

A Study For Adults

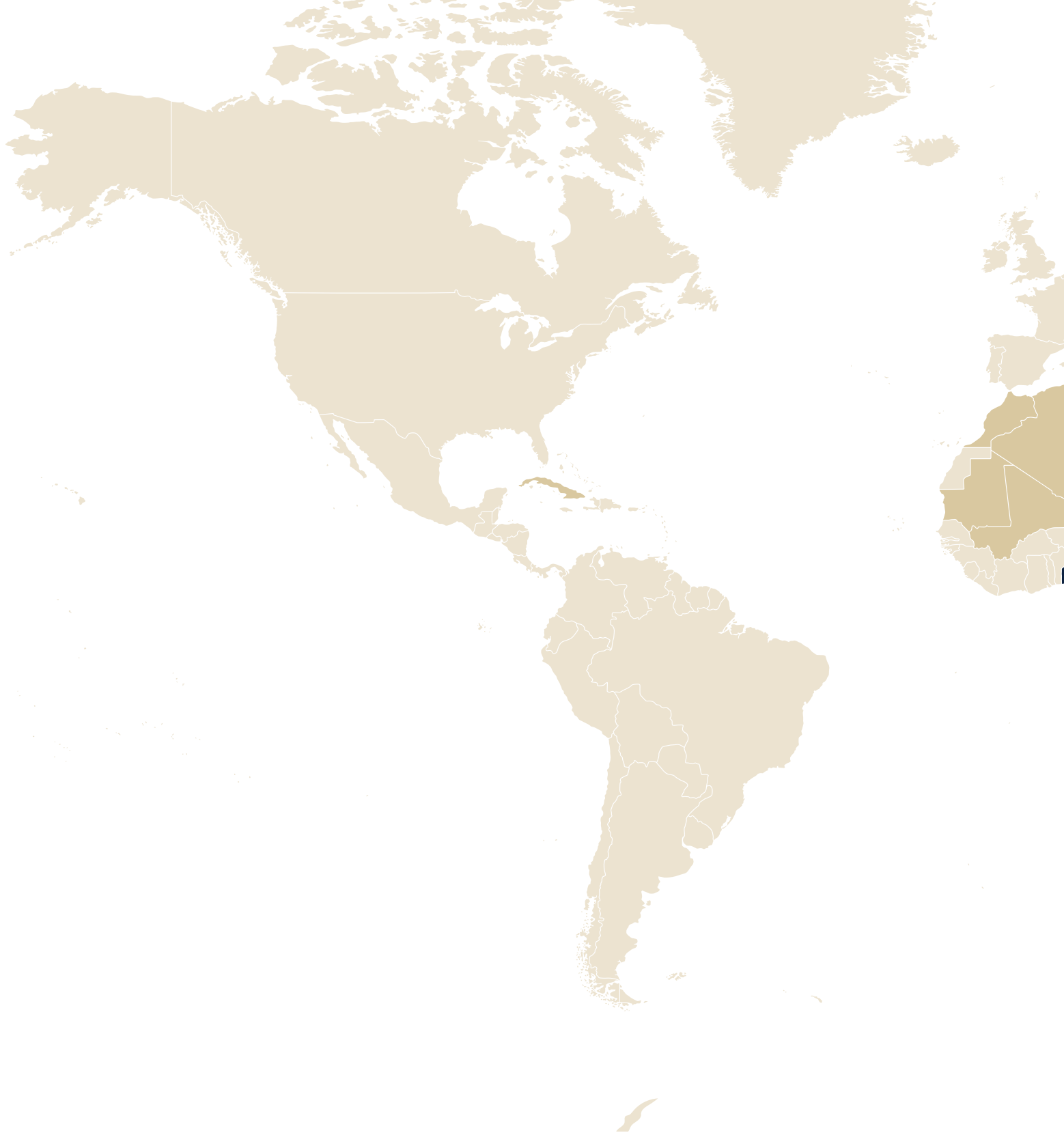
HOW PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITIES TODAY RESPOND

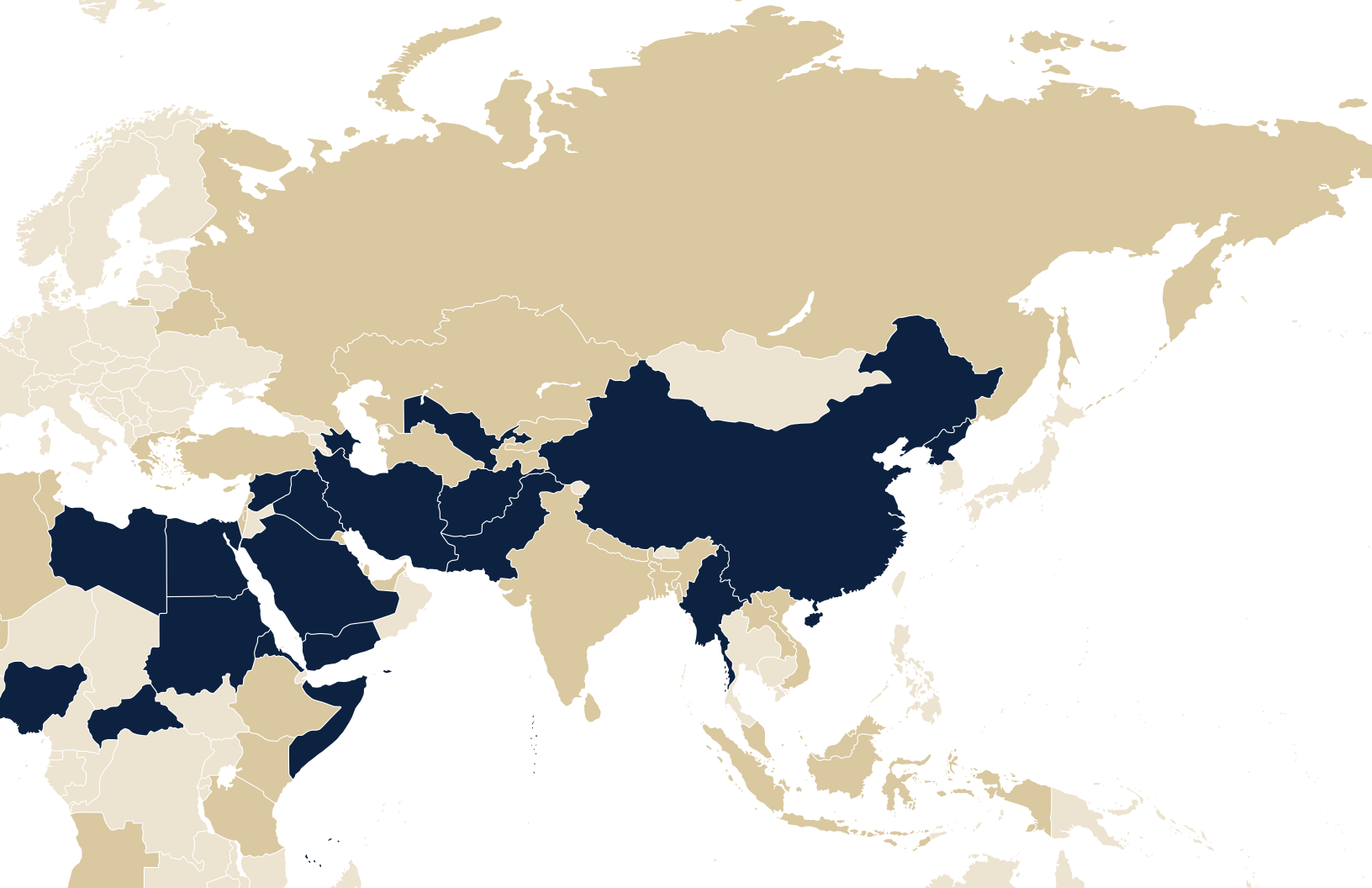
LEADER GUIDE

WE RESPOND

Following Jesus In Solidarity With The Persecuted Church







Christians around the world are brutally persecuted, facing imprisonment, torture, and even death. We shed light on their responses so that the world may know their stories and that others facing persecution may forge similar paths of witness and resistance. Join them on the way.

Under Caesar's Sword is a collaborative global research project that investigates how Christian communities respond when their religious freedom is severely violated. It is a partnership of the Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture, the Religious Freedom Institute, and Georgetown University's Religious Freedom Project, with the support of the Templeton Religion Trust and Aid to the Church in Need.

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn about our research, documentary film, and more resources.

Map courtesy of Aid to the Church in Need. See page 7 for further information on persecution of christians in the world.



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We Respond: A Study for Adults

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

How do Christian communities persevere under threat?

With what creative strategies does the Holy Spirit empower them?

Why is there so much persecution, and is this story tragic or hopeful?

Dear Friend,

First, let us express our profound gratitude for your commitment to learn about the lives of persecuted Christians. We pray this resource will allow you to encounter the reality of their lives around the world and inspire you to respond with courage, love, hope, and solidarity in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

This seven-session resource is created for adult discussion groups, Bible studies, faith-sharing groups, formation classes, and others ready to learn more about the lives of persecuted Christians through the lens of our shared faith. It puts you in touch not only with the suffering these communities experience, but also how they respond creatively, pragmatically, and faithfully to the various injustices they face. When do they choose to migrate or to hide? To challenge their persecutors and/or to forgive them? To band together with others in solidarity? What fruits has the Lord wrought through their responses?

To address these questions, the sessions bring you on a journey in the footsteps of our Lord. The starting point is the life of Jesus Christ, and in particular his relationship to his followers, the pattern of rejection he faced, and the mystery of his death and resurrection in which we participate (sessions 1-3). From there, you will step into the history of the Church in his Spirit (session 4), with a focus on some of the most interesting responses today (sessions 5-7). The series includes an overview of persecution as well as stories of Christians' survival, martyrdom, defense of human rights, forgiveness, and building bridges. The later sessions provide space for you to discern your own responses.

These stories of persecution are not always happy or enjoyable in a worldly sense. Yet, as Thomas Aquinas put it, our ultimate happiness consists not in passing delights but in the contemplation of truth. You will encounter true stories here, indeed, but also a deeper truth: The pattern of suffering, death, and resurrection through which Christ makes all things new. Christian communities in the worst of circumstances model for us the key to our own lives: to take up our crosses, to experience a hopeful exile in this life, to forgive one another, and to be our brothers' and sisters' keeper. May it bring you lasting happiness to recognize the truth of Christ's love reflected by his servants and friends, and the Lord inspire you to partake more deeply of the same love.

Be sure to connect with us on our website and through email, Facebook, and Twitter. As we join together in prayer and solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters, please know also that we hold you and your group in prayer as well.

