

RISKING PEACE

A Companion Study Guide

by Dee Koza to accompany

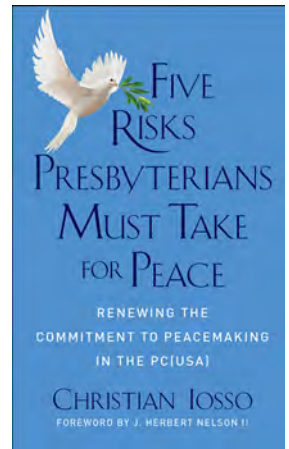
Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace

“Peace at all times in all ways.” —2 Thessalonians 3:16

INTRODUCTION

This companion study guide accompanies the reading of *Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace* by Christian Iosso, published by Westminster John Knox Press in August 2017, ISBN#9780664262853, hereafter to be called *Five Risks*. Information from the publisher can be found [HERE](#). It also can be ordered for study groups through the [PCUSA Store](#) at a significant discount.

It is timely for Presbyterians to read this new book and use this companion study guide to facilitate reading groups. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2016 commended *Five Peacemaking Affirmations* to the church to guide and direct our peacemaking work and witness. This book and accompanying study guide provide a timely opportunity for Presbyterians to dig deeply into these affirmations and to consider their implications for themselves.



Though it mentions five peacemaking risks, the book is organized into six chapters. The companion study guide follows the organization of the text and so includes six sessions. For those who wish to conduct a study group in five sessions, the final two sessions can be combined into one session.

BACKGROUND

“Shalom is the intended state of the entire human race. It involves the well-being of the whole person in all relationships, personal, social, and cosmic. Shalom means life in a community of compassionate order, marked by social and economic justice.” p. 16, *Five Risks*. The author, Christian Iosso, seeks to give his readers direction in living the Christian faith by addressing five risks for peace. He calls upon those reading and studying his work to renew commitment to peace, while staying faithful Christians and members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Historically speaking, Presbyterians have taken the call to peacemaking seriously. During the Protestant Reformation there were groups that would later become known as “peace churches.” They determined that Christian discipleship required rejecting violence as had the earliest church. On the other hand, most mainline Reformed and Lutheran bodies believed Christian discipleship allowed for the use of violence to preserve justice and order. (Justification for war is explored in Risk 4 of this study). Even in our Presbyterian Confessions, justifications for war are present.

“These two main Christian approaches to war and violence retained theological coherence as Christians sought to apply them through revolutions and wars of conquest, liberation, defense, and humanitarian intervention. American Presbyterians participated in and justified the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, both world wars, and the Korean conflict, but have been less and less of one mind on the more recent “wars of choice,” such as Vietnam, the Nicaragua/Contra war, the two Iraq wars, and Afghanistan. The US role in Libya and Syria multi-party “proxy” wars raises additional questions addressed in the fifth risk (discussed in the fifth and sixth chapters). (Introduction, p. 5, *Five Risks*.)

Pacifism grew and became stronger in both 1936 and 1938, when the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. sent proposals to the presbyteries to consider the removal of just-war language from the Westminster Confession. At that time, the Westminster Confession served as the church’s only confessional standard. Though a majority of presbyteries voted to amend or eliminate the language, it never received the overall necessary vote to make the changes.

During WWII, pacifism became accepted as a legitimate position and a reflection of discipleship. The development of

the Cold War concept brought concerns about nuclear issues and about ways to establish justice on a global scale. "Many Christian ethicists argued that draft laws should recognize the validity of conscientious objection on just-war grounds as well as on fully pacifist grounds, and the General Assembly of 1967 emphatically reaffirmed the right of Presbyterians to be conscientious objectors." (Introduction, p. 7, *Five Risks*.)

The Confession of 1967 was written with strong social/ethical concerns for economic and racial justice, family life, and peace:

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

The next statement to come before the denomination was "Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling." Creating the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, this 1980 statement lifts up the church "as faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking." This was followed by the Commitment to Peacemaking (1983), signed by more than half the churches in the denomination. "Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling" was buttressed by significant additions in 1988, with "Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age," and in 1998, with the resolution on Just Peacemaking." (Introduction, p. 8, *Five Risks*.)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently spent six years reflecting on peacemaking. Focusing 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 affirmed five affirmations the church must make to fulfill its peacemaking calling. Those affirmations become risks when truly taken seriously, because their message collides with the demands by the powers that be for continued sacrifice. In this timely resource, author Christian Iosco explains what the five risks are, how they differ from previous positions, and what taking each risk might look like today.

