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**Why Peace and Justice Education is Important in Places of Worship:  
An Introduction and Curriculum Proposal to Peace and Justice Education in  
Companion to the Sermon on the Mount**

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**Introduction: Why Peace and Justice Education is Important in Places of  
Worship<sup>1</sup>**

For a few years now, I have worked as an Outreach Director for a church located within the community of Five Points Toledo. It is an area that is made of diverse people, incomes, and has really taken a hit since the 2008 economic crisis. The church I work for has occupied the same building for 100 years, and still looks the same. They come every week and participate in the service that has changed very little, then they leave and most of them drive back to the suburbs they came from (myself included). While they want to engage actively with their surrounding community, they have no resources or points of contact. That is the genesis of this

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted the following was written before the mass shootings and Supreme Court abortion rights leak that occurred in the United States in May 2022. This is not the final curriculum, and work is already underway to provide a section covering how being pro-birth does not mean one is pro-life. And that Christians who support things such as the death penalty, war, caps on welfare, forced births, etc. should question whether or not they are in fact “pro-life”.

piece of work. The purpose of this curriculum is to engage people who want to incorporate issues of justice and peace into their practicing faith that have no way into the conversation, or how to even start helping or learning that come from a religious background that are saying they're called to do so. This paper is meant to be the starting point of a curriculum that should help those with no formal experience in peace and justice education to move forward in a world where they can bring light and knowledge to places that do not have it.

In considering the importance that peace and justice education has in our society, it would stand to reason that, outside of academic and higher education settings, houses of worship and religion ought to be a voice teaching people in their settings the importance of peace and justice. Having been in ministry for a cumulative decade in various denominations, and now serving as an outreach director for the past few years, I have been surprised to see this is not at the forefront of most evangelical church agendas. Given the tumult and general political unrest over the past six years, and how the majority of American evangelicals have adopted political views that run counter to their professed beliefs. It is with this in mind that I have decided to put together a six-part curriculum for evangelicals, specifically white cis hetero evangelicals, who are interested in learning more about peace, justice, and how they can fight against systems of oppression that they themselves (passively and actively) have upheld and benefited from.

This six-part curriculum is going to be based on the Sermon on the Mount as found in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5 – 7 of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Christian Bible. By basing the curriculum on the most famous sermon of Jesus, and widely accepted teaching in general, there is a universality that most evangelicals can accept. Using parts of the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament) as primary text (which talk at a greater length the need for justice), it may be easier to dismiss as most American evangelicals are taught passively or actively that all the Hebrew Bible is used for affirming Jesus as the Messiah and has no real bearing on today.

The curriculum should or can be taught over a series of at least six weeks, and by centering each week on a different passage of the Sermon on the Mount, there are specific readings from various authors of peace education that correspond with that passage. Understanding how peace and justice impact our world through our actions is critical to belonging to the Christian faith. Both the Old and New Testaments are peppered with verses, teachings, and stories about how peace and justice should influence our lived faith. Most famously, this is seen through Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout this course, we are going to be focusing on specific verses that highlight some of these while diving into the

writings of Betty Reardon, John Rawls, Daniel Buttry, some of the works from the Black Panthers, and a few others. Specifically using Reardon's works, and her approach to global citizenship and the importance of thinking globally and acting locally as the backbone of this curriculum (Reardon 2021; Reardon, B. A. & Snauwaert D. T., 2015). The goal by the end of this course is for those who have walked through these classes to be able to articulate not only the importance of peace and justice education within their faith, but also the importance of it as members of our shared society.

### **Part One: Salt and Light**

**Learning Outcomes:** The students should start to understand that not only does life exist outside of their personal context, but that they can play an active part in not only modeling peace and justice to others and engage in conversations to teach others the importance of peace and justice education. Knowing that by first modeling the knowledge one has on the subject, a community in which peace and justice conversations/education happens can be more attainable.

**Approach:** The section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus discusses shining light in front of others paired with Betty Reardon's concept of global citizenship should give the learner a tangible grasp on how to approach global citizenship. By becoming empowered to love out the education, and beliefs tied into one action provides grounding for learners to go out and do likewise.

*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:13 – 16 (NRSV)*

Within Evangelical Christianity, it is common for preachers, pastors, elders, and followers to bring about the importance of emulating the character and personhood of Jesus. This is usually described as found in the Sermon on the Mount, because the teachings and anecdotes that Jesus describes in that section are the most attainable (on the surface). It is easy to draw a line to how the teaching of Jesus can be translated to one's life in a way that the parables he gives out cannot. Also in those churches, it is not uncommon for the language to be that the Church (as in the global church) should be the leaders in peacemaking and issues of justice. Unfortunately, what is left out of those conversations are concrete ways to learn

about peace, justice, or anything resembling those two that are found outside of the Bible.

