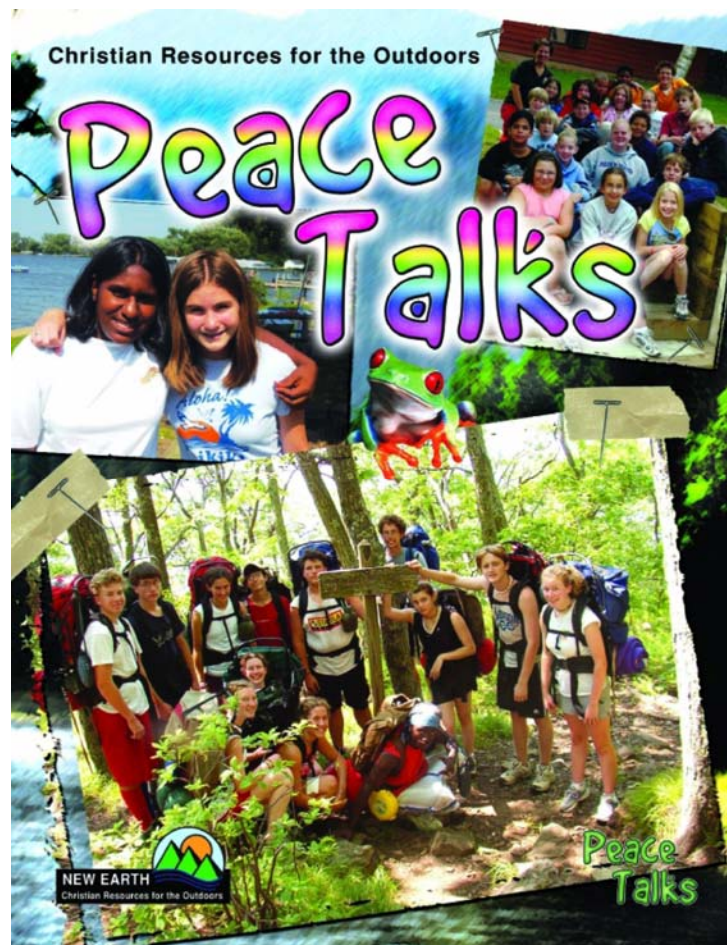


2006 STAFF TRAINING DEVOTIONS



Prepared by

The Reverend Nancy Ferguson.

Curriculum Project Manager

PEACE TALKS
2006 New Earth Resources Curriculum
Staff Training Devotions

DAY ONE

Have you heard the story of six visually impaired men who went to “see” an elephant? Each one approached the creature from a different direction. Making their astute observations, they each claimed the truth about the beast. Their conclusions were quite varied, including a wall, a spear, a snake, a tree, a fan, and a rope. The part of the elephant they happened to touch determined their perspective.

This may happen to us when we consider the word *peace*. There are at least as many ways to define peace as there are to describe an elephant: the absence of war, mental calm, a state of harmony, law and order. In the Christian community, we often find different meanings when we use that special word. And like those blind men, we see different parts of this profound concept.

This story may be useful to you as you explore the themes of “Peace Talks.” In each of the six daily discoveries, a scripture that gives a different way of understanding peace is introduced. Some are very personal; others emphasize the community. Some talk about our inner life; others focus on the world. Rather than taking one as your favorite, think of each of them as part of the total picture of God’s desire for humankind. The One who created and sustains us wants us to live together in unity and harmony—spiritually, emotionally, socially, and politically.

Combined with each scripture lesson are words for peace from around the world. These words were chosen because they help to describe these various aspects of peace, focusing on one aspect each day. Taken all together, these six daily discoveries can enlarge our understandings of peace and encourage us to grow as the community of peace that God desires.

Questions for Reflection

- How would you define “peace”? Write that definition.
- What kind of peace do you yearn for – personal peace, absence of conflict, world peace?
- How do you work for peace – in your life, in your relationships, in the world?
- What is one thing you can do to bring peace to your time at camp?

DAY TWO

Aloha

READ: Genesis 18:1–8

The Hawaiian word, “Aloha,” expresses an understanding of hospitality. It is used as a greeting upon both arrival and departure. It means peace and emphasizes a welcoming spirit. It also has that sense of intimacy in face-to-face relationships—the breath of life that connects host and guest. In the framework of that relationship, peace may be experienced. It is not surprising that the pineapple has become a well-known symbol of hospitality. When the word Aloha is spoken, the barriers that separate stranger from host are broken down.