1. We affirm that peacemaking is essential to our faith in God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge evil and hatred, and who calls the church to present alternatives to violence.
2. We have sinned by participating in acts of violence, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.
3. We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of nonviolent love evident in his life and teaching, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection.
4. Learning from nonviolent struggles and counting the costs of war, we draw upon the traditions of Just War, Christian pacifism, and Just Peacemaking to cultivate moral imagination and discern God's redemptive work in history. We commit ourselves to studying and practicing nonviolent means of conflict resolution, nonviolent methods for social change, and nonviolent opposition to war. Even

as we actively engage in a peace discernment process, we commit ourselves to continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the United States military, veterans, and their families. We promise to support materially and socially veterans of war who suffer injury in body, mind, or spirit, even as we work toward the day when they will need to fight no more.

5. We place our faith, hope, and trust in God alone. We renounce violence as a means to further selfish national interests, to procure wealth, or to dominate others. We will practice boldly the things that make for peace and look for the day when “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Introduction, p. 10, *Five Risks*.)

DEFINITIONS:

In moving into our study, it will be helpful to have common starting definitions which can be refined and expanded on by the study group. The definitions below are meant to guide the participants as they explore each of these concepts.

Christian Pacifism: opposition to war or violence as a means of settling disputes; specifically, refusal on moral or religious grounds to bear arms. For Quakers pacifism is a major tenet of belief. 2: an attitude or policy of nonresistance; efforts toward pacifism and civil rights.

Colonialism: a) an international system of control by one power over another area or people which creates and profits from that area’s dependence, b) a policy advocating or based on such control.

Complicity: the act of helping to commit a crime or do wrong in some way.

Disparity: a noticeable and often unfair difference between people or things.

Empire: a major political unit having a territory of great extent or a number of territories or peoples under a single sovereign authority, especially one having an emperor as chief of state; the territory of such a political unit.

Grace: unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification, a virtue coming from God, the undeserved favor bestowed upon sinners, a gift from God giving us Christ’s riches which we do not deserve nor can earn. Eph.2:8-10, “God’s blessing on the undeserving; unmerited favor.” (see Acts 11:23; Ephesians 2:8)

Imagination: the ability to conceive of things that are not real; the ability to form a picture in the mind.

Just War: a military action that is justified as being permissible for legal or moral reasons. Just war theory, also called just war tradition, is an attempt to provide or define acceptable conditions for international conflict.

Moral: concerning or relating to what is right and wrong in human behavior

Peace: a state of tranquility or quiet, freedom from civil disturbance, a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom, freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions, harmony in personal relations, a state or period of mutual concord between governments.

Peacemaker: one who makes peace, especially by reconciling parties at variance; a person who helps to prevent or stop an argument, a fight, or a war.

Peacemaking: actions and efforts of peacemakers.

Post-colonial: An era or attitude relating to the period after the settlement of one country by another; very broadly, after the 1960s, when many colonized countries gained their independence. A term often used in academic disciplines that attempt to analyze, explain, and respond to the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism.

Restore: to bring back to or put back into a former or original state, to put or bring back into existence or use.

Shalom (Hebrew): Peace, completeness, soundness, and welfare. Associated with the ending of war, conflict, or fighting between nations, the outcome is one of wholeness, safety, and security.

WORSHIP ELEMENTS:

Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace identifies key worship elements that are reflected by each of the risk areas. As part of each study session, there will be an opportunity to incorporate the worship component into the lesson's experience. These worship elements are:

CALL: God's children are invited to worship God, and the people respond with words inviting God to be present.

CONFESSION: This is an opportunity to admit and confess how our thoughts, actions/ inactions, or deeds have kept us from being faithful witnesses to the God of peace.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON: This is a statement that assures us that God forgives, loves, and restores the relationship with us when we confess we have fallen short.