While Christians are quick to point out that they are called to be peacemakers, as stated in the Sermon on the Mount, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God*” Matthew 5:9 (NRSV), but there are not a lot of great examples of this that are lifted up regularly, especially when considering why this teaching of peace and justice education is important. Most of those who fought for these issues (MLK, John Lewis, Dorothy Day to name a few) are not only activists but also seem to be raised on pedestals to where their works cannot be replicated and so it is almost feeble for others to attempt the same. This is why the education of peace and justice within Christian settings is so crucial. So, when those in the Christian tradition are untouchable, those within the tradition must reach outside to show how fighting and working for peace and justice are attainable. After all, fighting for those two issues are, in theory, key to the Christian faith, so examples of people working within that sphere of education should be sought by any means necessary. It is with that mentality that we look at our first example of someone doing the work is none other than Betty A. Reardon.

In looking at the passage from the Sermon on the Mount from the beginning of this section, it not only is important to stress the teachings of Jesus and emulation of his example within a Christian setting but look to others who do the same, regardless of faith. Betty A. Reardon is our first example of this type of life. Reardon has spent her lifetime not only calling for peace among nations but educating others about the importance of learning from peacemakers. Reardon promotes the importance of working within the mentality of acting as a global citizen. While each person works from their own context, it is important to remember that social structures, contexts, and experiences are not static. The experiences of someone who grew up in Beverly Hills, California is not the same as someone who grew up in Ocala, Florida. However, there are universal systems in place that are oppressive to those that do not fit the social and societal norms regardless of geography. To be the salt of the earth means to ensure that the flavor everyone brings to each situation is noticed and welcomed. Hence why we ought to shine our light in our communities to those on the outsides. While democracy may not act in favor of everyone at all times, we must take up a stance in which it can.

*Social systems, to maintain viability and vigor, must nurture human variety of all kinds. In ethnically homogeneous societies, this variety may be said to be adequate if various individual capacities and talents and other forms of human diversity and viewpoints are nurtured. In ethnically (and, we*

*might also argue, ideologically) mixed societies, the varieties of cultures and modes of thought must also be intentionally cultivated. Such conditions are essential to our notion of democracy that derives from the belief that the broader and more varied the human resource base, the more successful a society is likely to be. Above all, a successful democracy encourages full and responsible participation of all citizens. (Reardon and Snauwaert, 2015, p. 135)*

To start thinking as a global citizen means to start at home, ensuring those in our neighborhoods are receiving the full support of the social systems and structures at hand. When Christian practice was still in its infancy, it became famous for caring for the orphans, the widows, the foreigner, and the sick. In being the type of person who does not hide their light under a basket, Christians are called to be on the front lines demanding this type of justice. Thinking as a global citizen has never been hard for Christians when it comes to recognizing that we are a part of a global religion. Often, we speak of the church in the capital “C” form, meaning the Church as a whole. Only when some action is expected of us do we run and hide behind the image of Jesus and turn our once very physical religion into one that only consists of ethics, morality, and spirituality.

Thinking about and acting as a global citizen is foundational to the structure of this curriculum. To be a global citizen, and a part of a global religion means to care about the human rights issues at home and away. As Reardon (1989) writes in *Comprehensive Peace Education*:

*Peace as a network of humane relationships based on equity, mutuality, and the inherent worth of all persons might be interpreted as the manifestation of global justice. This concept of peace means to be the one that is the most characteristic of multicultural approaches to peace education that seek to develop appreciation of cultural differences and recognition of human dignity as the essential basis for human relations-interpersonal, social, and structural. It is, as well, the value base that informs human rights education (p. 30).*

To see this in action is a wonderful thing that can be done locally, and has. We have the tools and talents to do so, we just need to approach this as students, and humbly ask to learn. As Rev. Daniel Buttry, who has spent his life working in peacemaking missions at home and abroad writes in his book, *Peace Ministry a Handbook for Local Churches*:

*The local congregation is a particular manifestation of the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:27), so it is appropriate for the local congregation to be a locus for peacemaking ministry. As a gathered community of believers, the local church can give flesh to the work of Christ through its witness and action for peace. Peacemaking is not to be surrendered to the realm of politicians, diplomats, and activists; it is to be embraced as a component of the mission of the local church too (Buttry, 1995, p. 6-7).*

The choice has always been ours as to whether or not we wanted to be the salt and light. Christianity, at its best, is fighting for those who even oppose the beliefs, because we believe that peace and justice ought to rule. In some ways, it starts with us.

