaviors. Even then, any judgments that we make should be about the viability or destructive potential inherent in the presuppositions and behaviors.

Unfortunately, there are faith community messages that counter these messages and serve to increase fear in people. These messages have a long history that even predates Christian scriptures. They are messages that are designed to control people.

Fear is a very effective tool in controlling people’s behaviors. Consider a very common example of a child running out toward a dangerous street. We yell at the child in effort to stop her/him from getting into that danger. In essence, we are hoping to “freeze them in place.” In faith communities we often hear similar control messages intended to prevent what are considered to be destructive lifestyles. Often these messages only serve to enhance one’s sense of fear and sense of inadequacy to meet life’s experiences. Examples of these messages include:

- You are basically sinners and evil in nature. We earlier noted Paul's comment that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," which is a fact of life, but even more the Church, and we as Christians, should lift the message that every person is a precious child of God.
- God is a harsh judge who will cause bad things to happen to you in life when you do wrong. There are indeed passages in both the Old and New Testaments in which God is depicted in exactly those terms, just as there are passages such as those in the Books of Job and Jonah which offer exactly the opposite picture of the Divine nature. But most of all we need to point out that the whole purpose of Christ's coming was to redeem the world, not condemn it.
- God will punish you with an afterlife of hell if you don't behave properly. Of course, there are many passages in Scripture which speak of the eternal consequences of intentionally remaining alienated from God. Even Jesus warned of this. And we each could speak of examples of people we know who are living in their own special Hell in this, sometimes imposed on them and sometimes the consequences of their own choices and actions. But the good news of the Gospel is that God loves us as children even though we may have strayed. It's important for the Church – and for us – to be more concerned to love a bit of Heaven into them rather than scare the Hell out of them.

Sin is a biblical concept that has been misused and severely harmed in a lot of our faith community proclamations. In reaction to this misuse, some faith communities have worked to avoid talking about sin – which is not a panacea but another problem of its own. If we truly want to help people develop more creative and less fearful life stances, we need to develop a better understanding of the concept that we call sin. Sin should be considered in terms of destructive dynamics which have implications within and beyond this specific time and space. Alienation from God – which brings alienation from others and from our own best selves – has long-term consequences in our own life and the life of others. This is often described as "seeing the larger picture." In our faith teachings we must try to help people view more cosmic implications of what they do without debasing their sense of their own value – and the value of others. A healthy concept of sin can assist this. Our primary faith goal needs to be focused on helping people live the abundant life.

It is an easier task to threaten people with cosmic punishment in hope that this will control them to behave in ways that we consider to be better living. Unfortunately, for some this seems to be the only formula that works. However, for others this message only enhances their fears and results in a diminished sense of competence to meet the difficulties of life. As Paul addressed in his letter to the Roman Christians, law only defines spiritual death; it doesn't bring to us the life that is life indeed.

We need to be concerned about preventing spiritual death. More than that, though, we need to work to enhance life. It is easy to define that which causes death of the human spirit. The real work of faith relates to helping facilitate life. There are a number of Biblical teachings that focus on building a viable response to life:

- I came so that they could have life – indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest. (John 10:10 Common English Version)
- He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8 CEV)
- I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord; not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created. (Romans 8:38-39 CEV)
- Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is – what is good and pleasing and mature. (Romans 12:2 CEV)
- You must forgive, even as you have been forgiven.

This challenge to forgive is an important one. It has been said that bitterness is an acid which causes more damage to the vessel in which it is stored than to the object over which it is poured. Forgiveness toward others is an absolute necessity if we are to avoid being eaten by resentment and fear. Forgiveness is also the first step toward possibly restoring a broken relationship.

The problem – as most of us know from personal experience – often lies in the difficulty of accepting forgiveness. And some of us are willing to believe that God forgives us, and even can accept forgiveness from one we have wronged, but we find it almost impossible to forgive ourselves. Yet until we are able – by the grace of God – to do that, we find ourselves trapped in remorse and alienation.

DISCUSSION:

1. *How have you experienced forgiveness in your life?*
2. *How do you perceive forgiveness being offered in your church?*
3. *Do you think others believe the church is a forgiving fellowship? Why or why not?*

Conclusion

Paul Tillich wrote a book entitled *The Courage to Be*, in which he posited that living always has threat. He spoke of death as the only way to remove threat. Living is like moving against a black wall which hides what lies ahead. To live we must move forward and push the wall back, realizing that it is always possible that there is an abyss into which we might fall. The only way to avoid the abyss is to remain in place. This is the real essence of spiritual death. To truly live is to move forward, pushing the wall back. This requires courage, “The Courage to Be.” That is the real essence of faith.

Note that for Tillich faith is not simply assent to a set of doctrines but a basic attitude of trust – which for him was a trust in God. This is the only thing that can give us courage to push forward into the future with confidence and courage. Christians see the example of this faith in Jesus Christ, and believe that the essence of faith is to follow him, not simply repeat a Creed in church.

Our tendency is to ask, “Be what?” To consider what truly being is we might recall Moses’ question at the burning bush in which he asked what he was to say to the Pharaoh about who sent him to take the Israelites out of Egypt. The answer was “I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14 CEB) To **BE** is rather like that. Further definition only diminishes the essence of being. God is greater than the human mind can understand. In somewhat the same way it is difficult to say exactly what we must do and be, since we are made in the image of God, and we each face a different set of circumstances in life. But God has placed within each of us an innate sense of what it means to be an authentic person, characterized by honesty, humility and honor.

When I was pastor in one of my early churches, my wife and I regularly met with two other young couples to socialize. We fellows were in the kitchen playing cards while the women were in the living room. The women got onto the subject of sex appeal and one of them commented, “I don’t know how to define it, but I know it when I see it!”

Being is like that. There is something inside us that knows what it means to **BE** when we see it. To **BE** requires courage – which is not found in the ability to wreak violence on others or to swagger in macho bravado. It takes true courage to care, to forgive, and to witness to a higher way of living. It’s found in the classic formulation: Faith, Hope, and Love.

DISCUSSION:

- 1. What gets in the way of authentic living?***
- 2. How may we grow into authentic living?***
- 3. What resources are offered by religion to help us grow in authentic living?***

BASIC FEARS

- Fear of **extinction**
 - Annihilation
 - Ceasing to exist i.e., no longer being
 - The primary existential anxiety in all normal human beings
- Fear of **mutilation**
 - Losing part of one's bodily structure
 - Having one's body invaded
 - Anxiety about dangerous animals/humans
- Fear of **losing one's autonomy**
 - Becoming immobilized, paralyzed, entrapped, imprisoned
 - Becoming controlled by circumstances
 - Becoming overwhelmed
 - May be physical or social
- Fear of **separation from others**
 - Abandonment
 - Rejection
 - Loss of connectedness
 - Becoming a non-person
 - Not valued by others
- Fear of **ego death**
 - Humiliation
 - Shame
 - Profound self-disapproval
 - Disintegration of one's sense of lovability, capability and worthiness
 - Religious bigotry and intolerance may express the fear of ego-death on a cosmic level.
- Fear of **powerlessness**
 - Lack of ability to meet perceived demands or expectations.
 - Absence of tools or resources to meet situations.
 - Can result in utilizing what are perceived as more powerful tools to meet the situation.
- Fear of **the unknown**
 - Life is never totally predictable
 - Healthy life is never predictable, but it is trustworthy
 - Unhealthy life is more predictable

FEELINGS

As we dialogue and relate together, a very commonly used word is “feelings”. This word is used to address a number of our internal functioning stances:

	<u>Definition</u>	<u>How we use this</u>	<u>Translation</u>
*Speculations	Ideas that we strongly think are accurate though we do not have irrefutable proof for them	I <u>feel</u> like you are angry	I <u>think</u> you are angry
*Life Presuppositions	Basic “myths” upon which we base how we live. Usually rather deep in our unconscious levels of thinking.	I <u>feel</u> that women talk more than men.	I <u>believe</u> that women talk more than men even though I cannot prove that to be.
*Desires	A longing, yearning or desire to do something.	I <u>feel</u> like going to see my sister	I <u>want (desire)</u> to go to see my sister
*Judgments	An assessment of a situation	I <u>feel</u> like that it is wrong to wear blue jeans to church	In my <u>judgment</u> it is wrong to wear blue jeans to church
*Affective states	Emotional states of our being	I <u>feel</u> happy, sad, angry, afraid, content, & etc	I <u>feel</u> happy, sad, angry, afraid, content, & etc

There are three basic rules that apply to our affective states, i.e. the true definition of feelings:

1. Feelings are neither good nor bad, they just are.
2. We do not control our feelings. They happen before control is an issue. We control what we do with them.
3. Feelings are not challengeable. What we feel is what we feel, and nobody can say we don't feel that way.
4. Feelings are not caused by external actions. They are our responses to events. Nothing makes us have a feeling. This means that we are responsible for our feelings.