Something to Think About

Hospitality is a gift from God. Even though Abraham and Sarah were steeped in hospitality rituals in their culture, they were also clearly responding to the gracious gift of God’s presence. Abraham knew this was not just an ordinary visit and did everything he could to provide the very best for his guests. His welcoming spirit grew out of his ongoing relationship with the Lord. He was clearly responding to what he had already received from God. God had taught Abraham and Sarah about hospitality when God welcomed them into this new way of life with God. Hospitality is most genuine and rich when it comes from a grateful heart.

Peace begins with a welcoming spirit. Sarah and Abraham extended hospitality to three visitors. Their action in turn helped to create the space for relationships to grow. Their home became a holy and safe place. Whether our guests are human or divine, we can help develop trust in such an environment. Inviting persons into the space of our informal lives and taking personal interest in their well-being is a powerful sign of care and compassion.

Hospitality to strangers can be a rich spiritual experience. The writer of Hebrews knew this story from Genesis quite well and wrote these words to the early Christians: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2 NRSV). As members of the early church invited guests into their own homes, they often received an unexpected blessing. You may have seen a small plaque that reads: “There are no strangers, only friends we haven’t met.” This is particularly true when we open ourselves to persons of other races and cultures. How blessed I was recently when a local Muslim doctor invited a group of Christians and Jews into his home for a meal and table fellowship. Angels are often present in such interfaith

encounters.

Jesus takes hospitality a step further in his parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31–46. When we welcome the least and the marginalized into our space, we are welcoming Christ himself. This is often done quite unconsciously, as the parable suggests. The hosts ask, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” (25:37–39 NRSV) Jesus responded that when we do it for the “least of these,” we do it to him.

Questions for Reflection

- Recall a time when you were welcomed into someone’s home. How did the host make you feel comfortable? What was done and said? Did your attitude change as a result? Why or why not?
- How were you welcomed into this camp community? Who welcomed you? How did you welcome others?
- What risks do you take when you welcome strangers into your space? What are the blessings? What peace do you experience?
- How does a welcoming spirit contribute to a more peaceful camp/world?
- What is one thing you can do to bring peace to camp through *aloha*?

DAY THREE

Shalom

READ: Genesis 1:1—2:3

Shalom is a Hebrew word that means peace. Like *aloha*, it also is a word used in greeting and saying good-bye. But shalom is a word that encompasses more. It also means harmony, completeness, wholeness, well-being, even salvation. It is a description of the world as God intends it to be. When we offer shalom to others, we bless them with God's blessing. Those who receive shalom enjoy God's wholeness and salvation. Shalom is about wholeness and harmony in community. So God's act of creating the universe was an act of shalom. In this way, peace and creation are invariably linked.

Something to Think About

Humanity's role in God's world is not as ruler but as gardener. When humans were created on the sixth day of creation, God clarified our role in this world. "Be fruitful and multiply," God said. And "have dominion..." This elevated responsibility is to be understood in the context of being created in God's image. Our role is to be gardeners or caretakers in this beautiful garden; we do not have the role of the creator. Our task is be sure that what happens in this world is consistent with God's creative processes and plan. We have the power to impact the environment for our own personal or corporate gain. When we do so, however, we jeopardize the careful balance that makes life on this planet possible. Faithfulness to this role of caretaker is a requirement of shalom.

God's creative processes are always peacemaking processes. God created the world in the midst of chaos. That Spirit, like "a wind sweeping over the face of the waters," created a safe and hospitable place where life could flourish. We can still see this process in today's world. Whenever we find chaos and violence in the midst of wars, genocide, and civil unrest, we can discover God at work creating communities of trust and reconciliation. Even as opposing militia heap destruction and revenge on one another, God is at work calling ordinary people to bring people together and to protect the vulnerable ones. The faithful work of God eventually prevails even in the bitterest conflicts. God's voice spoken over the chaos is always a word of peace.

Science and faith are complementary. Although the natural world is user-friendly, by itself it never requires a faith orientation. There is an order, a beauty, diversity, and a consistency about the cosmos that we can experience with our senses. Our scientific disciplines can help us to enhance this awareness as we study creative processes. But our encounter with creation must always point us

beyond creation itself to the Creator. Creation cannot be separated from our spirituality. While we can easily measure and catalogue many kinds of flora and fauna, we cannot ignore the deeper questions of faith. The biblical creation story is written in the context of God's desire for human wholeness and redemption. We are always challenged to relate our science about creation with our faith and ethics about living together in a community of God's kingdom.

Questions for Reflection

- In Genesis, we see God's Spirit hovering over the formless void until God creates a safe space for life to flourish, a place of shalom. What is your own response to God's initiative?
- Humans are told to "have dominion" over this created world. What does this mean? What kinds of responsibilities does it entail? What is the relationship of peace and justice to the integrity of creation? How does your camp connect ethics about "love of neighbor" with teachings about care of the environment?

