

PEACE POINTS

Lutheran Peace Fellowship

Peace in our world • Peace in our nation • Peace in our neighborhoods • Peace in our homes • Peace in our hearts

It's Time to Talk!

A growing number of Christians are worried about the direction of our country. This concern takes various forms – anxiety, frustration, anger, alienation, discouragement. For many, the main issue is the Iraq War. Where do Christians stand on this issue? Where have the churches been? Is there anything we can do? At Lutheran Peace Fellowship we see this moment as a time to create space for conversation, to learn from one another, to ask together how we can respond. This resource aims to open up that conversation.

Using this Resource in a Group

Introduction: "Opinions about the Iraq War vary widely. As Christians we know to ask: 'How can we be faithful to the Gospel call to be peacemakers regarding Iraq?' As Christians, we also strive to reach past the divisions of our world and create a space where we listen to one another, respect one another, learn from one another, and support one another in taking steps to act on our faith." [Open with prayer.]

1. Listening: Find community in our diversity. (4-6 minutes)

Ask participants: "We each come here with a desire to be faithful disciples. We each have a piece of the truth; no one has all the truth. Can we commit to respect the feelings and conscience of each person here?... Let's honor our diversity as we share a few comments: what concerns or questions do you have about the war?... Do you know anyone who has served in Iraq? How does that affect your viewpoint?"...

2. Discussing: Where are we now? (10-15 min.)

"Let's explore several specific aspects of this war. To focus our discussion, we'll look at 'Taking a Closer Look,' two at a time, seeking to answer the first questions at the top. Refer to side two if someone wants current information on a particular point..." [End with several responses to the second question at the top of the page.] As a consensus emerges or differences become clear, move to the next step:

3. Sharing: How can we act on our beliefs? (8-12 min.)

"We'll begin by restating our opening question: 'How can we be faithful to the Gospel call to be peacemakers regarding Iraq?' While we might have differing answers, we can't avoid answering. So, let's look at 'Acting on our concerns,' beginning with the first section. Which activities make sense to you?... Is there anything we can add to the list?... Which of these could we do as individuals; which might we do as a group?"

4. Doing: What specific steps might we take? (10-12 min.)

Invite participants to "pick an aspect of the war that is especially important or compelling for you." [Ask a few to share theirs.] "Let's try writing our comment as a letter to a friend, elected official, or newspaper. Work in pairs if you wish..." [Have envelopes & addresses available] Read several letters out loud... "What else can we each commit to do? How we can support one another in our commitments? [Review web and forum info.]

Preparation: Make copies of the two handouts [share the week before, if possible]. Explore what groups in your area are doing, and web resources (over). In thinking about the forum, anticipate the range of views you might find in your group. Pray for wisdom and the ability to respect and encourage the conscience of each participant.

Peace Points is an activity series from Lutheran Peace Fellowship designed to encourage youth and adult groups in their justice seeking and peacemaking.

Lutheran Peace Fellowship (LPF) is a community of Lutherans across the U.S. and around the globe who seek to be faithful to the gospel call to be justice seekers and peacemakers. LPF offers a wide range of expertise, encouragement, and resources. For further information, contact:

lpf@ecunet.org

lpfyouth@yahoo.com

www.lutheranpeace.org

206.720.0313

Lutheran Peace Fellowship
1710 11th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98122-2420

"As a community of moral deliberation, the Church is a setting of freedom and respect where believers of different perspectives may learn from one another.... The church is a disturbing presence when it refuses to be silent and speaks the truth; when it names and resists idols that lead to false security, injustice, and war, and calls for repentance." (ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World*, page 5)

Acting on our concerns

Talk with your neighbors, relatives, and friends. Listen as much as you speak. **Look** for where they might hear your concerns. Make your tone caring and respectful.

Read alternative sources of news such as the websites below. **Support** hopeful efforts like the Declaration of Peace (see box at right), or the STEP resolution.

Share an article you find helpful. **Write** a letter-to-the-editor and/or letter to your members of Congress (sample below); it is fine to be brief. **Call in** to a radio talk show.

