Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

Violence

A Guide for Leadership Teams

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth—Violence
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Violence

On any given night, watching the local news shows us that the world we live in is a violent place. Yet as the people of God, we are called to follow Jesus Christ's teachings to bring peace to all of God's people. Sometimes this seems to be impossible. Our cities and our communities seem intent on destroying themselves and each other. Where will it end?

The purpose of this study of violence is to help us to understand how violence begins, what Scripture says about it, and what we can do to stop it. Jesus taught us to follow the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" *(Luke 6:31).*

Introduction

Violence is one of a series of modules developed for Older Youth who are in senior high school. The curriculum is based on the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant found in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The vision for the curriculum also includes the development of leadership skills for Christian young people. Youth need to be leaders of their own lives by following Christ's example and making choices that are best for them.

The leadership of the group will come from a team that includes youth and adults. It is recommended that leadership teams of youth and adults meet in advance, perhaps on retreat, to choose and plan for the various areas of study.

This Guide

This guide contains nine sessions, seven of which provide maximum opportunity for choice. Two copies of the guide will be helpful in sharing responsibility for leadership.

The first session, "Setting Goals," is designed for planning. It begins with a "Point of Contact"-three Questions from the Catechism-that are related to God's expectations of us in our behavior towards others. The planning session begins, as do all other sessions, begins with prayer and the study of Scripture to focus the experience on the presence of God in our lives.

The activities in **Session 1** are designed to develop the leadership skills of communication, trust, and relationship. Specific help such as Steps for Planning and the Planning Reference Guide is included to facilitate the planning effort for all members of the leadership team. Because pre-planning is not always possible, the first session can also serve as a tool for involving all participants in the choices to be made.

At this time the group will choose youth leaders and develop plans for study of the other eight sessions. In this process, adults will serve as

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facilitators for youth-directed planning.

Sessions 2 - 8 examine the issues of *Violence* through these individual topics:

In the World
In War
In Our Nation
In the Media
In the Community
In the Schools
Finding Safety

Each session begins with prayer, Scripture, and a Personal Story. The Personal Stories, written from the perspective of a young person, focus on the heart of the topic for that session. The group may choose-from a variety of themes and activities developed from those themes-the ways in which they want to interact with the materials.

A study of issues and Scripture often leads to more than just awareness of an issue. **Session 9** is designed to help youth bring together what they have learned and make decisions about the actions they will take in response. This may be done as individuals or as a group. The final activities include plans for liturgical celebrations, social action, and just plain fun.

Other Modules in the Episcopal Curriculum for Older Youth

Diversity	*Relationships*	*Spirituality*	*Violence*
Peace and Justice	*Success and Failure*	*Difficult Decisions*	*Treasuring Our Gifts*
Who Is God?	*What Am I Called to Be?*	*What Do Others Believe?*	*What Is Evil?*

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How to Use These Materials

1. DECISIONS ARE MADE BY LEADERSHIP TEAM

This curriculum is based on a model that requires a team of people to lead the sessions and the planning process. The assumption is that this team will consist of several teenagers who will take the key leadership roles and adults who will provide resources and support.

Each issue-based session develops three themes using a specific passage from the Bible as a focus for study. Suggestions for activities, discussion topics, and questions are provided for the three themes. Teams can decide to focus on one or two of the themes or take a broader look using all three.

The members of this team may change during the year as new issues are introduced or the needs of the group change. Leadership skills introduced throughout the module are for the whole group of youth and adults.

2. BUILDING A YOUTH-LED TEAM

The best way to function well as a team is to spend eight to ten hours together before the year begins. The team may decide to meet several times or go on retreat for this purpose. Here is a way to set up an effective team.

- Identify four to six teens who are leaders in school, church, and other settings. Choose two to four adults who are leaders but who also know how to follow.
- Spend time together getting to know each other and building community with one another. This can best be done in a retreat setting by sharing prayer time and meal times as well as planning times.
- Share faith stories in whatever way seems appropriate and comfortable.
- Review all of the materials in the chosen module and begin to make some plans about how best to use this resource. If time permits, it may also be a good time to make plans for future modules. Be aware that new leadership may emerge during the coming year.
- Decide on a plan and delegate responsibilities for planning, leading sessions, and communicating.
- Meet with the entire group, share your plans, and get their input.
- Finalize the plan and begin.
- Be prepared to revise your plan if circumstances change.

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3. CORE COMPONENTS

Each session includes the same basic information. Optional activities and sections change as needed in response to the issue and themes. These components are:

- **Session design**. Three elements are essential for every session. 1) A beginning prayer, chosen from *The Book of Common Prayer*, is offered as a way to center the group's time together. 2) The heart of the session is the three themes and activities that help the participants to gain deeper understandings of the issue. 3) The dismissal brings everyone together as the time ends and sends them out to do God's work in the world.

- **Objective.** A learning objective is found at the top of page one of every session. The objective guides the team in determining what is to occur as a result of the time spent with this material.

- **Scripture.** With a note to "Begin here," youth are asked to look at passages from the Bible that relate to the issue. Three different pieces of Scripture provide three different views of the issue. Most sessions include both Old and New Testament references.

- **Commentary.** Each passage from the Bible is briefly explained in a paragraph following the biblical quotation. Leaders who wish to know more may explore larger works such as *The Interpreter's Bible*, a Bible commentary, or a Bible dictionary.

- **Personal Stories.** Except for the initial planning session, all of the sessions include a Personal Story. Typically it is a story of an experience that youth encounter as a part of their daily lives. In telling these stories to each other the youth will be able to examine their own experiences and be more aware of the feelings of others.

- **Questions.** Suggestions for questions to be used as discussion starters are offered throughout the sessions. An icon easily identifies the questions.

- **Skill Building.** Because a specific goal of these materials is to help youth recognize their strengths and improve their leadership skills, certain skills are emphasized in each session. These will be developed through the optional activities.

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- **Optional Activities.** A goal of the *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* is to offer a wide range of options that allow flexibility within groups and meet the needs of different types of groups. Leadership teams are invited to use their own creativity in choosing other games or activities they enjoy. The following options will be available throughout various sessions:

1. **Creative activities** to stimulate the artistic talents of teens.

2. **Games** to build trust and skills as well as explore issues.

3. **Movies, TV Shows, and Print Media** that illustrate the theme presented in today's time.

4. **Literature**, books, and short stories, that develop the theme as well as those created by the individual members of a group.

5. **Music** from *The Hymnal 1982* and from contemporary and Christian resources relevant to the topic.

6. **Field trips** to places that provide an enhancement of the theme.

7. **Service projects** that arise from the themes to carry the mission of the church beyond the walls of the classroom or the church.

8. **Posters.** A set of six posters representative of the themes within each issue are provided separately. The posters are designed to stimulate thoughts, discussion, and reflection on the various concepts.

4. SAMPLE SESSION

After the leadership team has met and the planned study of the module, the group begins to meet. A model for a session might look something like this:

1. **Planning for a session.** The leadership team has selected Theme 2 as the way they wish to approach Session 2. One or two members of the group are assigned to be leaders. They prepare for the group to participate in several of the discussions and activities for Theme 2. Any necessary speakers or other outside arrangements are made in advance.

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2. **Begin with Prayer.** Starting together with prayer is a way to help the group focus their attention. A prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer* is printed above Theme 1. Leaders may use this prayer, choose another, or compose one of their own. The prayer can be said by one person, or everyone can pray together. This may also be a time for sharing of any concerns of those present or for those absent.

3. **Scripture.** These materials are unique because they look at issues through specific passages in the Bible. The leaders read the designated Scripture and use the questions to talk about the relationship of the Scripture to the theme.

4. **Activities.** The group participates in one or more of the activities furnished in the guide. The choice will depend on the interests of the group and the time frame of the gathering.

5. **Preparing for Next Time.** A few minutes before the end of the time, announce any coming events and give leaders for the next session an opportunity to give a preview.

6. **Dismissal.** Just as the start of time together needs prayer for focus, so does the closing. The participants share any concerns to be held in prayer during the coming days and close with the "Dismissal," also printed above the beginning of Theme 1.

5. SOME GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

A key to the effectiveness of these materials is to help the group learn how to talk with one another about the issues that affect their lives and faith.

Sharing of individual stories. People are given the opportunity to share the things that are important in their own lives. This will become easier as the group members grow in trust for each other. Sometimes this may be difficult or impossible for an individual. This person needs to be allowed to pass if they wish.

Issues, themes, stories. There are many interesting topics and stories that serve as a "launching pad" for rich and deep discussion. Choose those that will engage those who participate.

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Active learning. There are many opportunities for trips, visits, and other activities to bring great energy into your study. Your team can decide what works best for your group and plan times for these events to take place.

Speakers and guests. There are many people in your community with fascinating stories. The team can find the right people who will have an influence on your group.

Statement to the church. Teens have valuable things to say about and to their church. This can be incorporated into the program around any issue that the members of your group feel moved to respond to.

Here are some simple guidelines that can be used to facilitate sharing and community building. It is a good idea to discuss these guidelines with your team and add or delete suggestions from your group.

GUIDE LINES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Make and commitment to all sessions (continuity).

2. Include everyone, even yourself, in the conversation.

3. Be real—be honest.

4. Send "I" messages—share feelings.

5. Talk about your own experiences.

6. Listen with great respect.

7. Listen, understand, but do not fix.

8. Be specific.

9. Respect confidentiality.

10. Allow the Spirit, within and beyond, to work in this group.

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6. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The setting where your session takes place is crucial to the success of your program. In short, the less it is like a classroom the more you will be able to facilitate learning, sharing, and growth. Pay attention to the environment you are providing, as this will have a great impact on the learning process. Consider three possibilities to create the desired environment.

- **The youth room.** One good alternative is a room at the church designated for young people and arranged with comfortable chairs, couches, etc. This provides a comfortable and inviting atmosphere.

- **Meeting in a home.** Holding meetings at someone's home near the church can be a great asset. This provides a casual, comfortable setting that usually enhances the process. This may cause some problems but it is well worth investigating. Also, people may be more open to making their homes available if it is done on a rotating basis. Don't rule out this possibility without carefully considering it.

- **Gathering in a restaurant.** A restaurant can provide a wonderful opportunity for a meal, fellowship, and learning. Often young people who wouldn't come to the church will feel comfortable in this setting. Of course, this will raise some financial considerations, but these are not impossible. You could also consider meeting at a restaurant on an occasional basis as a way of promoting outreach and for celebration.

For Members of the Leadership Team

A General Philosophy of a Teaching Ministry

God made all people with great intelligence, skills, talents, feelings, opinions, and ideas regardless of their age. All people are growing in their faith journey. Two key words in working with others are value and respect. Never assume that you know more than they do or that your or their experience in life gives either one more value. Instead, enter into a learning adventure, side by side. You will discover as much as you impart. You will be impacted as much as you impact others. Keep an open mind and heart to all that is said, felt, and shared; and experience God doing greater things than you could pray or ask for.

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Who are Older Youth?

Volumes have been written on the lives of teens and adolescent development. The purpose here is to give the leadership team some keys about what young people are like. Youth who are on the leadership team may agree or disagree. A lively conversation about these issues will enhance the ability of the team to work together.

Characteristics of Older Youth:

- **THEY LIKE TO HAVE FUN**

  Fun is not the opposite of learning and should not be something to avoid. On the contrary, people learn best when they are having a good time. When they are having a good time, there is often chaos. Don't be afraid of a little commotion if most of the group is on task. Encourage each other to have fun in class and see how much you can learn.

- **THEY HAVE SKILLS, TALENTS, AND ENERGY**

  Teens are not empty vessels waiting to be filled up. They are people blessed with skills, talents, and intelligence. Draw upon the rich resources of the members of your group and know that there is much to offer, to share, and to teach to others. The energy of the group can deeply enhance the learning experience.

- **THEY ARE PEOPLE IN TRANSITION**

  Youth are in a transition stage of life. The essential element is change as a person moves from dependence to independence. The closer a person gets to graduation from high school, the more this reality will set in. Youth need freedom to make choices with adult support. Never underestimate the abilities of each other or the need for adult cooperation and support.

- **THEY ARE SELF-RELIANT AND ACCOUNTABLE**

  Most youth want to be self-reliant. By this point they have had enough experiences to form their own opinions and be able to make their own decisions. Of course, like everyone else, they will both succeed and fail. Encourage the group to take responsibility for the choices they select and hold them accountable to the agreements they make. Remember that everyone deserves input on decisions that affect his or her life.

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- **THEY LIKE MAKING CHOICES**

Youth can and do make good decisions. Our gift to others is to help them to develop their abilities to make good decisions and to treat them as capable human beings.

- **THEY NEED TO BE HEARD**

One of the best tools you can provide for members of the group are opportunities to speak out and be heard, and to listen to others with respect. It is important to set the example not by what you say but by what you do. Your ability to listen to others and respond to their ideas and comments will be a model for developing good listening skills. Being heard for even a moment can be a powerful experience. This is true for people of any age.

- **THEY WANT TO BE VALUED AND SIGNIFICANT**

How you treat the people in your group is much more important than what is taught. If all members feel important and significant, they are more likely to learn something. It is also crucial to pay attention to how the members of the group treat each other. The atmosphere of the classroom can inspire or destroy the whole experience. Encouraging all members of the group to treat themselves and others with extraordinary respect is one of the most important lessons to teach.

