



VOICES FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA
AN EDUCATIONAL PACKET ON COLOMBIA'S CRISIS
PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

This guide is designed as a four-part study on Colombia. It is intended for use in small- to medium-sized groups with materials for spiritual reflection, learning, and discussion.

All materials that are needed for the sessions are included in this packet. They are identified in boxes that appear at the beginning of each session.

For additional copies of this packet and for up-to-date information on Colombia, visit Lutheran World Relief's website at **www.lwr.org**.

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SESSION 1: LIGHT A CANDLE FOR COLOMBIA

Opening prayer

L: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

L: Let us pray. We gather today to pray for the people of Colombia, in the midst of the darkness of their internal strife. We light this candle to break the darkness; and as we pray, discuss, learn, and listen together we look to God's word to break the silence brought by distance, ignorance, and denial. Where one people suffer, we all suffer; where one people rejoice, we all rejoice.

All: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Discuss: Where do we get our information about Colombia today? Are some sources of information more reliable than others? Which would be more reliable? Which less reliable? Whose voices are being heard? Whose voices are not being heard?

Read and discuss: "Colombia: Overview" and "Overview of the Colombian Economy" (Handouts 1A and 1B). Share with the group anything you learned that you didn't know before or that perhaps surprised you. How would you compare the amount of money generated by oil and the amount generated by drugs in Colombia? How much of these amounts stay in the country and how much leave?

Read and discuss: "Response of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (ELCC) to the Ongoing Crisis of Colombia" (1C). What are some of the concerns and problems that the ELCC identifies in their country? How do they define the role of their church in relationship to these problems? Talk about what it would be like to be living in a community/church where both guerillas and members of the paramilitary were your neighbors/fellow parishioners. What is the voice of advocacy that the ELCC raises in the "institutional statement" section? What are they asking of us in the document?

Read and discuss: "LWR Op-Ed on Colombia" (1D). LWR President, Kathryn Wolford, says that U.S. government policies and aid is contributing to the violence in Colombia. What specific examples does she cite? She also calls for a new U.S. policy toward Colombia. What would this new policy look like?

RESOURCES:

"Colombia: Country Overview" (1A)

"Overview of the Colombian Economy" (1B)

Statement by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia (1C)

LWR Op-Ed on Colombia by Kathryn Wolford (1D)

"Plan Colombia' and the 'Andean Counterdrug Initiative'" (1E)

Read and discuss: “ ‘Plan Colombia’ and the ‘Andean Counterdrug Initiative’ ” (1E). Where does most of the money in “Plan Colombia” go? Why is some of that money designated for six border countries? What percent of the money is designated for peace? What percent for other human development needs?

Closing prayer

L: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

L: Let us pray...

All: We gather, in God’s presence and by God’s grace, to pray for the people of Colombia. For more than fifty years Colombia has been embroiled in war, exacerbated in recent years by millions of dollars earned from drug trafficking, paramilitary lawlessness, and guerrilla warfare. The people of Colombia are tired of war and violence, and they cry out for peace. Millions of children, men and women, young and old, march for peace, pray for peace, work for peace . . . yet peace does not come. Let us open our hearts and minds together in silent reflection, asking for God’s power and intervention for peace for the Colombian people. Amen.

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SESSION 2: THE EFFECTS OF THE DRUG WAR IN COLOMBIA—DISPLACED, CHILD SOLDIERS,
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Opening prayer

L: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

L: Let us pray.

All: God of history, God of peace, God who hears the cry of the poor and the afflicted – be with us now as learn about the pain of our brothers and sisters in Colombia as they struggle everyday with war and war’s devastating consequences. Show us ways to express our compassion and love for your children. Amen.

Read and discuss: “The Plight of the Displaced in Colombia” (2A). The displaced in Colombia are primarily from small villages and rural areas. Why would this be? What particular problems would these people have when they find refuge in large urban areas? Who should be held responsible for meeting the short and long-term needs of the displaced?

Read and discuss: “Child Soldiers” (2B). What forces push children into becoming soldiers? What can be done to counter these forces? What are the unique challenges to rehabilitation of child soldiers?

Read and Discuss: “Human Rights Violations” (2C). List the human rights violations that are common in Colombia. What is the faith community doing to support the rule of law and protect human rights in Colombia? What else can it do?

