

UU Peacemaking Congregational Study Action Program - Small Group Session Plan

Session 4 - The Many Faces of Violence

Chalice/Candle Lighting

Opening Words:

[In a discussion about war and violence in El Salvador, a peasant commented:]...“You gringos are always worried about violence done with machine guns and machetes. But there is another kind of violence you should be aware of too. I used to work on the hacienda,” he went on. “My job was to take care of the *dueno*’s dogs. I gave them meat and bowls of milk, food that I couldn’t give my own family. When the dogs were sick, I took them to the veterinarian in Suchitoto or San Salvador. When my children were sick, the *dueno* gave me his sympathy but no medicine as they died. To watch your children die of sickness and hunger while you can do nothing is a violence to the spirit. We have suffered silently for too many years. Why aren’t you gringos concerned about that kind of violence?”

from Witness to War (Bantam, 1984) pps. 260-261

Check-in/Sharing

Discussion: Structural violence is the term often used for violence that is not physical in nature, that comes from oppressive aspects of social institutions (for example, from institutionalized racism or economic injustice). Have you ever personally encountered structural violence? Perhaps you can recall a film in which you witnessed it or a book in which you read about it?

Structural violence can be related to being invisible. Homeless people have said that not being seen by others is painful. Can you think a time when you experienced something that allowed you to see someone differently? Some people have said working in a soup kitchen has given them such a moment. Service sometimes gives us a chance for an authentic encounter with others that we might not otherwise have.

Structural violence comes in many forms, but often relates to privilege or power. Can you think examples of how race, class, or gender might contribute to structural violence? How about disability? Sexual identity? Age? Can you think of some examples of structural violence in your community?

Structural violence and physical violence is often about dignity. It is possible to suffer structural violence and not allow it to undermine your dignity. Can you think of an example? Do you recall images of the sit-ins during the civil rights movement when patrons or waitresses at lunch counters would pour food over the heads of those refused service? How did they respond?

Select the topic and location for the next meeting

Check out/Likes and Wishes

Closing Words:

“Preparing dinner, washing dishes, the baby’s bath, my grandma’s flowers, they all come first, so often the water containers are empty, when I want to wash my hair and it’s too late to drive the ten miles to buy more. I’ve never been embarrassed about being poor. That is our daily bread. But living without water is more difficult. I am ashamed when I have to go to school without being able to wash my hair for several days.” An eleven-year old Mexican-American girl at a 1996 legislative hearing in Austin, Texas about the lack of running water in border communities.

Closing Ritual/Extinguish Chalice

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