

TALKING COLOMBIA:



A TEACH-IN STYLE EDUCATIONAL FORUM ON THE CRISIS IN COLOMBIA

Colombia is best known for its coffee industry and its role in the U.S. war on drugs. Less often discussed by the media and public leaders is how U.S. funds are helping to escalate Colombia's violent civil conflict. The violence of Colombia's war most often victimizes innocent Colombians. *Talking Colombia* is an important and engaging opportunity for people who have a vague idea about the situation in Colombia and want to know more. A teach-in is a place to illustrate both the logical, policy side of the conflict and also the human side of the conflict - our brothers and sisters who are asking for us to voice their desires for peace.

The *Talking Colombia* program is a way to bring people together to learn about Colombia, to highlight the crisis facing Colombians, and to invite more people to get involved in LWR's **Give Peace a Place in Colombia** campaign. The teach-in model that *Talking Colombia* is based on brings many people together to learn about and discuss an issue. Teach-ins often cover global issues that are new to most audiences. The teach-in format provides a way for complex issues to be discussed and explored in a casual setting. This document is to be a guide for you to use in developing a *Talking Colombia* program that succeeds in getting your message about Colombia out to a new group of people. Use the tips and advice that are most applicable to your community, and contact the LWR office for additional help in planning.



WHERE TO BEGIN?

Our brothers and sisters in Colombia have requested our prayers, action and solidarity. We want each of the actions we take to be in the spirit of brother- and sisterhood with our partners in Colombia; bringing their concerns, their experiences and their requests to the forefront to gain responses from our local and national leaders. We want to see the U.S. stop fumigating crops and villages, encourage a halt in displacement, invest substantial resources in alternative development projects, and shape our U.S. policy toward Colombia on an agenda of peace. These lofty goals will be achieved step by step, from the work of communities across the nation working for peace in Colombia. A good way to begin and end each meeting is to offer prayers for peace, for an end to the suffering, and for faith to continue in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Colombia.

PLAN FOR SUCCESS!

Start with common understandings. Provide a historic background on the decades of injustice and political unrest as well as the recent escalation of violence to give everyone an understanding of the current conflict and a common starting point. Do not spend more than ten minutes on this section; it is a good starting place but you'll have many important topics to discuss.

Select focus topics. With limited time and many topics to cover on the Colombian conflict you must maintain a focus on topics you decide cover. Our partners are concerned about displacement, fumigation, persecution of the church, human rights abuses, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, increased U.S. military involvement, and Colombian President Uribe's pro-war policies. Select no more than four or five of these areas to discuss. Choose topics that your speakers can address and that are of concern to members of your community. Refer to LWR's Colombia Education Packet for ideas on what to discuss. If you don't have a copy, visit www.lwr.org or contact Kirsten Anderson at the address below.

End with concrete action. After learning about the great needs of the people of Colombia audience members are ready to act. Conclude *Talking Colombia* with a discussion of ideas for action. Make sure that the actions you are suggesting that the group take are pertaining to the issues discussed in the body of the teach-in. Have an e-mail or phone call action to Congress that people can take home and do that night or the following day. Announce and pass out flyers for your next planned event or meeting, and provide opportunities for long-term involvement with Voice for Peace in Colombia.

Make sure you use sign-in sheets and send LWR a copy at the address below. We want to be sure that everyone is included in receiving Voices for Peace in Colombia communications.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Involving new people in planning. The war in Colombia brings many interests to the table. Involving as many people in the planning process is helpful in getting a lot accomplished, spreading the word about *Talking Colombia* and involving more people in your Voices for Peace in Colombia advocacy efforts. You can invite members from human rights, environmental, international policy, religious, and humanitarian concern groups to add their voices and perspectives to your event. By inviting a large number of groups to participate you are able to provide more specific information on the effects of U.S. funding on the war in Colombia, create new partnerships on your community for future advocacy opportunities, and invite a larger audience to the teach-in.

Who to invite? People come to events when they are invited. Members of your congregation, synod committees, ecumenical contacts, area universities, multicultural centers or groups with Latin American cultural or political concerns, indigenous rights groups, African American rights groups, environmental and human rights groups, and refugee assistance groups are all possibilities. Personally invite as many people as possible. Be sure to offer special invitations to the leadership of your church or university, your member of Congress, area pastors, synod staff, and any local civic leader who can take this issue on to other forums.

It is important to follow up with each invitee to remind them of the time and date of the event, offer directions and answer any questions they may have.

Week by week: Your first announcement of the teach-in should be one month ahead of the event or earlier. If you plan it with less time it can still be successful; just move quickly on spreading the word.