- **THEY ARE LOOKING FOR A FAITH OF THEIR OWN**

Teenagers are seeking their own opinions, values, and faith. Identity comes from becoming your own person. Youth often reject much of their parents' faith. This is an important sign that new values and a stronger faith are being formed. Embrace the searching process and affirm the importance of the ability to question, doubt, and think. Your response to doubts will encourage or discourage others' journeys to spiritual knowledge. You can't teach faith but you can grow together in your knowledge and love of the Lord.

- **RELATIONAL MINISTRY**

This curriculum is based on building relationships in three ways. Be constantly aware of the importance of these three dynamics of relationships.

1. The first, and most important, is the relationship between each person and God. This should be an ongoing focus in whatever is taught, discussed, or explored.
2. This second is the relationship between young people and adults. The adult's role is not that of teacher but rather one of "mature friend." One-to-one relationships take on special significance in

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this model.

3. The third is the peer relationship. How the members of the group treat each other enables or destroys the building of a caring community.

- **OWNERSHIP**

If youth are going to be truly involved in a program of learning, they must have a sense of ownership. The wise teen will learn how to share the program and build a sense of ownership together with the adults. This process can be improved and simplified by the formation of a team in the beginning with youth taking responsibility for leadership roles.

Who Are The Adults?

Adults who work with youth are more than teachers. To foster effective teaching and learning among youth, the Church needs adult leaders who are grounded in their own faith and identity as Christians. Effective leaders are excited about growing and learning and enjoy working with youth in a team relationship. They have high energy, genuine enthusiasm, and a passionate interest in youth.

Youth can have input into which adults are selected for the leadership team. Seek out people who care about youth, have a strong faith, and are committed to the program. Adults who want to be kids or who don't keep commitments are not effective over time. The following points should be carefully considered as leadership teams are formed.

Characteristics of Effective Adult Leaders:

- **THEY ARE ROOTED IN THEIR FAITH AND COMMITTED TO JESUS CHRIST**

Who adults are speaks loudly to teens. They don't have to be biblical scholars or perfect Christians. It also doesn't mean that they no longer have any doubts or are at the end of their own spiritual journey. Good leaders have a strong relationship with God and are comfortable with their faith.

- **THEY ARE WILLING TO BE A PART OF A TEAM**

For some adults working with teenagers as they grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord is an overwhelming task. It is essential for teens to understand the sense of responsibility that comes with this task. Wise teens know that they are only part of a teaching team and that adults are accountable to other people in the church who may or

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may not care about the activities of young people. Adults need to be able to let go of their need to be in charge and still have the ability to use their gifts as part of the team.

- **THEY ARE FUN AND ENJOY BEING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Adults should be able to relax and enjoy their time with youth. Effective adults know how to have fun and to share joy with young people without giving up expectations of them. Adults must find their own balance of fun and seriousness. Affirming joy and excitement with group, however, is essential for the adults' full participation.

- **THEY ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT PEOPLE THAN FACTS**

The *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* provides an excellent base of information to learn more about God, Scripture, and the Church. The sessions incorporate this learning with the issues that Affect young people's lives. Effective adults are aware of issues that are unique to their groups and look for ways to include these ideas in the work of the group. Adults should give priority to what youth are thinking and feeling.

- **THEY HAVE A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO THE GROUP**

Adults are committed and consistent. Steadfastness of faith and commitment to the class will make a real difference in the long run. Leaders should focus on the overall success of the program and not on any one moment, hour, or week.

A Final Word

Remember that this is a process of growing in the knowledge and love of the Lord. There will be ups and downs, successes and failures, joys and frustrations. Often you will never know the impact you have made on another person’s life. So much happens intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually in individuals’ lives that they themselves are not aware of the people who have had an impact on them. Trust in each other, trust in yourself and, most of all, trust in God.

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For More Ideas

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VIOLENCE

Setting Goals

Objective

Youth will be able to design a study of violence faced by the world, the nation, and their communities. Using leadership teams or the entire group in the planning process, they will explore the impact of violence on their lives.

Catechism

Q. What is our duty to our neighbors?
A. Our duty to our neighbors is to love them as ourselves, and to do to other people as we wish them to do to us;

V To love, honor, and help our parents and family; to honor those in authority, and to meet their just demands;

VI To show respect for the life God has given us; to work and pray for peace; to bear no malice, prejudice, or hatred in our hearts; and to be kind to all the creatures of God;

VII To use all our bodily desires as God intended;

VIII To be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and to use our talents and possessions as ones who must answer for them to God;

IX To speak the truth, and not to mislead others by our silence;

X To resist temptations to envy, greed, and jealousy; to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and to do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with him.

Q. What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?
A. The Ten Commandments were given to define our relationship with God and our neighbors.

Q. Since we do not fully obey them, are they useful at all?
A. Since we do not fully obey them, we see more clearly our sin and our need for redemption.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 848

SESSION 1

Scripture
Luke 6:27-36

Skill Focus
Communication
Responsibility

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Prayer

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

In Times of Conflict
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 824

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Jesus said,] "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Luke 6:27-36

Commentary: The Scripture passage comes from Jesus's "Sermon on the Plain" found in *Luke 6:17-49.* In this longer passage, Luke relates many of Jesus's sayings found in the "Sermon on the Mount," in chapters 5 through 7 in *Matthew*. The ideas in both "sermons" came from collections of memorized words of Jesus used to instruct new converts to Christianity. In the passage cited above, Jesus tells his followers how they are to relate to other people. Just as Christ forgave those who betrayed him at the cross, Christians are to "bless those you curse you, [and] pray for those who abuse you."

☐ Questions

- Is it hard to live up to the expectations Jesus expressed in the Sermon on the Plain? Are the expectations unreasonable in the world you live in?
- What would life be like if we treated other people as Christ told us to?
- Have you ever tried to love your enemy? What happened?

☐ Point of Contact

Catechism

Read the portion of the Catechism about the final six commandments on the previous page or in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 848. Read the Scripture passage and compare it with the Catechism.

- What ideas are found in both the Catechism and in *Luke*?
- How are both related to the topic of violence?
- Does our culture honor the ideas in the Catechism or in *Luke*? How do characters in movies and on television treat enemies?

☐ Activities

Talk It Out

See how well you communicate as a group. Before the group meets, borrow blocks from one of the primary classes, making sure that you have two of each size or color. Using one set, build your own creation at one end of the room that is hidden from view. Ask the group to spread out from one end to the other. One person is allowed to see the creation. The object of the game is to describe the creation in such a way that the last person at the other end of the room can reconstruct it. After the game begins, no one can move, except to talk to the person on either side of them. After about ten minutes stop the game. If the group is large, divide into teams to see which group comes closest to getting the design right.

- Did you find this exercise frustrating? Why?
- Did you get angry when someone couldn't understand you? Or did you just stop trying?
- What was the biggest barrier to communication?

Ace of Hearts

From a deck of cards, count out enough cards for each person to have one. Make sure one person will get the ace of hearts. Ask the participants to each select a card at random, look at it, and return it to the pile. Ask them not to disclose their cards to the others in the group.

Tell the group that the person who drew the ace of hearts will be the advocate of peace who works for justice and a resolution to conflict. Everyone else will work against justice and peace. Before beginning the activity, ask someone to read the Scripture passage.

Ask the group to create situations where conflict might occur; these can be hypothetical or real. Or, use one of the following:

1. At school, one teen is pushing another around. A fight has not started yet, but could break out at any time.
2. On a desert island after a few days, a group of people are getting on each other's nerves. An argument about what to have for dinner and who will prepare it starts.

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3. One teen at school drives everyone nuts. He is anti-Semitic, prejudiced, and boring. He approaches a group to ask a question.

Explore the situation, with most of the participants working toward escalating the conflict, and the person with the ace of hearts trying to use justice to resolve it. Give the group time to let the situation develop; there probably won't be a resolution.

- How did the "ace of hearts" feel when everyone was moving toward a more violent conclusion?
- Have you ever been in a situation where no one was trying to resolve a conflict? What did you do? What does Jesus expect us to do?

☐ Steps for Planning

Hint: *Talking about violence may be uncomfortable for some participants, especially if they have been in violent situations. The group should respect those who prefer not to participate. If a sensitive situation comes to light during the discussions of violence in the next few weeks, don't try to deal with it by yourself. Find help from someone you trust.*

1. Spend the last part of the meeting time looking at the other sessions to find out which themes and scriptures you want to study in more depth. Photocopy the last page of this session, and give each participant a copy of the Reference Sheet. Depending on the size of your group, divide participants among Sessions 2 through 8, honoring preferences whenever possible. Ask individuals or groups to take a few minutes to look at the themes and Scriptures, and answer the questions at the top of the page. If there is an extra session guide, tear out Sessions 2 through 8 and distribute them to the appropriate individuals or groups. Encourage them to look at the activities suggested for each theme as they make their choices.

2. Ask a volunteer to write down scripture and theme preferences for each session. Also keep a record of the activities that individuals or groups found interesting.

3. Examine all six posters and determine when and where to use them.
   Poster 1: Violence in the World
   Poster 2: Violence in War
   Poster 3: Violence in the Nation
   Poster 4: Violence in the Media
   Poster 5: Violence in the Community
   Poster 6: Violence in Schools

4. Ask for volunteers who will take responsibility for planning, implementing, and leading each session. The person who is responsible for a session does not necessarily have to be the discussion or activity leader. Pick up the tear sheets from the guide used for planning, and make sure the volunteers who are responsible for the sessions have the appropriate background information.

5. Be sure to include everyone in the planning process if possible. The participants should share leadership of the different sessions. Ask the group at this point how they feel about this unit of study.
   - Do the topics make you feel uncomfortable?
   - Are most of your concerns being met?

6. After the group has decided what to study, spend a few minutes with a calendar to determine when the themes will be scheduled. Field trips, movie nights, speakers, or special projects should be included on the planning calendar.

7. Find a way the participants can hold each other accountable for the success of this study of violence.
   - What if a team leader forgets to plan a session?
   - Who does a leader turn to in case of illness or an emergency?
   - What is the responsibility of the group as a whole?

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Planning Reference Guide

Violence

☐ **Questions:**

- What surprises you in this session?
- What ideas do you like in this session?
- Which of the three scriptures and themes would you want to focus on?

Topic	Scripture	Theme	Notes
In the World	*Job 19:7* *Luke 10:29-37* *Isaiah 11:6-9*	Cry for Justice The Good Samaritan A World With No Violence	
In War	*Judges 7:19-21* *Isaiah 2:1-4* *Matthew 26:47-56*	Just Wars War No More Suffering of the Innocent	
In Our Nation	*Genesis 18:20, 23-26, 32* *Judges 16:25-30* *Romans 12:1-2, 9-12, 17-21*	Evil on Trial Getting Even Change for the Better	
In the Media	*Psalm 135:15-18* *Mark 5:2-3, 7, 9, 12-13a, 14-17* *Colossians 3:2-5, 8, 12-15*	False Idols Unclean Spirits Setting Your Sights	
In the Community	*Genesis 4:3-11* *Exodus 2:11-15* *Acts 7:53-60*	Reining in Violence From Bad to Worse Forgiveness	
In the Schools	*Psalm 7:14-16* *Ephesians 4:25-5:2* *Matthew 15:10-11, 18-20a*	Mischief to Violence Seeing Christ in Others Hearts of Darkness	
Finding Safety	*Sirach 6:14-17* *II Corinthians 4:7-12* *John 14:27-28*	Safety in Friendships Power Over Violence Peace That Passes Under-standing	

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VIOLENCE

In the World

SESSION 2

Objective

Youth will be able to identify some of the causes of violence in the world. They will explore ways that governments and other agencies are working for peace and justice in these situations.

Personal Story

Last summer my parents announced to me that our family was sponsoring a pair of young people from Ireland. They were both from Belfast, and would stay in our home for two weeks. I was not exactly ecstatic about entertaining two strangers and sharing my bathroom for two precious weeks of summer. I already had to share the bathroom with my brother, and we had only recently come to an uneasy peace over its use.

The only thing my parents knew about the two 17-year-old girls who would be staying with us was that one was Catholic and one was Protestant. I have never understood the fighting in Ireland. We're Episcopalian, and many of our friends are Catholic. My mom even volunteers at a hospice operated by Catholic nuns. My closest friends are Jewish, Catholic, Hindu, and Episcopalian.

Every summer, people like us host teens from Northern Ireland who are Catholic and Protestant. The goal is to foster understanding between the two Irish religions. Before our guests arrived, we learned, read, and talked about Irish history and about how hate, anger, prejudice, and misunderstanding led to the gulf that now exists between Irish Catholics and Protestants. It's hard to understand how two groups that both believe in Jesus and his teachings could distrust each other so much.

I expected that we would be putting out fires between our two guests for most of their visit. First of all, I'm not sure I could share a room with my best friend without getting snippy.

When we picked up Megan and Anne from the airport, they were both a little disoriented and very polite. Both of them spoke with a lovely Irish lilt that at first we had trouble understanding. We kept them busy sightseeing from the beginning of their visit. All was peaceful, but I was worried.

