

# Reconciled to be Peacemakers in God's World

---

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



# SESSION 1: WHAT IS PEACE?

Welcome to Session One of the discussion sessions on the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding war, domestic and international security, and the Christian call to be peacemakers, entitled *For Peace in God's World*. The social statement can be viewed/printed [here](#).

## Before You Gather

Please read the introduction and first section of the social statement, “The God of Peace” (pgs. 1-3).

## I. Welcome and Introductions

Even if you know each other well, introduce yourselves with your names, pronouns, and one reason why you are here. Throughout the course of these discussion sessions, our conversations will inevitably turn to several hot-button topics. In order to enter into these intense discussions as a Christian community, we are all being asked to covenant together that:

1. We will be honest and transparent about what we are feeling, speaking only for ourselves and not invalidating the feelings of others. Whenever possible, we will use “I” language, through which we take responsibility for our own thoughts and feelings.
2. If we are feeling reactive or defensive about something someone else has shared, we will ask clarifying questions such as “What’s your perception of ... ?,” “How do you understand this?,” or “What I heard you saying was ... Is that what you intended?” We will seek nonjudgmental clarification from each other.
3. We prioritize the voices of people directly affected by a particular issue, especially those who are systemically oppressed, and affirm that intense emotions such as anger and sadness are healthy and appropriate responses to profound suffering.
4. We acknowledge that conflict and disagreement are part of the human experience and that, to be effective Christian peacekeepers, we must prayerfully lean into, rather than avoid, these uncomfortable moments.
5. If we wish to share outside this sacred space things we have learned about another person within it, we will first secure the consent of that person and those directly affected.
6. We seek, above all, to see one another through God’s loving eyes.

## II. Overview of the Five Sessions

This five-session discussion will guide us through an examination of the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World*. Each week we will examine a different question in light of the statement.

The central aim of this first session is to explore Section One of the statement, “The God of Peace.” Participants will discuss the meaning of peace and set a theological and biblical foundation for further conversation. Participants will also be given some action steps they can perform on their own to further the reflection and learning of this session.

The major objectives of this session are:

1. Get an overview of the social statement and the plan for the discussion sessions.
2. Identify personal definitions and understandings of war and peace and compare them to the definitions and understandings in the social statement.
3. Reflect on the meaning of earthly peace.
4. Use biblical insights to compare earthly peace and God’s peace.

Subsequent weeks will cover the remaining sections of the social statement: 2) The Church, A Community for Peace; 3) In God’s World, A Faith...; 4) Political Responsibility; and 5) Tasks.

## III. Opening Prayer

**“O God, as we gather, help us to see the beauty of our unity in our diversity. May we live within your desire for us to be reconciled to you, the earth, and each other, so that we come to know your peace. Amen.”**

## IV. Introductory Activity

## V. Video/Discussion

Video #1 can be viewed [here](#).

1. In the video Rev. Jensen states that “the biblical narrative reveals God’s resolve for peace, beginning in the story of creation itself.” What aspect of creation or the creation story makes you feel most peaceful?
2. Rev. Jensen notes that “human ones are created in the image of God for life in community.” One of the most important roles in human community is that held by people who are responsible for peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Who are the best peacemakers or conflict resolvers in the public sphere today? Who are the ones you know personally? What about their peacekeeping is most notable/admirable to you?

## Video/Discussion (cont'd)

3. *Optional:* For Christians, Jesus embodies God's word. Rev. Jensen notes that "we see God's resolve for peace as Christians most clearly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus called us to love our enemies. Jesus continually broke down the barriers that divided people by reaching out to those on the margins. Jesus submitted to death on a cross — confronting violence with the power of love. God's resurrection of Jesus shows us that ultimately love will triumph and that one day God's final reign of peace will come." Is there a particular moment from Jesus' life or aspect of his ministry that you feel best identifies Jesus as "God's resolve for peace" come to life?

## VI. Bible Study

Psalm 85:8-13 (NRSV)

"Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps."

### Discussion Questions:

1. In the video, Rev. Jensen explained that God's resolve for peace is the underlying foundation for creation. In the Hebrew Scriptures, this peace is most often described as "shalom." But shalom denotes far more than peace as just a simple absence of war. It is a state of harmony with God and with all beings that transcends time and space, and in fact, the Talmud teaches that Shalom is one of God's names. Christian theologian Cornelius Plantinga describes shalom as "The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight... We call it peace but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be." When you imagine "the way things ought to be," what is the first thing that comes to mind for you?
2. As you think about God's peace as it is present in both the heavenly kingdom and our day-to-day lives, what is one personal barrier to experiencing this peace that you encounter? For many people, these might be things like a disconnected prayer life, a life full of stress, a tendency to leap quickly to anger, etc. Whatever it is that prevents you from feeling God's peace, write a brief prayer for God's help to remove this barrier on a sticky note and place it somewhere you will see it throughout the week (and share it with the group if you are comfortable doing so.)
3. *Optional:* What does it mean to you that righteousness and peace will kiss each other? While this is a powerful image, it can be difficult to imagine what it might mean for our day-to-day lives. Have you ever encountered a situation that you felt exemplified this image?

## VII. Review and Reflect

1. Is there anything from the social statement, the video, or the bible reading that has affected how you think about what peace is?
2. How do your thoughts about peace that you identified at the start of the session compare with what you've discussed today about God's desire for peace? How are they similar? How are they different?
3. *Optional:* What are you most looking forward to in your participation in this study guide in the coming weeks? Is there anything that you are feeling anxious about or not looking forward to?

