

In Search of SECURITY



In Search of Security: Group Study Guide

This discussion guide provides an invitation to United Methodists throughout our connection to consider thoughtfully and prayerfully a faithful understanding of security in a post-September 11 world. The document, a product of a task force of the Council of Bishops, is not an official document of the Council but is approved by the Council for use by local congregations to stimulate conversation and reflection. The document sets a foundation to deepen our Christian conversation about what security means within our faith. It asks us to consider how inadequate fear-based ethics are in personal and political decision-making and to wrestle with the myth of human invulnerability.

The Council of Bishops invites the people called United Methodists to:

- Study this document carefully and to discuss its questions and implications with one another;
- Consider how we can search and work for security that is based on trust, justice and reconciliation;
- Pray for those who suffer most from lack of security as well as for those who are responsible in the political arena for providing means which secure and promote a life in safety;
- Communicate with the Bishops opinions about what the Church as a whole should do in order to help people in this search for security.

Using this Study Guide

There are two ways to effectively study “In Search of Security;” 1) In a small group, meet weekly for four weeks to discuss each section in turn. 2) In a larger group, divide into four small groups of 5-7 persons each and assign each group one section of the document to discuss. Use the guide together with the questions that are part of the four sections of the document (questions are in italic text) to guide the conver-

sation. Choose a facilitator to guide the discussion in each small group. Return to the large group and provide opportunity for each small group to share its reflections.

The goals of this study are to:

- Cultivate a common call and vision for United Methodist people that sustains and witnesses to authentic security;
- Provide a model for continued dialogue for local churches, districts, and annual conferences.
- Bring feedback from local churches to the Council of Bishops on the issues addressed by this study for further reflection or action.

Participants should have at least a brief familiarity with two important, recent United States government documents: The National Security Strategy of the United States and The National Strategy for Homeland Security. Copies are available at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html and at www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/book. Have Bibles available for participants.

In Search of Security Study Guide

Section 1: The Problem

Invite participants to close their eyes and reflect for a few moments on the examples marked by bullets. Ask: What image of insecurity affects you deeply?

Read aloud: “Most people around the globe are longing for more security and a safe life although the threats they fear may be different.”

Discuss in pairs: “What threatens us most in our situation?” What are the first thoughts you associate with the words “safety” and “security” and then “fear” and “threat”?

Close with intercessory prayer, with participants responding to each petition with the words: “Christ, deliver us.”

Section 2: Safety and security in a Biblical Perspective

Read aloud: “To live securely is a basic human need. Security in the Old Testament is an important aspect of the salvation of God. To be saved and to live safely belong together.”

“The Hebrew word that we translate as safety is the same word that also means ‘trust’ or ‘confidence.’ Where people are able to live in trust they are able to live ‘in safety.’”

Select and read one or more of the following three sets of Scripture:

Exodus 14:14; Isaiah 31:1-3; Ps. 46

2 Cor. 4:8-10, 6:3-10

Romans 12:17-21

How is God described in these passages? What are the primary values alluded to in the texts? Name the primary values reflected in *The National Security Strategy of the United States*. What values are held in common and where are they irreconcilable?

Ask participants to name hymns or Biblical verses that uphold peace and salvation for the universal church and global society.

Section 3: Insights for Our Present Situation

Invite participants to respond to whether they agree or disagree with each of the following statements found in this section and why:

“Preemption understood as preventative war is contrary to traditional moral norms because war is a last resort.”

“All current evidence indicates beyond a reasonable doubt that the reasons given to the public to justify the war with Iraq were false.”

“War has no built-in program to change things nor to rebuild what was destroyed in a new way.”

“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”

“As human beings we can attain neither total security nor total freedom, and surely not both. In order to live safely we must give up some of our liberty.”

“To dare to make the first step toward ‘trust-building measures’ is often the key for the solution.”

Ask participants to reflect on two questions posed by the document: “In which areas of life would we most hope for a renewed trust? What could we do ourselves to help build it up?”

Section 4: The search for security and the call for a responsible lifestyle

Ask the group to discuss:

The way to real peace and security is reconciliation. We will attain full reconciliation between all peoples before God’s final consummation because the forces of evil and destruction are still at work in the hearts of human beings and their relationships.

In which areas our lives and relationships do we need reconciliation most?

What can we contribute to the process of reconciliation?

There are dangers and threats in the world to whose emergence and increase we personally contribute. There are others we may not easily avoid but that we may face with the confidence that our life is in the hands of God and nothing that happens “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8:39.

Close with prayer.

In Search of Security

I. The problem

While opinions around the world about the effects of 9/11 may differ, in the United States at least there is one sentiment shared by almost all commentators of the event even today. The people in the United States have lost confidence that their country is safe. The myth of its invulnerability has been destroyed.

In the document “The National Strategy for Homeland Security” we read: “America historically has relied on two vast oceans and two friendly neighbors for border security.” But “America learned a terrible lesson on September 11. American soil is not immune to evil or cold blooded enemies capable of mass murder and terror.”¹

In the September 15, 2003 issue of Time magazine, Nancy Gibbs wrote similar words: “This week two years ago we lost for good the sunny sense that our world was safe, that the oceans will protect us, that there were rules, even among the hateful against men slaughter of the innocent” (p. 36).