RESOURCES:

“The Plight of the Displaced” (2A)

“Child Soldiers” (2B)

Human Rights (2C)

Closing Prayer

L: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

L: Let us pray.

Women: *For the children, who grow up knowing only a climate of war and violence, we pray that as your child, Jesus, came as the Prince of Peace, and in his adult life denounced violence and hatred, let us pray that soon this climate of fear, horror, death and destruction may soon pass, so that they might enjoy life in all its fullness. Lord in your mercy.*

All: *Hear our prayer.*

Men: *Particularly for the child soldier and the young draftees, male and female, we pray that those who conscript them will cease the abuse of their young bodies and minds for purposes of war, using drugs to make them behave more violently, and brain-washing methods to distort their understanding of themselves and others. Lord in your mercy.*

All: *Hear our prayer.*

All: *For the mothers and fathers of children forced into war, victims of so much violence; we pray that families may be reunited to rebuild dreams and unity within communities, to rebuild homes, and to rest assured that war will be no more. We hear the cries of the mothers and fathers, grandparents, sisters and brothers, for the children lost to war, drugs, despair, hopelessness, and for those who flee the country in search of opportunities and peace of mind not possible in a country at war. Lord in your mercy,*

L: Hear our prayer.

L: For the millions of people displaced in Colombia by the war, we cry out. We pray for those whose homes and villages have been and even today are being destroyed by guerrilla forces, paramilitary and military armies. We pray for those families and communities who are intimidated by all sides, and often forced to collaborate with one side or another, making them vulnerable to allegations of collaboration with the enemy.

We pray for those who have been driven out and are now being forced from their land where they have eked out livings, adding to the growing populations of the unemployed and underemployed in urban areas which further tear them apart socially and productively. For these uprooted, the marginalized, the homeless, the excluded, let us pray.

All: *Hear our prayer.*

L: All these and other concerns of our hearts today we bring before you, O God, who asks us to place our trust in you.

All: *Amen.*

VOICES FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA
AN EDUCATIONAL PACKET ON COLOMBIA'S CRISIS
SESSION 3: THE EFFECTS OF THE DRUG WAR IN COLOMBIA AND THE UNITED STATES—U.S.
INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY, AERIAL FUMIGATION, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Opening Prayer

L: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

L: Let us pray. We give thanks today for those visionaries among us who dream dreams and see new visions and new possibilities. For those who do not despair, but inspired and empowered by their faith become peace-makers, bringing healing and hope to broken hearts, broken lives, broken communities and broken institutions. We give thanks also for Jesus, the peace maker, who came and lived among us. And we give thanks for your Spirit who empowers and emboldens us to become peacemakers in our time and in our place.

All: Amen.

Discuss: In groups of 2-3: Many of our associations with Colombia (in the first session) were around drugs. Have drugs affected your life or the lives of anyone you know? How does the war on drugs here impact our policy in Colombia? Is this an adequate solution?

On the whole, what are some of the ways that drugs have affected us personally? How are drugs affecting our community?

Read and discuss: “U.S. International Drug Control Policy” (3A). This article argues that our international drug policy is focused on “supply-side” logic. That is, if we can reduce the supply of illicit drugs then the cost will increase to the extent that eventually drug use will be discouraged. Do you agree that this would happen? Why or why not?

This article also argues that U.S. policy fails to address the root problems of drug cultivation—poverty and economic inequality in the region. Do you agree with this view or not? In the last ten years the U.S. budget for international anti-drug programs has more than tripled while over the same period development assistance has been cut by two-thirds. If you could be in charge of the budget how would you choose to spend money to reduce drug use in this country?

Read and discuss: “Human and Environmental Degradation” (3B). Do you agree with Archbishop Jaramillo of Colombia that the solution of coca cultivation is not fumigation? What does he believe is needed to reduce the cultivation of drugs in Colombia?

RESOURCES:

“Introduction to U.S. International Drug Control Policy” (3A)

“Human and Environmental Degradation” (3B)

“Report: Visit of the governors of Putumayo, Tolima, Cauca, and Nariño” (3C)

“Resolution of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.” (3D)

“How to contact your representatives” (3E)

Read and discuss: “Report on the Visit of Four Colombian Governors to the U.S.” (3C). When these governors visited the U.S. in March, 2001 they strongly emphasized their firm commitment to ending illicit crop cultivation. However, they said that forced fumigation was not only ineffective but also a harmful way of dealing with the problem. Why did they say this?