## VIII. Preparation for Next Week

Read "In God's World, A Faith..." on pages 6-9 of the social statement (*note that we are skipping pages 3-6 for now*). If you would like to learn more about one way Lutherans connect around peace, explore the website of the [Lutheran Peace Fellowship](#).

## IX. Closing Hymn and Prayer

Sing "O God of Love, O King of Peace" (*ELW #749*, optional)

Pray this prayer to close the session:

**"O God, as we scatter to serve you in our daily lives, help us to see the beauty of our diversity and our unity in your love. May we live within your desire for us to be reconciled to you, each other, and the earth, so that we come to know your peace. Amen."**

## Learn more:

### Resources

- [Lutheran World Federation](#)
- [ELCA Faith and Society](#)
- [ELCA Publicly Engaged Church](#)
- [ELCA social statement, \*The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective\*](#)

### Articles

- ["War and Peace: A Review of Relevant Statements by Church Bodies Which Preceded the Founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America"](#)



# SESSION 2: WHAT ARE OUR CONTEXTUAL REALITIES TODAY?

Welcome to Session Two of the discussion sessions on the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding war, domestic and international security, and the Christian call to be peacemakers, entitled *For Peace in God's World*. The social statement can be viewed/printed [here](#).

The central aim of this second session is to compare the historical context of the 1995 social statement, *For Peace in God's World*, and where we are today. Participants will also be given some action steps they can perform on their own to further the reflection and learning of this session.

The major objectives of this session are:

1. Review the Cold War and its effects on people in the United States, as the social statement was a product of this specific context.
2. Explore the effects of global and domestic terrorism on us today.
3. Explore how individual and communal contexts affect experiences of peace and conflict.
4. Discuss how to discern God's grace and presence in challenging times.

## Before You Gather

Please read pgs. 6-9 of the social statement.

## I. Welcome and Introductions/Community Covenant

Do a reminder of names, pronouns, and content notifications. Take a moment to review the community covenant you agreed to in Session One.

## II. Opening Prayer

**“The times we live in can be challenging and even fearful, O God. Help us to see your presence among us, even in the midst of conflict and strife, so that we might come to find our peace in you. Amen.”**

## III. Introductory Activity

## IV. Video/Discussion

Video #2 can be viewed [here](#).

Post-Video Discussion Questions (You may not have time to discuss all these questions today. That is just fine! Prioritize authentic and faith-filled sharing over quantity of discussion points covered. Feel free to invite participants to contemplate remaining discussion questions between sessions.):

1. If you were alive during the Cold War, what remembrances do you have about how it affected your life and faith? What perspectives from other people had the greatest impact on you during this time?
2. If you were alive on Sept. 11, 2001, what remembrances do you have about how it affected your life and faith? What perspectives from other people had the greatest impact on you during this time?
3. *Optional:* After World War II and the Cold War, the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction became a major way not only to attain power and domination but also to keep the peace. In the shadow of the devastating effects of the U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the position of many world powers was, as Dr. Rodriguez notes, that “peace was to be achieved by perfecting the instruments of war.” How does this position interact with / affect your views on the gospel call to be peacemakers?
4. Like all of society’s ills, war and terrorism affect systemically marginalized people first and most profoundly. How does your social location impact your position as a peacemaker in the world?

### V. Bible Study

John 14: 25-29 (NRSV)

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

1. What do you think Jesus meant by saying, “I do not give to you as the world gives”?
2. When/how do you most experience this holy peace that Jesus describes?
3. *Optional:* Perhaps not surprisingly, immediately after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the first thing his followers did was argue. About whether they should keep quiet about what they witnessed, and what it is that actually happened. About whether being a Jesus follower was just for those who knew him when he was alive, or if others could be invited into the community. About whether following Jesus was exclusively something Jewish people could do, or if gentiles could be included too. The New Testament is thus full of letters from the Apostle Paul and other early leaders instructing new communities of Jesus-followers on how to think and behave. But the letter that ends the Christian scriptures, the book of Revelation, is a letter from a Jesus-follower named John (probably a different John than the one who wrote the gospel that we read from earlier in the session) that describes a vision he was given of God’s final reign of peace, when mourning and crying and pain will be no more and the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. What debate or conflict in the Christian community or the wider world do you most wish God’s healing for today?

### VI. Review and Reflect

1. Looking back on the first section of the social statement that you read last week and the section that you read for today's class, what aspects do you believe are still relevant to us today even though the document was written in 1995?
2. What aspects, if any, do you believe are outdated or no longer speak to our lived realities?
3. *Optional:* Last week you identified one personal barrier to experiencing God's holy peace that you encounter and prayed frequently throughout the week for God to help remove that barrier. What was that process like?
4. *Optional:* Throughout the Gospels, Jesus instructs his followers over and over again not to be afraid. But he also knew well that the world can be a very scary place. Are there any spiritual practices you employ in your life that help you access God's peace and comfort when you are afraid? Are there any you are interested in that you would like to try?

### VII. Preparation for Next Week

Please read "The Church, A Community For Peace" on pages 3-6 of the social statement. If you want to know more about global and domestic terrorism and how Christians might respond, read the ELCA's 2004 document *A Message On Global Terrorism*, available [here](#), and watch the June 2022 Senate Judiciary Hearing On The Rise Of Domestic Terrorism [here](#).

