

# Seek Peace & Pursue It



*To be used with Gather 'Round curriculum*

by Joanna Harader

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This summer, your congregation is invited to explore what it means to *Seek Peace and Pursue It*. The worship resources here reflect the Scripture readings and themes that are presented in the *Gather 'Round* curriculum for the summer. If you have Sunday worship first, Christian education classes may explore worship themes in greater depth through *Connect* and *Response* activities. If you have Christian education first, invite children and youth to share their gifts of music, reading, and drama in worship. They may lead prayers and litanies or present contemporary skits to go along with the biblical texts. If you do not have summer Christian education, this guide will bring *Gather 'Round* themes into your worship.

## RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP PLANNERS/ LEADERS

The *Gather 'Round* curriculum provides many materials that will be helpful for those planning and leading worship. Preachers will find the *Bible Insights*, written by Robert Bowman, to be particularly valuable. The multi-age curriculum provides dramatic readings for each of the designated Scriptures. Many of these readings would be appropriate in the worship setting.

You also will find some supplemental resources at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org):

- A peace-focused communion liturgy
- Sample sermons for some of the Scripture passages

In addition to *Gather 'Round*, this material suggests readings and songs from the following publications:

- *Sing the Journey (SJ)*
- *Sing the Story (SS)*
- *Words for Worship*
- *Words for Worship 2*
- *Hymnal, a Worship Book (HWB)*

## VISUALS

Because lighting the peace lamp is a part of each worship service, the lamp should be one of the visual elements each week. Peace lamps are available from the Mennonite Church USA Peace and Justice Support Network. You also could use a candle instead of the lamp.

If your congregation tends to follow the rhythms and liturgical colors of the Christian Year, you will want to note that summer falls into Ordinary Time, and the designated color is green.

In addition to the peace lamp, consider using your children's time objects as a key visual element. Each of the three suggested children's time series lends itself well to a central visual.

## CHILDREN'S TIME

Below are three options for children's time. The first two options use material from the *Gather 'Round* curriculum. If you choose one of these options, worship planners should consult with Christian education teachers to make sure they are not repeating activities. The general idea of each option is given below. More specific details for options 1 and 2 are in the curriculum. More specific details for option 3 are provided in the weekly worship material.

### Option 1:

*Pray for Peace around the World*—This activity is suggested for the “Sending” time in the Multi-Age curriculum. The *Gather 'Round* resource pack includes a world map poster and set of prayer cards. The map could be used as a central visual element, and each week the children could discuss one of the prayer cards, attach it to the map, and offer a prayer.

### Option 2:

*Peace Tree*—This activity is suggested in the “Sharing the Bible Story” section of the *Multi-Age* curriculum. A central visual element on the front table would be a

“peace tree.” (See curriculum for information on making this tree.) Each week the children would find a symbol that represents the lesson of the morning and place this symbol on the tree. Paper symbols are provided in the *Gather 'Round* resource pack.

### **Option 3:**

*Peace Banner*—Create a large felt banner that can be hung at the front of the worship space. This banner simply could be blank or might say, “Seek Peace.” Each week have a different felt item that represents the story for that morning. You might have one larger item or several smaller versions of the same item—one for each child. Allow the children to glue the item(s) onto the banner. As the weeks progress, the banner will fill up with symbols of peace.

*\*Note: The Peace Tree and Peace Banner options also allow for the children’s time leader to briefly review previous lessons with the children. This can be particularly helpful in the summer when many children will miss Sundays because of camps and vacations.*

## **SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP**

Most congregations have an established order of worship with which people are comfortable. The order suggested here reflects the pattern most often experienced in my home congregation: Gathering, Listening, and Responding. As you fit the provided worship material into your own worship rhythm, I encourage you to also consider why you do what you do in worship. Maybe this summer is a good time to add, remove, or rearrange some of your elements of worship. Items marked with an asterisk (\*) are included in the weekly worship materials.

## **GATHERING**

### ***Prelude***

A simple invitation to silence before the prelude begins can go a long way in encouraging people to experience the prelude as part of the worship service rather than as the music that tells them when the worship service is about to start.

### ***\*Psalm Reading***

Reading from the Bible at the very beginning of worship highlights the centrality of Scripture for

the gathered body. For this summer worship series, the opening Scripture readings are all excerpts—many overlapping—from Psalm 34. Worshipers will hear over and over again: “Seek peace and pursue it.”

### ***Welcome and Announcements***

This is a time for greeting the congregation and making announcements that are important for the life of the church.

### ***\*Call to Worship***

These responsive readings allow the worshipers to declare their purpose for being where they are: to listen, to learn, to worship God. In addition to specific suggestions below, 161 in *Sing the Story* and 155 in *Words for Worship* would be appropriate for any Sunday.

### ***Gathering Hymn***

The gathering hymn draws people together in song. It should be something that is familiar and/or easy to sing, and it should reflect the broader themes of the service.

### ***\*Prayers for Peace***

This is a time to light the peace lamp and offer prayers for peace in our communities and in our world.

### ***Passing the Peace and Sharing Joys and Concerns***

Different congregations have different practices for helping people greet one another in the name of Christ and share joys and concerns.

### ***Congregational Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer***

This is a time to lift up the specific joys and concerns of the congregation in prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is a central part of the teaching of Jesus, and our congregation chooses to pray it each week. We often simply pray the words of the prayer (*HWB* 731). Sometimes we use the New Zealand Lord’s Prayer (*SS* 149) or sing a version of the prayer (*HWB* 228, 351).

#### **Permission to photocopy**

Subscribers to *Leader* are welcome to photocopy worship materials in this section.

A *Leader* subscriber may download these documents at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org), click on the desired quarter, enter the username LDRSummer12 and the password (spf9384). They are both case sensitive.