Speculations, life presuppositions, desires & judgments are commonly called feelings. This erroneous use of the term is basically related to a desire to prevent having one's statement challenged, i.e. “If I feel thus and so, nobody has a right to challenge me.” Speculations, life presuppositions, desires and judgments are always challengeable. They do not come under the basic rules that apply to feelings. We will not stop this common misuse of the word or the social acceptance of its misuse. However, by identifying erroneous use of the term, feelings, we are freed to challenge statements in which the word is misused.

HUMAN FUNCTIONING PROCESS

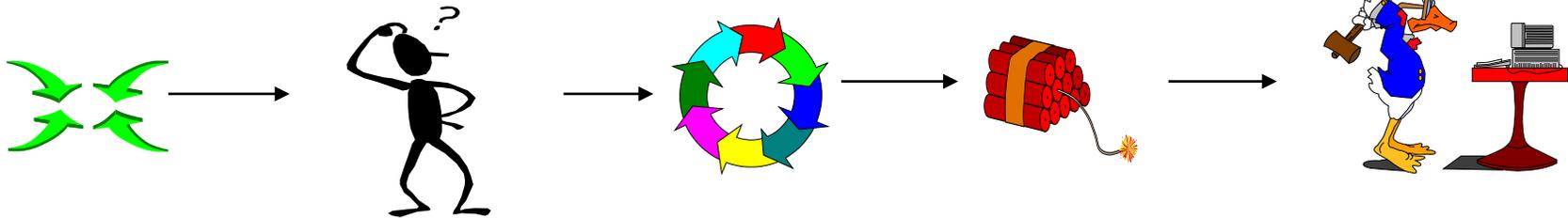
AN EVENT
OCCURS

A PERSON IS
INVOLVED

EVENT IS FILTERED
THROUGH PERSON'S
PRESUPPOSITIONS

FEELINGS
(EMOTIONS)
ARE IGNITED

BEHAVIOR
RESULTS



Feelings (emotions) are a result that precipitates behavior (action). An event does not cause behavior. One's basic life presuppositions evaluate events. This evaluation establishes a meaning for the event, which prompts an emotional response. The emotional response then prompts behavior.

This means that the primary driver of behavior is not the event or one's feelings but one's presuppositions. Feelings are merely a barometer pointing toward the presuppositions.

To change one's feeling responses, the basic presuppositions must change. One can learn to identify and manage her/his behavior even without changing feeling responses. In a number of situations managing behavior can, over time, change one's presuppositions and, therefore, the feeling responses.

Helping Our Children Feel Safe and Secure at School and Other Social Settings

Reasoning

At one of our early sessions in the development of this curriculum one of the members of our group made the statement, “Are we teaching our children to fear?” All of us – parents, teachers, and concerned adults – want our children to feel safe and secure in the settings in which they find themselves on a regular basis. When this feeling of security is absent, we tend to worry about what can or will happen when we speak and interact with those around us. Helping our children (and those who are no longer children) develop these skills is something in which Jesus calls each of us to actively participate.

The purpose of this section of “A Christians Response to Violence” is to give suggestions and share thoughts on enabling our children to live healthy, fear-less lives. This isn’t an easy task and is one that we should all be willing to review and work on throughout our lives.

Earlier in this seminar, we delved in-depth into fear and how it relates to behavior. We all learn from our parents, siblings and friends what we should be afraid of, even if we’ve never experienced danger first hand. However, confidence is something we can also learn.

Talking With Your Children by Paul Newhall

We’ve been told how difficult it is to talk with our children and many parents and other adults have given up on the power of conversation. If we don’t talk with our children about our fears, our shortcomings (this doesn’t mean that we share all of our “dirty little secrets”), and our ways of dealing with conflict, they will learn to take their social cues from other sources like television shows and their peers. Talking with our children about the various aspects of our lives helps them come to a better understanding of how adults deal with difficulty in their lives. It gives them a level of relationship and security that can’t be found any other way and allows them to feel like you trust them.

If you want your children to feel secure you have to talk to them! Trying to protect them from the realities of life puts them at a disadvantage. It used to be that families talked about what was happening in their lives around the dinner table. While this may not be a regular occurrence in your family, finding time to sit and talk with your children in an environment where they know they’ll be taken seriously, not talked down to, and where they can say anything without the fear of reprisal is remarkably important.

I was fortunate to be able to take my children to school most days. These were often the times when I had a chance to see how things were going in their lives. Whether it was the early morning ride to zero hour for the oldest, talking about the latest happenings with the middle one, or going out for our weekly “date” to Panera Bread with the youngest, I tried to listen and chat with them. I didn’t always like hearing what they told me about their lives, but it gave me the opportunity to share my thoughts and how I might have reacted in a situation. It also gave me the chance to let them know about times I’d mishandled dealing with others and how I might have acted differently.

If you don’t regularly talk with your children, you need to build that into your schedule immediately! Open lines of communication are crucial for children to believe they have an outlet for their concerns and someone who will give them reliably good guidance when they are having trouble navigating the problems that arise in life.

REFLECTION FROM LITERATURE:

From *The Scriptures Sing of Christmas*

By J. Ellsworth Kalas

... So many of our peacemaking efforts seem to go awry, not only at the level of international affairs, but within the circle of friendship, family, marriage, and business. And yes, within the church, too! The psalmist put it in mournful tones:

I am for peace;
But when I speak,
They are for war (Psalm 120:7)

Many of us have felt that way on some occasion or other. I must confess, as I examine my experiences, that when I have been for peace – that is, for the resolution of some conflict – I have often been for it specifically on my terms. I have sometimes seen earnest pacifists become unpleasantly aggressive in controversy over how peace should be pursued. I've seen two persons who loved each other break their relationship because they loved their own point of view more than they loved each other – and obviously, more than they loved peace. Nations and politicians often excuse themselves on the ground that they want peace only with honor, and sometimes they may be justified in what they say. But often, I think, honor is spelled, “My way.” Which is to say, we must want peace more than we want our own way, more than our particular method of solution, more than our pride. I wouldn't want any of us to sacrifice principle, but I know from experience that principle has a way of seeming identical with one's personal point of view. (pp. 24-25)

DISCUSSION:

1. Talk with the person next to you about one of the most important conversations you had with a parent or other adult. How did it change your actions or your attitude?
2. How can we temper our language to make our views known without discouraging the sharing or understanding of other people's views?

Bullying Awareness

Although bullying may not be something that's happening in your own home, your child's feeling of safety and well-being may be impacted by things experienced elsewhere – but you can see the symptoms in his or her behavior exhibited at home.

Bullying is unwanted aggressive behavior toward a person perceived to be weaker. Children are sometimes ill-equipped to diffuse the situation and need help from adults. Signs your child is being bullied include:

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations

- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

Source: [Stop Bullying.gov](http://StopBullying.gov)¹

If you recognize some of these symptoms in your child(ren), urge them to talk to you about it and let them know they don't have to deal with it alone. Get school officials involved if the problem is happening at school or on the bus. If the bullying is happening to your child in your neighborhood, shield him or her from the bullies by welcoming your children's friends into your own home and yard to play there, where you can supervise them. Any bullying that rises to the level of physical assault should be reported to your local police department.

Please go to www.stopbullying.gov for more information.

Reporting Threats of School Violence

The Center To Prevent Youth Violence created a national hotline to empower students take an important, proactive role in preventing violence at school. Many threats go unreported because students don't want to be labeled a "snitch" or fear that there will be retaliation. However, 83% of middle-schoolers would be willing to report another student at school with a weapon if they could do so anonymously.

The statistics on school violence are staggering:

- 1,150,000 high school students are threatened or injured with a weapon at school each year
- school violence lands 90,000 students in the emergency room each year
- nearly 1,000,000 high school students stayed home from school in the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school
- 2,500,000 of high school students carried a weapon at least once in the past 30 days
- **in 4 out of 5 school shootings, at least one other person had prior knowledge of the attack**

Source: Speak Up.com²

Urge your children to speak up if they've heard someone make threats of violence. Of course they don't want to get someone else in trouble. And they may question whether or not the person who made the threat was serious or "just kidding." However, teach them that it is far better to be safe than sorry. They'd feel much worse if some friends or classmates were injured or killed in a preventable act of violence. Let them know there is a hotline they can call 24/7 to make a completely anonymous report: **1-866-SPEAK-UP** (1-866-773-2587). For more information, visit speakup.com.

DISCUSSION:

1. Do you have fears that a spree shooting could happen in your child's school?
2. Do you think having an armed guard at schools or arming the teachers is a good idea? Why or why not?