### VIII. Closing Hymn and Prayer

Sing "Here O Lord, Your Servants Gather" (*ELW* #530, optional)

Pray this prayer to close the session:

**"Lord of Life, you gather us from many cultures and contexts, and bind us together in the wider context of your immense love. May we always seek justice in your name and continually find hope in your eternal promises. Amen."**

### Learn more:

#### Resources

- [ELCA social message, "Community Violence"](#)
- ["STRIVE for Justice and Peace in All the Earth"](#)
- [Lombard Mennonite Peace Center](#)
- [Franciscan Peacemaking](#)

#### Articles

- ["Two Decades Later, the Enduring Legacy of 9/11"](#)
- ["How 9/11 Changed Peacebuilding"](#)
- ["Conflict and Hunger: How the War in Ukraine Will Affect Food Security" blog series from ELCA World Hunger](#)





## SESSION 3: HOW ARE THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIANS CALLED TO BE INSTRUMENTS OF GOD'S PEACE?

Welcome to Session Three of the discussion sessions on the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding war, domestic and international security, and the Christian call to be peacemakers, entitled *For Peace in God's World*. The social statement can be viewed/printed [here](#).

The central aim of this third session is to discuss how the church on earth can contribute to earthly peace. Participants will also be given some action steps they can perform on their own to further the reflection and learning of this session.

The major objectives of this session are:

1. Discuss our biblical and theological identity as the church on earth.
2. Explore the categories the social statement identifies as the calling of the church.
3. Identify the concepts behind just/unjust war and explore obstacles to peace for us as peacemakers in our contemporary world (sin).
4. Consider what it means to be a peacemaker as a Christian citizen.

### Before You Gather

Please read pgs. 3-6 of the social statement.

### I. Welcome and Introductions

Do a reminder of names, pronouns, and content notifications. Take a moment to review the community covenant you agreed to in Session One.

### II. Opening Prayer

**“Lord Jesus Christ, help us to be expressions of your love in the world, both as individual members of your body and as your whole body, the church. Empower us to share your love and peace with all whom we encounter. Amen.”**

### III. Introductory Activity

### IV. Video/Discussion

Video #3 can be viewed [here](#).

## Video/Discussion (cont'd)

Post-Video Discussion Questions (You may not have time to discuss all these questions today. That is just fine! Prioritize authentic and faith-filled sharing over quantity of discussion points covered.):

1. How has war touched your life? For example, have you or a loved one served in the armed forces? Has someone you know been wounded or injured in war? Have you worked in a defense industry or participated in a protest against a war?
2. When have you been afraid of war? How is your faith impacted by the ways in which war has touched your life?
3. On a national or global level, do you observe or experience the church acting in ways that are antithetical to our call to promote peace? How about on a local level? What are some specific ways that you observe or experience the church acting as an instrument of peace on a national or global level? How about on a local level?

## V. Bible Study

Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

1. A bit of historical context is necessary to understand the importance of the story frequently referred to as "The Good Samaritan." At the time, hatred between Jews and Samaritans was fierce and long-standing, its origins stretching all the way back to the days of the patriarchs. Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons, whose descendants became 12 tribes. Joseph, his favorite, was despised by the other brothers, and they attempted to kill him.

## Bible Study (cont'd)

However, God intervened and saved Joseph's life as well as those of the entire clan. Before Jacob died he gave Joseph a blessing in which he called him a "fruitful bough by a well," predicting the fertile land where Joseph's sons would eventually settle. It is this land that eventually became Samaria. Eventually Israel divided into two kingdoms, and the northern kingdom established its capital in Samaria. In 722 B.C., Assyria conquered Israel and took most of its people into captivity. The invaders then brought in gentile colonists to resettle the land. The foreigners brought with them their pagan idols, which the remaining Jews began to worship alongside the God of Israel.

Meanwhile the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon in about 586 B.C. Its people, too, were carried off into captivity. But 70 years later a remnant of 43,000 was permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The people who now inhabited the former northern kingdom — the Samaritans — vigorously opposed the repatriation. By the time of Jesus, the monotheistic Jews of the southern regions detested the mixed marriages and worship customs of their northern cousins, considering them ritually unclean. So the "Good Samaritan" was a figure who was widely reviled by local people.

How does knowing this history impact your understanding of this story? What aspects of the Samaritan's behavior speak to you of peacekeeping?

2. In this story Jesus makes a principled stand for a definition of "neighbor" that includes people whom the religious authorities least expect. What people least expected by religious and social authorities today do you believe the church is called to treat as neighbors?
3. *Optional:* Jesus teaches the lawyer that the Samaritan man in the story was the one truly behaving like a good neighbor and instructs him, "Go and do likewise." How do you interpret that, and in what ways do you see yourself living that out, now and in the future?

## VI. Review and Reflect

1. The just war theory describes the justification for a war that prevents greater harm. It includes: being based on a just cause, being waged with right intention and having a reasonable chance of success. In all cases a just war is waged to protect the innocent. For Martin Luther, discussions of war and peace were not mere hypotheticals — he lived in a period of significant armed conflict, in particular the fight against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the Peasants' War, which was, in many ways, a direct result of the reforms that Luther and his followers instituted. His opinions on war are complex, sometimes conflicting, and infused with raw emotion, sometimes even racial and religious hatred. Though he did come to believe that just war was possible, he also believed that citizens could be conscientious objectors if asked to do something that violated their standards. Do you believe just war is possible? Are your standards for assessing just war the same as those named in the social statement?

## Review and Reflect (cont'd)

2. Read through the baptism rite in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, focusing on the baptismal promises made by the person being baptized (or their parents on their behalf), their baptismal sponsors and the gathered congregation. Where in the rite do you see/experience God's peacekeeping work, and where do you see/experience the call for us to be peacekeepers in God's name?

