



Curriculum for Peace Church Discernment in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed in collaboration by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s
Peacemaking Program and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship



*Presbyterian
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Contents

To Pastors, Christian Educators, and Congregations	3
A Discussion Session for the Inventory of Conscience Survey	5
Nonviolence In the Teachings of Jesus: A Study in Two Sessions	7
Session One: A Time of Exploring	7
Session Two: A Time of Sharing	13
Nonviolence In the Epistles: A Study in Two Sessions	14
Session One: A Time of Exploring	14
Session Two: A Time of Sharing	21
Nonviolence In the Early Church: A Study in Two Sessions	23
Session One: A Time of Exploring	23
Session Two: A Time of Sharing	28
Can War Be Just?	29
Resources for Study: War, Nonviolent Resistance, and Conscientious Objection	36
I. Film and Video	36
II. Print	39
III. Online/Virtual	43
IV. Personal Witness and Testimonies	44



To Pastors, Christian Educators, and Congregations

Responding to an overture from the Presbytery of San Jose, the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to recognize and commend those churches who had declared themselves as “Peace Churches,” to list such churches on the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program’s website, and to encourage other churches to engage in discernment. The General Assembly also urged the Peacemaking Program to develop or identify resources and curriculum for congregations to assist young adults and older teens in discerning their positions on war and violence and conscientious objection. It was the hope of the General Assembly that more churches would engage in study and discernment about how to respond to the challenges of violence, militarism, and war and that some would embrace the principles of nonviolence and declare themselves to be Peace Churches.

The Peace Church Working Group of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and the Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) worked collaboratively to develop a [definition about what it means to be a Peace Church in the PCUSA](#).

We invite you and interested congregations or study groups to explore an exciting new curriculum which examines what it means to be a Peace Church.

In the curriculum you will find a variety of resources to help you customize a study for the needs of your congregation or study group. A suggested plan of study might include:

- A review of the [Peace Church definition](#).
- Using the [Inventory of Conscience Survey \(IOC\)](#) as a starting point, with questions for discussion.
- Three study sessions on the foundations of Christian nonviolence:
Nonviolence in the Teachings of Jesus;
Nonviolence in the Epistles; and
Nonviolence in the Early Church.

- A discussion about Can War Be Just?
- Additional exploration of the topic using videos and other items from the Resources for Study: War, Nonviolent Resistance, and Conscientious Objection.
- Revisiting the [Inventory of Conscience Survey](#) to reflect on evolving perspectives.

As you engage with these materials, we encourage you to consider the option of declaring your congregation a Peace Church, beginning with the adoption of the [Peace Church definition](#) by your session.

If you feel called, you can also craft your own statement about what it means to your congregation to be a Peace church, building on the definition as a base. To add your congregation's name to the list of Presbyterian Peace Churches, notify the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program (peacemaking@pcusa.org) of your decision.



A Discussion Session for the Inventory of Conscience Survey

Overview: This guide is intended to assist sessions, study groups, and other users to more deeply explore their conscientious responses to the Inventory of Conscience survey as part of their Peace Church discernment. This resource does so by asking the users to focus on a few questions through journaling and discussion in a small group. Consider taking the survey and using this survey guide before and after your Peace Church curriculum study series. In order to use this guide, please make sure that all users have taken the survey ahead of time. It will only take about 10 minutes. [The IOC Survey can be found here.](#)

Goal: Help users of the survey to clarify what they believe about the use of violence, nonviolence, and war and why those beliefs are important to them.

Opening: (5 minutes)—Briefly have participants introduce themselves to each other. Invite the participants to join in prayer. Describe the purpose of the discussion using the overview above.

Please note: It is critical that sharing be voluntary and without judgment. Consider this to be an opportunity for discovery with an attitude of open-hearted inquiry with others in your community.

Method: Provide these questions to all members in your study group. Divide into small groups of 3 to 5 people. Use pen and paper for personal journaling or reflection for 5–10 minutes. Following the reflection, invite members of the group to share their personal reflections with one another. Allow 20–30 minutes for sharing and discussion, or as long as time allows. Make sure that everyone in the group has an opportunity to share their reflections.

Return to the larger group and ask members to share what they learned about themselves and/or the other members of the community.

Additionally, if you would like to know the IOC survey score for the group as a whole, calculate the average by adding up all the scores and divide that total by the number of people in your group.

Suggested Questions:

1. Which question or questions in the IOC survey did you find the most difficult to answer and why?
2. Was there anything that surprised you about the survey results, or did you land pretty much where you expected to land on the spectrum between strict pacifist and strict non-pacifist?
3. How does your faith influence your positions on the use of war and violence and your responses to the survey questions?
4. Are there any personal experiences in your life that have particularly affected your beliefs about the use of violence, non-violence or war?
5. If you are a military veteran, how might that have influenced your score? If you are not a military veteran, how might that have influenced your score?
6. What role do you think our media culture plays in influencing our perception of violence and war as good, bad, or necessary?
7. What score do you think Jesus would get if he were to take this survey?
8. If you have taken the survey more than once, how did your responses change?



Nonviolence in the Teachings of Jesus

A STUDY IN TWO SESSIONS

SESSION ONE

A TIME OF EXPLORING

(60 minutes)

Overview: What did Jesus mean by “turn the other cheek”? Did Jesus really teach “Do not resist evil”? Does a commitment to nonviolence mean being passively submissive in the face of evil? This Bible study offers an in-depth exploration into what Jesus actually taught about nonviolence. We will delve into selected passages in the Gospels, consult fresh translations, and be guided by contemporary interpretations of Jesus’ teachings. The picture that emerges dispels long-standing misconceptions and leaves us with a challenging vision.

Goals: To engage with Jesus’ teachings of nonviolence.

Opening: (5 minutes)—Welcome everyone. Invite the participants to introduce themselves to each other. Invite the participants to join in prayer. Describe the purpose of the study using the overview and the method.

Method: The group will divide into three smaller groups, each group working with one of the three gospel passages. Each group will explore their passage and reflection questions (20 minutes). Each group will report to the whole group (10 minutes), and the whole group will discuss together (20 minutes.)

