War & Conflict, Peace & Social Justice

“If development is the new name for peace, war and preparations for war are the major enemy of the healthy development of peoples. If we take the common good of all humanity as our norm, instead of individual greed, peace would be possible.”

Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #10

Wars and conflict are bringing about untold suffering throughout the world, and increasingly it is unarmed civilians and children that are being targeted. It is also the poor that suffer the most in situations of conflict, victims both of killings and torture and also of the devastating economic and social effects of war.

Many cases of conflict around the world are barely reported in the news and many of those that are, tend to be seen only as resulting from ethnic and/or religious rivalry. However, most have deeper underlying causes related to the distribution of wealth and social and economic development. Often the conflict arises over a vital resource such as water or oil. It is therefore necessary to find solutions to conflict that involve development, equitable sharing of resources and justice.

In developed countries, we need to be asking ourselves not only how we can offer help and support, but also question whether we might not be helping to fuel conflict, for example by selling arms to countries at war or exploiting their resources. Even the consumption of drugs may fuel “drugs wars,” and competition from our subsidized exports may be pushing farmers in developing countries to take desperate measures for survival by growing drug-related crops. In some cases, developed governments’ support for one or other side in a conflict may be influenced by their own interests in controlling access to vital resources.

Conflict is also part of our daily lives and we need the skills to deal creatively with personal relationships to help us solve problems without resorting to psychological or physical violence. On a global level, this helps us to think about the causes of conflict and those things that fuel or even thrive on conflict.

Reflecting on the Church’s teaching about these issues can help us to discern how we should act. The aim of this resource is to help group participants understand that:

- Examining the way we live our lives can help us understand how to deal with conflict.
- Conflict and economic injustice are related issues.
- Peace and conflict is an issue of development and justice. It is also a moral issue on which the Catholic Church has something to say.
Themes of Peace and Conflict

Introductory Discussion Questions
What do you know about any past or current conflicts in the following locations: Israel/Palestinian territory, Republic of Ireland/Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Sudan, Rwanda, Pakistan/India

What do you know about the Church and Biblical teaching on peace and war?

How is the work of the Church and the pursuit of peace linked?

How do you respond to conflict?

In his novel, The Comedians, Graham Greene says: “The Church condemns violence, but it condemns indifference more harshly. Violence can be the expression of love, indifference, never.” Do you agree that indifference is worse than violence? What can indifference lead to? Give some examples.

Peace Activity
Using books and/or web sites, find some basic facts about the life of a religious person who has/had a strong view about war and peace. Make a poster and present it to your entire group. Look at some key points in his/her life and discuss why you consider him/her to be a person of peace.

You may choose from any of the following:
- Martin Luther King
- Mahatma Gandhi
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu
- Thomas Aquinas
- Archbishop Oscar Romero
- Aung San Suu Kyi
- Archbishop Belo from East Timor
- Dorothy Day
- Thomas Merton
- Daniel Berrigan
- Philip Berrigan

Economic Injustice and Conflict
Can economic injustices lead to violent aggression between different communities? Can you think of any examples where this has happened?

In what conflicts below do economic issues and economic injustices play a role?
A. Israel/Palestine
B. US/Iraq crisis
C. Republic of Ireland & Northern Ireland
D. Kosovo
E. Sudan
F. Rwanda
G. Pakistan/India

Circle the correct answer(s): A. B. C. E. F. G. All of the above.

In a conflict there are many factors and variables that contribute to the overall problem. Often, only the surface layers get addressed rather than the core layers of the conflict. Economic injustices contribute to the deep-rooted layers. In many cases, certain groups within communities have experienced economic injustices, and their frustration has built up over time. If no avenues exist in which communities can meet their basic human needs, then economic frustration can contribute to aggressive reactions. Over time, a conflict can become more complex because the factors such as economic issues become intertwined with cultural and identity issues. Then, the layers of a conflict begin to overlap. Authentic solutions must look at the complex whole before proposing long-term, just solutions.

To understand some of the complexities, including economic injustices, of conflict, have small groups do research on one of the conflicts listed above, and then give a brief report to the larger group at a future date. The following web sites may be of help:

The Carter Center, http://www.cartercenter.org
The United States Peace Institute, http://www.usip.org
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (on-line library), http://library.gmu.edu/resources/sossci/conflict.html
Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE): University of Ulster and United Nations University, http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/home/
Peace and Conflict: Am I a Peace Builder?

