

The Sign of Peace 8.2

Reading Group Discussion Guide

A note about the Reading Guide:

This reading guide is intended to help parishes, schools, book clubs, and interested parties facilitate reflection and discussion on our journal, *The Sign of Peace*. The Catholic Peace Fellowship intends that the journal not only be a source of information, but also an educational aid that edifies the Church by guiding discussion and faith formation on issues of war, peace, and conscientious objection. Hopefully this resource will help channel your discussion by applying specific questions to distinct articles. Noting that there is ample material for multiple gatherings, please use whichever questions are most appropriate for your group and setting.

Opening Prayer: See *Peace Prayer Resources at the end of this reading guide.*

Q: After having read the recent issue of *The Sign of Peace (SOP)*, what general reactions do you have?

Pg. 2: About This Issue

1. "It might appear that with this issue...we are moving from left to right..." Was this your initial impression? Why?

Pg. 3: Editorial - The Gospel of Life & Peace

2. Do you know someone who integrates the Gospel of Life *and* the Gospel of Peace? Who? How?
3. How can the principle of nonviolence (par. 6) serve as common ground between the peace and pro-life movements?

Pgs. 4-5: Peace Briefs (News compiled by the CPF Staff)

4. What, in your opinion, is the most captivating Peace Brief?

Pgs. 6: 1974 CPF Statement on Abortion (From the CPF Archives)

5. Par 1 - See the Orthodox Peace Fellowship's website (<http://incommunio.org/>) for a history of the discussion between the OPF and the Fellowship of Reconciliation on the topic of abortion. Discuss.
6. As this 1974 statement exemplifies, CPF's view of all life issues (from war to abortion) as interrelated is not new. In fact, these very same words could have been written today. Are you encouraged—or discouraged—by that fact? Is this the result of a consistent pro-life vision for CPF, or of a complacency among Catholics that has prevented success in changing minds, hearts, and systems which degrade the value and dignity of life?

Pgs 7-12: From the Battlefield to the Medical Field (CPF Staff)

7. The staff piece opens with four examples of medical personnel struggling with issues of conscience. Can you add any personal stories of family and friends experiencing this same struggle?
8. Do you think Camilo Mejía's discussion of a soldier's professional duty vs. moral obligations (p. 7, col 3, par 1) is an accurate portrayal of how most soldiers view war? Regarding the transposition of Mejia's words to the medical field (bottom of p. 7, col 3): Is this something you could imagine a nurse saying?
9. Do you have a "good" doctor? What characteristics constitute her/him as 'good'? (see p. 8, col 2, par 2)
10. Describe the difference between curing disease vs. providing care (p. 9, col 1, par cont'd from p. 8). Which is more important to you? Should the two be separated?
11. Regarding the section on "Patients' Rights" (p. 9, col 2-3): Have you had to make any of these hard decisions for yourself or a family member? What was it like?
12. In your opinion, are the phrases "medical ethics" and "medical prudence" interchangeable? (see p. 10, "Prudence and Conscience in Medicine")
13. Have you experienced medicine prioritizing profit over people? Is the Church's warning (p. 10, col 3, par 2) a legitimate concern?
14. Contrast the freedom in Christ with the world's definition of freedom (p. 11, col 1, par 1). How does this relate to both: a) John Paul II's discussion of the "contraceptive mentality," and b) the renaming of certain actions formerly called "crimes" as "rights" (p. 11, col 2)?
15. In n. 73 of *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II seems to be suggesting civil disobedience against laws protecting

practices such as euthanasia and abortion. How does this relate to conscientious objection? Do you think applying for conscientious objector status (or making a statement of conscience against killing in war) constitutes an act of civil disobedience?

16. What difference does it make for soldiers, doctors, and yourself alike, that a papal encyclical “explicitly enjoins Catholics to conscientious objection” (p. 12, col 1, par 2)?
17. Paul VI said, “Every crime against life is an attack on peace” (p. 12, col 2). Can we therefore say that every abortion is an attack on peace? If so, how does that statement relate to the Feminists for Life motto that “peace begins in the womb?” Do you agree that peace begins in the womb?
18. How are you being called to be a ‘coworker in the vineyard’ of life and peace? (see p. 12, col 3, closing par.)

