Walking the Way of Love:
A journey through the Baptismal Covenant

Session 2:
Turn - Responding to sin and violence

“Persevere in resisting evil, repent and return to the Lord.”
Table of Contents

Introduction 2
Objectives 2
Sample Outline 3
The Baptismal Covenant Promise and Way of Love Step 4
Preliminary Discussion Questions 4
Bible Study 4
  Bible Passages 4
  Quotes 4
  Discussion Questions 4
Human Rights Content: Theories of violence and violence prevention 5
  Personal, Corporate and Historical Sin 5
  Galtung’s Triangle or Violence 6
  Violence Prevention 8
  Resist, Repent and Return 9
  Addressing Corporate and Historical Sin 10
Spotlight Congregation 11
  Background 11
  Video 11
  Questions 11
Group Discussion Questions 11
Additional Information 12
Materials
  Powerpoint Presentation
Session 2: Responding to sin and violence

Introduction
On the Way of Love, we Turn, pause to listen, and chose to follow Jesus. Choosing to turn toward Jesus means we are also turning away from that which prevents us from following: sin, violence, harming God’s people and God’s creation. In Baptism, we promise to turn, to “Persevere in resisting evil, repent and return to the Lord.”

Sin comes in the form of what we have done or neglected to do (personal sin), but also what the society and culture we are a part of has done and left undone (corporate and historical sin). Turning away from these wrongs and returning to God involves not only changing our own behavior and gaining new skills. Learning about theories of violence prevention and peacebuilding can give us tools to help us change our own behavior and influence group or societal behavior.

Together, you will explore concrete ways sin can harm others and develop ways to truly repent, not just seeking forgiveness, but changing the sinful behaviors and structures which harm others and ourselves.

General Objective
Connect our commitment to Turn and “Persevere in resisting evil, repent and return to the Lord” to a commitment to responding to direct, structural and cultural violence.

Specific Objectives
1. Participants will define personal, corporate and historical sin
2. Participants will be able to identify and analyze violence using Johan Galtung’s Triangle of Violence (optional)
3. Participants will discuss responses to violence using a public health model as concrete examples of repentance and “return to the Lord”
4. Participants will develop ideas for responding to different examples of cultural and systemic violence
Sample Outline
This guide has a variety of materials that you can use (or not use) to facilitate a study of the Way of Love and the Baptismal Covenant. Below is a sample outline of a 90 minute session using the materials provided in this guide. Feel free to use the sample provided, or to develop your own session using the materials in this guide and online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>Opening Prayer</td>
<td>● Open the session in prayer or ask a volunteer to do so</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Ground the session in our faith and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance</td>
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<td>4 min.</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>● Welcome everyone to the space and briefly explain the objective this session</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Make sure everyone is on the same page and in agreement with the objectives</td>
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<td>5 min.</td>
<td>Preliminary Questions</td>
<td>● Ask participants to separate into pairs and reflect on the preliminary questions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Share opinions and ideas in a low-stakes setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Begin critically reflecting on the subject matter</td>
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<td>o Apply the subject matter to your personal life</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Bible Study</td>
<td>● Share the Bible verses with participants</td>
<td>Bibles</td>
<td>o Share opinions and ideas in a higher-stakes setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Lead a discussion of the Scripture using the discussion questions</td>
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<td>o Reflect critically on the connections between two familiar subjects; the Baptismal Covenant and the Bible</td>
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<td>o What is sin?</td>
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<td>o What is violence?</td>
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<td>o How do we prevent violence?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o What does repentance and return look like?</td>
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<td>o Connect human rights to a faith commitment</td>
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<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>● Deliver the presentation on Sin, Violence and Repentance</td>
<td>Presentation o Computer o Projector o Projector Screen o Triangle of Violence Handout</td>
<td>o Introduce human rights as a tool for fulfilling this promise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Go through Galtung’s Triangle of Violence (optional)</td>
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<td>o Develop a basic understanding of violence and violence prevention as a way of reflecting on sin and repentance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Go through the Public Health Model of Violence Prevention</td>
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<td>o What is sin?</td>
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<td>o What is violence?</td>
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<td>o How do we prevent violence?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o What does repentance and return look like?</td>
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<td>15 min.</td>
<td>Churches in Action</td>
<td>● Show the video of our churches in action</td>
<td>Churches in Action Video</td>
<td>o Present a concrete example of a church blending this human rights concept with their faith</td>
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<td>● Ask the accompanying discussion questions</td>
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<td>o Reflect critically on the connections between familiar and new concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>Final Discussion</td>
<td>● Continue with final discussion questions</td>
<td>Journal, notebook or paper</td>
<td>o Think of new ways to apply human rights concepts in our lives and work</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>Closing Prayer</td>
<td>● Close the session in prayer or ask a volunteer to do so</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>o Close the session renewing our commitment to our faith</td>
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Baptismal Covenant Promise
Persevere in resisting evil, repent and return to the Lord.