3. Does it make our children feel more or less safe when they have to participate in “lock-down” drills at school?

Staying Safe Online

Cybercrime is a growing problem in our nation and can lead to fraud, identity theft, cyberbullying and even child abduction/exploitation. Cyberbullying, or bullying that takes place using electronic technology, is also on the rise. Examples of cyberbullying include demeaning or harassing text messages, emails, or posts on social networking sites; false rumors, embarrassing pictures, videos or website links sent by email, text, or posted on social networking sites; and fake profiles.³

As a parent, you should be extremely vigilant when children are on the computer, play multi-user games online, use social networks, send emails or text messages. It is important that you monitor their computer activity and activity with other electronic devices, such as their cell phone. There are filters, blocking software and parental controls that you can utilize to keep children off of sites that are inappropriate for them.

The FBI has put together an excellent [*Parent's Guide to Internet Safety*](#)⁴ that all parents should use as a resource. It has practical information about minimizing risk, warning signs that your child may be at risk online, and what you should do if you suspect your child might be communicating with a child predator or cyberstalker online. The guide includes the following instructions parents should teach their children to help keep them safe:

- Children should never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online.
- Children should never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the internet or online service to people they do not personally know.
- Children should never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number.
- Children should never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images.
- Children should never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent or harassing.
- Children should know that whatever they're told online may or may not be true.

DISCUSSION:

1. Most parents and teachers tell children to not be tattle-tales: how then can we encourage them to report bullying and abuse?
2. How do you tell when you are being over-protective as opposed to letting your child gain confidence in self-protection?
3. How can we best build a child's self-esteem so that he or she can stand up to bullies?
4. Do you feel as a parent that it is your duty to monitor your child's electronic activity or that doing so is an invasion of privacy?

REFLECTION FROM SCRIPTURE:

John 8: “³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now

what do you say?"⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹ She said, "No one, sir."¹² And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

DISCUSSION:

1. In what way were the men who brought the woman to Jesus bullies?
2. Why did the crowd melt away?

Conclusion

It is important for children to have someone to whom they can open up about what is happening in their lives. Ideally, parents should foster an open, trusting and reliably supportive relationship with their kids from the start. When children feel comfortable and encouraged about sharing things with their parents, pastors, and teachers or school counselors, they are more likely to go to those trusted adults for help when they are in "over their heads" and are potentially facing real danger.

¹ "Warning Signs." *StopBullying.gov*. U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/warning-signs#bullied>>.

² "Resources: Infographic." *SPEAK UP*. The Center to Prevent Youth Violence, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://speakup.com/media/2014/speak-up-infographic_final.png>.

³ "Cyberbullying." *StopBullying.gov*. U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/>>.

⁴ "Parent Guide to Internet Safety." *FBI Reports and Publications*. U.S. Dept. of Justice, 03 June 2005. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide/parent-guide>>.

SAFETY STARTS AT HOME by Mary Kay Mace

SESSION I

Sandy Hook – Columbine – Virginia Tech – Northern Illinois University – the names have been embedded in our consciousness, places where innocent people were murdered in mass shootings. It has brought a wide-spread concern that no town and no person is safe. But the problem is not simply a matter of mass shootings by people with mental illness. Eighty-nine Americans are killed each and every day by guns. Fifty-five are suicides, thirty-one are murders, two are accidental, whether while hunting or in the home and one is from police intervention.¹ The number of gun deaths in this country since 1989 exceeds the number of U.S. soldiers killed in combat in all of our wars combined.²

Many of us have become fearful for our safety and that of our loved ones as a result of relentless news stories about unexpected spree shootings in the kinds of places we all frequent in our daily lives. It's horrifying to think that our children might not make it home from school or a movie or the mall. Perhaps the rest of the population is starting to understand what it's like to be a spouse, parent or child of a police officer or fire fighter, whose jobs are inherently dangerous. Our greatest hope is that our lives will be happy and productive; attaining those goals can be frustrated, though, as we have to admit that our personal safety is anything but guaranteed. So what can we do? We can start in the place where we have some control: our own homes.

Some people believe that arming themselves makes them safer. Is that is actually true? Here are some statistics that can help you to make an informed decision:

- In 2013 in the United States, 505 people died from an unintentional shooting; 124 of those were children or teens aged 19 or younger
- In 2013, 16,864 people were wounded in an unintentional shooting but survived; 3,127 of those were children or teens aged 19 or younger

Source: [CDC](#)^{3,4}

- A gun in the home is 22 times more likely to be used in a completed suicide, 11 times more likely in an attempted suicide, 7 times more likely in a criminal assault or homicide, and 4 times more likely in an unintentional shooting death or injury than in a self-defense shooting
- Most unintentional shooting deaths occur in the home (65 percent), based on data from 16 states. The most common context of the death (30 percent) was playing with the gun.

Source: [USA Today](#)⁵

- It has been estimated at least 38 percent of American households have a gun. In homes with children younger than 18, 22 percent store the gun loaded, 32 percent unlocked, and 8 percent unlocked and loaded. The children in these homes know the gun is present, and many handle the gun in the absence of their parents.
- Children who have received gun safety training are just as likely to play with and fire a real gun as children not trained.

- In one study, 8-to-12-year-old boys were observed via one-way mirror as they played for 15 minutes in a waiting room with a disabled .38 caliber handgun concealed in a desk drawer. Seventy two percent discovered the gun, and 48 percent pulled the trigger; 90 percent of those who handled the gun and/or pulled the trigger had prior gun safety instruction.

Source: [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)⁶

Firearm Safety

Whether you have guns in your home because you like hunting or target shooting or for personal protection, here are some commonsense suggestions that can decrease the likelihood of there being unintended shooting victims in our own homes or thefts of firearms. **It is especially crucial that you practice safe storage if you have children in your home!**

- Take courses on gun safety from certified instructors and receive hands on training with your firearm at the gun range.
- Purchase a gun safe in which to store your firearms. Never give children the combination or let them know where you keep the key.
- Safety experts recommend that recreational guns be stored in the safe *unloaded* and that ammunition be stored in a separate location.
- Use trigger or safety locks, which are available for most firearms.
- Always treat firearms as if they're loaded. Unintended shootings happen often when people assume that removing the clip makes the gun unloaded. There can be a bullet already chambered, though.
- Never, ever, point a firearm at a person you don't intend to kill. Horseplay with something other than a lethal weapon.
- Teach children to never touch a firearm without adult supervision.
- Impress upon children that guns are not toys. If they should ever happen upon any gun, teach them that they should not touch it and to immediately tell an adult where it is.
- Do not hesitate to ask the adults in other homes where your children might play if they have guns and if so, how they're secured. It may feel awkward but it isn't intrusive. You are your child's first line of defense. If your children spend any time in the homes of playmates or caregivers, you should know if they could be at heightened risk for accidental shootings. Keep your children out of those homes, even the homes of relatives, if guns are not securely stored or if you don't get an answer to your question about guns and how they're kept there.
- Perform regular maintenance/cleaning on firearms to keep them in proper operating condition. Make certain the weapon is unloaded first and that there isn't a bullet in the chamber.
- Report any lost or stolen firearms to the police immediately.
- Alcohol or drug use should never be combined with the use of firearms. Even someone who is just a "little buzzed" can experience cognitive impairment and lapses in judgment that can lead to tragedy.

DISCUSSION:

1. *Guns can be used as weapons or as tools. What's the difference?*
2. *If your child is invited to a friend's house, do you think you should ask if there are guns in the home and if they are secure from children?*

REFLECTIONS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Joshua 10: ²⁸ Joshua took Makkedah on that day, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword; he utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

²⁹ Then Joshua passed on from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, to Libnah, and fought against Libnah. ³⁰ The LORD gave it also and its king into the hand of Israel; and he struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it; he left no one remaining in it; and he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

³¹ Next Joshua passed on from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish, and laid siege to it, and assaulted it. ³² The LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he took it on the second day, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah.

³³ Then King Horam of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people, leaving him no survivors.

³⁴ From Lachish Joshua passed on with all Israel to Eglon; and they laid siege to it, and assaulted it; ³⁵ and they took it that day, and struck it with the edge of the sword; and every person in it he utterly destroyed that day, as he had done to Lachish.

³⁶ Then Joshua went up with all Israel from Eglon to Hebron; they assaulted it, ³⁷ and took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it; he left no one remaining, just as he had done to Eglon, and utterly destroyed it with every person in it.

³⁸ Then Joshua, with all Israel, turned back to Debir and assaulted it, ³⁹ and he took it with its king and all its towns; they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining; just as he had done to Hebron, and, as he had done to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and its king.

⁴⁰ So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. ⁴¹ And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. ⁴² Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.”