GROUP 1: MATTHEW 5:38–41:

You have heard it said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

[BACK](#)

[BACK TO
CONTENTS](#)

[NEXT](#)

Consider this word-study and fresh translation of the phrase “Do not resist an evildoer”:

“When the court translators working in the hire of King James chose to translate *antistenai* as “resist not evil,” they were doing something more than rendering Greek into English. They were translating nonviolent resistance into docility. Jesus did not tell his oppressed hearers not to resist evil. That would have been absurd. His entire ministry is utterly at odds with such a preposterous idea . . . In the Greek Old Testament, *antistenai* is used primarily for military encounters . . . It refers to a potentially lethal disturbance or armed revolution. A proper translation of Jesus’ teaching would then be, ‘Don’t strike back at evil in kind. Do not retaliate against violence with violence.’ The Scholars Version is brilliant: ‘Don’t react violently against the one who is evil.’ Jesus was no less committed to opposing evil than the anti-Roman resistance fighters. The only difference was over the means to be used: how one should fight evil.” Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 10–12.

Jesus did not teach passive submission. He taught a “third way” beyond fight or flight. He gave three examples of this third way: turning the other cheek, giving over one’s coat as well as one’s shirt, and to carry the Roman soldier’s pack two miles instead of one. Consider this explanation of “turning the other cheek”:

“Why the right cheek? How does one strike another on the right cheek anyway? Try it. A blow by the right fist in that right-handed world would land on the left cheek of the opponent . . . The only way one could strike the right cheek with the right hand would be with the back of the right hand. What we are dealing with here is unmistakably an insult, not a fistfight. The intention is not to injure, but to humiliate, to put someone in his or her ‘place . . . A backhand slap was the normal way of admonishing inferiors. . . . Why then does he counsel already humiliated people to turn the other cheek?

Because this action robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, 'Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me.' . . . The powerful person has been stripped of his power to dehumanize the other. This response, far from admonishing passivity and cowardice, is an act of defiance." Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 14–16.

Reflection questions:

1. What strikes you as new in this discussion of Jesus' teaching on nonviolence?
2. Were you taught to be cowardly by the "doormat for Jesus" interpretation of this text?
3. If you have children, how might you help them deal creatively with bullying?
4. Do role-plays of Jesus' three examples of nonviolence. You might plant someone in the group who has on a swimsuit or jogging shorts who can play the role of the debtor.
5. How do these verses speak to the role of nonviolence in the lives of the followers of Jesus?

GROUP 2: MARK 13:9–13

As for yourselves. Beware, for they will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but

the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Consider these passages:

“The cross means that death is not the greatest evil one can suffer. It means that I am free to act faithfully without undue regard for the outcome. God can bring out of voluntarily assumed suffering the precious seeds of a new reality. I cannot really be open to the call of God in a situation of oppression if the one thing I have excluded as an option is my own suffering and death.” Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 87–88.

“Millions march off willingly to wars, fortified by blind trust in chance: the unexpressed hope that it will be their buddies who get it, not they themselves, and that they will kill the enemy, not be killed. It takes far more courage to walk into a situation voluntarily, knowing that suffering is inevitable, choosing to draw the poison of that violence with one’s own body rather than perpetuate the downward spiral of hate.” Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 92–93.

“Nonviolent resistance is not unrealistic submission to evil power. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflicter of it, since the latter only multiplies the existence of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop a sense of shame in the opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story,” in *The Radical King*, p. 46.

Reflection questions:

1. How do these passages speak to the role of nonviolence in the lives of the followers of Jesus?
2. What kind of treatment does Jesus tell his followers that they should expect?
3. How does this fit with God's purpose to share the good news of Jesus?
4. How does the willingness to be a *martus* (literally, "a witness," the root of the English word "martyr") relate to the salvation of the individual? To the good of the whole?
5. Do you think the church should engage in violence to avoid suffering?

GROUP 3: LUKE 22:47–53

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

Consider this passage:

"The enemy must be resisted in so far as he serves the power of darkness, although it would be better to say that the power of darkness should be resisted rather than the enemy. He should be seen not as the servant of darkness but as someone who is capable of a future conversion. Therefore, though he uses evil means—despotism, the

sword, force, darkness—one must not answer him with these same means. If one answered him in kind, with lies, deceit, violence, and force, one would be denying oneself and him the future and the possibility of change, one would be perpetuating the kingdom of evil.” Milan Machovec quoted in Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 68–69.

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean that Jesus told his followers to put away the sword? (In parallel versions, “Those who live by the sword, die by the sword.”)
2. How do these passages speak to the role of nonviolence in the lives of the followers of Jesus?
3. Though he rejects violence to establish his kingdom, which is “not of this world,” Jesus demonstrates that he is the master of his anger and the entire situation, and thus shifts the focus from himself as the disturber of peace and back onto the Romans and the religious authorities. What does Jesus’s refusal to retaliate, though he easily could have, reveal about his understanding of those adversaries arrayed against him?
4. How does the refusal to use force to protect oneself create the opportunity for others to reflect on their violent behavior and thus open the possibility for transformation?

Closing: (5 minutes) Bring the discussion to a close and offer a summary of what has been discussed, including key learnings, takeaways, or growing edges.

SESSION TWO

A TIME OF SHARING

(60 minutes)

Opening: (7 minutes)—Open with prayer. Allow the small groups 5 minutes to finalize their presentations.

Sharing What We Learned: (25 minutes)—Give each group 8 minutes to present their insights into the ways the material they studied speaks to how the followers of Jesus are to respond to violence and nonviolence. Allow questions for clarification to make sure all the participants have as full an understanding as possible.

What Do We Do Next?: (25 minutes)—Discuss the following questions:

1. What do you notice about what you heard?
2. What surprised you? What is missing?
3. What questions do you have?
4. What did you get out of this study?
5. What are you going to do with what you have learned?
6. What steps do you feel led to take next in living nonviolently as a follower of Jesus?

Closing: (3 minutes)—Thank group members for participating. Allow time for brief final remarks. Close with prayer.