Sincerely,

The Under Caesar's Sword Team



We Respond: A Study for Adults

SESSION I

DISCIPLESHIP & PERSECUTION

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution
Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Reflect on persecution in terms of discipleship and imitation of Christ

Engage with facts about the persecution of Christians around the world, such as statistics, identifying groups that persecute Christians, and a geographical approach

Relate as disciples to Christians around the world who experience the cost of discipleship very intensely

Name the three categories of response to persecution and give examples

Respond to some myths about persecution of Christians today

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

Take Up Your Cross

Invite participants to read and reflect on these passages about the love of Jesus and of his disciples. You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

JOHN 1:1-5, 10-13: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.

MATTHEW 4:12, 18-22: When Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. . . . As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

The Gospel of John says that Jesus' own people did not accept him. Is there a part of you that does not yet fully welcome Jesus?

Was there a moment, day, or time in your life when you first came to realize that following Jesus comes at a cost?

Leader: Jesus is our true life and light, but his own people did not know him. He faced danger from the beginning. When John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus fled to Galilee. Yet from there, he carried on his mission, announcing the Kingdom of God and calling the first disciples to follow him.

Let Us Pray: Jesus, we praise you for the love you poured out in order to make us children of our loving Father. We meditate on the fullness of love that it took for you to come to earth, vulnerable as a child and vulnerable to the rejection of your people. Fill us with this incredible love, that with people around the world, we may leave our comforts behind each day to follow you, no matter the cost. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENCOUNTER

The Cost of Discipleship

Leader: Many people today use the word “follow” to mean simply “express interest.” We may think about following a celebrity on Twitter or following a sports team to see whether they make the playoffs. Yet for many of us, to follow Jesus is much deeper – a commitment of one’s whole life for love of the Lord.

The word “disciple” comes from the Latin word *discipulus*, meaning “learner” or “pupil.”

“The whole of Christ’s life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the actualization of his word and the fulfillment of Revelation”

–JOHN PAUL II, CATECHESI TRADENDAE 9

Leader: Disciples take a beautiful risk as they “step into” the life of Christ. One day, as the Book of Revelation says, the Lord “will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away” (Rev 21:4). Yet here and now, Jesus tells us that following him also means taking up our crosses. Disciples of Jesus share in his mission and his joy, but also his sufferings.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

For many Christians around the world, following Jesus comes at a great cost indeed.

Read these facts:

- In 2015, 7,100 Christians around the world died for their faith, not including incidents of intimidation or non-lethal violence (Open Doors).
- Even the most stringent estimates find that Christians receive 60% of the world’s religious persecution. The figure may be as high as 80% (International Society for Human Rights, 2009).
- Christians face persecution in over 60 countries (U.S. Department of State).
- For each year between 2007 and 2014, Christians have been targeted for harassment in more countries than any other religious group (Pew Research Center).
- In Iraq and Syria, Christians have been tortured, raped, and forced to flee their homes.

Leader: To add to our own stories about the cost of discipleship, let’s listen to the story of a Christian community in the West African nation of Cameroon.

Cameroon borders Nigeria, and both countries are plagued by the violence of the Islamist extremist group Boko Haram. This group became increasingly radicalized and launched an insurgency in 2009. It has destroyed over 200 churches, internally displaced 1.5 million people, created 200,000 refugees, inflicted 13,000 deaths, and kidnapped and made sex slaves of Christian women. It is estimated that, in 2013, more Christians were killed in Nigeria as a result of religious persecution than in the rest of the world combined. In 2015, Boko Haram declared allegiance to the Islamic State.

Instructions: Have one participant locate Story 1 online and read it aloud. Then, invite participants to turn to their neighbors and discuss one or two things that surprised them. Discuss the two questions as a group.

Listen to Story 1 about Christians' responses to the violence of Boko Haram.

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

- What people and groups are involved? List as many as you can.
- What kinds of challenges do Christians and their neighbors face? How do Christians respond?

Explain: This story is just a small glimpse into how Christians navigate a very complex situation. In addition to the people and groups we named, please know that the governments have been involved, trying to suppress Boko Haram and protect the local communities. Yet the governments' efforts are hampered by corruption and other abuses of power.

How do Christians around the world respond to persecution?

Scholars working with the Under Caesar's Sword project find that, like the Christians in Nigeria and Cameroon, Christians around the world respond to persecution using three main kinds of strategies: survival, association, and confrontation. Each strategy may involve prayer and spiritual discernment.

Let's take a closer look at these three approaches:

- 1) Strategies of survival are those in which Christians aim to preserve the life and basic activities of their communities.
- 2) Strategies of association are those in which Christians build ties with others that strengthen their resilience in the face of persecution.
- 3) Strategies of confrontation are those in which Christians openly challenge the persecution levied against them or remain so faithful to their beliefs that they pay the ultimate price of martyrdom.

As a group, discuss: Would you classify any of the Nigerian and Cameroonian Christians' responses as strategies of survival, association, and/or confrontation? Sample answers are below.

Survival

- Migration of the 5,000 Catholic refugees
- Forming a circle during worship
- Prohibition of handbags during worship
- Screening worship participants for weapons and explosives
- Continuing to pray

Association

- Caring for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- Dialogue with Muslim neighbors
- Education of Muslim neighbors' children
- You may add: Christians here also forge strategic partnerships with domestic and international groups

Confrontation

- Continuing to pray is sometimes a bold witness
- Confrontation is the rarest strategy in this story
- You may add: Christians here do use confrontation, such as staging protests, documenting human rights abuses, or (rarely) even taking up arms.

Explain: In future sessions, we will continue to explore these three kinds of strategies Christians employ in responding to persecution. For today, let's take a step back from this story about Christians in Cameroon and look at the concept of persecution in general.

LEARN

Christian Persecution Today

Review these related terms.

PERSECUTE

Pursue, hunt

DISCRIMINATE

Divide, distinguish

PREJUDICE

Pre-judgment

**“POLITE
PERSECUTION”**

Bureaucratic or hidden

HARASSMENT

Signals of hostility

MARTYRDOM

Witness (unto death)

Note: In addition to the kind of persecution that targets Christians explicitly for their faith, Christians must beware of a **“polite persecution”** that is cloaked in a disguise of “culture, modernity and progress,” as Pope Francis explained in April 2016. Instead of targeting Christians directly for their faith, the phenomenon of “polite persecution” includes imposition of serious material costs on Christian believers due to their commitment to traditional Christian teachings. Despite their countries’ history of pluralism and robust liberal democracy, Christians in the “West” (the Americas, Europe, and Australasia) sometimes face these “polite” forms of restriction.

Why might religious leaders, public officials, journalists, and each of us want to use these terms precisely when speaking about persecution? Which distinctions do you find most important? Why?

Invite one person to read “Defining Persecution” to the group.

DEFINING PERSECUTION (From UCS report, *In Response to Persecution*)

Dr. Charles Tieszen defines religious persecution as “any unjust action of varying levels of hostility directed to religious believers through systematic oppression or through irregular harassment or discrimination resulting in various levels of harm as it is considered from the victim’s perspective, each action having religion as its primary motivator.”

Modes of persecution include arbitrary detention, coercive and unjust interrogation, forced labor, imprisonment, beating, torture, disappearance, forced flight from homes, enslavement, rape, murder, unjust execution, attacks on and destruction of churches, and credible threats to carry out such actions. Often, law and policy authorize or encourage persecution, for instance through blasphemy laws, onerous religious registration regulations, and laws outlawing proselytism.

This definition of persecution includes forms of severe discrimination in which religious minorities are denied jobs or positions in the economic sphere or in government, or are otherwise stigmatized within societies by private groups. Discrimination is a highly unjust form of unequal treatment that can impoverish entire communities. It often leads to violence.

WHERE IS THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS WORST?

Rankings from Open Doors World Watch List (2017):

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. North Korea | 10. Eritrea | 19. Turkmenistan | 27. Jordan | 35. Tajikistan | 44. United Arab Emirates |
| 2. Somalia | 11. Libya | 20. Qatar | 28. Myanmar | 36. Algeria | 45. Sri Lanka |
| 3. Afghanistan | 12. Nigeria | 21. Egypt | 29. Tunisia | 37. Turkey | 46. Indonesia |
| 4. Pakistan | 13. Maldives | 22. Ethiopia | 30. Bhutan | 38. Kuwait | 47. Mauritania |
| 5. Sudan | 14. Saudi Arabia | 23. Palestinian Territories | 31. Malaysia | 39. China | 48. Bahrain |
| 6. Syria | 15. India | 24. Laos | 32. Mali | 40. Djibouti | 49. Oman |
| 7. Iraq | 16. Uzbekistan | 25. Brunei | 33. Tanzania | 41. Mexico | 50. Colombia |
| 8. Iran | 17. Vietnam | 26. Bangladesh | 34. Cen African Republic | 42. Comoros | |
| 9. Yemen | 18. Kenya | | | 43. Kazakhstan | |

You may wish to ask participants if there are any personal connections to these countries, or if any surprise them. They can do further research via ucs.nd.edu.

RESPOND

Myths about Persecution Today

DISCUSS: As a group, name some things you have learned today for the first time. Does this challenge the ways you or other people often interpret this persecution? What questions are you left with after today's conversation?

Some common myths about Christian persecution today:

- **Not Real:** Most of the Church is in Europe and North America; therefore, if Christians are pretty much ok here, persecution must not be an issue anywhere. Plus, it's not in the news.
- **Nothing Special about Christian Persecution:** Other groups at home and abroad are persecuted as much as or more than Christians; Christians respond in the ways anyone else would.
- **They Deserve It:** Christians persecuted others for centuries; now it's their turn.
- **It's a Cover:** Christians with a "persecution complex" abuse the term "religious freedom" to mask their disagreement with progressive ideas and policies.
- **Church vs. World:** Manichaeian interpretation that sees the Church everywhere in opposition to regimes everywhere; persecution as monolithic around the world.
- **Helpless Victims or Saintly Superheroes:** Christians are passive victims of persecution and we're the only ones who can help, OR Christians are sufficiently empowered spiritually by their faith that they need no help.

Facts: If any of the facts we have discussed today are new to you, it may be because Christian persecution is underreported in the secular news and by human rights organizations. Georgetown University's Religious Freedom Project analyzed 323 major reports published by Human Rights Watch, one of the world's most influential human rights organizations, from 2008 to mid-2011 and found that religious persecution of any kind was the focus of only eight (about 2.5%) of the published reports. Fewer than half of that small number of reports focused on Christian persecution.

FURTHER RESOURCES:

All the resources listed in this packet are also available at ucs.nd.edu.

