

Peace Advocate News

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9

Peace begins when you make your peace with Jesus, accept Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

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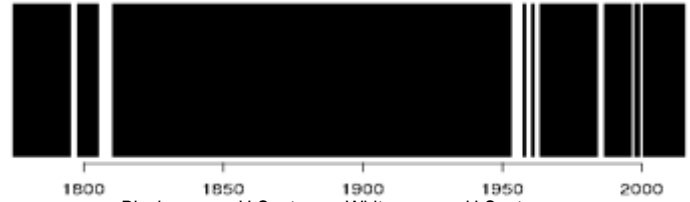
Are We Peaceful?

I was asked recently why I think peacemaking is important, especially right now. That we are living in a violent time; that we need to find a better way of dealing with conflict; that we need to think of others as well as of ourselves; all these things appear obvious to one who is steeped in the message of Jesus and seeking to live as one of his disciples; or does it? I am a student of history. When I was young, I was assigned an art project, to create a piece representing what I liked. I made a book because of my love of reading, library work, and book binding. For my love of history, I included a medieval knight (world history) and a revolutionary war soldier (American History). Looking back, I wonder why I chose those images and wonder if I should have used different ones since I have always tried to be a peacemaker.

One reason for the choice is the way history is taught. Much of school room history centers around war, and that affects our national thinking. We talk about everything in war terms from 'fighting' drugs and cancer to opponents in sports. Americans have occasionally been 'isolationists' – tried to stay out of 'someone else's war. However, often isolationism has been due to economic interests or a matter of self-preservation. Usually, even during such times, there has been an emphasis on the 'need' for military might to 'defend ourselves' against 'the enemy', real or perceived. Such 'defensiveness' is touted as noble, even though the U.S. has been the aggressor far more often than the one attacked. (Just between 1948 [the end of WWII] and 1991 the U.S. 'intervened' militarily in other countries 46 times and between 1992 and 2017 there were 188 U.S. military interventions. "Interventions" are offensive not defensive.) Even when more of these military actions are failing despite unrivaled military might and the enormous costs to the nation and the people, the number of 'interventions' is increasing as is the glorification of war. (The News International <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/595752-the-us-has-been-at-war-225-out-of-243-years-since-1776>. The Centre for Research on Globalization. Global Research. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/america-has-been-at-war-93-of-the-time-222-out-of-239-years-since-1776/5565946>. The Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/05/18/heres-how-much-of-your-life-the-united-states-has-been-at-war/>.)



Most people are unaware of the full reality of the role of war in our history and have not considered its impact on our thinking. During America's first century (1776-1876) the country was at peace for only 9 years. During our second century (1876-1976) there were only 8 years of peace, and since 1976, there have only been 4 years of peace. That means the U.S. has been at war 93% of the time. In fact, most of the military operations launched in the world since World War II have been launched by the U.S.



Black = years U.S. at war. White = years U.S. at peace
Source of graphic: <https://freakonometrics.hypotheses.org/50473>

This history means Americans actually have very little experience with peace! No one born after 2000 has ever lived in the country at peace. Is it any wonder non-violent ways of problem solving are not the first options many people think of? In fact, attempts at peaceful descent are frequently met not with dialogue but with violence (This was true during the women's suffrage movement in the early 20th century, the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and the current protests against racism and police brutality). For me, this is disheartening and points to part of the reason peacemaking is such an uphill climb and also an urgent need.

There is evidence that peaceful tactics to bring change do work in our times. One example: In 2003 political scientists Erica Chenoweth (Harvard Univ.) and Maria J. Stephan (U.S. gov. & U.S. Institute for Peace) set out to prove the "strategic logic" and need for armed resistance to bring about change. Their findings were unexpected, changed Erica's thinking, and are encouraging others: Peaceful civil disobedience "is not only the moral choice, it is also the most powerful way of shaping world politics – by a long way." Nonviolent campaigns are twice as likely to achieve their goals as violent campaigns. There are many factors in getting there. However, if only 3.5% of the population is actively involved in a non-violent campaign, success is all but assured. (Their book: *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. 2011. See also David Robson. "The '3.5% rule': How A Small Minority Can Change the World.") Peacemakers have known the power of peace all along. Chenoweth and Stephan's findings support that power. Peaceful action to solve problems or bring change is certainly not easy and not without great sacrifice, but it is creative, not destructive. This makes it worth the effort.