Propose a follow-up workshop or series like the forum ideas below right. **Encourage** another congregation or group to consider using "It's Time to Talk..."

Become active in a local peace group and in Lutheran Peace Fellowship. **Tell** others about and **attend** a vigil or rally that taps the power of active nonviolence.

Be creative! Plan a candlelight vigil... or a children's "Peace Paint-in" to create peace posters... Seek to send a clear message, to convey your humanity, to be inviting.

Sample letter on Iraq

Dear Congressperson___:

I am deeply worried by what the Iraq War is costing in lives, treasure, and priorities. I recently learned that President Bush's request for an increase of \$3 billion in foreign aid has been cut by Congress to \$600 million. The difference is what the Iraq War costs every ten days! This is funding for activity that might actually achieve what Iraq War supporters assert we are doing: giving oppressed people hope. Please work to reverse this budget decision in Congress, and to re-open a public discussion of the goals and reality of this war.

Sincerely yours, ___

Helpful web sites

Religious: The Journal of Lutheran Ethics, www.elca.org/jle;
Lutheran Peace Fellowship, www.LutheranPeace.org;
Sojourners: www.sojo.net; ECLA: www.elca.org/advocacy;
www.elca.org/nonviolence; */middleeast*; */hunger* Also:
www.forusa.org; www.paceebene.org; www.fcni.org

Secular: www.unitedforpeace.org; www.epic-usa.org;
www.peacefultomorrow.org; www.veteransforpeace.org

General sources of commentary: www.commondreams.org;
www.fpf.org; www.oneworld.org; www.ips-dc.org

Our goal: That we may be mutually encouraged by each others' faith, *Rom. 1:12*, and speak to others for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation, *1 Cor. 14:3*.

What can we support?

One example:

Declaration of Peace Campaign

"The U.S. war in Iraq is an endless fire consuming lives, resources, and the fragile possibilities of peace. Instead of quenching this fire, the US occupation intensifies it. The Declaration of Peace is a call to end this war – and a commitment to take action to translate this call into a concrete plan for peace...."

"The Declaration of Peace is a commitment people are making across the United States to take bold, powerful and peaceful steps to help establish a comprehensive withdrawal plan. Together – policy-makers and citizens; Democrats, Republicans and Independents; people of faith and people of conscience – we have the power to douse this fire. Sign The Declaration of Peace – and connect with groups planning tangible, nonviolent action to end this war and build a new era of peace and justice."

For more information: www.declarationofpeace.org; The STEP proposal: www.fcni.org; The Campaign for a New Foreign Policy: www.peace-action.org See also: www.unitedforpeace.org

Ideas for another forum ...or a series of forums

What Brings Security? – Many groups have raved about this computer-based budget priorities activity that helps participants explore their own values and compare them with actual federal budget choices. (Package includes CD, Leaders Guide, and handouts)

Kairos 2006 – Explores questions Christians are increasingly asking about the direction of US foreign policy and how it squares with the gospel vision of peace with justice. (Several LPF members are active in this ecumenical effort. 8 page package with discussion aids.)

What Is Christian Peacemaking? – Popular forum invites participants to examine biblical texts to develop a fresh, powerful, gospel-centered understanding of "Shalom" and what it might offer for our lives, church, and world. (Leaders Guide, handouts, litany)

Pieces of the Truth, Just War, How to Be a Bridge in a World Full of Walls – These activities use small groups to help us examine and share insights about growing in understanding, just peace and just war, and differences. (Handouts, Leaders Guide for each)

These and other resources are available from:

Lutheran Peace Fellowship, 1710 11th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122
206/720-0313 ♦ lpf@ecunet.org ♦ www.LutheranPeace.org

Taking a Closer Look

This summary of concerns was written in December 2002 for an 8-page resource on Iraq developed by Lutheran Peace Fellowship. *Questions:* 1. Which of these concerns from ten weeks before the war have proved true? Which have not? Use the "Update" (over) to see what has happened to any concern since the war. 2. Are there any concerns you would add? 3. Which are the most significant or compelling for you? In what way do these concerns encourage you to act?

