

Bible study outline - or self-study on

Community Violence: Scripture & ELCA teachings

- What are the values you bring into this - or background beliefs about who God is and how God is in relationship with humanity, that is pertinent to this topic?
 - Do these come from scripture? Or do they describe what we know of God from the whole (big picture) narrative of scripture)
 - What are the other values you weigh in regards to this topic?
- *Term: proof texting: having a belief first and then using the text (scripture) to support your belief, without regard for the context of the verses selected (and thus often against original intent/context)*
- When you think about the Bible and violence, what comes to mind?
- On a scale of 1 = perfectly peaceful to 10 = rampantly violent, how would you rate:
 - the Bible (or specific books of it?)
 - the world?
- The ELCA has a [Social Message on “Community Violence.”](#) (abbreviated below CVSM) adopted by churchwide assembly in 1994, after the 1993 resolution on “Community Violence - Gun Control” amid the country’s discussion and passing of the Brady Bill (1993) and subsequent gun control legislation.
- The CVSM begins: **THE REALITY AND FEAR OF VIOLENCE TODAY** Violence between humans is an age-old mark of sin. Cain slew Abel; Shechem raped Dinah; David plotted the death of Uriah. Massacres, raids, and widespread abuse of peoples have been a part of our history. Those in power have often extended their racial, sexual, economic, and/or political domination through violent means. Violence is woven in and through the distinctive stories that have shaped us as Americans. If there is something timeless about violence, there are also disturbingly new aspects. Today the word violence evokes images of random shootings and muggings on city streets and country lanes; savage abuse of women, men, and children; senseless brutality depicted in movies, TV shows, and video games. The breakdown of families and communities is a widespread fact of life, and violence one of its wages. For some women and children, home is less safe than the street. Hate crimes continue. Neighborhood, schoolyard, workplace, or family disputes spark into violence and become lethal. They become headline news, reinforcing the atmosphere of violence and inspiring profitable entertainment media.
- **RESPONDING OUT OF THE FAITH WE CONFESS** In the face of violence, God’s resolve for peace in human communities is unshakable. Deliberate acts to harm or kill innocent people violate God’s intention for human community. God’s commandment is “You shall not murder” (**Exodus 20:13**). In proclaiming God’s law, we declare that all people are accountable before God and the community to honor and respect the life God has given. Before God, we all are in captivity to sin, and in need of God’s mercy. Some have committed acts of violence. Others have been sinned against through acts of violence. Still others are overwhelmed by fears of violence. In proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ’s forgiveness, healing, and new life, the church addresses the ultimate root of violence. Through his death, Christ broke down the dividing walls of hostility, fear, and violence between people, reconciling us to God and one another (**Ephesians 2:13-17**). God’s reign of peace has come in Jesus Christ, and will be complete in a “new heaven and new earth” where death and pain “will be no more” (**Revelation 21:1,4**).

The Holy Spirit works among us to wrench us from violence, hate, greed, and fear, and transforms us into people who are called to trust God and live in community with one another. In doing so, we need to confront the violent tendencies within ourselves and our society, and find ways to cultivate the practice of nonviolence. Christians, as salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and light of the world (Matthew 5:14), are called to respond to violent crime in the restorative ways taught by Jesus (**Matthew 5:38-39**) and shown by his actions (**John 8:3-11**).⁴ Rather than reacting out of fear, or out of a vengeful desire to “get even” with those we consider our “enemies” (**Luke 6:27ff**), we realize they are our neighbors. We are empowered to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make violence so pervasive.

According to Lutheran theology, society is to be ruled by the civil use of the Law. Government is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintenance of justice and public order. Just laws and their proper enforcement by police and courts are necessary to restrain violence. But laws and their enforcement are often corrupted by sin. As citizens in a democracy, we have the responsibility to join with others to hold government accountable for protecting society and ensuring justice for all, and to seek changes in policies and practices toward these ends.

- **As a Community of Ongoing Deliberation** As a church committed to “contribute toward the up-building of the common good and the revitalizing of public life through open and inclusive processes of deliberation,” we call for public discussions of violence that:
 - continue to examine the appropriateness and effectiveness of measures such as the death penalty and gun control;
 - question a one-sided approach to violence, which would make persecution and punishment the primary remedies;
 - object to the manipulation of fear of violence by some who hold or seek public office;
 - deplore how “toughness on crime” can play into the racism infecting and affecting all in this society;
 - explore specific ways violence has shaped and influenced our history;
 - challenge the logic of winning by destroying one’s opponents, which Scripture has sometimes been used to justify;
 - explore how depictions of violence in the media (typically apart from the pain and anguish) affect actual violence in society; and
 - consider not only short-term measures, but also long-term address of the recalcitrant discrimination and injustices that lie behind many expressions of violence.

Guiding us is a vision of the age-to-come in which people are free from violence, justice is done, and the common good is realized. “They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (**Isaiah 65:25**). May that promise stir us to challenge and heal violence in our day!

- [ELCA Social policy resolution on Gun Control](#) (one page)
- [Do you believe God is a pacifist?](#)
- [What do you think is the calling or duty of Christians in the face or culture of violence?](#)
- **Further Reading:**
 - [Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way](#), by Walter Wink. A well-known and pivotal Christian text. Quick read (<100 pg book)
 - Other ELCA social statements: [Criminal Justice](#) and [The Death Penalty](#)
 - After the Mother Emanuel church shooting (which the shooter was a baptized ELCA member), and continuing gun violence, the ELCA called all congregations and people to pray, reflect, and confess - and offered this resource: [A 60 Day Journey toward Justice in a culture of gun violence](#).