## LISTENING

### *\*Children's Time:*

See the information above on children's time. Remember to be as concrete as possible with children—telling stories and giving specific examples. Object lessons that rely on complex analogies are beyond the cognitive grasp of most grade-school children.

### *Hymn*

This hymn reflects the themes of the upcoming Scripture and sermon.

### *\*Scripture*

The Scripture readings for each week correspond to the texts selected for the *Gather 'Round* curriculum. Some of the readings are rather long and would work well as dramatic readings for two or more readers.

### *\*Morning Message/Sermon*

#### *Silent Reflection*

Silence is an important aspect of worship. It allows people space to think about the words they have heard and to discern God's word for them. Many worship leaders are nervous about how much time to allow for silence. Here's a suggestion: Wait until you think there has been enough silence, then count to 30, then end the silence.

## RESPONDING

### *Sharing*

If your congregation invites people to offer thoughts about the Scripture and the sermon, it is appropriate to invite these responses after the time of silence.

### *Hymn of Response*

This hymn should reflect the message of the sermon. The response hymn is often in the form of a prayer—the singers addressing God.

### *\*Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon*

Confession is central to the Christian life, and forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel message. The placement of the prayer of confession in the worship service has theological implications. If

confession comes early in the service, the suggestion is that our confession will allow us to be in right relationship with God and therefore allow us to enter fully into worship. If confession comes later in the service, the message is that our willingness to confess our sin and accept forgiveness in Christ is part of our response to the good news that has been proclaimed to us. Whether confession comes early or late in the service, it should always be followed by the assurance that, through Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

### *Offering and Offertory Prayer*

This worship material does not provide offertory prayers for each Sunday. The prayer below reflects the general theme of the summer services and could be used for any or all Sundays. Number 142 in *Words for Worship 2* also would be appropriate.

Creator God of abundance, Giver of all good things, may our hands and our hearts reflect the generous love you have poured out on us. May this money we now offer be used by your church as we seek your peace and pursue it for our world. Amen.

### *Sending Hymn*

This is the song folks may be singing in their cars the rest of the week. The sending hymn should reflect both the themes of the service and the broader good news of abundant life in Christ. It is generally best if this hymn is familiar and/or easy to sing. In addition to the suggested hymns, 346 in *HWB*, "Dona nobis pacem," would be appropriate for any Sunday.

### *\*Blessing*

In addition to the suggested blessings, 57 in *Sing the Story* and 155 in *Words for Worship 2* would be appropriate for any Sunday. I encourage the worship leader and congregation members alike not to take the final blessing for granted. Many times it is viewed as simply a cue that worship is over. But think for a minute—how many times a week do you give or receive a verbal blessing? These final words can be a deep gift to the people.

*Note on Responsive Readings: Most of the responsive readings included use plain text for the part of the worship leader, bold text for the words of the congregation, and bold italics for words that everyone says together.*

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# Session 1: *Seek Peace with Your Neighbors*



**Scripture Text:** Genesis 26:12-33

**Focus Statement:**

When we trust in God's provision we can live in peace with our neighbors.

**Song Suggestions:**

SS 16 *Peace before us*

SS 49 *I will come to you in the silence*

HWB 327 *Great is thy faithfulness* ("O God my Father" can be replaced with "O God, Creator.")

HWB 367 *For the healing of the nations*

HWB 368 *O God of love, O power of peace*

HWB 383 *God, whose giving*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:1-3; 8-14

**Call to Worship**

We come with praise on our lips, with songs in our hearts.

**For God is good.**

We come seeking a glimpse of Christ's kingdom, a taste of God's grace.

**For God is good, and in Christ we lack no good thing.**

So let us listen well;

**let us speak truth.**

May this time of worship be a step;

*a step we take together*

*as we pursue God's peace.*

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for those places in the world where conflict rages because people are scared that there is not enough. [*You may mention specific areas of conflict: budget battles, wars in oil-rich nations...*]

May our worship and our lives bear witness to your abundant provision. May our trust in you lead us to live lives of generosity and peace. Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

If you are using option 1 or option 2 (see introductory material), the information and supplies you need are available in the Gather 'Round curriculum. The weekly children's time material will give suggestions for the Peace Banner option.

For the banner: water pitcher or well

Talk with the children about the Scripture story and highlight Isaac's willingness to share with other people. Ask the children about a time when they shared and a time when someone shared with them. Sharing is one way we can be peacemakers.

### ***Sermon Seeds***

Many acts of violence in our world are motivated by fear that there is not enough. Ours is a society that believes deeply in the myth of scarcity. (See Walter Brueggemann's wonderful article, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity" at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533)). Think about your own community, our nation, and our world; what are some examples of conflicts that are fueled by fears that there is not enough of something (money, food, power, respect...) to go around? In this Scripture passage, Isaac never buys into the myth of scarcity. He believes firmly in God's provision and therefore acts as if there is enough space and enough water for everyone. His faith in God's abundance releases him from the power of fear and frees him to live with generosity toward his neighbors.

## **RESPONDING**

### ***Prayer of Confession***

God of abundance,  
**we sometimes fear that there is not enough.**  
Generous Provider,  
**we sometimes hesitate to share with our neighbors.**  
Giver of all good things,  
**we sometimes resent those who seem to have more.**  
Holy Christ,  
**our fear, our selfishness, our resentment cause us to stray from your way of peace.**  
***Have mercy on us, O God, and forgive our sins.***

### ***Assurance of Pardon***

My friends, hear now the good news: God's abundant love is poured out on us through Jesus Christ. In Christ we receive grace upon grace—the forgiveness of all our sins; in Christ we receive life—abundant and everlasting. May the peace of Christ be with you.

Other Option: *Words for Worship* 2, 58

### ***Benediction***

As you leave this place,  
may your eyes be open to the abundant blessings of our Creator;  
may your ears be open to the peace-filled message of the Holy Spirit;  
may your heart be open to the overwhelming love of Jesus Christ;  
and may your hands be open to share with all who have need.