Nonviolence in the Epistles

A STUDY IN TWO SESSIONS

SESSION ONE

A TIME OF EXPLORING

(60 minutes)

Overview: What is the role of the church in a violent world? What does it mean to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds”? What do we make of the command to “be subject to the governing authorities”? What happens when the authorities abuse their power and threaten the innocent? Are Christians who are not conformed to this world bound to suffer, and how should we view this suffering? We will delve into three key passages from the epistles: Romans 12:2, 9–21, Romans 13:1–5, 11–12; and I Peter 3:8–18a. Consult scholarly resources, and discuss reflection questions.

Goal: To glean insights from the New Testament epistles into the role of the church in a world of violence.

Method: Divide the group into three smaller groups. Each group will explore one of the three passages from the epistles and their reflection questions (20 minutes). Each group will report back to the whole group (10 minutes), and the whole group will discuss together (20 minutes).

Opening: (5 minutes)—Welcome everyone. Invite the participants to introduce themselves to each other. Invite the participants to join in prayer. Describe the purpose of the study using the overview and method.

GROUP 1: ROMANS 12:2, 9–21

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. . . . Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 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; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Consider these theological interpretations:

“Long-term structural and spiritual change requires an alternative vision. As the means of purveying that vision and living it in the midst of the old order, Jesus established a new counter-community that developed universalistic tendencies, erupting out of his own Jewish context and finally beyond the Roman Empire. . . . Jesus’ sayings about non-retaliation are of one piece with his challenge to love our enemies. Here it is enough to remark that Jesus did not advocate nonviolence merely as a technique for outwitting the enemy, but as a just means of opposing the enemy in such a way as to hold open the possibility of the enemy’s becoming as well. . . . simultaneously affirming our own humanity and that of those whom we oppose.”
Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence*, pp. 45–49.

“Nonviolence does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The nonviolent resister must often express his protest through noncooperation or boycotts, but he realizes that these are not ends in themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community; while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.” Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Radical King*, pp. 49–50.

“When elements of the Indian Congress proposed resorting to violence on one occasion, Gandhi replied, ‘We’ve come a long way with the British. When they eventually leave, we want them to do so as friends.’” Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, p. 71.

Reflection questions:

1. What stood out for you in this passage and these interpretations?
2. How do the passages and messages speak to the role of nonviolence in the lives of the followers of Jesus?
3. How are the followers called to respond to those who are considered the “enemy?”
4. How do you respond to the idea of the church being a non-conformist community, a counter-sign, in a world of violence?
5. Would you want your church to be such a place?
6. How would it be to be an active part of such a church?
7. What do you think of the idea that every resort to violence, no matter how justified it seems to be, reinforces the normalization of violence as the default means of resolving conflicts? Is violence something we will always have with us?

GROUP 2: ROMANS 13: 1–5, 11–12

Let every person be subject to the authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. . . . Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Consider these reflections:

“Romans 13:2 has been translated in such a way that all resistance even to the most satanic despotism appears to be prohibited. . . . The first term for ‘resist’ is a military term meaning to ‘range in battle against.’ . . . The second and third instances of ‘resist’ indicate armed insurrection, violent resistance. Romans 13:1–7 is not, then, an injunction against all forms of resistance to an unjust regime, but only armed resistance. . . . God wills that there be political order rather than chaos. Human life is intolerable apart from the rule of law. This rule is to be for the benefit of all. The ruler is ‘God’s servant for your good.’ What happens when that rule is no longer good for the majority of the people? Romans 13 only tells us how government ought to be. Revelation 13 tells us how government ought not to be. The servant of God can very easily

become the beast. Even when the government is in a state of apostasy and rebellion against God, Christians are still encouraged to struggle against it nonviolently.” Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 75–76.

Regarding Romans 13:11–12, it’s worth remembering the widespread belief in the Christian community at the time of Paul’s writing the letter to the Romans, a belief that Paul shared, that Christ’s return was imminent. This end-times perspective colored Paul’s perspective on obedience to the authorities. Christ’s imminent return was thought to render campaigns to challenge injustice and improve the social order unnecessary.

Reflection Questions:

1. What stood out for you in this passage and the theological interpretations?
2. How do the passages and messages reflect on the vocation of the followers of Jesus to live nonviolently in the world?
3. Why is law such an important principle to uphold, even in consciously disobeying it, in the case of conscientiously disobeying an unjust law?
4. Black South African anti-apartheid theologians cited by Wink remind us that Christians’ relationship with the state is not simply with Romans 13, but also with Revelation 13. Why is this so?

GROUP 3: I PETER 3:8–18a

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for that that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the

righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God.

Consider these interpretations:

“Following the Philippines’ successful nonviolent revolution, Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., wrote, ‘We choose nonviolence not merely as a strategy for the attaining of the ends of justice, casting it aside if it does not work. We choose it as an end in itself . . . because we believe it is the way Christ himself struggled for justice.’ . . . We need to choose a way of living that already is a living of the outcome we desire. The Reign of God is already in the process of arriving when we choose means consistent with its arrival.” Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, pp. 87–89.

“Unearned suffering is redemptive. Suffering, the nonviolent resister realizes, has tremendous educational and transformative possibilities. ‘Things of fundamental importance to people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering,’ said Gandhi. He continues: ‘Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears which are otherwise shut to the voice of reason.’” Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Radical King*, p. 50.

“In your struggle for justice, let your oppressor know that you are not attempting to defeat or humiliate him, or even to pay him back for injustices that he has heaped upon you. Let him know that you are merely seeking justice for him as well as yourself. Let him know that the festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro. With this attitude you will be able to keep your struggle on high Christian standards. . . . Honesty impels me to admit that such a stand will require willingness to suffer and sacrifice. So don’t despair if you are condemned and persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Whenever you take a stand for truth and justice, you are liable to scorn. Often you will be called an impractical idealist or a dangerous radical. Sometimes it might mean going to jail. If such is the case, you must honorably grace the jail with your presence. It might even mean physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children from a permanent life of psychological death, then nothing could be more Christian. Martin Luther King, Jr. cited in Jon Meacham, *His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope*, pp. 34–35.