Concerns about War with Iraq

1. The Iraqi people have already suffered enough in more than two decades of war. Eleven years of US-backed sanctions alone have killed more than a million innocent civilians, half of them children.

2. Military action could result in a great many civilian casualties and cause suffering of countless innocent people. A war could seriously damage the environment and the US and world economy, the effects of which fall most heavily on the most vulnerable.

3. It is not in the US interest to take unilateral military action opposed by most of the world. Instead, we should cooperate with international efforts like UN inspections to control weapons of mass destruction.

4. Unilateral overthrow of another government heightens fears and concerns within other countries regarding American respect for international law and the rights of other nations.

5. The preemptive use of military force by the US sets a dangerous precedent. Do we want other nations to feel they can justify preemptive strikes because of weapons of their neighbors, grievances, fights over resources, etc.?

6. US military action is likely to spark more terrorism and further destabilize the region. Militants in other countries are likely to seize the opportunity to recruit more adherents and further incite people against the United States and allied countries.

7. A war with Iraq diverts attention from addressing the root causes of conflicts and terrorism such as

extreme poverty and hunger. It also distracts us from other issues like our economy, schools, and environment.

8. A war with Iraq will drain our resources and prevent creative and sustained efforts to bring a lasting, just peace to Palestine and Israel. Many countries believe our focus on Iraq detracts from our ability to help resolve this deepening conflict.

9. War could create an estimated 1.5 million Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries while hundreds of thousands could be displaced within the country. The UN estimates it might need to feed 7 to 8 million people. The use of chemical and biological weapons would drastically complicate conditions.

10. War in Iraq could cost the United States as much as 1.9 trillion dollars over a decade, according to a report issued in late 2002 by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. (President Bush has put the direct costs at 200 billion.) The 1991 Gulf War cost about \$61 billion, but allies reimbursed all but \$7 billion.

11. The American people have growing doubts about starting a war. Some wonder if it's mostly about oil. By January 2003, polls showed that 40 to 50% of Americans believed that the President had not made a compelling case for war in Iraq. Without the support of US allies and the UN, many more people oppose war.

12. Prejudice would increase if people were to see Arabs, Muslims, Christians and Americans as enemies. Hostility towards those who are different might deepen in the US and elsewhere.

1-03

With support from the ELCA Commission for Women and several other ELCA programs, this resource was mailed in early January 2003 – ten weeks before the Iraq War began – to 3800 lay leaders, 1400 pastors, and 800 synod, churchwide, and ecumenical leaders. Thousands of copies were distributed over the internet. It was used in many adult forums, encouraging public advocacy among congregations and groups. Is it again time for Christians to gather, talk, and act in the public arena?

Update: *Taking a Closer Look*

1. Suffering of the Iraqi people

A May 2005 report by the UN Development Program and the Iraqi government concluded that "Iraqis' living conditions have deteriorated and pose challenges for development efforts."

Though many services were built up under Hussein, most have deteriorated since the war, resulting in increased infant mortality rates, higher unemployment especially of the younger population, unstable electricity, water, and sewer services. All these have deteriorated further since 2005. **Source:** www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/attack/consequences/2005/0516tragic.htm

2. Civilian casualties

Estimates of Iraqi civilian deaths since the war began in 2003 range from 35,000 to 150,000. The lower figure is often cited, but it includes only deaths reported in magazines and newspapers.