In Response to Persecution, pages 6-11 and 15 (Overview)

In Response to Persecution, page 24 (Sub-Saharan Africa)

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn (Nigeria)

CLOSING PRAYER

BEGIN THE PRAYER IN YOUR TRADITION. READ MARK 4:37-41 (NAB) ALOUD:

MARK 4:37-41: A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?” They were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”

Leader: For the early Christian communities who were experiencing persecution under the Roman Empire, this Gospel had a very profound message. They saw this event as a sign of Jesus’ saving presence amid the persecutions that threatened their existence as a church.

Close with a time of shared prayer for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud. Our Father...

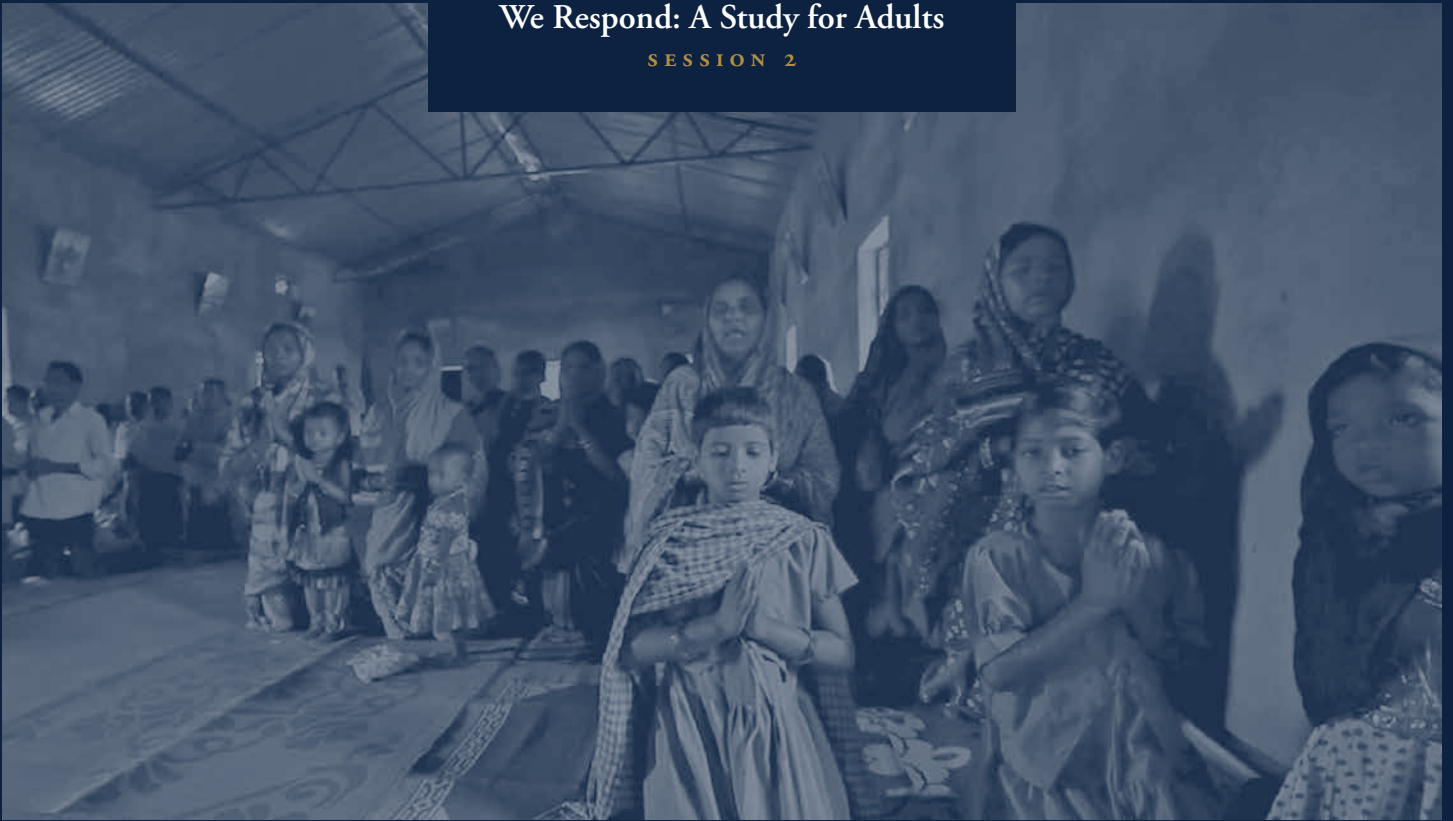
“They are being tested in faith.

We are being tested in love.”

**— FATHER WERENFRIED VAN STRAATEN,
FOUNDER OF AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED**

We Respond: A Study for Adults

SESSION 2



THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN EXILE

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution
Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Discuss the status of Christians “in but not of” the world, amid persecution and in everyday life

Draw connections between the life and ministry of Jesus and the lives of Christians today

Explain how Christians in the Middle East respond to the kinds of exile they face today

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

Exile in the Life of Jesus Christ

Introduction: In this session, we will discuss how Christians in many parts of the world respond when they are rejected in their homelands. At some times in history, the Lord has provided for Christians a great deal of success in evangelizing the culture and society of their birth. Even in a society like this, however, Christians have recognized that their true home was not in this world, but in the next. Here in this world, Christians are pilgrims on the way to their heavenly home.

What can we learn about that truth from persecuted Christians today? Let us begin by praying with stories from the earthly life of Jesus, where we see how the world treats him.

Instructions: You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

Begin the prayer in your tradition. Read these passages about how the world responded to Jesus:

JOHN 1:10-12. [The true light] was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name.

MATTHEW 2:10-16. [The magi] were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.

When do you feel most “at home”? What do you consider to be your true homeland?

What do you think it means to be in exile? Can you be at home and in exile at the same time? How?

Whether fortune has given [Christians] a home in a Greek or foreign city, they follow local custom in the matter of dress, food, and way of life; yet the character of the culture they reveal is marvelous and, it must be admitted, unusual. They live, each in his native land--but as though they were not really at home there. They share in all duties like citizens and suffer all hardships like strangers.... In the flesh as they are, they do not live according to the flesh. They dwell on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.

(LETTER TO DIOGNETUS, 5)

Reflection: When Jesus came to earth to dwell among us, he became vulnerable to the evil in the world. One of the first things Jesus experienced in his life was rejection and exile. King Herod, in his jealousy and lust for power, turned his political muscle not only against the baby Jesus but against those who were associated with Jesus. He desired to persecute the magi, who fled by another way; Jesus' parents, who took him to safety; and the youngest children in the area of Bethlehem, who could not escape. Later, during Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing, the people from his own homeland took offense at him, astonished at his wisdom and power. So, "Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house'" (Mark 6:4).

Let us pray: Lord, rejection was always a part of your life. As we continue to encounter the lives of persecuted Christians, show us the ways they imitate you when they are pushed to the margins. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENCOUNTER

Homeland and Exile

Leader: Just like us, Jesus had a hometown here on earth – people dear to him, familiar pathways, and probably even a favorite home-cooked meal. Yet he knew his true home was in eternity, at the right hand of the Father.

As Christians, we strive for the same relationship to the world and the Father. We dwell in the world, but we are not of the world, as the quote from the Letter to Diognetus explains.

The lives of our persecuted brothers and sisters bring this into focus. Watch this clip about Christians who live very near where Jesus did, the region we now call the Middle East.

Instruct participants to take notes in the chart in their workbooks based on what they hear.

Play Clip 1: You can find this film clip and others at ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/. Stop at 14:05.

Watch the clip from the documentary “Under Caesar’s Sword” about Christians in the Middle East. (3:25-14:05)

NOTES ON THE FILM

	Challenges to Christians	How do they respond?	Who else is involved?
Historical Background	Decline in population Erasure of historical footprint (including art and architecture) Hagia Sophia	Call for state to accelerate its reforms Advocacy with the government, working with other minorities	Government Other minorities in Turkey Islamist impulses that desire to replace the Christian influence
Two Christians' stories	The city of Izmir: People upset in the neighborhood Infiltration of event & assassination plan Hostility from other groups in society	Continue to inform people nearby Stay within strict law Security camera, bars Continue to pray, not hiding faith practices Dialogue, defense (compare Letter to D) Invite others to events	Neighbors Assassins/hostile neighbors Police assistance
Refugees from Iraq	Chaos for Christian minority in Middle East No safety for family Kidnapping of girls Payment or death or threat to family	Migration Care for refugees by the organization Try to welcome them Accept refugees	Islamic State Christians and others receiving refugees in Turkey and providing for them Government (agreed to accept refugees)

After a short discussion of the film, ask participants to review these definitions.

Review these definitions. How would you categorize these Middle Eastern communities' responses to the kinds of exile they faced?

- 1) Strategies of **survival** are those in which Christians aim to preserve the life and basic activities of their communities.
- 2) Strategies of **association** are those in which Christians build ties with others that strengthen their resilience in the face of persecution.
- 3) Strategies of **confrontation** are those in which Christians openly challenge the persecution levied against them or remain so faithful to their beliefs that they pay the ultimate price of martyrdom.

LEARN

Pilgrims Together

In this film clip, we met Christians from a small-town Protestant community, the ancient and well-established Orthodox community, and several other Christian individuals and groups.

Fact: Christians around the world come from a variety of sects, from ancient Catholic, Orthodox, and Assyrian communities, to booming independent house churches, small evangelical communities, and well-established churches founded by missionaries within the past several hundred years. Their treatment varies from place to place at the hands of state governments (including Islamist,* communist, religious nationalist, and secularist regimes) and non-state actors such as violent religious extremists.

Leader: Because the persecution of Christians spans across so many communities, some Christian leaders have spoken of an “ecumenism of blood.”

Invite someone to read the quote.

“When terrorists or world powers persecute Christian minorities or Christians, when they do this, they don’t ask: ‘But are you Lutheran? Are you Orthodox? Are you Catholic? Are you a Reformed Christian? Are you a Pentecostal?’ No! ‘You are a Christian!’ They only recognize one of them: The Christian. The enemy never makes a mistake and knows very well how to recognize where Jesus is. This is ecumenism of the blood.”

[POPE FRANCIS, SPEAKING WITH CHRISTIAN WORLD COMMUNIONS, DEC 2016]

Who is involved in Christian persecution around the world?

PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS		PERSECUTING GROUPS	
Catholic · Latin Rite (Roman) · Eastern Rite	Church of the East Protestant & Others · Evangelicals & Pentecostals · House Churches · Mainline Protestants	Governments · Islamist* · Communist · Religious Nationalist · Secularist	Non-State Actors · Violent religious extremists · Radical secularist & other interest groups Rarely, other Christians

DISCUSS: For many Christians, divisions over doctrine and authority are a painful wound to the unity Jesus calls for. What does it mean to you that all seem to share as disciples in the suffering of Christ? How would you relate these experiences to your own discipleship?