### **Learning Questions:**

1. What does it mean to be a global citizen according to Reardon?
2. What does it mean for you to be a global citizen?
3. What is similar, and what is different according to yours and Reardon's definitions?
4. Would you consider Jesus and his ministry to be globally minded?
5. How do you envision your community engaging and teaching what it means to be a global citizen?

### **Part Two: Violence, Prison, and Reconciliation**

**Learning Outcomes:** For learners to realize that an essential part of peace and justice education and living is to call out structures and systems of violence. Injustice is present in every community with a jail or prison. Learners should be able to articulate why it is important to care about prisoners and that they should be contacting local representatives for more humane treatment of fellow image bearers of God.

**Approach:** The majority of evangelical Christians in twenty-first century America are not always so quick to reach out to prisoners or argue that prison reform is a Christian principle. In looking at the section of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus teaches directly on violence, prison, and reconciliation, it provides a thorough line tied directly to modern issues within every community. The Church is supposed to be the place where reconciliation thrives and is alive, so in keeping in mind Reardon's global citizen approach we start to tie in other writings of hers, and Amy Levad (2014) we able to get learners to start thinking about how they can approach this leviathan in tangible ways.

*You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:21 – 26 (NRSV)*

As we learned in the previous section, there is an importance to calling out injustices where and when we see them. To be a Christian means to understand we may not always be correct in our deeds and actions. But we also know that no matter how far down the alleyway we go on that, there is always a point where we can turn around. There are so many stories of people finding faith behind bars, and while their actions may have been forgiven by God, there is still societal atonement to complete.

The passage from the Sermon on the Mount this section focuses on, Jesus speaks to those committing acts of violence, whether physical or not. Murder, emotional abuse, sexual assault or harassment, and many things in between, can be argued, fall into this category of the sermon. While the United States no longer has a debtor's prison (in theory) the imagery can still be used today. There is a price to pay for every action. Questions to ask: "if Christians are to fight for justice and peace, what does this have to do with the legal system? Isn't that justice in action within our democracy?" But while not everyone is a lawyer, there are simple things we can do in order to dismantle systems of violence that are within our systems that are supposed to achieve justice.

In March of 2022 a Scottish court refused to extradite an American citizen who had shot and killed a security guard before fleeing the United States. The man was arrested in Scotland, and the judge in his case, "*decided that poor conditions in Texas prisons might constitute an international human rights violation*" (Blakinger, 2022). There are so many calls to care for prisoners within the Christian Bible, but it becomes difficult to care for those where institutions have been built up to do the job for us. But we do not have to go far to find how awful these conditions are in many states (especially those who support the death penalty).

In using what was learned in the last section, we can call upon our knowledge of being the salt and light of the earth, and letting our lights shine for caring for those who are incarcerated. To be a global citizen/Christian, means to engage in this education and call for accountability.

*Peace educators who teach so as to cultivate the values of civility and reason and the capacity of reasoning see these values and this capacity as basic to education for reconstructive practice of global citizenship; to preparation for participation in global as well as national politics of change. Peace education's commitment to change toward reducing violence and vulnerability through dialogic critical analysis of political and social structures and relationships distinguish it from standard citizenship education (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015, p. 158).*

We tend not to think of prisoners as “the vulnerable”, but they are, and it is our job to call out for better treatment of them. As Amy Levad (2014) puts it in her book, *Redeeming a Prison Society: A liturgical and Sacramental Response to Mass Incarceration*, we may always need prisons. However:

*. . .our use of prisons could be reformed to minimize the harm they cause both to the imprisoned and to those of us who are ultimately harmed by the loss of full relationship with all of our neighbors. Sacramental and liturgical ethics call upon Catholics and other Christians to advocate for reform of our prisons. In all penal practice of our prisons, prisoners must be treated as fully human persons and must be provided with the resources necessary to participate in the dignity, unity, and equality of all people. The ultimate ends of punishment-internal reform and social reintegration-ought to be upheld. While some prisoners may never be capable personally of internal reform, the possibility that they could bring about significant change in their lives must be maintained or else we risk treating them as merely caged animals. The community must strive to provide the guidance and support for prisoners to prepare themselves to return as fully reintegrated members, even if their full integration may never occur (Levad, 2015, p. 138).*

We have all been on both sides of violence, prison, and reconciliation whether it is literal or metaphoric. Reconciliation is something that should always call Christians to action, because it is a physical act. To be reconciled means to be restorative. As Reardon puts it, “If we take seriously the need to change our way of thinking then we have to look toward the reintroduction of qualities and capacities

into the educational pursuit” (Reardon, 2022, p. 55). For Christians that education is to be interwoven in all our teachings, sermons, Bible studies, and classes. The reconciliation of all things is what drives Jesus, and it should drive us too. The start of reconciliation for us sometimes, is calling our elected officials to create better conditions for those we are mandated to care for, by word and deed.