Other Option: *HWB* 764

# Session 2: Seek Peace through Reconciliation



**Scripture Text:** Philemon

**Focus Statement:**

Living as peacemakers means mending broken relationships rather than running away from them.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SJ 54 *Longing for light*
- HWB 21 *All praise to our redeeming Lord*
- HWB 305 *Where charity and love prevail*
- HWB 406 *And is the gospel peace and love*
- HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:14-18

**Call to Worship**

We seek peace.

**We pursue peace.**

Peace with our family,

**peace with our neighbors,**

peace with our friends,

**peace with our enemies.**

We seek Christ.

**We pursue Christ,**

who guides our feet,

**who strengthens our legs**

*as we walk the difficult and holy path of peace.*

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We know that you desire wholeness for all of our relationships. Where relationships are broken, move us as individuals, as a community, and as a nation, toward reconciliation and healing. [*You may mention specific relationships as appropriate in your context.*]

Christ, grant us peace with each person we see. Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

For the banner: two stick figures holding hands

Talk with the children about the importance of friendship. You could ask the children if they ever have fights with their friends and how they make up when they have fights.

## *Sermon Seeds*

Paul writes to Philemon: “If [Onesimus] has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.” It makes you wonder about the back story, doesn’t it? What has happened between Philemon and Onesimus? What caused Onesimus to run away? Why does Paul think that Philemon may have been wronged in some way? We do not know the details of this relationship, but we know what broken relationships look like today. We know the kinds of words and actions that chip slowly away at the foundations of our relationships. We know the desperate mistakes that can destroy in an instant what has taken years to establish.

There are various entry points to this text. Perhaps we are like Philemon—needing to let go of an assumed position of superiority over another person; needing to let go of a grudge and accept someone with open arms. Perhaps we are like Onesimus—needing to establish a right and equal relationship with someone; needing to return to a relationship we have abandoned and try again. Or perhaps we are like Paul—seeking to be a mediator; reminding people that the reconciling work of Christ applies not just to our relationship with God, but also to our relationships with each other.

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

God of love and forgiveness,  
we know that you desire us to live in right and whole relationships with all people.

**We confess to you that some of our relationships are broken.**

Forgive the ways we contribute to the brokenness of our relationships:

**our failures to forgive,**

our failures to listen,

**our failures to give.**

Forgive our pride,

**our selfishness,**

our imperfect love.

*[Pause]*

**God of mercy and grace,**

we offer to you now all of our relationships that need your healing touch.

*[Silence]*

### *Assurance of Pardon*

Friends, hear now the good news: In Christ, God has reconciled Godself to each of us and has forgiven us. Through Christ’s work of salvation, we also can be reconciled to each other. May you know and live into the abundant grace of God.

### *Benediction* (Ephesians 2:13-14)

Remember that “in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” So go now to live out the reconciling grace of God.

# Session 3: *Seek Peace by Promoting Justice*



**Scripture Text:** Numbers 27:1-11

**Focus Statement:**

Justice is an essential aspect of peace.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SJ 13 *My soul is filled with joy*
- SJ 30 *Jesus Christ is waiting*
- SJ 61 *How can we be silent*
- SJ 65 *Let justice flow like streams*
- SS 24 *My soul cries out*
- HWB 226 *You are salt for the earth*
- HWB 368 *O God of love, O power of peace*

## **GATHERING**

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:4-7, 14

**Call to Worship**

We come from the chaos of our lives, seeking God in this place.

**We want answers;**

**we want deliverance;**

**we want to be heard.**

We come in our deep weakness into the powerful presence of God.

**We lift our hands;**

**we lift our hearts;**

**we lift our voices.**

We come in faith that the Mighty One, the Holy One

**is present,**

**is listening,**

**is enacting justice in our world.**

*Let us worship together in hope.*

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for those in our world who are oppressed by unjust systems. [*You may mention specific situations of injustice in your community, our nation, and the world.*]

Please strengthen us for the hard work of justice as we walk your path of peace. Amen.



## LISTENING

### *Children's Time*

For the banner: justice scales, or, perhaps an easier symbol for children to understand, a circle cut into equal-sized "pizza slices"

Children have a very keen sense of what is fair and what is not. If you use the pizza slices symbol, you might talk about whether it would be fair for Sally to get an extra slice of pizza because she is wearing pink or for Jimmy to get the biggest piece because he has on special tennis shoes. Children also know what rules are. Explain that it is important that the rules we follow do not treat people differently because of how they dress or whether they are boys or girls.

### *Sermon Seeds*

This is an astounding story of God changing established laws in order to make them more just. One message here is that we should not simply take established customs, rules, or laws for granted. We should consider who benefits and who is harmed by "the way things have always been." What laws are present and/or proposed in our nation and in your location that serve to oppress certain groups of people? Do we have practices—unwritten laws—within our own congregations or families that are unjust? Explore the fact that injustice is often at the root of violent conflict. The good news is that God is living and active among us, always moving us further along the path to justice.

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

God, we see in your Word that injustice has long been part of the human condition. And we see in your Word that your voice speaks toward justice and peace for all people.

If we have furthered injustice in this world,

**forgive us.**

As our lives are bound up in unjust structures,

**have mercy upon us.**

When you would use our voices to speak your words of justice and peace,

**guide us and give us courage.**

[*Silence*]

### *Assurance of Pardon*

We serve a God of both justice and mercy. God hears our prayers, forgives our sins, and calls us to join in the holy work of peace. Amen.

Other Option: *Words for Worship* 2, 66

### *Benediction*

As you leave this place, remember that you serve a speaking, acting, living God. A God who speaks words of justice. A God who acts to dismantle unjust systems. A God who lives within and among us, calling us always to follow more faithfully. Go make peace.

## Session 4:

# Seek Peace through Humility



**Scripture Text:** 1 Samuel 25:1-35

**Focus Statement:**

Acting out of pride and a sense of entitlement can often lead to violence; humility promotes peace.