Matthew 5: ³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right

cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”

DISCUSSION:

1. *How do you reconcile these two passages of Scripture?*
2. *We are supposed to oppose evil; how can we do that without violence?*

MORE THINGS TO DO:

1. Contact your Congressional and State legislators to support legislation to improve the process of background checks and close loopholes that allow dangerous persons (felons, terrorists, people with mental illness) to purchase and possess firearms.
2. Ask for legislation to toughen penalties for “straw-purchases”, that is, buying guns for someone who could not pass a criminal background check.
3. Encourage Congress to support “safe-gun” technology, such as biometric locks that would keep someone else (a thief or child) from using your weapon.

¹ “Key Gun Violence Statistics.” Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, n.d. Web. 16 Sep 2015. <<http://www.bradiycampaign.org/key-gun-violence-statistics>>

² Levintova, Hannah. *More Americans Have Been Shot to Death in the Last 25 Years Than Have Died In Every War.* Mother Jones, 15 Sep 2015. Web. 16 Sep 2015. <<http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2015/09/gun-violence-deaths-exceed-military-fatalities-us-wars>>

³ “Non-fatal Injury Reports 2001 – 2013, National or Regional.” *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System / CDC WISQARS.* Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d. Web. 17 September 2015. <<http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/nonfatal.html>>

⁴ “Fatal Injury Reports 1999 – 2013 (USA).” *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System / CDC WISQARS.* Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d. Web. 17 Sep 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html>

⁵ Racioppi, Dustin. *Epidemic: Guns Kill Twice as Many Kids As Cancer Does.* USA Today, 11 Apr 2013. Web. 23 Apr 2014. <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/04/11/guns-child-deaths-more-than-cancer/2073259/>>

⁶ Kennedy, Robert M., David M. Jaffe, and Martin S. Keller. “Gun Violence Is a Pediatric Public Health Crisis : Stltoday.” *Stltoday.com.* N.p., 19 Feb. 2013. Web. 23 Apr 2014. <http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/columns/gun-violence-is-a-pediatric-public-health-crisis/article_89b6fee9-f35f-560a-9111-fc16607fb11f.html>.

SESSION II

In the previous class session we discussed the widespread problem of deaths by gunfire in America, and looked at some of the ways in which the home might be made safer. In this class session we want to consider the problems of domestic violence and child abuse.

Dysfunctional Homes

As unpleasant a topic it may be, not everyone enjoys a safe environment in his or her own home. Domestic violence is a hidden epidemic; its victims are often ashamed and hide what's happening to them. But most pastors have experienced the issue of having a battered spouse come for counseling, even from the so-called "best families". Even church people sometimes have violence enter their family circle.

Child abuse is more widely recognized due to laws that require people in certain professions, such as doctors, educators and clergy, to report any suspected abuse, but it is still an insidious problem that affects far too many innocents.

Firearms in households with these problems introduce a more lethal component to a situation that's already bad. For instance, women are 500% more likely to be murdered by domestic abusers when there are guns in the home.¹ Additionally, 57% of all mass shootings are related to domestic or family violence.²

Please be aware and if you do suspect abuse, make your concerns known to the appropriate authorities. Below are some resources where you can find help seven days a week, 24 hours a day:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or www.thehotline.org
- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) or www.childhelp.org

DISCUSSION:

1. *Gossip is considered a sin in church circles; how, then, do we reconcile that reluctance to talk about others with the need to report suspected abuse?*
2. *Pastors are supposed to practice the "Seal of the Confessional." Even a court of law cannot force the pastor to divulge what has been told him or her in private. Should the pastor report cases of abuse?*
3. *Have you been in a situation in which you knew a friend or relative was being abused? What did you do?*

REFLECTIONS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Luke 10: ²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.^[a] "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor

as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii,^[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

DISCUSSION:

- 1. What are some dangers of being a neighbor like the Good Samaritan?**
- 2. Do you know of someone who has been a Good Samaritan? What did they do?**

¹ Gerney, Arkady and Parsons, Chelsea. *Nine Reasons Why Progress on Stronger Gun Laws is Within Reach*. Center For American Progress, 7 May 2013. Web. 23 Apr 2014. <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/civil-liberties/report/2013/05/07/62540/9-reasons-why-progress-on-stronger-gun-laws-is-within-reach/>>

² "Analysis of Recent Mass Shootings." *Mayors Against Illegal Guns*, n.d. Web. 30 Apr. 2015. <<http://everytown.org/article/analysis-of-mass-shootings/>>.

SESSION III

In the first session, we discussed the issues of shootings in America. In the second, we talked about family dysfunction and violence at the hands of a loved one. In this session, we will address some of the problems of violence caused by mental illness.

Ever since the Texas Tower mass shootings in 1966, there have been a number of incidents in schools, malls and other settings in which one or two shooters randomly killed other people. In almost every case, there was evidence uncovered later that the shooter had been treated for one or more mental/emotional illnesses.

Moreover, the majority of shootings in America are classified as suicides, which in most cases come about because of severe depression or other problems considered to be emotional/mental illness. It is important, then, for us to consider and deal with violence caused by such dysfunction.

Mental Illness

Mental illness is a topic that the typical layperson finds difficult to comprehend. While treatment is best left to professionals, being aware of the signs that a loved one might be struggling with mental illness can help to avert unsafe situations. It's important to understand that the vast majority of mentally ill people are not violent and are, in fact, more prone to becoming victims of violence or being a danger to themselves.

While it is tempting to deny there is a problem, especially when the person involved is a loved one, please do not ignore such signs without getting assistance from a professional, such as a school counselor or a psychiatrist. If someone who has a lot of contact with your loved one, such as a teacher or a close friend, observes behavior that concerns them enough to mention it to you, please do not take offense or just hope that the problem goes away. There is no stigma to seeking help.

Be on the lookout for any change in personality or behavior that is atypical for your loved one. Not every such change means that mental illness is involved. According to the Mayo Clinic's website, some of these signs may be symptomatic of mental illness¹:

- Prolonged periods of feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant fatigue, low energy or problems sleeping
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Major changes in eating habits
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

For more information, contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness at 1-800-950-NAMI (1-800-950-6264) or log on to www.nami.org.

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Are we uncomfortable around mentally ill people?*
- 2. What should the church do if someone comes into worship or a Sunday School class who is obviously mentally ill? Who should step in?*

REFLECTIONS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Mark 5: “They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.^[a] ² And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³ He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; ⁴ for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷ and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” ⁸ For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” ⁹ Then Jesus^[b] asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” ¹⁰ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; ¹² and the unclean spirits^[c] begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.” ¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

¹⁴The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷ Then they began to beg Jesus^[d] to leave their neighborhood.”

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Why did the people beg Jesus to leave the district after he had healed the mentally ill man?*
- 2. Can you think of instances in which we value economic considerations ahead of human need?*

Suicide

Viewed through the lens of reducing gun violence, it is important to address the topic of suicide a little more thoroughly than just touching upon its possibility when discussing mental illness. There are people who think that suicides should not be included in the statistics on gun violence, perhaps because they think those numbers represent people who “wanted to die” and would go ahead and do so by any available means. While that

is not necessarily true, would a Christian response to violence overlook the human suffering involved in suicide, whether leading up to it or its aftermath?

More than 60% of all gun deaths are intentional suicides.² Not only does suicide account for the majority of gun deaths, suicides are far more likely to be successful when the method used is a firearm.³ Tellingly, ninety percent of people who make an unsuccessful attempt at suicide do not go on to die by their own hand.⁴ This strongly suggests that removing the availability of a gun for those experiencing extreme emotional distress has the potential for saving lives.

Of course, we value all human life. It is desirable to prevent suicide regardless of the means and, as such, it is important to recognize some of the warning signs that someone might display prior to an attempt. Suicide *is* preventable.

Warning signs that behavior may be suicidal:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Seeming suddenly calm or serene after having been distraught

**Also important to note is that the risk of suicide is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.*

Source: [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)⁵

Getting started: Being familiar with the above warning signs and being prepared ahead of time will enable you to help a person in danger of self-injury. Find out in advance what resources are available in your community, such as hospitals or mental health facilities. Encourage anyone who seems to struggle with coping or challenging circumstances to seek help from a mental health professional and be ready to share the resources available to that person. Additionally, encourage the person to stay connected with family and friends who can provide ongoing support, but also make it clear that you care and would like to be one of those people providing support, if he or she will let you.

Take action: If you think someone has reached the point where he or she may be contemplating suicide, reach out to that person; don't wait for the person to come to you.

