

# The From Violence to Wholeness Workshop

## *Program Overview*

One of the most important solutions to the growing crisis of violence lies in furnishing people from all walks of life with the tools, and ongoing support, to engage in powerful and sustained nonviolent transformation of violence and conflict.

From Violence to Wholeness is a program that invites individuals, small groups, and established organizations to explore, experiment with, and practice the vision and dynamics of creative nonviolence in their daily lives and in the effort to make their communities and the larger world more just and peaceful. Presentations, discussions, small group reflections, readings, music, role playing, journaling and other creative techniques and processes are incorporated to help participants deepen their knowledge of active nonviolence and learn how to put that knowledge into practice in their daily lives. Rooted in an inductive, popular education process, From Violence to Wholeness begins where people are and returns, again and again, to their experience as the foundation for discovering alternatives to violence.

From Violence to Wholeness is presented in a variety of formats, including a ten-part series of two-hour sessions, One-Day and Weekend Introductory Workshops, Weekend Facilitator Trainings, and the Training for Trainers. In a safe and comfortable environment, participants explore their experience of violence and conflict and develop effective and powerful alternatives rooted in the values of justice, fairness, equality, compassion, forgiveness, participatory democracy, nonviolent people power, the hunger for discovering and creating meaning, and the desire for the well-being of all. As part of this process, Pace e Bene organizes and/or nurtures ongoing groups designed to create an environment to support the use of practical tools for nonviolent change and to deepen the human, cultural, and spiritual foundations in which such action is rooted. These Circles of Creative Nonviolence provide their members with the opportunity to share experiences and stories of violence and active nonviolence, role-play personal situations of conflict, brainstorm creative ways of addressing interpersonal and social injustice and violence, and support one another in taking nonviolent action in many different settings.

From Violence to Wholeness situates creative and productive ways to deal with conflict within the context of supportive Circles of Creative Nonviolence marked by four key qualities: relationship, inclusivity, inner growth, and action.

From Violence to Wholeness promotes the health and well-being of its participants by offering them:

1. tools to prevent personal and social destructive behavior and the patterns from which they flow
2. ways to respond creatively when faced with conflict, rooted in a set of values marked by compassionate problem-solving
3. participation in a nurturing support group, community, or circle fostering deepening human connection, care, companionship, and creativity.

From Violence to Wholeness offers the possibility of improving the health and well-being of its participants by inviting them to:

1. break free of oppressive personal and social patterns of victim/victimizer
2. exercise the "people power" of active nonviolence to confront patterns of personal and social dysfunction

3. create and nourish meaning in their lives
4. find life-giving support from others who also long for transformation.

### ***From Violence to Wholeness: Curriculum***

From Violence To Wholeness is a study and action program that explores nonviolence as a creative, powerful and effective process for addressing and resolving the conflicts in our lives and in the life of the world. Drawing on the vision of Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Shelley Douglass, Fanny Lou Hamer and many others, this program offers your church, community, or group resources to deepen the journey from fear to freedom, from despair to hope, from violence to wholeness. Facing Violence

Whether we like it or not, most of us are enrolled in a class called "Violence 101." This class is not confined to a particular setting or time of day. Nobody asks if we want to attend. We don't need letters of reference or a high grade point average. It is taught everywhere, open to all. Our teachers are the media, with their flow of violent images and messages, and our society's values of consumerism, rugged individualism and superiority. Sometimes we receive extra tutoring from our family and co-workers. We take special workshops when our country goes to war or when violence erupts in the streets. Consciously or not, we are continually being schooled in the logic and practice of emotional, verbal, physical or structural violence.

What do we learn in this class? First, we are taught that the world is a dangerous place and that human beings are intrinsically violent. This is especially true of our enemies, who are the most violent and are beyond redemption or change. Faced with these cold facts, we learn our second lesson: the only way to deal with violence is to accommodate it, avoid it, or use violence ourselves. Television, our families, and the policies of the government teach us these methods, which we then try out in real life. With every conflict, we rehearse these three "scripts" by going along with violence, by running from it, or by throwing a physical or verbal punch.