Why Study Christians?

Christians are far from the only religion whose members have suffered persecution, and at times Christians have been on the delivering end of persecution. Violations of religious freedom are violations of the dignity that all humans share. Wherever, whenever, and against whomever they occur, these violations merit attention and alleviation.

Today, Christians are mostly on the receiving end of persecution. The data confirm they are the most persecuted minority. To study their responses as Christians makes it possible both to see general patterns of response shared widely by Christians and to compare the responses of Christian communities with different histories, theologies, challenges, and resources. Learning how Christians respond to persecution offers lessons to be learned for other faith communities and for those who are concerned about the persecution of any individual or group.

** Please note the distinction between Muslims, i.e., all who practice the religion of Islam, and Islamist governments and extremist groups. Islamists, rather than all Muslims, seek to impose Islam and Shari'a law on all of society through the law and/or violence. Islamic extremists use armed violence or terrorism to this end.*

NOTES:

R E S P O N D

Comfort and Exile

Discuss 1-2 of these questions:

- What connections do you see between the story of Jesus and the situation of Christians today?
 - Do you ever experience feeling too at home in this world? How could you “set reminders” of your true homeland while still engaging with this world?
 - How would you like to respond if you were in the shoes of persecuted Christians, and what would help you choose and sustain your response?
 - Is there anything you feel the Lord is calling you to do in response to what we have discussed today? What else would you like to learn, pray, or do in response to their stories?
-

Good point!

Persecution is not inevitable. It is not to be sought out or celebrated, but instead, it is good when Christians are treated with dignity along with the rest of our human family. Even then, however, the world is not our home.

While a kind of “daily exile” is inherent in our Christian life, persecution is a more severe reality that results from sin and evil, the violation of human dignity, and a rejection of the message of hope and peace.

Further Question: What is it that the world – even within ourselves – always resists about Christianity?

Further Question: How did Jesus respond when he faced rejection and exile?

FURTHER RESOURCES

In Response to Persecution, pages 20-21 (Syria and Iraq, Turkey)

In Response to Persecution, pages 36-38 (Findings: Strategies of Survival, Association, Confrontation)

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn (Turkey, Iraq, Syria)

NOTES:

CLOSING PRAYER

1 PETER 1:3-7. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time.

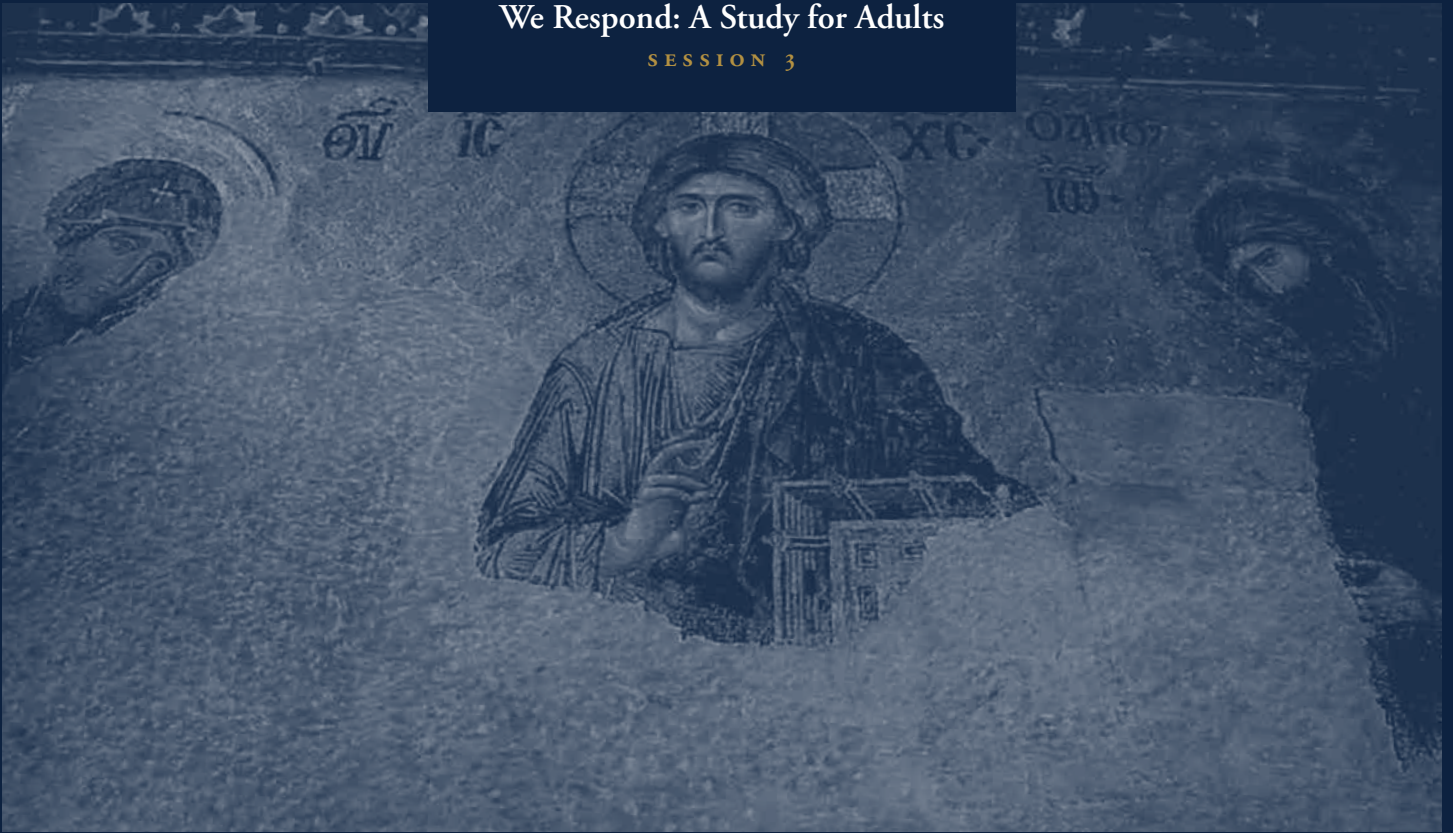
In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Close with a time of shared prayer for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud. Our Father...

NOTES:

We Respond: A Study for Adults

SESSION 3



THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF CHRIST

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution
Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Describe the connection between the paschal mystery and martyrdom

Reflect on stories about contemporary martyrs in Asia

Define martyrdom including its application in various forms of hatred of the faith

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

To Lay Down One's Life

Note: *Written by the same author, the Passion narrative of Luke and the story of the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts bear striking and meaningful similarities. At ucs.nd.edu, you may find a "synopsis," a side-by-side comparison, of these two passages as a supplement to Session 3 and Session 4.*

Introduction: In the last session, we discussed the unavoidable tension for Christians living in the world but not of the world. For some Christians this means literal exile. Even as a baby, Jesus was seen as a threat; later, he was rejected in his hometown and ultimately persecuted by the authorities. Living in Christ, we bear witness to the only way of life that can fulfill our desire for beauty, goodness, and truth. Yet this witness by its nature threatens the logic of worldly systems. Today, we focus on the next step in this story – the mystery of the saving crucifixion of Jesus, when the Lord defeated death for our salvation.

You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

LUKE 22:54-23:46 (selections): After arresting [Jesus] they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us," but he replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond. But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it [blasphemy] from his own mouth."

Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate. Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people and said to them, "You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him." But all together they shouted out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us."

As they led [Jesus] away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.'

Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last.

JOHN 15:13-18: No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another. If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first.

Have you ever chosen to remain in a difficult situation out of love, perhaps at great cost?

What stories of saints, martyrs, or other models in faith show you how to do so?

Let Us Pray: Lord, as we encounter the stories of Christians who follow you even unto death, open our eyes to the infinite hope you offer us. Give us a share of their steadfast love, in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENCOUNTER

Faithfulness & Sacrificial Love

Some Christians today lay down their lives for their friends in imitation of the love of Jesus Christ. Listen to stories 2 and 3 about Christians in China and North Korea.

Find them: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

Invite participants to read the stories quietly to themselves, or have one person read each story aloud.

DISCUSS: Share with your neighbor anything that struck you or surprised you in these stories. How do the Christians' stories compare with your own? With the story of Jesus?

The following paragraphs provide important historical and political background to these stories.

Christians in China and North Korea

Christianity first came to the territory of modern-day China in the seventh century. Despite periods of significant diminishment, Christians were well-established and influential by the thirteenth century within the Mongol Empire’s Yuan dynasty. In the modern era, the Communist party established the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and has exercised tight state control over all religions, even using church demolitions, imprisonment, torture, and murder against those who do not comply. Christianity is divided into state-sanctioned churches that accept government restrictions, and independent churches (including the underground Catholic Church, loyal to the Vatican) that reject government intervention.

Meanwhile, North Korea is considered the worst place in the world for Christians. The fact sheet on North Korea by Open Doors depicts a grim situation:

In this totalitarian communist state, Christians are forced to hide their faith completely from government authorities, neighbors and often, even their own spouses and children. Due to ever-present surveillance, many pray with eyes open, and gathering for praise or fellowship is practically impossible. Worship of the ruling Kim family is mandated for all citizens, and those who don’t comply (including Christians) are arrested, imprisoned, tortured or killed. Entire Christian families are imprisoned in hard labor camps, where unknown numbers die each year from torture, beatings, overexertion and starvation. Those who attempt to flee to South Korea through China risk execution or life imprisonment, and those who stay behind often fare no better.

As a group, name as many of the individuals and groups involved as you can, noting the complexity of the social and political situations. In the months and years leading up to their deaths, what choices, if any, did Christians make in relation to the ruling powers?

Further question: Would you consider any of the people we learned about to be martyrs?

NOTES:

LEARN

What Makes a Martyr?

Christians who accept and endure death for the sake of faith are called **martyrs**. The word “martyr” itself comes from the Greek word **μάρτυρός** (martyros), which means “a witness” or “one who gives testimony.” In the early Church, the word “martyr” would have reminded hearers of the prophets who bore testimony to the Word of God, as well as of testimony in a juridical proceeding.

A martyr gives his or life at the hands of a persecutor who is motivated by the hatred of the faith, in odium fidei. Consider this summary: “The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He or she bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2473).

The Martyr: An Image of the Master

Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers. From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon—and some will always be called upon—to give the supreme testimony of this love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, then, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of the Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world—as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood. Though few are presented such an opportunity, nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross.

