

# HOW TO USE THIS KIT

This kit is a contribution to the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) from the Social Justice Network of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). It is published as a resource to celebrate Social Justice Sunday. Social Justice Sunday is the last Sunday in September, but it can be celebrated on any day that suits your church.

The National Council of Churches invites all churches to use the resources provided in this kit to consider, in worship and in study (in congregations, groups and/or individually), one of the major issues in our world today – security.

All of us are tempted by false concepts of security. This can lead us to do things that other people experience as violence, even when that is not our intention.

This kit offers theological reflections, resources for worship, and case studies to help us think about security, violence and peace in our everyday lives.

Most of us think of ourselves as very ordinary people who never commit violence.

To help us understand how the desire for security leads us to violence, and how we can find security in different, more peaceful ways, we use in this kit the major biblical themes of truth, mercy, justice and community. These are the principles which inform a Christian spirituality of peacemaking and reconciliation and which have been identified by the NCCA as Christian strategies for overcoming violence.

**Truth** Christians are called to speak truth and are called towards repentance for our complicity in violence. It is the power of truth – naming violence where it occurs – which will transcend the 'logic' and spirit of violence.

*Truth is a force of non-violent resistance that exposes and opposes oppression and injustice.*

**Mercy** Christians are called to address power and to exercise 'mercy-power' or compassion ('opening the eyes of the blind and giving voice to the voiceless'). It is mercy which will overcome the abuse and misuse of power by adjusting our relationships.

**Justice** Christians are called to do justice. It is justice which overcomes violence by redressing injustices in ways that oppose violence without replicating it.

*Mercy and justice are forces of non-violent resistance that transform our relationships and the systems and structures of our interconnectedness.*

**Community** Christians are called to build a community which encompasses all people and all creation. It is community which builds peace and true security through relationships of co-operation, understanding, and trust.

*Community is a force of non-violent resistance that transforms the culture of violence into a culture of peace, where security is found in relationship with God and each other.*

In using the material in this kit we invite you to think about the language and assumptions by which we live, to open your hearts and lives to the source of transforming power and peace, to commit yourself to practise justice in all your dealings, and to widen your understanding and embrace of your 'neighbour'.

The Christian reflections in this kit are "contextual exegesis". That is, once we had a general idea of the issue we wanted to discuss in the kit, we went to the Bible asking: where does the Bible talk about this issue and the concerns we have? How can we relate our faith to our insecurities and fears, and our understanding of security? Similarly, in the notes provided on the lections for the day, we have approached the Bible readings with the issue of security already in mind.

*In worship, we invite you to ask:*

*How does the Biblical message, including the lectionary readings, illuminate the issues of security that we are facing today?*

*How does this help us distinguish between true and false security?*

*What hope and assurance does Christianity offer us as we seek security?*

*What guidelines for our everyday living and actions do we find in the Bible when we bring it into a dialogue with the issues we face?*

The case studies are each based on an important justice issue and illustrate a particular temptation of security. They can be used for group and/or individual study. Each case study reflects one of the DOV program's seven circles of violence and peace, examining how we all give in to temptations of false security that ripple into violence in our personal, family, local community, religious/cultural, national, international and ecological lives. In each case study we have highlighted the path to peace and true security that comes with following the Christian strategies of truth, mercy, justice, and community. You will also find paragraphs that are tagged with icons representing 'reflection' and 'action'. Reflection paragraphs offer comments or questions which you can discuss as a group or think more deeply about in private, and action paragraphs contain ideas or comments that offer hints to opportunities you can take to act positively for justice, embarking on the path toward peace and security.

*In study, we invite you to:*

*Begin with us as we name violence, in this case, various manifestations of false security. Ask what are the temptations we face in seeking security in each of these circles of life?*

*Come on a journey of applying Christian principles to our lives in order to transform both our understanding of security and the actions we take toward it. Ask how can Christian reflection help us take the path toward genuine security?*

*Seek from amongst the case studies a starting point for further action and ongoing involvement in building true security through sharing the love of Christ and creating ripples of peace.*

This kit is offered as an invitation to view our world through the twin lenses of reality and hope. You are invited to give up the security of a small definition of violence as something out there, that other people do, and to enter the insecurity of considering that violence may be in your society, your neighbourhood, your house, your church, or even your self. At the same time, you are invited to find a new security, in recognising the opportunities to build peace in community with God and each other. Peace is something to which we can all contribute. Genuine security is something that Christians find in faith.



***We hope that these resources will be helpful tools which enable Australian Christians to use their everyday lives to build peace and security in this country and beyond.***

# UNDERSTANDING SECURITY – UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

“Security” has many meanings. We talk about social security, national security, a secure financial future, secure borders, emotional security, company securities, loan security, security systems for a home, office or factory, airport security, personal security, computer security, the Security Council of the United Nations, international security, collective security, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation... Some forms of security are things we hope for as a form of health and wellbeing, some are things we do to protect ourselves and others, and some are actions that other people require us to take (like the Australian Government asking us to be alert but not alarmed as we looked around us for suspected terrorists).