AFFIRMATION: These words are said together, as God's family, and tell what it is that we believe.

CHARGE: These words of encouragement and direction are shared as a way to help prepare us to depart ready to do God's will.

GETTING THE STUDY GROUP STARTED:

By engaging in this study, participants have the opportunity to explore five risks that, as Christians, we are challenged to take for peace. Each session is designed to take a single hour, providing time for both individual and group processes. The study is designed to have participants be present, listening, understanding, and helping one another to explore the material.

A handout is included for each session.

In order to have optimum time to discuss and explore the themes of *Five Risks*, the lesson plan is designed with the expectation that participants come to class having read the chapters for that session.

RISK SESSION LESSON PLANS

Each lesson plan is divided into four sections, allowing participants to experience an introduction to the particular risk area, engage with and explore the content, and close with a worship element that draws together the subject, its faith implications, and a personal commitment to peace.

ENTERING: Introduces the risk area and components to be addressed

ENGAGING: Allows the participants to consider the focus of the risk area

EXPLORING: Challenges the study group with the depth of content and implications of living as peacemakers

EXITING: Draws the participants into a worship experience that focuses on a worship element that addresses the risk area.

*At the top of each lesson plan, a **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION** list helps the leader know what items need to be gathered for the session.*

SESSION ONE

Risk: Commit to the Gospel of Peace

Worship Element: CALL

(PRIOR TO STUDY GROUP MEETING, each person should read the Introduction and Risk One, pp. 13-23)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Items needed for this session include:

- Session handout
- Blue masking tape
- Bible

ENTERING (5 minutes)

As participants enter, invite them to read the three statements displayed and be seated by the statement to which they are most drawn. The statements are:

- **The church is faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking.**
- **The church is obedient to Christ when it nurtures and equips God's people as peacemakers.**
- **The church bears witness to Christ when it nourishes the moral life of the nation for the sake of peace in our world.**

ENGAGING (20 minutes)

Once everyone is seated around one of the three statements, invite participants to introduce themselves (if not familiar with each other) and share the reason they chose their statement. When enough time has been given, have each statement group share their thoughts with the total study group.

(If the study group is small, each statement could be on a separate slip of paper and given to each entering member. As a total group, the study group would have each person read their statement with total group discussion to follow, moving until each statement is covered.)

EXPLORING (30 minutes)

Draw the group's attention to the quote on page 13 of the book.

Peacemaking is at the core of our faith, not the periphery. It's in our DNA. By not challenging evil and hatred, we disobey. The first risk is to take to heart the centrality of peacemaking to Christian faith and demonstrate what that faith looks like in practice, here, today. "The gospel of peace" is how the author of the letter to the Ephesians sums up the entire message. (p. 13)

Using questions 1,2, and 3 listed on p. 23 of the book, invite group members to consider the questions in light of the following portions of the quotation:

Quote: *The first risk is to take to heart the centrality of peacemaking to Christian faith . . .*

Question: *How do you personally embody peacemaking as a Christian?*

Quote: *. . . and to demonstrate what that faith looks like in practice here today*

Question: *Are there reasons today for Christians to be absolute pacifists?
What alternatives to violence does the church offer the world?*

EXITING (5 minutes)

Worship Element: CALL

Gather group members into a circle, drawing attention to how the first risk CALLS each of us to serve God as peacemakers. Invite a group member to read Ephesians 4:1-7. Ask participants to contemplate a phrase that expresses how God is calling them to be peacemakers. Provide time for group members to share their peace-calling phrase.

Close in unison by saying "There is one body, one spirit, just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God."

SESSION ONE HANDOUT

Risk: Commit to the Gospel of Peace

Worship Element: CALL

ENTERING

- The church is faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking.
- The church is obedient to Christ when it nurtures and equips God's people as peacemakers.
- The church bears witness to Christ when it nourishes the moral life of the nation for the sake of peace in our world.

