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Telling the Truth about ourselves and our World

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A study guide to help individuals and churches to continue to reflect and act together



Telling the Truth About Ourselves and Our World



TELLING THE TRUTH
ABOUT OURSELVES
AND OUR WORLD

A study guide to help individuals
and churches to continue to reflect
and act together as the
**2001-2010 Decade to Overcome
Violence – Churches Seeking
Reconciliation and Peace**
is celebrated at the International
Ecumenical Peace Convocation
(May 17-25, 2011, Kingston, Jamaica).

The opinions in this study guide are intended to encourage reflection and action and should not be taken as official statements of the World Council of Churches, unless clearly quoted as such.

This study guide has been prepared by Simon Oxley.

2009

Other information is available as necessary from the WCC and other sources.

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Forward

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:31b-32(NIV)

We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

1 Cor 2:7(NIV)

The end of the Decade to Overcome Violence will be celebrated and marked by the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC). This event is expected to point to the future of peacemaking in the ecumenical movement. In preparation for the IEPC and requested by the WCC Assembly, a consultative process towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace is underway, exploring the meaning and challenges of just peace in a time in which war and violence are still real and still find justification in social and cultural habits and in various arguments. Meetings and documents in themselves will not establish peace and justice. Nor will sitting at home complaining or shedding tears.

We live in a time of great danger, great opportunity and great hope, all at the same time. Christians believe God's promise of peace and justice is real and is working itself out in history. The DOV and the IEPC are small instruments in getting ourselves and others engaged in the realization of that promise. There are several good reasons, actually emerging for the first time in history, to hope and to engage.

- Violence no longer goes unnoticed and unchallenged: victims, both collectively and individually, are being given a voice and a stand. Both victims and offenders are recognized as human beings in need of healthy relationship.
- Violence prevention is becoming mainstream, world-wide. No longer an issue only of criminal justice, violence and its prevention is becoming an issue of health, culture and education across civil society and even in governments.
- Peace building and conflict transformation are new academic disciplines all over the world. Field research is used to enhance positive intervention.

- Reconciliation has become a pressing issue for churches and communities. Truth and healing are real and tangible categories arriving on national and international agendas.
- Global threats are real and imminent. There are growing movements to change the course of history regarding nuclear weapons, access to and distribution of water and climate change.
- Justice and peace have for some time been said to belong together. Today the notion of just peace requires courage, truth-telling and merciful joint action.

This list is not exhaustive and its arguments are not developed here. Yet it does point towards things that have been 'hidden from the beginning of time' and are now unfolding before our eyes, through God's creative and healing power in Jesus Christ. No less than that is at stake as the ecumenical movement moves towards convening in Kingston and declaring what it means when it speaks of just peace and as it seeks to pursue it. The truth being revealed to us – not by us – cannot be killed. We may as well find ways to tell it and live it.

I want to thank Simon Oxley, former colleague at the WCC and co-author of the first DOV study guide – *Why Violence? Why not Peace?* – for leading us in this reflection and call to action.

Hansulrich Gerber, Coordinator, DOV

The Decade to Overcome Violence – Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

The full title is important because we are not simply called to resist the many ways in which violence appears in our own lives, the life of the church and the whole world. As Christian people we are called to 'seek peace and pursue it' (1 Peter 3.11 NRSV). Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus, weeping over Jerusalem, said, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!' (Luke 19:42, NRSV). We too need to recognise the things that make for peace and act on them.

The Decade was launched at the WCC Central Committee meeting in Berlin in 2001 in the hope that,

We come together from the four corners of the earth, aware of the urgent need to overcome violence that pervades our lives, our communities, our world and the whole created order. We launch this decade in response to a deep yearning among our peoples to build lasting peace grounded in justice.

The Decade is a space created by the WCC in which individuals, churches and movements have worked together to encourage one another and share the challenges we face in our different contexts and responses. In doing so, we have deepened our understanding of violence and affirmed creative approaches to peace-building.

In order to move peace-building from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church, and to build stronger alliances and understanding among churches, networks and movements working toward a culture of peace, the goals of the Decade to Overcome Violence are as follows.