### **Learning Questions:**

1. When you think of prisons, what comes to mind? Pop culture interpretations, or real-life examples?
2. According to Reardon and Snauwaert, what is a commitment that peace education offers to global citizens?
3. Does looking at the injustices that still happen in our own country today bring Jesus’ teachings to life?
4. Levad paints a pretty harsh, but accurate picture, and Christians of all walks have a responsibility to our fellow humans. How does this section from her book make you feel about providing guidance and support to your community on fighting for humane and just conditions for those in jail?
5. What tangible ways do you think reconciliation could play in real life situations?

### **Part Three: Non-Violence in the Face of Violence**

**Learning Outcome:** Understanding that engaging in non-violent acts can be more powerful and radical than violent ones. The learner should be able to articulate the importance of going the extra mile and turning the other cheek, and how it helps promote justice and peace.

**Approach:** In looking at part of the historical context to “going the extra mile” as the basis for good trouble and civil disobedience, paired with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and reengaging in a conversation about reconciliation in a more meaningful way learners should be able to have a firm understanding on non-violent engagement.

*You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. Matthew 5:38 – 42 (NRSV)*

The passage from the Sermon on the Mount we are focusing on in this section is a rather infamous one. In it, Jesus lays down the expectation of physical conflict in the culture and settings of his time. For example, today not many people can force you to walk one mile, and therefore you should go another. The context for this is that Roman soldiers could force anyone who was under Roman rule/subjugation to take their armor and force them to carry it up to one mile. Any further than one mile, and the soldier would get into trouble. It is also argued that this was the model in which Jesus was executed- by not speaking to the charges which ultimately lead to his death. But what does it mean in practice when one is fighting against injustice and trying to teach peace to others? How are we to respond in a way in line with the global mentality of everyone being a part of the same community, and not wanting to cause more violence?

Easter weekend in 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded by Ella Baker in Raleigh North Carolina at Shaw University. SNCC became infamous throughout the Civil Rights era as a group of non-violent protesters led by students of color to fight for equality. They participated in many sit-ins, marches (including Selma), and were incredibly influential. When we talk about peace within Christianity and our local church settings, it can often mean silencing those who are “stepping out of line”. The rationale is that conflict has no home in the church, but that could not be further from the truth. There is a difference between trouble and good trouble as John Lewis, former head of SNCC and United States Congressman liked to say. The Church’s call is getting into all kinds of good trouble.

The Civil Rights movement is a time where some churches in the United States can point to and say, “we were on the right side of history.” It is no breaking news that religion, specifically Christianity is acknowledged as a cause of racist ideals. After all, Cotton Mather is one of the most influential preachers this country produced, and a notorious example of why those ideas were so prevalent. But we know with education comes growth, and with context comes deliverance. To turn the other cheek in the same way that the SNCC protesters did forced those inflicting the harm and violence to look at them as equals (whether they recognized it or not). Refusing to hit back, and in turning your cheek in the time Jesus was preaching this meant having to hit someone with an open palm. It is hard to dehumanize someone with an open palm.

In the case of injustice and a violation of human rights, there must be an absence of physical conflict and more open dialogue.

While there are occasions, I'm sure it can be argued that violence is the only way to stop some people, as members of the Church, that is not our cause or argument to make. We are called to be peacemakers, and peacemakers show up and love people into being, even when others don't recognize the humanity in them. As we move through new spaces and learning, we must look again through the lens of a global community, and not in the way that some of the Christians who attended the violent insurrection at Capitol Hill on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 did. But to practice non-violence and in negotiation means walking alongside and ushering in reconciliation. As we learned in the previous section, reconciliation is more than just a word, it's an action. Reardon goes into depth about the importance of teaching reconciliation, and the impact it can have globally.