EXPLORING

"Peacemaking is at the core of our faith, not the periphery. It's in our DNA. By not challenging evil and hatred, we disobey. The first risk is to take to heart the centrality of peacemaking to Christian faith and demonstrate what that faith looks like in practice, here, today. "The gospel of peace" is how the author of the letter to the Ephesians sums up the entire message." (p. 13)

SESSION TWO

Risk: Confessing Our Complicity

Worship Element: CONFESSION

(PRIOR TO STUDY GROUP MEETING, each person should read Risk Two, pp. 24-38)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Items needed for this session include:

- Butcher paper (or white/blackboard, poster board)
- Entering activity quote written on graffiti sheet
- Blue masking tape
- Color markers
- Sticky notes on which are written “physical” or “structural” (one set per person, see *Exploring*)
- Pencils/pens
- Session handout

ENTERING (5 minutes)

Write the following quote and question on newsprint (or white/blackboard, mural paper posted on wall or poster board):

Quote: “If we fail to acknowledge our shortcomings, we only increase the probability we will perpetuate them.” (p. 25)

Question: In what ways do we perpetuate or are we complicit in societal violence?

As participants arrive, invite them to use the markers provided to write their responses to the question found under the quote on the newsprint.

ENGAGING (25 minutes)

Once participants have had a chance to write their newsprint responses, invite the participants to review and group responses into categories (e.g., physical violence, social violence, “isms”).

Next place the following statements alongside the newsprint responses/categorization and lead a discussion about how their responses relate to these statements. (See handout.)

“We have sinned by participating in acts of violence, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.” Affirmation Two, 222nd General Assembly (2016)

“The commitment to peace that stands at the heart of Christian obedience requires that Christians take an honest look at the extent to which they are complicit in the violence that characterizes the society of which they are a part.” (p. 25)

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil it multiplies it. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” (p. 29).

EXPLORING (25 minutes)

Distribute two notecards to each person, (one notecard with the words “physical violence” written on it and the other notecard with the word “structural violence.”)

Ask a member to read the following statement (on Handout, p. 30)

*“While direct physical violence is more visible and attracts more media attention (“If it bleeds, it leads”), structural violence is far more widespread and arguably does much more harm over time. We see it manifest in hunger and homelessness, poverty and disease. The processes of oppression noted above include patterns of inequality and exclusion called the “isms” of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ethnocentrism. These patterns operate at interlocking levels (**structural**)—institutional (policies and practices), interpersonal (group and individual), and cultural (social norms and valuing).”*

Using the work done in the Engaging Activity (newsprint responses, categorization, and placement of statements) have notecards placed alongside areas where physical violence is characterized, and where Structural violence is characterized.

After reviewing the note placements, have the study group talk about which of these “isms” they believe the church is called to address, and talked about ways to best do that.

EXITING (5 minutes)

Worship Element: CONFESSION

“The risk in this chapter is to acknowledge and understand the interlocking web of violence in our lives, our society, and the world, and then to call the church to confession.” (p. 37)

Gather in a circle and ask each member to silently consider the following three reflection questions:

1. What idols of violence do you see around you?
2. In what ways are you complicit in violence?
3. What would you risk if you actively unmasked these idols?

Close by inviting those who wish to share a confession with the group. The group ends with the following:

Leader: The peace and pardon of God be with you.

All: And also with you.

NOTE FOR NEXT SESSION: Invite everyone to bring a picture of Jesus that has special meaning for them to be shared in the next session.

SESSION TWO HANDOUT

Risk: Confessing Our Complicity

Worship Element: CONFESSION

ENGAGING

"We have sinned by participating in acts of violence, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation." Affirmation Two, 222nd General Assembly (2016)

"The commitment to peace that stands at the heart of Christian obedience requires that Christians take an honest look at the extent to which they are complicit in the violence that characterizes the society of which they are a part!" (p. 25)

"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil it multiplies it . . . Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." (p. 29).

EXPLORING

"While direct physical violence is more visible and attracts more media attention ("If it bleeds, it leads"), structural violence is far more widespread and arguably does much more harm over time. We see it manifest in hunger and homelessness, poverty, and disease. The processes of oppression noted above include patterns of inequality and exclusion called the "isms" of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ethnocentrism. These patterns operate at interlocking levels—institutional (policies and practices), interpersonal (group and individual), and cultural (social norms and valuing).