Anything in the way of “homeland security” that promises to satisfy the longing for safety and restoration of lost trust is likely to find approval in the society.

Longing for safety is a feeling that all human beings share with one another. And what the American people went through on 9/11, other people around the globe have experienced for many years – some of them every day.

Let us recall a few examples from different parts of the world and from different areas of human life.

- People in Liberia, Sierra Leone and other African countries have lived for years in a state of utmost insecurity. So-called regular troops and so-called rebels fought against one another and threatened, mutilated, looted and killed people indiscriminately. Anyone could be the enemy of any other one, and even after the “war” people are left feeling that they

can trust no one, even in their own families. Nothing is safe.

- In other regions of the world, even years after a civil war, people are threatened by hidden landmines. They don't live on safe ground. Farmers who plough their fields and children who play on the ground may be hit by an explosion and severely wounded or killed.

- The State of Israel is about to erect a huge wall that separates the areas of Palestine and Israel in order to protect its people from terrorist attacks — especially suicide bombers — who make life in the cities of Israel a nightmare. Every bus stop, every bus, every café and every supermarket could be a deadly trap. But what is meant to protect the Jewish people threatens the Palestinians: important connections are cut, property is taken away and people are excluded.

- In many countries of the world, not only in the neighborhood of the *favelas* and slums of the developing world, well-to-do people guard themselves against robbers and thieves in “gated communities” and seek security and protection behind walls and barbed wire.

- There are many neighborhoods in the big cities of our world where people — especially women — may not dare to walk alone on the streets in the dark.

- Even in a country like Sweden where politicians used to need no bodyguards there have been murderous attacks against them, and the bombs in trains in Madrid brought terror into the hearts of European cities.

- Our schools are no longer safe places. Massacres as in Columbine or Erfurt are only the tip of an iceberg of hidden violence that makes school a place of fear and terror for many children.

- People would hope that at least churches are safe places, but many children and women have found themselves victims of abuse or harassment in the House of God.

Of course, this is not the whole picture of what happens in our

world. You may still find places where people don't have to lock their houses or their cars (especially where they have neither locks nor cars). But these last bastions of a safe world are more and more endangered.

People around the world yearn for more security and the possibility to live safe lives. How can we make this world a safer place?

We emphasize: Most people around the globe are longing for more security and a safe life although the threats they fear may be different.

We ask ourselves: What threatens us most in our situation?

II. Safety and security in a biblical perspective

To live securely is a basic human need. This issue is not overlooked in the Bible. Security, especially in the Old Testament, is an important aspect of the salvation of God's people. To be saved and to live safely belong together.

Because the Bible is often quoted superficially when the question of security is dealt with, we will look a little bit closer at how this theme is developed in the Biblical narrative.

1. The Promise of God

The assurance that Israel will “live in safety” is part of God's promise to his people in the Old Testament. It is connected with the gift of the Promised Land where they will live in peace. We may observe two different aspects of this assurance:

To live in safety can be seen as the unconditional promise that prompts God's people to bring him offerings, sacrifices and gifts (cf. Deut 12:10f; 33:12, 28). It can also be described as the consequence of the people's obedience to God's commandment (cf. Lev 25:18f; 26:3-5).

Israel lived in safety as long as it followed those leaders whom God sent (cf. I Sam 12:11; I Kings 4:25).

2. To Walk Securely

For the individual to “walk securely” or to “lie down in safety” is on the one hand a consequence of obedience to God and of personal integrity (cf. Prov 1:33; 3:23; 10:9: “whoever walks in integrity walks securely”) and on the other hand solely the gift of God and therefore an important subject in prayer and thanksgiving (Ps 4:9; 16:9).

3. The Redemption of Israel

When Israel became the plaything of the superpowers of its days and when its national security and integrity were endangered or destroyed, the prophets declared it to be the consequence of the people’s disobedience and lack of trust. But they announced that after a time of judgment God would guide his people into a future in which they would “live securely and in safety.” This is connected with the coming of the Messiah (Jer 23:5f; 33:16; Mi 5:4), with the gift of a new covenant (Eze 34:25-28; Hos 2:18), with the outpouring of God’s Spirit (Is 32:15-18), and with the gathering in and bringing home of all those who were dispersed by the wrath of God (Jer 32:37; Eze 28:26; 38:8; 39:26; Zech 14:11).

4. The Question of Justice

An integral part of the promise of secure life is the announcement that this will be the time when justice and righteousness will rule the land and thus create *shalom*, real peace. It is not possible to overemphasize the importance and the necessity of righteousness, faithfulness and trust as the preconditions of peace and a safe life. The prophets announce the effect of the reign of God and his Messiah: “Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Is 32:16-18; cf. 11:1-9).

But it is clear that this is not only expected in a distant future but even now through the reign of a righteous king (Ps 72:1-7) and as a

result of a new openness of the people of God for God’s word of peace (Ps 85:8-13: “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” [v. 10]).