Reflection Questions:

1. What insights in this passage and the interpretations seemed especially important?
2. What examples of redemptive suffering in history can you think of?
3. Persecution and abuse are the presupposed realities for the followers of Jesus, according to this passage. Twenty centuries later, King, and Lewis and their companions in the civil rights movement personally experienced this truth. What does it say about our hopes for fundamental changes in society?
4. How far do you think you would be willing to go in nonviolent direct action for a cause you believed in?
5. Jesus’ third way—active nonviolence—uses means commensurate with the Kingdom of God or the Beloved Community, the new order we desire. Why is it important that the means are consistent with the ends we seek?

SESSION TWO

A TIME OF SHARING

(60 minutes)

Opening: (7 minutes)—Welcome everyone. Open with prayer. Allow the groups 5 minutes to finalize their presentations.

Sharing What We Learned: (25 minutes)—Give each group 8 minutes to present their insights into the ways the material they studied speaks to how the followers of Jesus are to respond to violence and nonviolence. Allow questions for clarification to make sure all the participants have as full an understanding as possible.

What Do We Do Next?: (25 minutes)—Discuss the following questions:

1. What stood out for you about what you heard?
2. What surprised you? What is missing?
3. What questions do you have?
4. What did you get out of this study? What are your takeaways?
5. What are you going to do with what you have gained?
6. What steps do you feel led to take next in attempting to live nonviolently as a follower of Jesus?
7. How has this study shaped your thinking on the question of whether your congregation might be called to become a “peace church?”

Note the pledge of Campaign Nonviolence North Carolina (similar to pledges in other states):

“I solemnly pledge to take a stand against violence and to help build a culture of active nonviolence.

I will strive to:

- Practice nonviolence toward myself.
- Practice nonviolence toward all others.

— Practice nonviolence by joining the global movement to abolish war, end poverty, stop the destruction of the earth, and foster a just and peaceful world for all.”

Closing: (3 minutes)—Thank everyone for participating in this study. Allow time for any brief final remarks. Close with prayer.



Nonviolence in the Early Church

A STUDY IN TWO SESSIONS

SESSION ONE

A TIME OF EXPLORING

(60 minutes)

Overview: For the first three centuries of the Christian church, though there was a wide divergence of opinion on matters like the relationship of the Father to the Son, the nature of Christ, and the books of the Bible that should be considered canonical, the leaders of the Early Church were unequivocal in their opposition to Christians participating in violence. Our task in this study is to engage the passages and reflect on what these writings of the Early Church say about how the followers of Jesus should approach violence and nonviolence.

Goal: To engage the teaching of nonviolence in the writings of the Early Church.

Opening: (5 minutes)—Welcome everyone. Take a few minutes for participants to introduce themselves to each other briefly, perhaps by sharing their reasons for participating in this study. Describe the study using the overview and the method. Open with prayer.

Method: The group will divide into three smaller groups, each group working with one of the three early Christian theologians. Each group will explore their passage(s) and reflection questions (20 minutes). Each group will report to the whole group (10 minutes), and the whole group will discuss together (20 minutes).

GROUP 1: JUSTIN MARTYR

Justin Martyr was born in Flavia Neapolis (present day Nablus, a city in Palestine, just north of Bethlehem) around the year 100. He converted to Christianity in about 130. He taught and defended the Christian religion in Asia Minor and at Rome, where he suffered martyrdom about the year 165.

Consider these passages:

“We who hated and slew one another, and because of difference in customs would not share a common hearth with those who were not of our tribe, now, after the appearance of Christ, have become sociable, and pray for our enemies, and try to persuade those who hate us unjustly, in order that they, living according to the good suggestions of Christ, may share our hope in obtaining the same reward from the God who is Master of all.” Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 14.

“We who had been filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness, have each one—all the world over—changed the instruments of war, the swords into ploughshares and the spears into farming instruments, and we cultivate piety, righteousness, love for humanity, faith, and the hope which is from God Himself through the Crucified One.” Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 109.

Reflection questions:

1. What did you notice?
2. What surprised you?
3. How do the passages speak to the role of nonviolence in the lives of the followers of Jesus?
4. How is a life committed to nonviolence beneficial to the larger community, according to Justin?

5. Given the deep divisions, polarization, and tribalism in our contemporary society, what positive impact could come from followers of Jesus refusing to engage in “enemy-making,” praying for our “enemies”, and working to dismantle hate within themselves, their relationships, and in society?
6. In the quote from the Dialogue, how does Justin connect Isaiah 2:4 to the church of his day? How might we connect it to the church and the world of our times?
7. How has Jesus transformed his followers, given them new values and norms to live by?

GROUP 2: HIPPOLYTUS

Hippolytus was probably born around 180. Hippolytus was a presbyter of the Church of Rome at the beginning of the third century. During a period of persecution by the emperor Maximus Thrax, he was exiled to Sardinia with the pope and other church leaders. He died in the mines on the island. After his death, his remains were returned to Rome. He was revered as a martyr and named a saint.

Consider this passage:

“A military man in authority must not execute men. If he is ordered, he must not carry it out. Nor must he take a military oath. If he refuses, he shall be rejected. If someone is a military governor, or the ruler of a city who wears the purple, he shall cease or he shall be rejected. The catechumen or faithful who wants to become a soldier is to be rejected, for he has despised God.” Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Canon 16, 9–11.

Reflection questions:

1. What did you notice?
2. What surprised you?

3. What does the threat of excommunication say about the Church's understanding of the prohibition against killing?
4. Copies of this passage show that it was translated and used in Latin, Greek, Ethiopic, and Egyptian well into the fourth century. What does that say about how Jesus' followers viewed its proscription against military service?
5. Today, many baptized, confirmed Christians serve in the military and carry out orders to kill. We send chaplains to serve in the military, and the American flag adorns many sanctuaries. Many in our churches view this as a fact of life, not as a contradiction of their faith. But it was not always so, as this passage from Hippolytus shows. There was a clear line separating Christians from participation in war and violence. What impact does knowing this have on your thinking about faith, war, and violence?