The great illusion of violence is that it will solve our problems decisively. Unfortunately, conflicts often do not end when violence is used; they generally continue to smolder or escalate. Violence 101's ultimate lesson is that violence feeds on itself and cannot be extinguished; there is always residual resentment and injustice. What is our society's answer to this spiral of violence? More violence. From this point of view, being human means becoming chronically suspicious of a world populated with real and potential enemies where unresolved anger and hurt are forever mounting.

The world can be dangerous, and we face conflicts our whole lives. But are we condemned to an endless cycle of retaliation and domination? The traditional responses to violence often make matters worse because they fail to address root causes and they lose sight of the integrity of those in conflict. They are fundamentally unreliable and ineffective. They also keep us from seeing what violence truly is: emotional, verbal or physical behavior that dominates, diminishes or destroys ourselves and others.

Violence crosses boundaries without permission. Violence disrupts authentic relationships. Violence separates us from others. It defiles the human person and desecrates the image of God. It is a process of economic, racial, social or cultural domination. To become truly human and to faithfully worship the God of Love means

challenging this violence. Transforming these patterns of destructiveness is a sacred journey from fear to freedom, from despair to hope, from violence to wholeness.

## **The Nonviolent Alternative**

Jesus, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others have declared with their lives an alternative to the treadmill of violence. They have preached and practiced active nonviolence as a way to resolve conflict humanely and effectively, to become genuinely human, and to be faithful to the Nonviolent God.

Woundedness lies at the roots of violence in ourselves, in others, and in our culture. Active nonviolence comes face to face with these wounds. This includes identifying and gradually transforming our personal and social "scripts" that keep us in the rut of violence. But even more profoundly, active nonviolence makes contact with the sacredness that lies deeper than our wounds. This sacredness is the presence of the God who longs for our wholeness. It is where our truest selves live, the depths where we receive the gift of our richness, our authenticity, and our capacity for compassion. It is the spiritual center where we come to our senses, recover our balance, and reclaim our humanity.

By facing our woundedness and acknowledging our sacredness, active nonviolence prepares us to address the conflicts we face in our lives and in the life of our world. We are able to see the woundedness and the sacredness of those with whom we struggle.

We are able to:

- Let go of our traditional scripts and allow our truest self to be fully present
- Creatively interrupt the cycle of retaliatory violence
- Acknowledge and safeguard the humanity of the opponent as well as our own, and
- Identify and struggle nonviolently for an agreement that respects all parties.

## **From Violence To Wholeness: "Active Nonviolence 101"**

Produced by Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service, From Violence To Wholeness offers a vision of creative nonviolence and a toolbox of techniques that we can use in our daily lives. Many groups have used this series. Through presentations, small group reflections, scripture, readings, and keeping a nonviolence journal, participants explore how to use active nonviolence in their lives. The program explores how:

- Nonviolence is an act of faith in the God of Love and Justice
- Human beings are called to love and be loved
- Reality is connection; we are called to transform all that divides human beings from themselves, from one another, and from the Earth
- Active nonviolence is an effective way to break the spiral of retaliatory violence and to create options for a more humane world.

## ***The Structure of the From Violence To Wholeness Sessions***

There are many ways to enter the spiritual journey of nonviolent transformation. The *From Violence to Wholeness* book includes a curriculum - ten sessions, two hours per session - offered as a framework for exploring the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence.

Each session generally includes:

- Opening prayer, meditation, and/or music
- Reflections on personal issues or experiences that have arisen since the previous session
- Small group reflection on our life experience
- Discussion of the session's topic and readings
- A role-play
- Reflection on that session's reading. (The readings are found at the end of each of the ten sessions.)
- Shared entries from the participants' "nonviolence journals."

*From Violence to Wholeness* is designed to be adapted to many different contexts and thus may include all of these elements. In addition, the program can also be adapted to half day, one day & weekend workshops & retreats for groups between 10 & 30 people.