Underlying all these types of security is a more fundamental idea of security as safety, and the reduction or elimination of risk. This raises a number of questions. Can all risks be eliminated from human life? Would we want a life without risk? What risks should be reduced or eliminated, because of the harm they cause? What risks are intrinsic to human life and human relationships? Is the idea of total security an illusion?

What makes people secure? Does our security depend on alarms, bars on windows, money in the bank, weapons and military force? Or does security depend on human dignity and worth? Do weapons, bars, and alarms make you feel secure? Or do you feel secure in your family, community, or neighbourhood, knowing that you have housing, food, and a job, that your children will be educated and that you can get medical treatment when you are sick?

The types of security expressed in peoples’ everyday lives, or put to us by governments or through the media, are often not genuine. We are encouraged to seek our security in clothes and possessions, through the police force, by excluding others, in weapons and military force, and even in empty prayers. We often assume that we are entitled to both what we have and whatever we want, and that it is reasonable to do whatever it takes to be secure.

## TRUE SECURITY

The Christian tradition provides an alternative type of security that is found in relationship with God and carried into every human interaction. In thinking about security, we think about our life in God, and about concepts like love, peace, community, justice, jubilee, being neighbour, God’s provision of the things people need to live (what theologians call “providence”), the Kingdom of God, forgiveness, reconciliation and the grace of God. These are some of the many Christian concepts that offer ways of understanding security that differ sharply from the views offered to us day by day. Ultimately it is “the peace of God which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and the perfect love of God which “casts out fear” (1 John 4:15) that enables us to love our neighbour with confidence.

True security is found in community. Our security depends on the security of others and the natural world. Our security will always be limited as long as there are people who struggle for survival in situations of poverty and disadvantage. What looks like security for some, is insecurity for others – which inevitably makes it security for no-one. Being neighbour involves giving up the perspectives and priorities of the powerful, to understand life and security from the viewpoint of the powerless. Only then can communal security be developed to serve everyone, not the privileged few.

Violence can take many forms. We can define it in terms of: who experiences it (eg. child abuse or spouse abuse), who commits it (eg. gang violence or police violence), the form it takes (such as emotional violence, physical violence, verbal attack, economic violence, or oppression), the reasons for committing violence (such as racist violence or religious wars), or where it is committed (eg. school bullying or violence in sport).

We often focus on the more obvious forms of violence committed by those with less power in a situation, while ignoring the more accepted - but profoundly damaging - forms of violence that those with power commit. So we talk about family violence as the violence within families rather than the violence done to families by inadequate wages or unemployment. We see the violence of the bag snatcher but ignore the violence that the offender may experience in prison.

There are many forms of violence that often remain unacknowledged in our everyday language: poverty, injustice, providing an unsafe workplace, treating a person as if they were less than human, denying a person asylum when they are a refugee, polluting the environment with chemicals or waste, excluding people from community, making unreasonable demands on people... Sometimes we even forget that war is violence.

So what do we mean by violence? Violence is best understood as harm that another person experiences as a result of things that we or other people do or fail to do. It is a breach of human relationships. It may be a breach of our responsibilities as citizens, but often it is not seen in that way. Often violence is accepted as a way of life, and hidden by euphemisms such as “financial disadvantage” or “collateral damage”. Sometimes we even use terms that blame the victim, such as “school drop out” to describe those for whom we have failed to provide appropriate schooling, or “liberation” to describe the purpose of a war.

## OVERCOMING VIOLENCE

If we are to overcome violence, then we need to view our world through different lenses. We need to see the various forms that violence takes, and recognise that the perpetrators of violence are not only the wicked criminals – we all inflict violence. We must recognise that violence, in any form, does not bring true and lasting security. This is the reality we must be prepared to acknowledge.

We also need to recognise that in every sphere of life, peace is possible – we can overcome violence, we can work for justice, we can build peaceful communities. True security will come with a peace which is born out of justice. This is life with hope.

### PRINCIPLES FOR OVERCOMING VIOLENCE

- respect everyone as human beings
- care for everyone involved in a conflict or a relationship
- refuse to harm, damage or degrade people, living things, or the earth
- if suffering is inevitable, take it on yourself rather than inflict it on others
- never retaliate to violence with violence
- believe that everyone is capable of change
- appeal to everyone’s “humanity”
- recognise that no one has a monopoly on truth – peace brings together different “truths”
- believe that means are the ends-in-making, so the means have to be consistent with the ends
- be open rather than secretive