Two to three weeks before the event should be your second wave of public invitations to the teach-in with all of the specifics and details. This is a time to post more flyers, pass out small sheets with the details of the event, invite anyone who was not contacted in the first round, and make sure all invitees have been reminded and now have all important details of time, place and directions.

The final reminder should happen during the **three-day countdown** before the event. Remind people of time and place and encourage them to bring a friend.

Where should you announce the event? People attend events because they are asked to attend. The best way to recruit participants is by asking them in person or over the phone and then asking each person to ask their friends, neighbors and members of their church or community group to attend.

- Ask for the event to be put in your congregation's morning announcements.
- Request for this event to be on your Synod, congregational or university calendar.
- Does your community have a public or civic events calendar? Post on this calendar; ask if it can be posted on a website as well.
- Post flyers everywhere! On doors, in people's boxes, on telephone poles--wherever people have a high traffic path. Always be sure to have permission to hang your flyers.
- A quarter sheet of paper or a postcard can be used as a reminder for those who are attending. Include all relevant information, such as date, time and place.
- Set up a table in a public place. A table with attractive flyers, some additional information on Colombia and the Voices for Peace in Colombia campaign brings attention to the issue and can be a good place to recruit. Have a sign-up sheet available to keep track of those who are interested. Follow up with everyone who says they are interested in attending.
- Be creative. Publicize the event with colorful illustrations, sidewalk chalk, or with your own creative style.
- Use a phone tree. If you have not yet used a phone tree with your group, this is the time to do it. Call the phone tree with each announcement and have each person personally invite ten of their friends and ask each friend to invite others as well.
- Everyone loves to be invited. Personal invitations in the mail are excellent, phone calls are great and e-mails are easy to pass along to others.
- Students on campuses can write reminders on black boards, announce the event in your campus newspaper, radio station and daily flyer.

HOW WILL THE EVENT BE STRUCTURED?

Talking Colombia teach-ins give us ample time to tell our stories, share the statistics, provide analysis, and engage people to join us in advocating for peace in Colombia. It is important to provide information, allow time for questions and answers, and to discuss how to get involved in Voices for Peace in Colombia in the short and long term.

Talking Colombia should commence with a welcome and an overview of the agenda. The facilitator or master of ceremonies should introduce those who will be speaking or helping out during the teach-in and tell a little bit about the group who is hosting the event. Follow the welcome with some of the essential historical and background information on Colombia.

After you have introduced the event and given a brief background on Colombia, the format for your teach-in should be determined by the number of speakers you have. A panel of three to five people with a facilitator who monitors time and leads the question and answer session is a great way to start out. Each speaker should have five to seven minutes to present their information or argument. It is best to ask for all questions to be held until the end of the panel so all of the panel members have an opportunity to answer the questions.

If you have a large audience, the conclusion of the panel discussion is a great time to have smaller discussions that are led by the panelists or by others. These smaller discussions are excellent times to gain more in-depth knowledge of topic areas and to provide opportunities to exchange thoughts and ideas between members of the audience. After the small group discussions it is helpful to bring the group back together for people to briefly inform one another on the activities of their small group. There can be more than one small group discussion if the audience is large enough and if there are enough discussion leaders. The balance is to make this as rich of an experience as possible without drawing the event out for too long a period of time.

Small group discussions are an excellent way to add creativity to your teach-in. If you have artists who want to lead a session, music you want to share, a video or another creative way of discussing Colombia, use that idea in a small group setting! Maintain your focus and do not offer too many small groups. You don't want to have so many options that there is sparse attendance in your small groups. If you are speaking to a small group of people you can choose some of the small group topics to present and discuss to the larger body - be sure to alter the presentation style so you keep energy high throughout the teach-in.

Finally, you want to cap off the event with a vibrant speaker, a call to action, and a blessing or closing. The final speaker should bring it all together. He or she can provide some new information but should focus on **action steps - what you can do**. The final words should include all of the details for the call for action and a big thank you to everyone. All of the audience members, the speakers and all who contributed deserve a warm round of applause.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND SPEAKERS FOR THE EVENT?

Choosing speakers is very important. You want your array of presenters to have multiple perspectives on Colombia while keeping in mind that we are promoting peace and want very strong voices for peace and the protection of civilians presented throughout the teach-in.

Colleges, universities and seminaries often have scholars who can speak on an area of the Colombian conflict. Contact departments of Political Science, International Studies, Spanish and Biology (for environmental issues such as fumigation). Human Rights organizations or refugee agencies may also have speakers.