DAY FOUR

Shalom

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Shalom is a Hebrew word that means peace. Like *aloha*, it also is a word used in greeting and saying good-bye. But *shalom* is a word that encompasses more. It also means harmony, completeness, wholeness, well-being, even salvation. It is a description of the world as God intends it to be. When we offer *shalom* to others, we bless them with God's blessing. Those who receive *shalom* enjoy God's wholeness and salvation. *Shalom* is about wholeness and harmony in community. So God's act of creating the universe was an act of *shalom*. In this way peace and creation are invariably linked.

Something to Think About

We are meant to live in a healthy balance of work and rest. We cannot assume that God rested on the seventh day because God was tired. Our Lord needs no rest, but we do. We need the rest, the refreshment, and the play in order to bring balance and a sense of appropriate rhythm to our lives. Just as God stopped to enjoy and savor, so we, who are created in God's image, need Sabbath rest. As we move toward a "24/7" kind of life, there are even fewer hours in the week to reconnect with the One who created us. God continues to be scheduled out of our lives as we move further into the twenty-first century. A life lived in balance between work and rest, and in full awareness of God's presence, always points us to *shalom*.

Questions for Reflection

- What part can Sabbath-living play at camp?
- How can you create a balance between work, play, and worship?
- If *shalom* is about peace, wholeness, and salvation, how will you help make it possible for campers to go home at the end of the week feeling more whole, more centered, and at one with God, with one another, and with creation?

DAY FIVE

Be Still

READ: Mark 4:35–41

Our phrase for peace, “Be still,” was used when Jesus called out to the raging wind and the churning sea. This was a command, not a request. Jesus used the same language when he healed a man with an unclean spirit. This call for peace is first a call for discernment. We must be able to discern the difference between good and evil spirits at work in the world. Evil spirits are those that seek to minimize, distract, cause stumbling, and otherwise hinder the work of God in the world. The call of “Peace, be still!” is also a call to empowerment. Working against these hindrances to God’s ongoing processes takes strength and courage. Perhaps “Peace, be still!” is actually a prayer that God’s ways prevail.

Something to Think About

God is clearly at work among us, creating a new world based on love, peace, and justice. Jesus’ teachings make this clear. God does not sit quietly by, disinterested in the unfolding drama of human suffering and violence. Our Master is already here, planting seeds of hope and cultivating hearts of compassion, so that a harvest of truth can emerge, creating a new community based on God’s desires. *There are also forces at work in the world in opposition to all that God is doing.* These forces seek to undermine and render helpless any efforts to bring justice and peace. Sometimes we, too, wonder about the storms in our lives. We have given our lives to this same Christ; we become more than discouraged by the storms that seem to test our faith, our resolve, and our resourcefulness. Our fear is that these forces will overpower us.

In these situations faith that Christ will provide the resources we need helps us to weather these storms. It only takes a little faith, like that of a tiny mustard seed. In such times we will be equipped to speak the powerful word that stills the storm. We will be given the necessary gifts to discern the spirits, to name them, and to overpower them. We will not be abandoned in these times of testing, for Christ’s Spirit will accompany us to safety.

Questions for Reflection

- Recall a frightening experience you had in an outdoor setting. What happened? How did you deal with your fears?
- How does faith overcome fear? How can we teach our campers to trust in Christ in the midst of the storms in their lives? How can we model this inner peace?
- How can we learn to see God at work in the world more clearly? What discernment is needed?
- How does Christ give you hope for a more peaceful and just world in the midst of wars, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation?

DAY SIX

Agape

READ: Luke 6:27-36

Agape is one of the words meaning love in the Greek language. Instead of one word, the Greeks have many words to convey its vast meanings: *eros* (sexual love), *philia* (brotherly love), *storge* (family affection), etc. But *agape* conveys the idea of showing love in action. It carries the understanding of God's love for humanity as expressed through the person of Jesus Christ. The way God loves us is the way we are to love our neighbors. While *agape* is not exactly a word for peace as we have been defining it in this curriculum, it certainly is the basis for relationships of peace in community. Without *agape*, we can have little understanding of God's desire for humanity to live in peace.

Something to Think About

Christ calls his disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Coming from Jesus' lips as instruction to his followers, this passage is not simply meant for that historical time and place. As the community that continues to follow Jesus, today's Christians must understand and live out these words. The gospels make it clear that Jesus chose love as the response to his enemies. Christ went to his death without violent resistance. He trusted that even in death, God would bring glory and honor. And as we read Acts and the letters of the early church, we see this same kind of love in Christians who refused to return evil for evil. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul restated it, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Romans 12:14 NRSV). It is clear that for Christ and the early church, as well as for Christians in our world, this teaching is central to the gospel message.