The Way of Love
Turn: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

Preliminary Questions
Ask participants to answer the questions in pairs and share with the group if they like.
1. What does the step Turn on the Way of Love, mean to me? What am I turning from, what am I turning to?
2. How do I live out this Baptismal Covenant Promise in my life?
3. How does our church live out this promise as a community of faith?

Bible Study
Introduce one or more of the following passages and ask the discussion questions.

1 Peter 5:6-9
Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

Acts 2:38
Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Mark 1:14-15
Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Discussion Questions
Lead a discussion of the Scripture passages. Below are sample discussion questions:
1. Evil
   a. What does it mean to resist evil?
   b. What are some common temptations?
   c. What does holding onto sin or evil do to people? To me?
2. Repentance
   a. What were ways that people express repentance?
   b. What was a meaningful way someone expressed repentance to me?
   c. What are examples of ways I have repented?
   d. How does it feel to repent?
3. Return to the Lord
   a. What does it mean to be with Jesus, to walk in his ways?
   b. What does it mean to return to Jesus?
   c. How does it feel to return to Jesus after repenting?
d. What is Jesus’ attitude toward people who return to him?
In this session, we will be connecting our understanding of sin and repenting of sin with theories of violence and violence prevention. Begin the presentation by asking participants “What is sin?” After receiving some ideas of what people's ideas of sin are, begin the presentation.

**Individual, Corporate and Historical Sin**

There are many different ways of understanding and classifying sin. In this session, we will look at individual sin, corporate sin and historical sin.

**Individual sin** is any sin that we commit as an individual person. It is an act—or lack of action—that hurts or neglects others or ourselves. This hurt can be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Physically hitting someone is a straightforward example of individual sin, as is child neglect or using religion/religious language to manipulate or exploit someone.

**Corporate sin** is any sin that we commit as a community, society, institution, nation or group. As Jeremiah calls upon Jerusalem in Lamentations 3:40-42, “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord… We have sinned and rebelled.” Jeremiah calls on the city and society of Jerusalem to repent, not just individuals.

Corporate sin supports injustice, violence and/or oppression by directly oppressing, committing acts of violence, or violating people’s rights, but can also sin by turning a blind eye, condoning, or even encouraging others to commit these acts. It includes not just our intentional efforts to harm others, but the ways our collective way of life falls short of the dream of God. This can include the normalization of hurtful attitudes and acts of violence, such as the objectification of women in media or the belief that it is permissible to beat a child. It can also include a lack of response to racism, or the covering up of violence such as a church cover-up of child abuse.

**Historical sin** is sin that was committed in the past for which we have not repented. This includes injustice, violence and oppression which still affects the victims or their descendants today by contributing to present-day corporate sin, disadvantaging individuals or specific populations, or keeping historically marginalized populations in the margins. Even if the sin is no longer actually occurring, until there is a process of forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation and reparation, sin can continue to affect the affected party. Examples of this include slavery, segregation, the genocide of Native Americans, etc.
Galtung’s Triangle of Violence (optional)

“Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.”

–Johan Galtung

“Violence is here defined as the cause of the difference... between what could have been and what is. Thus, if a person died from tuberculosis in the eighteenth century it would be hard to conceive of this as violence since it might have been quite unavoidable, but if he dies from it today, despite all the medical resources in the world, then violence is present according to our definition.”

–Johan Galtung

The triangle of violence is a model developed by sociologist Johan Galtung to understand the different types of violence we face. Galtung proposes that violence is more than just harm from one person to another (direct violence), but includes the structures of unjust and discriminatory institutions (structural violence) and the violent and discriminatory attitudes that justify direct and structural violence (cultural violence).

To Galtung, violence is anything which prevents people from reaching their potential. This includes physical violence, which prevents people from enjoying security and health, but it also includes systemic discrimination and social prejudice against certain groups.