Pg 12 (bottom): Some Relevant Sections of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* on Conscience

19. Referring to sections 1799 & 1801: Recall a time when you acted in erroneous conscience. How was it different than acting with a good, well-formed conscience?

Pg 13: First, Do No Harm (Greg A. Gehred, M.D.)

20. Article 1 of “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Does our society believe this?
21. Do most doctors see a pregnant woman as representing (embodying) *two* patients? (see p. 13, col 2, par 1)
22. Dr. Gehred speaks of how his personal health, conscience, morality, and even freedom determine how he interacts with—and treats—a patient (p. 13, col 2, par 2). Do you often hear a doctor referring to his/her own health, freedom, conscience, morality, etc. when meeting with you? Is this the right approach?

Pgs 14-15: Killing Abstractions (Emmanuel Charles McCarthy & John Carmody)

23. How has our abstraction of the human embryo led us to view life and decide when it actually begins?
24. How are you called into deeper *metanoia*—conversion—of heart, mind, and behavior? (see p. 15, col 2)

Pgs 16-21: Unjust War on the Womb (An interview with Juli Loesch-Wiley and Helen Alvaré)

25. In her interview, Juli Loesch Wiley mentions that we are often drawn to a narrowed group of life issues. To what “constellation of concerns” are you most naturally drawn? (see p. 16, col 1, last paragraph)
26. When talking about beginning (or end) of life issues, is it helpful to talk about “rights”? (p. 17, col 1, par 2)
27. What do you think about Wiley’s statement that “every abortion is an ‘unjust war’?” (p. 17, col 1, par 3)
28. “Abortion is an overwhelmingly ‘urban’ phenomenon, more specifically, an ‘inner-city’ and ‘college/university town’ phenomenon, not a small-town or rural phenomenon” (p. 18, col 1, par 5). Is this true, in your experience?
29. Have you been involved with any pregnancy resource centers in your area? If not, locate the closest one and plan a visit, perhaps as a group, to learn more about what they do and how you can help. (p.18, col 2, par 3)
30. Do you know of anyone who has been involved in the practice of abortion and has decided to refuse to participate in it?
31. Referring to Wiley’s story of her conversation with the Muslim woman she met at the abortion clinic (p. 19, col 2): How does conscience cross and go beyond all variations of faith and belief? Do people who define themselves as non-religious use language of conscience? How would a non-faith understanding of conscience differ from one based on faith?
32. Helen Alvaré says that “the average Christian comes across [...] pro-life issues just by living life” (p. 20, col 2, par 3). What pro-life issues and opportunities to help those in need (including family) have arisen in your life?
33. Have you heard others claim conscientious objection to church teaching on such things abortion and contraception (p.21, col 1, top)? Is that a legitimate use of the term?
34. How or where have you seen the act of informing conscience done well? (see p. 21, col 1, par 4)
35. Is the slavery/abortion analogy helpful? Why or why not? (see p. 21, col 2, par 3)
36. Do you know anyone who feels like “pariahs in the wrong profession” (p. 21, col 2, par 5) at their work place? Do you?

Pgs 22-27: When Healers are Expected to Kill (Rick Becker)

37. Why is our society ‘apologetic’ about those who are (or seem to be) “different”? (see p. 22, col 2, par 2)
38. Did you know that nine out of ten (9/10) Down Syndrome babies are aborted? What does that say about our society and its mentality toward the value of human life? (see p. 22)
39. “Few, if any, medical schools administer the Hippocratic Oath in its original form today” (p. 23, col 1, par 2). Why do you think this is so?
40. Is Becker’s contrast of military recruits vs. medical students’ intention upon enlisting/enrolling accurate?

(see p. 23, col 1, par 4)

41. How have you seen relativism played out in your life? (refer to p. 23, col 2, par 3 and 4)
42. How does language affect reality and how we value people and things? (see p. 24, par cont'd from p. 23)
43. Do you know someone who, like the Beckers, refused an amniocentesis? For what reason? (see p. 24, col 2, par cont'd from col 1)
44. "The Catholic obstetrician might himself never recommend aborting a baby with diagnosed problems, but if he leaves that door wide open for his patients, isn't it tantamount to the same thing?" (p. 25, col 1, par 1)
Is it the same thing?
45. Did you know the details (and truth) of the Terri Schiavo case? How do they conflict with the media's coverage of her case? (p. 25, col 1, par 3)
46. Discuss the difference between *allowing someone to die*, and *causing death*. (p. 25, col 2, par 1)
47. How may *you* be being called to de-compartmentalize personal faith claims and professional practice (see p.26, col 1, par 1)? In other words, how does your faith interpret and challenge your work or career?