EXITING

"The risk in this chapter is acknowledge and understand the interlocking web of violence in our lives, our society, and the world, and then to call the church to confession." (p. 37)

- What idols of violence do you see around you?
- In what ways are you complicit in violence?
- What would you risk if you actively unmasked these idols?

SESSION THREE

Risk: Reclaim Christ the Peacemaker

Worship Element: ASSURANCE OF PARDON

(PRIOR TO STUDY GROUP MEETING, each person should read Risk Three, pp. 39-52)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Items needed for this session include:

- Pictures of Jesus bought by participants
(Send email reminder—*remind participants in the week before the session to bring a picture of Jesus that has special meaning for them.*)
- Bible
- Newsprint/whiteboard
- Markers
- Session handout

ENTERING (3-5 minutes)

Place the following quote on a piece of paper in the middle of a table.

“We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of nonviolent love evident in his life and teachings, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection.” Affirmation Three, 222nd General Assembly (2016)

As participants arrive, invite them to place their picture/illustration of Jesus on the table. Once all have arrived, invite someone to read the affirmation.

ENGAGING (15 minutes)

Invite each member to identify their image of Jesus and what it is about this image that holds special meaning for them. As a group, consider what aspects of these depictions relate to Jesus' life of modeling nonviolence.

NOTE: #1 Question for Reflection on p. 38 could be used to introduce the conversational focus.

EXPLORING (30 minutes)

Invite a group member to read Matthew 5:38-48.

Ask the study group to consider the different patterns regarding peace shared by Jesus in this passage. After exploring the insights of the group, have the group consider the approaches shared by the following:

Richard B. Hayes, p. 41

Richard Horsley, p. 40

Walter Wink, p. 59

Martin Luther King, Jr., p. 44

Paul, p. 41

Have the class consider the connections between these approaches and Jesus' message.

(Depending on the size of study group, each of the approaches could be initially reviewed by pairs, triads, or other sub-units)

and then shared with the total group).

NOTE: #2 Question for Reflection on p. 39 may be used to start the conversational section.

EXITING (10 minutes)

Worship Element: ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Invite group members to gather around the pictures of Jesus. Ask each person to identify an image of Jesus that represents for them the peace of Christ. Reflect on how these aspects of Christ's peace move us from confession to Assurance of Pardon through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The group ends with the following:

Leader: The peace and pardon of God be with you.

All: And also with you.

SESSION THREE HANDOUT

Risk: Reclaim Christ the Peacemaker

Worship Element: ASSURANCE OF PARDON

ENTERING

"We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of nonviolent love evident in his life and teachings, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection." Affirmation Three, 222nd General Assembly (2016)

SESSION FOUR

Risk: Practice New Peace Strategies

Worship Element: AFFIRMATION

(PRIOR TO STUDY GROUP MEETING, each person should read Risk Four, pp. 53-69)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Items needed for this session include:

- 3 x 5 cards or pieces of paper
- Glue stick
- Copies of statements (Handout)
- Newsprint/whiteboard
- Markers
- Copies of hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (recorded/video/or group singing)

ENTERING (5 minutes)

After all have gathered, invite someone to read each of the following:

- The Dirk Willems story, p. 60.
- The Fourth Risk sentence, p. 53.

The fourth risk Christians must take is to choose peace through justice rather than peace through strength.

ENGAGING (15 minutes)

Invite group members to share their initial responses to the Dirk Willems story.

Once completed, the group compares and contrasts the Dirk Willems story with the Fourth Risk Statement regarding peace through justice vs. peace through strength.

NOTE: If study group is large enough, divide in half, with one group considering the Dirk Willems story and the other discussing a general response to the Fourth Risk statement, gathering back to compare/contrast as the total group.