5. Trust and Security

One of the most exciting discoveries we make in researching the Biblical view of security is the fact that the Hebrew word that we translate as safety or security is the same word that also means “trust” or “confidence.” Where people are able to live “in trust” they live “in safety.” There are places where different translations alternate between both options; cf Is 12:2 NRSV: “I will trust, and will not be afraid”; Luther: “I am safe and not afraid”; or Is 32:17 NRSV “The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever”; Luther: “And the fruit of righteousness will be peace and the yield of peace will be quietness and safety.” Safety has nothing to do with the power to defend oneself but solely with trust in God.

6. Against False Security

The writings of the prophets are full of warnings against a false security that trusts in human powers or allies or even in one’s own piety if it is not connected with justice and righteousness. For the prophet Isaiah the national security strategy of Israel is God’s call to faith; cf. Is 7:9b: “If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all”; or Is 30:15: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength” (cf. 31:1-3). To rely on weapons and to expect from them salvation and security is frequently criticized by the prophets. That is not the way God acts: “I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen” (Hos 1:7). Or with even more clarity: “Alas for those who go down to Egypt for help and who rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord! ... The Egyptians are human, and not God: their horses are flesh, and not spir-

it. When the Lord stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble and the one helped will fall, and they will all perish together” (Is 31:1+3). Or the word of the Lord to Zerubabel: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech 4:6).

The most dangerous self-deception is to rely on a mixture of trust in one’s own righteousness, God’s promise and a clever system of alliances without really seeking God’s will. Jeremiah criticizes those who are saying: “Peace, peace – when there is no peace” (6:14) or “We are safe!” and don’t obey God’s will (7:1-15; cf. also Is 47:8; Zeph 2:15). Trusting God while executing justice and righteousness is the only way to shalom and safety. The story of King Hezekiah is a kind of model for this truth (cf. Is 36-39; II Kings 18-20).

7. The Wars of the Lord

Some may object: But does not the Old Testament speak also about the “wars of the Lord” (Num 21:14) and of the task to conquer and to defend the promised land? That is true. But if we look carefully enough we will see that these aspects don’t principally deny what the Bible says about peace and safety. When we read in Exodus 15:3, “The Lord is a warrior,” it means that God destroys the army of the Egyptians without any help from soldiers or weapons on Israel’s side! As Moses said: “The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still” (Ex 14:14; cf. Ps 46!).

Even in the battles for the conquest of the promised land and its defense against its enemies we have many stories that seek to show rather graphically that God is not “always with the largest battalions” (cf. Joshua 6: The trumpets cause the wall of Jericho to fall down; Judges 7: Gideon won the battle against the Midians with only 300 men; I Samuel 17: David kills Goliath without Saul’s armor but with a sling!). Prov 21:31 summarizes this insight very well: “The horse may be ready for the day of battle but the victory belongs to the Lord.”

When in Joel 3:10 the often-quoted saying from Is 2:2-4 (Mi 4:1-5) “to beat swords into plowshares” is reversed into the opposite: “beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears,” it is **not** an appeal to Israel to rise up finally and defend or

protect itself with all possible arms. Instead it is the ironic call to the nations to try everything to arm against God only to be finally judged by him. In the Bible, taking up arms is never the way to real security and peace.

8. The Vulnerability of the Disciples

In New Testament preaching and teaching, safety seems not to be an issue. On the contrary, the disciples are made aware that following Jesus leads into radical insecurity, at least from a human perspective. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt 8:20). The disciples are not expected to defend themselves and are encouraged to love even their enemies (Matt 5:38-48) and in everything to trust in God who knows what they need (6:25-33). Paul describes the “dialectical” safety of those who trust in God with the following words: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (II Cor 4:8-10; cf. 6:3-10; 11:21-12:10; I Cor 4:10-13). Theodore Weber characterizes the attitude of the first Christians aptly: “If the Resurrection is truth, then whatever true security might mean, it is to be found on the other side of exposure to suffering and death.”² The security of the Christian believer is the conviction “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38f).

9. The Spiritual Struggle

Of course the apostles also knew something about the forces of evil in this world and the struggle against their power. But this struggle is a spiritual struggle against cosmic powers (Eph 6:10-17) and the “armor of God” encompasses the “shield of faith,” the “helmet of salvation” and the “sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.” Evildoers, people who commit crimes or cause suffering, are not identified with

evil itself. Therefore St. Paul can write the rather astonishing advice: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’. No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21).

It is God and God’s eschatological representative, “the Lamb that was slaughtered,” who will overcome the power of evil (Rev 19). As violent and as cruel the images may seem in this final battle in the last chapters of Revelation, it is clear that this only depicts the severity, intensity and heaviness of this last clash and decision over the question of who rules the world. But it is by no means a blueprint for our struggle with those who threaten our lives and security.

10. The Final Fulfillment

There is a clear vision of a last fulfillment of God’s promise of peace and salvation when God will be present among his people and “Death will be no more and mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev 21:3f). Yet as long as we live in this world “we walk by faith not by sight” (II Cor 5:7). There is no total security. Jesus has told his disciples how endangered they are. He did this not to make them afraid but to give them security through their faith in him: “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world” (John 16:33; cf. 14:27). Jesus’ death and resurrection were God’s victory over all powers that may threaten our lives. To be saved through this reality makes our lives safe and secure.