**Song Suggestions:**

SS 71 *Gentle God, when we are driven*  
HWB 307 *Will you let me be your servant*  
HWB 367 *For the healing of the nations*  
HWB 383 *God, whose giving*  
HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:14-18

**Call to Worship**

To worship is to bear witness that there is One who deserves worship.

**There is One who is holy and righteous and powerful.**

*And that One is not us.*

So as we gather for worship, let us humble ourselves.

**Let us release our pride and our sense of entitlement,  
that we might listen deeply and watch expectantly.**

Other Option: *Words for Worship* 2, 17

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for those in our world who are engulfed in violence that stems from bruised egos and feelings of entitlement. [*You may mention specific areas of conflict such as drug violence in Mexico, conflict in the Middle East, situations of domestic abuse...*]

Please grant us the humility and grace we need to make peace in our world. Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

For the banner: two open hands offering something

Talk with the children about the importance of sharing with other people—people we do not know very well. This could be an opportunity to talk about some of the work done by Mennonite Disaster Service or Mennonite Central Committee. We do not give to others to get something in return; we give to others because God wants us to give. Often our gifts can pave the way for peace.

## *Sermon Seeds*

For a helpful explanation of the background of this passage, see Robert Bowman's *Bible Insight* in the *Gather 'Round* curriculum. This biblical story shows both David and Nabal acting out of a sense of entitlement: David thinks that he and his men are entitled to Nabal's generous hospitality (food, wine ... and who knows what else) because David's crew had protected Nabal's shepherds in the fields; Nabal feels it is the prerogative of the rich to do as they please with their wealth. On top of this sense of entitlement, we are also dealing with two very big egos. It is only through the intercession of Abigail that the conflict between David and Nabal does not result in a bloodbath. Abigail's humility, wisdom, and generosity save many lives, as well as saving David from his own murderous impulses.

In preaching this text, one could consider the many ways that feelings of entitlement and pride lead to violence in our own time. You might discuss the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and ongoing terrorism throughout the world. Also consider issues that hit closer to home: our attitudes toward immigrants; our national budget priorities; our desires to protect our property. How do pride and entitlement lead to violence—physical, spiritual, structural—in our own lives?

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

Holy One,  
sometimes we act as if we are of utmost importance.

**Hallowed be your name.**

We spend so much energy trying to make things the way we want them to be.

**Your will be done.**

Sometimes we feel as if we deserve whatever we want.

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

We think that everyone should overlook our mistakes.

**As we forgive those who sin against us.**

Temptations abound. The evil is real.

**Deliver us, forgive us, O Holy One in heaven.**

Other Options: *Words for Worship* 2, 58 or 70

### *Assurance of Pardon* (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Hear now these words of assurance. God declares: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

### *Benediction*

May the Holy Spirit empower you to make peace this week—no matter who you are with, no matter where you go. May your mind be wise; may your words be gentle; may your hands be generous. And the God of peace will be with you. Amen.

Other Option: *SS* 147

# Session 5: Seek Peace within the Congregation



**Scripture Text:** Matthew 18:15-22 (*HWB 837* is a responsive reading of vv. 15-20)

**Focus Statement:**

If we want to be a witness for Christ's peace in the world, we must live out that peace within our own congregation.

**Song Suggestions:**

- HWB 4 *Unto thy temple, Lord, we come*
- HWB 307 *Will you let me be your servant*
- HWB 310 *How good a thing it is*
- HWB 322 *For we are strangers no more*
- HWB 362 *Help us to help each other*
- HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*
- HWB 420 *Heart with loving heart united*
- HWB 452 *Ubi caritas et amor*
- SJ 87 *Put peace into each other's hands* (communion hymn)

**Prayer Suggestions:** *HWB 726, 736*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:1-3

**Call to Worship** (from: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Mark 6:7; Matthew 18:20; Acts 2:46; Hebrews 10:24-25)

As we gather together to worship, let us remember the words of Scripture:

**Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.**

Jesus sent his disciples out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

**For with two, if you fall, someone is there to help you up.**

Jesus says, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

**Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm.**

Every day the believers continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

**Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.**

Let us consider how we may spur each other on toward love and good deeds.

**A threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

So let us not give up meeting together, but let us encourage one another.

**Let us worship God together.**

Other Options: *SS 190; Words for Worship 2, 17, 21*

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for your peace within this congregation, this part of your body that is [name of church].

[*You may mention specific areas of conflict within the congregation or significant decisions faced by the church.*]

May we speak to each other with gentleness, honesty, and love. May we listen deeply to each other. And together, may we listen to and follow the leading of your Spirit among us. Amen.

## LISTENING

### *Children's Time*

For the banner: shape of a church building

Talk with the children about what the church is: a group of people who try to follow Jesus together. Jesus wants us to love one another and get along; and Jesus also knew that people who were in church together would have disagreements. Jesus doesn't say that we should not disagree. He says that when we disagree we should be respectful and loving as we work through the disagreements. You might ask the children for some examples of what would be a disrespectful way to deal with someone you disagree with. And what would be a respectful way?

### *Sermon Seeds*

The Greek word translated as "church," *ekklesia*, is used in only two places in the Gospels—both in Matthew. The first use of the word is Matthew 16:18: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." This is a strong, powerful image of the church. The other use of the term is here in Matthew 18:17, in the context of church conflict. The church is strong and powerful; the church is petty and vulnerable. How do we experience this tension in our own congregational contexts? Jesus' teaching here indicates that how we deal with conflict in the congregation is an important aspect of being church. It matters how we talk to each other. It matters to the health of the community, and it matters to the vibrancy of our witness for Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Ultimately, a group of people who wish to live in peace must forgive each other just as God, in Christ, has forgiven us.

(A sample sermon on this passage is available at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org).)