EXPLORING (35 minutes)

Put each of the following seven excerpts from the text on a separate card or piece of paper:

(Handout)

1. **Contrast Peace Model:** "The contrast model grounds peaceful resistance to evil both in God's interaction within individual human conscience and within dedicated, worshipping communities . . ." (p. 59)
2. **What if the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reoriented more of its common life around the Prince of Peace?** (p. 60)
3. **Many Presbyterians have rarely given serious attention and reflection to questions of violence and nonviolence, war and peace.** (pp. 60-61)
4. **The just-war tradition is intended to serve as a constraint on the use of military force—to minimize the violence used in achieving a particular objective . . .** (p. 62)

5. What the just-peacemaking principles do well is to introduce a whole new body of practical measures for conflict resolution and reconciliation forged in some very difficult circumstances, often with strong Christian inspiration . . . (pp. 64-65)
6. As long as Presbyterians continue to serve in the US military, the Presbyterian church has a responsibility to care for active-duty soldiers, veterans, and their families . . . (pp. 65-66)
7. Developing the moral imagination: “Moral imagination is . . . our greatest ally in taking the risk of practicing new peacemaking strategies, whether or not we are entirely convinced of the necessity of nonviolence . . . ” (pp. 68-69)

Distribute the cards/sheets (one statement per group) to the group members for reflection. Depending upon the size of the group, you may ask some people to find partners or form small groups. If individuals receive the excerpt, invite them to quietly reflect on the quote. However organized, invite participants to consider the statement they are given by reading it in the context of its larger paragraph/pages that contain its explanation (noted in parenthesis). Reflect on how their segment could be introduced and considered in the local church setting.

After enough time has passed, gather the group back together and ask for helpful insights for them that came up during this activity.

FOLLOW BY Using the reflection questions on p. 69 to guide the group through the insights of each of the Exploring statements/questions listed.

EXITING (10 minutes)

Worship Element: AFFIRMATION

Circling up, the study group sings together the hymn: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”.

NOTE: A video of the hymn, or an audio version may be used.

Distribute a bookmark (found in the Handout) to each participant. It contains the following quote:

To risk is to step into the unknown without guarantee of success or safety. For many people caught in conflict, violence is the known, and peace is the mystery. Because peace building typically requires people to move toward a new, uncertain, and unexpected future, it can be a difficult journey. Yet Christ clearly calls us to join him in risking peace and transforming conflicts by boldly practicing “the things that make for peace.” (p. 69)

As a group, read the bookmark in unison as a prayer, with the leader beginning “Dear God, we know that . . . (start unison reading).

Conclude with the following:

Leader: The peace and pardon of God be with you.

All: And also with you.

SESSION FOUR HANDOUT

Risk: Practice New Peace Strategies

Worship Element: AFFIRMATION

EXPLORING

The following quotes can be put onto 3 x 5 cards or copied onto cardstock and cut into separate statement slips.

Contrast Peace Model

“The contrast model grounds peaceful resistance to evil both in God’s interaction within individual human conscience and within dedicated, worshiping communities . . .”

What if the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reoriented more of its common life around the Prince of Peace?

Many Presbyterians have rarely given serious attention and reflection to questions of violence and nonviolence , war and peace.

“The just-war tradition is intended to serve as a constraint on the use of military force—to minimize the violence used in achieving a particular objective . . .”

“What the just-peacemaking principles do well is to introduce a whole new body of practical measures for conflict resolution and reconciliation forged in some very difficult circumstances, often with strong Christian inspiration . . .”

“As long as Presbyterians continue to serve in the US military, the Presbyterian Church has a responsibility to care for active-duty soldiers, veterans, and their families . . .”

Developing the moral imagination

“Moral imagination is . . . our greatest ally in taking the risk of practicing new peacemaking strategies, whether or not we are entirely convinced of the necessity of nonviolence . . .”



“To risk is to step into the unknown without guarantee of success or safety.

For many people caught in conflict, violence is the known, and peace is the mystery. Because peace building typically requires people to move toward a new, uncertain, and unexpected future, it can be a difficult journey. Yet Christ clearly calls us to join him in risking peace and transforming conflicts by boldly practicing the things that make for peace.”



“To risk is to step into the unknown without guarantee of success or safety.

For many people caught in conflict, violence is the known, and peace is the mystery. Because peace building typically requires people to move toward a new, uncertain, and unexpected future, it can be a difficult journey. Yet Christ clearly calls us to join him in risking peace and transforming conflicts by boldly practicing the things that make for peace.”

