



Every Church in Iowa is a Peace Church

August 2002

In December 2001, a small group of Christians from diverse faith backgrounds met in Ames, Iowa, to talk about a way we could assist our congregations in talking about peace. All of us had long-standing interest in peace and justice issues as a result of our involvement in either Iowa Peace Network (a faith-based organization representing Mennonites, Quakers, Church of the Brethren, and United Methodist traditions) or the Justice Committee of Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa (representing the American Baptist Churches, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Church of the Brethren, the Community of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church). Over the past several months, we have met together many times to develop the attached curriculum.

All of us have experienced a yearning among persons in our congregations to explore alternatives to violence in our families, our communities, and our world. We are shocked by the reports of horrific tragedies—the World Trade Center, Columbine, Rwanda, West Bank—and we long to explore, with other Christians, just what God would have us do in response. All too often, individuals in our churches and our communities become polarized in their reaction to the violence we see in the world around us. Those of us who are pacifists are often marginalized as either silly idealists or unpatriotic obstructionists. Those of us who believe violence is inevitable are characterized as warmongers.

We have tried to establish a vehicle through which to dialogue about nonviolence both in our daily lives and in the larger world. We hope to create a place of safety and stillness where we can listen to our own hearts, to God, and to our fellow Christians.

Every Church In Iowa Is A Peace Church

Background

The Iowa Peace Network and the Justice Commission of Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa invite you and your congregation to participate in a movement called “**Every Church in Iowa is a Peace Church.**”

Every Church a Peace Church is a grassroots movement that started in 2000 through neighborhood conversations between John Stoner of New Call to Peacemaking (an organization of Friends, Mennonites, and Brethren traditions in the United States) and Moravian friends Rick and Susan Stamm. Rick, a Pennsylvania National Guard trained jet pilot who had objected to the Gulf War, had begun to discover the marginalization experienced by those Americans who object to war. In conversations with Stoner, he often said, “But the historic peace churches should not be the only peace churches. Every church should be a peace church.” Advocates of Every Church a Peace Church believe that the church could turn the world toward peace if every church lived and taught as Jesus lived and taught.

The work of Every Church a Peace Church coincides with another important grassroots peace movement that is occurring on an international scale. In 2000, the Harare Assembly of the World Council of Churches proclaimed the decade beginning in 2001 as the “Decade to Overcome Violence.” Through this decade, denominations, seminaries, ministerial associations and congregations all over the world are invited to offer their own gifts for peacemaking according to their own particular calling.

Worship in the manner of the Society of Friends

The goal of **Every Church in Iowa is a Peace Church** is for each congregation, in its own places and times, to consider prayerfully Jesus’ own life and his call to us to be peacemakers. To this end, we offer an order of worship in which participants wait in silence for the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit on the subject of peace, as well as a brief list of resources. The worship is modeled after the historic manner of the Society of Friends.

Friends worship involves the gathering together of individuals to wait in expectant silence in order to experience direct communion with God. Friends believe that the Holy Spirit resides in all people and is ready to comfort and guide them. All

believers are promised by Christ, in Matthew 18:20, “for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Friends begin participation by stilling their bodies and directing their mind beyond the distractions of the immediate environment. They have found that it is sometimes helpful to surmount the insistence of self by focusing on a Bible verse, meditating on their sense of community with creation or with fellow humans near and far, or by concentrating on a visual image that draws one closer to God. As one quiets the senses and centers down, one reaches a deeper level within the self. At this deeper level, believers may become aware of a clearer insight, a fresh understanding of some Bible passage and its application to the modern situation, or a deep concern for the world.

Friends believe that God speaks directly, reveals God’s will, and gives guidance to those who listen. Friends believe that God can also prompt believers to speak out to those with whom they gather together for worship. This call to vocal ministry may come to any worshipper, and the sensitive worshipper will know when to share a message with others. Sensitive worshippers will also refrain from dominating the worship time or speaking directly after someone else without leaving a time of silence between speakers. Whether one is moved to speak or to keep silent, what matters is that all worshippers be guided by the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit.