## RESPONDING

*Prayer of Confession:* HWB 696

### *Assurance of Pardon*

Friends, know that Jesus Christ grants you peace through the forgiveness of sins. He says: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.

### *Benediction*

As we have been received, let us go forth to welcome others. As we have been forgiven, let us go forth to forgive others. As we have been loved, let us go forth to love others. And the peace of Christ go with us.

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## Session 6:

# Seek Peace with Your Enemies



**Scripture Text:** 2 Kings 6:8-23

**Focus Statement:**

God calls us to treat potential enemies with hospitality rather than hostility.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SJ 23 *Slowly turning, ever turning*
- SJ 67 *Let there be light, Lord God*
- HWB 366 *God of grace and God of glory*
- HWB 371 *Let there be light, Lord God*
- HWB 374 *O young and fearless prophet*
- HWB 420 *Heart with loving heart united*

**Prayer Suggestion:** SJ 140

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:4-8, 14

**Call to Worship**

- Leader: Open our eyes, O God, that we may see,  
*Side 1: that we may see your flaming presence that surrounds us with protection,*  
**Side 2: that we may see the light of your Spirit that dwells among us with love.**
- Leader: Open our eyes, O God, that we may see,  
*Side 1: that we may see the face of a friend where we thought there was an enemy,*  
**Side 2: that we may see a banquet hall instead of a battlefield.**
- Leader: During this time of worship, O God,  
**All: open our eyes to your vision of peace. Amen.**

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for those in our world who are victims of the violence that nations inflict on other nations. [*You may mention specific parts of the world where international wars are occurring.*]

We earnestly pray that those in this world with military power will make choices toward peace. Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

For the banner: table with food on it

Briefly tell this story from 2 Kings 6 up to the point where Elisha brings the Aram army into Samaria. Ask the children what they think the Israelites will do to the Aram army. Then pull out the banner shape and explain that they fed them and sent them on their way. God wants us to be kind to everyone—even if they are not kind to us.

### *Sermon Seeds*

This story seems almost too good to be true; the kind of story that someone would make up to relate a desired reality rather than a story that reflects an actual reality. It has a certain “Once upon a time...happily ever after” quality to it. Perhaps preaching on this text will require you to use your own holy imagination. In what ways might peace surprise us today? How might we discover friends where we thought there were enemies? We are assured in this story that God is strong enough to protect us from those who would wish us harm. We do not need to use our power to try to save ourselves and punish our enemies. We can trust in God’s protection and turn our energies to reaching out in friendship.

## **RESPONDING**

*Prayer of Confession:* *Words for Worship* 2, 58 or 75

*Assurance of Pardon* (adapted from John 14:27)

Hear now these words of assurance: Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Know that, through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, your sins are fully forgiven. Amen.

### *Benediction*

As you go forth into the world, may each face you see be the face of a friend. May the hand you extend and the hands extended toward you be open and inviting. May God surprise you with peace in unexpected places. Amen.

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# Session 7: *Seek Peace within the Broader Church*



**Scripture Text:** Acts 15:1-35

**Focus Statement:**

God calls us to come together and seek the Holy Spirit when there are disagreements within the broader church.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SS 1 *Praise the One who breaks the darkness*
- SJ 3 *Jesus calls us here to meet him*
- HWB 289 *Filled with the Spirit's power*
- HWB 306 *In Christ there is no East or West*
- HWB 309 *Built on the rock*
- HWB 310 *How good a thing it is*
- HWB 311 *The church's one foundation*
- HWB 322 *For we are strangers no more*
- HWB 363 *Renew your church*
- HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*
- HWB 420 *Heart with loving heart united*

## **GATHERING**

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:1-3, 14

**Call to Worship**

*Words for Worship*, 105  
*Words for Worship 2*, 17

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for peace within your church universal, within our denomination, and within our conference.  
[*You may mention specific areas of conflict or any upcoming gatherings.*]

May your people regard one another with love. And may we find unity of purpose as we proclaim and enact your good news. Amen.

## **LISTENING**

**Children's Time**

For the banner: a stick figure with big ears

Talk to the children about how important it is to listen to each other when we disagree. You might ask them a question and then pretend you are not listening when they answer. Or let them show you how they can *not* listen and how they *can* listen. Explain that the people in this story spent a lot of time listening to one another in order to help the broader church grow stronger.



## *Sermon Seeds*

In some respects, it is a comfort to realize that our generation is not the first to experience conflict within the larger church. Since the beginnings of the church, followers of Christ have had disagreements about what it means to be a Christian. Who can be part of the church? What rules must we follow? What is expected of church leaders? Paul and Barnabas, Silas and Judas, the apostles and the elders were asking these questions in the first century. And we still ask them today. What conflicts within the church body are most troubling for your congregation?

It is important to note that early church leaders took this conflict over Gentile inclusion very seriously. They traveled long distances and devoted a great deal of time and energy to talking and listening to each other. Because of their faithful work, the church grew stronger through the conflict. This Sunday may be a good opportunity to remind people that conflict is to be expected, and that when deep divisions emerge, we should talk together, listen together, and work to discern what is “good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

## **RESPONDING**

### *Prayer of Confession*

Holy One, we come to you as part of the body of Christ.

Hear our confession:

**We belittle those who disagree with us  
and seek the company of those who agree with us.**

We believe that our way is right  
and their way is wrong.

**We fail to have the patience, the energy, the courage, the faithfulness,  
to seek your way together.**

*God of peace, forgive us.*

Other Option: *Words for Worship* 2, 54

### *Assurance of Pardon* (Ephesians 2:13-14)

“Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” In Christ Jesus, we are all forgiven. Amen.

### *Benediction*

As you walk the difficult path of Christ, know that many others walk with you. May we walk the path together in peace. May we walk the path together with joy. May we live in ways that seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us. Amen.