- Addressing holistically the wide variety of violence, both direct and structural, in homes, communities and in international

- arenas, and learning from the local and regional analyses of violence and ways to overcome violence.
- Challenging the churches to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active nonviolence.
 - Creating a new understanding of security in terms of cooperation and community, instead of in terms of domination and competition.
 - Learning from the spirituality and resources for peace-building of other faiths, to work with communities of other faiths in the pursuit of peace and to challenge the churches to reflect on the misuse of religious and ethnic identities in pluralistic societies.
 - Challenging the growing militarization of our world, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Through the WCC, the churches have called one another to an International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21 September each year.

Small ecumenical teams are visiting different countries to listen, learn and share approaches and challenges in overcoming violence and in peace-making, and to pray together for peace in the community and in the world. These Living Letters are a sign of solidarity with those who suffer violence and an opportunity for the wider ecumenical community to learn from the experience of others. There is also a participatory process to prepare an International Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace, for adoption at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May 2011.

The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation will be a time for

- harvesting the learning of the ecumenical movement's ten-year journey towards overcoming violence;
- celebration of what has been achieved;
- mourning the many victims of violence;
- reflection on our theology and ethics;
- prayer and spiritual renewal;
- developing creative visions for the days after the decade.

For, in the words of the words of the Jewish philosopher Elie Wiesel, when visiting the former German concentration camp Buchenwald with US President Obama, "Tears are not enough".

You can read more about the Decade to Overcome Violence, the Living Letters and the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, together with stories from all around the world and resources on the special website: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org>.

Introduction to the Study Guide

Telling the Truth about Ourselves and the World may at first sight seem a strange title for this study guide about overcoming violence and seeking reconciliation and peace. One of the striking things about the *Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace* written in preparation for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) is the frequent use of 'truth' and 'truth telling' in the text. Telling the truth means

- identifying the difference between things as they are and how they should be;
- recognising our need for repentance;
- offering and accepting forgiveness;
- drawing on the on the personal and faith resources we have been given;
- acting for change.

Telling the truth is not easy and it can be painful. This study guide suggests some ways to approach telling the truth using the four themes of the IEPC – Peace in the Community; Peace with the earth; Peace in the Marketplace; Peace among the Peoples. However, the real work and struggle has to be yours. There are no shortcuts to facing up to the truth about ourselves and about the world we make.

We probably find it easy to identify the difference between the way things are and the way we would like them to be for us. But what is good for us may be bad for others. It can be hard to recognise that the way things should be for the good of all may not always be in our immediate personal interests. In a world scarred by the differences between the rich and the poor, commitment to peace with justice can be costly.

We all share, in varying degrees, the responsibility for the way the world is. It is not always someone else's fault. Repentance, especially in Christian terms, means more than saying sorry. It is about redirecting our way of life. We need the support and encouragement of one another, as well as the grace of God, to live in ways that make for peace.

There are not some who should offer forgiveness and others who should accept it. Our human condition means that we all need to both offer and accept forgiveness. Neither is easy to do.

As Christian people and as churches, God has given us a wealth of spiritual and practical resources. The gifts that come from God are not personal possessions or controlled by any church. They are not given as rewards or as a means to achieve some private salvation. They are given so that, to quote the Lord's Prayer, God's kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. Faced with the terrible reality of violence in all its forms we need to use all of these resources and use them together.

Finally, telling the truth means acting for change. The Decade to Overcome Violence ends in 2010. The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation will come and go in 2011. The quest for reconciliation and peace in every part of life in the world will continue. Faithfulness to the God we encounter in Jesus Christ demands that we continue to live and act for peace.

How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide has been written to help individuals, groups and churches to reflect on the themes of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) and to be active in their own contexts in promoting reconciliation and peace. Please read the two introductory sections to familiarise yourself with the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and the IEPC and the rationale of this study guide.

The four main sections deal with the four main themes of the IEPC

- Peace in the Community
- Peace with the Earth
- Peace in the Marketplace
- Peace among Peoples

Each section starts with a quotation from people from different parts of the world who gave an introduction to the themes at the 2009 WCC Central Committee meeting.

The process of each section follows the same pattern. It provides

- an opportunity to relate the theme to your own experience and context,
- further reflection on the theme in the global context,
- thinking of our own vision of peace,
- a commitment to action.

Even if you choose not to use all the questions, it is important to follow this pattern, as it will root your reflection in your reality. Each section includes a prayer. Whether you use that prayer or not, it will remind you that faith in Christ is the foundation of your discussion.