GROUP 3: EUSEBIUS

Eusebius was born around 275. He became bishop of Caesarea around 313. He was an early and very influential church historian. His many writings include *The Life of Constantine*, *Panegyric of Constantine*, *The Church History*, and materials focused on martyrs. He played a key role at the Council of Nicea and in various theological controversies until his death in 339.

Consider this passage:

This story tells of a Christian soldier about to be named a Roman centurion (a position of considerable military authority with material security and social influence). He is challenged by another man about the legality of a Christian serving in this position. The soldier is then warned by his bishop that he must make a choice.

"When he came out from the tribunal, Theotecnus, the bishop there, took him aside and conversed with him, and taking his hand led him into the church. And standing with him within the sanctuary,

he raised his cloak a little, and pointed to the sword that hung by his side; and at the same time he placed before him the Scripture of the divine Gospels, and told him to choose which of the two he wished. And without hesitation he reached forth his right hand, and took the divine Scripture. 'Hold fast then,' says Theotecnus to him, 'hold fast to God, and strengthened by him mayest thou obtain what thou hast chosen, and go in peace.' Immediately on his return, the herald cried out calling him to the tribunal, for the appointed time was already completed. And standing before the tribunal, and manifesting greater zeal for the faith, immediately, as he was, he was led away and finished his course by death." Eusebius, *The Church History*, 7.15.

Reflection questions:

1. What did you notice?
2. Did anything surprise you?
3. Eusebius' story draws a sharp contrast between "the way of the sword" and "the way of the Word of God." Following Jesus meant choosing between these two paths; they could not be faithfully combined. How does this story land with you?
4. How do you imagine such a story would have illustrated the faith community's values to young people who sought to follow Jesus during the period in which it was written?
5. How do you imagine such a story would impact youth in your congregation who might be tempted to resort to violence or take up a career in the military?
6. Ancient empires and modern nation-states generally impose penalties on those who reject military service for reasons of conscience? Why is this so?

Closing: (5 minutes)—Offer a brief summary of what has been discussed, key learnings, takeaways, and growing edges. Set the stage for Session 2, hopefully not more than a week hence. Close with prayer.

SESSION TWO

A TIME OF SHARING

(60 minutes)

Opening: (7 minutes)—Open with prayer. Allow the small groups 5 minutes to finalize their presentations.

Sharing What We Learned: (30 minutes)—Give each group 10 minutes to present their insights into the ways the material they studied speaks to how the followers of Jesus are to respond to violence and nonviolence. Allow questions for clarification to make sure all the participants have as full an understanding as possible.

What Do We Do Next?: (20 minutes)—Reflect together on the following questions:

1. What questions do you have?
2. To what extent are the norms of the Early Church authoritative for the church in the 21st century? If to a great extent, why? If not, why not?
3. How has this study shaped your thinking about your congregation possibly becoming a “peace church?”
4. What do you feel led to do personally with what you have gained from this study?
5. Are there specific steps you feel led to do next in living nonviolently as a follower of Jesus?

Closing: (3 minutes)—Thank all the members of the study for participating. Allow time for brief final remarks. Close with prayer.



Can War Be Just?

Overview: Most modern Christians adhere to what has come to be known as “Just War Theory.” This session explores the history of Just War Theory and offers participants an opportunity to reflect on the relative merits and usefulness of Just War Theory.

Opening: (5 minutes)—Welcome everyone. Invite the participants to introduce themselves to each other. Invite the participants to join in prayer. Describe the purpose of the study using the overview.

Historical Background for Just War Theory

During the first three-and-a-half centuries of its existence Christianity was a pacifist religion; in part, this commitment to nonviolence stemmed from a fidelity to the words and spirit of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, but the Early Church’s pacifism also was rooted in its opposition to the Roman Empire and to the idolatry of imperial religion.

Christianity might have remained a pacifist faith, but in the year 380 (or thereabouts) the emperor, Theodosius I, made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, and Christian pacifism faced a serious challenge: with the disappearance of Rome’s pagan imperial religion, would Christians continue to practice pacifism, or would they embrace their status and the new imperial religion, which, necessarily required an embrace of the empire’s use of military violence?

The Christian Church chose to forgo pacifism in favor of enjoying an elevated and powerful position in Roman society, but in the church, there remained a desire to be thoughtful about when and how Christians could understand military violence to be just.

The first theologian to address the question of when and how military violence can be justified was Saint Augustine, who was the most prominent theologian of his time, and remains among Christianity’s most influential thinkers.

For Augustine, wars could be justified if a godly monarch found the war to be advisable and if the soldiers who carried out the war did so with the goal of creating peace and safety for their communities (see *Reply to Faustus the Manichean*, XXII.74–75).

So long as Christian secular rulers were in charge of waging wars, Augustine's somewhat vague principles for just war were considered sufficient to guide the Christian understanding of what made military violence just. Six centuries after Augustine's death, however, the Church itself started initiating warfare by declaring crusades in the Holy Land, in the Iberian region of Andalucía, and in the French region of Languedoc. The idea that the Church should initiate military violence led to a further development of Just War Theory, initiated, primarily, by St. Thomas Aquinas whose list of criteria for just war included an insistence that wars be waged for just causes, with just aims, and with peace as an ultimate goal. Aquinas also suggested that ambushing the enemy was a legitimate strategy and that clergy should not fight in wars (See Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* Part 2, question 40). This last stipulation was, in all likelihood, included in response to the practice of warrior monks leading crusades, especially in the Albigensian crusades in Languedoc.

During the Protestant Reformation opinions about the morality of military violence ranged from the Anabaptist movement that rejected war altogether, to the teachings of Ulrich Zwingli who died in combat. Martin Luther ceded decisions about war and peace to temporal rulers; John Calvin agreed with Luther in principle but urged restraint in war, saying,

“Wars are never so permissible that they can be allowed to destroy everything and create utter confusion. And we must remember that however much we exercise restraint, the damage done will be too great. When even one person is killed, it is, alas, an image of God that is destroyed. And when great numbers are killed, there will be many widows and orphans; and even if goods and possessions are spared, many people will be displaced from their homes and badly treated, so that some will die of cold and some of other ills. So, even if we behave as fairly as possible in time of war, there will inevitably

be many evils. All the more reason, therefore, to refrain from doing wrong and avoid cruelty of any kind. John Calvin, Fourth Sermon on Deuteronomy 20:16–20.