## VII. Preparation for Next Week

Please read section 5C of the social statement, titled "A Politics of Cooperation" on pages 17-20 of the social statement. Invite participants who want to know more about diverse Christian responses to war to read a Veteran's Day sermon by a former soldier and current ELCA pastor [here](#), Mark Twain's "The War Prayer" [here](#), and a reflection on the faith of Colin Powell, Former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Secretary of State, and four-star general, [here](#).

## VIII. Closing Hymn and Prayer

Sing "O God, Our Help In Ages Past" (*ELW* #632, optional)

Pray this prayer to close the session:

*Leader: What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured.*

**All: We acknowledge that we have been tempted to seek only our own good, hear only our own truth, and acknowledge only our own suffering. Let us start along the road to justice and peace by holding the pain of our siblings as if it were our own. We pray that no more children are lost to indifference and violence.**

*Leader: Kindness is a mark of faith, and whoever has not kindness has not faith.*

**All: We pray for the courage to transform this beautiful planet into a place where people are not tormented by wars and not torn apart in senseless divisions. Together we will find the strength to resist hatred by our caring. Help us remember that it is our hands that shape the earth.**

*Leader: The exercise of religious duties will not atone for the fault of an abusive tongue.*

**All: We pray, without ceasing, that our words become actions that give life the shape of justice.**

*Leader: God is a unity and likes unity.*

**All: Help all persons to be able to not merely see the similarities between all people, but to feel less fear in the differences. If this can be our focus, perhaps our goal may be not for homogeneity, but for a true and joyful diversity.**

### Closing Hymn and Prayer (cont'd)

*Leader: God is a unity and likes unity.*

**All: Help all persons to be able to not merely see the similarities between all people, but to feel less fear in the differences. If this can be our focus, perhaps our goal may be not for homogeneity, but for a true and joyful diversity.**

*Leader: Anyone of you who sees wrong, attempt to undo it; and if you cannot, then speak against it with your tongue; and if you cannot do either, then abhor it in your heart, and this is the least of faith.*

**All: Every human life is precious to God and the human community. Each human path of faith is a sacred journey within life.**

*Leader: One is true who protects neighbors both present and absent.*

**All: We pray for all who have no sense of safety in their daily lives. We consider the hatred we witness and participate unwittingly in, and we pray for more than fear and tolerance to dominate people's thoughts and motivation in these trying days.**

### Learn more:

#### Resources

- ["Christian Approaches to War" handout](#)
- [Nonviolent Peaceforce](#)
- [Ploughshares Fund](#)
- [The Carter Center](#)
- [Veterans for Peace](#)
- [Peace Not Walls](#)
- [ELCA social message, "Human Rights"](#)
- [Luther's Small Catechism](#)
- [Luther's Large Catechism](#)
- [The Book of Concord \(for purchase\)](#)
- ["Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved"](#)

#### Articles

- ["War and Peace: A Review of Relevant Statements by Church Bodies Which Preceded the Founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America"](#)



# SESSION 4: WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PEACE?

Welcome to Session Four of the discussion sessions on the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding war, domestic and international security, and the Christian call to be peacemakers, entitled *For Peace in God's World*. The social statement can be viewed/printed [here](#).

The central aim of this session is to discuss some of the healthy aspects of a politics of world cooperation and peace. Participants will also be given some action steps they can perform on their own to further the reflection and learning of this session.

The major objectives of this session are:

1. Discuss the meaning of international cooperation.
2. Reflect on what the statement says about arms control and reduction.
3. Consider means of nonviolent/pacifist action to protest violence and injustice.

## Before You Gather

Please read section 5C (on pgs. 17-21) of the social statement.

## I. Welcome and Introductions

Do a reminder of names, pronouns, and content notifications. Take a moment to review the community covenant you agreed to in Session One.

## II. Opening Prayer

**“O God, open us to the power and possibility of daring relationships with you, each other, and with your beloveds throughout our communities, our nation, and the world. Empower us to support one another as we seek to be and to build peace. Amen.”**

## III. Introductory Activity

## IV. Video/Discussion

Video #4 can be viewed [here](#).

### Video/Discussion (cont'd.)

Post-Video Discussion Questions (You may not have time to discuss all these questions today. That is just fine! Prioritize authentic and faith-filled sharing over quantity of discussion points covered.):

1. Prior to watching the video, what did you know/think about the United Nations (UN) and its relationships with the ELCA and Lutheran World Federation?
2. What new information did you learn about the UN and/or its relationships with the ELCA and Lutheran World Federation?
3. Mr. Frado notes in the video that “the United Nations — first by adopting its charter in 1945, but since then through its various structures — has been the conceptual basis upon which international cooperation has been built, beginning after the devastation of World War II.” Because of the ways in which Lutheran theology informed and sometimes empowered the rise of Nazi ideology, many Lutherans around the world feel a particular call to the work of international peacekeeping (though it bears noting that the Lutheran World Federation did not repudiate Martin Luther’s hate-filled writings on Judaism and the Jewish people until 1983, with the ELCA following suit in 1994).

More recently, many Lutherans, especially here in the United States, have expressed a particular call to the work of anti-racist peacekeeping in the wake of Dylann Roof’s brutal murder of nine African Americans in Charleston, S.C., in 2015. Roof, a cradle Lutheran, sat in a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church for almost an hour and argued with congregants about Scripture before opening fire in hope of igniting a race war. Since that time many Lutherans in the U.S. and around the world have debated whether Christianity in general, and Lutheranism in particular, promotes bigotry and sectarian violence. Does your personal understanding of Lutheran history and theology shape your call to peacekeeping in particular ways? If so, how?