What to do if you think someone may be suicidal:

- Talk with the person and show you care. Listen without judging, regardless of your religious beliefs about suicide.
- Ask the person, “Are you thinking of ending your life” or “Are you considering killing yourself?” If the answer is “yes,” ask how he or she intends to accomplish this.
- If the person has a plan and access to lethal means, do not leave him or her alone. Contact a local mental health professional, a local hospital emergency department, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Calls to the Lifeline are routed 24 hours a day to the crisis center closest to the caller where staff are trained to work with people who are suicidal.
- Provide any relevant information you may have about the person to those who are managing the crisis.
- Keep in contact with the person after the crisis and provide ongoing care and support if he or she wants it. Draw on other leaders and volunteers in the community to provide support as appropriate.

Source: [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)⁶

It is important to remember to take it seriously if someone talks about killing him/herself or displays suicidal behavior. If it is possible to safely do so, remove lethal means, particularly firearms, from places to which the person has access. If the risk seems severe or an attempt imminent, take the person to the emergency room or call 911. If you feel the person may be capable of physically harming you in addition to him/herself, do not hesitate to call 911.

According to the director of the Suicide Prevention program at the Illinois Department of Public Health, churches are on the front line for suicide prevention. Churches can be instrumental in educating people by having suicide prevention literature available. Moreover, churches can provide a crucial sense of connection by forming support groups for those in primary caregiving roles for ill spouses or other family members or for people going through significant life changes, such as the death of a loved one, a recent divorce, the loss of job, etc.

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Do you think the Church can play a useful role in suicide prevention? What could your church do?***
- 2. Do we give the families of suicide victims the same kind of support while they're grieving that we do to families of people who have died in accidents or by illness? Why or why not?***

¹ Mayo Clinic Staff. "Mental Illness." *Symptoms*. Mayo Clinic, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/basics/symptoms/con-20033813>>.

² "Statistics on Gun Deaths & Injuries." *Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-deaths-and-injuries-statistics/#footnote_9_5975>.

³ "Lethality of Suicide Method." *Means Matter*. Harvard School of Public Health, n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/case-fatality/>>.

⁴ "Attempters' Longterm Survival." *Means Matter*. Harvard School of Public Health, n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/>>.

⁵ "Suicide Warning Signs." National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/learn/warningsigns.aspx>>.

⁶ "The Role of Faith Community Leaders in Preventing Suicide." Suicide PreventionResource Center, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/FaithCommunityLeaders.pdf>>.

Conclusion

While locking doors and windows and teaching children how to call 911 are home safety basics that most everyone knows, many people ignore other aspects that can have an impact on their feeling or actually being safe in their homes. Hopefully, you'll never need the information provided in the above sections, but if you do, there are people and organizations that stand ready to help.

HELPING TO MAKE A SAFE CHURCH SESSION I

Houses of worship are not immune from the tragedy of violence by a mentally ill person or a fanatical bigot. For example, in 2012, six people were killed and four injured in a shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and in 2008, two people were killed and seven wounded at a Unitarian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee.

The problem for churches wishing to build a defense against violence is more complex than it is for some other institutions, for by their very nature, most religious organizations are based on the concept of peaceful reconciliation of differences. Christian churches, for example, claim to be devoted to the “Prince of Peace”, Jesus Christ. Jesus called his followers to turn the other cheek when threatened by violence, and epitomized non-violence even when faced by his own death.

For the first 300 years of its existence, the Church taught and practiced non-violence. When Constantine, in the fourth century A.D. became the first Roman Emperor to be converted to Christianity, he did so after a promise before the battle of the Mulvian Bridge – when he faced other pretenders to the throne – to convert if he won. After his victory, he not only claimed to be a Christian but ordered his army to be baptized. Contemporary accounts said that his soldiers entered the river to be baptized by Christian priests, but were careful to keep their weapons arm above water. They believed that if their fighting arm was baptized, they could no longer wage battle.

Of course, it was not long before that understanding changed, as even a nation ruled by a Christian Emperor needed not only an army but also a police force for protection, and protection needed more than prayers, it was thought.

Nonetheless, the notion of Christian non-violence was kept alive in various ways. For one thing, there was a legal protection given to church buildings: the idea of sanctuary. Reaching back to the Old Testament, sanctuary (from the word “sanctus” or “holy”) was a place where no soldier or police officer – even under orders by the king – could enter to arrest a person fleeing the power of government.

Reaching back to that ancient understanding of sanctuary being a holy place, some Christian denominations today – including the United Methodist Church – have declared all their church buildings to be a “gun-free” place. But in the face of a possibility of someone using a weapon in a church building (which might include not only guns by explosives, poison gas, or some other harmful device), churches are beginning to struggle with new questions.

Break into groups of no more than three members and discuss the following questions. Make sure that each person has a chance to express an opinion. Appoint one person to report back to the whole group after 20 minutes of discussion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Is your church a “holy place”? In what ways?
2. Should church buildings be declared “gun-free”? How would that deter someone determined to wreak violence there?
3. Would such a designation mean that members who were officers of the law could not wear their weapons into the church, even if required to do so by superior officers?
4. Should churches perhaps designate certain members – for instance, ushers – to be trained in the proper use of weapons and given authority to have those weapons available when worship or church school is being done?

After each group has made its report, have the whole group discuss the following question:

5. How should we interpret the teachings of Jesus in order to allow for self-protection or for protection of the weak and innocent? What New Testament passages could be used for answering this?

Close the session with this prayer:

O Lord, our God, whose Son, Jesus, was a victim of violence on a cross, look with compassion upon all folks involved in shootings this week in America and around the world.

Comfort those traumatized by these horrendous events.

Wrap your everlasting arms around those who mourn.

Heal those persons and families whose hearts and minds are terrorized.

Grant wisdom and strength to those medical personnel who minister to the wounded.

Protect law enforcement officers who risk their lives for our safety.

Calm all whose memories of violence are triggered by new reports of shooting.

Bring the gunmen to repentance and redemption, and deal tenderly with their confused families and friends.

Hear our cries of lament as we seek to understand the incomprehensible, and deliver us from the evil of violence in any form.

Through Christ we pray.

Amen.

SESSION II

In 2013, the Annual Conference session of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church passed a comprehensive resolution entitled “ A Christian Response to Violence”. Among other things, it proposed the following:

8. We need a dialogue about the violence-obsessed culture in our nation. Surely the excessive depiction of violence in our mass media (movies, TV, video games, etc.) has an impact on our children and youth.

9. Churches need to initiate dialogue within their own congregation and in their own community about gun safety, violence prevention, and what adults can do to help keep our children safe. It is notable that General Conference in 2008 officially declared all United Methodist congregations as a gun-free zone, but little has been publicized about that declaration, even in those churches.

10. Pastors need to take leadership in their teaching role to help the congregation and community enter a dialogue about a wide-spread ideology in our nation that peace and justice can only be secured by violence (e.g. “guns keep us safe”, “What makes America great is God, Guts, and Guns”, “the only answer for a bad man with a gun is a good man with a gun”, etc.) We need to explore time-tested methods of non-violent resistance to evil advocated by such prophets as Gandhi and M. L. King, Jr., for example, while also discussing the insights of “realism” promoted by such thinkers as Reinhold Niebuhr. Let’s also draw on resources from our brothers and sisters in the Friends (Quaker), Mennonite and Brethren traditions.

Most of all, we need to more deeply explore the teachings of the Prince of Peace. It is difficult to imagine that our Lord would have called his followers to load up with weapons in order to face threats. What is the role of prayer and redemptive love in dealing with violence in our nation and world?

11. Churches and educators should come together with law enforcement officials to discuss issues of keeping our children, schools, and churches safe from gun violence. In most communities, the police are already aware of many individuals most likely to be a danger, and they need our support as they risk their lives on our behalf.

12. Churches and health care professionals also need to come together to discuss plans for helping children, families, and communities cope in the wake of publicized mass killings in schools and other public places. We need to avoid traumatizing our children. We can surely reassure them without ignoring the reality of danger in the world.

Break into groups of no more than three members and discuss the following questions. Make sure that each person has a chance to express an opinion. Appoint one person to report back to the whole group after 20 minutes of discussion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do the ideas quoted above make sense to you? Are they practical?
2. Americans are blessed with certain basic rights, including the right to own and bear arms under certain defined limits. Do the ideas expressed in the conference resolution interfere with Americans' constitutional rights? If so, how?
3. Which suggestion in the resolution could be implemented in your congregation? If more than one, with which one would you begin?

After each group has reported back to the whole gathering, discuss any suggestions for implementation and identify the proper church committees to approach with these suggestions.

End with the following prayer:

Eternal God, our Rock and our Salvation:

Renew our nation and world in the ways of justice and peace.

Guide those who make and administer our laws so they may lead us to build a society based on trust and respect.

Erase prejudices that oppress others and imprison those who hold them.

Free us from crime and violence, from bullying and prejudice.

Guard our youth from the perils of drugs and materialism, and from the peer pressures that force them into gangs and violent behavior.

Give all our citizens a new vision of a life of harmony and the common good.

