



# EQUIPPING FOR... **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

Produced by Canadian Ministries

## Peacemaking in Times of Chaos

*“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 let them be afraid .” — John 14:27*

**A**sk any teen or young adult how they feel about the world these days and their answers will reflect a mixture of youthful optimism and fearful worry. The realities of our collective issues, such as social conflict, political violence and environmental destruction, combined with personal struggles leads many people to believe that chaos rules life.

Because we are grappling with these issues ourselves, we can feel ill-equipped to address young people’s questions about the role of faith in the chaos of our contemporary world.

While we can’t answer all questions or alleviate all fears, we can journey alongside youth in discovering and exploring the relevance of Christ’s peace to our lives today. This issue offers ideas and tools for exploring how to be peacemakers in times of chaos.

### **Christ as Companion in Chaos**

We’ve all had the experience of expressing heartfelt and painful concerns about our lives and the world around us to fellow Christians only to have them respond with well-intentioned but slightly dismissive



stock phrases like “God is in control” or “Cast your cares on the Lord.” It is important for us to remember that reassurances of peace through Christ can seem hollow in times of chaos if not accompanied by opportunities to know and experience it.

The gospel stories about the disciples’ first encounters with the resurrected Christ teach us that, while hearing the good news is an important first step, it is a personal encounter with Christ – an *experience* of his presence – that moves us along the path to peace.

**Read** Luke 24:13-35

### Reflect

- Why do you think Jesus walked and talked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus for so long without revealing who he was?
- What made it difficult for the disciples to recognize that it was Jesus who was walking with them?
- What was it about their experience at dinner with Jesus that allowed them to go from confusion and skepticism to total belief?

### Apply

There are three things that Jesus does for the disciples on the road to Emmaus that we should also do when walking alongside young people in times of chaos:

- He **listens** to their concerns;
- He reminds them of the defining stories of their faith and explains how those stories **connect** to their current situation;
- He offers them an **encounter** with the divine.

If any of these elements are out of balance or missing in your youth ministry, spend time brainstorming and praying about the best ways to incorporate them. You will find some helpful suggestions following here.

### Peace as a Shared Gift

*“Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

— John 20:21

When Jesus appeared to his disciples at the gathering after his resurrection, the familiar ancient greeting of “peace be with you” took on a new significance. As Christ breathed on them, the disciples were commissioned to be agents of peace in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In times of conflict or chaos, it is good to remind ourselves that we are not called to be peacemakers out of our own power. The peace that we extend to the world is a gift from God. Our calling is to allow God’s peace to flow through us in our thoughts, words and actions.

In community, it is easier to be faithful to this

calling. Together, we can address the barriers that prevent God’s peace from flowing through us. In order to live as peacemakers, we must listen to each other’s stories and collectively wrestle with issues of injustice in ways that are honest and respectful.

To be a community that equips people to be agents of peace means:

- prioritizing listening
- building relationships from a place of respect, honesty and trust
- facilitating opportunities for open dialogue
- celebrating each other’s differences
- seeking common ground in discussions

### Pray Together

After listening to each other’s stories and/or concerns, pray for one another. Here are some ideas for how to do so in a creative way:

1. Write your own prayer for peace. If you are looking for inspiration, do an internet search for peace prayers. Francis of Assisi’s is a great model.
2. Place unlit tea light candles in the shape of the word PEACE. As each person shares about an area in their life or the world that needs Christ’s peace, invite them to light a candle. Continue until all candles are lit.
3. Invite each person to turn to the person next to him or her and share one part of his or her life that is chaotic. During prayer time, ask each person to pray for peace in whatever area of their partner’s life was shared.

### LISTEN

**Best Part/Worst Part Exercise:** Develop a routine of regularly listening to youth group members by starting meetings with each person describing the best part and the worst part of their day or week. Set a tone of non-judgmental openness. Allow each person uninterrupted time to speak. Respond only when invited to give feedback from the person speaking.

**Faith Stories:** Invite Christians from all different walks of life to come share their faith stories with the youth. Ask them to specifically talk about where, when and how they found God (or didn’t find God!) in times of confusion or chaos.

### Peace as an Everyday Practice

*“And let the peace of Christ rule your hearts...”*

– Colossians 3:15

Unfortunately, there is no fast way to establish peace in our lives or in the world. As Jean Vanier writes in *Finding Peace* (2003), “It may be easy to be a *lover of peace*, but it is more difficult to be a *worker for peace*, a maker of peace, day in and day out.” Most paths to peace are created through a series of small deliberate choices and habitual practices.