**Johan Galtung’s Triangle of Violence**

**Direct Violence** involves the use of physical force, like killing or torture, rape and sexual assault, and beatings. It can also include verbal or psychological abuse. What makes it *direct* is that there is a clear victim and victimizer. It is easy to identify who is at fault and who suffers because of this violence.

“We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct... these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons as actors.”

–Johan Galtung
Structural Violence is the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and access to goods, resources, and opportunities in favor of certain groups, classes, genders, nationalities, and/or races. This unequal advantage is built into the very social, political, and economic systems that govern societies, states, and the world. It is structural because we cannot point to one individual or small group who is responsible for this violence, but must reflect on the overall structural context. For this reason, Galtung labels this violence as “invisible.” Extreme examples include Segregation in the United States and Apartheid in South Africa, where certain groups were explicitly and legally disenfranchised and marginalized. More subtle examples include discriminatory mandatory minimum sentencing laws (e.g. the mandatory minimum sentence for crack cocaine [a drug more likely to be used by the poor] is longer than that of powder cocaine [a drug more likely to be used by the rich]) which affect the poor and people of color more than the wealthy and white.

“We shall refer to the type of violence where there is no such actor as structural or indirect. There may not be any person who directly harms another in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.”

- Johan Galtung

Cultural Violence is constituted by violence through hate, fear, and suspicion. It is reflected in our attitudes and assumptions about one another and about the world. It can be expressed through cultural institutions like religion, ideology, and even science, when it assumes a fundamentalist nature. Examples of cultural violence include racism, sexism, classism, ableism, adultism, etc. It is difficult to see and identify cultural violence because it is so pervasive that it feels natural to us, and because it can be difficult to identify one responsible party. Thus, it is also categorized as “invisible.”

“By ‘cultural violence’ we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence . . . that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.”

-Johan Galtung

All three kinds of violence are interrelated, and affect one another. Cultural violence justifies discriminatory structures. These discriminatory structures enable and condone direct violence. Direct violence reinforces our ideas about inferiority in the minds of victims and victimizers.

Because they are so interwoven, it can be difficult to address violence. However, understanding the different types of violence can help us generate holistic responses to violence which take into account the variety of ways that violence is expressed.
Violence Prevention

The prevention spectrum

Primary Prevention: Primary prevention aims to prevent violence before it ever occurs. This is done by making potential victims less likely to be the victims of violence, and by preventing potential victimizers from committing acts of violence. Preventing systems of vulnerability, bringing people out of difficult situations where they may feel forced to commit acts of violence and limiting the ability of individuals to cause harm help to prevent an act of violence in the first place. Examples could include providing regular health screenings, creating jobs to provide desperate individuals with meaningful work and income, and/or closing gun sales loopholes to prevent violent individuals from purchasing firearms. Ideally, we could prevent all violence and avoid harm coming to anyone, but that is unfortunately not the reality. As such, we must also develop strategies for addressing violence when it occurs.

Secondary Prevention: Secondary prevention aims to reduce the impact of violence that has already occurred. This means working with victims of violence to escape a violent situation or manage their injury, as well as working with victimizers to prevent them from continuing to harm the victims of violence. Examples include healthcare to mitigate the effects of an illness, or revoking someone’s driving privilege after an incident of drunk driving.

Tertiary Prevention: Tertiary prevention responds to violence that has already occurred and attempts to minimize the lasting damage and prevent future perpetration and victimization. It does this by working with victims to live with the effects of
violence, receive reparations for the violence committed and creating an environment which is less likely to put them in a situation of vulnerability. When addressing the victimizers, tertiary prevention works to prevent victimizers from committing further acts of violence by providing alternatives and addressing the root causes of their desire to victimize. Examples include rehabilitation programs in prisons and building strong communities to receive and support the victims of violence.

**Resist, Repent and Return**

So how does this understanding of violence and violence prevention give us tools to resist evil and repent of sin?

**Resisting evil** before committing a grave sin is preferable for obvious reasons; it prevents harm from being done in the first place. Relationship is never broken, and we do not need to help fix a broken situation. However, resisting sin need not happen alone. In community, we can work together to hold one another accountable, and engage in strategies of Primary Prevention to avoid committing sins that harm others altogether.