We emphasize: The Bible declares that real security is the gift of God. Those will live safely and in peace who trust in God and do justice to their neighbors. This makes them vulnerable and may cause suffering. But the assurance that no one can snatch them out of the father’s hand (John 10:29) sets them free to work for reconciliation

and real peace.

We ask ourselves: What effect do these insights have for us? What supports us, what sustains us, what comforts us? What seems to be strange to us and how do we deal with these statements?

III. Insights for our present situation

This biblical perspective doesn’t leave us with an easy solution for our problems today. We notice that the biblical message almost unani-mously denies the option to put our trust in weapons and armed forces and encourages us to trust only in God. On the other hand, we are aware that we live in a world that is full of terror and violence, a world that kills innocent people just for the sake of spreading fear and panic. Many of our politicians tell us that we will only be able to combat terrorism if we use military power and beat the enemy with its own means. Not a few of these politicians are devoted Christians and may even claim to be called by God to fulfill this mission. Whom should we follow?

When we ponder the meaning of the biblical message for our day, we have to admit that we are not Israel and that the political advice of the prophets may not be directly the word of God for our time and our situation. No nation in our time, perhaps not even the present State of Israel, should claim to be God’s chosen people and therefore to be the direct addressee of God’s promise and commandments. No nation consists only of disciples of Jesus who may be expected to follow Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount.

Does this mean then that the perspective of the Bible has nothing to say to us and to those who are responsible for security in our society and our world? We need the police in our towns and cities in order to maintain civil order and to enforce the law, in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament (cf. Rom 13:1-7). We may even need military actions when the use of military power is the “last resort” to defend a country or to intervene in favor of people who are in danger of being exterminated by others. But we need always to keep in mind that a policy of law and order or the use of military strength will only

create an unstable truce but not real peace. We need the biblical perspective of *Shalom* in order to learn what it is that can give people real peace and make their life together safe and secure.

We as the Council of Bishops want to share with the people within and beyond The United Methodist Church some insights on how the impulses from the biblical message and the teaching of our Christian tradition may help us discern what God's will is in our times and what we as Christian people can contribute to the common search for security. We don't pretend to have the ultimate answer to these complicated questions, but we want to give some guidance for a time of Christian conferencing about an issue of life and death for so many people around the globe.

1. The search for security and the pressure of fear

Lack of security creates fear and fear creates dangerous reactions. We experience this in many situations of our everyday life. When we respond to a challenge out of fear we often make the situation worse. The man who wants to protect his house and shoots down his neighbor who knocks at the door in the night seeking a loaf of bread is only one example.

We have to ask ourselves whether the so-called "preemptive actions" that are advocated by the National Security Strategy of the United States are anything but a fear-driven overreaction to a possible threat. Preemption understood as preventive war is contrary to traditional moral norms because war should be a last resort. There is too much danger of miscalculating the perceived threat. Much is to be said about preemptive actions from the point of international law: e.g., that the established norm for the legitimacy of preemptive actions assumes an imminent threat such as the visible mobilization of forces. In any case, it may be questioned whether such preemptive strikes serve their purpose because the logic of fear normally does not solve existing problems but creates new ones.

All current evidence indicates beyond any reasonable doubt that the reasons given to the public to justify the war in Iraq were false. Neither the security of the world nor that of the region was at risk.

The sanctions and controls of the United Nations had done their job. There was no connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. But in an atmosphere of fear people were ready to believe what they were told, not realizing that such a war would more likely strengthen the impact of Islamic terrorism in these countries rather than destroy it.

This experience admonishes us to beware of the rhetoric of war. It is popular to speak about the war against terrorism or a war against drugs. But it is dangerous to use this concept. War kills indiscriminately. We have been told that modern wars are clean. But the nasty word "collateral damage," which tries to camouflage the truth of the opposite, reveals more than it hides. War tries to destroy. If it aims at something dangerous it may seem acceptable. But war has no built-in program to change things nor to rebuild what was destroyed in a new way.

A last observation: fear causes us to accumulate weapons and to devote all too much of our resources to the goal of deterring a supposed enemy. Paradoxically enough, it is the special temptation of the strong and the rich to overreact in this way. This blocks resources that could be used much more creatively for development and social justice around the world.

All these considerations apply not only to questions of international relations. They are true as well for life in our communities. No one likes to live in an unsafe neighborhood. To be threatened by crime and harassment makes us anxious. We are thankful when the police are present and protect us. But Zero Tolerance is not the last answer and often hits the wrong people. The real solution is not that we are protected whatever the cost but that we try to remedy what is wrong in society and what causes the problems. This takes courage.

As Christian people we share the anxiety and the fears of the people around us. But we know the One who did not cease to tell his disciples: Do not be afraid. Therefore our contribution to the process of decision-making in our society should be to avoid fear-driven overreactions to the challenges we face and to work for solutions that solve the problems in a constructive way.

We emphasize: When we are threatened we react with fear. Fear

as such is nothing bad. It warns us of danger and preserves us from being careless. But fear must not rule our actions. Fear-driven reactions are often dangerous and don't help. Courage means overcoming fear and doing the right thing. The Bible says: "Perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18). The love with which God loves us is the key for a way of life lived in full awareness of all the dangers we are in but that deals with them with creative courage.