Most of us will never be called on to intervene in large-scale conflicts, but we will face situations everyday in our homes, workplaces and churches where we can choose to bring a peaceful presence instead of adding to the chaos. As Christians, we can learn to be bearers of peace in all aspects of our lives by following Christ’s example.

To be a peacemaker means:

- showing love to *all* people, even our “enemies” (Luke 6:27-36)
- welcoming strangers and those in need (Matt. 25: 34-46)
- being willing to be “last” (Mark 10:35-45)
- being compassionate (Matt. 5:1-12)
- not judging (Matt. 7:1-5)
- embracing nonviolence (John 18:1-11)



### Discuss Together

After exploring the scripture passages listed above, discuss the following questions:

1. How does Jesus’ approach to the chaos of the world, especially inter-personal conflict and violence, differ from the approaches we see people taking today?
2. What qualities shape Jesus’ leadership that we feel we are missing in our own lives or the lives of our leaders today?
3. What are some practical ways that we can follow Christ’s peacemaking example in our everyday lives?

### CONNECT

**Peace Questions:** Create a few simple questions as a group that you can ask yourselves when faced with chaos. For example: How can I be the bearer of peace in this situation? What would Jesus’ reaction be in this situation?

**Passing the Peace:** Incorporate a time into each youth group meeting where you “pass the peace” to one another. This can be done with the traditional handshake or in more creative ways. See the Canada Youth 2016 video “Worship 101: Passing the Peace” available on the PCC’s YouTube channel *presvideo*.

### Peacemaking as an Action

*“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” – Luke 6:27-28*

For Jesus, peacemaking was an action directed at the most unlikely group of people. His direction to his followers was not that they should simply ignore or tolerate their enemies but that they should go out of their way to care for them and bless them. In Romans, Paul reminds the early Christians that their calling as peacemakers requires that they attend to their



enemies' needs: "... if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink..." (12:20).

The language of "enemy love" that Jesus uses can seem foreign in contemporary Canada. Although many of us can identify groups of people who are considered enemies by others, most of us would say that we don't *personally* have enemies. It can, therefore, be helpful to introduce the concept of *enmity*, which comes from the same Latin root as enemy and means "the feeling or condition of hostility, opposition, ill will, animosity or antagonism." The question then becomes: Towards whom do I feel hostile? Or, towards whom does my society express ill will or animosity?

In his sermon on the plains (Luke 6:17-42), Jesus offers us words of guidance for transforming our hostility into solidarity with those who are marginalized or excluded on account of their difference from us and/or the dominant culture in which we live.

To put peacemaking into action means:

- being willing to let go of the security and safety your socio-economic position affords (20-21)
- being willing to be rejected by those who do not ascribe to the vision of peace Christ offers (22-23)
- being willing to go against the "norms" of society that are hateful and harmful for those on the margins (24-25)
- being a blessing and doing good for those who don't like you (27-28)
- praying for those who've done you wrong (28)
- turning the other cheek (29)
- giving without expecting anything in return (32-34)
- being merciful by showing compassion and forgiveness (36)
- not judging (37-38)
- being willing to examine and eliminate your own faults and prejudices (41-42)

### Serve Together

Discuss Jesus' sermon on the plains together in a spirit of openness, honesty and non-judgment. This is a

## ENCOUNTER

**Create a prayer of confession:** Draw on the experience of those in the group to create a prayer of confession that lays out the ways that you have as individuals, as a group, and as a society failed to be peacemakers. Ask God to guide and bless you in loving your enemies.

**Write a letter of support:** Read the newspaper together and, using what you've read, write a letter of support and encouragement to individuals or groups experiencing injustice in your community. Or, write a letter to government petitioning for more support for those suffering injustices.

challenging passage so be sure to allow the space for people to express their thoughts and feelings about it. Challenge your group to use Jesus' teaching to identify ways you could serve together. Here are some possible ideas:

1. Volunteer as a group with an organization or mission that is already serving those on the margins in your community.
2. Visit the Justice Ministries website for resources and information at [presbyterian.ca/justice](http://presbyterian.ca/justice). Choose one initiative that interests your group and organize an awareness campaign about it within your community.
3. Find an organization that promotes peace locally or globally and organize a fundraiser in support of their work. Visit the online *Gifts of Change* catalogue for some ideas of projects in The Presbyterian Church in Canada that you could support at [presbyterian.ca/gifts-of-change](http://presbyterian.ca/gifts-of-change).

## Canadian Ministries wants to hear from YOU!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your experiences of peacemaking in times of chaos. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 Ext. 290. Find more great ministry ideas through our weekly Facebook post *Take it Up Tuesday*. Follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/pconnect](https://facebook.com/pconnect).