Other resources for the DOV can be found on the Overcoming Violence website: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org>. Web addresses for statements and reports quoted in the study guide have been given so that you can access the whole documents if you wish.

The study guide encourages you to tell the truth about yourselves, your church and the world. Being honest about oneself is never easy. Neither is speaking the truth in love. When we speak we should be sensitive to those around us. Listening is as important as speaking and violent words can be just as destructive as physical violence.

These themes are each very large and this study guide and your own discussions will not be able to cover everything. You can create opportunities to take your reflection further another time.

You can use this study guide for personal reflection but we strongly encourage you to join with others in discussion groups, which requires careful preparation. At least one member should be thoroughly familiar with the material in order to guide the group. There should be a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. Sitting in a circle helps interaction. Allow time for people to speak from their experience but be aware that this may be painful for some.

This study guide is not a report to be read but an invitation to be involved. Talking about these themes can be very rewarding. However, it is the kind of people we become and the things we do together that most clearly demonstrate our commitment to the Prince of Peace.

Peace in the Community

Violence against women and children is very high. We are also aware that gender based violence is not a South African problem but a global issue.

Professor Isabel Phiri, working in South Africa.

Think about the communities to which you belong. Remember that this study is about telling the truth, as painful as that may be.

YOUR FAMILY

The family is often described as the basic human community. Who are the members of your family? How well do you relate to each of them? How does being a member of your family support you? How does it restrict you? What produces tensions? Who has the power in the family? If you could choose the members of your family, who would be in it? What are the good things about your family? What are the bad things?

WHERE YOU LIVE

Is your local neighbourhood a community or just an area on a map? Think of a phrase that describes your home neighbourhood. How many people do you know there? How well do you know them? Who would you go to if you had an emergency? What produces tensions? Who has the power in your neighbourhood? What are the good things about your neighbourhood? What are the bad things?

WHERE YOU WORSHIP

Christians put a lot of emphasis on community. Is your local church or congregation something to which you belong or just where you go to worship God? Is church for you a real community or a place? Why do you belong or go there? How well do you relate to others in the church? What produces tensions? Who would you go to if you had an emergency? Who has the power in the church? What are the good things about your church or congregation? What are the bad things? There may be communities within the church, for example youth or

women or groups to undertake particular tasks or ministries. Ask the same questions about them.

WHERE YOU WORK

If you are in employment, you may spend more time in your work community than any other. How would you describe your workplace? How well do you relate to those you work with? Who has the power in the workplace? What produces tensions? What are the good things about your work place? What are the bad things?

OTHER COMMUNITIES

Many of us belong to other groups and organisations – political, sporting, cultural or interest-based. Why did you join? What holds you together? What produces tensions? Who has the power? What are the good things about this group or organisation? What are the bad things?

Are there any similarities in your experience of belonging to these different communities? Are there any differences? How do you explain these?

How do these communities relate to their members who may appear different from the majority or from those who hold power? How can issues such as race, gender and culture cause tensions?

How do these different communities react or relate to those who do not belong to them? Are they open and welcoming? Are they fearful? Do they see others as some kind of enemy?

We may like to think of the church community as a safe place for everyone. However, many people experience violence of various kinds. The interpersonal violence of society is not left at the church door. Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela and Gerald West have written about their experience of setting up the Tamar Campaign in Africa, which uses contextual Bible study in churches to challenge an acceptance of violence against women.

We had learnt from previous workshops that the church responded with unhelpful suggestions to survivors of

abuse. Women are usually encouraged to pray for their abusive partners or to persevere in the abusive relationship. More often than not it was the woman's faith that was questioned, instead of the abuser being confronted. ... A common understanding of abuse was that it was primarily physical. We felt it was important for women to be aware of the other dimensions of abuse, including sexual, economic, verbal, psychological and spiritual dimensions. Our cultures and religion clearly provide a setting for all these forms of abuse to take place without being reported or challenged. Most women have accepted this as their lot, believing this is how God has ordered the world! Some women believe the other kinds of abuse are not as bad as physical abuse!

[http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p5/Ministerial_formation/mf103.pdf]

How do you react to this? How do we tell the truth about violence against women?

