

Small Group Ministry Session Plan

Just War

(by Sharon Welch, Jim Nelson, and Charlie Clements)

IMPORTANT NOTE:

These SGM topics are a bit different from the ones with which you are most familiar. Right away you'll notice that they are more educational, and contain more material (to be read in advance) than most SGM topics. We included this material as a matter of accessibility --- to provide everyone with a common language base regardless of their background, knowledge base, or access to libraries.

The questions these topics ask may also require more than one SGM meeting to complete. This may not be new to many of you (we've heard about the "Mothers" topic taking six sessions!) We encourage you to take your time and not to rush the material or the topics.

Chalice/Candle Lighting

Opening Words:

“Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence. In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the reward and challenges of political and economic liberty. In a world that is safe, people will be able to make their own lives better. We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.” George W. Bush, National Security Strategy of the United States, September 17, 2002.

“Empires may be born by force but they are not long sustained by it. They are sustained by a capacity to peddle a better idea than one’s adversaries and to practice what you preach, to resolve conflicts equitably. . . We knew that during the cold war. We knew we needed friends; we knew we had a better idea – democracy, freedom, human rights and respect for the rule of law. Debate as we will whether the United States today seeks empire and whether, if it does, that quest will be just, what is beyond dispute is that we have forgotten what for so long we knew. Moralism mixed with hubris driven by repression and force leads to resentment, resistance, and rebellion.” William F. Schulz, Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights Nation Books: 2003.

Check-in/Sharing

Discussion:

How do we best create, defend, preserve and extend peace? Advocates of just war claim that in some situations, military action is necessary to establish and sustain an equitable and enduring peace.

1. Give examples of wars that you, and/or members of your community, regard as being just. Give examples of wars that you, and/or members of your community believe to be unjust. What are the criteria used to determine whether or not the use of military force is warranted? Compare the criteria used by you or others with traditional just war theory. [see addendum] What criteria do you think should be used to evaluate the necessity and legitimacy of military action?

2. There are significant policy questions being raised about the nature of just war.

According to traditional just war theory, military force should only be used in response to a direct attack. Some however, now argue that in the face of terrorist threats and the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction, that pre-emptive action may be warranted.

Discuss the following statements from the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, as developed by the Bush administration:

“The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack....”
(15)

“To support preemptive options, we will:

- build better, more integrated intelligence capabilities to provide timely, accurate information on threats, wherever they may emerge;
- coordinate closely with allies to form a common assessment of the most dangerous threats; and
- continue to transform our military forces to ensure our ability to conduct rapid and precise operations to achieve decisive results.

The purpose of our actions will always be to eliminate a specific threat to the United States or our allies and friends. The reasons for our actions will be clear, the force measured, and the cause just.” (2002 NSS, 16)

3. Just war theory was developed to address conflicts between states. Can it be applied as well to counter-insurgency warfare?

Discuss the “representative paradoxes of counterinsurgency” as described in the just released draft Army and Marine corps field manual, [see below] and describe their ramifications for just conduct in warfare.

The Army and Marine Corps field manual draws on the recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, and is greatly influenced by the experiences of soldiers: “Colonel Crane [the director of the military history institute at the Army War College and one of the writers of the new doctrine] said that “In many ways, this is a bottom-up change...The young soldiers who had been through Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and now Iraq and Afghanistan, understood why we need to do this.” These are the nine “representative paradoxes of counterinsurgency operations:”

“The more you protect your force, the less secure you are.

If military forces stay locked up in compounds, they lose touch with the people, appear to be running scared and cede the initiative to the insurgents.

The more force is used, the less effective it is.

Using substantial force increases the risk of collateral damage and mistakes, and increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda.

The more successful counterinsurgency is, the less force that can be used and the more risk that must be accepted.

As the level of insurgent violence drops, the military must be used less, with stricter rules of engagement, and the police force used more.

Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction.

Often an insurgent carries out a terrorist act or guerilla raid with the primary purpose of causing a reaction that can then be exploited.

The best weapons for counterinsurgency do not shoot.

Often dollars and ballots have more impact than bombs and bullets.

The host nation’s doing something tolerably is better than our doing it well.

Long-term success requires the establishment of viable indigenous leaders and institutions that can carry on without significant American support.

If a tactic works this week, it might not work next week; if it works in this province, it might not work in the next.

Insurgents quickly adapt to successful counterinsurgency practices. The more effective a tactic is, the faster it becomes out of date.

Tactical success guarantees nothing.

Military actions by themselves cannot achieve success.

Most of the important decisions are not made by generals.

Successful counterinsurgency relies on the competence and judgment of soldiers and marines at all levels.”

Michael R. Gordon, “Military Hones a New Strategy on Insurgency,” The New York Times, October 5, 2006, A1, A19

4. What (if anything) has changed in your beliefs or thinking from engaging in this SGM topic, and what caused the change?

Closing words

“ ‘It is a sin to fight in a spirit of vengeance, but not if it is for love of justice.’ Who does not think his own cause just?” Erasmus, The ‘Adages of Erasmus: A Study with Translations, by Margaret Mann Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1964, p. 337.

Addendum: Resources to be used in workshop

Definitions of just war theory

A Very Brief Summary of Just War Criteriology – developed by Michael Hogue

The Just War tradition(s) articulates a set of moral criteria that provide a framework for determining when war can justly be waged and how conduct in war can be justly constrained. Moral abhorrence to war is presumed, along with the idea that sometimes war is the lesser of evils. The criteriology for the Just War tradition basically encompasses two areas, justification to wage war (Jus ad bellum) and just conduct in war (Jus in bello).

A. Among the stipulations within the justification to wage war category, attention is given to:

1. Just Cause: a cause for war is only just when it is motivated as a response to a grave public evil, such as self defense against physical aggression;
2. Comparative Justice: on the presumption that there is no simple division between innocent and guilty, this criterion stipulates that a cause for war can only be just if the injustice suffered on one side of the conflict significantly outweighs that on the other;
3. Legitimate Authority: war can only be declared by a legitimate authority, usually identified as the sovereign of a state;
4. Right Intention: cause to wage war is only justifiable if it issues from attempt to redress massive wrong to common good.

B. Among the stipulations within the conduct in war category, attention typically is given to:

1. Discrimination: non-combatants and civilian infrastructures cannot be justly targeted
2. Proportionality: strength of force cannot exceed force of inflicted original wrongdoing.