After a while, I realized that Anne and Megan felt much more comfortable with each other than with me or the rest of my family. The things they had in common—their homeland, language, and tourist status—far outweighed the only significant difference which was their faith. By the end of the two weeks, a stranger would have assumed they were old friends. (*Continued on p. 21)*

Scripture

Job 19:7
Luke 10:29-37
Isaiah 11:6-9

Skill Focus

Influence
Fairness

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Prayer

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For the Human Family
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Cry for Justice

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Job said,] "Even when I cry out, 'Violence!' I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice."

Job 19:7

Commentary: At the beginning of the *Book of Job*, Job is a wealthy man who is "blameless and upright," the father of ten children, and a leader in his community. Satan makes a wager with God that if Job lost everything, he would curse God. The lament in *Job 19:7* occurs after Job has lost all, even his health. These words are in reply to one of his friends who is trying to help Job understand why he is being tormented. Job does not admit any error on his part, but asserts that the way he has lived is between him and God; his friends are in no position to judge him. Verse 7 is part of Job's description of God's attack against him.

☐ Questions

- Have you ever experienced or heard about an act of violence where there seems to be no justice? What did you think or feel at the time?
- Do you ever wonder why God allows violence? How did Job feel about the evil he was facing?

☐ Activities

Job's Dilemma

Ask a volunteer to read the scripture passage. Share information from the Commentary about the story of Job and the context of verse 7. Discuss violence in the world from the perspective of the *Book of Job*.

- What groups in the world are crying out for justice?
- Who is not being heard? Who are the invisible and forgotten?

Pass out news magazines and world news sections of newspapers to individuals or pairs. Ask the group to find stories or pictures about people and countries that were identified in the discussion questions. Share the clippings with the entire group and talk about the people and situations in the stories.

- Can we do anything—as individuals, as a group, as a church, as a community—to change these situations?
- How can we be the voice of those who are not heard?

If there is time, make collages on poster boards showing clippings about the forgotten. Display them in the church.

In the Air

Bring in a globe or a beach ball imprinted like a globe. Throw the ball to someone in the group. After the person catches the ball, ask him or her to close their eyes and point to a place on the globe. If you use a globe instead of a ball, spin the globe before they close their eyes and point. Find out if anyone knows anything about the place the person touches. If the place is in the ocean, think about disputes over fishing rights, animal rights, and environmental issues that have resulted in violent actions. After discussing the area, write down a sentence prayer about an issue the group has identified. Continue until everyone has had a chance to be the "pointer." Collect the sentence prayers in a bag, and ask everyone to draw one out. Make a covenant that each person will pray for the area in the prayer he or she selected.

- How can we be voices for those who have no voice?
- How can we answer those who can find no justice?

Holding Up the World

Clear a large space in the meeting room or a church hall. Spread pages containing world news from several newspapers. The number of pages and room size will depend on the number of participants. Using masking tape, connect all the pages together in one continuous sheet.

Ask the group to stand around the perimeter of the newspaper display. Together, lift the newspapers off the floor. (**Hint**: *Be ready with the masking tape for quick repairs.*) Explain that the group is holding up the world filled with people that are crying for justice in a world of violence. Slowly begin eliminating the number of people holding the papers. For example, ask those wearing glasses to let go of the paper and take one step back. Make sure one person is left trying to hold up the papers alone.

Now bring people back to the paper by making broad statements, such as "If you are baptized, step back and pick up the paper."

- Can one person hold up the world by themselves?
- Do we ever let go of our responsibilities?
- How does that affect others?

At the end of the time period, ask the group to stand on the papers and offer individual prayers for people in the world who are facing violence.

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2 The Good Samaritan

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

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."

Luke 10:29-37

Commentary: The person who asked Jesus to define "neighbor" thought he had a right to eternal life by using a very narrow definition of duty. Jesus uses a parable to define neighbor and help the man look beyond the narrow construct of the law. The first two people to pass the victim were a priest, representing the highest religious leadership among Jews, and a Levite, a worker at the temple. The Samaritan was an outcast, a foreigner not expected to show sympathy toward Jews. The outsider is the one to show compassion and love, while those connected to the hierarchy of the faith were too busy, distracted, or arrogant.

☐ Questions

- According to Jesus, who is your neighbor? How are you supposed to treat neighbors?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How does the summer program described in the story help people love their neighbors?
- Who are your enemies? Would you feel differently about them if you knew them personally?

☐ Activities

Special Report

Ask the group to pretend they have gone back in time to watch the story of the good Samaritan unfold. Ask for volunteers to act out the story while someone reads it aloud slowly. After the reenactment, assign another participant to be a news reporter who then interviews each of the characters to find out what motivated their actions and how they felt about what happened. For example, the reporter could ask: "How did it feel to be robbed? Why did the robbers pick this victim? Was the innkeeper skeptical of being paid for taking care of the victim?"

If you have time, move the story to the present. Where will it take place? Who will be the robbers? The victim? The religious leaders? Could this story happen today?

In the Hands of Robbers

- "What if the world fell into the hands of robbers?"

Explore this question by discussing each of the characters in the Scripture passage. Divide into groups of two or three and draw a picture of a specific scene. Some groups can decide what the robbers look like, and what they are robbing from the world. Another group can depict the priests or the religious leaders from the Church at large, the diocese, or your own church. What are they doing that keeps them from stopping to help? A third group can depict the Levites, or the lawyers, elected officials, judges, mayors, or governors. What distracts them from helping a world that is hurting? At least one group should draw a good Samaritan to the world. What are the good Samaritans doing before they stop to show mercy to the world? Encourage each group or individual to describe their pictures to the others.

Name That Person

Using a chalkboard or newsprint, write the characters from the scripture passage: victim, robbers, priest, Levite, and Samaritan. Ask the participants to think of people or groups to put in each category. Their answers could include famous people, friends, or even someone in the church. Encourage the group to think about places in our world where this could occur, such as Northern Ireland and countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa.

- Have you heard a "good Samaritan" story in your community? In this country? In foreign lands?
- Can you think of a situation in which you could be a good Samaritan?

Identify a place or situation outside this country where the group could be a good Samaritan. You could write letters in support of an international relief organization or stage a fundraiser. Some organizations to consider are The Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, Greenpeace, UNICEF, the Children's Defense Fund, Amnesty International, Heifer Project, and Church World Services.

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3 A World With No Violence

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

Commentary: The prophet Isaiah is describing the world under the rule of the "messianic king." He made this prophecy to the people of Judah who lived in the shadow of the Northern Kingdom that had been annexed to the Assyrian empire. Isaiah's words were a comfort to a people faced with possible confrontation and the loss of freedom. In the new world envisioned by Isaiah, the disorder of nature is to be restored to its original harmony. The hunters and hunted will live in peace, and children will be safe even when playing near a snake's den.

☐ Questions

- The passage in *Isaiah* describes the prophet's vision of an ideal world. How would you portray the ideal world? Who would be in it?
- How do you think people from areas torn by violence would describe the perfect world?

☐ Activities

If I Ruled the World. . .

Pass out pencils and paper to each participant. Ask them to list the first five decrees they would make as leader of the world to create an Earth similar to the one describe by Isaiah in the Scripture passage. Give them time to think about problems that exist throughout the world, including differences in religion, environmental concerns, ethnic, and racial divisions, among others. When everyone has written their decrees, share them with the group.

- Which of the decrees are unrealistic?
- Which could be accomplished if people worked together?
- Could this group help to bring peace in the world? How?

Identify one place in the world where an organization or individuals have achieved or made progress towards one of the decrees suggested in this exercise. How could you support this work?

From a Distance

Play the song "From a Distance" sung by Bette Midler; if possible, write out the lyrics so people can follow along. Discuss the words.

- What does our world look like from a distance? From outer space it may be blue and green, but what is really happening?
- Is it a peaceful place to live?
- What would aliens from another planet think about our world?

Pass out *The Hymnal 1982*, and ask participants to read the words of hymn 347, "Go forth for God; go to the world in peace."

- In light of the Scripture passage and this song, how can we go into the world for God?
- What is one way we can "go forth for God" to make this a better world?

Draw a poster or banner or write a poem or song that illustrates how God calls us to go into the world in peace, love, strength, and joy.

The Good and the Bad

Brainstorm the "wolves" and "lambs" that are in the world today. Some examples are Saddam Hussein, Hitler, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., musical artists, and others. After a list is compiled, ask a volunteer to be a prayer leader. **Hint:** *Ask the person ahead of time to give him or her time to prepare.*

Form a circle and join hands. While the group remains silent, ask them to concentrate on the person whose hand they are holding. The prayer leader will then begin to read out the names of those listed as either "wolves" or "lambs." After each name, allow a time of silence to pray for that person. Ask the participants to try to visualize the person they are praying for as though they were holding his or her hand in the prayer circle. Next, ask the group to first pray for the person on their right, and then to pray for the person on their left. End the prayer time by saying together the Lord's Prayer.

If you have time, look up Prayers for the World (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 814-816). Select one, and make a covenant with each other to say the prayer once a day until you meet again.

(Continued from p. 18)

We never spent much time talking about the reason they came on this trip. Instead, we spent hours talking about movies and movie stars, food, and friends. Sometimes we just acted silly or got the giggles—nothing could make us stop laughing!

We've heard from both Megan and Anne since they returned to Ireland. They have called each other, but it is more difficult to see each other there. I will never forget Megan and Anne and how much they came to mean to each other.

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VIOLENCE

In War

Objective
Youth will be able to discuss the pros and cons of war in relation to Scripture and Christian belief.

Personal Story
I was at church the night the Gulf War was officially declared. There was an initial skirmish and some pilots were shot down; someone called the church to let us know. Right in the middle of the service the priest asked us all to pray for those involved in the war, both the Americans and the Iraqis.

My father, who had just retired from the Army, was kneeling next to me. It was with a jolt that I realized that if he had not taken early retirement, I could be faced with losing my dad. I was only 18—much too young to be fatherless. Then I thought about all the other kids who were worried about their dads and moms that night, wondering if they'd ever see them again. I began to cry.

I put my arms around my dad, hugged him tight and whispered, "I'm so glad you retired and won't have to go. I'm so glad I don't have to lose you."

To my surprise, my dad looked up at me with tears streaming down his face. He said, "I was just about to say that I wish I hadn't retired so I could go and help. Maybe I could do something to help fight it better or faster. I feel so helpless."

I felt helpless, too. Not just because there was a war going on, not just because over the next few months I would have friends leave for that war, but because I didn't understand my feelings about the war. Was it right? Was it wrong? How could my dad want to go and fight? Could I do that if I were drafted? What about turning the other cheek? Is it better to protest the war, or to help make it end sooner? How are Christians supposed to love their enemies and still go to war?

For the first time in my life, I began to think about the causes and effects of war and of the death and destruction that come in its aftermath. I still don't know the answers to most of my questions. I know that winning a war doesn't necessarily mean the victors are right. At the same time, not doing anything may result in even more death and destruction. Maybe there aren't any answers to my questions.

SESSION 3

Scripture
- *Judges 7:19-21*
- *Isaiah 2:1-4*
- *Matthew 26:47-56*

Skill Focus
- Ethics
- Conflict
- Choices

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Prayer

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Social Justice
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 823

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Just Wars

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

So Gideon and the hundred who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. So the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow; and they cried, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" Every man stood in his place all around the camp, and all the men in camp ran; they cried out and fled.

Judges 7:19-21

Commentary: The Scripture passage describes the outcome of Gideon's first battle against the Midianites who had invaded Israel and looted the crops and animals. The story of the entire confrontation is in *Judges 6:1-8:35*. Originally Gideon had amassed an army of 33,000 from several tribes. God ordered him to keep only the most courageous and able fighters, reducing the force to a mere 300. Using psychological warfare Gideon played on the fears of the Midianites. With the element of surprise, Gideon and his small band attacked their enemy with only loud noises and torchlight. The Midianites fled. Gideon's obedience to God in the face of a strong adversary resulted in a resounding victory with no bloodshed for his forces.

☐ Questions

- Can you picture the battle describe in *Judges*? Do you know of any recent battles or confrontations where loud noises were used as weapons?
- Would you have wanted to be one of the 300 fighters? Read the entire story to find out how they were chosen.

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Have you ever asked the questions the narrator posed in the personal story?
- What is a "just" war? Are there criteria to determine if a war is "just"? What are your personal feelings?

☐ Activities

Gideon's Feats

Read the entire story of Gideon in *Judges 6:1-8:35*. The story begins with the disobedience of the Israelites toward God, follows their triumphs under Gideon's leadership, and ends with their relapse to worship false god. After reviewing the story, select one or more scenes to act out. For example, the group could reenact the victory over the Midianites in *Judges 7:1-21*. Afterwards, discuss your feelings about the story of Gideon and the battle highlighted in the Scripture passage. Use the questions above for the discussion.

If the group enjoys drama, plan a more elaborate staging of the story of Gideon. Bring in props and costumes, and ask someone to prepare a script. Invite a younger group in to see the play, or videotape your drama for repeated use. A participant interested in still photography could also take pictures of the play for a slide show. After presenting the drama, plan a follow-up discussion about the events in *Judges* and their relevance today.

Change of Attitude

Watch segments of a movie depicting World War II battles, such as *The Longest Day* or *Patton*. Compare these scenes to more recent movies made about the Vietnam War, such as *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now*, or *Born on the Fourth of July*. Discuss the differences in the attitudes and goals of the soldiers.