People also experience violence in their place of work. Per Lindblad from Finland writes,

Workplace violence is either physical or psychological. Instances like hitting and beating, pinching, pushing, jostling, squeezing breasts and raping are all considered physical violence. Threatening with violence is considered a crime, too. Psychological violence, or bullying at work, is meant when someone repeatedly becomes a victim of negative behaviour, bullying, oppression, name-calling, ridiculing or subjecting by a colleague, superior or employee for a long period of time. A victim of psychological violence feels unable to defend him or herself.

[http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p5/Ministerial_formation/mf103.pdf]

How do you react to this? How do we tell the truth about violence in the workplace?

Sometimes whole communities are violently rejected by the rest of society. The WCC Central Committee has recognised that discrimination on the basis of caste is sinful because everyone is made in the image of God. WCC member churches have been called on to recognise that,

...the continued discrimination and exclusion of millions of people on the basis of caste as a serious challenge to the credibility of their witness to their faith in God and to take necessary steps to expose and transform structures and cultures which perpetuate these gross injustices. ... The fact that untouchability practised against Dalits in India and South Asian countries as well as other similarly affected communities elsewhere, represents one of the gravest systemic violation of human rights in the world today.

[<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-caste-based-discrimination.html>]

What difference does it make in your situation to recognise that everyone is made in the image of God?

We do not have to accept violence in the home, church, workplace or local community. Where in the Bible and our Christian tradition and experience do we find the encouragement and strength to work for peace in the community?

What is your vision for peace in the communities to which you belong? Be creative in describing this vision.

There is a saying in many cultures that every long journey begins with a few small steps. Name three small but practical steps you can take to make your vision of peace in community become a reality.

O God of peace, you know us from before we were formed in our mother's womb.

Forgive us when we only have good intentions and do not commit ourselves to concrete action for peace and justice.

Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.

O God of justice, you judge our human race with mercy.

Forgive us when we allow your image in us to be marred as we remain passive in face of so much violence and exclusion.

Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.

O God of love, you have created humankind to be one great family.

Forgive our inability to be reconciled with others, both our dear ones and our enemies.

Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.

O God of grace, you have given us the gift of speech to be an instrument for change.

Forgive us for the times when we have spoken too hastily without thinking of the consequences, or have remained silent out of fear or indifference.

Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.

[From *Imagine Peace*, WCC, 2008, http://overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2008pdfs/imagine_peace.pdf]

Peace with the Earth

At least 40% of all inter-state conflicts over the last 60 years have a link to natural resources. Climate change produces droughts and floods. With floods and droughts there's no food. Where there's no food, there's a greater chance that people are fighting for it.

Rev. Aaro Rytkönen of Finland

In the first account of creation of the natural order in Genesis, it says 'And God saw that it was good' (Genesis 1:25, NRSV). When you look at the natural world, what do you see that is good? What is wonderful, amazing and beautiful? In preparation for this reflection, you could find some photographs – mountains, fields, rivers, trees, flowers, insects, animals, etc. – and spend a few minutes looking at them before trying to find words to describe the goodness of creation.

Where in your own locality do you experience the wonder and goodness of creation? Are there other places you have visited where you have experienced that?

We humans have a habit of spoiling the goodness of creation. In what ways do we do that? You could find some different photographs – smoking chimneys, roads crowded with cars and lorries, rainforests cleared, polluted rivers, land laid waste by industry or by dumping rubbish, etc. – and spend a few minutes looking at them before finding words. Why do we do this to the earth and its atmosphere? Do we have to do this or are there other ways? Where in your own locality do you see the results of human abuse of the natural order? Are there other places you have visited where you have seen that?

The WCC Central Committee in 2008 noted that,

Climate change, as the variation in the earth's global climate or in regional climates over time, and its effects are being experienced already in many regions of the world. Global warming, i.e., the increase in the average temperature of the earth's near-surface air and oceans, is one of the most evident aspects of climate change. The average temperature of the earth is rising. This creates the melting of ice

sheets in Antarctica and Greenland, glaciers, permafrost in mountainous regions and the rising of the average sea level. Rising sea levels are already affecting some countries like Bangladesh in Asia and some islands, particularly in the Pacific. A water crisis brought on by severe droughts and unprecedented floods has resulted in a lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Other effects of climate change are hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, which are increasing in strength, causing loss of life and destruction of the environment and property. ... Thus, human life and the whole of creation are suffering a new threat. Climate change raises ecological, social, economic, political and ethical issues, and demonstrates the brokenness of relationships between God, humankind and creation.