# Session 8: *Seek Peace and Know God's Blessing*



**Scripture Text:** Matthew 5:1-12 (see HWB 834)

**Focus Statement:**

Jesus teaches that those who live lives of peace are blessed by God.

**Song Suggestions:**

SS 37 *Firstborn of Mary*

SS 41 *Blessed are they*

SS 49 *I will come to you in the silence*

SJ 94 *Blest are they*

HWB 13 *Blessed Jesus, at your word*

HWB 230 *Blessed are the persecuted*

HWB 427 *You shall go out with joy*

HWB 521 *Come, thou fount*

\**"All who hunger, gather gladly"* (words by Sylvia Dunstan; copyright by GIA)

**Other Suggested Reading:** *Words for Worship 2, 133*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:4-8, 14, 19-20

**Call to Worship:** SS 147 or SJ 134

### **Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray that the peacemakers of our world will know the fullness of your blessing in their lives. [*You may mention specific peacemakers by name and/or pray in general for those working with organizations such as your local women's shelter, Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Central Committee, and Christian Peacemaker Teams.*]

Even though the world often tells us otherwise, we believe the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers." May our eyes be open to your blessings. Amen.

## LISTENING

### **Children's Time**

For the banner: a smiley face (or if you are a talented felt cutter, a person kneeling to receive a blessing)

While Jesus' words give us suggestions of how to live in peaceful ways, the heart of Jesus' message here is a blessing. Jesus loves and blesses all of us. I encourage you to take this opportunity to offer a blessing for each child that comes forward for children's time. If there are not too many children, bless each one individually by name. Use simple words that the children will understand, such as: "Michael, may you know the joy and peace that Jesus offers. Always remember that God loves you and we love you. And the blessing of the Holy One rests upon you."

## *Sermon Seeds*

Christians, maybe especially Mennonite Christians, tend to read the Beatitudes as a set of commandments. We hear Jesus saying, “You *should* be poor in spirit. You *should* mourn. You *should* be meek.” But Jesus is not wagging his finger here, telling us what we *should* do. He is proclaiming the reality of God’s kingdom: “Blessed are the peacemakers.” By the world’s standards, the things that make for peace are often belittled. People who strive to follow Jesus may find that they are not successful, or “blessed,” according to the values of the world. As we seek to be peacemakers, we can rest in the blessing proclaimed by Christ. And this blessing can empower us to follow Jesus more faithfully, to seek peace more deeply.

(A sample sermon is available at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org).)

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

Gracious God, we come before you to confess that we have not fully lived out the folly of the gospel.

You call those who are poor in spirit “blessed,”

**yet we often place our own desires over the needs of others.**

You call those who mourn “blessed,”

**yet we insulate ourselves from the pain that surrounds us.**

You call those who are meek “blessed,”

**yet we struggle mightily to appear strong and superior.**

You call those who thirst for righteousness “blessed,”

**yet sometimes we just want to take the easiest path.**

You say, “Blessed are the pure in heart,”

**yet our hearts are pulled in many directions.**

You say, “Blessed are the peacemakers,”

**yet we fail to live in peace with those closest to us, and we are too often silent about the warring ways of our nation.**

***Forgive us, O God.***

### *Words of Assurance:* (1 Corinthians 1:30)

The Scriptures state that Christ Jesus has become “for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Thanks be to God that, through Christ, our sins are forgiven. May the peace of Christ be with you.

(See *Words for Worship* 2, 50, for a slightly different version of this confession.)

### *Benediction:* HWB 772

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# Session 9: Seek Peace through Love



**Scripture Text:** Mark 12:28-34

**Focus Statement:**

The path of peace requires that we love God fully and love our neighbors deeply.

**Song Suggestions:**

SJ 56 *Make me a channel of your peace*

SJ 87 *Put peace into each other's hands*

HWB 76 *Praise, I will praise you, Lord*

HWB 310 *How good a thing it is*

HWB 362 *Help us to help each other*

HWB 411 *I bind my heart this tide*

\**"They'll know we are Christians by our love"* ("We are one in the Spirit")

**Other Suggested Reading:** SJ 176; *Words for Worship*, 184

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:1-3; 8-14

**Call to Worship**

We come with praise on our lips, with songs in our hearts;

**for God is good.**

We come seeking a glimpse of Christ's kingdom, a taste of God's grace;

**for God is good, and in Christ we lack no good thing.**

So hear, O people of God, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One.

**We seek to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.**

Yahweh our God, Yahweh is love.

**We seek to love our neighbors as ourselves.**

May this time of worship be a step;

**a step we take together**

**as we pursue God's peace.**

Other Options: SS 190; *Words for Worship*, 138

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for the light of your love to break into the hate-filled places of our world. We pray for those individuals, groups, and nations whose actions are driven by fear and hostility. [*You may mention specific situations of hate-fueled violence in your community, our country, and around the world.*]

We thank you, God, that nothing can separate us from your love. Amen.

## LISTENING

### *Children's Time*

For the banner: a heart

Tell the children that Jesus says loving God and loving other people are the most important things for us to do. Talk about how we can tell when people love us. What kinds of things do they do? What kinds of things can we do to show our love for others? How can we show our love for God?

### *Sermon Seeds*

I think we may have heard these words of Jesus so many times that we cease to be struck by how profound they are. "There is no commandment greater than these," says Jesus. Certainly, love of God and neighbor is a necessary foundation for peace. What hate crimes have been in the news lately? In what parts of the world are civil wars raging based on ethnic, religious, or other forms of hatred? A thoughtful sermon could draw many connections between hatred and violence, between love and peace.

It is important, of course, to understand love in the biblical sense and not the common cultural sense. What images of love have you seen lately that miss the biblical mark? The life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus serve as the deepest witness to God's love for us. What does Christlike love look like today? Where have you seen it? How might we live it more fully?

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

Jesus says: Love God with all of your heart.

**Our hearts, O God, are broken and scattered.**

Jesus says: Love God with all of your soul.

