

forming civil disobedience. Those taking part in nonviolent actions should be aware that there are both risks and consequences of taking the action, and they should be prepared to accept them.

Military Service

The church continues to offer respect and support to those who have made a conscientious decision to enter the military. However, there will be many issues which will challenge the Christian in that work.

The biggest difficulty confronting those serving in the military is to be in a working environment where the daily values are not Christian. The values within the military perpetuate a state of war against some enemy by maintaining levels of fear and anxiety so that they are ready to respond before the opponent attacks. It is a fear-based model that maintains enemies to be defended against, rather than to be approached in love and transformation. This is incompatible with the gospel where we learn to “love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.”

Although police work is different in many ways from military service, the police face many of the same issues regarding the use of force and power in responding to the increasing violence in our communities. Their role is being seen as adversarial, rather than service because of the shifts in attitudes.

The Response Is Up to You

The violence which is permeating our society demands a response. For Christians working to usher in the reign of God here on earth, the violence demands a Christian response. The response we make needs to be deliberate and in keeping with our baptismal

covenant where we vowed to “strive for justice and peace among all people.” There is a range of nonviolent responses which we can make to the violence which surrounds us. Throughout this century, the Episcopal Church has been calling the faithful to respond in nonviolent ways to warfare, violence, and oppression. May God give us the grace to go forth and do this work to live fully in the reign of God.

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship

We are a body of Episcopalians dedicated to discovering and practicing the biblical concept of peace: Shalom. This includes a commitment to renounce, so far as possible, participation in war and other forms of violence. The EPF recognizes that there can be no peace without a commitment to justice, and no justice without reconciliation. Thus, the Fellowship endeavors to develop within the Church a community of Christians pledged to peace, justice, reconciliation, and nonviolence.



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CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Violence surrounds us. The most obvious form of violence we think about is open, international warfare. However, wars between nations are being replaced by civil wars and by violence between tribes and ethnic groups within countries. Closer to home in the United States is random violence and the violence between gangs in our inner cities, violence in the schools, and domestic violence. For many of us, that violence is as remote as the wars being fought elsewhere in the world. But there is another level of violence which affects all of us, because we all experience different degrees of violence in our relationships at home, at school, or at work. This violence may be verbal or physical. This violence comes from the same attitudes of anger, rage, hatred, and fear that lead to wars. It affects all of us because these attitudes are part of all of us. We need to respond to that violence as Christians.

Violence is usually a symptom of underlying causes of injustice. We need to learn how to address both the symptoms of violence and the root causes. To overcome the violence in our lives, we need to break the cycle of fear, which is connected to distrust, which is related to stereotyping other people's actions and intentions, which affects anger, which leads to a violent response to either defend ourselves or cut others off before they can attack us. This cycle can be broken at several places in the process.

The Episcopal Church has repeatedly stated that “War as a means of resolving conflicts is incompatible with the teachings and

example of Jesus Christ.” The experience of domestic violence is similar to living in a state of war because we live in fear and anxiety and are constantly ready to preempt others before they can attack us, either verbally or physically. We need to learn how to respond as Christ would have us respond.

There are two basic issues at stake in making our response to the violence around us. The first is whether we confront violence (or indeed any issue within our lives) deliberately or passively. A passive response is to follow thoughtlessly where others lead. The second issue is to determine what response we will give when confronted with violence. The possibilities range from pacifism to nonviolent confrontation to a response with violence or the threat of violence.

The Episcopal Church has declared that “nonviolent refusal to participate in or prepare for war is a faithful response of a member of this Church and that a decision to participate in or prepare for war should be made only after careful and prayerful consideration.” This can also form our approach to violence in general. To refuse to enter the process with deliberation, however, is to enter into passivism.

Passivism

Jesus came that we may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). We need to embrace life in its fullness and be aware of all the events and issues which surround us. That is part of what it means to live in the kingdom (reign) of God here on earth. As the world has gotten more complex, it has been easier for all of us to compartmentalize various areas of life and allow others to determine what happens. This passive acceptance infringes on our ability to live life to the fullest. This passivism is an unchristian response to the world around us. It is an abdica-

tion of our responsibilities as Christians to make Christ’s presence known in the world and to live as co-creators with God. It is easy to claim we are allowing specialists to make decisions in areas where we are not specialists, but this can result in decisions which do not further the reign of God here on earth.

Having determined to be deliberate in our choice of responses, we need to make choices about confronting violence around us. Here we are faced with a range of responses. Pacifism has been an historical approach and has been contrasted with militarism. However, there is a range of intermediate responses which actively engage issues of violence.

Pacifism

Pacifism has historically been a stance in which pacifists accepted the violence directed at them without resistance, because resistance might be an act of violence against others. This stance was used by many Christians during World Wars I and II. Pacifists would not fight when confronted by their enemies and would not inflict violence on their enemies. Pacifism is a position which is carefully and thoughtfully taken. It is not a position for cowards, as some claim. It is also not a position which is taken by people simply because they are passive. This is an extreme position which allows the individual to respond on a personal level to violence and war. Many people are uncomfortable with pacifism, since it is usually seen as a personal position which does not necessarily confront issues of injustice and violence which affect society as a whole.

Non Violent Conflict Resolution

A Christian position which directly engages issues of injustice and violence is non-violent con-

flict resolution. Nonviolence can be understood as a means of resolving conflict without violence, hatred, or rancor, by prevailing upon another person or group with moral, social, economic, political, and/or personal force. Nonviolent confrontation stems from the realization that each individual has the inclination to good or evil within them, and that the victimizers should be treated with the same compassion as the victims, the oppressors with the oppressed. It does not excuse the oppressors or victimizers, but recognizes that they should be confronted in a compassionate, nonviolent way. Nonviolent actions taken in love are described in the Letter to the Romans as heaping coals upon the head (Rom 12:20). Any actions taken should be deliberate confrontations with ourselves and with others to demonstrate love toward all, and to demonstrate that there is injustice in the situation.

Nonviolence begins with the individual. It is a position which is taken even while recognizing that there is still violence and anger in the individual’s heart. As an individual confronts that violence and seeks to transform it, the life of nonviolence begins. The individual is able to look for appropriate actions which can be made to intervene in the immediate violent situation. The nonviolent response should be proportional to the problem encountered.

There are many situations where a group can take action collectively. When groups act, the whole group should understand how each individual will respond and how the group will respond. Not everyone needs to take the same approach to the situation. Appropriate actions may range from large scale education sessions about an issue, to nonviolent intervention between disputing factions, to per-