Questions for Reflection

The move from early Christian pacifism to an evolving sense that wars, in some circumstances, are just can be interpreted as a necessary accommodation of secular values for a Church that was growing both numerically and in the power it wielded in the world.

1. Was this accommodation necessary?
2. Was it righteous?
3. What accommodations (righteous and otherwise) do you see churches making today in order to stay relevant and powerful?

Just War Theory Today

Modern Just War Theory is rooted in the insights of Church leaders like Augustine, Anselm, and Calvin, and is informed by theologians from various parts of Europe and from a variety of Christians traditions who have reflected on the wars their countries have fought, won, and lost. While there is not a canonical or definitive list of criteria that, according to Just War Theory, justifies the use of military violence, most adherents of Just War Theory would agree to the following criteria, *all* of which must be met in order for a war to be just.

1. A war must have a just cause. Usually this means a war must only be fought for the purposes of national self-defense, for the sake of defending another nation from aggression, or in order to prevent an atrocity.
2. A war must have a just motivation. This criterion recognizes the fact that just causes can be invented or exaggerated, and so a war cannot be just if the just cause is merely a pretext.
3. A war must be waged by those who have legal authority to wage war. This criterion is a protection against warlords, or rogue paramilitary forces that might initiate warfare for personal gain.

4. A war must be fought proportionally. This criterion is a hedge against the use of military violence to exact revenge or to incapacitate a foe after the fighting has ceased.
5. A war is only just if, in waging it, there is a chance for success. This criterion is included to limit the use of military violence that will kill people for the sake of a lost cause or misplaced patriotism.
6. A war cannot be just if civilians and other non-combatants are targeted. This criterion is both the most self-evidently moral and, in modern wars, the most frequently ignored.

While a majority of Christians would self-identify as adherents of Just War Theory, when the criteria for just war are applied in their entirety, they render modern warfare impossible, and, as a result, the principles of Just War Theory are ignored.

Questions for Reflection

A key component to Just War Theory is that *every condition must be met in order for a war to be justified*. This makes the list of criteria critically important.

1. Which, if any, of these criteria seem unnecessary or unreasonable?
2. Are there any criteria you would add?
3. Can you think of a war—ancient or modern—which has met all of the criteria listed here?

A Critique of Just War Theory

Frequently, the principles of Just War Theory are twisted by those who want to justify the use of military violence. Vladimir Putin, for example, justified the invasion of Ukraine by saying the invasion was necessary to defend Russia from the menace of NATO, that the unification of Russia and Ukraine was an important step in healing a lamentable rift between people who are essentially one spiritual family, that the war was necessary to remove Nazis from Ukraine, and that the

conduct of the war was both proportional and mindful of the need to protect civilians. All of those claims are questionable at best, but all of these justifications make use of one or more facets of Just War Theory.

Similarly, during the invasion of Iraq, the United States government claimed the Iraqi government was in possession of weapons of mass destruction, and therefore posed a clear and present danger to the United States, Israel, and other American allies. The Iraqi leader, according to the United States government, was a despot who supported terrorism abroad. The invasion of Iraq, according to the United States government, would be conducted in a way that protected civilians. Furthermore, the government was quick to assure the world that protecting American access to Iraqi oil had nothing to do with the invasions' motivation. As with the Russian justifications for the invasion of Ukraine, these governmental justifications rely on Just War Theory. In both cases the veracity of the claims was dubious, and, in both cases, those justifying the use of military violence overlooked one of the key premises of Just War Theory, namely that all of the criteria must be met in order for the war to be just.

Questions for Reflection

The wars in Ukraine and Iraq follow a common practice of using select principles of Just War Theory to justify a war that might otherwise be unacceptable. Based upon your knowledge of the wars in Ukraine and Iraq, and from what you have learned about Just War Theory:

1. Were either of the wars a just war?
2. What criteria for just war were overlooked by the Russians in Ukraine or the Americans in Iraq?
3. Could those conducting either war have changed strategies in order to make it just?

What About the Second World War?

In Russia, as in the United States, the Second World War is considered a good war made moral by its necessity. Both Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush referenced the Second World War while advocating for the invasions of Ukraine and Iraq. Those who fought in the Second World War are celebrated as the greatest generation and there exists a societal taboo against questioning the morality of the Second World War.

In some ways, the Second World War has become a myth—not because it didn't happen, but because the story of the war is used to help Americans to understand ourselves as defenders of freedom and protectors of the vulnerable. Scholars will quibble over the historical accuracy of the World War II myth, but even the commonly known stories contained within the World War II myth raise questions about whether or not it was a just war.

The use of incendiary bombs in Dresden and Tokyo and the use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki force us to confront the fact that the United States and its allies knowingly and intentionally targeted civilians in a way that almost certainly was not proportional to the threat Germany and Japan posed as the war came to an end. Similarly, the ethnic cleansing and subsequent internment of Japanese Americans living along the West Coast of the United States raises questions about the American commitment to protecting the innocent and confronting those who committed atrocities during the Second World War.

Under Just War Theory all of the criteria for just war must be met in order for a war to be just. Following the logic of Just War Theory, the Second World War was not just because during the war, the United States and its allies employed disproportional military violence against civilian populations in Germany and in Japan, and, in the United States, engaged in the ethnic cleansing and internment of Japanese Americans, which, by modern standards would be a crime against humanity.

Questions for Reflection

Many Americans consider the Second World War to be “the good war”.

1. Does Just War Theory allow us to say the Second World War was just?
2. Could the Second World War have been fought in such a way that it was just?
3. The ethnic cleansing and internment of Japanese Americans is not something covered by the criteria for just war. Should the criteria for Just War Theory be expanded to include crimes against humanity?

Conclusion

After this brief exploration of Just War Theory, spend time discussing the usefulness of Just War Theory. How is it helpful? Is it sufficient for the work of judging the morality of military violence? Should it continue to guide Christians as they form faithful opinions about war and peace?