**Our souls, O God, are restless and hesitant to settle.**

Jesus says: Love God with all of your mind.

**Our minds, O God, are filled up and easily distracted.**

Jesus says: Love God with all of your strength.

**Our strength, O God, is not as strong as we wish it was.**

Jesus says: Love your neighbor as yourself.

**Our love, O God, is not as strong as we wish it was.**

### *Assurance of Pardon:* (2 Corinthians 12:9)

My friends, the Scripture says that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. And God's word to Paul is also a word to each of us. Listen: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Thanks be to God.

(See *Words for Worship* 2, 50, for a slightly different version of this confession.)

Other Options: *Words for Worship* 2, 53

### *Benediction:* SS 176 or Romans 8:38-39

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# Session 10: *Seek Peace as a Lifestyle*



**Scripture Text:** Romans 12:9-21 (HWB 850)

**Focus Statement:**

Being people of God's peace, as individuals and as a community, requires the daily practice of Christlike virtues.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SJ 10 *Spirit, working in creation*
- SJ 61 *How can we be silent*
- HWB 311 *The church's one foundation*
- HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*
- HWB 411 *I bind my heart this tide*

**Other Resources:**

- Closing prayer in the *Jr. Youth Gather 'Round* material for session 10
- Words for Worship*, 181
- HWB 733

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:11-15

**Call to Worship:** *Words for Worship* 2, 17 or 21; *Words for Worship*, 144

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We thank you for each person in this world who strives to make choices toward peace every day. We pray for groups that work to teach people how to live lives of peace. [*You may mention specific peace education groups.*]

May the community of this church be a witness to others, showing the joy of a peaceful lifestyle. Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

For the banner: a clock or a circle with an arrow

Discuss with the children what it means to practice. What sorts of things do we practice? Why do we practice? Explain that following Jesus requires practice. It is not something we do one time, but a way that we try to live every day. Ask the children what they might do in the coming week to practice living out God's peace.

**Sermon Seeds**

When we preach narrative texts, we have a story and we seek God's teaching within the story. The epistles, on the other hand, present the teaching directly, and so the preacher is tasked with finding the stories. These words from Paul will only come to life if we can show people what it looks like when people do these things. What stories can you tell of communities where people try to outdo each other in showing honor? You might look to the persecuted church—historical or contemporary—to show those who rejoice in hope, are patient

in suffering, and persevere in prayer. Perhaps the current immigration debate provides an opportunity to discuss hospitality to strangers. You can find powerful testimonies of refusing vengeance from death penalty opponents—especially the families of murder victims.

You will not be able to fully flesh out every one of Paul's statements in this passage. You might want to choose one or two statements as your focus. Or you might want to look at examples of communities that exhibit many of these traits at the same time. Either way, the heart of the lesson is that those of us seeking peace must make many decisions every day that move us forward on the path of peace. Peace is not a one-time action, but a lifestyle we are called to embrace.

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

Leader: Holy One, it is hard to live our lives toward your peace.

Side 1: *Sometimes our love is false.*

Side 2: **We cling to the evil and ignore the good.**

Side 1: *We exaggerate our own importance.*

Side 2: **We grow weary.**

Leader: God, sometimes we lose our joy, our patience, our words for prayer.

Side 1: *We close the door on strangers.*

Side 2: **We respond to hatred with more hatred.**

Leader: We do not trust the power of good to overcome the evil around us.

All: *Have mercy on us, O God.*

### *Assurance of Pardon:* (Romans 12:1-2)

As we present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, we receive the promise: our minds, our lives, are being transformed and renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us rejoice that in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Amen.

Other Options: *Words for Worship* 2, 53 or 54

### *Benediction:*

Go forth to live peaceably with all, knowing that, by the power of God, you will not be overcome by evil. Rejoice that you are part of God's work to overcome evil with good!

# Session 11: Seek Peace through Respect



**Scripture Text:** James 2:1-13

**Focus Statement:**

Peace requires respect for all people.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SS 26 *Helpless and hungry*
- SJ 13 *My soul is filled with joy*
- SJ 30 *Jesus Christ is waiting*
- SJ 54 *Longing for light*
- SJ 62 *Christ's is the world*
- SJ 81 *Take O take me as I am*
- HWB 142 *Brothers and sisters of mine*
- HWB 374 *O young and fearless prophet*
- HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*
- HWB 409 *What does the Lord require*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:14-22

**Call to Worship:**

Brothers and sisters, welcome to worship.

**We lay aside our pride and our judgments as we enter the house of God.**

In this place, each seat is a seat of honor.

**In this place, each person is of utmost value.**

Here we glimpse God's kingdom of justice.

**Here we hear whispers of God's kingdom of peace.**

**May our eyes and our ears be open.**

Other Option: SS 190

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for people who suffer oppression. We lift up those who are weighed down by hasty judgments and unjust systems. [*You may mention specific individuals and/or groups of people who are currently facing oppression.*]

May we see with your vision and judge by your wisdom, that your kingdom of justice may come on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.



## LISTENING

### *Children's Time*

For the banner: dollar sign

Ask the children what they think makes a person important. Explain that in God's eyes all people are important. We should treat everyone with kindness and fairness.

### *Sermon Seeds*

You probably will not need to look far for examples of the rich oppressing the poor. Congregations made up of mostly middle-class people may need to be reminded that, from a world perspective, we are the wealthy. Are there steps we can take that will make us less complicit in systems of oppression? This could be an opportunity to suggest specific ways people might become involved in ministry to the poor of your community and/or the world. It might be helpful for the preacher to explain the connection between respect for the poor and peace. People rarely perpetuate violence against people they respect. Respect leads us to listen to others and work with others, rather than lashing out and working against them.