Teach us the proper balance between rights and responsibilities.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

For the coming week, assign each member of the class to read the entirety of session three's FEMA guidelines, with an eye to discussing how best to implement its suggestions in the local church.

SESSION III

See the following for practical ideas offered by the Federal Government for churches to develop a plan for protection of their members, children and visitors.

Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship (developed from a document provided by FEMA)

A Closer Look: Active Shooter Situations

Police officers, firefighters, and EMS (i.e., first responders) who come to a house of worship because of a 911 call involving gunfire face a daunting task. Though the objective—protect congregants—remains the same, the threat of an active shooter incident is different from responding to a natural disaster or other emergencies.

Active shooter situations are defined as those where an individual is “actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.”

The better first responders and those working and visiting a house of worship are able to discern these threats and react swiftly, the more lives can be saved. This is particularly true in an active shooter situation, where law enforcement responds to a 911 call of shots fired. Many innocent lives are at risk in a concentrated area. Working with emergency management officials and community partners, houses of worship can develop a plan to better prepare their staff and congregants in prevention, reaction, and response to an active shooter incident.

Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Because of this, individuals must be prepared to deal with an active shooter situation before law enforcement arrives on the scene.

Preparing for an Active Shooter Incident Planning

As with any threat or hazard that is included in a house of worship’s EOP (Emergency Operating Plan), the planning team will establish goals, objectives, and courses of action for an active shooter annex. These plans will be affected by the assessments conducted at the outset of the planning process and updated as ongoing assessments occur. As courses of action are developed, the planning team should consider a number of issues, including, but not limited to:

- How to evacuate or lockdown personnel and visitors. Personnel involved in such planning should pay attention to disability-related accessibility concerns when advising on shelter sites and evacuation routes
- How to evacuate when the primary evacuation routes are unusable - How to select effective shelter-in-place locations (optimal locations have thick walls, solid doors with locks, minimal interior windows, first aid-emergency kits, communication devices and duress alarms)
- How those present in buildings and on the ground will be notified that there is an active shooter incident underway. This could be done using familiar terms, sounds, lights, and electronic communications, such as text messages or emails. Include in the courses of action how to communicate with those who have language barriers or need other accommodations, such as visual signals to communicate with hearing-impaired individuals. Planners should make sure this protocol is readily available and understood by those who may be responsible for sending out or broadcasting an announcement. Rapid notification of a threat can save lives by keeping people out of harm’s way.

The planning team should consider the following when developing their goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- What supplies will be needed to seal the room and to provide for personal needs (e.g., water)
- How shelter-in-place can affect individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, such as persons who require the regular administration of medication, durable medical equipment, and personal assistant services
- How to move persons when the primary route is unusable
- How to locate and move children who are not with a parent or guardian
- How everyone will know when buildings and grounds are safe.

The planning team may want to include functions in the active shooter annex that are also addressed in other functional annexes. For example, evacuation will be different during an active shooter situation than it would be for a fire.

Additional considerations are included in the “Responding to an Active Shooter Incident” and “After an Active Shooter Incident” sections below.

Sharing Information with First Responders

The planning process is not complete until the house of worship’s EOP is shared with first responders. The planning process should include preparing and making available to first responders an up-to-date and well-documented site assessment as well as any other information that would assist them. These materials should include building schematics and photos of the buildings, both inside and out, and include information about door and window locations, as well as locks and access controls. Emergency responders should also have advance information on where individuals with disabilities are likely to be sheltering or escaping, generally in physically accessible locations or along accessible routes. Building strong partnerships with law enforcement, fire, and EMS includes ensuring they also know the location of available public address systems, two-way communications systems, security cameras, and alarm controls. Equally important is information on access to utility controls, medical supplies, and fire extinguishers.

Providing detailed information to first responders allows them to rapidly move through buildings and the grounds during an emergency; to ensure areas are safe; and to tend to those in need. It is critically important to share this information with law enforcement and other first responders before an emergency occurs so that they have immediate access to the information. Law enforcement agencies have secure Web sites where these items already are stored for many schools, business, public venues, and other locations. All of these can be provided to first responders and viewed in drills, exercises, and walkthroughs.

Technology and tools with the same information (e.g., a portable USB drive that is compatible with computers used by first responders) should be maintained in secured locations in the building where designated staff for the house of worship can immediately provide it to responding officials, or where first responders can directly access it. The locations of these materials should be known by and accessible to a number of individuals to ensure ready access in an emergency. Every house of worship should have more than one individual charged with meeting first responders to provide them with the site assessment, the EOP, and any other details about facility safety or concerns.

Exercises

Evacuation drills for fires and protective measures for tornadoes may be part of routine activities for a house of worship, but far fewer facilities practice for active shooter situations. To

be prepared for an active shooter incident, houses of worship should train their staff and congregation, as appropriate, in what to expect and how to react.

Good planning includes conducting drills that involve first responders. Exercises with these valuable partners are one of the most effective and efficient ways to ensure that everyone knows not only their role, but also the role of others at the scene. These exercises should include walks through buildings to allow law enforcement to provide input on shelter sites as well as familiarize first responders with the location.

Each person carries a responsibility that is three-fold:

1. Learn the signs of a potentially volatile situation and ways to prevent an incident.
2. Learn the best steps for survival when faced with an active shooter situation.
3. Be prepared to work with law enforcement during the response.

Preventing an Active Shooter Incident

Warning Signs

No profile exists for an active shooter; however, research indicates there may be signs or indicators. Leaders and staff in houses of worship counsel congregants on a daily basis as part of their work. Law enforcement can assist in knowing the signs of a potentially volatile situation and help houses of worship proactively seek ways to prevent an incident from escalating.

By highlighting common pre-attack behaviors displayed by past offenders, Federal researchers have sought to enhance the detection and prevention of tragic attacks of violence, including active shooting incidents. Several agencies within the Federal Government continue to explore incidents of targeted violence in the effort to identify these potential “warning signs.” In 2002, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) published a monograph on workplace violence, including problematic behaviors of concern that may telegraph violent ideations and plans.

Specialized units in the Federal Government (such as the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit) continue to support behaviorally-based operational assessments of persons of concern in a variety of settings (e.g. schools, workplaces, houses of worship) who appear to be on a trajectory toward a catastrophic violent act. A review of current research, threat assessment literature, and active shooting incidents, combined with the extensive case experience of the Behavioral Analysis Unit, suggest that there are observable pre-attack behaviors which, if recognized, could lead to the disruption of a planned attack.

While checklists of various “warning signs” are often of limited use in isolation, there are some behavioral indicators that should prompt further exploration and attention from law enforcement and/or house of worship officials. These behaviors often include:

- Development of a personal grievance
- Contextually inappropriate and recent acquisitions of multiple weapons
- Contextually inappropriate and recent escalation in target practice and weapons training
- Contextually inappropriate and recent **interest in explosives**
- Contextually inappropriate and intense interest or fascination with previous shootings or **mass attacks**
- Many offenders experienced a significant real or perceived personal loss in the weeks and/or months leading up to the attack, such as a death, breakup, divorce, or loss of a job
- Few offenders had previous arrests for violent crimes.

No research has been conducted on individuals solely engaged in active shooting incidents at houses of worship; however, the behaviors listed above may be useful in identifying some of the behaviors of individuals of potential concern.

Threat Assessment Teams

As described in the previous section, research shows that perpetrators of targeted acts of violence engage in both covert and overt behaviors preceding their attacks. They consider, plan, prepare, share, and, in some cases, move on to action. A useful tool to identify, evaluate, and address these troubling signs is the creation of a multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Team (TAT) for the house of worship.¹⁶ The TAT serves as a central convening body, so that warning signs observed by multiple people are not considered isolated incidents, slipping through the cracks, when they actually may represent escalating behavior that is a serious concern. TATs should keep in mind, however, the importance of relying on facts (including observed behavior) and avoid unfair labeling or stereotyping of individuals to remain in compliance with civil rights laws, when applicable.

Although not as common in private industry or in religious establishments, TATs are increasingly common in college and university settings, pushed to the forefront of concern following the 2007 shooting at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, where 32 individuals were killed. In some cases, state funding mandates that institutions of higher learning create TATs.¹⁷ Houses of worship may also want to create TATs. The Departments offer the following recommendations for the creation and operation of TATs, although they fully recognize that houses of worship may differ in their approaches to certain issues.

For the purposes of consistency and efficiency, a TAT should be developed and implemented in coordination with other policy and practices for the organization. A TAT with diverse representation often will operate more efficiently and effectively. TAT members may include the leaders or administrators of the house of worship, counselors, staff, congregants, and medical and mental health professionals, who may be drawn from the congregation.

