

SESSION 11

Purpose: By the end of this session, participants will look at a portion of the United Methodist heritage in order to gain insight into ways to work for *shalom*, and will discover several ways that they themselves can serve as peacemakers in five arenas of life: personal, family, church, occupational, and political.

□ □ □

Materials Needed: copies of the *Foundation Document*; newsprint and marker; copies of "The General Rules of the Methodist Church," pages 68-71 of *The Book of Discipline, 1984*; scratch paper; and pencils.

1 Over the past sessions, participants have been led through Bible study, historical traditions, and the issues and problems of the nuclear arms race. In this session, participants will focus specifically upon what they as United Methodists—laity and clergy—are led to do to work for *shalom*. Divide group members into teams of three. Distribute copies of "The General Rules of the Methodist Church" (which can be found on pages 68-71 of *The Book of Discipline, 1984*). Explain that when the Methodist movement was beginning during the eighteenth century, John Wesley offered these rules to Methodists as they "sought the power of godliness." Ask the teams to read through the "General Rules," noting those things Methodists were to do that the teams believe would serve the work of *shalom*. Ask them what *shalom* rules they would add in order to update the list for our time.

While the teams are studying the "General Rules," put up five sheets of newsprint, one with each of these headings: "PERSONAL," "CHURCH," "FAMILY," "OCCUPATIONAL," "POLITICAL."

After the teams have had adequate time, ask them to report on their lists. As they report, write a brief term or phrase summarizing the items on their lists under the appropriate heading on the sheets of newsprint.

Read the following passage (or have it prepared on newsprint) and ask participants for their responses:

"Purity of heart or inward holiness is to manifest itself in outward life. The pure are peacemakers who hate strife and contention, and who seek to mediate hostility. Defining his terms broadly, Wesley describes doing good to all as the mark of the

peacemaker. To do good to friend or enemy, to assist the poor, the sick, and the hungry, is his lifelong work. Wesley concludes that the pure and the peacemaker shall be persecuted, but that in these qualities are found 'the fundamentals of Christianity,' the quintessence of religion."¹

The bishops note in the *Foundation Document* that "the Wesleyan emphasis on personal holiness can be a powerful source of fidelity in peacemaking. We affirm peacemaking as a sacred calling of the gospel, especially blessed by God, making us *evangelists of shalom*—peace that is overflowing with justice, compassion, and well-being" (pages 83-84).

During the rest of this session, participants will be adding to the newsprint lists, noting various concrete ways in which God's grace might lead and empower them to be "evangelists of *shalom*" in all the arenas of their lives.

2 The bishops note in the *Foundation Document* that "peacemaking is ultimately a spiritual issue. Without conversion of minds and hearts, the political systems of this world will remain estranged from *shalom*" (page 84).

Ask group members to read "The Peaceable Spirit" (pages 83-85), making note of ideas about prayer they can put into practice. Ask them to report while you list their ideas on the newsprint headed, "PERSONAL."

Press the group members to brainstorm specific ways they could pray that would work for *shalom*. (Possible ideas to get them started might be: praying daily for an end to strife around the world; reading the newspaper or watching TV news programs to build a prayer list of places in the world where war is threatened or occurring; praying for forgiveness for our part in the nuclear arms race [for example, our feelings for national and personal security, our paying of taxes that build weapons]; praying for the Christians and churches in "enemy" lands; praying for the political leaders and soldiers of "enemy" lands.)

Read aloud the following passage. Tell your listeners to pay special attention to what is said about prayer and Christian hope.

"Prayer reminds us that there is both divine grace and human responsibility. Christian living entails both. The danger of nuclear war is real. Our faith would be false if we supposed there were no urgency,

if we supposed that everything is in God's hands alone. But our faith would be equally crippled if we supposed that the full responsibility lies upon us.

"God shares the responsibility for our world with us and seeks to direct us in ways of peace. That is the basis of Christian hope: confidence that God's call is worthy of trust and that we can be sustained and guided by it. Trust in God and responsibility for the creation go hand in hand. That is the ultimate basis for peace in a nuclear world."²

Invite members of the group to state the basic point in their own words.

3 In the *Foundation Document* the bishops call the family "the potential greenhouse of all peacemaking" (page 85). The models we exhibit for our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and neighbors' children will influence how they will choose to live and act within the world. The old adage remains true: Actions speak louder than words.

Invite participants to brainstorm ideas they could use to work concretely for *shalom* within their families. If the group has trouble getting started, you might share the following excerpt from a family magazine to get started.

"Is there any way to dispel this cloud of gloomy apprehension? Many families—especially those with children—are tempted to deal with the problem by ignoring it or by avoiding any discussion of it. But that does not resolve the problem. The fear remains, even if we consciously put it on a back burner.

"More importantly, such withdrawal may contribute to the problem because it tells the family that problems of war and peace are for 'experts' only. Instead, what we need to do is to seek out constructive responses that are helpful and appropriate for the family. This is especially important for families with children since children's attitudes toward war begin to crystallize at an early age and show a close relationship to parental attitudes and opinions. Most important for the family is avoiding getting stuck at the stage of identifying fears. Images of war and extinction, if replayed constantly, can block visions of peacemaking and well-being.

