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 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