SESSION FIVE

Risk: To Convert the Empire (Again!) and Work for Peace

Worship Element: CHARGE

(PRIOR TO STUDY GROUP MEETING, each person should read Risk Five, pp. 89-103)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Items needed for this session include:

- Bible
- Lord's Prayer match up handout
- Pens/pencils
- Exploring handout

ENTERING (3 minutes)

Begin by inviting the group to pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Next, distribute the handout "The Lord's Prayer Match Up" and a pen/pencil to each participant. Invite them to individually work on the exercise.

ENGAGING (20 minutes)

When everyone has had time to complete the exercise, invite the group to go over the responses. Allow time for the whole group to go through the handout, discussing the various responses and how individuals came to match up the sentences. Allow time for conversation around different responses.

EXPLORING (30 minutes)

Explain to the group that this section in the book (pp. 89-90) begins with our Christian vision of "things that make for peace," then outlines the scale of the "practices of empire," and concludes with ideas for "scaling up our peace practices."

Using these three areas, invite the group to review the chapter, with one participant reading each of the following portions followed by group discussion of insights and thoughts.

1. **The things that make for peace**—On pp. 72-73, read the following:
BEGIN: "Our confirmation and adult education classes can teach . . ."
CONCLUDE: "Don't Confuse the Cross and Flag"
The practices of empire—On pp. 73-82 read the following:
BEGIN: "Don't Confuse the Cross and Flag"
CONCLUDE: "Economic Drivers or National Purposes"
2. **Scaling up our peace practices**—On pp. 85-87 read the following:
BEGIN: "Challenges in Pulling the United States Back from 'Empire' Practices"
CONCLUDE: End

EXITING (5-7 minutes)

Worship Element: CHARGE

Gather the group in a circle. Remind the group that the worship element for this risk is the “charge.” Invite a group member to read Ephesians 4:1-6 for the group, asking the members to listen for words or phrases that hold special meaning given the conversation of today’s session. Invite those who wish to share their word or phrase from the reading.

Conclude with the following:

Leader: The peace and pardon of God be with you.

All: And also with you.

SESSION FIVE HANDOUT

Risk: To Convert the Empire (Again!)

Worship Element: CHARGE

ENTERING

Lord's Prayer Match Up

Using the letters to the left of the Lord's Prayer phrases, match each one to the six risk statements.

Matthew 6:9-13 King James Version (KJV)

- (A) Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
- (B) Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
- (C) Give us this day our daily bread.
- (D) And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- (E) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
- (F) For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
- () *When fears of the other are stoked, when national glory is understood primarily in terms of power, when terrorism is magnified, when presidential candidates compete in threatening war crimes, then the church . . . must call the nation-state back, in our case to liberty and justice for all, and to hopes that America would be an exception to old-world power politics. (p. 71)*
- () *We place our faith, hope, and trust in God alone.(p. 102)*
- () *As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to seek first the kingdom of God (p. 70)*
- () *Presbyterian Christians are looking for direction and guidance about how we can take faithful and effective action to reduce violence and war and to further justice and peace. There is broad interest in learning concrete peacemaking skills that we can use in our daily lives. (p. 89)*
- () *Peacemaking is part of our seeking that reign or commonwealth where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. (p. 70)*
- () *. . . as Reformed Christians we believe the church is called to invite the nations of the world into new understandings of how to respond to violence in our time. (p. 73)*

Answer Key—The Lord's Match Up

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. *We place our faith, hope, and trust in God alone.* (p. 102)

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. *Peacemaking is part of our seeking that reign or commonwealth where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.* (p. 70)

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. *Presbyterian Christians are looking for direction and guidance about how we can take faithful and effective action to reduce violence and war and to further justice and peace. There is broad interest in learning concrete peacemaking skills that we can use in our daily lives.* (p. 89)

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. *When fears of the other are stoked, when national glory is understood primarily in terms of power, when terrorism is magnified, when presidential candidates compete in*

threatening war crimes, then the church . . . must call the nation-state back, in our case to liberty and justice for all, and to hopes that America would be an exception to old-world power politics. (p. 71)

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: . . . **as Reformed Christians we believe the church is called to invite the nations of the world into new understandings of how to respond to violence in our time.** (p. 73)

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. **As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to seek first the kingdom of God.** (p. 102)

EXPLORING

“things that make for peace”

“practices of empire”

“ideas for scaling up our peace practices.”

