

# SESSION 5

**Purpose:** By the end of this session, participants will be able to discuss the three dominant positions about war and peace that have emerged in Christian tradition since the New Testament was written: pacifism, just-war, and crusade.

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**Materials Needed:** copies of the *Foundation Document*; three index cards; newsprint and marker; three signs with “Pacifism,” “Just-War,” and “Crusade” written on them; masking tape; and copies of *The Book of Hymns*.

**1** Explain that in this session group members will explore three classical responses to war and peace by Christians living in postbiblical times. Point out that tradition has been regarded as one of the criteria for authoritative judgment since the beginning of the Methodist movement. So it is reasonable to look at how Christians have responded to crucial issues in the past.

**2** Divide the group into three teams. Give each team an index card with one of the following messages on it: (1) “As pacifists, you believe that Christians must always refrain from using violence against others.” (2) “You believe that Christians sometimes find themselves in tragic situations in which violence is required to restrain evil and protect the innocent.” (3) “You believe that God has called you to exercise God’s vengeance by punishing evildoers.” Announce that you will read a test case and, after one minute of deliberation, each team will respond from the perspective given on the team’s card. For the first case, ask: What would you do if an intruder threatened to assault and perhaps kill someone in your family? For the second case, ask: What would you do if an enemy nation threatened to attack your country? Allow some ventilation of feelings and opinions by team members, but don’t try to decide yet upon any one of the positions as right.

**3** Read aloud the section “The Pacifist Tradition” in the *Foundation Document* (pages 30-32). Point out two issues that surface here. First, the church in the early centuries by and large adopted a pacifist stance. Second, the reference to nonviolent strategies of social change, civilian defense, and conflict resolu-

tion, suggests a thorny issue: Is the primary duty of Christian action *faithfulness* or *effectiveness*? Invite group members to comment briefly, but caution that the issue is not a simple one.

**4** Have group members read silently the section “The Just-War Tradition” in the *Foundation Document* (pages 32-35). Write on a newsprint sheet the seven main principles of this historic approach (just cause, just intent, last resort, legitimate authority, reasonable hope of success, discrimination, and proportionality). Explain that *all* of them must be satisfied for the use of violence to be considered *just*. Ask group members if they agree with the bishops that the use of nuclear weapons would likely violate three criteria in particular.

**5** Read aloud the section “The Crusade Tradition” in the *Foundation Document* (page 35). Ask the group members what they think about a crusade mentality. What problems do they detect? While this approach to violence has drawn many supporters ever since its emergence in the twelfth century, its legitimacy has always been suspect (largely because it denies that the enemy has any worth either as a child of God or as someone for whom Christ died).

**6** Post three signs around the room: “Pacifism,” “Just-War,” and “Crusade.” Ask group members to stand closest to the position(s) they agree with and farthest from the position(s) they reject. Ask if everyone feels comfortable where he or she is standing.

**7** Explain that the bishops are not entirely comfortable with any of the three classic positions. They have proposed a provisional list of twenty “guiding principles for a theology for a just peace.” Have the learners turn to that list in the *Foundation Document* (pages 36-37). Read aloud the principles one at a time, asking those who agree to raise their hands, then those who disagree to raise their hands, and finally those who aren’t sure to raise their hands.

**8** Close by singing or reciting together “God of Grace and God of Glory,” No. 470 in *The Book of Hymns*.