"The family can play a crucial role in educating for peace. One obstacle to political action for peace is our pattern of stereotyping the enemy as all bad. The family is one place where we can and should be reminded that our 'enemies' are fellow children of God. We forget, sometimes, that there are Christian churches in the Soviet Union. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. More than that, families can

nurture concern and caring for all the peoples who share this nuclear-threatened world. Pictures, calendars, posters, place mats, foods, and music of other peoples and nations remind us of our common humanity.

"We need to be alert to special opportunities for activities as a family. Television specials and documentaries can prompt discussion of our policies and our perceptions of other nations. Field trips to the site of a weapons factory or a defense base can stimulate conversation about defense policies and dangers. Television newscasts and newspaper articles provide further opportunities for discussion among family members.

"Social action for peace can itself be a family educational activity. Writing letters to legislators and newspaper editors is a project for the entire family. Children can participate in such peacemaking activities as demonstrations, marches, public meetings. Adults need to include tasks in which children can have specific roles: games, decorations, singing, wearing a button, sign-making. Whenever possible, integrate fun with action—that applies to adults as well as children.

"Children benefit from social action as a family in three ways: First, learning by doing is probably the most effective method. Second, it helps children realize that change for the better is possible. Third, it enables children to develop confidence in themselves.

"Children need to be exposed to advocates for peace. Inviting persons who work for peace to be guests in the home for a visit, a meal, an overnight stay, can provide a witness to what a living faith can mean. They provide examples of faithful action and testify to the joy and satisfaction that such a life of service brings.

"These exposures need not be face-to-face. Younger children delight in hearing stories—why not include stories about peacemakers and heroes for peace? Family members may want to locate—with the help of the church's mission agency—a family in Europe active in the peace movement. An exchange of photos and letters can boost the morale of both families as well as broaden their perspectives and concerns. Inviting a foreign exchange student into the home serves the same purpose."³

4 The bishops note that "it remains an essential task of Christian education to help the community of faith understand the nature of commitment to the God of *shalom*" (page 86). Turning to the newsprint headed "CHURCH," ask the participants to name ways their local church already teaches in support of *shalom*. Ask what other ways their local church might

do so. Be sure to include ways to promote education for peaceful alternatives beyond the walls of the church. Refer to the list of ideas generated for step 5 in Session 9.

5 As people tell what they do for a living, list their occupations in one corner of the newsprint headed "OCCUPATIONAL." Note that the bishops "plead for a new vocational strategy of peacemaking. . . . We ask all our people to lift up the ministry of the laity as a vital bearer of *shalom*, working through *vocational guilds* (occupational groups) in ways that are appropriate to each field of work. . ." (page 87).

As you list their thoughts on the newsprint, ask group members to brainstorm opportunities for peacemaking in each of the occupations they listed. Also, ask them to discuss ways in which they might support the peacemaking efforts of one another across occupational lines.

Whereas persons in the church vocations serve as "primary gatekeepers" in the work for peace, what do group members see themselves doing to encourage and support the efforts on behalf of *shalom* by their pastors, Christian education director, and other professional church workers?

6 The bishops note that "peacemaking is inescapably political" (page 88). "One of the most important purposes of Christian peacemaking is to equip persons for *political ministry*—the positive exercise of their God-given power in the political arena. We affirm two essential means of fulfilling this purpose: (1) personal involvement of United Methodist leaders, lay and clergy, at every level in nurturing political action as an imperative of *shalom* and (2) direct and regular personal engagement of our church members with policy makers in foreign and defense policy. For Americans, it is especially important to be in touch not only with members of Congress but with executive agencies and influential opinion leaders outside of government" (page 88).

Spend some time brainstorming in your group about concrete ways to engage in political ministry for the sake of peace. You may want to do some of the following:

- contact politicians by mail, by phone or mail-gram, or in person;
- write letters to the editor of your local newspaper;

- organize an "offering of letters" in your local congregation, district, or conference;
- organize signature ads in local newspapers in support of a general theme or a specific issue (paid for by a small contribution by each person signing);
- provide radio spots to local stations;
- coordinate a march from congregations all over your conference to the state capitol, with participants carrying signs and banners;
- organize a walk-a-thon (with sponsors agreeing to write a certain number of letters to elected representatives for each mile walked);
- join one of the many national networks, with local chapters of citizens working for peace in political arenas. (Contact the General Board of Church and Society for some suggestions.)

7 Ask whether any group members are ready to commit themselves to *doing* something to work for peace. If time allows, spend several minutes now to begin making plans. If time is short, make plans to meet again soon to decide what to do and how to proceed.

8 Close with a prayer of your own, giving thanks for God's continuing care for creation and pledging to work for God's *shalom*. Or offer the following prayer on behalf of the group:

"O God, author of peace and victor over death, we give you thanks that from the beginning you have gathered a people to be the instruments of your reconciliation, never leaving your world untended. Grant unto all your servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to carry on the work of peacemaking and that we may abide in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."⁴

¹Taken from *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley's Ethics*, by Leon O. Hynson. Copyright © 1984 by The Zondervan Corporation; page 87. Used by permission.

²From "Stop the Arms Race!" by Jack A. Keller, Jr., in *Christian Home*, Fall 1983; page 6. Reprinted with permission from *Christian Home*, Fall 1983. © Copyright 1983 by The Upper Room.

³From "Stop the Arms Race!"; pages 5-6. Reprinted with permission from *Christian Home*, Fall 1983. © Copyright 1983 by The Upper Room.

⁴From "*My People, I Am Your Security*" (Sojourners Peace Ministry, 1982); page 53.