[LUMEN GENTIUM, 1964, §42]

DISCUSS: How is martyrdom connected to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? What does it mean that martyrs are “transformed into an image of the Master,” the Lord? Would you count all who die for being Christian as martyrs? Why or why not?

NOTES:

How do Christians in China and North Korea respond?

Isolation is among the most formidable obstacles facing persecuted churches. Persecuting regimes and militant groups aim to keep Christian communities disconnected, hidden, and obscure. It is no coincidence that North Korea, the country in which Christians are persecuted most severely, is the country in which the plight of Christians is least known. Still, estimates suggest that 50,000-70,000 Christians are held in prison camps along with tens of thousands of other political prisoners.

The People's Republic of China is experiencing both a sharp growth in Christianity and a spike in the persecution of Christians. Since the Communist Revolution in 1949, the government of China has sought the demise of Christianity and, indeed, of all religions. In the 1950s, it required all Protestant and Catholic churches to be governed by the official church associations. While some Christians associate with these bodies, others have belonged to underground "house" churches, and still others have skirted the line or oscillated between these statuses.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1979), the Communist regime undertook a plan to eradicate Christianity, but Christian churches held firm, with Catholics remaining at three million and Protestants growing from one million to three million during this period. Since 1979, the government has tolerated Christianity but has also restricted it and inflicted setbacks and spikes of persecution. Estimates of numbers of Christians in China vary considerably, but one 2010 estimate held that some 5.5 million Catholics and 23 million Protestants populated China's official churches, while underground churches accounted for some 11 million Catholics and between 46 and 69 million Protestants.

The persecution of Christians in China takes place in three broad forms, mostly at the hands of the government.

- 1) The first form is ideological eradication, which takes place through mandatory indoctrination in atheism in all schools, from the elementary level through university education, and in extracurricular youth organizations. The party also transmits atheist propaganda through the mass media and prohibits religions from utilizing public media.
- 2) A second form of persecution is political repression. Religious leaders are prohibited from joining the Communist Party and thus from holding government positions. Throughout Communist rule, the government has conducted campaigns to suppress missionaries and religious leaders, subjecting them to imprisonment, labor camps, torture, and sometimes execution. Since 1997, overt persecution has become less frequent, though the government adopts indirect strategies, like falsely charging religious leaders with economic crimes and sex crimes. In 2015, 260 religious leaders were estimated to be in jail. In Zhejiang province, the government has destroyed more than 1,500 crosses and nearly 400 churches since 2013.
- 3) The third form of repression is economic punishment. Christians who refuse to obey government strictures may be fined, dismissed from their jobs, stripped of their property, or demoted. As a result, these believers face social isolation, defamation, or stigmatization.

Responses to persecution take several forms, too.

- 1) Some Christian leaders have become active cooperators with Communist rule, either clandestinely or openly; some of these renounce their faith while others retain their faith and look upon Communism as a progressive program of justice. Several leaders of the TSPM, for instance, have been active cooperators with Communism. This response is less common, however, among younger generations of Christians.
- 2) A second strategy, which remains common today, involves the reluctant accommodation of Communist authority, in some cases after imprisonment or torture, in order to keep alive Christian ministry and evangelization. Many Christian leaders have joined the TSPM and CPA as an expression of this strategy.
- 3) Other Christians, unwilling to compromise, follow a third strategy, one of resistance, conducting underground worship, ministry, and evangelization, fully anticipating severe consequences at the hands of the state. A moderately confrontational response is that of Christian lawyers who take up civil and human rights cases in the courts. A small number of Christians have openly criticized the government for its repression of religion.

R E S P O N D

Witnesses to the Resurrection

DISCUSS:

- Are the stories of Christians who die for their faith tragic or hopeful to you? Explain.
 - How can you imagine the transformation of you and your community into the image of the Master?
 - Is there anything else the Lord is calling you to do in response to what we have discussed today? What else would you like to learn, pray, or do in response to these stories?
-

FURTHER RESOURCES:

In Response to Persecution, page 28 (China; see also page 29 on Vietnam and Laos)

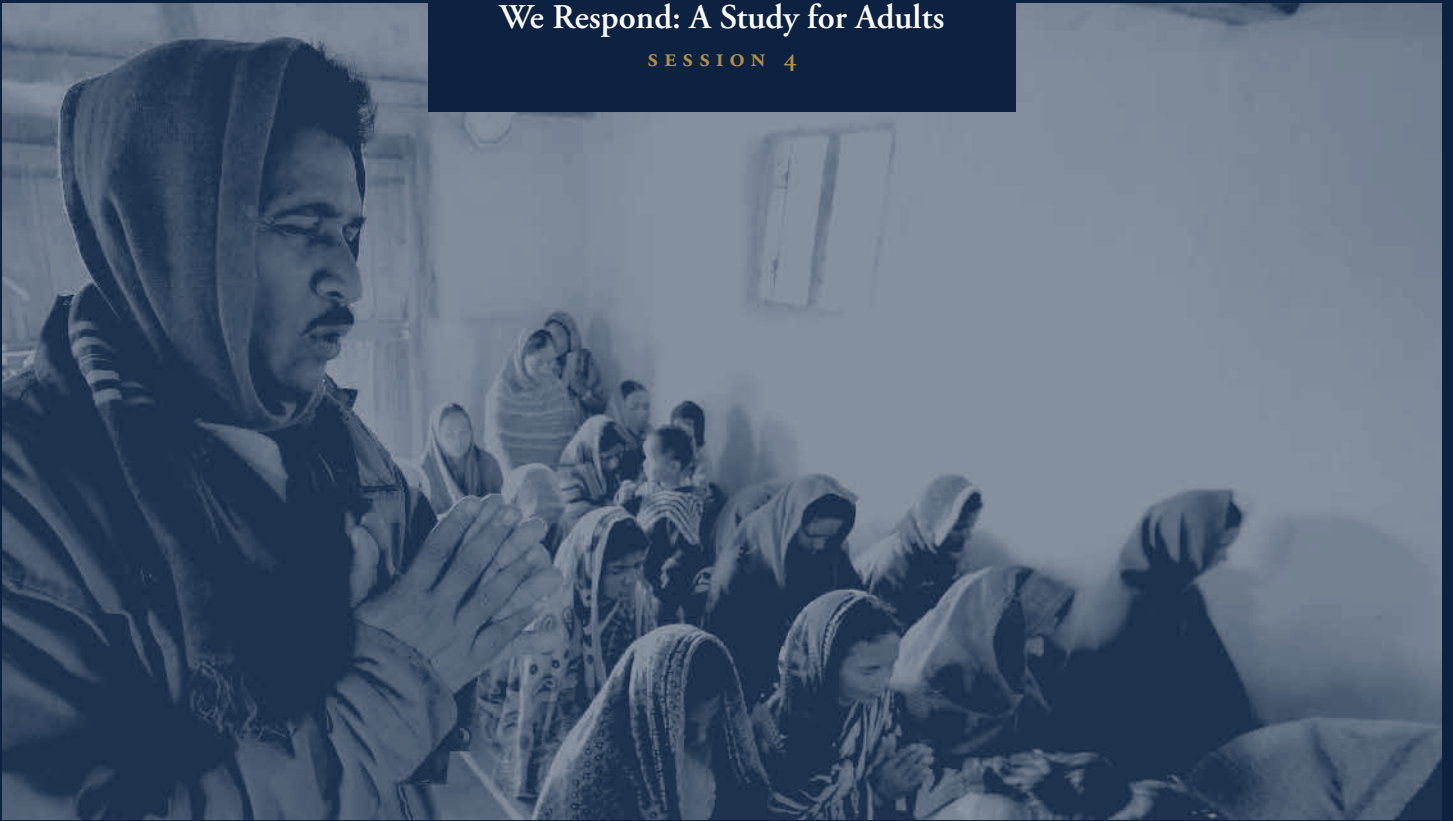
In Response to Persecution, pages 39-41 (Findings on Nonviolence, Theology, Churches)

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn (China; see also profiles of Vietnam, Laos)

C L O S I N G P R A Y E R

My very bones shall say, “O LORD, who is like you, Who rescue the afflicted from the powerful, the afflicted and needy from the despoiler?” Malicious witnesses come forward, accuse me of things I do not know. They repay me evil for good and I am all alone. They slandered me without ceasing; without respect they mocked me, gnashed their teeth against me. Lord, how long will you look on? Save me from roaring beasts, my precious life from lions! Then I will thank you in the great assembly; I will praise you before the mighty throng.

Close with a time of shared prayer for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud. Our Father...



WITNESS & MARTYRDOM IN CHURCH HISTORY

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution

Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Recognize the connection between the Paschal Mystery of Christ and the witness of the martyrs

Describe how martyrdom is related to witness, truth, and beauty, rather than just “useful” ends

Name some ways in which the persecution of Christians has evolved through the ages and explain that in any particular era, persecution is contingent on human free will in favor of or against justice

Name the different categories of regimes and other persecuting groups active today

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

Models of Faithfulness

Note: *Written by the same author, the Passion narrative of Luke and the story of the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts bear striking and meaningful similarities. At ucs.nd.edu, you may find a "synopsis," a side-by-side comparison, of these two passages as a supplement to Session 3 and Session 4.*

You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

ACTS 6:8-15, 7:54-60: Martyrdom of Stephen

Now Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke (cf. Lk 21:15). Then they instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, accosted him, seized him, and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They presented false witnesses who testified, "This man never stops saying things against [this] holy place and the law. For we have heard him claim that this Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

When they heard this [testimony of Stephen], they were infuriated, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (cf. Lk 22:69), and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, and rushed upon him together. They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"; and when he said this, he fell asleep.

Let Us Pray: *As we encounter the beauty of persecuted Christians' faithfulness, let us be filled with wonder and awe through the power of your Holy Spirit. Make us sharers in this same beauty through our own lives of discipleship. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

ENCOUNTER

Transfigured in Splendor

DISCUSS: The martyrdom of Stephen in Acts was written by the author of the Gospel of Luke, whose account of the Passion we heard last week. What is similar between these two passages? What is different, and specifically, what do Jesus' death and resurrection make possible for Stephen?

TWO MODERN WITNESSES

Background: Eritrea, a country in the Horn of Africa, is one of the ten worst persecutors of Christians in the world. Helen Berhane is an Eritrean gospel singer imprisoned for 32 months in a shipping container due to her Christian faith.

Listen to the story of Helen Berhane (video 2, 16:06-16:57, and video 3, 17:20-22:00).

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

Background: Many of us will remember the 2016 murder of Fr. Jacques Hamel in Saint-Étienne du Rouvray, a town of less than 30,000 people in the region of Normandy, France. On July 26, 2016, two teenagers claiming allegiance to the Islamic State attacked Fr. Hamel while he was celebrating Mass, slitting his throat as he cried, "Go away, Satan!" The targeting of a priest during Mass, known to Catholics as the "source and summit" of Christian faith, seems to signal clearly the intentional target of Christianity.