This kind of Meeting for Worship comes to a close in a special way. The clerk indicates the close of the Meeting by shaking hands with another person as all then shake hands with those nearby.

The Peace Circle

The Peace Circle described here is based on the silence followed by vocal ministry that is at the heart of Friends worship. It is intended to be used by any group gathered together as a part of the church. It can be used in one continuous session or over several shorter sessions. Additional quotations are included in the “Resources” section of this packet.

Introductions

Begin each session by:

- Designating a leader/clerk if there is none;
- Explaining the context for this gathering, including the introductory material on Every Church a Peace Church and the Decade to Overcome Violence;
- Asking the group to introduce themselves to each other;
- Reviewing the expectations for silence and vocal ministry.
- Centering the body and mind in order to receive God’s Word and God’s will. (This can be done using breathing exercises, focusing on a candle or stone, listening to a fountain, or any other way of bringing yourself to focus on God.)
- Ringing a bell or some other way to designate beginning.

Food for Thought Reading

“Christians are a people who believe in and experience a divine love that, in the words of I John 4:18, ‘casts out fear.’ To live in faith that we are truly loved, forgiven, and accepted by God is to be freed from the cramped life of self-confirmation, to be opened to genuine otherness.” (from People Obsessed with Bread, Michael Kinnamon.)

Silence, to be broken by vocal ministry if people are so moved. If this worship time is done as one session, begin with just a few minutes of silence after the reading and gradually increase the time allowed for silence up to 10 minutes by the end of the process. If you choose to break the worship into several sessions, allow 10 minutes of silence after the reading. Remind participants to leave time for silence between individual responses. Allow everyone who wishes to respond to do so.

Questions for response if necessary.

How did you feel as you pondered this quotation?

Are you at peace with the reality of God’s love and forgiveness in your own life?

Does this knowledge free us to love and receive others?

Food for Thought Reading

“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” (I John 4:20-21)

Silence, to be broken by vocal ministry if people are so moved. After several minutes, move to

Questions for response if necessary.

How do you deal with conflicts at home, office, church?

What does this say about our relationship with God?

Specifically, how can the church be violent?

Why is it easier for us to accept violence, to be passive about it, when it happens on TV, across town or across the globe?

Food for Thought Reading

“Peace is not the product of terror or fear.

Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.

Peace is not the result of violent repression.

Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.

Peace is dynamism.
Peace is generosity.
It is a right and a duty.

Silence, to be broken by vocal ministry if people are so moved. After several minutes, move to

Questions for response if necessary.

How is peace a right?

Do we, as Americans, live with a sense of false peace?

Closing

After the leader begins a handshake that moves around the circle in order to end each session, close with a prayer circle in which each participant prays for some aspect of peace in their lives or in the life of the world. Candles could be held and the flame passed as each participant prays. The church bell could also be rung at the end of the session(s) to indicate to the community that the congregation has been praying for peace.

Additional Worship Prompts/Queries

Food for Thought Reading

“The feeling of many Christians that they need to look beyond their congregations for ways to witness Christ’s peace is a telling indictment of the church’s life. The church’s very purpose is to be evidence of Christ’s peace in the world...The church has no greater peace to give to the world than the quality of peace it experiences in its own fellowship. A peace ministry should emerge naturally from the church as its members experience solidarity with Christ and one another.” (from “Peace by Peace,” Marnie King, Sojourners, September 1980.)

Silence, to be broken by vocal ministry if people are so moved. After several minutes, move to

Questions for response, if necessary.

What are the characteristics of a church that is evidencing Christ’s peace?

How does your own congregation promote peace both within the church and in the larger community?

Can pacifists and people who believe war is necessary worship together in the same congregation? What are the problems of such diversity of belief, and what are the rewards? What are areas of possible agreement or action that both can support?