[<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2008/reports-and-documents/public-issues/minute-on-global-warming-and-climate-change.html>]

We need to tell the truth about ourselves and our churches. What impact do our personal and family ways of life have on the environment? And that of our churches? How green are we? Do we waste electricity and fail to recycle? Are we careless in our use of cars and airplanes? Do we care about buying food that is fair to the earth and the people who produce it?

In a message for World Environment Day 2009 [<http://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=en&id=1071&tla=en>], His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew wrote,

The ecological crisis, and particularly the reality of climate change, constitutes the greatest threat for every form of life in our world. Moreover, there is an immediate correlation between protection of the environment and every expression of economic and social life. For our Orthodox Church, the protection of the environment as God's creation is the supreme responsibility of human beings, quite apart from any material or other financial benefits that it may bring. The almighty God bequeathed this 'very beautiful' world (Gen. 1.26) to humanity together with the commandment to 'serve and preserve' it. Yet, the direct correlation of this divine mandate for the protection of creation to every aspect of contemporary economic and social life, ultimately enhances the global effort to control the problem of climate

change by effectively introducing the ecological dimension into every aspect of life.

With the opening of this third millennium, environmental issues – already evident since the 20th century – acquired a new intensity, coming to the forefront of daily attention. According to the theological understanding of the Orthodox Christian Church, the natural environment is part of Creation and is characterized by sacredness. This is why its abuse and destruction is a sacrilegious and sinful act, revealing prideful contempt toward the work of God the Creator. Humanity, too, is part of this Creation. Our rational nature, as well as the capacity to choose between good and evil, bestows upon us certain privileges as well as clear responsibilities. Unfortunately, however, human history is filled with numerous examples of misuse of these privileges, where the use and preservation of natural resources has been transformed into irrational abuse and, often, complete destruction, leading occasionally to the downfall of great civilizations.

Indeed, the care for and protection of Creation constitutes the responsibility of everyone on an individual and collective level. Naturally, the political authorities of each nation have a greater responsibility to evaluate the situation in order to propose actions, measures and regulations that will convince our communities of what must be done and applied. Yet, the responsibility of each individual is also immense both in one's personal and family life but also in one's role as an active citizen.

How do you react to this understanding of the sacredness of creation? Much discussion of ecology and climate change has been based on the self-interest of humanity in preserving an inhabitable earth. What difference does it make to look at them from a Christian perspective?

Isaiah (11:1-9) had a vision of life under the governance of the one sent by the Lord. Isaiah links justice for the poor and meek (with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth v4 NRSV) with harmony within the natural world (The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together v6, NRSV). Why do issues of justice and ecology belong together?

Where in the Bible and our Christian tradition and experience do we find the encouragement and strength to work for peace with the earth?

What is your vision for peace and harmony with the earth? Be creative in describing this vision.

Name three small but practical steps you can take to make your vision of peace with the earth become a reality.

Our God, the source of life,

Your name be glorified as you reveal yourself through the beauty of your creation.

Let your will of protecting and preserving your earth community be continued.

Give the poor the strengths to own their forests, lands, seas and rivers to sustain them daily.

Forgive us for breaking nature's cycle of life.

Lead us not into temptation of greed, want and seeking to make a commodity of your creation.

Deliver us from being evil agents destroying your creation.

For yours is this cosmos which proclaims your reign and glory

For ever and ever. Amen.

[Lutheran World Federation, 2009 from the European Christian Environmental Network]

Peace in the Marketplace

The presence of greed is a form of violence, is like a virus. Greed is a major source of violence between people individually and collectively. ... The economy of enough for all is in opposition to the economy of the unlimited accumulation of power and wealth.

Rev. Dr Ofelia Ortega of Cuba

Local markets can be colourful, lively and exciting places. Not only are they places where people buy and sell, they are places of meeting and celebration.

Financial markets brought the world's economy to its knees in 2008. Individuals and financial institutions played games with stock markets, currencies and commodities in the hope of making huge profits. Instead we all lost. These two views remind us of the beneficial and the harmful potential of the marketplace.