- Has our society changed its outlook on war in the past fifty years? Why?
- Is that outlook still evolving?
- What are your feelings about American involvement in war or conflicts in other countries?

Humor in the Midst of Horror

During World War II, humor was used to help soldiers live in conditions that were fearful and degrading. Cartoonist Bill Baker created a character called "Sad Sack" whose woes mirrored many of those faced by soldiers on the front. Bill Mauldin was another cartoonist who drew humor from the everyday trials of the foot soldier. There was a famous slogan—"Kilroy was here"—that usually preceded the Allied forces into enemy territory. When soldiers entered newly captured areas, they found the slogan awaiting them on walls and other places.

Working in small groups or individually, draw cartoons that could have been used to break the tension in Gideon's forces. Or make up a slogan Gideon might have found when he entered the Midianites' camp. Share your creations in a church newsletter or on the Internet.

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2 War No More

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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 any more.

Isaiah 2:1-4

Commentary: The Scripture passage in *Isaiah* describes the "new age," when creation is set aright in an age of peace. This oracle, or divine revelation is also found in *Micah 4:1-4*. This passage follows Isaiah's prophecy to the people of Judah who have turned from God. Not only are they being threatened by outside forces, but they are also doomed because of their social and ethical misconduct from within. War and the loss of their lands, however, will not be God's final act. Isaiah tells of a new Jerusalem that is purified and where justice is restored.

☐ Questions

- Have you ever heard parts of this Scripture passage? In what context were they quoted?
- Do people sometimes prefer war over peace? Why?
- Who profits from war? From peace?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- The Gulf War was fought in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula. After the war, fires in the oil fields left the area even more barren. What would this area look like in the new age described by Isaiah? What would the soldiers become?

☐ Activities

Swords into Plowshares

Reread the Scripture passage from *Isaiah*. The prophet describes how the instruments of war become instruments of peace. Working in groups or individually, think of new ways to use weapons and soldiers in a new age of peace. For example, rifles could be disarmed and used as fence posts. Groups can compete against each other to see who has the longest list, or they can work together.

The second task is to think of peaceful ways to use military technology and information. Encourage the participants to be creative and whimsical. For example, people who operate listening devices or break codes could use their skills to try to find communication patterns among animals. Encourage the group also to think of ways the military is already involved in helping civilians, such as using cargo planes to deliver food in Ethiopia, or providing support services during natural disasters.

Ask for volunteers to write up the group's ideas for peacetime uses for the military. Post it on the Internet or write a letter with your ideas to a congressman or congressional committee.

Personal Swords

Reread verse 4, the last part of the passage from *Isaiah*. Ask the participants to list the "swords" in their lives today that result in violence, distrust, or the destruction of relationships. For example, someone with a sharp wit may use a gift of humor to put other people down.

After the initial lists are completed, make a second list of ways to turn the "swords" into instruments of peace. Using the example from above, humor could be used to defuse a potentially violent situation. Both lists should be kept private, unless the group agrees to share their ideas. When everyone has had time to think about turning their "swords into plowshares," discuss actions the group could take to promote peace. Individuals could also make a covenant with the group to try to use their gifts in positive rather than harmful ways.

Video

Watch the movie *Billy Jack*. During most of the movie, the main character uses violence to bring about justice. At the end, he learns that violence rarely results in peace.

- What message do most movies impart about violence and revenge?
- Have you ever been in a situation that violence was necessary? Describe it. Can you think of other ways the situation could have been handled?

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3 Suffering of the Innocent

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

While [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high prist, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 26:47-56

Commentary: The confrontation with Jesus and the crowd in *Matthew 26* takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus begins his final hours before the crucifixion. As the crowds arrive with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus, a follower in fear and alarm draws his sword, matching force with force. However, this is the moment for which Jesus has tried to prepare his followers. Although Jesus is also fearful, he knows that his saving acts are necessary to counteract a world of sin. At the end of the passage, he is left alone, deserted by those closest to him.

☐ Questions

- How do you respond to anger and violence?
- Does Jesus's reaction make sense in the world you live in? Why?
- Did Jesus's followers understand what was happening? Put yourself in their place. What would you have done?

☐ Activities

Arrest of the Innocent

Reread the Scripture passage. Ask the group to identify places in the world in recent history where the innocent were arrested or held hostage by violence. For example, inner city streets where a child gets caught in the crossfire of a drug war, or the annihilation of millions of Jews during the Holocaust, or the destruction of entire towns in Bosnia.

- Where is God when these things happen?
- God promises his presence to all who seek it. Is that enough for those who suffer?

After a brief discussion, ask the questions below and give participants time to write down their ideas and thoughts. Be sure they know that they will not have to share their responses.

- What do you think about a God who doesn't go to war?
- Is God a powerless God?
- Does God suffer?

At the end of the time period, gather in a circle and pray for the people identified in the first part of this exercise.

In the Present

Reread the Scripture passage. As a group or in sub-groups, rewrite the story in a contemporary setting. Decide where the story will take place, who will be in the crowd coming to get Jesus, who will be the innocent person or group of people arrested, who will be the betrayer, and so on. Be sure to include the final scene when the followers run away.

If there is time, act out the story. Add dialogue that reflects the situation and the setting. Invite another group to see the dramatization and discuss the issues the Scripture passage raises. The group might also prepare a more formal staging of the story for a Maundy Thursday service during Holy Week or Lent.

Prayer of St. Francis

Read together the prayer attributed to St. Francis on p. 833 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Divide up the prayer into sentences or phrases, depending on the size of the group. Give each person a section of the prayer and ask him or her to illustrate it through art, poetry, or music. Put all the pieces together for a "St. Francis Banner" that can be displayed in the meeting room or somewhere in the church.

- How does St. Francis tell us to respond to adversity?
- Name a time that you received something as a direct result of giving.
- If we lived out the words of this prayer, what would our friends think?

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VIOLENCE

In Our Nation

Objective

Youth will be able to name several factors that contribute to violence in our nation. They will identify ways that churches and governments are working to bring about reconciliation.

Personal Story

If you ask me, baseball isn't America's national pastime. Violence is. What's the lead story on the local news every night? What's the main plot of half the movies? Violence is everywhere—kids killing kids, adults killing adults, kids killing adults, adults killing kids.

I think my generation gets blamed for the way things are getting worse, as though it used to be so great. Where do you think we learned to be violent? We learned at home, a lot of us. We learned from television. We learned from being a part of this world we were born into.

This country got started with a war. I've read about the Civil War, where 23,000 soldiers were shot on a single day. And I've read about the Indians, or what's left of them. I've listened to my dad's stories about Vietnam, and I watched the Oklahoma City bombing on the news.

Despite everything I hear and see, I know that violence is not the only thing going on. Most people live quiet lives most of the time. I usually feel safe, although a guy shot a gun at a party to be funny, and you have to be careful at school sometimes. Even if I don't experience violence that often, I'm not really surprised by it.

Our priest recently told us about a friend he had in seminary named Jonathan Daniels, who was sent to Alabama in the '60s to be a part of the Civil Rights movement. A lot of people resented his being there. When he brought some black friends to church with him one Sunday, one of the parishioners walked up to him and called him “scum.” Another person spat on him, and the rector of the church wouldn't shake his hand.

He didn't get angry, and after a while, he began to change some people's minds. He was always cheerful, and never seemed to be afraid. Then one day he was going into a store with some black girls. It was hot, and they all wanted to buy sodas. However, the doorway was blocked by a sheriff holding a shotgun. He said, “This store is closed. If you don't leave, I'm going to blow you away.” Then he aimed his gun at one of the girls.

Jonathan quickly pushed the girl aside, and took the blast meant for her, right in his stomach. He flew backward a dozen feet, and died. The sheriff was never punished.

Our priest says we need to remember people like Jonathan and Martin Luther King Jr.—people who don't use violence, but show us another way to live. They're the ones who offer this country a real future. (*Continued on p. 28)*

SESSION 4

Scripture

Genesis 18:20, 23-26, 32
Judges 16:25-30
Romans 12:1-2, 9-12, 17-21

Skill Focus

Trust
Forgiveness

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Prayer

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.
Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

From Prayers of the People, Form IV
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 388

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Evil on Trial

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Then the Lord said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!". . . Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.". . . Then [Abraham] said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

Genesis 18:20, 23-26, 32

Commentary: In this Scripture passage, Abraham intercedes for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is angry about the evil in the cities, and has threatened to destroy both places. Abraham diplomatically questions God about the justice of his decision to allow innocent people to be punished with the guilty. In the mission portions of the passage, Abraham begins bargaining with God by asking for mercy if fifty righteous people can be found. Finally Abraham gets God to agree to save the cities if only ten righteous are found. Ultimately, however, Abraham's bargaining is in vain when no righteous can be found.

☐ Questions

- Is Sodom worth saving? What about the children?
- What argument does Abraham offer to God?
- Can you think of a time in history when the innocent were killed with the guilty? Describe the situation.

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Who were the innocent in the story? What happened to them?

☐ Activities

City on Trial

Your city or area is on trial for its life. Divide half the group into a prosecution team, and the other half as a defense team. Ask both sides to comb through the same set of newspapers looking for headlines and stories that will bolster their case: either the city is worth saving or it isn't. Cut out the evidence the groups find, and create a display area for each side. Set a time limit to add a little pressure to the search. The group that comes up with the most examples will have a better argument.

Look at the two displays. Decide as a group whether each of the stories is admissible. Make a final tally.

- Which side has more stories?
- Are there enough good stories to justify a future for your city?
- If God were the judge, what would his ruling be?

Select one of the stories about goodness in the display that involves a group or persons who you can contact. Find a way to say thank you, or visit them (if it is a local organization) to find out more about their work and if they need help.

Hope Among Despair

As a whole group, make a creative expression that illustrates the conviction that human society is worth saving. Write a letter to God, work individually or as a group to write a poem, prepare a drama, or sew a banner with the message: "We have hope; we do care." Before you begin, discuss the places and people that give you hope.

Share your creation with the whole congregation by including the poem in a liturgy, displaying artwork in a gathering area, or publishing your writing in the church newsletter.

Countering Violence

As a group, come up with small personal acts that would counter the climate of violence, anger, revenge, hatred, disrespect, apathy, and fear that you see in your daily life. Think about people you know who give of themselves in small or big ways. The acts need not be dramatic; they might be as simple as resisting the impulse to get even or to put somebody down. In most cases, God's creation is built up or torn down brick by brick, stone by stone.

Ask each person to think of one act he or she will commit to doing in the next week to counter anger and violence and write it on a piece of paper. Put their promises in an empty shoe box marked with their initials. Stack the boxes, and leave them in a corner or unused part of the room. Next week, ask the participants to remove their box if they were unable to keep the commitments.

- What happens to the pile if even a few don't do their part?
- What can we do to help each other keep our commitments?

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2 Getting Even

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, and let him entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. They made him stand between the pillars; and Samson said to the attendant who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, so that I may lean against them." Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "Lord God, remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, so that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life.

Judges 16:25-30

Commentary: The story of Samson begins with God's promise to his mother that she would have a son who would deliver Israel from the Philistines. God would be with him and give him victory as long as he did not cut his hair. Samson obeyed God, and won many confrontations with the Philistines. However, Samson had a fatal flaw—a naive love of a Philistine woman, who finally convinced him to reveal the secret of his strength. When his hair was shorn, he was helpless to fight off the Philistines who blinded and enslaved him. The passage in *Judges 16: 25-30* occurs after he has been in prison and his hair has grown back. The Philistines who had gathered to honor their god Dagon called for Samson to come and entertain them. In a final act of courage, Samson destroys all those who had gathered to ridicule him.

☐ Questions

- Who is the clear winner in the Scripture passage?
- What happens when violence is answered by violence?
- What lesson did Samson learn during his imprisonment?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What do people like Jonathan Daniels and Martin Luther King Jr. believe about getting revenge?
- How would you have felt if the sheriff had been punished?

☐ Activities

Getting Revenge

Ask the group to think up a number of injustices done to them and to other people throughout America, drawing both on personal experience and their general knowledge of what's happening to people in contemporary society. For example, the coach's son gets to play your position even though you are a better athlete, or your school has only a tenth of the computers as the school in the suburbs. Break into smaller groups, with each group choosing several injustices to address.

The first task is to devise creative ways to get even for the selected injustices. Think about how characters in movies seek revenge. Share the revenge fantasies with the others. **Hint:** *Be ready to stop the discussion if fantasies get too violent.*

- Does getting revenge feel good?
- Does revenge sometimes escalate injustice?

The second task is to come up with ways to deal with those same injustices that do not involve revenge, but bring change in nonviolent ways that recognize the wrongdoers as brothers and sisters in God's family. Act out or describe these responses for the whole group.

- Which responses ere easier to come up with?
- Which is harder—revenge or reconciliation?

Sorry!

Play a board game such as Sorry!, which involves bumping opponents back to the starting place when you land on their square. Change the rules so that whenever you bump someone back to square one, you must switch places with your opponent. Eliminate any options that would allow players to avoid such plays. The result: every time you inflict harm upon your opponent, you become the one to suffer the consequences.