We ask ourselves: What frightens us most in the present situation? What kind of protection or security do we long for? How may God's love help us to overcome our anxiety?

2. The search for security and the commitment to freedom

With regard to crimes like theft or robbery people in the former German Democratic Republic lived rather securely. The almost total control of public and private life and the hermetic seal from the outside world made it difficult for criminals to escape the police. Some joked: "You are really safe in prison"! (that regrettably is not true in most parts of the world).

This extreme example shows a problem we face today. We not only want to protect our lives but also our freedom. People of different origins should be able to live safely together without discrimination. We are convinced that those people who frighten our society with their terrorist attacks would like to establish a system where people would be treated arbitrarily without the rights of fair process. But if we, in defense of our freedom, deny people the right of a fair trial and suspect people or discriminate against them because they belong to a certain group of human beings, we destroy what we want to protect, the tolerance and the liberty in an open society and the respect of human rights.

It is the nature of many terrorist regimes to impose a moratorium of human rights in order to create a better society. Such a society never appears because those who rule get used to exploitation and abuse.

This should be a warning even if we do not think we have already reached such a situation in most of our countries. The protection of

human rights and the commitment to freedom are not negotiable even for the sake of security. Increased surveillance and aggressive, "non-traditional" law enforcement tactics are in danger of destroying what they seek to protect. That hints of an unpopular truth: Freedom has its price. You cannot have freedom and total security. But what is security in this context? Theodor Weber writes from a biblical perspective: "The really important change in our consciousness of the problem of security comes when we recognize that real security is the freedom safely to be vulnerable and that this freedom is a prime ingredient of an integral community."³

Martin Luther King Jr. said rightly: "There is no way to peace; peace is the way." As Christian people we should always be "conscientious objectors" against the wisdom of this world that the end justifies any means. In large part the means will determine the end!

This may not apply only for international relations and for life in society. We may also ask ourselves where in our personal life "over-protection" destroys what we want to keep safe or where in the life of the church legal "over-regulation" suffocates the freedom of the children of God.

We emphasize: As human beings we can attain neither total security nor total freedom, and surely not both. In order to live safely we may have to give up some of our liberty. Yet in order to stay free we cannot give up all our civil rights and liberties in exchange for the promise of increased security. As Christian people we are aware of the freedom to risk our lives for the good of other people. This may help us to find the right balance between the commitment to freedom and the search for security.

We ask ourselves: Where do we experience the tension between security and freedom? What helps us to find the right balance?

3. The search for security and the need for trust

According to the opinion of many political analysts the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Communist regime was not due to the rearmament of the West with missiles and nuclear weapons. Beside the economic breakdown of the Communist system it was especially the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe with its “trust-building measures” that overcame the walls of fear and aggression and helped to build bridges that finally brought people together. Trust-building measures are actions that try to prove to the other side one’s good will by providing open information about sensitive matters, ready access to areas of suspicion or prior concessions in controversial affairs.

There is some risk involved in such actions – and therefore they have been always disputed; but often such actions offer the only chance to achieve a break through between rigid front lines. This may be true also for some present areas of tension as well.

The wall between Israel and Palestine may create some kind of security for the people of Israel because it hinders Palestinian people from accessing the cities of Israel easily. But it also cuts off the Palestinians from pieces of their own land and will be a constant source of hatred and aggression. As long as there is no process that builds up mutual trust between both sides there will be no peace in the Middle East. A policy of military strength and retaliation will not be enough to create a safe and peaceful life in this region.

This does not mean that we should negotiate with “terrorists” about trust-building. We say this, although in history so-called terrorists sometimes turned out to be freedom fighters. But as long as so-called freedom fighters behave like terrorists the community of states should fight against them as the police fight against criminals. But police would be very careful to avoid any means that could create too much solidarity in the neighborhood of the criminals! Therefore nations who want to combat terrorism and injustice in the world should do all they can to avoid the impression that this is only a pretext to extend the area of their dominion or to secure the goods of the world exclusively for themselves.

The nations of the West, and especially the United States, have a great responsibility. They have the means and the strength to look out for the needs of others and for a good order in this world. But they have to do this in cooperation with the other peoples in the world. The situation is like the one in a little town in the Wild West where the

strongest and richest man in the town volunteers to be the sheriff. That is a good thing as long as his precondition is not that he can also write the laws and be the only one to judge (including his own actions).

The people of the world look upon the United States as the richest and strongest nation of our times and expect support and help. But as long as the United States wants to determine the conditions exclusively from their own side they will earn distrust. It would be in the best interest of all people in the world if we could strengthen the role of the United Nations as a mediator of different interests and a platform of common decision. We affirm the preamble of “The National Security Strategy,” which states, “We are also guided by the conviction that no nation can build a safer, better world alone. Alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations. The United States is committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States, and NATO as well as other long-standing alliances.”