Read story 4 about the French priest Fr. Hamel and the two quotes below.

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

DISCUSS:

- Are Helen Berhane's and Fr. Hamel's stories similar to the story of Stephen the martyr?
- Would you call their lives beautiful, eloquent, and/or attractive? Why or why not? What does it mean that those who suffer and die for the faith "light up every period of history"?
- What could it mean that their lives given in love are the seed of the church, as Tertullian says?

The Seed of the Church

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.... Your [the Roman Empire's] cruelties merely prove our innocence of the crimes you charge against us.... And you frustrate your purpose. Because those who see us die, wonder why we do, for we die like the men you revere, not like slaves or criminals. And when they find out, they join us.

(TERTULLIAN, THE APOLOGY [DEFENSE], 197 AD)

The Splendor of the Martyrs' Witness

By their eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendor of moral truth, the martyrs and, in general, all the Church's Saints, light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense.... Although martyrdom represents the high point of the witness to moral truth, and one to which relatively few people are called, there is nonetheless a consistent witness which all Christians must daily be ready to make, even at the cost of suffering and grave sacrifice. Indeed, faced with the many difficulties which fidelity to the moral order can demand, even in the most ordinary circumstances, the Christian is called, with the grace of God invoked in prayer, to a sometimes heroic commitment. In this he or she is sustained by the virtue of fortitude.

[JOHN PAUL II, THE SPLENDOR OF TRUTH, 1993, §93]

LEARN

Persecution through the Ages

Note: You may wish to invite participants to read this article quietly to themselves or, on the other hand, paragraph by paragraph out loud.

Worldly powers – whether legitimate rulers, rogue groups, or others – have despised Christians for the same reasons the world hated Jesus. “If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you” (Jn 15:18-19).

In the first centuries of Christianity, persecution was not “polite.” Roman rulers such as Nero, Decius, Diocletian, and Galerius undertook different forms of persecution against Christians, such as allowing or encouraging mobs to attack and stone Christians; requiring Christians to perform a symbolic sacrifice to the gods or emperor; forbidding conversion or assembly; and trying, exiling, and executing Christians.

In the year 313 AD, the Edict of Milan legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire, and the Roman Empire officially adopted Christianity in the year 380 AD. This allowed a shift in the attention of the Church from survival and apologetics to a formalizing period marked by articulating theology in the form of doctrine, the formalization of church hierarchical structures, and the advent of forms of monastic life which afforded Christians the more intense spiritual challenges that earlier Christians had faced in the desert or amid persecution. Through various periods in the Middle Ages, the spiritual, intellectual, charitable, and political dimensions of Christianity flourished through the institutions of religious orders, hospitals, universities, music, law, and political engagement.



Christians are often accused of atrocities related to the Crusades and Inquisitions and the associated political and religious interests. Indeed, many lives were lost and human rights abused in these campaigns, but the extent is often exaggerated and the blame applied retroactively using a moral lens not shared by the people of the time.

The Reformations and Enlightenment periods introduced from within that thoroughly Christian culture a new sort of criticism of Christian thought and structures. Meanwhile, the period brought a blossoming of missionary endeavors that meant many Christian missionaries died at the hostile hands of foreign cultures not yet evangelized. Later, with the French Revolution, the advent of the nation-state as the dominant structure in modern politics meant that persecution would come not from hostile foreign cultures but from hostile local rulers according to their ideologies. The French Revolution produced a typical secularist state, which targeted religious structures as at odds with the autonomy of the person, but later other states emerged as well, including Communist regimes, Islamist states, and religious-nationalist states, along with non-state actors within each type of regime either hostile or friendly to it.

With the advent of secular regimes and severe challenges to human dignity, an avalanche of death and destruction has been unleashed, which is unprecedented in human history. Beyond the six million Jews and the millions who died in the mass slaughter of World Wars I and II, it is estimated the anti-religious Communists of the twentieth century were responsible for over 100 million deaths. To be sure, many of these deaths were not related to persecution of religion, but many were, and it is estimated that there were more Christians killed for their faith in the twentieth century than in all other centuries combined.

DISCUSS: Why has Christian persecution evolved, ebbed, and flowed through the ages? From a historical perspective, is persecution inevitable? Give reasons for your answer.

The following charts summarize the different sources of persecution Christians face today, along with their historical precedents.

SECULARIST STATES

Precedent: French Revolution, 1789

Today: Some European states, Mexico, post-Soviet Central Asia

Note: As opposed to secular states that maintain and respect religious pluralism, secularist states actively repress the freedom of various religious groups

COMMUNIST STATES

Precedent: Russian Revolution, 1917, which replaced Tsarist rule with Soviet rule

Today: China, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, North Korea

Note: Formerly Soviet states may retain some influence, e.g., in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, South/SE Asia, parts of Africa

ISLAMIST STATES

Precedent: Decline of Ottoman Empire, late 19th Century, and transition of Muslim areas into nation-states

Today: North Africa, Gaza, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan

Note: Islamist groups are also influential in Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Somalia, etc.

RELIGIOUS NATIONALIST STATES

Precedent: Post-colonial or post-Soviet states developing new national politics

Today: India, Sri Lanka, Russia

Note: A religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Russian Orthodoxy is seen as fundamental to national identity while others are repressed

NON-STATE ACTORS

Precedent: With the rise of the nation-state, non-state groups compete with state power or fill in power vacuums under weak states; The arms trade exacerbates their power

Today: ISIS, Boko Haram, mobs loyal to BJP, etc.

Note: Violent non-state actors may oppose or share the ideology of the state(s) where they operate

Note: In the course of the discussion, you might find the opportunity to make the following observations about persecution in the history of Christianity:

First, persecution is not limited to Christians. Others have been persecuted for their political commitments, involvement in other religions, and race. These elements of persecution sometimes coincide with Christian faith, which may either worsen or moderate persecution; for example, members of the lowest traditional Indian caste, Dalit converts to Christianity may receive poor treatment both because they are Christian and because they are Dalits by birth.

Additionally, Christians have at times persecuted other groups or other Christians; we should admit and grieve this fact, though it does not follow that Christians today should pay for others' wrongs.

Finally, Christians have at times evangelized the culture and political leaders to such an extent that persecution of Christians was quite rare in a place, though it may have continued in some missionary contexts. In addition to early medieval Europe, examples include post-colonial Latin America and North America (1800s-2000s), parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and the Philippines.

R E S P O N D

Beauty in Every Age

Listen to the homily given at Fr. Hamel's funeral, story 5.

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

DISCUSS:

- What are your takeaways from the homily and the rest of today's discussion?
 - The stories of martyrdom can be repugnant to our natural inclinations. Do you experience this?
 - Aside from practical or pragmatic responses to persecution, such as charity, advocacy, or education, is there a way you can share the beauty of the martyrs' witness for its own sake?
 - Do you think non-Christians would find this witness compelling? In what circumstances?
-

FURTHER RESOURCES:

Tertullian, The Apology [Defense], 197 AD

John Paul II, The Splendor of Truth, 1993

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn

C L O S I N G P R A Y E R

Begin the prayer in your tradition. Read from the letter to the Romans.

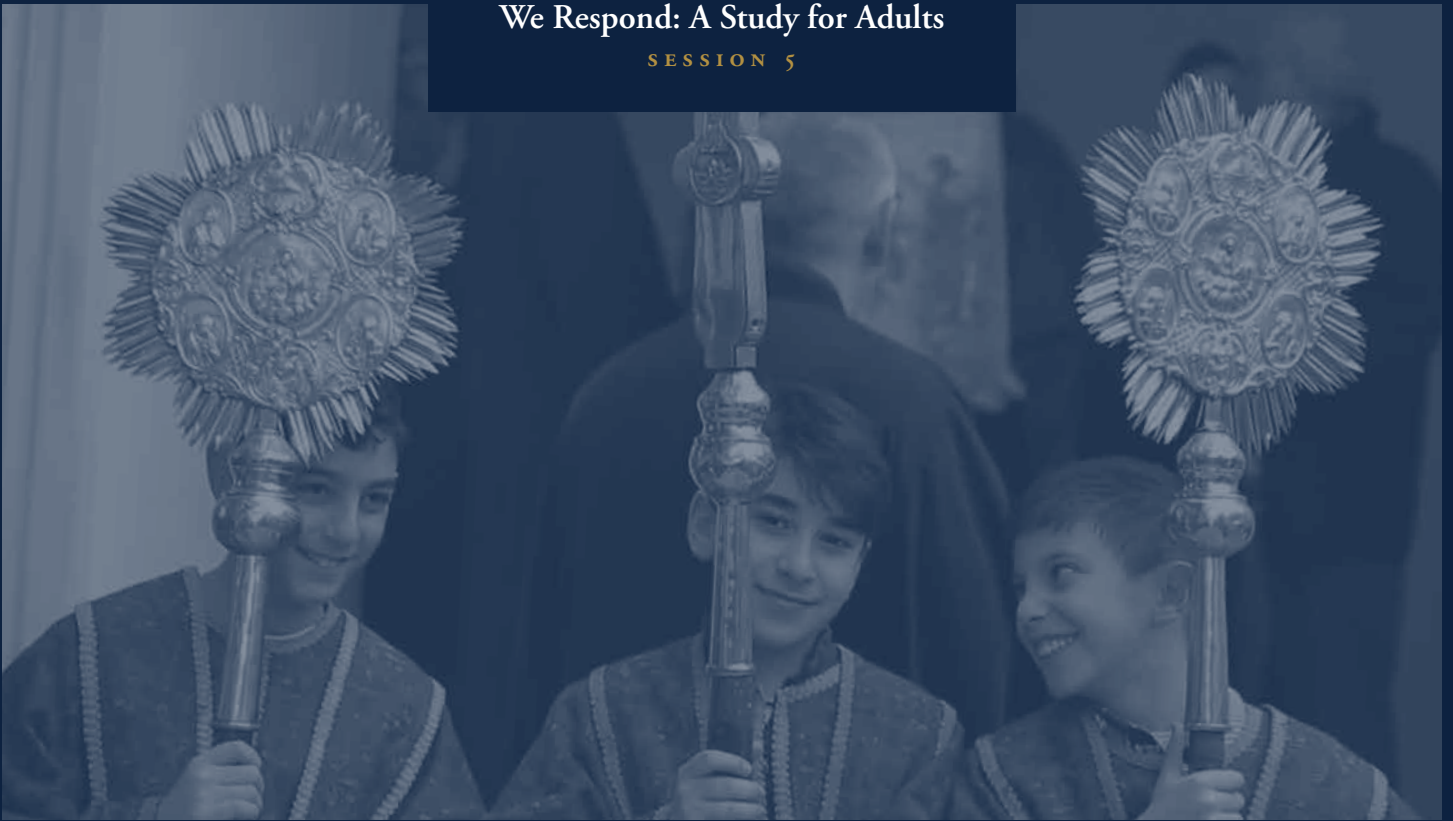
I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.