- Did the new rules force you to change your strategy?
- Did the most aggressive player win the game?
- What if you thought about consequences before you tried to get even in dealing with people every day?

Media

Select a film, a story on television or in the newspaper, or an example from history that resembles the story of Samson and the Philistines. Discuss what happened, then consider whether there might have been any alternatives to getting even and letting violence take its course. For example, the character in the movie *The Crow* comes back from the dead to revenge his murder and that of his wife. The resulting violence leaves a sense of justice, but the city and its problems are left unchanged.

(*Continued from p. 26*

But I wonder about that. Would Jonathan have changed if he had survived that day? Hearing his story makes me so angry. Wouldn't he have tried to get even? But I guess the whole point of nonviolence is that getting even has a way of going on forever. The violence has to stop somewhere. But if the good people end up dead, how does that make anything better? (Read about Jonathan Daniels in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, August 14.)

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☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. . . . Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:1-2, 9-12, 17-21

Commentary: *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* is the longest and probably the most influential of all his letters. The portion of *Romans* cited above is a good example of Paul's ethical teachings. In this passage Paul calls on Christians to embrace the teachings of Christ instead of the values of the world. Perhaps the most difficult teaching of Paul is to live peaceably and not repay evil with evil. Paul's reference to heaping "burning coals on their heads" is the power of goodness to make enemies feel ashamed and perhaps repentant.

☐ Questions

- How does Paul tell Christians to react to enemies?
- What does Paul mean by not being "conformed" to this world? How does the world tell us to treat our enemies?
- How can prayer help us live out Paul's teachings?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Do you think the world is more violent today that it was in the past? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that adults blame your generation for creating more violence?

☐ Activities

Proclaiming God's Word

Write each verse or phrase of the Scripture passage on a slip of paper. Put the slips in a sack and ask each person to draw one of the slips. If there are fewer people than verses, preselect the most applicable verses. If there are more people than verses, repeat the verses as needed. When everyone has taken a verse, ask them to create an artistic response, using paint, clay or other craft materials, or writing a song, preparing a story, or devising a skit which others can help act out.

Present the finished creations to the group and explain what the verse means to you and how you chose to illustrate it. There is always the option to let the artwork stand on its own without the artist's comments, though the others may want to share insights and connections that they see between the work, the verse, and their own experience. **Hint:** *People who do not want to share their work should not feel pressured to do so. Artistic ability and merit are not the subject of discussion—only the feelings and ideas expressed and evoked by the works.*

Look at the themes and connections running through the various presentations. Could a mural be created to express these in a unified composition? A local artist could help with technical and artistic questions, or even help with the design, which the group could then execute. A wall would have to be found, perhaps on a drab street or inside a community center, and permission secured. A scaled-down version of this project might be to create a temporary presentation on a large paper surface to display in some area of the church.

Rule of Life

Breaking into small groups, create a rule of life—a way to live each day—based on the Lord's Prayer that includes practices, choices, and attitudes that could realistically be practiced in daily situations. For example, "We will forgive those who hurt us."

- What could you do that would make the various parts of the prayer a reality?
- Where can you affirm God's will in a situation, or make Earth look more like heaven?

Make a manageable list of practices—thoughts, words, or deeds—that your small group can agree on, and covenant to try living by this rule for a specific time period, such as a week or a month. Be accountable to the others in your group, checking in with them as your "experiment" goes on. Pray for each other.

Write down the rule of life and keep it in a place where you will see it daily. At the end of the allotted time, report back to your group.

- What were the hardest rules to implement? What were the easiest?
- Does it help to have friends in a rule of life?
- Would you change your rule in any way? Do you plan to continue practicing it?

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VIOLENCE

In the Media

Objective

Youth will be able to examine varieties of media and identify acts of violence. They will be able to discern the positive and negative effects of violence in the media.

Personal Story

My parents were divorced when I was 6 years old, and I grew up mostly with my mom. Since she worked and couldn't be with me and my brothers all the time, we had a live-in babysitter—a nineteen-inch screen.

We learned a lot from our babysitter. We learned what kind of clothes to wear, what was the best candy, how to treat girls, and what sort of things you need to make you happy. And we learned that violence is a really good way to get something done or to get your own way.

Our babysitter taught us that heroes didn't need to control their anger or try to hold in their violent impulses. On the contrary, controlling emotions was a sign of weakness. Heroes are tough, and know how to fight for what they want. People who don't fight are usually losers, unless they can be rescued by a violent hero.

These are important things to know, said our babysitter, because the world is a mean and dangerous place. Every afternoon the babysitter told us stories about the world outside our house, where people were being attacked, abused, and killed. These stories taught us that violence is normal, and we should expect it in most situations.

We were sometimes surprised, whenever we did get out of the house (our babysitter kept us inside a lot), at how peaceful the neighborhood seemed. There were not nearly as many shootouts and car chases and explosions as we expected. It was positively dull.

Using the skills our babysitter had given us, we were able to liven things up. We began to look forward to those times when other kids would pick on us, because we could apply our knowledge to teaching them a lesson they wouldn't soon forget. And we really loved it when anyone tried to get between us and something we wanted. Then we could get radical. Pow!

When mom started to get a lot of calls from the principal of our school about us, she considered getting rid of the babysitter. But the babysitter always had a good argument for staying around, such as having such a vast knowledge of culture and art, politics, and science—things no one should be without. So mom never did get rid of that babysitter.

Now that I'm in juvenile hall, I don't see much of mom anymore. But I still have the babysitter, and the lessons haven't changed a bit.

SESSION 5

Scripture

Psalm 135:15-18
Mark 5:2-3, 7, 9, 12-13a, 14-17
Colossians 3:2-5, 8, 12-15

Skill Focus

Independence/Individuality
Respect

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Prayer

Most loving Father, whose will it is for us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on you who care for us: Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 216-217

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 False Idols

☐ Scripture

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, and there is no breath in their mouths. Those who make them and all who trust them shall become like them.

Psalm 135:15-18

Commentary: In this passage the psalmist is contrasting the power of God with the powerlessness of pagan gods. The Israelites lived in a land that was home to many different tribes and people. These people worshipped a variety of gods, often tied to the growing seasons and fertility. In the Old Testament, time after time prophets and judges call the people to reject the false gods of their neighbors and to embrace the one, true God. *Psalm 135* is a hymn of praise to God for his mighty deeds. The verses in the selected passage show once again the futility of worshipping false idols.

☐ Questions

- What are the idols we worship today?
- What activity or possession absorbs much of your time? Have you ever thought this might be an idol in your life?
- What are the idols in our culture today? Are we that different from the Israelites?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What became the most important influence in the life of the family?
- Do you think this story is typical of real life?

☐ Activities

Listening to Lyrics

Ask everyone to bring in a favorite CD or tape. Look through the lists of songs and listen to some that involve violence. These could include attitudes or behavior that could lead to violence, abusive situations, degrading behavior toward others, or insensitivity to others as the beloved children of God. Write down the lyrics of songs you find most compelling and discuss them.

Define violence. Is it only physical? Apply your definition to the lyrics of the music you listen to.

- Do lyrics matter?
- Does popular music affect actions or attitudes?
- How do you deal with a song you like but with lyrics that you don't believe in?
- In violent song lyrics, who are the criminals and who are the victims?

Find a lyric that has questionable content. Is there a real-life situation that you have experienced or observed where this has been acted out? Does media merely reflect what is already happening, or does media influence or even create behavior? What can we do to counteract negative effects of media?

Find a song you like which has lyrics which do not express your values. Write new lyrics that do reflect your values, and sing these for the group. If the group thinks your song has merit, enlist others for backup and harmony, and sing it at youth group or a worship service.

Selling Violence

Look at advertising images from magazines or taped from television during the week. Look for ads about personal happiness and sense of worth, self-image, relationships, success, desire, meaning, and value.

- Which ads exert the most power on you emotionally, regardless of whether you want the product or approve the underlying messages?
- Which part of the ad evokes this response in you—the images, the music, the words, the overall feel of it?
- Write a sentence that summarizes the values or underlying assumption about life that the ad contains. Do you agree or disagree?

Look at the last four of the Ten Commandments as expressed in the Catechism (Session 1 or in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 848). Discuss the ads in the light of these commandments. Identify all the places and aspects of the ads that are either violent or could lead to violence, such as alcohol, fast driving, depictions of women as objects, beauty standards that can be harmful to health, consumption or pleasure-seeking that abuses the environment, or the violent style of the ad itself.

Write and act out (or produce on video) a commercial that might persuade someone to live according to one or more of the commandments. Is it hard to be persuasive for good?

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2 Unclean Spirits

☐ Scripture

And when [Jesus] had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; . . . and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.". . . Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many.". . . and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. . . . The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

Mark 5:2-3, 7, 9, 12-13a, 14-17

Commentary: In this story, Jesus removes evil spirits from a demented man he encounters in his travels. The first part of the story describes the encounter and the spirits' plea to be cast into the herd of pigs—a fitting receptacle since swine were considered unclean animals. When people came to see what had happened, they were afraid and asked Jesus to leave. The spirits that dominated the man are the dark side of all humankind that no one on their own has the power to subdue. When Jesus brought this darkness to light, the people rejected him and his message. The cure was too painful; denial was better.

☐ Questions

- Do you find it difficult to bring your dark side to light?
- Would other people like you if they knew your dark side?
- Do you think God knows about the darkness even if you can't confront it?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Does the media nurture our dark sides?
- How can you counteract negative messages from the media?

☐ Activities

Cartoon Violence

Stage a "taping" of one of the more famous television talk shows. The topic of the day will be: "Cartoon characters who can't control their own violence." Select which cartoon personalities will appear and who will play them, and ask a volunteer to be the host. Ask the host to engage the rest of the group, who will be the audience. The more adversarial the discussion, the better. After the show, discuss the points raised in the dialogue.

- Do you think cartoon violence has any negative effects on children?
- What are the other forms of violence in television, movies, and videos? Is the violence realistic?
- Are the consequences of violence on victims accurately depicted?
- Does violence in the media fairly reflect what the world is really like? Does it cause further violence? Does watching violence in the media make people less sensitive to it?

Prime Time

Watch together parts of a prime time drama, a local newscast, or a national news show that you taped during the week. Before viewing the tape, agree on a definition of violence. Ask each person to keep count of all the acts of violence during the viewing. Participants should note who the criminals are and who the victims are, and how these characters are different in terms of gender, race, and culture. Share the results as a group.

- What is television telling us? Is it telling the truth?
- Is television's effect positive, negative, or neutral? Give examples from your own experience or observations.

Questionnaire

Create a questionnaire to find out what people think about television. Use the following questions or develop your own:

- What do you watch on television?
- How many hours per day/per week do you watch TV?
- Do you give it your full attention or do you do other things while watching?
- Where do you see yourself on the screen? Where do you see someone you want to be like?
- In what ways are you better for watching TV? In what ways are you negatively affected?
- What things on TV make you feel better? Why? What things make you feel worse? Why?
- If you had your own television station, what kinds of programming would you run, and why?
- What is not being shown on television that ought to be seen?

Take your questionnaire to adult forum or a younger group and lead a discussion about the influences of TV in our lives and the dark sides of people it creates or hides.

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3 Setting Your Sights

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). . . . But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. . . . As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 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.

Colossians 3:2-5, 8, 12-15

Commentary: The Scripture passage come from *The Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, a church in Asia Minor. Throughout this letter Paul holds up Christ as the Lord of the universe and the Church. These verses deal with Paul's view of the true Christian life, a life that is secure in God but "hidden with Christ" from the world. Paul lists the worldly or "earthly" things that should be put to death, including destructive practices that turn people away from God. The latter part of the passage lists the virtues that are to replace earthly desires, including compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness. The reward for Christians is the peace of Christ that will "rule in your hearts."

☐ Questions

- What "earthly" things do you need to set aside?
- Can you think of times that you recently have displayed "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language"?
- Does the media provide more examples of earthly things or Godly virtues?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What kind of life did the "babysitter" in the story promote?
- What role has the media—print, television, music, or video—played in your life?
- Is there anything in your life that counters the influences of television?

☐ Activities

The New Self

Reread the Scripture passage, and talk about its meaning for Christians today.

- What "earthly" thing or vice do you want to discard?
- Which of the virtues that Paul listed would you like to incorporate into your own life?

Using fabric paints or other craft materials, decorate T-shirts (either individually or using a group design) that express the essence of the Scripture passage in *Colossians*, such as "Seek things that are above" or "The New Self."

Create a ritual in which the old self is stripped away, and the new self is put on. For example, each person could make a cloak out of old newspapers that could be discarded and replaced with the T-shirt. Individuals may want to write the qualities they want to get rid of on the newspaper cloak. Plan to sing an appropriate song, such as the Iona Community round, "You have put on Christ" (GIA Publications).

Plan to act out the ritual at a church picnic or youth outing. Find ways to include everyone during the service.

Debate

Divide the participants into two groups for a debate, allowing them to select the position they want to defend. Select your own topic based on the Scripture passage or use the following: The negative impacts of the media far outweigh positive qualities. Use the following questions to prepare your defense or attack of the statement.

- How do you resist being affected by the negative influences and questionable values in the media culture without dropping out and living on a desert island?
- What are the ways that you use to keep from becoming the worst of what we see and hear all around us?
- How do you "set your mind on things that are above"?

