



**The Power and Promise of Peace:
Reflections on the United States Focus 2004
of the Decade to Overcome Violence
and Resources for US Churches 2005-2010**

**The Decade to Overcome Violence:
Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010**



World Council of Churches

WE COME TOGETHER BEFORE GOD, SEEKING THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE.

The Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010 stems from the World Council of Churches' passionate engagement with the issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, while relentlessly exploring the purpose of Christian unity in a broken world.

At the end of the most violent century in human history, churches meeting for the Eighth World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, committed themselves to a pilgrimage of peace. The Assembly called the churches, ecumenical organizations and all people of goodwill, to work together to overcome violence through peace and justice.

The World Council of Churches and the United States Conference of the World Council of Churches encourages churches and communities to address issues of violence in their own contexts and to work together for peace, justice and reconciliation.

The four themes for The Decade to Overcome Violence are:

- The spirit and the logic of violence
- Use and abuse and misuse of power
- Issues of justice
- Religious plurality and identity

God of Diversity and Unity,

We are strangers and pilgrims on ever-intersecting roads.

Wherever we are on this day's journey,

And amid our many disparities,

Lead us on the narrow path to peace,

So that in the friction of our closeness,

We may spark movements for reconciliation

In our communities, our nations, and our world.

WE CONFESS OUR SEPARATION FROM THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE.

The United States was selected as the focus for the Decade to Overcome Violence in 2004 for many reasons, but three are of particular importance. First, Americans have struggled with violence throughout the life of the country, having built a culture deeply stained with violence, yet also having a rich history of nonviolent movements. Second, the United States has enormous global influence—economic, political, cultural and military. Third, churches in the United States play important roles both in buttressing the status quo and in promoting social change.

A “Living Letters” delegation of representatives from partner churches around the world brought expressions of solidarity and challenges to the churches of the United States at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the United States Conference for the World Council of Churches. One letter called the churches of the United States to consider their prophetic role in the world:

We have heard and been told by US brothers and sisters that the struggles for global justice and peace go far beyond partisan politics or the policies of any specific administration – at stake is the very self-identity of the USA. The voice and prophetic witness of the churches is fundamental as you struggle to harness the power of your mighty nation in response to God’s call to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

—Dr. Marion Best, Vice Moderator, World Council of Churches & Past Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Endorsed by Canadian Member Churches of the WCC

God of mercy, we acknowledge that having power distorts our view of the world and often prevents us from entering into true community with our sisters and brothers. Remind us that as citizens of the United States, we must extend our vision beyond the distortion of power.

WE REFLECT SCRIPTURALLY AND THEOLOGICALLY ON THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE.

The power of rich and dynamic practices of peace is rooted in God's oikonomia, God's divine activity and plan. An understanding of power begins with the creative and sustaining power of a loving God and with the power of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:13-16). Empowered by God with the gifts of the spirit (Galatians 5:22) we are not only enabled to live peaceably with others, but are also called to serve them. For human beings, power is that which enables us to flourish as children of God, united in God's Spirit. Power is not to be wielded over and against others, but rather channeled toward the realization of the peaceful realm of God. It is through peace that people are liberated and empowered to build just and vibrant communities.

The promise of peace is one of assurance. Peace is available now, in Christ, and it is promised in its fullness in the final restoration of God's reign. In the promise of peace in Christ, we are called now to be peacemakers, and promised that peace with justice will prevail.

Excerpted from "Theological Reflections: Focus Statement for the Annual Focus of 2004, The United States of America, 'The Power and Promise of Peace.'" Full statement available at www.overcomingviolence.org.

**For he is our peace;
in his flesh he has made
both groups into one
and has broken down
the dividing wall,
that is, the hostility
between us.**

—Ephesians 2:14, NRSV

WE OFFER PRAISE FOR GIFTS OF GLOBAL WITNESS ABOUT THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE.

Expressions of solidarity and challenges to United States churches were brought by a “Living Letters” delegation to the 2004 Annual Meeting of the United States Conference for the World Council of Churches. The delegation was composed of some of the World Council of Churches’ global ecumenical partners.

As Mother Teresa has said, ‘Peace is not something you wish for, it is something you make, something you do, something you are, something you give away.’

—Rosalyn M. Laylo, WCC Scholar, United Methodist Church in the Philippines

Real courage is risking something you have to keep on living with. Real courage is risking something that forces you to rethink your thoughts and suffer change and stretch consciousness. Real courage is risking one’s clichés. Your justice and voices are needed now more than ever! As a Palestinian Christian, we have great hope in you!

—Zoughbi Zoughbi, Director, WI’AM, Palestine Center for Conflict Resolution, Bethlehem, West Bank

My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in human rights without determined legal and non-violent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.

—Hermina Damons, Local Program Coordinator, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme (EAPPI) in Palestine and Israel, from South Africa

**WE AFFIRM THE FOUNDATION PROVIDED BY THE
2004 FOCUS ON THE UNITED STATES OF THE
DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE TOWARD
ACHIEVING THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE.**

The 2004 Focus on the United States of the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010 highlighted efforts among United States churches to resist and overcome violence, and to share successful models. Ongoing activities of the United States Decade to Overcome Violence Committee include:

- Sponsoring and promoting peace and justice events throughout churches and denominations in the United States
- Recognizing local individuals and organizations involved in peacemaking initiatives through the “Blessed are the Peacemakers” Awards
- Providing opportunities for young adults to draw connections between ecumenism and peacemaking through internships, the WCC Scholars program, and the Stewards program
- Developing, compiling and distributing theological reflection resources and statements through www.overcomingviolence.org
- Participating in the International Day of Prayer for Peace in conjunction with the United Nations International Day of Peace

For a detailed list of events related to the 2004 Focus on the United States of the Decade to Overcome Violence, and for more information on ongoing events, visit www.overcomingviolence.org.

**Can you imagine what the world would be like if churches
worldwide made overcoming violence their top priority?**

—Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia,

General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

WE INVITE INDIVIDUALS AND CHURCHES TO GET INVOLVED IN THE DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE, THAT TOGETHER WE MIGHT REALIZE THE POWER AND PROMISE OF PEACE.

For the second half of the Decade to Overcome Violence, individuals and churches in the United States are invited to build on the peacemaking foundation that was laid in the first half of the decade, and highlighted in the 2004 US Focus Year. Here are some ways to get connected:

- Visit www.overcomingviolence.org for World Council of Churches resources on the Decade to Overcome Violence, including:
 - The theological reflection guide, “Why Violence? Why Not Peace?”
 - The full report on the United States Focus 2004 of the Decade to Overcome Violence
 - “Lenten Fast From Violence” and Advent study guides
 - “On the Wings of a Dove” campaign against violence toward women
- Order [Decade to Overcome Violence resources](#), including posters, brochures, and the theological reflection guide (see back cover)
- Visit the [World Health Organization at www.who.int](http://www.who.int) for information on violence as a public health priority
- Consider [how to engage in peace and justice work in your community](#) by reflecting on the following questions:
 - What forms of violence do you encounter in your country, community, home and workplace?
 - Who are the perpetrators and peacemakers?
 - How can you work to overcome these forms of violence?
 - What are your hesitations and obstacles?
 - What are your faith resources?
 - What kind of peace do you wish for?

**For more information and to order resources
on the Decade to Overcome Violence:**



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