Let the One Who Is Without Sin Cast the First Stone

For 17 years, the U.S. federal government has not executed anyone. Support for the death penalty among the American people is at a 45 year low. 21 states have abolished the death penalty for all crimes and several other states have a moratorium on using it. Even so, the Trump administration started federal executions again in July. Daniel Lee was killed July 13, Wesley Purkey was killed July 16, and Dustin Lee Honken was killed July 17. "As

courts and judges haggled back and forth about the lives of individuals, any semblance of respect for life was shattered. According to his lawyers, Mr. Lee was strapped to a gurney for the final four hours of his life, while the legal challenges played out. Wesley Purkey suffered from mental illness and dementia, leaving many to question his awareness of what was happening to him.” (Rachel Gross. “Death Row Support Project Reflects On First Federal Executions In 17 Years”. Church of the Brethren *Newsline*. July 18, 2020.)



A person is strapped to a gurney during a lethal injection execution.

Media witnesses said Honken’s execution seemed to take longer than did the other two (Mark Berman. “Justice Department Carries Out Third Federal Execution In Four Days”. Washington Post https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/justice-dept-carries-out-third-federal-execution-in-four-days/2020/07/17/5afba3fa-c86f-11ea-8ffe-372be8d82298_story.html.)

Questions continue to be raised about execution methods. “Every method of execution comes with an intolerably high risk of extreme pain and torture.” (ACLU on Capital Punishment <https://www.aclu.org/issues/capital-punishment>) In 2014 an execution in Arizona required 15 doses of the drugs and took two hours. This led to a moratorium on executions because of the inhumanity of the method. Many pharmaceutical companies, that produce drugs used in executions, are no longer willing to provide their drugs for such a purpose. The U.S. courts have only recently ruled that there is a method (which relies on only one drug) that is, in their view, ‘humane’. This decision assumes there is a humane way to kill.

The U.S. is the only country in the Americas that continues to carry out executions. In Europe, Only Belarus and Russia have not abolished the death penalty. (Cornell Law School: Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide. <https://www.deathpenaltyworldwide.org/>) By the end of 2019 a majority of countries (106 of them) had abolished the death penalty and more than two thirds (142 of them) had abolished its use in law or practice (Amnesty International. “Death Penalty In 2019: Facts and Figures”. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/death-penalty-in-2019-facts-and-figures/>).

In the U.S., 173 prisoners on death row were exonerated and released between 1973 and 2019; nine of them in Ohio (Death Penalty Information Center <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence#resources>). A 2014 National Academy of Sciences study found that as many as 1 in 25 (4.1%) of those on death row ‘are probably innocent’. (Pema Levy. “One in 25 Sentenced to Death in the U.S. Is Innocent, Study Claims”. *Newsweek*. 4-28-2014) Being sentenced to death in the U.S. has more to do with a defendant’s ability to pay for a good lawyer; where the crime took place; the prejudices of the law enforcement and courts involved; the quality of the investigation of the case; and the race of the suspect and the victim, than it does with the crime committed. 52% of all executions imposed and 56% of all prisoners on death row are in only 2% of the counties in the country (ACLU). Texas uses the death penalty more than any other state. The frequency of death sentences issued does not reflect a higher crime rate in those counties. The evidence indicates that the use of the death penalty does not detour crime. The financial cost of the death penalty is far higher than that of a life sentence, not to mention the strain on the victim’s and the accused’s families. Many in victim’s families are among those who do not support the death penalty.

The death of George Floyd and several others has heightened public awareness of problems with racism and abuse by some law enforcement officers, both because of how they died and because of overly violent responses to usually peaceful public protests. The resulting calls for long overdue changes are being heard across the country. Do not forget however, that police brutality many only be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to injustice and unfair treatment some receive in the judicial system. Flaws in the ‘system’ are widespread and deep. They extend beyond the use of the death penalty. Since 1989, 367 people wrongfully convicted of a crime have been exonerated by DNA testing. On average they have served 14 years in prison for crimes they did not commit (some have served 20 years or more). 69% of these cases involved ‘eyewitnesses’ who were wrong. 44% of the cases involved the ‘misapplication of forensic science.’ DNA testing identified the actual perpetrator in 162 cases. These real assailants committed 152 additional crimes (including 35 murders and 82 sexual assaults) while the wrong person was in jail (The Innocence Project. <https://www.innocenceproject.org/dna-exonerations-in-the-united-states/>). Do not forget, that, since not all cases are reviewed, there may be more cases of innocent people in jail than we know of.