## ***Ten Sessions of the "From Violence to Wholeness" Curriculum: an Overview***

### **Session 1: Beginning Our Journey**

Session 1 begins the process of creating safe and comfortable space for the participants to engage in the spiritual journey of active and creative nonviolence. We are invited to begin the process of making contact with our woundedness and our sacredness as a significant way of addressing and transforming the conflicts in our lives and in the life of the world. In this opening session, we begin to explore the possibility of each of us playing an important part in cultivating a growing culture of peace and nonviolence.

### **Session 2: The Experience and Dynamics of Violence**

We cannot explore active nonviolence without coming to a greater understanding of violence. In Session 2, we explore the phenomenon, dynamics, and scripts of violence. We reflect together on our own experience of violation, and explore how violence is emotional, verbal, physical, or institutional behavior or attitudes which dominate, diminish, dehumanize, or destroy ourselves or others.

### **Session 3: The Faithful Nonviolence of Jesus**

In Session 3 we experiment with Jesus' spirituality and practice of active nonviolence. We reflect on stories of gospel nonviolence and share, at whatever level we feel comfortable, experiences in our own lives when we have resolved conflicts, not through accommodation, avoidance, or counter-violence, but by making agreements that meet the needs of both parties. During this session, we begin to

explore nonviolence as "the desire for, and action on behalf of, the well-being of all." We also explore daily practices for cultivating this spirituality and practice.

### **Session 4: Violence, Nonviolence and Gender**

Session 4 explores the development of a creative nonviolence informed by the insights and practices of feminism and the modern women's movement. Feminism is a lens for understanding the imbalance of power in all relationships. It is also a way to transform such imbalance by advancing mutuality, consensus, and personal and societal wholeness.

### **Session 5: Gandhi and the Nonviolence of Soul-Force**

While rooted in the vision of Jesus, many of the principles and dynamics of *From Violence to Wholeness* were articulated by Mohandas Gandhi. Session 5 examines Gandhi's "experiments with truth" and the principles on which they were based, including the notion that the divine is in all beings, that we all possess a piece of the truth, that all life is one, that being human means actively loving our adversaries, and that human beings cannot be reduced to the evil they commit.

### **Session 6: Cultivating Reverence for the Earth**

Nonviolence is a practical process of acknowledging and re-weaving the great web of life. In Session 6, we explore how to deepen a loving relationship with the cosmos. We ponder the reality of the violence of ecological degradation, and the relationship between the earth's well-being and the work for peace, justice and equal access to the resources needed by the human community.

### **Session 7: Nonviolence and Social Transformation**

In Session 7, we examine how nonviolence is actively embodied and dramatized in the struggle for social change. We explore the strategic assumptions and stages of successful nonviolent social movements, and reflect on personal and historical examples of "nonviolence in action."

### **Session 8: Nonviolent Social Change in Action: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement**

Session 8 draws on the U.S. Civil Rights movement as a powerful case-study for seeing how nonviolent struggles create the conditions for change. As part of this session, we reflect on the lives and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fanny Lou Hamer.

### **Session 9: Experimenting with Nonviolence: Organizing a Group Activity**

Session 9 explores tools for taking nonviolent action. The group will be encouraged to create an activity that responds to a local situation as a way of practicing

nonviolence together. Tools include group consensus decision-making, identifying an issue, setting goals, developing an action plan defining strategies, tactics and roles, and carrying out the planned activity.

## **Session 10: Creating Communities of Nonviolence**

Session 10 offers an opportunity for the group to evaluate its recent activity where it experimented together in the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence. It also explores the importance of being part of an ongoing group that is able to offer its members support, a place for reflection, and a community for action. The participants reflect on continuing together. The session closes with a commissioning of the participants to continue and deepen the journey of creative and active nonviolence.

For more information, visit [www.paceebene.org.au](http://www.paceebene.org.au)