4. *Optional:* The social statement calls for reducing weapons of mass destruction and banning land mines and biological and chemical weapons. It also calls for treaties and agreements eliminating these weapons. Frado notes that the United States is one of 33 member states (out of the current 193) that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. In addition the U.S. has not ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Though the U.S. has ratified the United Nations International Chemical Weapons Convention treaty, efforts to eliminate chemical weapons stores in accordance with the treaty have largely stalled, and the U.S. continues to regularly employ chemical weapons as a domestic policing tool. These stances by the U.S. are hotly debated both here and around the world. What are your views on these controversial stances, and how are those views informed by your faith?

## V. Bible Study

Isaiah 2:2-5 (NRSV)

“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

1. Many people, when they first read Scripture in earnest, are surprised to find that the Bible contains so little content about what life will be like in the coming kingdom/kin-dom of God. But what it does contain is astoundingly powerful. Here, in this vision from Isaiah, we learn of God’s promise of a day when all the people of the world will stream before God’s mountain for Torah, holy instruction. What is one question you hope God answers, or one topic you hope to learn more about, in that time?
2. Isaiah’s vision promises that war will no longer exist when God’s reign is fully expressed. But it does say that God will continue to “judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples.” What do you think this mediating and arbitrating work might look like? How might this inform your own peacekeeping work?
3. *Optional:* The vision of formerly armed combatants beating their swords into plowshares is one of Scripture’s most enduring images. This image has been brought to life on several occasions by people seeking to work for peace in tangible ways:
  - After World War II, military surplus armored vehicles were sometimes converted into agricultural vehicles.
  - Several anti-war musicians have played guitars made from military surplus weapons, including Jamaican reggae star Peter Tosh.
  - Over 20 years the Megatons to Megawatts Program successfully converted 500 metric tons of fuel from Soviet-era nuclear warheads into fuel for nuclear power plants.
  - Nitrogen mustard — developed from the chemical weapon mustard gas, which was deployed in World War I — became the basis for the world’s first chemotherapy drug, mustine.
  - The Caliber Collection is jewelry made from recycled gun parts, with the proceeds used to fund future gun buyback programs.

What is the most powerful kind of positive transformational relationship you have ever seen or experienced?



## VI. Review and Reflect

1. The social statement calls for employing nonviolent means to protest violence and injustice. Since the statement was written, there has been increasing conversation about whether true nonviolence is possible in a deeply violent society, and about the differences between pacifism and nonviolence and between types of nonviolent philosophy and theology.

**Pacifism** is generally defined as opposition or resistance to war, militarism and violence. Pacifists generally reject just-war theories.<sup>1</sup>

Peace churches are Christian denominations that explicitly advocate pacifism. The term “historic peace churches” refers specifically to three church traditions: the Church of the Brethren, the Quakers (Religious Society of Friends) and the Mennonites (and other Anabaptists, such as the Amish, Hutterites and Apostolic Christian Church). The historic peace churches have, from their origins in the 16th century, always taken the position that Jesus was himself a pacifist who explicitly taught and practiced pacifism, and that his followers must do likewise. Pacifist churches vary on whether physical force can ever be justified in self-defense or protecting others.

Confusingly, the term **nonviolence** is sometimes used to refer to the personal practice of seeking to not cause harm to others under any condition, centered around the ancient Sanskrit principle of *Ahimsa*. Other times it is used to describe the overarching principle of not wishing for or prioritizing violence.<sup>2</sup> Within this second definition there are several key varieties of nonviolent philosophy, such as apocalyptic nonviolence, which seeks to extricate creation itself from the machinations of death, and realist nonviolence, which emphasizes that humans are always participating in violence as a consequence of living in society and must constantly make decisions about what causes the least harm.<sup>3</sup>

There are also many peace-seeking Christians who push back against the principles of pacifism and nonviolence, arguing that such principles frequently promote bigotry and support the wishes of the state and ultimately prove ineffective. Prominent anarchist scholar Peter Gelderloos argues that nonviolence is generally advocated by privileged people who “expect oppressed people, many of whom are people of color, to suffer patiently under an inconceivably greater violence, until such time as the Great White Father is swayed by the movement’s demands or the pacifists achieve that legendary ‘critical mass.’”<sup>4</sup>

Do any of these positions align with your own beliefs? If so, which? If not, what are the key points of resonance or disagreement?

<sup>1</sup> Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The Peace Movement in Britain, 1914-1919* (University of Wales Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Gene Sharp, *Sharp’s Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> David Cramer and Miles Wertnz, *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence* (Baker Publishing Group, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Boston: South End Press, 2007).

## Review and Reflect (cont'd.)

2. The anti-racist ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is widely known around the world, but his anti-war ministry is far less known. You can view a brief summary of Dr. King's work in protest of the Vietnam War [here](#) and listen to his seminal speech "Beyond Vietnam — A Time to Break Silence" [here](#). Are there any current wars or armed conflicts that you feel called to respond to today? Are there domestic conflicts to which you likewise feel called? How about personally contentious relationships?
3. The social statement lists several specific actions and approaches that can be used to bring about just and peaceful change when facing oppressive systems. Education about nonviolence is one type of action advocated. Another call is for personal and conscientious participation in nonviolent action toward greater justice. The statement also calls for pastoral support for both those who participate in armed combat and those who conscientiously take nonviolent action for peace.