*... the capacity for reconciliation must be included in education for conflict resolution. It should, perhaps, be considered both as a culminating phase and the context of conflict resolution. Not just the settlement of disputes, but the true reconciliation of the disputing parties might well be the purpose of transformative conflict resolution processes. The notion of reconciliation and the capacity to reconcile can be integrated into much of what we now teach in world studies, in comparative systems, in the analysis of conflicting ideologies, and the problems of sexism, racism, and colonialism and world community building. Reconciliation is the manifestation of wholeness, relatedness, and integrity. Teaching for the recognition of interconnection is teaching toward reconciliation. (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015, p. 105)*

Reconciliation is a threat to the powers at hand that continue to enforce systems of violence. That is why working with those in our communities and practicing this in front of others in authentic ways help lend to not only the credibility that the Christian church has something to offer, but that this fight is important enough to stand up in the face of violence and can be done without lifting a finger. It is in part of the actions and sit-ins from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and their ever-present reminder about how things could be that the Civil Rights era was such a success. They did not give up in the face of harsh violence, and serious cost to their personal lives. To be a peacemaker means walking the path of reconciliation in a tangible way and remembering that those often-inflicting violence are doing so out of a place of fear. To hold someone accountable to their actions while going the extra mile is not for everyone, but we can all turn our cheeks and hold those doing the slapping accountable.

It cannot be stressed enough that without teaching peace and justice, reconciliation cannot happen, and without those two being tied to accountability for violence, reconciliation is unlikely. This is why people protest the deaths of people

of color at the hands of state sanctioned violence, and it is rare to see protests for those police who are injured or killed at the hands of citizens. Those who kill or injure cops are almost always brought to court and jailed, while those cops that may have unjustly killed people of color are still on the job. No justice, no peace, no reconciliation.

### **Learning Questions:**

1. How does the extra mile backstory change what you learned growing up about it? How does that impact your understanding of peacemaking or justice?
2. Are there ways the non-violent protests can still have an impact in your community in the same way the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee did?
3. Reconciliation is something that is talked about a lot the evangelical Church, or at least should be. Usually, it is taught in conjunction with repentance. Do you think repentance should be a part of the conversation when it comes to non-violent actions?
4. What are the three things Reardon names as hallmarks of reconciliation? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
5. Knowing that peaceful, non-violent protests or actions can make you the target of violence, do you think it is worth engaging in? Why or why not?

### **Part Four Loving Your Neighbor (5:43-48)**

**Learning Outcome:** To continue partnering the concept of being a global citizen with the concept of caring for one's neighbor. The learner should be able to articulate the connection as to why love of neighbor is important as a global citizen and how everyone is our teacher in this way.

**Approach:** Chairman Fred Hampton is not someone who has been welcomed with open arms by most evangelical Christians. They haven't probably heard of him, but also because most of evangelical Christianity has severe issues with racism. In pointing out how groups like the Black Panthers have cared for their neighbors in line with the Sermon on the Mount, this can be contrasted by Christianity systemically supporting racist policies and agendas that keep children hungry. This can show us how there are wonderful people doing the work of Jesus by being a global citizen, while thinking and acting locally within their communities and contexts.

*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43 – 48 (NRSV)*

To love one's neighbor is hands down the easiest thing Christians recite when asked what is important to their religion. Jesus is asked in one account of the gospels what are the two most important commandments, and he sums the Torah up by saying to, love your neighbor as yourself and love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, body, and spirit. If this is such a pillar to being a Christian, then why is it we are often so quick to shut our neighbor and their needs out? After all, we are also called to love our enemies and to pray for those that want to hurt or harm us. Should the love of our neighbor outweigh our political beliefs? After all, as Jesus teaches, rain falls on those who deserve it, and those that do not- does this impact our thoughts and practices? In striving to learn more about how our global citizen mentality works, and seeking out justice and peace matters, how are some examples to love our neighbors?

Not everyone knows of the name Fred Hampton. Hampton was the Deputy Chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, and he was assassinated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation while he slept. Now, not everyone expects the Black Panther Party to be associated with peace, but most who do not could probably fairly comfortably get pulled over by the police and walk away safely from that experience. The Black Panthers were founded due to ongoing police brutality and wanting to protect neighborhoods of color from those issues. As the Panthers gained more in popularity, they also grew by creating programs to help to continue to watch out for their neighbors and community in order to fight oppression. Mary Potorti (2014) points out that the Panthers food program