Disciples of Christ respond to enemies and friends with the radical grace of God. In this passage Jesus instructed his followers not to reciprocate in like manner—hate those who hate you and love those who love you. Certainly we are often tempted to respond as we have been treated. A Christian is one who responds to both good and evil by imitating the One who gives us life. We are to take our cue from the Lord who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45b NRSV). Christ's way is the forgiving grace of God. Even though we don't always appreciate the radical grace of God, we seek to respond with that same grace when we respond to foe and friend alike.

Questions for Reflection

- Think of a time when you had to deal with someone you could easily call an “enemy”. What made it difficult for you to forgive him/her? Did you want to seek revenge or retaliate? How did you reach reconciliation?
- How is it possible to “turn the other cheek” and not feel like a victim? How might this happen in the camp setting?
- Our national “enemies” are often stereotyped as evil, unlovable, and out to get us. In what ways can you foster an attitude that encourages our young people to pray for enemies?
- Mister Rogers always told his young television viewers, “I like you just the way you are.” Is that a good description of *agape* love? How does that set the stage for peace?

DAY SEVEN

Ubuntu

READ: Acts 2:41–47

Ubuntu is a South African word for peace that has its setting in community. It means “I cannot be who I am unless you can be who you are.” We must describe it as a culture of peacemaking rather than one of violence and brutality. Often the word *reconciliation* comes to mind. *Ubuntu* societies are not based on self-interest, accumulation of wealth, and the competitive drive for power and resources.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu introduced this concept to the larger world. There are five stages in this peacemaking process: “acknowledgement of guilt, showing remorse and repenting, asking for and giving forgiveness, and paying compensation or reparation as a prelude to reconciliation.”

Something to Think About

Today’s Bible passage describes the early church formed that day by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit marked followers with a new identity. After Pentecost, this new community can be described as: *Being filled with God’s presence*— They lived in awe of the wonderful things that were happening around them. People were experiencing healing and were being transformed by God’s forgiving grace. When they met together, gratitude and praise were on their lips.

Experiencing Reconciliation— As they found themselves reconciled to God, they experienced a spirit of reconciliation among themselves. This was obvious in their willingness to pool their economic resources and share equally. No one had an advantage over anyone else. It became a community based on need rather than privilege.

Worshipping— God’s Spirit was the source of their life together. They lived their lives according to the Spirit’s guidance. Meeting together publicly at the temple and in each other’s homes, they shared in the breaking of bread. Through their common life together, they celebrated what God was doing in their lives and in the world.

Witnessing— This experience was not “for members only”. They began to see barriers between classes, races, and cultures breaking down. This was not a secret sect, but an open, inclusive fellowship based on loyalty to Christ and his vision of a reconciled life together.

Questions for Reflection

- Acts 2 models a community living in peace. How can camp be a similar type of community?
- What made that peace possible, even in the midst of diversity?

- We are so intricately held together in community that “I cannot be who I am unless you can be who you are.” How does what we learn by living together in Christian community help us to experience peace?
- How can you teach the *ubuntu*?

DAY EIGHT

Ubuntu

READ: Acts 2:41–47

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Something to Think About

The church, born of the Holy Spirit, is a new community of reconciliation; and, it is also the first fruits of God’s desire for the reconciliation of the human family. Luke described the early Christian church as a spiritual community that manifests life together as God intended it to be lived. It is created by God’s Spirit rather than by human effort. God’s reconciling love creates a people who are freed to live together in mutuality, justice, compassion, and peace. And to the extent that this is manifest, it offers a model for the whole human family. While the church has not always chosen to live out faithfully this reconciled and reconciling life, the church challenges the world to move in this direction.

Many see the early Christian community mirroring the prophetic call of Jubilee. Leviticus 25 called on the Hebrew community to restructure their society every fifty years to create the community that God desired. In the year of Jubilee, liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land, property sold to pay debts was to be returned, and slaves were to be freed. Even the land was to be restored by sitting idle for a year. This plan helped the Hebrew society provide for a more just and equal sharing of the resources of the land. While it is unclear whether such reforms ever were fully carried out in Israel’s history, the model of the year of Jubilee was part of the tradition of God’s people. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, probably saw the emerging Christian community in the same light.