Pgs 24-25: Jérôme Lejeune

48. Had you heard about Lejeune before? Reflect on his story. Whom in your life would you describe as "an ardent defender of life?"

Pgs 28, 30: My Journey to the Culture of Life (Jillian Stalling)

49. Do you think most doctors grew up *wanting* to be doctors?
50. Do most medical professionals see their career as *vocation*? What about soldiers?
51. Compare Jillian's "crystallization of conscience" (p.30, col 1, par 2) with Daniel's similar experience which solidified his conscientious objection to war (p.32, top of col 1).
52. Describe the similarities between Jillian's meeting with her superior (p. 30, col 2, par 2) and a soldier writing a statement of conscience.

29, 31-33: My Battle with My Conscience (Daniel Baker)

53. Are Daniel's intentions to join the military (p. 29, col 1, par 1-2) representative of others you know who joined?
54. How do nonviolence and inter-dependence (p. 29, col 2, par 1) fit into the United States' idea of independence?
55. Can you relate to Daniel's experience of being "unschooled in faith" (p. 29, col 2, par 2)? How can an increased emphasis on sound catechesis—in the school, parish, and at home—serve to form consciences?
56. Answer Daniel's question for yourself: "Could I kill, and at the same time be a follower of Jesus who said, 'Love your enemies?'" (p.31, col 1, par 2). Is there a clear-cut answer to this? How would you answer?
57. Are many soldiers, while in combat, "grappling with the morality of war and killing" (p.29, col 1, par 4) as Daniel did? Why or why not?
58. Have you experienced irony along your faith journey as Daniel did? (see end of article, p.33)

Pgs 34: A View of Abortion with Something to Offend Everyone (Walker Percy)

59. Do Walker Percy's criticisms of both sides stand firm today, more than twenty-five years later?
60. "But I do submit that religion, philosophy, and private opinion have nothing to do with this issue" (p. 34, col 1, par 1). Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
61. Do you view "the onset of individual life" as "a dogma of the church," "a fact of science," or both? (p. 34, col 2, par 3)

Closing Prayer: Intentions, Our Father, Exchange the sign of peace

The Reading Guide for The Sign of Peace is a new initiative for CPF to help facilitate group discussion stemming from the topics raised in our journal. We appreciate your feedback, suggestions, and evaluation of our efforts. Please direct comments to: **Aimee Shelide** -- shelide@catholicpeacefellowship.org • 574.232.2811. P.O. Box 4232 • South Bend, IN 46634

Peace Prayer Resources

Prayer for Reconciliation

God of perfect peace,
Violence and cruelty can have no part with you.
May those who are at peace with one another hold fast to the good will that unites them;
may those who are enemies forget their hatred and be healed.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

-- From *The Sacramentary*

Prayer for Peace -- Pope John XXIII

Lord Jesus Christ, who are called the Prince of Peace,
who are yourself our peace and reconciliation,
who so often said, "Peace to you," grant us peace.

Make all men and women witnesses of truth, justice, and brotherly love.
Banish from their hearts whatever might endanger peace.

Enlighten our rulers
that they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace.
May all peoples on the earth become as brothers and sisters.
May longed-for peace blossom forth and reign over us all. Amen.



<http://peaceprayer.gn.apc.org/>

Franz Jägerstätter Prayer ¹

(Diocese of Linz, Austria)

Lord Jesus Christ, you filled your servant Franz Jägerstätter with a deep love for you, his family and all people. During a time of contempt for God and humankind you bestowed on him unerring discernment and integrity. In faith, he followed his conscience, and said a decisive NO to national socialism and unjust war. Thus he sacrificed his life. We pray that you may glorify your servant Franz, so that many people may be encouraged by him and grow in love for you and all people. May his example shine out in our time, and may you grant all people the strength to stand up for justice, peace, and human dignity. For yours is the glory and honor with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

¹ Franz Jägerstätter holy cards and icons are available to view and purchase on the CPF website at www.catholicpeacefellowship.org