The statement and video also emphasize the importance of peaceful civic involvement, such as:

- Volunteering with nongovernmental organizations that expose injustice.
- Advocating for environmental justice, the preservation of fundamental freedoms or the promotion and protection of other human rights.
- Community organizing.
- Networking for the common good.
- Humanitarian assistance to the victims of war and conflict.

While the impact individuals can have on these peacekeeping measures is significant, the potential impact is significant that entire congregations, synods, and denominations may have. Are there items on this list in which your congregation currently excels? What are some next steps you could take to widen your impact? Are there items to which you feel God might be calling the congregation now? What are some next steps you might take together to discern this?

## VII. Preparation for Next Week

Please read the fifth section "Tasks" of the social statement (pp 13-23). If you are interested in learning more about Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s ministry, listen to his speech at the first triennial gathering of the Luther League in 1961 [here](#).

## VIII. Closing Hymn and Prayer

Sing "Down By The Riverside" (African-American Spiritual, available [here](#), optional)

Pray this prayer to close the session:

**"Mighty God, continue to stir us up with your Spirit that we might live, united as seekers of your rebellious peace, in a fragmented world where complacency so often reigns. Amen."**

### Learn more:

#### Resources

- [“Tasks for Making, Building, and Keeping International Peace” handout](#)
- [Lutheran Office for World Community](#)
- [Faith Action Network](#)
- [Nonviolent Peaceforce](#)
- [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum](#)
- [ELCA Federal Chaplaincy Ministries](#)
- [ELCA Care for Returning Veterans](#)
- [ELCA Muslim Relations](#)
- [ELCA Jewish Relations](#)
- [ELCA Resolution on Conflict in the Middle East](#)
- [ELCA social message, “The Israeli/Palestinian Conflict”](#)
- [ELCA Inter-Religious Policy Statement](#)

#### Articles

- [“World War II’s Spiritual Legacies”](#)
- [“Reinhold Neibuhr and the Second World War”](#)
- [“The Reformation at 500: Grappling With Martin Luther’s Anti-Semitic Legacy”](#)
- [“Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community”](#)
- [“Why Did Luther Want the Qur’an to Be Published?”](#)
- [“Faith-Based Advocacy With Today’s U.S. Government”](#)
- [“Ukraine: Lutheran Churches Around the World Call for Peace and Support”](#)



# SESSION 5: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOSTER A CULTURE OF PEACE AND JUSTICE?

Welcome to Session Five of the discussion sessions on the social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding war, domestic and international security, and the Christian call to be peacemakers, entitled For Peace in God's World. The social statement can be viewed/printed [here](#).

The central aim of this session is to focus on the values involved in creating a culture of peace and justice. Participants will also continue developing action steps they can take in the days, weeks, and months ahead to live out their calls as peacemakers.

The major objectives of this session are:

1. Reflect on how we might seek unity in diversity in our contemporary context.
2. Seek understanding on how peace promotes respect for human rights.
3. Consider how peace and economic justice are related.
4. Reflect on the major lessons taken from participating in these sessions and possible next steps within the congregation.
5. Consider means of non-violent/pacifist action to protest violence and injustice.

## Before You Gather

Please read section Five of the social statement (on pgs. 13-23).

## I. Welcome and Introductions

Do a reminder of names, pronouns, and content notifications. Take a moment to review the community covenant you agreed to in Session One.

## II. Opening Prayer

The World Peace Prayer is an adaptation of a mantra from the Hindu Upanishads by Mother Theresa and Jain Monk, Satish Kumar. It was designed to be able to be used by all people of all languages and beliefs. Since its public release in 1981, it has spread around the globe and made appearances in prayer books and hymnals of many faiths, including Jewish, Catholic, Anglican, Hindu, and Muslim sources. Each day at noon people of all faiths and none recite it, seeking to form a wave of prayer and hope rippling each day around the globe.

### World Peace Prayer

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.  
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.  
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.  
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe. Amen.

### III. Introductory Activity

### IV. Video/Discussion

Video #5 can be viewed [here](#).

Post-Video Discussion Questions (You may not have time to discuss all these questions today. That is just fine! Prioritize authentic and faith-filled sharing over quantity of discussion points covered.):

1. In the video Rev. Reumann notes that the church is called to be “a disturbing presence,” uncovering injustice and denouncing harmful beliefs and actions, but that she is “sometimes approached by Lutherans who are concerned about getting involved in advocacy because they are worried that talking about social issues and speaking up about public policy would be divisive or disruptive to the peace in their congregations. Some state that the church should ‘stick to the gospel’ and not wade into affairs outside of our concern.” Though this congregational “peace” is temporary and illusory, we might be tempted to prioritize it over the more significant and longer-lasting peace that God instructs us to seek. How do you respond when concerns over “niceness” or expectations around “keeping the peace” threaten to derail important conversations and peacekeeping work? If this is something you struggle with, identify a role model who excels at navigating these uncomfortable situations.
2. Peace and economic justice go hand in hand because inequality tends to fuel conflict. Because of this, nurturing a culture of peace means focusing on root causes of inequality such as: low living wages, unequal educational opportunities, ableism, systemic racism, the prison system and oppression based on gender or sexuality. Where do you see or experience these issues in the life of this congregation and/or the surrounding community? What people are most directly affected? Make a plan to reach out to them so you can offer an apology, a listening ear and your willingness to hear what they need from the community to experience equity and justice.
3. *Optional:* Rev. Reumann notes that promoting human rights is a critical foundation for peace and that Lutherans have done so by advocating for just immigration policy and providing aid and care to refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers. In particular Lutherans are known around the world for their work through Lutheran World Relief, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and the ELCA’s AMMPARO program (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). What do you know about the history of immigration in your family? In your congregation? What next steps do you believe God is calling your congregation toward in its peacekeeping work with the people named above?