There have been some successful military interventions in the last years, e.g. in Sierra Leone and, we hope, now in Liberia. Here, under the leadership of the United Nations, troops of different countries fulfilled a peacekeeping mission. We may recognize some ingredients of this success: people were truly ready to be liberated from the terror of conflicting parties and gangs, the peacekeepers did not wage war against a special group but were consistent in protecting people and disarming the rebels after careful negotiation and they were not suspect of fighting for the interests of their home country.

Credibility is one of the most important ingredients of trust-building. We have to acknowledge that especially the so-called Christian nations of the West have lost much credibility within the world. Too often they have mixed their own economic and strategic agendas with the high principles for which they pretend to work and fight. When it seemed to be in their own interest they have allied themselves with dictators like Augusto Pinochet, Mobutu Sese Seko or even Saddam Hussein, whereas they fight against others in a voice of deep conviction and holy indignation. We know that there is no longer such a thing as a “Christian nation” but there are leaders who are Christian

and majorities of Christian people within our countries and one of the most important steps for them in creating more security would be to do all to regain credibility and to build up more trust and solidarity among the nations and in their own countries.

Trust-building is again not only an urgent issue in the area of international relations. In countries like Burundi or Ruanda learning to trust one another will be the only way to a peaceful life between Hutu and Tutsi. It is important for the development of multi-racial societies in countries like South Africa or the United States that the different groups develop and retain mutual trust. We may need “trust-building measures” to open the hearts of defiant young people who have lost any trust in anybody and therefore fight against society. For victims of sexual abuse and harassment trust-building measures may be a clear and consistent policy wherever such cases happen.

For the life of The United Methodist Church and its congregations as well it will be vitally important that the different theological camps regain trust in one another rather than continue to struggle over power within the church.

The first step to build up renewed trust should normally come from the individual or group in power or holding the stronger position. But we as Christians will not play the “whoever moves first loses” game, but will try everything we can to start building bridges which have enough load-bearing capacity to span over deep abysses of fear, distrust — even hate.

We emphasize: To create lasting security and peace between nations, ethnic groups or estranged positions within the society or the church, we have to build up mutual trust. To dare to make the first step toward “trust-building measures” is often the key for the solution.

We ask ourselves: In which area of life would we hope most for a renewed trust? What could we do ourselves to help to build it up?

4. The search for security and the call for a responsible lifestyle

Let us pause for a moment. International terrorism and violence at home are not the only threats that frighten people today. In many parts of Africa the pandemic of HIV and AIDS threatens the lives of many

and in some regions has already destroyed a whole generation. In Asia new diseases like SARS endanger and frighten people.

A further imminent global threat is often denied and ignored. It is the danger that comes from the ecological crises. There is no doubt about it: We are in the midst of a dramatic change of climate of our earth and most of its causes are man-made. The balance sheets of the large insurance companies which have to cover the damages after natural disasters make it perfectly clear: there is a tremendous increase of disasters of all kinds many of which result from human destruction of the environment such as deforestation, pollution, waste of energy and other kinds of careless use of the resources of our planet.

Some have rightly said: We use our earth as if we have another in reserve. But God has commissioned us human beings to care for the one he has created for us!

The astonishing thing is that most people don’t care about these dangers. The danger seems far away and a threat only to other people. While more people may already be dying because of the deterioration of our environment than from all terrorist attacks combined, our governments are slow to react or they deny the problem altogether. Billions of dollars are spent for military security, while few resources are used for the protection of God’s creation.

It would not cost much. To live a sustainable lifestyle would change our attitudes and the way we live, but it would not substantially diminish the standard of living in the so-called developed countries. On the contrary: people in the so-called undeveloped countries would have opportunity, to catch up in a responsible way without overstraining our ecosystem. We would need only to use the new technology that is already at hand for saving energy and reducing emission of carbon dioxide and other harmful substances into the atmosphere, the water or the soil. We would have to watch our eating habits and how we use energy, how food is grown and produced and how waste is dealt with.

In all these issues the best of our scientific research is in accordance with the simple biblical story that God put Adam into the Garden of Eden “to till and to keep it” (Gen 2:15). This charge is still

valid outside Eden and does not contradict the other biblical commandment to human beings in regard to God's creation: "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). We are not expected to make of the earth a global National Park that should be – if possible – in the same state it was before the Neolithic revolution. We are entitled to till the soil, to grow our crops, to fight disease and to use natural resources; but as populous as we are in these times we have to do this in a responsible way and through a sustainable lifestyle so that we will not cause the extinction of thousands of species of plants and animals which are also part of God's creation and so that we will not destroy the natural base of our own lives.

Responsible lifestyle may also be the solution for the prevention of diseases like AIDS. Information campaigns about its causes and the possibilities to prevent an infection are as important as the provision of affordable medicine which mitigates the effects of the disease so that many people may live longer in a much better state of health.

But to be clear: Diseases and natural disasters may show us that there is no absolute security available for human beings. God has made this earth a safe place for us. But he has not included a guarantee for everybody to live to be 80 or 90 years of age. To give another example: Just because of the way the tectonic structure of our planet is made up, there will be always earthquakes in certain regions of the globe. What can be responsibly done in these regions is to build houses that are not likely to be destroyed burying hundred or thousands of people under their debris. Sometimes we are reminded that the only safe place for human beings is in the hands of God. This should not make us fatalists. It gives us the base and the free space to life in a responsible way.