Food for Thought Reading

“Behold, I will create new heavens
And a new earth;
And the former things shall not be remembered
Nor will they come to mind...
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox;
But dust will be the serpent’s food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
On all my hold mountain, says the Lord. (Isaiah 65:17, 25)

Silence, to be broken by vocal ministry if people are so moved. After several minutes, move to

Questions for response, if necessary.

Is peace a political idea, a spiritual idea, or both?

Is violence a necessary outcome of conflict?

Is God’s vision of a “new earth” a real possibility or is war inevitable?

Food for Thought Reading

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matt. 5:43-44)

Silence, to be broken by vocal ministry if people are so moved. After several minutes, move to

Questions for response if necessary.

Do you struggle with Jesus' call for us to be peacemakers in your daily life?

How are you a minister of reconciliation in your family, community and church?

Where do you need help in peacemaking?

PEACE TITLES: AN ANNOTATED LIST

Arinze, Cardinal Francis. Religions for Peace: A Call for Solidarity to the Religions of the World. ISBN 0385-50-4608 Doubleday, 2002. \$17.95

Cardinal Arinze is a Nigerian and head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Carney, Glandion. The Missing Peace: A Modern Parable on Recovering Your Soul in a Material World. ISBN 1879-29-0189 Pagemill Press, 2001. \$13.95

King, Martin Luther, Jr. Strength to Love. ISBN 0802-72-4728 Walker, 1996. \$14.95
Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous sermon on love.

McCarthy, Colman. I'd Rather Teach Peace. ISBN 1570-75-4306 Orbis Books, 2002. \$18.00

When asked to talk to students about writing, Colman McCarthy declines; he, instead, taught about peace.

McGinnis, Jim et al. Families Creating a Circle of Peace. The Institute for Peace and Justice, 1996. \$5.00 (order directly from the Institute; see website list for URL)

An example of the many publications for families and congregations to use in church or at home.

Meltzer, Miton. Ain't Gonna Study War No More: The Story of America's Peace Seekers. ISBN 0375-82-2607 Random, 2002. \$8.99

This award winning book for young people gives the history of American pacifists.

Must We Fight? William L. Ury, editor. ISBN 0-7879-6103-5 Jossey-Bass, 2002. \$19.95

A timely publication by the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School that explores non-violent conflict resolution from the battlefield to the schoolyard.

WEBSITES

www.nonviolence.org includes information on what nonviolence is and also includes links to various nonviolent organizations like Fellowship for Reconciliation, Voices in the Wilderness and others.

www.fcnl.org (Friends Committee on Federal Legislation) includes legislative updates on peace and justice related federal legislation.

www.peace-action.org includes information on U.S. militarism.

www.zmag.org includes media updates on many peace and justice issues and provides links to other groups.

www.banminesusa.org or www.phrusa.org (Physicians for Human Rights) includes information on landmines.

www.nisbco.org (Center for Conscience and War) includes an extensive peace bibliography under its publication section, also has information about conscientious objection to military service and the draft.

www.ipj-ppj.org (Parenting for Peace and Justice Network at The Institute for Peace and Justice) includes information for schools, churches and families on creating peace and justice and countering violence at home and in the community.

www.nationalpriorities.org Shows how we are now spending our tax dollars and looks at alternative spending ideas.

www.tvturnoff.org Has information on how TV violence increases real life violence.

www.peacemaker.org Growing Communities of Peace works to expand, propel and celebrate peace and justice in everyday life through workshops, school curriculum, books and videos.

www.wcc_coe.org World Council of Churches

www.brethren.org/oepa/seekingpeace On Earth Peace Assembly of the Church of the Brethren

www.iowachurches.org Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa

<http://home.earthlink.net/~ipnet/> Iowa Peace Network

www.ecapc.org Every Church a Peace Church

For alternative sources of world news

www.independent.co.uk The Independent newspaper in the United Kingdom

www.guardian.co.uk The Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom

www.commondreams.org Common Dreams newswire in the United States

www.csmonitor.com The Christian Science Monitor in the United States

www.thenation.org The Nation magazine

www.progressive.org The Progressive magazine