In our 1987 statement on the death penalty, the Church of the Brethren said our understanding of God’s will for us upholds the sanctity of human life and personality. “The Church of the Brethren is a New Testament church, interpreting the Old Testament in light of the New.” We affirm our faith foundations in Israel’s history but see it “through the renewing mind of Christ, who provides our pattern for living.” The emphasis is on personal accountability and forgiveness. Only the sinless one can take life (John 8:7-11), putting the taking and giving of life only in God’s hands. (Gen. 9:5). “Instead of passing judgement, Christ offers justice in the form of renewing, life-giving redemption.” “There is an element of God in each of us, and so we must hold all human life as sacred. To take the life of any person is to destroy what has been created by God and redeemed by Christ. To admit that there are those who are beyond saving is to deny the ultimate power of redemption, the cross and the empty tomb.” (find the statement at www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1987deathpenalty.html).

Be Aware of Domestic Violence

As people spend more time confined with family at home, during this pandemic, we need to be aware of the increased potential for abusive behavior to take place. Abuse by people in a person’s most intimate circle is far more common than most of us know. In part this is because the topic is hard to talk about. In part it is because some in society still tend to blame the victim.

Women Against Abuse define domestic violence as: “a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use to gain power and control over their intimate partners.” They also point out that “domestic violence is lethal, common, and affects people of all cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels.” Despite some cultural myths, Domestic violence is a crime. Both women and men can be victims or perpetrators of domestic violence and children are also victims.

- More than 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men in the U.S. have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner.
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men will experience severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some time in their lives.
- Between 2 and 4 million women are physically abused each year in the U.S. 2,000 of them will die of their injuries.
- Domestic violence is one of the top 3 causes of homelessness among families in many major cities.

Physical abuse is the most recognized form of domestic violence. It includes everything from hitting to refusing medical attention or coercing a partner into substance abuse. There are also other forms of domestic violence that are no less damaging.

- Emotional abuse includes name calling and insults; blaming; jealousy; intimidation; shaming; isolation; controlling movement and activity; and stalking.
- Sexual abuse is not about sex it is about power. It includes forcing a person to have sex with others (human trafficking); forcing sex on a victim who is not fully conscious or who is too afraid to say no; hurting someone during sex; forcing sex without protection or sabotaging birth control measures.
- Technological abuse includes hacking into a partner's email or other personal accounts; using tracking devices on their cell phone to monitor location, phone calls, and messages; monitoring interactions by social media, demanding to know a partner's passwords.
- Financial abuse is "any behavior that maintains power and control over finances" including causing a partner to lose their job by causing work preventing injury, harassing them at work, etc.; controlling assets by putting a partner on an 'allowance'; or damaging a partner's credit score.
- Using one's immigration status (destroying immigration papers, threatening exposure to deportation or injury to family, etc.) is abuse.
- Using one's sexual orientation as a threat or making false accusations about it are also ways of abuse.

<https://www.womenagainstabuse.org/education-resources/internet-safety>

People dealing with domestic violence are in a dangerous situation. Abuse generally escalates over time. Attempting to get away from the situation is often dangerous, so victims of abuse often need help to do so. Educate yourself so you can help yourself or others. **Here are some additional resources:**

Mayo Clinic Staff. "Domestic Violence Against Women: Recognize Patterns, Seek Help." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/domestic-violence/art-20048397>

Center For Disease Control. Preventing Intimate Partner Violence. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>

The domestic violence hotline (800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233). can provide crisis intervention and referrals to resources, such as women's shelters.

Local healthcare providers, counseling/mental health centers, & local courts can help.

Be aware of those around you. Be the trusted friend or family member who will step in and help.



Remember Nigeria!