Close with prayer and share some cookies. You deserve it.



I. FILM AND VIDEO

1. [A Force More Powerful](#) (1999)

This two-part Emmy-nominated series explores one of the 20th century's most important but least understood stories: how nonviolent power has overcome oppression and authoritarian rule all over the world.

2. [How to Start a Revolution](#) (2011)

How To Start A Revolution is the remarkable untold story of Nobel Peace Prize nominee Gene Sharp, the world's leading expert on nonviolent revolution. This new film reveals how Gene's work has given a new generation of revolutionary leaders the weapons needed to overthrow dictators. It shows how his 198 steps to non-violent regime change have inspired uprisings from Serbia to Ukraine and from Egypt to Syria and how his work has spread across the globe in an unstoppable wave of profound democratic change.

3. [The Singing Revolution](#) (2006)

Song was the weapon of choice when, between 1986 and 1991, Estonians sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation. Hundreds of thousands gathered in public to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to rally for independence. *The Singing Revolution* tells the moving story of how the Estonian people peacefully regained their freedom—and helped topple an empire along the way.

4. [The Shape of Water](#) (2006)

The Shape Of Water, narrated by Susan Sarandon, interweaves the intimate and powerful stories of Khady, Oraiza, Bilkusben, Dona Antonia, and Gila, living in Senegal, Brazil, India, and Jerusalem. The women abandon female genital mutilation, tap for rubber to protect the rain forest, protect the biodiversity of the planet and oppose military occupations. This film offers a unique view of the complex realities of the women and their passions to create a more just world.

5. [A Hidden Life](#) (2019)

The Austrian Franz Jägerstätter, a conscientious objector, refuses to fight for the Nazis in World War II.

6. [Hacksaw Ridge](#) (2016)

World War II American Army Medic Desmond T. Doss, who served during the Battle of Okinawa, refuses to kill people and becomes the first man in American history to receive the Medal of Honor without firing a shot.

7. [The Conscientious Objector](#) (2004)

The story of Desmond T. Doss, a US Army medic who was the first conscientious objector to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

8. [Joyeux Noel](#) (2005)

In December 1914, an unofficial Christmas truce on the Western Front allows soldiers from opposing sides of the First World War to gain insight into each other's way of life.

9. [Love and Solidarity](#) (2014)

What can people do to change a world full of violence and hate? Is nonviolent revolution possible? *Love and Solidarity* addresses these questions through the life and thought of Rev. James Lawson, an African American Methodist minister who worked with Martin Luther King, Jr., to initiate civil rights struggles in the South in the 1960s, and in recent years taught nonviolence organizing to poor Black and Latino workers in coalitions that have remade the labor movement in Los Angeles.

10. [Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom](#) (2013)

A chronicle of Nelson Mandela's life journey from his childhood in a rural village through to his inauguration as the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

11. [The Fight in the Fields](#) (1997)

This documentary traces the history of the United Farmworkers Union and the life of its founder, Cesar Chavez, from his birth in Arizona, his education into organizing and nonviolence, his formation of the union, to his death in 1993. It includes newsreel footage of the Delano grape boycott, Senate hearings conducted by Robert F. Kennedy, Chavez's fasts, encounters with growers and rival Teamsters.

12. [Gandhi](#) (1982)

The life of the lawyer who became the famed leader of the Indian revolts against the British rule through his philosophy of nonviolent protest.

II. PRINT

1. [Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea](#) by Mark Kurlansky

Nonviolence is a sweeping yet concise history that moves from ancient Hindu times to recent conflicts raging in the Middle East and elsewhere. Kurlansky also brings into focus just why nonviolence is a “dangerous” idea, and asks such provocative questions as: Is there such a thing as a “just war”? Could nonviolence have worked against even the most evil regimes in history?

Kurlansky draws from history twenty-five provocative lessons on the subject that we can use to effect change today. He shows how, time and again, violence is used to suppress nonviolence and its practitioners—Gandhi and Martin Luther King, for example—that the stated deterrence value of standing national armies and huge weapons arsenals is, at best, negligible; and, encouragingly, that much of the hard work necessary to begin a movement to end war is already complete. It simply needs to be embraced and accelerated.

2. [Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way](#) by Walter Wink

More than ever, Walter Wink believes, the Christian tradition of nonviolence is needed as an alternative to the dominant and death-dealing “powers” of our consumerist culture and fractured world. In this small book Wink offers a precis of his whole thinking about this issue, including the relation of Jesus and his message to politics and nonviolence, the history of nonviolent efforts, and how nonviolence can win the day when others don’t hesitate to resort to violence or terror to achieve their aims.

3. [Non-Violent Resistance \(Satyagraha\)](#) by M. K. Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi gained the deep respect and admiration of people worldwide with both his unwavering struggle for truth and justice and his philosophy of nonviolent resistance—a philosophy that led India to independence and that was later taken up by the American civil rights movement. This volume pres-

ents Gandhi’s own clear and consistent vision of that philosophy, which he calls Satyagraha—literally, “holding on to the truth.” Through Satyagraha, one brings about change by appealing to the reason and conscience of the opponent and puts an end to evil by converting the evil-doer.

4. [Engaging Nonviolence: Activating Nonviolent Change In Our Lives and Our World](#) by Veronica Pelicaric and Nina Koevoets

The Engaging Nonviolence Study Program is a fifteen-part study and action guide offering participants a wide variety of principles, stories, exercises, and readings for learning, practicing, and experimenting with the power of creative nonviolence for personal and social transformation. In this book you will learn powerful methods for opposing violence and injustice and for building just and peaceful nonviolent alternatives. *Engaging Nonviolence* is designed to build your capacity to use these methods to address the direct, structural or cultural violence that matters most to you.

5. [Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know](#) by Erica Chenoweth

A sweeping overview of civil resistance movements around the world that explains what they are, how they work, why they are often effective, and why they can fail. Civil resistance is a method of conflict through which unarmed civilians use a variety of coordinated methods (strikes, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, and many other tactics) to prosecute a conflict without directly harming or threatening to harm an opponent. Sometimes called nonviolent resistance, unarmed struggle, or nonviolent action, this form of political action is now a mainstay across the globe.