Sokoni is the Swahili word for the traditional African market in Kenya. It is more than merely a place for exchanging goods, it is a place for exchanging stories and experiences. The sokoni is a place of human contact, mutual exchange and support, connecting and re-connecting with others in the community and beyond the village. The market is a place of life, of personal relationships and formation in community. In some cultures, the market is also the place where disputes are settled.

How does this description of a market relate to your own experience, locally and elsewhere? Think of a market you have visited. What are your memories of the sights, sounds and smells? How did it make you feel? What is the difference between a market and a supermarket? Which gives greatest benefits to you and the community?

Where is greed most obvious in your community? Why do you think that people want to have more than they can eat, or wear, or use? Telling the truth, do we have more than we need?

In 2005, the WCC produced a background document - *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE)* (<http://>

www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccassembly/documents/english/agape-new.pdf). It stated that,

1.5 billion citizens of our planet – the majority of whom are women, children and Indigenous Peoples – live on less than one dollar a day, even as the world's richest 20 percent account for 86 percent of global consumption of goods and services. The annual income of the richest 1 percent is equal to that of the poorest 57 percent, and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. ... Financial crises have become more frequent and intense. Joblessness is growing, threatening the people's livelihoods. The centrality of money and monetary standards, especially as economic growth aiming at capital accumulation, now drives almost every country in the world. Financial markets and transnational enterprises systematically plunder the earth for short-term profitability. The belief that corporate market-based economic growth can sustain development is deceptive. Reality again and again contradicts this naïve belief. Pressure to maintain credit-worthiness and competitiveness in the global market harm the political will of governments to create and implement a strong national social policy. The breakdown of social safety nets, expenditure cuts for health and education, and lack of protection for the ecosystem reflect the fact that governments have lost control over their finances, budgets and policies.

We have heard a lot about the effects of the 2008/9 global financial crisis on those who thought they were financially secure. But for most of the world's population the global financial system has always denied them financial security. The rich and the powerful manipulating the market is nothing new. The prophet Amos condemned those who 'trample on the needy and bring ruin to the poor of the land' (Amos 8.4 NRSV)). They adjusted weights and measures and terms of trade to their benefit, exploited labour and sold counterfeit goods.

Telling the truth, how have you benefited from or been impoverished by the global economic system? If you have savings or a pension, where is the money invested? What does your church do with its money? Jesus said that what we do with our money reveals our true values. 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6.21 NRSV). What does our use of our financial resources say about us?

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance campaigned that,

Trade justice is about recognizing the right that farmers have to feed their families and send their children to school. It is about allowing domestic industries to develop; it is about access to essential services like water and healthcare, and it is about the right to fair wages and dignified work. It is the best chance for poor countries to work their way out of poverty.

Trade justice is people-centred, respects human rights and guarantees food security, livelihoods and sustainable development for the whole of society. It recognizes the right of all people to have a say regarding their own future, and all governments to determine their own economic and trade policies.

Trade justice calls for basic changes to the rules that govern international trade. It requires that rich countries' governments and institutions like the WTO, IMF and World Bank stop forcing liberalization and free trade on poor countries.

[http://www.tradeweek.org/resources/guides/guide-Feb08_REVISED.pdf]

What do you think of the values expressed in this statement? When you buy food, clothes and other goods, why should you care whether the original producer receives a fair payment? What can you do as an individual or collectively to promote trade justice?

Where in the Bible and our Christian tradition and experience do we find the encouragement and strength to work for peace in the marketplace?

What is your vision of peace in the marketplace? Be creative in describing this vision.

Name three small but practical steps you can take to make your vision of peace in the marketplace become a reality.

O God who is one in Trinity, in you we find the perfect relationship of love and justice.

We confess that too often our relationships have been characterized by greed and self interest,

That we have sought wealth and security for ourselves with little thought for your creation,

That our desire for more has meant that others have less,

That we have displayed the Pharisees arrogance and not the widow's sincerity in our giving.

Inspire us with a vision of your oikumene, characterized by love and compassion,

Where all have enough to eat,

Where work is justly rewarded,

Where concern for the least is our most pressing demand,

Where life is celebrated and you, the giver of life, is praised.