On July 2, 2020 Joel S. Billi, president of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) held a press conference in Jimeta, Yola. He wanted to bring "attention to the

continuing insurgent violence that is affecting members of EYN and their neighbors in northeast Nigeria, and issu[e] a strong call on the Nigeria government." He shared that: EYN was established at Garkida, Adamawa State, by the Brethren Christian missionaries from the U.S. on March, 17, 1923. EYN will be 100 years old in 2023. It is the largest Christian denomination in northeast Nigeria where there are an estimated 1.5 million communicant members. EYN is one of the three Historic Peace Churches in the world.



Photo by Zakariya Musa. EYN president Joel S. Billi

The other two are the Mennonites & the Society of Friends (Quakers). EYN has given a practical demonstration of this peace heritage during over 11 years of insurgency in northeast Nigeria perpetrated by the Boko Haram Islamic fundamentalist sect. There have been no reprisal attacks by members of the EYN.

Of the Christian denominations in Nigeria, EYN has been the worst hit by the activities of the Boko Haram.

- Over 700,000 members have been displaced
- only 7 out of 60 District Church Councils have not been directly affected by the insurgency.
- EYN has lost over 8,370 members and 8 pastors. The numbers increase on a daily basis.
- Many EYN members have been abducted, with 217 out of the 276 Chibok school girls taken in 2014 belonging to EYN.
- Over 300 of the 586 EYN churches have been either burnt or destroyed, with uncountable numbers of member's houses looted or burnt.

President Billi commends the Nigerian "Federal Government under President Muhammadu Buhari and the President's Task Force on COVID-19 for the proactive measures taken. We salute our frontline health workers for putting their lives on the line for Nigerians. We sympathize with families who lost their loved ones as a result of this global pandemic. We call on all Nigerians to adhere to safety protocols & guidelines so that COVID-19 may be defeated."

President Billi also commends government zeal in dealing with Boko Haram, he urgently calls on them to rescue the remaining Chibok school girls and hundreds of other people abducted by Boko Haram and return them to their families. However, he was shocked when the Nigerian president said in June that all displaced people were home. This was "unfortunate, misleading, and demoralizing." In fact, there were 4 EYN District Church Councils in the Gwoza area of Borno State before Boko Haram. There are none now. More than 18,000 EYN members are still taking refuge in Minawao, Cameroon. About 7,000 EYN members are in other internally displaced person (IDP) camps in Cameroon. Some 47,000 IDP people from Gwoza are still in Cameroon. Most of Gwoza is still uninhabited - President Billi lists 34 such communities. This has not been acknowledged or reported by the government. There have also been more than 50 Boko Haram attacks from late 2019 through June 2020 that have gone unreported or under reported in the media. President Billi gives the details of many of these attacks including the names of the people killed, injured, or abducted in each attack. Some details are given here. See the Church of the Brethren *Newsline* report for more details.

Christmas day, 9 were killed- some of them burned to death; Dec. 29, 18 were abducted, 1 was 3 years old, a church, a school & food stuffs were destroyed. **January attacks:** the EYN District secretary of Adamawa State was abducted & gruesomely murdered; 6 EYN women were abducted; 10 EYN member homes were looted & burned. **February attacks:** 3 churches burned the same day; a 9-year old boy abducted; a person shot & 17 member homes destroyed. The church in Garkida (1st in Nigeria) & 2 non EYN churches burned as was the EYN College of Health Technology & the Rural Health Department; homes & shops were looted & burned; 8 were killed including a soldier & 4 Muslims. In a **March attack** a truck loaded with food was taken. **April attacks:** 6 killed, shops looted & burned, vehicles burned, & 20 houses destroyed. **May attacks:** 2 churches & 2 villages burned/destroyed & more deaths & injuries – some were machete attacks. 1 attack was an attempt to wipe out an entire family. **June attacks:** saw people of all ages killed or injured & some abducted along with property damage. Some communities have been attacked repeatedly some are currently uninhabited because they are not safe.