We emphasize: There are dangers and threats in the world to whose emergence and increase we personally contribute. There are others that we may not easily avoid but that we may face with the confidence that our life is in the hands of God and that nothing that happens "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39).

We ask ourselves: Where do we discover our own part within the

growing threat to human life on this planet? What can we do to prevent or reduce our contributing to the deteriorating conditions of life for so many human beings and species of life?

5. The search for security and the pursuit of justice

Gated communities may be a solution to the security problem for well-to-do people for a period of time. But they don't solve the real problems and don't create a safe community for all. There must be another approach for our search for security.

Certainly there may be individuals even in the healthiest society who assault others and try to hurt them or to rob them. But if in a society a whole group has to protect itself from others by walls, barbed wire and security personnel, there is something wrong in that society. If in some countries a high percentage of young males become delinquent in a certain segment of the population this is not the cause of the problem but a symptom of it. If in some countries young girls from poor families have to prostitute themselves to support their families this is not the problem itself but a symptom of it. Obviously these young people have no future in the "ordinary life" of their society and therefore become a threat to its security or have to spoil their own lives for short-term gain.

Similarly terrorism may be less the real cause of the problem in our present world than a symptom of it. Although it is true that most of the top terrorists come from well-to-do families they find support among the masses of young people who long for a better future for themselves and their countries. Can we give them a better vision of such a future?

The National Security Strategy has only one solution for all of these problems: free market. With almost religious zeal free trade and free markets are again and again offered as the remedies for the problem of poverty, poor education and underdevelopment. "Free markets and free trade are key priorities of our national security strategies."⁴ Where do the authors of this strategy get data which support the conviction that "free trade and free markets have proven their ability to lift whole societies out of poverty" and that economic freedom alone

can solve the problem of unequal distribution of the resources in a society or in our world, of poor healthcare for many and unequal access to education opportunities in a society?⁵

We see the opposite almost everywhere around the world where there is no social component in the system of free markets. The free market must also be a just market where people can sell their labor and their goods for a just price that gives them a sufficient living. We need free markets as a component of a just social system where basic health care is provided for all, where all have access to education appropriate to their needs and their gifts and where all are protected by law and its enforcement in the same way. Such is the standard for justice and peace and public security found in the Bible and this is the way to a safe and healthy society still today and for the future.

We have to apply these principles not only to society in our respective countries but also to our life together in the global village. We will only be able to live together safely if we seek justice and shalom for all.

The Romans used to say: “If you want peace prepare for war.” This may be fairly good advice to maintain an empire. But it is not the way to give people the peace they need. Our Christian ethic tells us: “If you want peace, work for justice.” This is the course we should pursue in our search for security. The Franciscan theologian, Father Bryan Massingdale, gave a vivid description of the kind of security that may result when we follow this way. Security in the perspective of faith “is a state of being that flows from the inclusion of all in the bounty of the earth. Security is meant for all and results from a concern of each one for the other. Security results from a concern for the common good and the promotion of solidarity between nations and peoples. Security stems from a recognition and defense of basic human rights, foremost of which are life and those things necessary for its proper and authentic development. Security results when all have access to and enjoy food, housing, clothing, medical care, social security, education, healthy environments and a living wage. Security follows from realizing that a preoccupying pursuit of self-interest is a sure path to social disaster.”⁶

Is this the security we search for? Or do we want to have other options?

Father Massingdale speaks about “two competing visions of security, rooted in two highly divergent world views. The first is rooted in a world of fear, seeks security in military power directed to the end of defending economic privilege for a few. The other, rooted in a world-view of blessing, sees security lying in the effort of assuring that the blessings of creation are enjoyed by all. How do we respond to these visions?”⁷

Perhaps we find this alternative too simplistic. But it points clearly to the choices we must make. There will never be “total security” for human beings. Total security – if it would be possible at all – would be total enslavement. But as those called by the One who relinquished and sacrificed all personal security in order to save all human beings, we must be ready no longer to seek a security which merely preserves our own way of life but rather security which gives life and peace to as many as possible.

We emphasize: If we want to live in a safe society and in a world where biblical peace reigns we need to pray and to work for a just society and for an inclusive, embracing community of human beings that excludes none.

We ask ourselves: What should be the first step in our neighborhood, our city, our country to move toward such a community?

6. The search for security and the gift of reconciliation

We have already quoted Martin Luther King’s phrase: “There will be no peace if the way to peace is not peace itself.”

From the biblical message and from what we may learn from deeper insights into the nature of human conflicts it is evident that reconciliation is the “way to peace which is peace itself.”

Reconciliation is in no sense appeasement. More than conflict management, reconciliation is conflict transformation.⁸ It resolves conflicts from their roots. Therefore reconciliation is the ideal way to security.

Reconciliation is the process of restoration of broken relationships

between persons or groups that have been destroyed by enmity, hatred and guilt. Reconciliation overcomes a past which is burdened by guilt and poisoned by unexpiated suffering of victims of violence and counter-violence.