6. [The Adventures of Alaren: Stories for Building a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence](#) by Rivera Sun

When his two older brothers try to start a war, Alaren must gather all his friends to stop it. In a series of clever and creative escapades, he rallies thousands of people to take bold and courageous actions for peace. From the Children’s March to the

Women’s Strike, to the resistance of hawk keepers, blacksmiths, and musicians, Alaren has a hundred tricks up his sleeve—and he’ll need all of them to succeed! *The Adventures of Alaren* offers perfect stories to teach peace at home, conflict resolution in the classroom, and nonviolence in your faith community. Kids, parents, and teachers will love the adventures and escapades of this creative and clever peacebuilder.

7. [Nonviolent Lives: People and Movements Changing the World Through the Power of Active Nonviolence](#) by Ken Butigan

This book celebrates a host of change-makers who have transformed the world and who teach us to do the same. While successful social change hinges on strategic thinking, serious training, critical mass, creative action, and often the capricious accidents of history, it also requires the power and relentless determination of “extraordinary ordinary human beings,” whose relentless determination so often lies at the heart of social transformation.

8. [A Faith Not Worth Fighting For: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Nonviolence](#) edited by Justin Bronson Barringer and Tripp York

In this anthology of essays, theologians reply to such challenges to Christian pacifism as what would you do if someone were attacking a loved one, what about Hitler, and didn’t Jesus chase people from the temple with a whip? By countering common objections to the Christian peace witness, the book endeavors to help both pacifists and nonpacifists alike gain a deeper understanding of how a Christian commitment to nonviolence can be enacted and supported.

9. [The Nonviolent Life](#) by John Dear

How can we become people of nonviolence and help the world become more nonviolent? What does it mean to be a person of active nonviolence? How can we help build a global grassroots movement of nonviolence to disarm the world,

relieve unjust human suffering, make a more just society and protect creation and all creatures? What is a nonviolent life? These are the questions John Dear poses in *The Nonviolent Life*. He focuses on three important aspects on the path toward becoming people of nonviolence: being nonviolent toward ourselves; being nonviolent to all others (including creation and creatures); and joining the global grassroots movement of nonviolence. In this book, John Dear explores the powerful journey of nonviolence rooted in the Christian vision of love. He also offers discussion questions throughout the book making it ideal for study groups.

10. [Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace: Renewing the Commitment to Peacemaking in the PC\(USA\)](#) by Christian Iosso

The Presbyterian Church recently spent six years reflecting on peacemaking. Building on past policy documents, people at all levels of the church studied and discussed what peacemaking policies needed to be modified given the world context today. The 2016 PC(USA) General Assembly approved five affirmations the church must make to fulfill its peacemaking calling. Those affirmations become risks when truly taken, because their message collides with the demands for continued sacrifice by the powers that be. Ideal for individual or group study, this important resource includes questions for reflection and discussion.

11. [Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from ACT-UP to Women's Suffrage](#) edited by Roger S. Powers and William B. Vogele

The first encyclopedia of nonviolence includes case studies of nonviolent struggle, selected methods of nonviolent action, and profiles of people and organizations that have contributed through their arguments or actions (or both) to advancing the knowledge or practice of nonviolent struggle.

III. ONLINE/VIRTUAL

1. [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship \(PPF\)](#)

Connects, equips, and supports people in the work of peacemaking and non-violence through an Activist Council (for individuals) and a network of Peace Churches (for congregations). Resources for congregational study include an online Inventory of Conscience, statements of Peace Churches and conscientious objectors, sample sermons, and responses to frequently asked questions (Peace Church FAQ).

2. [Center on Conscience & War \(CCW\)](#)

Advocates for the rights of conscience, opposes military conscription, and serves all conscientious objectors to war. Resources include a writing tool for conscientious objectors in the military seeking discharge; information for youth about draft registration, military enlistment, and alternatives to military service; and a GI rights hotline.

3. [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons \(ICAN\)](#)

Nobel Peace Prize awarded coalition of non-governmental organizations in one hundred countries promoting adherence to and implementation of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Resources include briefing papers, brochures, and research reports on nuclear weapons and the work to abolish them.

4. [Community Peacemaker Teams \(CPT\)](#)

Builds partnerships to transform violence and oppression, enlists spiritual communities and individuals in an organized nonviolent alternative to war, and places teams at the invitation of local peacemaking communities that are confronting situations of lethal conflict. Offers online and in-person training in nonviolent direct action.

5. [Nonviolent Peace Force \(NP\)](#)

Protects civilians in violent conflicts through unarmed strategies, builds peace side-by-side with local communities, and advocates for the wider adoption of these approaches to safeguard human lives and dignity. Resources include online Nonviolence Café gatherings and a toolkit for Community Safety Teams.

IV. PERSONAL WITNESS AND TESTIMONIES

1. Remembering Jacob George

George was a three tour veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) turned peace activist. He served as a paratrooper in the United States Army Special Operation Command (USASOC) between 2001 and 2004, and was honorably discharged as sergeant. George co-founded the Afghan Veterans Against the War Committee, part of Iraq Veterans Against the War and was a musician who biked around the country playing music for peace, a campaign he called “A Ride Till the End.” The ride began on May 1, 2010 and covered over 8,000 miles in the U.S. Jacob returned to Afghanistan in the summer of 2011 with Voices for Creative Nonviolence to work with and hear stories of Afghans struggling for peace. In the lyrics of one of his songs:

Now, I’m just a farmer from Arkansas.
There’s a lot of things I don’t understand,
Like why we send farmers to kill farmers
In Afghanistan.

2. [The Unseen Scars of those who Kill via Remote Control](#) by Dave Philipps

Printed in the *New York Times* on April 15, 2022. This is a poignant and important story.

QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about becoming a Peace Church in the Presbyterian Church (USA) or about using this curriculum, please contact either the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program at peacemaking@pcusa.org or 502-569-5805 or the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at info@presbypeacefellowship.org or 845-786-6743.



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BACK

**BACK TO
CONTENTS**