*...represent[ed] an opportunity to approach food less as a forum of cultural and community expression than as a tool for political mobilization. As a historical case study, the Panther food programs offer several useful angles for classroom interrogation of hunger and emergency food relief specifically, as well as struggles for liberation and movements for social change more broadly. Their message remains relevant today, or as The*

*Black Panther newspaper proclaimed in March 1969, "Hunger is one of the means of oppression and it must be halted." (Potorti, 2014, p. 44)*

A common quote that is credited to Chairman Hampton is, "first you have free breakfasts, then you have free medical care, then you have free bus rides, and soon you have freedom." This signifies not only that the breakfast program was not only a start, but not the means to an end. So often Christians are confused as to how they can care for their neighbors. What occurs is a bunch of people cooking meals that may or may not be needed. Or dropping off toiletry kits to the unhoused. Basically, outreach without a touchpoint, when instead, if we are acting as global citizens, we should be asking our neighbors "what do you need and how can I help?" By listening to those around us, we can find small, tangible ways to achieve justice. What Chairman Hampton was able to accomplish by creating the free breakfast program for the children in his area was incredible.

Most churches that have a free meal to the community are not just attempting to serve some hungry people but are secretly hoping for a meal-to-church attendance pipeline. This is not only an unreasonable expectation but goes against seeking peace and justice. At this point, what is being done in the name of attempting to provide justice has become a transaction with obligations placed (knowingly or unknowingly) on the recipient. This can often lead to resentment on the side of the church because they are in some views doing this to people who should be more grateful. To be a global citizen attempting to learn and teach others peace and justice pedagogy in a Christian setting is to set up a meal that someone may not show up to and be okay with it. After all, in loving your neighbor, you can do the work in finding out what neighbors need and are asking for. Providing that for them at no cost, but out of love and service, and being there every time whether the neighbors show up or not. You cannot force love on someone, but you can be there offering it to them when they are ready to take it.

While I realize some may say that I am offering a romanticized version of the Panthers and their breakfast program, it is important to point out the good they did, and the example that they can still hold in showing up to love their neighbors (and enemies). But this love of neighbor does not just extend to feeding those in need but caring for the very planet that we leave behind. It is recognizing our privilege and what we are able to accomplish easily, but at the risk of the death of our planet. A way that this can be changed, as C.A. Bowers puts it: "*traditions provide the basis of living less commoditized lives--and thus do not contribute to degrading the environment in ways that threaten the health of marginalized groups, including future generations.*" (2003, p. 17)

To be perfect does not mean to do everything right, to be perfect in the time of Jesus meant to follow the Torah in every way. When we abandon the concept of Greek perfection that so often infiltrates Christianity, we recognize that loving our neighbors with practical action is not only attainable but is also in line with living as a global citizen.

### **Learning Questions:**

1. What does it mean for you to love your neighbor in your community?
2. Have you ever listened to what the needs are, or have you assumed what is needed?
3. What do you think it means to be a global citizen while loving your neighbor?
4. Is being a global citizen and acting globally possible? Is it something that can only be done locally?
5. How does the Free Breakfast for Children program reshape your thoughts on loving your neighbor?

### **Part Five Do Not Rush to Judgment (7:1-5)**

**Learning Outcome:** Christians should be able to articulate reasons as to why they should not judge those they do not know. By learning about the Veil of Ignorance, it should open the eyes of those trying to be global citizens within a Christian framework. Upon completion, the learner should have a better understanding as to how they can approach situations without judging first, but instead displaying compassion.

**Approach:** John Rawls's (1971, 1993) work is a great introduction for those who have never experienced looking outside of their privilege and community. It is a low stake attempt to get people to realize there is life outside of their bubble. Christians are also infamous for judging individuals, communities, and other general settings. Pairing that with the section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is very specific about how to handle situations where others would be quick to judge should allow the learner to step outside of themselves and begin to truly love their neighbor.

*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment, you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the*

*log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. Matthew 7:1 – 5 (NRSV)*

“Only God can judge me” is a phrase often heard from Christians, and while it is true, is also incredibly unhelpful. For some reason, Christians think that they not only cannot be judged by other Christians, but for some reason are given full scope to judge those who may or may not be of their faith. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is pretty clear about the standards of judgment. Don't worry about someone else while you need to get your house in order. If your house is in order, then you can worry about what the other person has going on. However, to be a global citizen in peace and justice matters means to be concerned with the realities of life for others. Not in a way to condemn, but to hopefully bring about a just resolution, equity, and equality.