## V. Bible Study

Colossians 3:14-17 (NRSV)

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

## VI. Review and Reflect

1. The social statement lists several specific actions and approaches that can be used to bring about just and peaceful change when facing oppressive systems. It advocates education about nonviolence. It calls for people to personally and conscientiously participate in nonviolent action for greater justice and for pastors to support both those who participate in armed combat and those who conscientiously take nonviolent action for peace.

The statement and video also emphasize the importance of peaceful civic involvement, such as:

- Fostering a dynamic vision of difference in unity.
- Promoting respect for human rights.
- Countering and transforming attitudes that encourage violence.
- Strengthening the will and ability to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Insisting that peace and economic justice belong together.
- Supporting just arrangements to regulate the international economy.
- Revitalizing economic assistance to poorer nations.
- Evaluating carefully the balance between legitimate security needs and other priority uses of government revenues and reducing military expenditures whenever necessary.
- Strengthening international cooperation.
- Improving structures of common security.
- Giving high priority to arms control and reduction.
- Controlling and reducing the arms trade.
- Advocating for participatory and accountable political structures within nations.
- Encouraging nongovernmental organizations and their work for peace.
- Encouraging and supporting nonviolent action.
- Caring for the uprooted.

While the impact individuals can have on these national and international peacekeeping measures may be noteworthy, the potential impact that entire congregations, synods, and denominations can have is multiplied. Are there items on this list in which your congregation currently excels? What are some next steps you could take to widen your impact? Are there items to which you feel God might be calling the congregation now? What are some next steps you might take together to discern this?

## Review and Reflect (cont'd)

2. *Optional:* In the first session you brainstormed a list of words you associate with peace and words you associate with war or strife. Take another look at the list. Is there anything on it that you have reconsidered or want to revisit?
3. In her role Rev. Reumann often experiences people asking for guidance on how to reach out to one another across the differences exposed by deep political polarization. She reminds us that we are called to be peacemakers who listen to one another and seek understanding, because in doing so we participate in God's shalom and desire for the wholeness of humanity.

Despite political polarization and social division, there is still a great yearning to listen, to understand, to connect with the divine spark that exists in all people and the entire created order. How has your participation in these discussion sessions affected your interest/ability to honor diversity while holding firm convictions?

4. Brainstorm how, over the next week, the next month or the next six months, you will implement at least one thing you learned in our time together in (a) your personal life, (b) your work / school / other sphere of influence and (c) here in the congregation. Schedule a meal with your fellow learners approximately six months from now to discuss how you're progressing with these goals and offer each other support and encouragement.

## VII. Evaluation

## VIII. Sending Liturgy

*Leader: Let us pray ...*

**All: O God, you are the Alpha and Omega of peace. Through your Holy Spirit you have called us to live now into the extraordinary peace of your coming kingdom. Empower us to be your representatives in the world, building peace in our church, our communities, our world and ourselves. Amen.**

*Leader: We give you thanks, O God, for the gift of your creation, intended from the start to be experienced in communion with you.*

Participants: Yet we recognize our human sinfulness, which separates us from you and each other.

**All: We are thankful for the reconciling gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was sent to repair the rift between us.**

*Leader: We give you thanks, O God, for the gift of your church on earth, created to recognize our unity in diversity.*

### **Sending Liturgy (cont'd.)**

Participants: Help us, as your church and as individuals, to be your reconciling, serving and unifying presence here on earth.

**All: We celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, which makes us yours and unites us in Jesus' name.**

*Leader: Help us to recognize our responsibility to be peacemakers, as individuals and as your church on earth.*

Participants: Help us to do this work in the world and in our hearts, and to foster a culture of peace in our communities and throughout the world.

**All: We live in an age seemingly dominated by hate, injustice, war and suffering, yet we trust you to fulfill your divine promises of eternal peace. We thank you for allowing us to participate in enacting these promises, and we celebrate the diversity that reflects your love. Unite us now and always in grateful joy and active hope as we make our way through the world together. Amen.**

Psalm 46 (NRSV)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Sing "We Shall Overcome" (*This Far by Faith* #213), optional.

Mark one another with the sign of the cross (*with or without holy water*).

**All: Empowered by the Holy Spirit, let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.**



**Learn more:**

**Resources**

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#)
- [ELCA social message, “Immigration”](#)
- [Lutheran World Relief](#)
- [Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs](#)
- [ELCA AMMPARO](#)
- [ELCA social message, “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States”](#)
- [Plum Village](#)

**Articles**

- [“Called to Be a Daily Peacemaker”](#)
- [“White Niceness As the Enemy of Black Liberation”](#)
- [“Lutheran Legacy of Peacemaking Series”](#)
- [“What Is the ‘Exchange of Peace’?”](#)

**Resources Specifically for Youth**

- [Lutheran World Federation Peace Messengers Training](#)
- [\*Lutheran Youth Ministry As Peace Education\*](#)
- [Lutheran Youth Organization Peace Statement](#)
- [“Lutheran Youth Continue to Focus on Peace in 2022”](#)
- [“Montessori Peace Corner — Powerful Way to Resolve Conflicts”](#)
- [“Pillars of Peace: Tips for Peacemaking in the Early Childhood Classroom”](#)
- [Bread Houses Network](#)

### Bonus Activity

Consider organizing a Peace Sunday in your congregation, involving your pastor, Sunday school, worship and music committee, social ministry committee, Women of the ELCA chapter and other groups.