Other places to find speakers: the Synod or District church offices, through a Latin America focused agency like the Resource Center of the Americas (in Minneapolis), area peace or activist groups, and by asking groups or individuals involved in advocacy on Latin America. Contact LWR for help--LWR staff may know of a speaker that you could invite to present at your teach-in.

How about you? People love to hear their peers and community members in new areas of leadership. You probably know much more about Colombia than you give yourself credit for. The LWR office can help you find appropriate materials to use in researching a presentation on any of the topic areas. LWR's website resource guide is also a good place to start looking for information. If you need this or any other information simply e-mail kanderson@lwr.org or call 202.626.7947.

YOU ARE FINISHED - CELEBRATE!

(Almost). After you are finished celebrating the successful event there are some important follow up steps. You want to be sure to send personal thank you notes or make phone calls to all of your speakers, the facilities provider, your food helpers and anyone else who contributed. **Please send LWR a contact list of those in attendance so that we can strengthen LWR's Colombia advocacy network.** Those who are newly signed up will receive information from us about once a month via e-mail. Expanding our network puts communities in touch with one another across the United States. Communities are also able to hear about our partners in Colombia and more effectively plan and advocate as voices for peace. Be sure to contact all on your lists and remind them of your next event.

CREATING A SENSE OF WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Consider planning the event around a meal, or provide light snacks. Breaking bread together allows for the essential fellowship that builds relationships and binds people together. It can be distracting to have food during the presentations, but you can offer snacks during break time or conclude with a meal. To cut costs, ask for the food to be donated, try a potluck style, or ask for a donation at the door.

Logistics: Chose a time and place that are comfortable for everyone. Evenings are usually best, though if you plan to do a longer event Saturdays may work better. Also consider the best location. Request space in a church, community center or school building that people are familiar with, and where accessible parking is available.

In all of your announcement flyers and invitations be sure to put some basic directions so people know how to get to the event. It is also helpful to provide contact information for anyone wanting additional information.

What about visuals? Maps, charts and graphs are all helpful ways to learn more about the situation in Colombia. Videos can show people new images and leave a lasting impact, but limit their use to brief clips as a way to introduce topics. One way to provide helpful visuals is to post colorful quotes and statistics that you want to your audience to remember - all you need is a marker and some big paper. Visuals are helpful but not necessary. The focus is on the presenters and the participants!

Final tips:

- You do not have to include all perspectives.
- Remember to gear this teach-in for your community.
- Involve as many people as possible in planning the event. More people can get more accomplished and invite more people to *Talking Colombia*.
- Have fun!

CHECKLIST FOR YOUR TEACH-IN

- Have you invited area human rights, environmental, and faith groups to participate in planning, speaking or recruitment?
- Are the date, location and time set?
- Does your location have accessible parking? If not, are there alternate means of transportation?
- Do you have a list of potential speakers and someone who is coordinating the invitation of the speakers?
- Have you found food to be donated for the occasion?
- If this event is more than 2 hours will there be time for activity changes - for the audience to participate, for the audience to move around?
- Have you contacted the LWR office to let them know your plans?
- Have you ensured that each speaker, panel participant or workshop leader is prepared and knows about the agenda for the teach-in?
- If you have a Colombian or expert speaker coming to present at your teach-in have you planned for them to also meet with some of the key leaders and other groups in your area (before or after the teach-in)?
- Have you done three rounds of recruitment? The initial invite (a month or more ahead of time), the specific invite - with the agenda, speakers, and all details included (two to three weeks in advance), and the reminder invite (three days before the countdown begins - last minute flyers, chalk reminders on the sidewalk, notes on the black boards, notices taped to doors and halls, and phone calls to remind people to attend *Talking Colombia*).
- Do you have the next event planned and a way to invite all participants to get involved after the teach-in?
- Who is facilitating the teach-in?
- Do you have materials available for people to pick up? (Articles, materials from your organization and LWR, flyers on your next event or what people can do next, etc.)
- Have you prepared an action for people to do the day after the teach-in with the phone number, e-mail address and snail mail address of your members of Congress or local leaders?
- Sign up sheets are key! Do you have them prepared and have a way to send the copies to LWR in DC and add these newcomers to our network?
- Have you personally invited the people who you are hoping to get involved?
- Have you personally invited the leadership of your university, church, synod, city council, or other key leaders to attend?
- Is someone in charge of arranging all handouts on a table and ensuring that everyone signs in? (Set up a table near the door where people get nametags, sign in, receive materials, and make a donation if one is being requested)

We are here to help! Please contact LWR staff at 202.626.7947 or kanderson@lwr.org. We can help you with shaping the event, gathering materials and any other advice you are looking for.