Video

Watch the movie *Regarding Henry*, starring Harrison Ford and Annette Bening. In this movie a successful, self-centered attorney has everything the media portrays as important: money, status, and power. When a robber shoots him in the head, he loses his memory and becomes a gentle, childlike man. The "new" Henry embraces the qualities Paul says Christians should clothe themselves with. Which Henry would you rather have for a friend?

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VIOLENCE

In the Community

Objective

Youth will be able to name and discuss recent acts of violence in their own communities. They will explore ways they can respond to or prevent violent acts in their community.

Personal Story

I live about a fifteen minute walk from school, if I take the most direct route. But I don't take that route any more; I take the long way. Last year I was jumped by some kids I didn't even know. They beat me, although not too badly, before I ran away. The sound of their laughter followed me. “You better not show your face around here again!” they shouted.

I hated the humiliation worse than the bruises, and thought about all kinds of ways to get even. They were just fantasies—what could I really do? But it makes me mad that there are now places I can't go in my own community.

I told a friend about the incident. He said I needed to deal with it, that I shouldn't let those kids push me around. “You have just as much right to take that path as they do,” he said. “The rule in this neighborhood is to hit first and hit harder.” He added, “If you lose face, then you'll always be an easy target.”

He offered to get his dad's gun, and he and a bunch of others could challenge the kids who beat me up. “They'll back down,” he said. “Nothing will probably happen, but it will make them respect you, and leave you alone.”

I thought he was crazy. What if they had guns, too, and started shooting? Would we shoot back? It'd be like the Wild West. I'm not into that. Things are getting so weird—even at school. It used to be that whenever someone yelled, “Fight! Fight!” everyone ran to watch. Now when you hear a fight is starting, you run the other way, because they might start shooting.

I told my friend I didn't want any trouble. He called me a chicken, which hurt me. I told him to take it back, and when he didn't, I hit him. We didn't fight very long. Our hearts just weren't in it. We stopped, said goodbye, and never talked about it again. We didn't see much of each other after that.

A couple of months ago, I heard he got shot at a party. There had been drinking, and there was an argument over a gift. My friend had a gun with him. He pulled it out to look tough, I guess, but I don't think he would have used it. But the other guy grabbed for the gun, and it went off. My friend didn't die, but his kidney got really messed up. He'll always have problems with it. (*Continued on p. 37)*

SESSION 6

Scripture

Genesis 4:3-11
Exodus 2:11-15
Acts 7:53-60

Skill Focus

Relationships
Conflict

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Prayer

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. *Amen.*

In the Evening
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 833

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Reining in Violence

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." *Genesis 4:3-11*

Commentary: The story of Cain and Abel portrays the themes of sibling rivalry, jealousy, and violence. It is the first time murder is found in the Bible and involves the children of Adam and Eve after they were exiled from the Garden of Eden. It pits Cain, a farmer, against Abel, a herdsman and hunter. The Bible does not explain why God had "no regard" for Cain's offering, although a later verse (*Genesis 4:7*) implies that Cain himself is accepted. Cain lashes out against his brother, kills him, and then lies to God. His actions result in God's curse. (Read the rest of Cain's story in *Genesis 4:12-17*.)

☐ Questions

- Do you understand Cain's anger and frustration?
- Was Cain angry at Abel or God?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What can happen to us if we act on our anger?

☐ Activities

Retaliation

Ask everyone in the group to write a brief description of a time when he or she was wronged or provoked by someone in their family and responded with some retaliatory reaction. Ask the participants to write down the provocation and the feelings generated, but not the actual response. Do not put names or other clues in the stories that would indicate who wrote them.

Collect the unsigned stories and read each of them in turn. In between each story, ask each person in the group to share a method of retaliation that satisfies the need to get even. The person who wrote the story should say what actually happened, though the group will not know this. After the participants have had a chance to "finish" the story, let them guess the real ending and author. The author of the story can choose whether or not to go public.

Take a second look at each story, and ask everyone to come up with an alternative response to the situation—one that does not respond in kind. The "second chance" should end the cycle of revenge and settling scores, redeeming the situation in some way by introducing some element of healing or transformation, or at the very least modeling a response that is nonviolent.

- How do you deal with your anger? What are the things that feed it or make it grow?
- What are the things that defuse it, cool it, transform it?
- Where have you learned how to deal with anger?

Drama

Act out a role play of the Scripture passage, but select a contemporary situation that you have experienced or heard about in which Cain makes peace with Abel. Using others from the group, create, cast, and act out a second scenario where ongoing tension or a specific incident has the potential to escalate into violent conflict. Ask a volunteer to serve as peacemaker to try to diffuse the situation, while the remainder of the group responds with either anger or indifference. Act out more than one scenario, allowing participants to experience more than one role.

- How did it feel to be the lone peacemaker?
- Have you experienced a confrontation in real life?
- Are you a part of the violence if you stand by and do nothing?

Vigil Service

Obtain a list of all the victims of violent crime in your community from newspaper clippings or the police department. Hold a candlelight vigil service where every name is read, along with times for silence, songs, and prayers. There may be an appropriate location in the community to hold the vigil, such as the scene of a shooting, but safety of participants should be a prime consideration in choosing a site. Invite your congregation, other youth groups, and other churches to join you.

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2 From Bad to Worse

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

Exodus 2:11-15

Commentary: The story in the Scripture passage shows Moses as a young man. He had been raised by one of Pharaoh's daughters, but he identified with his own people, the enslaved Hebrews. When he encountered the Egyptian beating a relative, he killed the Egyptian in anger and hid the body. Later when he confronted two Hebrews who were fighting, his words of reconciliation ring hollow because his act of murder speaks louder than his words of peace. Moses is forced to flee to save his life. Any help he might have given to his people is no longer possible because of his impulsive anger.

☐ Questions

- Did you sympathize with Moses's anger at the Egyptian?
- Did Moses's action against the Egyptian bring him honor among his people? Why?
- Why is it so difficult to correct the consequences of violence?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did the author keep the violence from escalating?
- Can you think of a situation in your community when violence was justified? Describe it.

☐ Activities

Levels of Violence

Reread the Scripture passage. Identify the levels of violence in the story. Who is doing what to whom? Match the people and the situation to specific equivalents in your own community.

- What do you know about the causes of conflict and violence?
- What don't you understand?
- Which character do you relate to in this story?
- What can you do to help resolve conflict and bring peace in the community?

Find out about conflict resolution programs in your community. Look into having your church sponsor an information program for the community about conflict resolution techniques. As a group, try to bring your conflicts out in the open and look for ways they can be reconciled.

Mock Trial

Change the ending of the story of Moses, and stage a mock trial. Let the group decide if the setting should be in ancient Egypt or your own community. For background, read about Moses's childhood in *Exodus 2:1-10*. Let participants decide if they want to be on the defense team or the prosecution. Assign people to play other key roles. If the group is large, let one person be the judge and others be the jury.

- What were the key points for the defense? Do you think they had merit?
- Who was the Egyptian and who would be his counterpart in your community?
- Do you think Moses would have killed the Egyptian if he had thought before he acted?

Prison Ministries

Invite a representative from a local prison ministry to meet with the group. Listen to his or her stories about prisoners' lives, and how lives of violence have been changed by the grace of God.

Find out how your group could be involved in a prison ministry through fundraisers or other means of support. **Hint**: *Letter writing between your group and prisoners may result in inappropriate communications. There are other ways to support a prison ministry that are less risky and more appropriate, such as sending anonymous cards with cookies for a holiday.*

Behind Bars

Visit a local jail if it is appropriate, safe, and endorsed by parental consent. Before going, talk about what the group can expect to find. Several youth may want to visit prior to the discussion to find out first-hand what the conditions are like and what the group will see. Ask participants if they would be willing to be locked in a jail cell for five minutes alone. Make sure the jail officials agree with this plan. Share your impressions with each other after the visit.

- Is the jail what you had envisioned?
- What would be the hardest part of being in jail?

After the discussion, pray for all prisoners, using your own experiences at the jail or in the cell as a guide to shaping your prayer.

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3 Forgiveness

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Stephen said,] "You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it." When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Acts 7:53-60

Commentary: The story in the Scripture passage takes place soon after Jesus's death. Stephen was a leader in the early Church and was described in *Acts* as bold, wise, full of faith, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Stephen believed that because of Jesus the Mosaic law should be seen in a new and different light—he went so far as to say the religion of the temple had outlived its usefulness. His opponents were threatened by his blasphemy because he undermined the religious practices associated with the Jewish faith. Stephen refused to deny his beliefs, and was stoned by an angry mob. Among the people there was a young man named Saul, whom we later know as Paul. Stephen's response to the hatred flung at him was forgiveness and acceptance.

☐ Questions

- Did you find Stephen to be a sympathetic character?
- Why did the crowd get so angry at his words?
- Have you ever been angry enough about something someone said to try to hurt that person?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Is it harder to avoid violence when you are a part of a group?
- What can you do if you get caught in a situation where someone has a gun? Has this ever happened to you? What did you do?

☐ Activities

Mad Relay

Stage a "mad relay." Divide into teams and write down a number of ridiculous actions to be performed by every member of opposing relay teams. Each team member runs in turn to a table, reads the instructions listed there, performs the ridiculous task, and returns home to tag the next runner. That person runs to pick up and perform a new instruction, and so on.

After the race, discuss why you are willing to do things as a group that you would not do on your own. Relate this willingness to the story of Stephen in the Scripture passage.

- Can you think of any other stories about mob violence from literature or film? (For example, "The Lottery," a short story by Shirley Jackson.)
- Are acts of violence often done by groups rather than individuals?

Comparisons

Read the story about the woman caught in adultery in *John 8:1-11*. In this passage, Jesus intervenes when a mob tries to stone a woman caught committing adultery, a crime punishable by death during that time. Jesus responded to the crowd by saying, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." With those words, the crowd dispersed.

Compare the story in *John* with the passage about the stoning of Stephen in *Acts*. Discuss the similarities and differences between the stories.

- Why was Jesus successful?
- Would the same thing have worked for Stephen? What if the young Saul (Paul) had intervened? Could he have made a difference?

Tossing Anger Aside

Collect smooth, tennis ball-sized stones for every person in the group. Ask them to take some time to recall something they are really angry about. With permanent markers write a word or a symbol to represent that anger on one side of the stone.

Ask the group to stand in a circle around a metal tub, with each person in turn tossing his or her stone into the tub. Sing a song or repeat a prayerful phrase, inviting peace and healing into their hearts.

Invite everyone to take a stone at random out of the tub, and think of a word or phrase that might heal the sign of anger written on the stone. With the markers, write the healing words on the other side of the stone. After everyone has finished, one by one place the stones on the ground, to make the form of a cross from the redeemed stones. Finally, around this cross, pass the peace with one another.

(*Continued from p. 34)*

That could have been me, if I had listened to his crazy scheme. So I take the long way home, and one day maybe I'll live in a place where I don't have to worry about getting hurt. But you hear about violence happening even in nice places. What if no place is safe? Will we have to choose between being tough and being afraid? Isn't there some other choice?

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VIOLENCE

In the Schools

Objective

Youth will be able to provide information about actual or potential violence in their schools. They will propose ways to counteract that violence.

Personal Story

As I was walking down the hall recently, I saw a group of popular guys ganging up on this other guy who everyone thinks is kind of "dorky." He must have done something to draw attention to himself because they went up to him and knocked him down. That apparently wasn't enough, so they preceded to hit and kick him.

These tough guys are supposedly my friends, but I was embarrassed to see them gang up against someone who couldn't defend himself. Even though I didn't really like the guy they were hitting and didn't feel that sorry for him, my friends' actions really made me mad. I walked up to my friends and told them to find something better to do. To my surprise, they walked off.

Maybe they knew they were overdoing it. Maybe they were embarrassed at being confronted. Or maybe they had just finished what they had set out to do. They didn't say anything or look back after they walked away. In any case, I helped the guy up off the floor. He told me thanks, and I handed him my bandanna for his bloody nose.

Then he asked me if he could walk with me to my next class. He's not someone I really want to be seen with. I laughed nervously, thinking that my friends might think I had betrayed them by making friends with the person they had just beaten. Finally, I decided that I didn't really care what they thought. Helping this guy had helped me see that there wasn't anything "dorky" or weird about him. He was okay.

Maybe my friends would be nicer if they would just look for the good in others. And maybe we'd *all* take care of each other a little bit more if we looked beyond the surface.

SESSION 7

Scripture

Psalm 7:16
Ephesians 4:25
Matthew 15:10-11, 18-20a

Skill Focus

Compassion
Responsibility

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Prayer

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Young Persons
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 829

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Mischief to Violence

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

See how they conceive evil, and are pregnant with mischief, and bring forth lies. They make a pit, digging it out, and fall into the hole that they have made. Their mischief returns upon their own heads, and on their own heads their violence descends.

Psalm 7:16

Commentary: *Psalm 7* is a prayer for deliverance from personal enemies. It begins with a cry for help and an assertion of innocence. The psalmist declares that if he is guilty of the crime for which he is accused, then his enemies can "trample my life to the ground." Then the psalmist pleads with God to intervene in his trial. The remainder of the psalm expresses the psalmist's belief in God's righteousness in dealing with those who commit "mischief." The psalm ends with a promise to offer thanksgiving and sing praises to the Lord.