TATs review troubling or threatening behavior of persons brought to the attention of the TAT. TATs contemplate a holistic assessment and management strategy that considers the many aspects of the person's life. More than focusing on warning signs or threats alone, a TAT assessment involves a unique overall analysis of changing and relevant behaviors. The TAT takes into consideration, as appropriate, information about behaviors; communications; any threats made; security concerns; family issues; or relationship problems that might involve a troubled individual. The TAT may also identify any potential victims with whom the individual may interact. Once the TAT identifies an individual that may pose a threat, the team will identify a course of action for addressing the situation. The appropriate course of action, whether law enforcement intervention, counseling, or other actions, will depend on the specifics of the situation.

The TAT may wish to seek assistance from law enforcement that can help assess reported threats or troubling behavior and tap available Federal resources (as part of the TAT process or separately). The FBI's behavioral experts in its National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes (NCAVC) at Quantico, Virginia are available on a 24 hours per day, seven days per week basis to join in any threat assessment analysis and develop threat mitigation strategies for persons of concern. Law enforcement working with a TAT from a house of worship should contact the local FBI office for this behavioral analysis assistance.

Each FBI field office has a NCAVC representative available to work with the house of worship TAT and coordinate access to the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit, if the congregation wishes. They focus not on how to respond tactically to an active shooter situation, but rather on how to prevent one. Early intervention can prevent a situation from escalating by identifying, assessing, and managing the threat.

Houses of worship should also work with local law enforcement to gain an understanding of the threats from outside the house of worship community that may affect the facility, so that, in partnership, appropriate security measures can be established.

Generally, active shooter situations are not motivated by other criminal-related concerns such as monetary gain or gang affiliation. Often, violence may be prevented by identifying, assessing, and managing potential threats. Recognizing these pre-attack warning signs and indicators might help disrupt a potentially tragic event.

Responding to an Active Shooter Incident

The house of worship's EOP should include courses of action that will describe how congregants and staff can most effectively respond to an active shooter situation to minimize the loss of life, and teach and train on these practices.

Law enforcement officers may not be present when a shooting begins. Providing information on how congregants and staff can respond to the incident can help prevent and reduce the loss of life.

No single response fits all active shooter situations; however, making sure each individual knows his or her options for response and can react decisively will save valuable time. Depicting scenarios and considering response options in advance will assist individuals and groups in quickly selecting their best course of action. Understandably, this is a sensitive topic. There is no single answer for what to do, but a survival mindset can increase the odds of surviving. As appropriate for the house of worship's congregation, it may be valuable to schedule a time for an open conversation regarding this topic. Though some congregants or staff may find the conversation uncomfortable, they may also find it reassuring to know that as a whole their house of worship is thinking about how best to deal with this situation.

During an active shooter situation, the natural human reaction, even for those who are highly trained, is to be startled; feel fear and anxiety; and even experience initial disbelief and denial. Noise from alarms, gunfire, explosions, and people shouting and screaming should be expected. Training provides the means to regain composure, recall at least some of what has been learned, and commit to action. There are three basic response options: run, hide, or fight. Individuals can run away from the shooter; seek a secure place where they can hide and/or deny the shooter access; or incapacitate the shooter in order to survive and protect others from harm.

As the situation develops, it is possible that congregants and staff will need to use more than one option. During an active shooter situation, these individuals will rarely have all of the information they need to make a fully informed decision about which option is best. While they should follow the plan and any instructions given during an incident, they will often have to rely on their own judgment to decide which option will best protect lives.

Respond Immediately

It is common for people confronted with a threat to first deny the possible danger rather than respond. An investigation by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (2005) into the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001 found that people close to the affected floors waited longer to start evacuating than those on unaffected floors. Similarly, during the Virginia Tech shooting, individuals on campus responded to the shooting with varying degrees of urgency. These studies support this delayed response or denial. For example, some people report hearing firecrackers, when in fact they heard gunfire. Train congregants and staff to skip denial and to respond immediately.

For example, train congregants to recognize the sounds of danger, act, and forcefully communicate the danger and necessary action (e.g., "Gun! Get out!"). In addition, those closest to a communications system should communicate the danger and necessary action. Repetition in training and preparedness shortens the time it takes to orient, observe, and act. Upon recognizing the danger, as soon as it is safe to do so staff or others should alert responders by contacting 911 with as clear and accurate information as possible.

Run

If it is safe to do so, the first course of action that should be taken is to run out of the building and far away until in a safe location. Congregants and staff should be trained to:

- Leave personal belongings behind
- Visualize possible escape routes, including physically accessible routes for individuals with disabilities
- Avoid escalators and elevators
- Take others with them, but do not stay behind because others will not go
- Call 911 when safe to do so
- Let a responsible adult know where they are.

Hide

If running is not a safe option, hide in as safe a place as possible. Congregants and staff should be trained to hide in a location where the walls might be thicker and have fewer windows. In addition:

- Lock the doors
- Barricade the doors with heavy furniture
- Close and lock windows and close blinds or cover windows
- Turn off lights
- Silence all electronic devices
- Remain silent
- If possible, use strategies to silently communicate with first responders; for example, in rooms with exterior windows, make signs to silently signal law enforcement and emergency responders to indicate the status of the room's occupants
- Hide along the wall closest to the exit but out of the view from the hallway (allowing for an ambush of the shooter and for possible escape if the shooter enters the room)
- Remain in place until given an all clear by identifiable law enforcement.

Fight

If neither running nor hiding is a safe option, as a last resort, when confronted by the shooter, adults in immediate danger should consider trying to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by using aggressive force and items in their environment, such as fire extinguishers or chairs. In a study of 41 active shooter events that ended before law enforcement arrived, the potential victims stopped the attacker themselves in 16 instances. In 13 of those cases, they physically subdued the attacker.

While talking to the congregation and staff about confronting a shooter may be daunting and upsetting for some, they should know that they might be able to successfully take action to save lives. How each individual chooses to respond if directly confronted by an active shooter is up to him or her. Each house of worship should determine, as part of its planning process, policies on the control and presence of weapons, as permitted by law.

Interacting with First Responders

If a shooting occurs, congregants and staff should be trained to understand and expect that law enforcement's first priority must be to locate and stop the person or persons believed to be the shooter(s); all other actions are secondary. One comprehensive study found that in more than half of mass shooting incidents where a solo officer arrived on the scene (57 percent) shooting was still underway when the officer arrived. In 75 percent of those instances, that solo officer had to confront the perpetrator to end the threat. In those cases, the officer was shot one-third of the time.

Congregants and staff should be trained to cooperate and not to interfere with first responders. They should display empty hands with open palms and anticipate that law enforcement may instruct everyone to place their hands on their heads or get on the ground.

After an Active Shooter Incident

Once the scene is secured, first responders will work with house of worship staff and victims on a variety of matters. This will include transporting the injured, interviewing witnesses, and initiating the investigation.

The house of worship's EOP should identify trained personnel who will provide assistance to victims and their families. This should include establishing an incident response team (including community partners) that is trained to appropriately assess and triage an active shooter situation (as well as other emergencies), and provide emergency intervention services and victim assistance beginning immediately after the incident and throughout the recovery efforts. This team will integrate with local, state, and Federal resources when an emergency occurs.

Within an ongoing and/or evolving emergency, where the immediate reunification of loved ones is not possible, providing family members with timely, accurate, and relevant information is paramount. Having family members wait for long periods for information about their loved ones not only adds to their stress and frustration, but can also escalate the emotions of the entire group. When families are reunited, it is critical that there are child release processes in place where minors might be involved (e.g., childcare, religious classes) to assure that no child is released to an unauthorized person, even if that person well meaning.

Essential steps to help establish trust and provide family members with a sense of control can be accomplished by:

- Identifying a safe location separate from distractions and/or media and the general public, but close enough to allow family members to feel connected in proximity to their children/loved ones
- Scheduling periodic updates even if no additional information is available
- Being prepared to speak with family members about what to expect when reunified with their child/loved ones

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Are these suggestions from FEMA practical for your church?
2. Should a Christian try to physically restrain a threatening person as suggested in the section above entitled “fight”? How far should he or she use force in doing so?
3. Should your church have a plan for dealing with the possibility of one or more persons threatening your church with violence?
4. How should your church get started on such a plan? Who should be involved in the decision-making?

End with this prayer:

O God, you love justice and you establish peace on earth.

We bring before you the disunity of our nation and world today:

the absurd violence depicted in so many of our popular games and media; the many wars which are breaking the courage of the peoples of the world; militarism and the armaments race, which are threatening life on the planet; and human greed and injustice, which breed hatred and strife.

We lift before you our concern for the young people of our community and nation; save them from following the wrong influences, from despair and loneliness, and from the temptation to end their own lives or to wreak violence on others.

Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Teach us to be compassionate toward the whole human family;

Strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and for peace;

Lead all nations into the path of peace, and give us that peace which the world cannot give. For it's in the name of the Prince of Peace we ask it all:

Amen.