The process by which we experience conversion to the way of Christ is remarkably similar to the process of conflict resolution embodied in Ubuntu. To become a Christian is: (1) to acknowledge our distance from God; (2) to repent; (3) to ask forgiveness of God; (4) to take responsibility for

damage done; and (5) to be a reconciling person. As God has initiated this reconciliation with us, we are empowered to live this way with others. How God treats us is how we are to treat our neighbor. Ubuntu describes both the process by which we can live with one another in peace, and the way God is with us as we become one in God.

Questions for Reflection

- There is a striking similarity between the experience of conversion to the Christian life and the process of reconciliation as described by *ubuntu*. Review the five steps in each. Is this a coincidence? What does this say about living together in peace?
- How can the Christian community be a model for unity in the human family, even when we are aware of other religious traditions, practices, and beliefs?
- Do we all have to be Christians to have a world of peace and harmony?
- How can you create an *ubuntu* among staff and campers this summer?

DAY NINE

Heiwa

READ: Luke 4:16–21

Heiwa is a Japanese word for peace. It has two syllables that describe aspects of living peacefully together. “Hei” means equality, justice, balanced states, and harmony. “Wa” means softness and represents “a state in which people are not striving for grains and eating them.” It is “a tender language.” Such a word describes a sense of peace—justice with compassion, gentle equality, harmony where there is no striving after the material things of life. Such a view of peace is not far from the prophet’s vision of the Messiah.

Something to Think About

This text describes one of Jesus’ first sermons after he started his ministry of teaching and healing in Galilee. As such it sets the stage for understanding the purpose of his ministry and his identity as the Messiah. After initial contacts in Galilee where word spread quickly, Jesus came to Nazareth, his hometown. When he came to the synagogue on the Sabbath, he was treated as a special guest. Respecting the visiting rabbi, the officials invited him to read scripture and provide commentary. Jesus read from the first verses of Isaiah 61. It refers to Israel’s captivity in Babylon and desire to return to their land. The prophet declared that the anointed one of God would lead God’s people back home. This Messiah (anointed one) would create a just and peaceful society, as God had always desired. This vision of a restored community under God’s rule gave the captives hope for the future.

In a rather startling statement, Jesus identified himself with this prophetic call for the Messiah to come, and for this new community of peace and justice to be formed. Jesus announced that his purpose was to declare the coming of God’s kingdom. He had come to announce the beginning of this new era in which the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized would be valued and included.

Such a proclamation was consistent with the word from the other prophets as well. The prophet Micah spoke of this new Messianic community where, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:3–4 NRSV)

Christ’s mission is to create a world of peace through justice for the human family. We affirm that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one who has brought good news to the poor, proclaims release to

captives and recovery of sight to the blind, frees the oppressed, and calls for the Jubilee year. The gospel narrative affirms that these things happened in Jesus' ministry. Although God's love is for all, there is a special place in God's heart for the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. This world of peace and justice is social, economic, and political, as well as spiritual.

- How do you understand the role of the Messiah? In what way does Jesus' coming to earth express God's desire for the human family to live together in peace and justice?
- How can your camp community keep alive Christ's vision of peace and justice for the human family? What peace traditions can be used this summer to teach peace?
- What will campers take home with them that will remind them of God's great desire for all people to live together in peace?

DAY TEN

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Something to Think About

The Isaiah text Jesus read also anticipated the coming of “the year of the Lord’s favor.” This is a reference to the Jubilee year, described in detail in Leviticus 25. Every fiftieth year in Israel, there was to be a year when slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and the land returned to its former owners. Nothing was to stand in the way of a just and equal sharing of available resources.

Another aspect of the tradition of the Messiah was Isaiah’s insight that this anointed one would be a suffering servant. His way of bringing justice and peace would not be by coercion or force, but through gentleness, nonviolence, and inner transformation. Isaiah writes, “He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth;” (42:2–4 NRSV). Christ’s way of peace and justice is never by the sword, but through a radical reorientation of the heart. Confession, repentance, and forgiveness are always the powerful tools for making peace.

The way to this peace is the way of suffering servanthood. Gentleness, humility, and meekness are core values of the kingdom of God. It is not through power and worldly strength that peace will come about. This kind of peace is willing to listen as well as to speak, to receive as well as to give, to hope as well as to declare. Peace is a concept and a reality best understood and conveyed by a servant leader. The way of Jesus invites openness to enemies and a willingness to work on behalf of others.

Questions for Reflection

- The world teaches us that peace comes about through military strength. Jesus teaches another model. How can peace come through gentleness and humility?
- In what way can servant leadership be modeled at camp?

- How will you be a servant leader during camp to demonstrate gentleness and humility?
- What new things have you learned about peace during these times of reflection? How will that impact your life within the camp community?