☐ Questions

- In the scripture passage, what happens to people who "are pregnant with mischief"?
- Have you ever had mischief return to your "head"?
- Earlier in the psalm, the psalmist says that "God is my shield, who saves the upright in heart." How can God help you when others are encouraging you to be part of mischief that is harmful?

Option: read and discuss the personal story.

- How did the writer stop a mischief that had escalated to violence?

☐ Activities

April Fools

April 1 is a national holiday for mischief-making, but if you are in a mischievous mood, any day will do.

- Can you think of a time recently that you were involved in a little mischief?
- What made it funny?
- Did the mischief get out of hand? Did you ever get into trouble for something that started out as mischief?

List different kinds of mischief you have been involved in or heard about in the center of a big sheet of paper. On one side of each item, list ways that the act could escalate to violence. On the other side of each entry, list ways that the acts can remain mischief.

Think about ways you can have fun on April Fool's Day that are not harmful to the environment or to others. Plan a party for a younger youth group on April 1 or another day you designate as Fool's Day. Find games that help the youth distinguish between mischief and violence.

Crossing the Line

Put a strip of masking tape across the middle of the floor. Ask the group to stand together on one side of the tape. Ask the group to call out different ways to create mischief. For example: putting yellow food coloring in someone's clear drink; adding bleach to a drink; leaving a silly drawing on the podium for the priest; stealing the priest's sermon.

Ask the participants to decide if the mischief "crosses the line." If they think it does, they should step to the other side. If they think the mischief is in fun and not harmful, they should stay where they are. If there is disagreement among participants in the group, ask them to explain their choice. After the explanations, give everyone a chance to rethink their earlier decision and change sides.

- What makes one idea change from being harmless to harmful?
- Is it ever alright to "cross the line"?
- Have you ever been in a position in which you wished you had not crossed the line?

Environmental Graffiti

Look around your church or community for a place where mischief has resulted in vandalism, litter, or graffiti. Clean up the area, and leave your own mark. Plant spring bulbs in the area—autumn is usually the best time for this, but you can do it in the winter if the ground is not frozen. Next spring, your "graffiti" will brighten the area and maybe encourage others not to harm it.

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2 Seeing Christ in Others

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Commentary: In the scripture passage, the writer, who may or may not be Paul, describes some of the ethical implications of the teachings presented in the first three chapters of *Ephesians*. The writer believes that Christians should be "imitators of God" in both loving and forgiving others. Christian conduct, therefore, is the natural consequence of Christian theology and beliefs. In *Ephesians* the writer makes clear the idea that the Church is involved in accomplishing God's plan. Christians are called to work together to display love in their daily living.

☐ Questions

- How are Christians supposed to treat their "neighbor" according to Paul?
- What does it mean to "imitate" God? How would imitating God affect our treatment of others?

Option: Read and discuss the personal story.

- Why was it easy for a group of people to attack a weaker person? Did they really see him as a person or some*thing* to be tormented?

☐ Activities

Balloon Game

Blow up a balloon and tie it to your ankle with a piece of string that is two feet long. At a signal the participants should try to break each other's balloons by stepping on them. When your balloon is broken, step to the side and cheer for the remaining players. The last person to have an unbroken balloon wins the title of "Best Stepper." Discuss how you felt playing the game or sitting on the sidelines.

- Did you become more aggressive than you usually are?
- How did you protect your own balloon while stepping on other balloons?
- Did friendships keep you from breaking some balloons?
- Were you more intent on the game than the participants?
- Are there times you get so caught up in an activity you lose sight of the people around you?
- How does Paul suggest we treat each other in the scripture passage?

Conflict Management

In conflict management theory, there are terms (written in italics) for identifying the stages of conflict and resolution. Working in small groups or pairs, create a scenario in which an incident escalates into a conflict and possibly into violence. Choose a *potential trouble spot* such as a bus stop, cafeteria, locker room, or stadium where an initial *incident* might occur. What would be a *provocation*? What reaction would constitute a *dispute*? What gestures or actions would represent a *threat of violence*? that would results in a *retaliation*? If others get involved and choose sides, who has *allies* and what do they do? How much *hostility* is there? Can an authority figure *cease or defer hostilities*? If that person leaves, do *hostilities resume*? If an objective third party introduces *diplomacy* and helps to negotiate a *settlement*, what are the terms of the *peace agreement?* How can former enemies become *friends*?

Act out or describe each scenario. Share the experience of escalating conflict. How can a dispute be resolved before it escalates? Change the scenarios to stop at different stages. Can one person make a difference?

Select one or more of the role plays that might be appropriate for younger youth. Make a poster listing the terms for the stages of conflict and resolution. After sharing a scenario with the younger teens, use the poster in a discussion of conflict management.

Movie

Watch a film, such as *Jack* starring Robin Williams, in which the main character overcomes a stereotype to win the affection and respect of others. *The Breakfast Club*, a movie that may be too dated for your group, illustrates both conflict resolution and teamwork.

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3 Hearts of Darkness

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Then [Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.". . . "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, . . ."

Matthew 15:10-11, 18-20a

Commentary: In the scripture passage, Jesus was responding to a group of Pharisees and scribes concerning the Law of Moses. They were particularly questioning Jesus about the principle in the law that certain physical conditions that make a person unfit to share in community worship. (The word "defile" means to be unfit to share in public ritual.) Earlier Jesus had called the Pharisees hypocrites for honoring God with their lips, but not in their hearts. He answers the specific charge by saying that violating the rights and interests of others is more critical in hindering worship than keeping the letter of the law.

☐ Questions

- What are some "evil intentions" that have come from your heart?
- How can we change the intentions in our hearts from evil to good?

Option: Read and discuss *The Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad. Find the metaphors the author uses for evil.

☐ Activities

Sin Through Thought

People often have thoughts that they never act on or express, but those thoughts still shape feelings about others or themselves. Jealousy, resentment, anger, deceit, ill-will are some of the thoughts that God would consider as obstacles to being *in Christ.* Ask each participant take a few moments alone and write down on a piece of paper some thoughts that they would like to confess to God. These are not to be shared, but collected in a paper bag.

Place the bag in a can or some other fire-proof container. Gather in a circle around the container and say the general confession in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 360. Set the bag on fire. Ask a volunteer to read the absolution on page 360 substituting *us* and *our*, for *you* and *your*. Say the Peace, and greet one another in Christ. This would be a good time to sing a hymn about forgiveness and love, such as *Just as I am, without one plea* (*The Hymnal 1982*, 693) or *I come with joy to meet my Lord* (304).

Sin Through Words

Words are powerful tools, but they can also be lethal weapons. On a sheet of newsprint or chalkboard, write down words the group considers to be hurtful, such as nerd, fatso, or stupid. Talk about the words on the list.

- What kinds of words hurt most?
- What kinds of words don't hurt if said by someone you know but might be painful from someone else?
- Which words tend to make the other person into an *object*? When someone is a *thing* they are easier to ridicule.
- Do we treat different people as if they are a part or apart?

Ask the group to come up with a new list of words that are complementary. Think about things you like others to say about you. Identify a person in the church or at school who would benefit from positive reinforcement. Find a way to say something positive to this person in the next week.

Sin Through Deeds

Read the personal story or make it into a role play. Talk about how each of the characters in the story, including the tormentors, might have felt.

- What kind of courage did the person telling the story show?
- Have you ever been in a situation you could have changed by doing something instead of just observing?
- How can we help each other make unpopular but courageous choices?

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VIOLENCE

Finding Safety

SESSION 8

Objective
Youth will be able to examine their own needs for safety in their environments. They will reflect on the peace of God.

Personal Story
I guess most people would assume that I'm one of the lucky kids. My family isn't rich or poor, and we live in a small town with a low crime rate. But my years in school here have still been pretty scary, mostly because of this group of kids who were, well, different from the rest of us. They looked different, acted different, and didn't seem to care about school at all. The only time their parents came to school was when one of their kids go into trouble or was expelled for beating up one of us.

I understand now that one reason they probably resented the rest of us was the way we dressed, because our clothes were newer and cleaner. Maybe they picked fights with us because our families seemed to care about us. Maybe it was because we were the ones the teachers responded to and seemed to like. Maybe it was because were relatively happy, while I guess they were pretty unhappy people. They scared me. My biggest worry was how to keep away from them during gym classes at school, and how to keep them out of my nightmares at night.

Lately, I've seen those kids with knives. I've heard about them destroying other people's property. I've seen them out on the streets during the day and at night with nothing to do. I think they're hanging out with a gang.

I just try to mind my own business. I stay away from the places they are likely to be. I also try to remind myself of how lucky I am and that my family cares, my friends at church care, and I care about what happens to me.

Deep inside, I think what these kids really want is for somebody to care about them. I guess if nobody cares about you, then you don't care much about yourself. And if you don't care much about yourself, it doesn't bother you to hurt other people. If they don't even respect themselves, how can they respect other people and things? Their lives must be pretty crazy, pretty sad.

Scripture
Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 6:14-17
II Corinthians 4:7-12
John 14:27-28

Skill Focus
Communication
Independence/Individuality

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Prayer

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.
Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A Light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen.*

From Compline
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 134

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Safety in Friendships

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price; no amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; and those who fear the Lord will find them. Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright, for as they are, so are their neighbors also.

Sirach 6:14-17

Commentary: The Scripture passage come from *Sirach*, also known as *Ecclesiasticus*, in the Apocryphal or Deutero-canonical Books of the Bible. Some Bibles do not include the Apocryphal section, but the Episcopal lectionary refers to this section throughout the different cycles. The passage above is similar to teachings in *Proverbs* about proper speech, riches and poverty, honesty, diligence, choice of friends, retribution, and wisdom itself. Verses 14-17 are part of a discourse about true and false friendship. True friends, according to the writer, are a "treasure," a gift from God.

☐ Questions

- What do you look for in a friend?
- Do your friends help you live up to your potential?
- Have you ever had a friend who encouraged you to do things you knew were wrong? What did you do?
- How do you forgive a friend?

☐ Activities

Stuff a Friend

For this activity you will need different sizes of balloons, not inflated, indelible ink markers, and an extra large sweatshirt. Ask the participants to name qualities of friendship that they value, such as trust, dependability, tolerance, and so on. Record their ideas on a piece of newsprint, and ask volunteers to blow up the balloons. With indelible ink markers, write the qualities the group identified on the balloons. Take the balloons and stuff them into the sweatshirt. As you put each balloon in, discuss the importance of the quality that's going into this "new friend."

For dramatic effect, go up to the "friend" with a pin and pop one or more balloons. Retrieve the deflated balloon, and cross out the characteristic on the newsprint that was written on the balloon.

- What happens when a friend loses that characteristic?
- Does it change your attitude about that friend?
- Can your friends find in you the qualities you say are important?

Music

Bring in some CDs with music that has something to do with friendship. Listen to the lyrics and make notes about what the songwriter values about friendships. Some examples are "You've Got a Friend" by James Taylor, "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" by Simon & Garfunkel, or "Friends are Forever" by Michael W. Smith.

- Are the qualities of friendship described in the lyrics important to you?
- What qualities do you think they left out?

Write new lyrics or add a new verse to one of the songs that includes the qualities of friendship you think are most important. Use some of the ideas from *Sirach* for inspiration.

Appreciating Friends

Invite the participants to write a letter to someone who is a good friend. Before they begin, ask them to reflect on why that particular friendship is important to them. As a group, discuss the qualities of friendship they have experienced that make them feel safe.

- What is necessary for a friendship that can be trusted?
- How does a particular friendship make you feel safe?
- What is your role in a good friendship?

Try to answer these questions in the letter, and thank the recipient for his or her friendship. Provide envelopes and stamps for those who wish to mail their letters.

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☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

II Corinthians 4:7-12

Commentary: In this letter to the church in Corinth, Paul is responding to words and feelings not recorded in the letter itself. However, it is clear that the relationship between Paul and the church had deteriorated. The passage in *II Corinthians 4:7-12* is part of a discourse about true treasures and the weakness of human messengers who tell of this treasure and the good news of Christ. Paul refers to humans as “clay jars” that carry the treasure but can also be easily broken. By suffering for Christ in these imperfect bodies, Christians can share in Christ's death and in his resurrection and victory over death.

☐ Questions

- If you were writing the Corinthians today, what kind of container would you choose to describe people's limitations?
- What weaknesses keep us from sharing the “treasure” of our faith with others?
- How can the “treasure” of our beliefs protect us from violence?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What does the writer have that the kids on the outside lack?
- How does a caring community of family and friends protect us?

☐ Activities

Clay Jars

Find a CD that features The Clay Jars, a contemporary Christian rock group, and play it while doing this activity. Buy an inexpensive ceramic dish or make one from clay earlier in the week to give it time to dry out. Read the Scripture passage, and smash the dish. Collect pieces of the broken dish, and distribute a piece to each participant. Using modeling clay, ask each participant to fashion a new creation incorporating a piece from the broken vessel. If possible, ask a potter to assist your group and fire the dishes in a kiln.

- Was it difficult to incorporate the broken piece into a new vessel?
- Why did we use the old with the new? What part of your life do you think is worth keeping?

Several members of the group may want to use some of the broken pieces and clay to create a chalice and paten. After the pieces have been fired and glazed, present the set of vessels to be used in the Eucharist with the entire congregation or at a special service. This could be especially powerful during Lent.