Close with a time of shared prayer for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud. Our Father...

NOTES:

We Respond: A Study for Adults

SESSION 5



HUMAN DIGNITY & RIGHTS

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution
Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Discuss the treatment of religious freedom in the Christian tradition and in international human rights documents

Encounter Christians who draw on the human rights discourse and tradition in defense of their own dignity and that of others

Describe how Christians respond to grave human rights violations through strategies of survival, association, and confrontation

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

The Dignity of All

You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

GENESIS 1:24-27: Then God said: Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: tame animals, crawling things, and every kind of wild animal. And so it happened: God made every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, and every kind of thing that crawls on the ground. God saw that it was good. Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

GALATIANS 5:1, 13-14: For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What is the difference between an act of justice and an act of love or mercy? Does our society – or do you personally – ever mistake one for the other?

Let Us Pray: Heavenly Father, you created all human beings in your image. Let each person in our human family seek you and respond with a free and listening heart, un so that we will honor the dignity and protect the rights of all. Teach our hearts today about the freedom you will for all people to come to knowledge of your Truth, in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENCOUNTER

Justice Shall Flourish

Listen to the story of the human rights lawyer, video 4 (2:59-7:34).

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

How have the human rights lawyer's motivations evolved? What do human rights mean to her?

LEARN

Christianity and Human Rights

Invite the group to read and discuss the following passages with a partner. Share insights as a whole group.

Human Dignity and Religious Freedom:

From the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* (para. 2, 1965)

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

It is in accordance with their dignity as persons—that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility—that all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth. **However, men cannot discharge these obligations in a manner in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom. Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed.**

Find it: Search the web for “Dignitatis humanae.”

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

ARTICLE 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

ARTICLE 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Find it: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

Christians in Iran and Saudi Arabia tend to employ strategies of survival, while Christians in Vietnam, Laos, and other countries have attempted in various ways to advocate for their human rights (see the report *In Response to Persecution* for examples).

What kinds of conditions might explain this difference? Is it always possible or advisable for Christians to advocate “out loud” for their dignity in resistance to the abuses against them?

RESPOND

Protecting Human Rights

Christians and Religious Freedom

The link between Christianity and freedom is thus original and profound. It has its roots in the teaching of Christ himself, and St. Paul appears as one of its most strenuous and brilliant defenders. Freedom is intrinsic to Christianity, for it was, as Paul says, for freedom that Christ set us free (cf. Gal 5:5). The Apostle, of course, was referring primarily to the interior freedom enjoyed by Christians, but this interior freedom naturally also has consequences for society. This year marks the 1,700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan, which crowned the expansion throughout society of that interior freedom of which St Paul spoke. At the same time, from an historical and cultural standpoint, the Edict represented the beginning of a process which has marked European history and that of the entire world, leading in the course of the centuries to the definition of human rights and the recognition of religious freedom as “the first of human rights, for it expresses the most fundamental reality of the person” (Benedict XVI, 2012) and as “the litmus test for the respect of all the other human rights” (John Paul II, 2003).

From “Christians and Religious Freedom,” address by the Archbishop Secretary for Relations with States, 13 December 2013, Pontifical Urbaniana University, “Christianity and Freedom” conference, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Note: Christians who defend human rights confront the injustice of the persecution levied against themselves or others. Therefore, the actions of documenting human rights abuses, appealing to the law, and other defenses of Christians’ basic rights are considered responses of confrontation. One precedent for these strategies in the Scriptures is the voice of the prophets who denounced the injustices of their times that went against the will of the Lord. Similarly, Jesus himself denounced the hypocrites who did not make provision for the poor.

DISCUSS:

- Human rights describe the treatment owed to every person on account of his or her intrinsic dignity. Does this conception of human rights resonate with the biblical understanding of the human person and of justice? Why or why not?
- Is there anything you feel the Lord is calling you to do in response to what we have discussed today? What else would you like to learn, pray, or do in response to our discussion of Christianity, justice, and human rights?

FURTHER RESOURCES:

In Response to Persecution, page 23 (Iran and Saudi Arabia)

In Response to Persecution, page 29 (Vietnam and Laos)

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn (Iran, Saudi Arabia)

FOR NEXT TIME:

Of Gods and Men (2010, 120 minutes) – in preparation for next session

“Last Testament of the Monks of Tibhirine” by Fr. Christian de Chergé

Optional Group Homework: You may wish to watch the film *Of Gods and Men* (2010) as a group, perhaps with snacks or dinner. It is a stunning 120-minute film about the monks’ friendships with their Muslim neighbors, their Christian witness, and their faithfulness to the end. It won the Grand Prize at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

Along with the film, or instead, read and reflect on the “Last Testament,” a letter from the superior of a group of Christian monks killed by Islamist terrorists in Algeria.

RESPONSES OF CONFRONTATION

Strategies of *confrontation* are those in which Christians openly challenge the persecution levied against them or remain faithful to their beliefs no matter the threat.

CLOSING PRAYER

The LORD does righteous deeds, brings justice to all the oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, to the Israelites his deeds.
Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
He will not always accuse, and nurses no lasting anger;
He has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our wrongs deserve.
For as the heavens tower over the earth, so his mercy towers over those who fear him.

Close with a time of shared prayer for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud. Our Father...

NOTES:

Last Testament

Fr. Christian de Chergé | Pentecost Sunday, 1996

On May 24, 1996, a group of Islamic terrorists announced that they had “slit the throats” of seven French Trappist monks whom they had kidnapped from the monastery of Tibherine in Algeria and held as hostages for two months. Prior to the kidnapping, the superior of the monastery, Father Christian de Chergé, had left with his family this testament “to be opened in the event of my death.”

If it should happen one day—and it could be today—that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to encompass all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, my family, to remember that my life was given to God and to this country. I ask them to accept that the One Master of all life was not a stranger to this brutal departure. I ask them to pray for me: for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to be able to associate such a death with the many other deaths that were just as violent, but forgotten through indifference and anonymity.

My life has no more value than any other. Nor any less value. In any case, it has not the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know that I share in the evil which seems, alas, to prevail in the world, even in that which would strike me blindly. I should like, when the time comes, to have a clear space which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of all my fellow human beings, and at the same time to forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down.

I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this. I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice if this people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder. It would be to pay too dearly for what will, perhaps, be called “the grace of martyrdom,” to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he may be, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam. I know the scorn with which Algerians

as a whole can be regarded. I know also the caricature of Islam which a certain kind of Islamism encourages. It is too easy to give oneself a good conscience by identifying this religious way with the fundamentalist ideologies of the extremists. For me, Algeria and Islam are something different; they are a body and a soul. I have proclaimed this often enough, I believe, in the sure knowledge of what I have received in Algeria, in the respect of believing Muslims—finding there so often that true strand of the Gospel I learned at my mother’s knee, my very first Church.

My death, clearly, will appear to justify those who hastily judged me naive or idealistic: “Let him tell us now what he thinks of it!” But these people must realize that my most avid curiosity will then be satisfied. This is what I shall be able to do, if God wills—immerse my gaze in that of the Father, to contemplate with him his children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness, delighting in the differences.

For this life given up, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God who seems to have wished it entirely for the sake of that joy in everything and in spite of everything. In this “thank you,” which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my brothers and sisters and their families—the hundredfold granted as was promised!

And you also, the friend of my final moment, who would not be aware of what you were doing. Yes, for you also I wish this “thank you”—and this adieu—to commend you to the God whose face I see in yours.

And may we find each other, happy “good thieves,” in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen.

Translated by the Monks of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, Leicester, England.



We Respond: A Study for Adults

SESSION 6

RESPONSES OF FORGIVENESS

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution
Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Discuss the command of Jesus Christ to forgive and his role as reconciler

Articulate how forgiveness is a strategy of association, oriented toward rebuilding right relationship

Sense the complexity and power of forgiveness after the abuse of human rights

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

Even Our Enemies?

You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

MATTHEW 5:43-48: “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, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

MATTHEW 18:15-35: “If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’ Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.”

Has anyone ever forgiven you when you were sure you did not deserve it?

Let Us Pray: We thank you, Lord, for your infinite mercy to us sinners. As we encounter some Christians' radical stories of forgiveness, let us see with your eyes and theirs, set free from resentment and violence. Fill us with the grace of your Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

LEARN

Persecution and Forgiveness in Pakistan

Listen to the story of Dr. Paul Bhatti of Pakistan (video 5, 12:11-21:27).

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

DISCUSS: The Under Caesar’s Sword project classifies forgiveness as a response of association.

Read this excerpt from the UCS report, *In Response to Persecution* (page 37).

“Forgiveness, which involves overcoming resentment and foregoing revenge as well as inviting the perpetrator to conversion—another form of building ties. Anticipating martyrdom, Christian de Chergé, leader of the ‘Tibhirine Monks’ of Algeria who were martyred in 1996 during the uprising, wrote a letter to his would-be killers, forgiving them and inviting them to a future of living together in freedom. Forgiveness is among the most distinctively Christian responses to persecution, understood by its practitioners as obedient imitation of Christ.”

Those who forgive do not necessarily rebuild an active relationship with the person forgiven.

Still, how does forgiveness transform the relationships we heard about in the letter of Fr. Christian and in the testimony of Dr. Bhatti? To what new realities does forgiveness invite the people involved?

NOTES:

RESPONSES OF ASSOCIATION

Strategies of *association* are those in which Christians build ties with others that strengthen their resilience in the face of persecution.

RESPOND

Practicing Mercy

Keep in mind the Scriptures we used for the opening prayer.

DISCUSS:

- Think of the human rights abuses, restrictions on religious freedom, and other atrocities we have learned about throughout these weeks. How do the Lord’s parable and his commands to love and forgive even our enemies challenge “business as usual” in the world? In your life?
 - Do we need both justice and mercy? Explain your answer.
 - What else is the Lord calling you to learn, pray, or do in response to the stories of forgiveness?
-

FURTHER RESOURCES:

In Response to Persecution, page 26 (Pakistan and Afghanistan)

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn

NOTES:

CLOSING PRAYER

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” They divided his garments by casting lots. The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, “If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.” Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:33-43)

Close with a time of shared prayer for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud. Our Father...