**Repentance** is an act taken after which we sin in which we recognize the sin and make a commitment to stop sinning. When we repent, we must first name the sin we have committed and acknowledge the act as sinful. If we refuse to admit that we have fallen short or committed a sin, we cannot begin the healing process. Using Galtung’s theories of violence helps us to recognize the sin which usually remains “invisible” such as corporate or historical sin. Just as with Secondary Prevention, we cannot undo the harm we have done, but in repenting, we can acknowledge how we have fallen short and work to minimize the damage done.

**Returning to our Creator**, or walking with our Creator, means living in accordance to Jesus’ teachings about love. When we return to our Creator, we change the way we live, and reaffirm our commitment to not only resist evil, but to do good in the world. By applying strategies of Tertiary Prevention, we can develop concrete plans to prevent harm in the future by working to prevent ourselves and our institutions from repeating the sins of the past. Returning to the Creator also includes a renewed commitment not just to refrain from sin, but actively take steps to lift up others, especially those who have suffered because of the corporate or historical sin of our institutions.

When we do return, we are welcomed, forgiven and restored to dignity, just as Jesus treated sinners who repent and turn to him. Jesus’s attitude toward sinners is one of acceptance, forgiveness, and restoration. This is not just a one-time action. It is a practice that we engage in time and time again. These are like spiritual muscles which we train by practicing again and again, eventually getting better the more we do it. We do this both as individuals and as communities.
Addressing Corporate and Historical Sin

It is often easier to identify and respond to individual sin just as it is easier to identify and respond to direct violence. Repentance in this case is an individual act over which we have control, and it is easy to identify the sin and the sinner. Corporate and Historical sin, however, are much more difficult to uncover and address.

We can continue to learn more about and resist corporate and historical sin, but because of the extent, it can be difficult and even impossible to identify all the ways our society, church, country, city, etc. have sinned. Just as it is much easier to identify direct violence which has one victimizer and a clear relationship between the victimizer and the victim, it is easier to identify personal sin in ourselves and others. It is similarly much harder to identify corporate and historical sin because they often take the form of structural and cultural violence; they seem normal to us, and there is no clear “responsible party.”

Being in relationship with those harmed by corporate or historical sin, is one way to learn about the effect of such sins, and may offer opportunities for repentance in the context of that relationship.

Public corporate declarations of repentance are also possible in public letters, ceremonies, liturgies of lament, or collective prayers. In these cases, entire institutions engage in the process of repenting and returning to the Creator, acknowledging sin and committing to walk with Jesus and abandon their sinful ways. Examples include:

- Services on the anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, take place in El Salvador, and in many churches in the United States.
- “Liturgy of Listening” to lament sexual harassment in the church, 2018 General Convention of The Episcopal Church
- A delegation of several hundred Episcopal Clergy officially apologized for and lamented the church’s role in the genocide of Native Americans and the seizing of their land, in front of representatives of over 200 tribes, and ceremonially burned a copy of the “Doctrine of Discovery” - Standing Rock, 2016
Spotlight Congregation: Prism Prison Ministry

Prism is a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles engaged in prison reform, abolition of the death penalty and spiritual for the incarcerated community in L.A. County Jails.

Background

“Prism advocates for positive change in the system of mass incarceration and we are committed to bringing a voice to the struggle of the marginalized in our society. Guided by our baptismal vows to seek and serve Christ in all persons, we strive for justice and peace among all people and promote the respect and dignity of every human being.”

-Prism Website

Videos

Interview with Prism leaders: https://youtu.be/F07-3Ojo92U

Questions

1. How does this ministry incorporate human rights into their work?
2. What kinds of sin can we identify in the example? What kinds of violence?
3. What kinds of violence-prevention can we identify in the example?
4. Who are the rights-holders in this example? Who are the duty-bearers?
5. How does this ministry connect this baptismal promise with their work?

Journal Reflection

Take a time of personal reflection, allowing participants to gather their thoughts by journaling, note taking, or thinking.

Prompt

1. What key ideas influenced me?
2. Where do I see these ideas in my own life?

Final Group Discussion Questions

Continue in group discussion with the following questions:

1. How do we understand the connection between Scripture, human rights, and the decision to Turn?
2. How do we understand the relationship between sin and violence?
3. How do we understand the relationship between repentance and return and violence prevention?
4. How can we apply this in our lives?
5. How can we transform our mission and ministry as a community of faith using these concepts?
Additional Information
If your participants want to learn more, check out the following resources:

Additional Video
PBS special on Prism Prison Ministry: https://player.pbs.org/viralplayer/1523616466/

Additional Bible Verses
Hosea 12:6
But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.