Potential activities include:

1. Planning an intergenerational Sunday school hour focused on peace.
2. Picking a Sunday when one or more lectionary texts relate to peace. Ask the pastor and worship committee to emphasize peace in the prayers, hymns and sermon.
3. Have one or more members of the discussion group provide a “Temple Talk” on what they learned (this can also happen outside the context of your Peace Sunday).
4. Invite local residents (especially those of other faiths) to attend and speak about their need for peace and their own peacemaking work.
5. Organize a coffee hour and peace fair after worship, inviting your youth group, Sunday school, social ministry committee, Women of the ELCA chapter and other groups to contribute a display about peace.
6. Highlight specific opportunities for peacemaking activities. You may wish to invite community groups working for peace.

Historically, Christian approaches to the issue of war have fallen into three categories: holy war or crusade, pacifism and just war. The crusade approach is based on the conviction that God sanctions war when the enemy represents great evil. A crusade war is therefore viewed as a struggle between good and evil, and in the pursuit of total conquest, any means may be justifiable. This approach to war is viewed by the ELCA and most Christian churches as incompatible with Christian teaching.

For Peace in God's World continues the historic Lutheran perspective on justifiable war though it acknowledges the concerns about its viability in the modern age. The statement raises up the important witness of pacifists in the church today. Just war doctrine and pacifism are complex but the following chart seeks to make some rudimentary comparisons between the two approaches.

### Just War and Pacifism: Contrasting Approaches to War

(Source: *War: A Primer for Christians* by Joseph L. Allen, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991. Allen offers a concise description of the just war teaching as well as other options Christians have followed.)

#### Theological/Biblical Basis

**Just War:** God's creation is beset by persisting and often destructive conflicts in human life. It is wrong to kill to save one's own life; it is our duty to act to help other people.

**Pacifism:** Jesus teaching, life and death show us the way of Christian love. In particular, Jesus instructed his followers not to resist an evildoer (Mt. 5:39) and to love their enemies (Mt. 5:44).

#### Historical Notes

**Just War:** A doctrine developed by Ambrose and Augustine in the late fourth and early fifth century after the Roman Empire had become officially Christian and faced external threats. The criteria for justifiable war were further developed by Thomas Aquinas and others in the late Middle Ages.

**Pacifism:** Pacifism was the predominant position of the Christian church until 312 CE and the end of Roman persecution of Christians. Since then, pacifism has persisted as a distinctive strand in Christian ethics, within Roman Catholicism and within the Protestant tradition in the historic peace churches (e.g., Quakers, Mennonites) as well as in other denominations.

#### Core Convictions Held in Common

All people are of worth in God's sight, including our enemies. A Christian approach to the issue of war must be guided by our understanding of Christian love and the duty placed upon us by such love. The presumption in a conflict situation is always that disputes should be settled peaceably.

#### Core Convictions That Are Different

**Just War:** Wars may be justifiable if they are fought by a rightly constituted authority for the purpose of protecting people and restoring a just and peaceful order in society. Such wars must meet certain criteria (see below), precluding revenge and requiring mercy to the defeated.

**Pacifism:** War cannot be an expression of Christian love and is incompatible with being a follower of Jesus. "Pragmatic" pacifists emphasize that nonviolence achieves better results than violence in conflict situations. "Witness" pacifists insist that Christian refusal to use power violently is a required witness to the love of Jesus Christ.

#### Critique

**Just War:** The just war criteria are applied infrequently prior to war and are used as a rationalization for government action. The just war criteria can no longer be met because of the destructiveness of modern weaponry.

**Pacifism:** "Pragmatic" pacifists do not recognize the depth of human sin. "Witness" pacifists have defined what constitutes Christian love too narrowly; they do not engage in the give and take of politics concerning war and peace.

## Just War Criteria

### Criteria for resorting to warfare are:

- 1. Justifiable Cause**  
Justifiable causes are to protect people from unjust attack, to restore rights that have been wrongly taken away, and to defend or reestablish a just political order.
- 2. Legitimate Authority**  
Decisions to employ military measures must be made by those who have legitimate authority in a nation or the international community.
- 3. Last Resort**  
Before resorting to war, all peaceful alternatives must first be exhausted.
- 4. Declaration of War Aims**  
Those who decide to use military force must make known what their proposed action is meant to accomplish.
- 5. Proportionality**  
Is the probable good to be attained and evil avoided greater than the anticipated evil effects of military action or inaction? A reasonable calculation of probably consequences must be made.

- 6. Reasonable Chance of Success**  
A case must be made that the military means chosen will likely accomplish the stated aims. The use of military force should never be a futile act.
- 7. Right Intention**  
War must not be waged for reasons of hate or revenge. War should never be an end in itself, but a means to bring a just peace.

### Just war criteria for conducting war are:

- 1. The Principle of Discrimination**  
This principle prohibits direct and intentional attacks on noncombatants.
- 2. Proportionality**  
Within the limits set by the principle of discrimination, military action must be conducted so that objectives are achieved by the least destructive means possible.

In considering the possibility of revolution in situations of structured injustice, some Christians use a version of the just war criteria. The criterion of "legitimate authority" is interpreted to refer to an organization that convincingly represents the people.