The problem with most Christians and the stance on judging comes from others expecting to think their stuff doesn't stink because of God's unconditional forgiveness. The reality is, life is unfair, and some people are born with golden spoons in hand, while others have to fish a spork out of the garbage. Christians look at their surroundings and are quick to point out why others are failing and offer platitudes about how God is in control. However, in the twentieth century, a philosopher named John Rawls (1971) gave us an exercise that helps break down some of those barriers and forces these Christians (and others) to face their reality to some degree. The exercise is called, *The Veil of Ignorance*, and is described as such:

*A hypothetical state, advanced by the US political philosopher John Rawls, in which decisions about social justice and the allocation of resources would be made fairly, as if by a person who must decide on society's rules and economic structures without knowing what position he or she will occupy in that society. By removing knowledge of status, abilities, and interests, Rawls argued, one could eliminate the usual effects of egotism and personal circumstances on such decisions. Rawls maintained that any society designed on this basis would adhere to two principles: the principle of equal liberty, which gives each person the right to as much freedom as is compatible with the freedom of others, and the maximin principle, which allocates resources so that the benefit of the least advantaged people is maximized as far as possible. Rawls's exposition, and the maximin principle in particular, have proved widely influential in discussions of welfare provision and, especially, the allocation of medical resources (Oxford, 2022).*

In looking at the two principles Rawls describes *equal liberty* and *maximin principle*. Not knowing how you were going to be born into that society, one can assume people will choose the maximin. When it is in the best interest of ourselves, typically humans choose an equal playing ground, it is only after we know the stakes and our place within the culture do we decide to critique systems of violence. But to live and act as a Christian, and by extension a global citizen, means we must always act in a way that promotes the maximin principle. To point at others and say, it is their fault they are in that situation, is not an acceptable response. We know systems exist, like redlining, to keep people of color as second-class citizens in a nation that should be exuding principles of equity and equality. When considering the place of justice in this, it is good for us to look at Rawls's (1971) principles of justice as fairness.

The first of these principles is that “*each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all*”. What does this mean for us, especially in the context of the Sermon on the Mount and judging others? As global citizens we must do our part in thinking globally, acting locally, and being the salt and light to lead by example. As an example, we know there are areas of our society where the police have broken the social contract that is in place to protect all citizens regardless of ethnicity, belief, etc. After all, “the origins of modern-day policing can be traced back to the ‘Slave Patrol’” (NAACP). With this knowledge, when we as citizens see public school budgets being slashed and the police budgets growing obscenely, we can ethically call for a defunding of the police and reallocate those funds to go back where they belong. And at the very least, ensuring that police are not the first in the line of defense for calls that may not require them. In a just democracy, according to Rawls all citizens have a claim to equal basic liberties. An equal basic liberty for Philando Castile was the right to bear arms, and when he informed the cop who pulled him over that he had a gun and was then asked to remove it, he was murdered.

The second principle Rawls points out for justice as fairness is “*social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair and equality of opportunity; they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society*”. The second principle falls into what we have already read with the *Veil of Ignorance*. For us to truly be a just society, we must be taking care of those in need first. This falls in line with the judgment aspect of the Sermon on the Mount. Too often those of us in the church are quick to blame others for their circumstances. This is instead of realizing we and the structures we uphold have failed our fellow siblings who are marginalized because we remain silent in the

ways that would be helpful. The circumstances in which we enter life have a larger grasp around our throats than we realize, and we as Christians often fall under the illusion that it does not, usually because of our privilege.

To live in a way in which we consider the global view, and to live by example, we must again address the human rights component of this. In order to do this, we must also do the inner work of being a student and listening about where to start. To paraphrase Jesus, what comes out of the mouth is an overflow of the heart, and the same can be said of direct action and figuring out where to begin. Dale Snauwaert puts it in his introduction to *Betty A. Reardon A Pioneer in Education for Peace and Human Rights*:

*Moral/ethical reflection addresses questions of justice, and thereby structural and cultural violence, guided by the principles of a human rights framework. Contemplative reflection is conceived as self-examination of internal moral motivation and commitment. It pertains to a reflection on what is meaningful and valuable. It also involves the exercise of imagination to envision alternative realities necessary for transformative action. (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015, p. 14)*

When we are no longer concerned for only ourselves, but the situations of those around us, we judge a person and context in a more just and peaceful way.

### **Learning Questions:**

1. What makes up Rawls' principle of justice as fairness?
2. Do you agree with Rawls on the principles? Why or why not?
3. What is the "veil of ignorance"? How does it make you feel?
4. Do your moral and ethical reflections have a place in looking at justice?
5. Do you think applying the veil of ignorance to the Sermon on the Mount passage of not judging one another should help you love your neighbor? Why or why not?