President Billi calls on the government to deal with the threats and make it safe for displaced people to return home. He asks that the government help with rebuilding schools, churches, and homes that have been destroyed. The government has a “constitutional responsibility to stop the killings, abductions, rape and all forms of criminality across the country.” Religion is a sensitive issue in Nigeria. The government should “ensure that Christian Religious Studies is taught in public schools” in the states where it is not. “This would contribute in molding character of the citizens.” The federal government should respect and uphold the rule of law equally for all and see that all sectors and religious groups are equally represented in the government. He calls for U.N. and African Union help with the security challenges since the government seems to be overwhelmed. President Billi also calls for job development and improvements in infrastructure. At the same time, President Billi says: “As a church, though abandoned by the government, I call on all EYN members to remain law-abiding citizens, upholding our peace heritage and keeping an unwavering faith in God whom we believe will one day deliver us.”

Source: A Press Conference by EYN President Brings Attention to Recent Boko Haram Attacks & Calls On the Government & International Community For Action. Church of the Brethren *Newsline*, July 3, 2020.

Worship Resources

Make Praying for Peace Part of Your Worship Remember in prayer:

1. **Those facing the coronavirus** – That is, all of us. Support those who are sick and those caring for them; scientists looking for a treatment and a vaccine; leaders responsible for public policy during this pandemic. Help all of us do our part to work together for the good of everyone in this time of pandemic.
2. August marks the **75th anniversaries of the U.S. nuclear bombing** of Hiroshima (Aug. 6, 1945) & Nagasaki (Aug. 9, 1945) in Japan. These horrific events helped end WWII, a war that started for the world in 1939 with the German invasion of Poland, & for America with the horrific Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941). During the war, at least 60 million people died – some 20 million military personnel & at least 40 million civilians. Many of the civilians died as the result of deliberate genocide, massacres, mass bombings by both sides, disease, & starvation. Even the end of

this war did not bring peace. The war sowed the seeds that moved the world into a cold war that continued for decades. The world has continued to engage in wars ever sense. As you pray this week, remember the terrible human cost of war & pray that the world will find ways to stop resorting to war. Ask and act on the question: what can you do to work for peace?

3. On Aug. 4, a **horrific explosion rocked Beirut Lebanon**. At least 135 people died, & at least 5,000 were wounded. There was major destruction in the city already struggling under corruption, economic disaster, & COVID-19. A major hospital was severely damaged & is out of commission. Some medical staff were killed. The remaining medical facilities were overwhelmed & turned away some wounded. Many people are now homeless. The siloes which housed 85% of the country's wheat supply were destroyed leaving only contaminated grain. The country imports 80% of its food through the now damaged port, so the food supply is a serious concern. Pray for the people & their leaders. People are now protesting the corruption that allowed the storage of the explosive material in their city.
4. People around the country continue to make their **voices heard for change** peacefully. They call for an end to racism, abusive treatment, & the inequality many Americans of color live with every day. Pray that these voices will be heard & that changes will come.
5. **Remember those dealing with weather issues & fire** eastern hurricane season & western fire season, as well as elsewhere in the world
6. **The people of Brazil**. Brazil is now 2nd only to the US as a COVID-19 hot spot. Brazilian Brethren (Igreja da Irmandade) live near, and many work in São Paulo, one of the hardest hit cities in the country.
7. **The victims of gun violence & for those willing to commit such senseless acts.**
8. **All people in this world who continue to live with war.**
9. **Girls & Women** facing abuse & violence every day



Peace Resources

See specific articles for related resource information.

Guns & America is a groundbreaking new national reporting collaborative in which 10 public media newsrooms, including ideastream, will train their attention on a singular issue: the role of guns in American life. Over the course of two years, the stations will report on how guns impact us as Americans, from the cultural significance of hunting and sport shooting, to the role guns play in suicide, homicide, mass shootings and beyond. Follow this reporting at gunsandamerica.org or listen to 90.3 WCPN ideastream. Source: <https://www.ideastream.org/topics/guns-america>

Book: Chanel Miller. *Know My Name*. Viking Press, 2019. This is Chanel's memoir about being sexually assaulted in January 2015; the aftermath; and the court case. She was known as Emily Doe during the court case, but eventually chose to make her identity known as part of her own healing and for others dealing with the same life changing trauma. It is a moving survival story that has already helped make a difference by sparking a nationwide conversation about rape. The judge, who gave her assailant an unjustly light sentence, was removed from the bench and sentencing laws have been changed in California as a result of the case.

Look for Peace & Reconciliation Resources on the Northern Ohio District Website.

For access go to: www.nohcob.org



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