## RESPONDING

*Prayer of Confession:* *Words for Worship* 2, 70 and *Words for Worship*, 203

*Words of Pardon:* (Psalm 51)

God will create in you a clean heart and renew within you a right spirit. God will draw you into the divine presence and fill you with the Holy Spirit. In Jesus our sins are forgiven, and we are free to live out the peace of Christ.

*Benediction:*

In the week ahead, may you see each person through the eyes of Christ; may you hear in each voice echoes of the kingdom; may you speak words of love; and may grace guide each step. Amen.

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# Session 12: *Seek Peace for the Whole World*



**Scripture Text:** Isaiah 2:1-5

**Focus Statement:**

We are called to live into the peaceful future that God promises.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SS 124 *My soul cries out*
- SS 114 *God has chosen me*
- HWB 176 *Comfort, comfort, O my people*
- HWB 189 *To us a Child of hope is born*
- HWB 334 *Christ is the world's true light*
- HWB 372 *O healing river*
- HWB 408 *O day of peace*
- \**"Down by the riverside"* ("Ain't gonna study war no more")

**Other Suggested Reading:** SJ 140 and HWB 756

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:8-14

**Call to Worship:** *Words for Worship* 2, 18

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

Be with those who are suffering because of violence in the world. [*You may mention individuals and/or groups who are victims of violence.*]

God, our world seems far from your vision of peace; let your powerful Spirit move us and transform us.  
Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

For the banner: a bent sword

Show the children a world map or globe. Point out places where there are wars going on right now. Pray with the children for those places.

**Sermon Seeds**

The prophet Isaiah, like us, lived in a time when there were "wars and rumors of wars." In the eighth century B.C., Israel was under constant threat of attack by Assyria. In the 21st century, armed conflicts continue to be part of our world. Think both locally and globally: What conflicts are making headlines this week? What are the weapons of choice? How does one act of violence fuel another? The vision presented by Isaiah seems, at best, naive: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2:4).

On the one hand, Isaiah presents us with a vision of the kingdom of God—a future reality that most of us cannot realistically imagine occurring in our lifetimes. On the other hand, as Christians we live within the saving work of Christ. We live in the “already/not yet” time. God’s promises have, in Christ, already been fulfilled; and we are not yet experiencing the fullness of Christ’s reign. Through his death and resurrection, Christ has already overcome violence and death; and we are not yet living in the promised realm of peace and eternal life. This is a tension worth naming and exploring as we struggle to walk into God’s vision of peace while remaining alert to the violence present in our world.

(A sample sermon is available at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org).)

## RESPONDING

*Prayer of Confession:* *Words for Worship* 2, 58 or 75

*Assurance of Pardon:*

In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven! Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

*Benediction:*

Go forth to continue learning God’s ways. Go forth to walk in the path of Christ. And the Holy Spirit go with you. Amen

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# Session 13: Seek Peace for Your Community



**Scripture Text:** Zechariah 8:1-8

**Focus Statement:**

God longs to provide a safe and joyful home on earth for all people.

**Song Suggestions:**

- SJ 30 *Jesus Christ is waiting*
- SJ 62 *Christ's is the world*
- SS 114 *God has chosen me*
- HWB 372 *O healing river*
- HWB 405 *Where cross the crowded ways of life*
- HWB 408 *O day of peace*
- HWB 417 *All who love and serve your city*

## GATHERING

**Psalm Reading:** Psalm 34:1-22

**Call to Worship:**

Let us be still and listen.

**Do you hear the voice of God?**

“I long to be your God; I long for you to be my people.”

**Do you hear the voice of God?**

“Come from east and from west; come home.”

**Do you hear the voice of God?**

“I am with you here, in this place.”

**Let us gather together to listen.**

Let us come together in praise.

**Let us rejoice together in God's promised reign of peace.**

**Prayer for Peace (Lighting Peace Lamp)**

Holy God of Peace,

We pray for all the people of [name of your town]. May our young play in joy and safety. May our old live with comfort and dignity. [*You may pray for specific needs in your community.*]

May we experience your peace-giving presence in our midst. May we participate with joy in your work for peace. Amen.

## LISTENING

**Children's Time**

For the banner: a house

Take this opportunity to review the various symbols on the banner with the children. What have we learned this summer about seeking peace?

## *Sermon Seeds*

Robert Bowman's *Bible Insights* provides helpful background information on the historical context of Zechariah's writing as well as a discussion of what is meant by God's "jealousy." Through the prophet Zechariah, God is providing the Israelites with a vision of what their community can be—of the home God longs to provide for them. This Scripture passage allows us to consider what "home" should be, and to mourn the many ways that our homes—family homes, church homes, communities—fail to meet our ideals. The passage particularly mentions the health and safety of the children and the elderly of the community. What is the status of children and elderly in your town? What needs do they have? What good work is happening to meet their needs?

Since this is the concluding session of the series, you might want to discuss more broadly some of the themes from earlier sessions: trusting God's abundance; healing broken relationships; promoting justice; being humble; practicing hospitality; loving our neighbors; respecting all people. This is a good opportunity to encourage the members of your congregation as they seek to walk with Christ on the path of peace.

## RESPONDING

### *Prayer of Confession*

Holy One,

**we know of children in our community who do not live in safety.**

We know of adults in our community who do not live with dignity.

**We know that within [this town], there is poverty, there is abuse, there is fear and deep sorrow.**

Your picture of peace plays at the periphery of our vision,

**but it is hard for us to bring it into focus.**

Your words of promise echo faintly in our ears,

**but it is hard for us to hear them clearly.**

We know that you call us to your work of peace right here with our neighbors,

**but our feet feel heavy; our hands are hesitant.**

*Holy One, forgive our failings.*

### *Assurance of Pardon:*

Hear now the good news: By God's gracious mercy, your sins are forgiven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you are filled and inspired. By the example of Jesus, you continue to be led on the path of peace. Amen.

### *Benediction:* (adapted from John 14:27)

As you leave this place, know that the peace of Christ goes with you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.