Comparisons of such reports with figures from Iraqi hospitals and morgues come up with figures that are typically three to five times as large.... Widespread use of depleted uranium munitions by the U.S. in the 1991 and 2003 wars has been linked to higher rates of birth defects and illness among Iraqi people and U.S. service members. **Source:** <http://icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>

3. Opposition to the war in other countries

The US went to war without the support or legitimacy of the UN Security Council. Almost none of the 49 countries in the "coalition of the willing" have language or cultural similarities to Iraq. Since 2003, 26 coalition nations have left it, including Kuwait, Spain, the Philippines, and Turkey. Opposition to US policy are at historic high levels. <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=803>

4. Impact of unilateral military action

Few Americans realize how badly the Iraq War, torture scandals, etc. have damaged international opinion of the U.S. A poll in 16 countries showed that the number of people with a favorable opinion of the U.S. dropped more than 20% between 2002 and 2005 in half the countries, including Britain, France, Indonesia, Morocco, and Russia. Travelers and journalists report deep fear that the U.S. has become more of a bully than a beacon among nations. <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=247>

5. Preemptive use of military force

The United States has lost leverage and weakened our ability to build international support to restrain the nuclear ambitions of countries like Iran and North Korea, and human rights abuses or growing military budgets in countries like China. It is hard to tell other countries not to develop weapons of mass destruction and to avoid military action when the US threatens or uses them.

6. Terrorism and regional stability

Between March 17, 2003 and March, 17 2004 the U.S. State Dept. reported 504 incidents of terror in the Middle East Region. Between the same dates in 2005-06, there were 3000+ incidents. According to the U.S. National Intelligence Council, Iraq has become a place that provides terrorists with "a training ground, a recruitment ground, and the opportunity for enhancing technical skills." www.tkb.org/home.jsp; www.ips-dc.org/iraq/costsofwar.htm

7. Root causes of conflicts and terrorism

In 2006, the US budget allocates 58 times as much money for military responses to conflict as for all programs to address root causes of conflict and terrorism like extreme poverty. The 2007 budget calls for a 7% increase in spending for military responses to conflict, a 48% increase since 2001. (This increase alone is ten times what we spend to address root causes). Yet the FY 2007 budget cuts funding for proven, effective programs such as International Development Assistance, Child Survival and Health, and Disaster Assistance... **root causes:** www.Interaction.org, **military:** www.whitehouse.gov/omb See LPF's "What Brings Security" activity

8. Israel-Palestine

When President Bush first took office, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were very close to a peace agreement. But his Administration's lack of determination on this issue, especially compared with its determination in Iraq, has taken a huge toll on prospects for peace in Jerusalem. With the Palestinian election of a Hamas legislature and Israel's pursuit of unilateralism, even greater creativity and determination will be needed to restart negotiations toward a viable two-state solution. www.cmep.org

9. Refugees

In late April 2006, the Vice President of Iraq announced that as many as a half million people within Iraq "were living as refugees because of sectarian violence." Even more people are refugees in neighboring countries. The UN refugee agency estimates the number of refugees just in Syria exceeds 500,000. www.unhcr.org www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/MAC854892.htm

10. Financial cost

The direct costs of the Iraq War have reached \$320 billion, a total likely to double before the war ends according to the research arm of Congress, the Congressional Research Service. It now costs more per month than the Vietnam War. A study by a Nobel prize-winning economist and a Harvard budget expert concludes that the total will likely approach \$2 trillion after adding long-term costs like health care and disability. www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/r133110.pdf www.informationclearinghouse.info/article11495.htm

11. Public opinion

A March 2006 poll shows that two in three Americans call Iraq a war of choice, not necessity, and that Americans show strong support for making the Iraq operation more multilateral. Fully 72% of American troops serving in Iraq think we should exit the country within a year. www.zogby.com/news/readnews.dbm?id=1075 www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar06/USIraq_Mar06_rpt.pdf

12. Prejudice

According to the latest annual report on the subject, anti-Muslim hate crimes in the U.S. rose by 50% over the previous year. The study covers 1,552 anti-Muslim incidents: 141 cases were hate crimes, 225 involved religious discrimination, 196 cases involved workplace discrimination, 190 cited verbal harassment. A notable increase was in discrimination by police, e.g. unwarranted arrests and searches. www.cair-net.org/asp/2005CivilRightsReport.pdf

The LPF website offers additional resources and a version of this list with live links to these and other sources of information:

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