SESSION SIX

Risk: To Convert the Empire (Again!) and Work for Peace

Worship Element: CHARGE

(PRIOR TO STUDY GROUP MEETING, each person should read Risk Five, pp. 89-103)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Items needed for this session include:

- Bible
- Whiteboard/wall
- Blue masking tape
- Sticky notes
- Pens/pencils
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Session handouts

ENTERING (5 minutes)

Place the Golden Rule (handout) on a wall or on the table in the center of the study group. Distribute a sticky note to each participant and invite them to “rewrite” the Golden Rule in light of the insights gained in this study. Have each person place their sticky note around the original Golden Rule. *(These will be used later during the Exiting activity.)*

ENGAGING (25 minutes—15 minutes in sectional work and 10 minutes back in total group)

Read the following quote from the study:

“We commit ourselves to studying and practicing nonviolent means of conflict resolution, nonviolent methods for social change, and nonviolent opposition to war.”

—Part of Affirmation 4, as amended by the 222nd General Assembly (p. 89)

Divide the participants into three teams. If the group is too small to divide, this exercise can be done by individuals or pairs. Assign each team one of the following sections of the text. Invite the teams to review the pages and then record on newsprint practical ways to take action.

1. Conflict Resolution—pgs. 93-94
2. Faith-based Community Organizing and other Grassroots Ecumenism, pp. 94-95
3. Accompaniment and Nonviolent Third-party Intervention—pgs. 96-97

When finished, invite each team to report back to the whole group.

EXPLORING (20 minutes)

Using the newsprint ideas, invite the group to reflect on their particular congregation or worshiping community. Ask the following:

- In what ways is our congregation or worshiping community taking some of the actions listed on the newsprint?
- What might we begin to do that we aren’t already doing?

- How are some of these actions challenging to our congregation or worshiping community?
- How would we “charge” this congregation to work for peace in these areas?

If desired for later use, ask a group member to record the responses on newsprint.

Note: To help the group with ideas for this exercise, pp. 97-98 could be reviewed.

EXITING (10 Minutes)

Worship Element: CHARGE

Depending on time, the group could explore “The Three Examples of Risking Peace” on pages 98-99.

OR

Using the Five Risks handout, invite each person to

- reflect on what they have learned
- identify the risk they feel most called to live out
- think of one way they will incorporate their chosen risk into their lives and their congregational involvement.

Invite a group member read Ephesians 2:14 and 3:20.

Conclude with the following:

Leader: The peace and pardon of God be with you.

All: And also with you.

Amen! Go in peace!

SESSION SIX HANDOUT

Risk: To Convert the Empire (Again!) and Work for Peace

Worship Element: CHARGE

ENTERING

The Golden Rule

¹²"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

—Matthew 7:12 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO YOU!

EXITING

Five Affirmations to Guide the Peacemaking Witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016, Portland, Oregon)



1. We affirm that **peacemaking is essential to our faith** in God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ, whose love and justice challenge evil and hatred, and whose call gives our church a mission to present alternatives to violence.
2. We confess that **we have sinned by participating in acts of violence**, both structural and physical, or by our failure to respond to acts and threats of violence with ministries of justice, healing, and reconciliation.
3. **We follow Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Reconciler, and reclaim the power of nonviolent love** evident in his life and teaching, his healings and reversals of evil, his cross and resurrection.
4. Learning from nonviolent struggles and counting the costs of war, we draw upon the traditions of Just War, Christian pacifism, and Just Peacemaking to cultivate moral imagination and discern God's redemptive work in history. **We commit ourselves to studying and practicing nonviolent means of conflict resolution, nonviolent methods for social change, and nonviolent opposition to war.** Even as we actively engage in a peace discernment process, we commit ourselves to continuing the long tradition of support by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for our sisters and brothers who serve in the United States military, veterans, and their families. We promise to support materially and socially veterans of war who suffer injury in body, mind, or spirit, even as we work toward the day when they will need to fight no more.
5. We place our faith, hope, and trust in God alone. We renounce violence as a means to further selfish national interests, to procure wealth, or to dominate others. **We will practice boldly the things that make for peace** and look for the day when "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