NOTES:

We Respond: A Study for Adults

SESSION 7



RESPONSES OF SOLIDARITY

Adult Faith Formation Resource: Christian Responses to Persecution
Meeting Jesus in his Persecuted Church

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Discuss the theological and practical basis for strategies of association

Reflect on stories of solidarity, outreach, and partnership from India and Sri Lanka

Discern our responses of solidarity related to persecution and discrimination today

Visit ucs.nd.edu to learn more.

PRAY

Christ Our Reconciliation

Introduction: In this final session, we look to Jesus himself as our model for solidarity along with Christian communities responding to persecution. Often it is witnessing the suffering of others that drives us to acts of justice, love, and solidarity for those on the margins. Yet true solidarity is driven not only by pity but also by a deeper recognition – recognition of the common humanity of another, and recognition of our dependence on the broader human family.

You may wish to have each person read the passages individually and journal about the reflection questions before discussing, or you may read and discuss the passages and questions as a group.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-19: So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

What does it mean to you to be an ambassador for Christ?

When interdependence becomes recognized... the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a “virtue,” is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

(POPE JOHN PAUL II, SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS, 1987, §38)

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

(MARTIN NIEMÖLLER)

Martin Niemöller (1892–1984) was a Protestant pastor in Germany who spoke out against Adolf Hitler. As punishment, he spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps.

In what ways do you see the human family as interdependent?

Let Us Pray: Lord, while we were still sinners, you proved your love for us, reconciling us to God in Jesus' death and new life. When we deserved your punishment, you emptied yourself, taking flesh in solidarity with us. Let those persecuted for their faith live in the same solidarity by your grace, reaching out to protect, dignify, and reconcile all people in you, even in difficult circumstances. Work the same grace in us as we go forth in your love and solidarity. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENCOUNTER

One Human Family

Listen to story 6 about Christians' networks of solidarity in India.

Find it: ucs.nd.edu/teach/stories/.

DISCUSS: What does it take to be in solidarity with another person or group? Does this definition of solidarity resonate with you? How does the story of Indian Christians build on your understanding of the term

LEARN

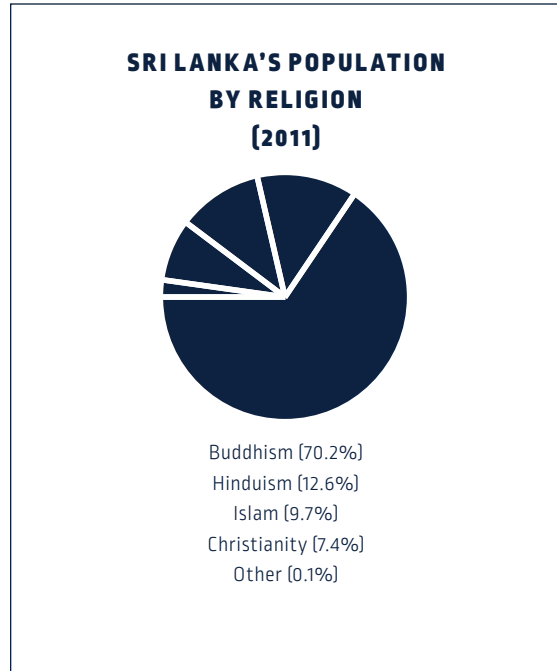
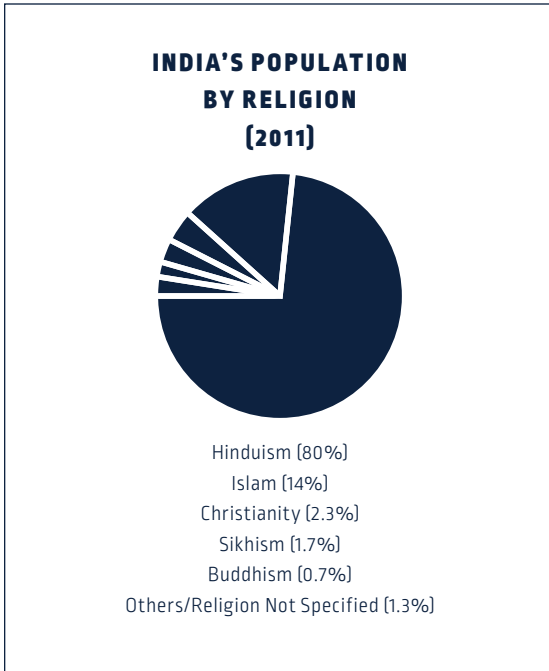
Association in India and Sri Lanka

Review this selection from the report *In Response to Persecution*:

Christian communities in India and Sri Lanka have enacted a wide range of all three types of responses—survival, association, and confrontation—which are made possible in part by the democratic character of both countries' regimes. Where violence has been greatest in India, especially in Odisha, Christians have migrated, mostly within India. Indian Christians have also made extensive efforts to build alliances among churches and with Hindu and Muslim religious leaders, stressing common values and collaboration to provide social services....

In Sri Lanka, Christian churches—not just Catholics, who represent 80 percent of the country's Christian population, but also evangelicals and Pentecostals—have built bridges both among themselves and with other faiths, often collaborating to provide social services, for example. Christian churches have conducted civic education campaigns among their followers and contributed to peacebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka after its civil war ended in 2009. Christian churches and organizations like the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka have also engaged in international advocacy on behalf of religious liberty in Sri Lanka.

Christians constitute small minorities in India and Pakistan. What does solidarity mean for them? Who benefits from solidarity?



NOTES:

RESPOND

Going Forth in Solidarity

Leader: In Matthew 10:7-33, Jesus instructs his disciples to carry on his mission, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, curing the sick, and more.

Leave a significant amount of time for the group to pray with Matthew 10 and discern responses of our own to the persecution of Christians around the world. Please refer participants to the attached section entitled "Our Responses: Six Ideas for Action" for ideas.

How did Jesus respond when he encountered those of other social groups and religions?

Read this selection from Matthew 10:

"As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you. Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words—go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

"Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave that he become like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household!

"Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Pray with these words of Jesus, and discuss individual and collective responses you or your group might make to the persecution of Christians around the world. For ideas, please refer to the following section entitled “Our Responses: Six Ideas for Action” and to the longer list of recommendations on pages 46-55 of the report *In Response to Persecution*.

DISCUSS:

- What would it look like for us to follow the example of Indian Christians today?
 - How would you like to respond in solidarity with the Christian communities we have encountered throughout our discussions together? Are there other groups who have come to your mind and heart deserving of our prayers, solidarity, and even alliance?
 - Is there anything your group would like to do together in response?
-

FURTHER RESOURCES:

In Response to Persecution, pages 46-55 (Recommendations for Action)

In Response to Persecution, page 25 (India and Sri Lanka)

In Response to Persecution, pages 42-43 (Findings: Active Responses and Successful Responses)

Country Profiles: ucs.nd.edu/learn (India, Sri Lanka)

CLOSING PRAYER

Take some time to write down your “takeaway” from this seven-part series. What insights, stories, and encounters will you take with you as you go? What other fruits has the Lord shared with you?

Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Share these takeaways one by one, if desired, and place the papers in a central place as a sign of offering them to the Lord. Close with a time of shared prayer. Our Father....

Share these takeaways one by one, if desired, and place the papers in a central place as a sign of offering them to the Lord. Close with a time of shared prayer in gratitude for the fruits of this series and for intercessions the group would like to pray aloud

We Respond: A Study for Adults

OUR RESPONSES

OUR RESPONSES: SIX IDEAS FOR ACTION



Pray

- Pray for persecuted Christians and their persecutors, for solidarity by leaders and others in more religiously free parts of the world, and for the courage to follow Christ no matter the cost. Pray for courage including in the face of growing – if more “polite” (Pope Francis) – persecution in the West. (Acts 12; Hebrews 13)
- On your own or with your Bible study group, pray with:
 - A story of persecution, such as the persecution of Jeremiah (Jer 38), the Book of Daniel, the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6-7), or the trial of Paul (Acts 22).
 - A hymn of lamentation, such as Psalm 35, Psalm 69, or Lamentations 1, alongside the latest news about persecution.
 - The Book of Daniel or the Book of Revelation, which use apocalyptic, allegorical imagery during a time of persecution to convey meaning, hope, and trust in God. You will want a scholarly resource to help you understand the imagery.
- Passages about the oneness of the Body of Christ, especially amid suffering.
- Incorporate specific prayers, as above, into your liturgy or worship services.

Learn More

- Read a book or report, such as *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (John Allen, 2013), *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom* (Taylor, van de Meer, and Reimer, 2012), or the Pew Forum report *Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion* (2016, available online).
- Study the early history of Christianity in the Middle East and its spread to other areas.
- Read about U.S. efforts to advance international religious freedom through our foreign policy, with sources such as Allen Hertzke, *Freeing God’s Children: the Unlikely Alliance for Global Human Rights* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), and Thomas Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Freedom is Vital to American National Security* (Oxford, 2008)
- Sign up for the online course on Christian responses to persecution (Fall 2017)
- Follow us on Twitter and Facebook @CaesarsSword
- Visit the Under Caesar’s Sword website at ucs.nd.edu for more resources

Reach out

- Connect with refugees and other people marginalized in your community
- Consider planning ecumenical or interfaith prayer services, learning events, or other efforts with other groups in your area, since those who are persecuted come from various Christian traditions and other faiths; all people have a right to religious freedom.

Spread the Word

- Host a film event for the broader church, school, university, or neighborhood community
- Learn about our six-week study series on Christian persecution, and consider bringing this resource to your church group, class, or organization
- Share information, opportunities, and your insights and beliefs on social media
- Reflect with your family and friends about what you have learned and what it means
- Talk about how you will resolve to seek grace to be more clear and courageous in your own witness, even in the face of so-called “polite” (but in its own way difficult) persecution and other forms of pressure and hostility here at home.

Talk to Your Leaders and Communities about Religious Freedom

- Discuss what you have learned with your pastor or minister
- Discuss in your parish, small group, or sodality group how you can pray and prepare to be clearer and more consistent and bold witnesses in the face of countervailing pressures and hostility to the Gospel – including “polite” persecution – here at home.
- Contact your elected officials, both locally and at higher levels, and ask them to support the strengthening of America’s policy to advance international religious freedom.
- Advocate for better protection of religious freedom where you live and abroad

Support Charities that Aid Persecuted Christians Worldwide

Many wonderful charities focus on the Middle East; consider other areas also.

We recommend:

- Aid to the Church in Need
- Catholic Near East Welfare Association
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide
- The Knights of Columbus
- Open Doors
- Voice of the Martyrs
- In Defense of Christians (which emphasizes advocacy)
- The Religious Freedom Institute



VISIT UCS.ND.EDU TO LEARN MORE.