Read and Discuss: “Resolution of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA”(3D). This resolution by the NCCC, like the article on U.S. International Drug Control Policy, addresses the shortcomings of our country’s war on drugs. It affirms the need to eliminate drug production and trafficking. And it also (in the “resolved” section) encourages its members to advocate with the U.S. Administration and Congress for a wide range of policies and programs that would address profound economic inequalities. Are these suggestions on target or off base?

Closing Prayer

L: Let us pray. We pray for those many people throughout the world who are addicted to drugs and whose addiction fuels the fires of violence in places far removed from their realities. Bring healing and new hope to them and their families. Lord in your mercy.

*All: **Hear our prayer.***

L: We pray for those recreational users of drugs that see no connection to the killings, kidnappings, torture, poverty, hunger and displacement of men, women, and children in Colombia. Bring a new sense of awareness and meaning to their lives. Lord in your mercy.

*All: **Hear our prayer.***

L: We pray for those policy makers who are content to find easy answers and who are unwilling to look at the more difficult issues of poverty and injustice. Give them new eyes to see and new hearts to understand. Lord in your mercy.

*All: **Hear our prayer.***

L: We pray for those farmers in Colombia who this week have lost their crops of vegetables and who no longer have food for their animals to eat and who have no source of income now to provide for their families because of aerial fumigation. As they consider leaving their homes to join the countless numbers of internally displaced help them to find shelter, food, and health care at the hands of caring individuals and communities. Lord in your mercy.

*All: **Hear our prayer.***

L: These and all other concerns of our hearts we commend to you, oh God of judgment and mercy.

*All: **Amen.***

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SESSION 4: RESPONDING TO THE CRY—WHAT CAN WE DO?

Opening Prayer

L: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

L: Let us pray. Today we remember the churches of Colombia and their leaders. We pray to God that they may continue to find strength and hope amidst so much despair. Thank you God for their courage, patience, wisdom, and unfailing love for you and all people as they hold up the light of hope and life in the midst of darkness.

All: Amen.

Read and discuss: “A Mennonite Vision for Peace in Colombia” (4A). The Anabaptist community in Colombia proposes that churches become “Sanctuaries of Peace.” What do you think of this proposal? Does it have possibilities? How would it contribute to the peace process?

Read and take action: “Ten Questions for Colombia Policy” (4B). The next time your representative in Congress has a town meeting, is speaking somewhere in your district, or meeting with you at your request ask her/him some of these questions.

Take action: Write letters to policymakers, write letters to the editor of local papers, write guest editorials, advocate whenever and wherever possible on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Colombia and the Andean region. (See 3E, 4C, 4D).

RESOURCES:

“A Mennonite Vision for Peace in Colombia” (4A)

“Ten Questions for Colombia Policy” (4B)

“How to write your representatives” (4C)

“How to write effective letters to the editor” (4D)

Description of LWR projects in Colombia (4E)

“Biblical passages relating to social justice” (4F)

Closing Prayer

L: Let us pray. We continue to lift up our prayers today for human rights workers, journalists, health care workers, humanitarian aid workers, and for all those who in countless ways seek to right the wrongs, heal the wounded and sick, speak the truth, minimize the violence, and protect the vulnerable. We give you thanks, and ask that you would protect them from all harm and danger. Lord in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

L: For the Colombian and international peacemakers and negotiators seeking the ways of peace and the management of conflict. We pray that they may be given wisdom, patience, and courage for their tasks. Only those who make war can make peace. Open the hearts and minds of those who now see each other as enemies, and lead them to sincere negotiations in good faith and a spirit of justice, for the good of all. Lord in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

L: For the nations of the world, we ask your guidance, that they may accompany the Colombian people with compassion and wisdom. Convince us all to turn our swords into plowshares, and to wage war no more. Lord in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

L: the prayers of the people are invited...

L: These and all other concerns of our hearts we commend to you, oh God of the nations. Bring us all to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly in your ways, through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.