[from the 2009 WCC Central Committee]

Peace Among the Peoples

We see now signs of hope. When people start to talk to each other and listen to each other their cries are heard, their joys are shared and their sufferings even are felt.

Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi of Burundi

Who are you? Choose ten words that each say something about who you are. If you are using this study guide in a group, share your self-descriptions. Explain to one another why you have chosen your words. What categories of identity have you used (for example, gender, ethnicity, nationality, character, appearance)? Why is our identity important to us?

Why are differences between people's identities often involved in conflicts? Where have we seen such differences being the cause of conflicts? Where have leaders with other agendas (such as wealth, power and the control of resources) used differences in identity to create conflict – between the churches and between nations?

The early church had problems with conflict between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians. The Letter to the Ephesians talks of Christ bringing peace and breaking down the barriers of hostility between them so that 'you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone' (Ephesians 2.19&20 NRSV). Writing to the Philippians, Paul said that as Christians 'our citizenship is in heaven' (Philippians 3.20 NRSV). What difference does being a citizen of heaven make to our identity? What difference should it make to our relationships with others?

The Roman poet Horace, who lived just before the birth of Christ, observed, '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* [How sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country]'. His sentiments have been echoed by political and religious leaders down the centuries. In 2009, the last British soldier to have experienced fighting in the trenches in the First World War died at the age of 111. He is quoted as having said, 'War is organised murder,

and nothing else.' When wars have ended, we have often heard people saying, 'This must never happen again'. Yet the twenty-first century has continued the pattern of the twentieth-century with war or armed conflict always existing somewhere in the world. Every news report seems to contain figures of deaths or casualties in some conflict or other. Do you see war as glorious, as an unfortunate necessity or as organised murder?

Christians have often been described as either supporting war or being against war. The *Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace* puts it differently:

Just as 'pacifism' – one family of traditions – is wrongly taken by some to mean 'passive non-resistance', so 'just war' – another family of traditions – is misleading. 'Just war' is not about justifying war; it is about limiting its occurrence and limiting the ways in which it is carried out. 'Justified use' or 'just use' is the better term, since the effort is to determine whether there are ever morally exceptional uses of deadly means, wherever they may occur – in self-defence, as the responsibility to protect innocent populations, in police actions, in circumstances when rebellion or revolution may be justified, or in tragic cases at the beginning and end of life (whether euthanasia, assisted suicide, or medical abortion). 'Justified use' is about the exceptional and highly occasional use of lethal means as the last resort. After all, both pacifism and just-use traditions, including just war, share the same Christian norm for the use of force – non-violence. Both share a same common task – the reduction of violence. And both dedicate themselves to the same goal – overcoming violence.

[http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/peace_declarations/drafting_group/Initial_Statement_JustPeaceDeclaration_full.pdf]

Where do you see the unjustified use of violence in the world? What is the role of individual Christians and churches in helping to reduce or overcome that violence?

Being peacemakers is not about frightening others into submission. Nuclear weapons are said by some to guarantee a peaceful world because everyone fears the consequences of using them. The 2009 WCC Central Committee called on

member churches to declare to their national leaders, 'Transform opportunity into action. Signal your intentions to the global majority who want the elimination of nuclear weapons, and supply the proof of progress. Let a year of cooperation reverse a decade of nuclear deadlock. Reject weapons that should never have been made and that must never be used. Begin now to fulfill the international treaty promise to free the world from nuclear weapons. Put a deadline on this obligation to us all.'

[<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/statement-of-hope-in-a-year-of-opportunity-seeking-a-nuclear-weapon-free-world.html>]

The churches and the ecumenical movement have been calling for nuclear disarmament for decades. Why should we continue to call for this?

Why is it important for people and peoples to listen to one another? How can churches, which sometimes appear not to listen to one another, have the moral authority to challenge groups and nations to peacefully engage with one another?

Being peacemakers is more than trying to end violence or reduce its deadly effects. Conflict is not the norm, even though it often appears to be so. The *Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace* states,

In the Hebrew Scriptures, *shalom* means 'completeness, soundness, welfare, peace'. ... The Hebrew Scriptures are clear in their understanding that peace is lost when illnesses, injustices, poverty, conflict, violence and wars inflict wounds on the bodies and souls of human beings, on society and on the earth. But peace is more than the absence of conflict, as it is sometimes understood today. The absence of conflict and war does not exhaust the meaning of *shalom*. ... The Hebrew Scriptures give us the understanding that all peace is of God, and the wholeness of human life includes obedience to God who is just, merciful and righteous. Peace, therefore, is the fruit of righteousness and practice of justice.