From Bad to Good

In the Scripture passage, Paul used the image of a clay pot to illustrate the frailty of all people. He then describes how Jesus was broken on the cross for humankind. Although there are times when we feel broken like clay pots, the broken pieces themselves may strengthen us later. Think of ways that people you know have used bad experiences to make good things happen. Look through the local sections from the newspaper from the past week to find stories of people who turned evil into goodness. For example, a group of parents who mourned the deaths of their children from drunk driving initiated MADD—Mothers Against Drunk Driving. This organization has spread throughout the nation and has saved the lives of many young people.

Share the stories you find and discuss them. Identify something in your life that is bad or frightening, and think of ways you might be able to change it into something that is good.

Power of Prayer

Invite the participants to write a prayer in which they ask God to give them strength to overcome a violent or stressful situation in their lives. The prayers could address a personal issue or a situation at school, in the church, or in the community. Those that are comfortable doing so can share their prayers with the group. Use the prayers as a basis for writing a Prayers of the People that could be used in a worship service or as a dismissal.

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3 Peace that Passes Understanding

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

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.

John 14:26-27

Commentary: In this passage Jesus promises his followers that God will send them the Holy Spirit to be with them when Jesus has left. The Holy Spirit, or Advocate, will help them understand Christ's teachings and bring them Christ's peace. John says the Holy Spirit will continue to work of Jesus by helping us understand Jesus's ministry and by revealing new things Jesus was unable to convey. All Christians can call upon the spiritual knowledge and comfort available through the Holy Spirit.

☐ Questions

- What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "I do not give to you as the world gives"?
- How can something invisible comfort you?
- Have you ever found peace and safety from within? What was that experience like?
- How can strength from within protect you from violence in the world?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How could this passage be of comfort to the writer of the story?

☐ Activities

Facing Our Fears

Invite the participants to share some of things in their world that make them anxious or nervous. For example, situations at school that threaten their safety, choices their friends have made about drugs or alcohol, or a destructive direction a relationship takes.

- What can an individual do to reduce this anxiety?
- Where can you go for help? What can the school do to reduce anxiety for students? Are there organizations in the community that provide help?
- Someone said, "In the desert, I have to go inside myself for shade." In what ways can a person "go inside" oneself for relief from anxiety or fear?

Discuss ways the church can help us face our anxieties. The group may want to talk to the rector or youth director about providing programs or counseling at the church to help people cope with anxiety.

Movie

Watch together the movie *Shine*, about a troubled pianist who overcame powerful anxieties to perform again. He was hampered at first by learning disorders that he was able to conquer. The same tendencies that caused his withdrawal from people also gave him the power to concentrate and perform difficult music.

Images of Peace

Read the following quote from a high school youth:

"In the world we live in, I find that to feel safe I must be at peace with myself and with others. For safety in my eyes equals inner peace. No matter what situation I'm in, as long as I am at peace with myself and with God, I will always be safe."

Discuss the nature of peace as a group.

- What is peace? What does it feel like?
- What is God's peace like?

Think of images that make you feel at peace. If possible, draw the image or describe it in prose or poetry. Share the images as a group. Keep the expression of the images in your backpack or posted in your room. Whenever you feel anxious or nervous in the coming week, look at your image of peace for inner strength.

Meditation

Experience a guided meditation. Invite someone the group is comfortable with to lead it, or lead it yourself. To begin, ask everyone to get comfortable, close their eyes, and relax the body. Tell them to be aware of their breathing. Describe a peaceful scene, like a beach or a field of flowers. Maybe Christ could enter this scene or the Holy Spirit that he promised to send. How does this presence feel? What does Jesus want for you? As he leaves the scene, slowly read the Scripture passage in *John 14:26-27*. End the meditation by slowly focusing again on breathing and the person's presence in the room.

Invite everyone to open their eyes. Discuss the experience of an encounter with God.

- Did you feel comforted by Jesus' presence?
- How can you use this experience later this week?

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VIOLENCE

What We Can Do

Objective

Youth will be able to name ways they can reduce violence in their lives. They will compose a statement about what they have learned and how the Church can be a force for peace and justice.

Personal Story

Jake was in our confirmation class at church and tried to be an acolyte, but he never seemed to make it to services on time. The rest of us are pretty much resigned to going to worship services because our parents keep after us. We also think that the priest is a pretty cool woman who always seems to care how things are going with us.

One Sunday morning when I was on the schedule to acolyte, I had begun to settle in for the prayers—which go on for a while at our church—when I heard the priest mention Jake in the prayers. She said something about him having been admitted to the hospital with stab wounds and that he was in serious condition.

I could hardly believe it. I knew this guy. I had even tried to train him as an acolyte. He had sat in the chancel right next to where I was now sitting. Jake stabbed? That couldn't be. That sort of thing isn't supposed to happen to people you know, especially people you know at church. I remember looking over at Geoff and Sarah, Dave, and Will who were sitting with their parents, all looking the way I felt—stunned with disbelief.

I couldn't help but wonder if they were thinking the same thing I was thinking. Jake had written off our youth group as "uncool," and we all had pretty much written him off. I remember even feeling a little relieved when he dropped out of our group. Jake is different from the rest of us in a lot of ways. Maybe we should not have let him go away from us so easily. Maybe he really needed us to work harder to include him. Come to think of it, Jake isn't really all that different from the rest of us. Maybe I should have done something.

During the passing of the peace—which also goes on for a while at my church, the priest came up to me and gave me a hug. Believe it or not, I just started to cry. She said to me, "I know. I wish I had done something, too. But he needs us now more than ever. Why don't you come over to the hospital with me later?"

"Yeah," I said, "I'd like that." For the rest of the service, I found myself praying that Jake was going to be all right, and that when he got out of the hospital, I'd do whatever I could for him. At the very least we can make him feel welcome as a part of our group. Maybe Jake still wants to be an acolyte. We can do something about that, too.

SESSION 9

Scripture
Luke 6:27-36

Skill Focus
Trust
Forgiveness

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Prayer

Most holy God, the source of all good desires, all right judgments, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, so that our minds may be fixed on the doing of your will, and that we, being delivered from the fear of all enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the mercies of Christ Jesus our Savior. *Amen.*

A Collect for Peace
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 123

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

☐ Begin Here: Remembering Scripture

[Jesus said,] "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Luke 6:27-36

Connect with the Personal Story

Read the Personal Story out loud or pass out copies to be read by each individual. Instead of discussing the story as a group, ask each person to relate it to their own experiences by reflecting on the following questions. Write your responses in a journal, or depict them in a poem or drawing.

☐ Questions

- Have you ever known someone like Jake at school or in your church?
- Did you make an effort to include this person, or did you find it easier to let the person drift away on their own?
- Have you ever been the "Jake" in a group at school or church? How did that feel?
- How does Jesus tell us to treat the outcast in the passage in *Luke*?
- Why is it so hard to love those who don't love us?

RESPONDING ACTIVITIES

Activities to help others in the community and church that are described in Sessions 2 through 8 are summarized in the chart at the end of Session 9. Use these ideas or create your own to help make your church and community a less violent and safer place.

☐ Individually

Working together or alone, think about ways an individual can respond to issues raised in the your study of violence. Share your ideas, and write them on a piece of newsprint. Possible responses are listed below:

- Write a Personal Story about an experience of violence in your life. Include in the story the consequences of the violence, what those involved learned, who was hurt, and who helped resolve the conflict.
- Reflect on changes that have taken place in your own heart. Is there a new awareness of what violence is?
- List ways that you can respond to violent situations or provocations in safety.
- Be aware of the way you treat others; even those you never meet personally. Make a covenant to "love your enemies. . . expecting nothing in return." For example, the way we address people or call them names escalates violent feelings. Share this covenant with a close friend or others in the group who will help you keep it.

☐ As a Group

Think about ways this group can respond to issues raised in the study on violence. Write them on a piece of newsprint. Possible responses might include:

- Agree to welcome anyone who would like to be a part of this group. List ways you can include someone who might be an "outsider." Reread the Scripture passage for inspiration.
- Write a statement of intent to do something specific as a group in response to violence or what you have learned in this study about violence. Your actions could be as simple as making a covenant to stop cursing, or as complex as addressing violence in an elementary school, middle or junior high school, or your own school.
- Collect Personal Stories written by individuals in the group, and publish them in a newsletter or under separate cover. Ask group members to contribute stories they want to share. Remember some may not wish to share.
- Set up a way to resolve conflicts within the group. Make a list of ways disagreements can be resolved between individuals or among subgroups. Decide if you want to use conflict resolution skills. If so, invite someone from the community or church to help you set up acceptable procedures.

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☐ Celebrate!

Celebrate the completion of your study about Violence with a specific activity. Ask the group to think of an appropriate activity or use one of the following options:

Art

- Plan an art project incorporating some of the themes from the sessions on violence (a list of themes is included at the end of Session 1). For example, collect junk from the streets around the church and make a sculpture. Display your artwork, with an explanation that God can turn our trash into a work of art.
- Decorate plain, clay flower pots with images of justice and peace to beautify an area that has been neglected or filled with trash. In the spring, plant flowers in the pots.

Liturgy

- Plan a worship service that incorporates the Prayers of the People written during Session 8. If the group made a chalice and paten for that session, use it for a Eucharist service.
- Using the same concept described in Session 6, Theme 3 that incorporated rocks in the shape of a cross, plan a worship service for the church or youth group.
- Look at the sacrament called The Reconciliation of a Penitent in *The Book of Common Prayer*, beginning on p. 447. Read the instructions on p. 446; decide if the group would like to participate in a service of reconciliation.
- Read the prayer For Young Persons in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 829. List the ways that young people can find safety in this world.

Community

- Write thank you letters to individuals in your local police or fire departments.
- Bake a cake for workers and residents of a local shelter. Thank them for their contributions to making God's peace a reality.

Fun

- Plan a party to celebrate the end of your study on violence. Use some of the music you listened to during the study that promotes peace and justice. Decorate with balloons that have characteristics of friendship written on them. Invite those who helped you plan a program or who served as speakers.

FOLLOW THROUGH

Individual Response: Make a covenant with God to do one thing to prevent violence in any form. Write down this promise and keep it in a place that you will see it often, such as on the flap of your backpack or on a mirror in your room. Think about the steps you need to take to accomplish your goal.

- Do you need help to keep your promise?
- Can you identify someone in this group, the church, or the community who can help you?

Group Response: Go back over the list of ideas the group made as a response to your study of violence. Decide which of the ideas is most interesting to the group. Perhaps only one will be feasible, given time constraints and other commitments of individuals in the group. On a separate piece of newsprint write down the response the group has selected. List the actions that must be taken to complete the task. Next to each action, estimate the time it will take, and ask the participants to designate someone to be responsible for getting it done. Appoint one person to oversee the entire activity.

- What kind of activity did the group select?
- Can every person participate who wants to?
- Can you identify people in the church or community who can help the group finish the activity?

Celebrate: Select one person or a group of people to choose an appropriate liturgy response to your study of violence. It can be as simple as saying a prayer together or as complex as designing a worship service. Ask a volunteer to gather materials for art projects, and find out who would like to participate in decorating pots or other projects you identified. If the group decides to have a party, delegate responsibility for invitations, food, and decorations.

- Does the celebration include all participants?
- Do you want to include people outside the group to join your celebration?

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LOOKING BACK AND GOING FORWARD

Outreach Activities in Sessions 2-8

Violence

Session	Theme	Suggested Outreach Activity
In the World	1	• Display in your church the collages about "forgotten people."
		• Pray for a place featured in the Anglican Cycle of Prayer.
	2	• Support an international relief group through letters or a fundraiser.
	3	• Find a way to support an organization that promotes peace.
In War	1	• Stage a play about the story of Gideon for a younger group.
		• Share the cartoons or slogans written for Gideon's army in a newsletter.
	2	• Post your ideas about peacetime uses for the military on the Internet or send them to your congressional representatives.
	3	• Dramatize the story of Jesus's arrest for a Maundy Thursday service.
		• Display the "St. Francis" banner made by the group in your church.
In Our Nation	1	• Thank a group in your community that makes the world a better place.
		• Share your expressions of hope with the congregation.
	3	• Create a mural that illustrates the Scripture passage in *Romans* about Paul's list of attributes for Christians.
In the Media	1	• Perform at a worship service the song written to express Christian values.
	2	• Lead a discussion at adult forum about the influences of television and how it promotes our "dark sides."
	3	• Act out the ritual of finding the "new self" at a youth picnic.
In the Community	1	• Hold a candlelight vigil service in honor of victims of violence in your community.
	2	• Sponsor an informational meeting about conflict resolution programs.
		• Raise funds for a prison ministry in your area.
In the Schools	1	• Plan a "Fool's Day" party for younger youth to help them distinguish between mischief and violence.
		• Clean up an area marred by graffiti or trash.
	2	• Perform a role play for younger youth that emphasizes conflict resolution.
Finding Safety	1	• Write a letter of appreciation to a friend.
	2	• Make a chalice and paten from a broken pot for a Eucharist service.
		• Write a Prayers of the People that addresses your study of violence.
	3	• Explore with the rector the possibility of the church offering a counseling program to help people face anxiety.

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