Encouraging Shalom in the Congregation: a resource guide

It helps to begin with the meaning of the word we translate as “Peace.” The word used by Jesus and his disciples, the early church after, and the prophets before means more than our word “Peace.” Shalom fully included our concepts of justice, welcoming community, wholeness, etc.

The place of Shalom in the gospel is conveyed by the fact that the first word of Easter is ‘Peace,’ spoken by Jesus in every account after the Resurrection. The broader concept of Peace can make a big difference. Indeed, the gospel calls us to embody Shalom in each part of our lives together: from worship, bible study, and meetings, to discussion, giving, and action.

1. In worship: We can look for ways to engender Shalom in worship. Lutheran Peace Fellowship offers several well-regarded resources including a Peace Litany, PeacePoints leaders guide, bulletin inserts, and a Calendar of events. LPF also has crafted a 60-page “Peace Worship Packet” with dozens of prayers, songs, litanies, sermon helps and complete services. ELCA and other web sites offer further resources; LPF has links to many of them on the ‘Day of Prayer for Peace’ page of our web site. Consider as well devotion books like Call to Peace, by Jim McGinnis.

2. In adult education, Sunday School and youth group: The gospel calls us to educate and motivate congregation members to live lives of Shalom and expand the areas of life in which they explore and find the power of Shalom.

LPF offers tested, effective Shalom resources for adult and youth group use including our “PeacePoints” series of 12 activities, each of which offers a discussion guide, handouts, and leader tips for effective use. For example, What is Christian Peacemaking leads a group through the biblical meaning of Shalom with handouts of outstanding texts, and a wonderful litany. A concise, useful exploration is the 5 pg discussion essay, “Shalom!” followed by a rich and helpful annotated bibliography on many aspects of the subject.

Each of these resources embodies an important insight: that our means of education match the message of Shalom. This doesn’t mean telling folks what to think (or how to vote!) in adult education or sermons. (That neither squares with our values, nor is it very effective). Rather, Shalom encourages us to provide space for moral deliberation and discernment, and engaging discussions and bible stories for members to discover how they might respond to the gospel call for us to be peacemakers and justice seekers.

3. Activity in the world: We can help our members join and learn from projects and service activities, as individuals in their communities and workplaces and as a congregation through projects of our youth, women’s or men’s groups, Sunday School, worship committee, council, etc. Each can regularly share, and urge support for activities of ELCA Advocacy, Lutheran Peace Fellowship, Bread for the World, and other reliable, faith-based sources of action in the world.

There are often effective, responsible sources of volunteer involvement available such as food banks, meal programs, shelters, etc. We can also find ways for members to share in the congregation what they’re observing and learning. A few good links: www.elca.org/advocacy and other parts of the ELCA website; www.facebook.com/lutheranpeace www.lutheranpeace.org www.thriventbuilds.com www.bread.org www.campaignnonviolence.org

4. In our giving: You can encourage support for Shalom activities, projects, and organizations through contributions of individual members and as congregation. Lutheran Peace Fellowship and other Shalom efforts can become valued parts of your congregation’s benevolence offerings.

5. In our gatherings and meetings. One great place to discover and experiment with Shalom is in how we interact, work together, and conduct meetings. It isn’t always easy, but offers great rewards as a place to explore Shalom skills useful in our families, workplaces, churches, as citizens, etc.

LPF offers a variety of activities to highlight and encourage effective ways to do this, for example, our workshops on “Conflict Education” and “How to Be a Bridge in a World Full of Walls” (see the LPF website). The resource guide on “Conflict Education” describes a variety of possibilities.

Other Resources on the Potential of Shalom:

a. Over 700 congregations have used “Jesus’ Way of Shalom” or “What is Christian Peacemaking” exploring the biblical roots of Shalom. Others have used the “Shalom!” essay (at left), or our five Women’s Resources. Our “Path of Hope” offers 150 stories of Shalom in action throughout history & across the globe.

b. Campaign Nonviolence is an exceptional ecumenical source of training, witness and action. Well over 300 faith groups across the U.S. offer a wide variety of enriching Shalom education and advocacy activities in the annual Sept. “Week of Actions.”

c. Superb books for discussion: Resisting Structural Evil and Public Church by Cynthia Moe-Lobeda; The Powers That Be by Walter Wink; Courage to Think Differently and Beyond Guilt by George Johnson; Richard Deats on Gandhi and King; as well as books by Joan Chittister, John Dear, Mary Evelyn Jegen, Michael Nagler, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, Jim Wallis, etc.