

Overcoming Personal Violence Study Reflection Materials



Some general questions

What struck you positively in this story?

What did you find challenging, or difficult?

What can we learn from this story to apply to our own situation and journey towards peace?

Some further questions arising from the stories in the Personal circle of peacemaking

What wounds do we have through which the presence of God can heal us and others? (what hurts, angers, anxieties, addictions?)

Who do we need to connect with? What helps us to laugh?
How can we give a smile and release the joy and happiness within us?

What particular gifts or characteristics (culture, background, gender, disability, experiences) give us our 'difference'? How can we develop their potential as sources of pride and healing?

Which men (past or present) offer us inspiration?
What is the source of their inspiration?

What 'little thing' (like a button or a paper crane)
can we make as sign and seed of peace?

What kind of artistic activity (painting, dancing, playing/listening to music) helps tell our spiritual autobiography and overcome our pain? What examples are there in our lives?

Some further thoughts for reflection and discussion

'How can we live in the midst of a world marked by fear, hatred and violence, and not be destroyed by it? During a hard period of my life in which verbal prayer had become nearly impossible and during which mental and emotional fatigue had made me the easy victim of feelings of despair and fear, a long and quiet presence in this icon (Rublev's Old Testament Trinity) became the beginning of my healing. As I sat for long hours in front of Rublev's Trinity I noticed how gradually my gaze became a prayer. This silent prayer slowly made my inner restlessness melt away and lifted me up into the circle of love, a circle that could not be broken by the powers of the world. Even as I moved away from the icon and became involved in the many tasks of everyday life, I felt as if I did not have to leave the holy place I had found and could dwell there whatever I did or wherever I went. I knew that the house of love has no boundaries and embraces everyone who wants to dwell there.' (Henri Nouwen *Behold the Beauty of the Lord – Praying with Icons* p.21)

SEEDS OF PEACE

The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either... but right through the human heart...and through all hearts... and even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of hearts, there remains... an un-uprooted small corner of evil. (Solzhenitsyn)

*I resonate with what Dennis Potter, the playwright, said just a few months before his death from cancer. 'Thank God religion to me has always been the wound, not the bandage.' My life has been rich but it also has had many times of desolation and depression when I have not been able to believe that there was any light at the end of the tunnel...I know that I have to face, and to live with, not only the dark forces in today's world, the suffering and injustice that is brought daily to me by the media, but also the dark forces that reign and have such power within my own self. None of us can evade the darkness. (Esther de Waal *The Celtic Way of Prayer*)*

Keep your spiritual centre. In the urgency of present times, it is tempting to be drawn into the frantic and depleting pace of activity. Doing things can actually be energising, but Sabbath time is needed for balance. We encourage friends to filter/limit information (eg news, internet) and to honour your need to take a break when you feel too overwhelmed or anxious. When interacting with others, spend time getting very clear about the purposes and methods before going forward with a public action. We need to support each other, celebrate efforts even if they are not perfectly done or 'successful' in outcome, and keep a sense of humour. (Quaker Peace Committee)

My suspicion is that the real fear of the men's movement is what will show up when men explore their shadows. Men's anger needs to be welcome. Men's pain needs to be welcome. Men's sexuality needs to be welcome. But what men often hear is, 'Don't bring this or that to the table because it's not welcome here.' And so they stand at the doorways in the back of the church during Mass, not comfortable inside, not wanting to totally leave. (Tom McGrath)

Some suggestions from the South Australian Council of Churches' 'Steps to Peace':

Create a rhythmic walk with God. Many Christians have rich resources in their particular faith for prayer. The rhythm of prayers brings peace to our soul amidst chaos. A daily walk with God, like physical walking, sets a rhythm that calms the inner person. The anxious heart steps into a rhythmic pace of consistency. The great saints lived a rhythmic life style of prayer and work; they diminished anxiety in the midst of chaos.

Do something simple: Get up early and see God in the sunrise, or later and see God in the sunset. What did you see? Write in a journal. Read it later!

Find people or events that lift us above the chaos. They are gifts from God who gives us optimism and hope. We are fortunate in Australia, we can escape on boat trips, bush walks and meetings for coffee. Can you think of others, even silly things to do?

Keep your face to the sunshine and you will not see the shadows (Helen Keller)