Use the questions in the chart below to reflect on your own experiences and to start thinking about peace and conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past month have you . . . ?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>What did you do? Give an example.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Read about conflict in the newspaper or on the Internet?</td>
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<td>Prayer for peace?</td>
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<td>Been involved in an argument?</td>
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<td>Settled a dispute--at home or in school/work?</td>
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<td>Watched a movie or television program?</td>
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<td>Campaigned for peace?</td>
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<td>Tried to see another person's point of view?</td>
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<td>Spoke to someone in a demeaning way?</td>
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<td>Explained to someone how a particular comment hurt you?</td>
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<td>Discussed peace and war with your peers?</td>
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How would you rate yourself as a peace builder?
The Church’s Teaching: A Call to Peace

What does the Bible say about peace and conflict?
“He will proclaim justice to the nations.”
Matthew 12:18

“The peace sown by peacemakers brings a harvest of justice.”
James 3:18

“Love your enemies and do good to them.”
Luke 6:35-36

“The will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”
Micah 4:3

What does the Church have to say?
The church encourages us to follow the path of peace. For three hundred years Christians would neither engage in Rome’s military campaigns nor justify killing as a means to achieve goals. Only later did the Church allow for war under very special prescribed circumstances. These are summarized in the Just War theory. It provides Christians with a set of criteria to judge a conflict and to decide whether it is justifiable.

A Just War must fulfill all of the following criteria:

1. All non-violent options must be exhausted.
2. It is waged by a legitimate authority.
3. There is a just cause.
4. It has a reasonable chance of success.
5. The ultimate goal is to re-establish peace.
6. The violence used is proportional to the injury suffered.
7. The weapons used discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Civilians are never permissible targets of war.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Throughout history Christians have actively promoted peace. Conscientious objectors to military service regularly refer to scripture and the church’s teaching to explain their rejection of violence. Here are some examples of Catholic teaching on the subject of peace and conflict:

“Peace is founded on truth, built on justice, nurtured and animated by charity and brought into affect under the auspices of freedom.”
Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, #167

“Christians, and the followers of other religions, must work together to build a world without violence, a world that loves life, and grows in justice and solidarity . . . Religion must never be used as a reason for conflict.”
Pope John Paul II, September 12, 2002

“Peace must be born of mutual trust between nations rather than imposed on them through fear of one another’s weapons.”
Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, #82

“Terrorism can never be portrayed or defended as a protest against poverty; but neither can it be defeated simply by force of arms. Even a decisive and ‘successful’ war would create swathes of new victims and tend to deepen existing patterns of hostility . . .”
Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, September 5, 2003, The Times

“Prayer for peace is not an afterthought to the work of peace. It is of the very essence of building the peace of order, justice, and freedom. To pray for peace is to pray for justice, for a right-ordering of relations within and among nations and peoples. It is to pray for freedom.”
Pope John Paul II, Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2002

“Excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities among peoples arouse tensions and conflicts, and are a danger to peace.”
Pope Paul VI, Populorum Progressio, #76

“If you want peace, work for justice.”
Pope Paul VI

“In the face of all the threats, there’s a great unity in the church. That’s the most important thing; it’s a church that prays and reflects on its responsibilities.”
Fr. Rafael Castillo, Colombia
The Church’s Teaching:  
A Call to Peace (continued)

Discussion Questions
What does Jesus have to say about peace? Are his comments realistic and useful today?

What action does Jesus take to achieve peace?

Can it ever be right to use violence in the search for peace?

Can any of the learning from the Just War principles be applied to the situation in Sudan, Serbia or other conflicts?

Why does the Catholic Church claim authority to speak on matters that relate to the arms trade? See *Pacem in Terris*, #109-#129, an encyclical of Pope John XXIII.

What action do you think Christians should take in regard to Colombia, Serbia and/or Sudan to act in solidarity with the peacemakers in these countries?

Activity
Meet as a group of religious and lay people working to update the Just War criteria. Aim to give Christians a framework to judge modern warfare. Try to provide criteria to examine how Christians judge terrorism, civil conflicts and innocent victims of modern warfare. Use *Pacem in Terris* as a reference point.

Further Discussion
Working in pairs or small groups, discuss the possible roots of the points of view in the boxes below. Which, in your opinion, reflect Scriptures and the teachings of the Church? Which statements do you agree with? Why? Which statements do you disagree with? Why?

Conflict is inevitable. It is part of the human condition.

Conflict is often a result of inequalities. We have a duty to make the world a fairer place.

If a war has a just cause then as Christians we should support it.

Under certain circumstances war can be justified.

All war is evil. As Christians we are opposed to war at all costs.

We should oppose the arms trade.

People have the right to fight against oppressive regimes.

We should intervene when other countries are in conflict.