That is why the questions of guilt and justice have to be addressed in the process of reconciliation. Those who have violated others should acknowledge what they have done and ask for forgiveness. Those who were hurt should be ready to forgive. But it is important that this does not create a new power play where the perpetrator becomes the victim and the victim the oppressor. Sometimes both parties are embroiled in the causes of the conflict. Therefore reconciliation deals with justice that overcomes guilt and hatred but is not judgment.

Reconciliation works for the balancing of conflicting interests between nations and within society. Legitimate issues on both sides may compete with one another and provide cause for ongoing conflict. "Reconciliation, politically understood, is the process of eliciting, coordinating, and strengthening the elements of community in both domestic and international society. The stronger the community and its ethos, customs, and laws, the stronger the invisible and presupposed security to be free, to be vulnerable. The greater the invisible security of common will and supportive social fabric, the less need there is for visible, coercive 'security forces'. Therefore, a politics of reconciliation, which attempts to overcome hostilities, conciliate interests, and generally strengthen the fabric of social relationships, may be much more valuable as a security policy than a politics of competition in armaments."⁹

Reconciliation takes time. It was some time after World War II before a process of reconciliation between Germany and its neighbors had started and brought peace to this war-torn part of our world. German people had to become ready to ask for forgiveness for unspeakable atrocities during the war and to renounce what they still thought to be legitimate claims on former German soil. Neighbors had to become ready to trust these words and to accept signs of repentance and expiation. It is good to know that the churches no longer preached

retaliation against traditional enemies but took the risk to make unpopular first steps in the direction of reconciliation by words of repentance and an open invitation to give up old claims.

We find a similar process within broken societies. In South Africa and Sierra Leone a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" has tried to deal with the atrocities committed during Apartheid in the one case and the Civil War in the other. This process is the attempt to deal with these matters not with the justice of the victor but in a spirit of reconciliation. It is an attempt to renounce retaliation without giving up justice. The verdict is still out whether this leads to true reconciliation. But the attempt is remarkable. Here as well church leaders are in the forefront of its implementation. As we have said: Reconciliation takes time.

Reconciliation also takes courage. Taking the first step that opens the process to reconciliation is often a great risk. In St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland, you can see a door with a large hole in it. Legend has it that after a very long feud between the House of Ormand and Kildare, which took many lives, the two parties were gathered in rooms on either side of this door. A truce was agreed, but only after the Chief of one of the parties cut a hole in the door and, as sign of good faith, put his arm through the hole they were able to shake hands and to make peace. "To chance you arm" has become a saying, meaning "to take the first dangerous step."

One wonders what message this could have for the hostile parties in Northern Ireland in our times. We know that devoted Christian people on both sides have tried to take similar steps, but they could not convince the majority of their fellow countrymen. Yet they are on the right track. "The New Testament calls Christians to accept the risks of vulnerability for the sake of reconciliation with the enemy."¹⁰

Not only Christians are moved to do so. Izhaq Rabin, the late Prime Minister of the State of Israel, and Anwar Saddat, the late President of Egypt, took this risk in order to make peace between their countries. Both were murdered by fanatical compatriots who did not want to follow the path of reconciliation. Yet their legacy may be seed out of which peace for the Middle East could sprout and grow.

We may remind Christian and non-Christian people what God has done in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the arm of God stretched out into the world to make peace with human beings. When they killed the messenger of peace it was not the end of reconciliation but its fulfillment. God took on himself the consequences of hatred, violence and guilt in Jesus' death on the cross. As St. Paul says: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (II Cor 5:18f).

As Christian people we are the messengers of reconciliation through word and deed. That is our calling and that is our contribution to the search of security which all are involved.

This, of course, is a kind of reconciliation, which cannot simply be a goal of political action. But it sets the context in which all our actions take place. Reconciliation as context implies that all of our actions are a part of an active process moving towards wholeness and renewal, whether or not we reach ideal goals.

We emphasize: The way to real peace and security is reconciliation. We will not attain full reconciliation between all peoples before God's final consummation because the forces of evil and destruction are still at work in the hearts of human beings and in their relationships. But we are called to be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation until our Lord comes.

We ask ourselves: In which area of our lives and our society do we need reconciliation most? What can we contribute to a process of reconciliation in such conflicts?

Bishop Walter F. Klaiber
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Footnotes

1. The National Strategy for Homeland Security, p. VIII and 1 (U.S. Office of Homeland Security, July 2002).
2. Theodore R. Weber, Security, International Responsibility and Reconciliation, Quarterly Review, Summer 1986 (11-29) p. 17.
3. Theodore Weber, Quarterly Review, Summer 1986, p. 24.
4. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Sept. 2002), p.23.
5. National Security, Presidential Letter and pp. 17-20. Our critique of the over simplistic approach of this document to the problems of poverty and its consequences does not deny that there are applaudable goals and pledges of the present administration of the U.S. that are mentioned in it.
6. Father Brian Messingdale, From Homeland to Biblical Security, Origins, February 20, 2003 (598-603) p. 601.
7. Messingdale, loc. cit. p. 602.
8. Cf. John Paul Lederach, The Journey Toward Reconciliation. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999.
9. Cf. Theodore Weber, loc. cit. p. 24.
10. Theodore Weber, loc. cit. p. 17.