This comprehensive meaning of *shalom* is carried over into the New Testament. ... In the New Testament, Jesus himself is the source of peace. His life reveals the Spirit of Peace,

a peace that the world cannot give. This peace he bestows upon his disciples: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid' (Jn 14:27-28).

[http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/peace_declarations/drafting_group/Initial_Statement_JustPeaceDeclaration_full.pdf]

Why is it important to understand peace as wholeness rather than as the resolution or absence of conflict?

Where in the Bible and our Christian tradition and experience do we find the encouragement and strength to work for peace among peoples?

What is your vision of peace among peoples? Be creative in describing this vision.

Name three small but practical steps you can take to make your vision of peace among the peoples become a reality.

Lord, we pray for:

Peace for those who weep in silence,

Peace for those who cannot speak,

Peace when all hope seems to disappear.

In the midst of rage, of violence and disappointment,

In the midst of wars and destruction of the earth,

Lord, show us your light in the darkness.

Lord, we pray for:

Peace for those who raise their voices to demand it,

Peace when there are many who do not wish to hear of it,

Peace as we find the way to justice.

[From *Imagine Peace*, WCC, 2008,
http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2008pdfs/imagine_peace.pdf]

Tears Are Not Enough

The violence in our lives, our communities, the churches and the world should make us weep. But tears are not enough.

FOCUSSING AND LOOKING DEEPER

If we are to work on the 'things that make for peace!' (Luke 19.42 NRSV), we need to be well informed – not only about issues of violence themselves but about how God calls us to be peacemakers and our faith supports us. Each of the themes of the IEPC is very large and this study guide cannot cover everything or go into great depth. So don't stop with the four sections but focus on some issue and look deeper.

Look at the Overcoming Violence website <http://www.overcomingviolence.org> for information, resources, stories and prayers to help you.

ACCOMPANY THE INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL PEACE CONVOCATION

Only a limited number of people will be in Jamaica in May 2011 for the Convocation. But we can all accompany it in the months leading up to it and during the event itself. Again the website <http://www.overcomingviolence.org> will help you to feel involved.

Also accompany the process for drawing up the International Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace which will be adopted at the Convocation. Then make the Declaration known.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR COMMITMENTS

Let others know in your congregation and in the churches locally and nationally. The global IEPC process needs your input. The Overcoming Violence website, <http://www.overcomingviolence.org>, offers some ways.

INVOLVE MORE PEOPLE

We can do much as individuals but together we really can refuse to accept violence in any part of our lives. Involve the people

and groups you already know. Reach out to others and break some barriers.

CONTINUE IN PRAYER

Prayer is a commitment to change – repentance and forgiveness mean changing and being changed. Prayer is standing in solidarity with God’s purposes of peace and with one another. If only we are open, prayer does make a difference.

TAKE ACTION

Put those small steps you identified in each of the sections into action. Millions of small steps around the world towards peace will make an immense difference. Now is the time to take those steps.

Telling the truth about ourselves and our world is necessary. We hope that this study guide helps us to do this. We may lament and weep over the violence we experience and to which we contribute. But tears are not enough.

For Further Reading, Study and Action

Violence – the Evidence and Approaches to Violence Prevention

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/en/

Join the Ecumenical Water Network

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/activities/ewn-home.html>

The Right of Conscientious Objection to Military Service

<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/documents/thematic-documents/the-right-of-conscientious-objection-to-military-service.html>

Seeking a Nuclear Weapon-Free World

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/seeking-a-nuclear-weapon.html>

Explore the Nuclear Story – and the Global Zero Solution

<http://www.globalzero.org/>

Prayer

Compassionate God
We speak of love and are accomplices in violence
We cry for justice and are entangled in injustice
We claim the truth and accept a lie
We hope for peace and fail to live it

Prince of Peace
You have taken upon you the sin of the world
You have suffered the violence of humankind
You have confronted the injustice of the powers
And faced the force of death

Creator Spirit
Give us the courage and strength
To speak the truth in love
To do justice with peace
To be merciful as you are

Amen



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