## Part Six Review

**Learning Outcome:** The learner should be able to articulate the importance of peace and justice education in the lens of the Sermon on the Mount and should understand why being a global citizen is important not only as a Christian, but a way to live as a society.

**Approach:** By reviewing all five previous parts in summary, this review should serve to help the learners consolidate the program into practical application.

The Sermon on the Mount has been used for generations and should continue to be used as the standard to which Jesus sets for our lives. There are ways to live that are found within that text, but more is needed if we are to try and live a life of seeking and teaching peace and justice wherever we go. While people may not have changed fundamentally, the world is slightly more complex than when Jesus walked the earth. There have always been systems of violence that oppress others. Knowing the strength of the people and finding nonviolent ways to bring about change that fall in line with the sermon exist, but also have been expounded upon.

In assessing part one and trying to encapsulate being the salt and light in the world, we must remember that the mentality starts in being a global citizen. Thinking globally but acting locally is the best way to begin a lifelong journey towards being a student of peace and justice issues. The example of Reardon's life is one we could all strive to emulate, whether teaching peace and justice issues, or being vocal and calling out the need for disarmament in an ever-increasing situation. We are so quick as Christians to want to lead by example, that we end up with the wrong people holding the leadership microphone. By sitting and listening to those around us and starting to understand the importance of being a global citizen, the transformation into someone seeking peace and justice in all situations can begin.

We must engage in and create new systems to care for the oppressed and marginalized. Prisoners are people who tend to fall through the cracks in our Christian walks, and often the conditions that they live in are in most need of love, care, and justice. People are not animals, and as we found out from a judge in Scotland, some prisons in our country are inhumane. Reaching out and starting to contact those officials in charge of prisons are an easy way to engage in peace and justice issues locally. When we lock people up and throw away the key, that does not make them any less of an image bearer of God, and it is for the least of us that we must be sure to care for. It is through these actions reconciliation can start to

have a foothold in ours and their lives. To be held accountable for an action, and to be reconciled are two completely different things.

Violence is an ever-present part of life, and if we are lucky or privileged enough, we can avoid it. Standing on the side of peace and justice, learning and teaching, means we would most likely find ourselves facing it. Whether state or civilian, violence finds a way to express itself out of fear and insecurity. This is why we must remember to turn the cheek and go the extra mile. While not all of us are capable of that, we are capable of contacting our representatives to advocate for policies that reflect the change put forth in this curriculum. Not everyone can be Ella Baker and form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on an Easter weekend (probably the most appropriate time for that founding). But what we are able to do is force others to see us as equals and fellow global citizens whether those committing the violence want to admit it or not, knowing reconciliation is the name of the game.

May we be able to love our neighbors in not only a way that would make Fred Rogers happy, but Fred Hampton too. Providing for those who are in need physically, emotionally, or spiritually is part of providing peace and justice. People cannot be active members of society when they are bankrupt in all areas of life. What is important is we listen and provide what is asked for, even if no one shows up. Part of loving our neighbor's means being there ready to give love, peace, and justice at all costs. Even when people are not ready to receive it. Finally, we are not rushing to judgment. In awakening to being a global citizen, we recognize that there are structures of power that must be overcome for a just society to prevail. Rawls provides an exercise and a few glimpses of what those requirements are. In moving and looking at those on the margins that are there due to the brokenness of those structures supported by most Christians, it is upon us to not judge those in those spots. While we are able to move and judge one another when our house is in order, there are others whose houses may never be in order due to those structures. As global citizens a part of a church that believes in the reconciliation of all things and people, it is our duty to come alongside and call for those unjust areas to be righted.

### **Learning Questions:**

1. What does it mean to live as a global citizen?
2. Do you think peace and justice education should be taught in tandem with the Sermon on the Mount?
3. Do you think Jesus had a global citizen mindset?
4. What stood out to you most in this learning?

5. How should you use what you have learned to love your neighbor better?

## Conclusion

Christians of all walks of life can stand to learn more from the studies of peace and justice education. Looking at the Sermon on the Mount as a tangible way to provide a better life for those, Jesus calls Christians to be more- to seek justice and peace at every doorstep and pathway. Jesus calls Christians to a higher standard of living within those chapters in Matthew's gospel that can get lost today in mainstream evangelical churches. But by taking some guiding principles of peace and justice education and teaching them in local congregations, there is hope that they can become guiding lights for those seeking to learn more about building the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

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