RESOURCES FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

UM BOOK OF WORSHIP, PAGES 423 and 428

A LITANY ON THE TRAGEDY OF GUN VIOLENCE

(Written for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." We celebrate and give thanks for the life and witness of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Who proclaimed a vision of all people living together, and bore witness to the power of nonviolence,

We gather, to remember his words, his commitment, his life and to rededicate ourselves to addressing the evil of gun violence -

Which claimed his life and which continues to plague our country and the world.

Some 30,000 Americans die by guns each year in the United States;

And we grieve.

An average of eighty people is killed by guns every day, including eight children;

And our hearts break.

Guns kill some 1,000 people each day in the developing world;

And we mourn.

An American child is twelve times more likely to die by a gun than are the children who live in all twenty-five industrialized nations combined;

And we weep.

The annual economic cost of gun violence in America is estimated to at least \$100 billion.

Medical costs, decimated families, the court system, our jails and prisons, and security measures in airports, schools, and public buildings all contribute to this sum;

And sorrow sweeps over us.

Since John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, more Americans have died by gun fire within our own country than American servicemen and women who were killed in all our wars of the 20th century;

And we pray.

Faced with gun violence,

We grieve for those are killed and those whose lives are forever changed; we seek to comfort for those who have lost loved ones; we pray for a change of heart for those who resort to violence.

Faced with gun violence, may we

Educate; Organize; Advocate; and in all the ways we can, work for that day when weapons of destruction are transformed into instruments of healing.

May it be so.

May we so do.

The Rev. W. Mark Koenig, Coordinator, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

Liturgical Resources in Response to Violence

"God shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence" (Ps. 72:14)

The Promise of God's Reign

The Third Song of Isaiah; Isa. 60:1–3, 18, 19

*(which can be sung using #177 from *The Psalter—Psalms and Canticles for Singing*)*

**Refrain: The Lord will be our everlasting light; *
and God will be our glory.**

R

Arise, shine, for your light has come; *
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you,
though darkness covers the earth *
and dark night is over the nations.

R

But upon you the LORD will rise, *
and the glory of the LORD will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light; *
and rulers to the brightness of your dawn.

R

No longer will violence be heard in your land, *
nor ruin or destruction within your borders.
You will name your walls Salvation, *
and all your gates Praise.

R

No more will the sun be your light by day, *
nor by night will you need the brightness of the moon,
for the LORD will be your everlasting light, *
and your God will be your glory.

R [*Book of Common Worship*, 581]

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Lord, our God, victim of violence on a cross,
look with compassion upon all involved in shootings this week in America and around the
world.

Comfort those traumatized by these horrendous events.

Wrap your Everlasting Arms around those who mourn.

Heal those whose hearts and minds are terrorized.

Strengthen those medical personnel who minister to the wounded.

Protect the law enforcement officials to risk their lives for our safety.

Calm all whose memories of violence are triggered by this shooting.

Bring the gunmen to repentance and redemption,
and deal tenderly with his confused family and friends.

Hear our cries of lament as we seek to understand the incomprehensible,
and deliver us from the evil of violence in any form.

Through Christ we pray. **Amen.**

PASTORAL PRAYERS

Almighty God, you have made us and all things to serve you,
now prepare the world for your rule.

Come quickly to save us, so that wars and violence shall end,
and your children may live in peace, honoring one another with justice and love.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer. [Book of Common Worship (BCW), 175]

Renew our nation in the ways of justice and peace.

Guide those who make and administer our laws to build a society based on trust and respect.

Erase prejudices that oppress others and imprison those who hold them.

Free us from crime and violence.

Guard our youth from the perils of drugs and materialism.

Give all citizens a new vision of a life of harmony.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer. [BCW, 319]

O God, you love justice and you establish peace on earth.

We bring before you the disunity of today's world:

the absurd violence, and the many wars which are breaking the courage of the peoples of the world; militarism and the armaments race, which are threatening life on the planet; human greed and injustice, which breed hatred and strife.

Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Teach us to be compassionate toward the whole human family;

strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and for peace;

lead all nations into the path of peace, and give us that peace which the world cannot give.

Amen. [A Prayer from Zaire, BCW, 797-98]

COLLECTS

O God, bring our nation and all nations to uphold justice and equity,

that poverty, oppression, and violence may vanish and all may know peace and plenty; in the name of Jesus Christ, the ruler of all. Amen. [BCW, 694]

From earthquake and tempest; from drought, fire, and flood;

from civil strife and violence; from war and murder;

and from dying suddenly and unprepared,

Good Lord, deliver us. [BCW, 788]

PEACE MAKING HYMNS

(from The Faith We Sing)

2169, "God, How Can We Forgive"

2170 "God Made From One Blood"

2171 "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace"

2172 "We are Called"

2177 "Wounded World That Cries For Healing

(from Glory To God, new Presbyterian hymnal)

372 "O For a World"

376 "When All Is Ended"

378 "We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom"

God We Have Heard It

HERZLIEBSTER JESU: Johann Crueger, 1640 (Ah, Holy Jesus)

God, we have heard it, sounding in the silence:
News of the children lost to this world's violence.
Children of promise! Then without a warning,
Loved ones are mourning.
Jesus, you came to bear our human sorrow;
You came to give us hope for each tomorrow.
You are our life, Lord God's own love revealing.
We need your healing!
Heal us from giving weapons any glory;
Help us, O Prince of Peace, to hear your story;
Help us resist the evil all around here;
May love abound here!
By your own Spirit, give your church a clear voice;
In this world's violence, help us make a new choice.
Help us to witness to the joy your peace brings,
Until your world sings!

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society resources:

Mefford, Bill. *Kingdom Dreams, Violent Reality*. General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, June 2014. <<http://umc-gbcs.org/content/general/Kingdom-Dreams-Violent-Realities.pdf>> (A new downloadable resource from the General Board of Church & Society is a three-session Bible study using Micah 4:1-4 to stimulate discussion about the use of guns in committing violence.)

Rhodes, Wayne. *Hate Hurts, Peace Heals*. General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, May 2015. <<http://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/hate-hurts-peace-heals-resources>> (Lesson plan, book study guides, prayer templates available.)

Recommended Research:

Webster, Daniel W., ScD, MPH, John S. Vernick, JD, MPH, Katherine Vittes, PhD, MPH, Emma E. McGinty, MS, Stephen P. Teret, JD, MPH, and Shannon Frattaroli, PhD, MPH. *The Case for Gun Policy Reforms in America*. Rep. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, Oct. 2012. <<http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy>http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/publications/WhitePaper020514_CaseforGunPolicyReforms.pdf>.

Protect Children Not Guns. Rep. Children's Defense Fund, 24 July 2013. <<http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/protect-children-not-guns-2013.html><http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/protect-children-not-guns-2013.html>>.

Recommended Websites:

<http://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/hate-hurts-peace-heals-resources>

<http://www.bradycampaign.org/about-gun-violence>

<http://www.mayorsagainstillegalguns.org/html/research/research.shtml>

<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/view/>

<http://concealedcarryandme.com/>

Recommended Books:

Winkler, Adam. *Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011. Print.

Creach, Jerome F.D. *Violence in Scripture: Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. Print.

DeBrabander, Firmin. *Do Guns Make Us Free? Democracy and the Armed Society*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015. Print.

Atwood, James E. *America and Its Guns: A Theological Expose*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012. Print.

Winter, Richard. *When Life Goes Dark*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. Print.

Recommended Viewing:

PBS Documentary, “The Path To Violence,” February, 2013.

(<http://www.pbs.org/program/path-to-violence/>) Details what is proving effective to thwart school violence.

ABC 20/20 Special with Diane Sawyer, “Young Guns,” February, 2014.

(<http://abc.go.com/shows/2020/listing/2014-01/31-2020-131-young-guns-a-diane-sawyer-special>) Includes segments on how children are curious enough to handle guns even after receiving safety instruction to not touch them, parents who take children to gun ranges, a couple whose toddler shot and killed himself with the father’s gun even though they didn’t think the child knew where to find it or was strong enough to pull the trigger, and asking neighbors or friends where one’s child may play if they have guns and how they’re secured.

ABC 20/20 Special with Diane Sawyer, “If I Only Had A Gun,” April, 2009.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezzskoEB0Gc>) This is one portion of the episode that illustrates how stress affects reaction time in active shooter simulations.

TED Talk with Emmy Betz, “How to Talk About Guns and Suicide,” July, 2015.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwBgcjDVxxE&feature=youtu.be>) In this inspiring talk, an injury prevention expert shares her experience at the nexus of conversations about trauma, guns and suicide with a view to answering the question of how we can support and protect people in danger from self-harm.