

Tapestry: reweaving the fabric of community after public violence

study guide

Photo: Paul Lewis



Notes for the Leader:

Preparation work for the leader of this session might include researching public violence events in or near your community. What are the local statistics for violent crime? Are there groups which respond or do advocacy around these issues? Is there a local victims' aid or advocacy organization with which you might connect?

The Tapestry film looks at the effects of public violence events in congregations and the communities of which they are a part. It is framed through the lens of volunteers and professionals, including members of PDA's National Response Team, who respond to such events to support communities, their leaders, and survivors as they walk through the valley of the shadow of trauma and its aftermath and begin the process of healing. You may choose to view the 28 minute film in its entirety prior to discussion; or if you prefer, we have suggested two stopping points in the midst of the film, at which points discussion may be engaged. Each break in the film is followed by quotations drawn from that section, and provides questions for conversation.

You may begin the session with a prayer.

May our eyes remain open even in the face of tragedy. May we not become disheartened. May we find in the dissolution of our apathy and denial, the cup of the broken heart. May we discover the gift of the fire burning in the inner chamber of our being—burning great and bright enough to transform any poison. May we offer the power of our sorrow to the service of something greater than ourselves. May our guilt not rise up to form yet another defensive wall. May the suffering purify and not paralyze us. May we endure; may sorrow bond us and not separate us. May we realize the greatness of our sorrow and not run from its touch or its flame. May clarity be our ally and wisdom our support. May our wrath be cleansing, cutting through the confusion of denial and greed. May we not be afraid to see or speak our truth. May the bleakness of the wasteland be dispelled. May the soul's journey be revealed and the true hunger fed. May we be forgiven for what we have forgotten and blessed with the remembrance of who we really are.

—The Terma Collective, from *The Box: Remembering the Gift*

Part One: Ripple Effects

STOP THE FILM at minute 10:00 AFTER "...it is the goodness that gets destroyed and it takes awhile to get put back together."

Quotes from this section of the film:

"When somebody purposely shoots somebody with the intent of taking their life, it fractures the soul. It fractures the soul of the community"
—JK

"When you hear about that person on page eight that has been shot and it is background noise and so many people look past that and don't hear it or don't feel it but as a survivor of gun violence, you can't help but feel for the entire community and the entire web of people that are touched by that individual."
—CH

"It's almost as if you can chart it out: single person, handgun, bullet, death. The wave just gets huge really quickly. That energy just ripples through a whole community and touches so many lives. Because a shooting occurs in their community and that ripples through the community, that's just the trigger—but that devastation is so much bigger. That is just the epicenter of it and then it goes out and what gets destroyed is love and hope and peace. But all of that goodness, it is the goodness that gets destroyed and it takes awhile to get put back together."
—DH

Questions for Pondering and Conversation

Think about public violence events that have occurred in your community, or are known to you. How do such events "fracture the soul of the community"? What does gun violence do to individuals? Families? Churches? Communities?

This film frames public violence events as "disasters." How are public violence events and shootings similar to natural disasters? What are the differences between human and natural disasters? How could they impact people differently?

In the film, one responder describes public violence as having a "ripple effect." Do you agree? What ripple effects have you seen from shootings and acts of public violence? What impact does this have? Whom does it impact?

What would help "the goodness" come back to a community that has been fractured by public violence?

Part Two: Ministry of Presence

STOP THE FILM AT minute 14:21 "Healing through Community" title

Quotes from this section of the film:

"It is a call versus a choice, meaning you don't do this because you want to, you do it because you know it's who you are and God leads you to sit with other people's pain."
--BW

*"Resurrection doesn't come unless you are willing to enter into that world of loss and terror. So, to be in a **ministry of presence** in those initial moments or in those initial weeks and months*

is to be able to hold someone's hand while they are in the valley of death, in the valley of the shadow and to say "I will stand with you here, I will be your companion here while you do this work."
--LK

"When there is gun violence within a community, the instinct is to feel like "well this is our problem, this is our situation" and that's scary. It can be shameful, it can be "what could we have done to prevent this?" And to have National Responders from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance come in the door and name it as a disaster gave a word to what we were experiencing...(it helps) to orient everyone to the sense that, yes, this does touch every aspect of your life and it is overwhelming. And it helps to give you a starting place, even if that starting place is a feeling of being at the bottom; it gives you a sense of "well, from what we hear we can do something with a disaster." You can start the hard work of cleaning up and healing and repairing."
--KW

Questions for Pondering and Conversation

It is noted in the film that several of the people who do this kind of ministry of presence for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance were, themselves, survivors of public violence events in their community, and were moved to join this team because of their experience with responders who walked alongside them and their community in the valley of the shadow.

What kind of experience have you had, personally, that has made you more aware and responsive to someone else's similar circumstance? Have your own difficult experiences moved you to get involved in reaching out to others or advocating for others? How so?

What does it mean to be in a "ministry of presence"?

Is responding to/being present in public violence events a "call" or "choice" for the church/faith community? In what ways?

100,000 people a year are wounded by gun violence. How are we called to address this as Christians? How can we "listen to" the communities impacted by gun violence/public violence?

Part Three: Healing Through Community

Continue film to the conclusion.

Quotes from this section of the film:

"When a disaster hits a community, it is like a tear in the fabric of the community, and that recovery is the matter of retying those thousands of little threads that make up the tapestry of our lives."
--JR

"As responders, we sometimes need to be the memory of a community and remind people that the work of recovery is ongoing and it takes time. We need to be the ones to help people be able to continue to identify with and give voice to their sorrow and suffering as a way of finding the healing that is offered."
--JK

"Part of the work of growing beyond a trauma is focusing on narrative and community and being attuned to and attentive to the range of voices that were involved in that situation and making sure that folks feel that they had a sense of expressing themselves and what their part was in the community event."
--KW

"I don't know very many people who do trauma well when they are not connected to a larger sense of community. We need each other and we need others to come in to be with us to help strengthen the ability to connect again."
--BW

Questions for Pondering and Conversation

In this segment of the film, three different ways of "healing through community" are demonstrated: a community based support group for victims of gun violence, a worship service in a congregation that lost several members after an explosion, and a community-wide service of commemoration on the anniversary of that event. How do think the persons in each setting experienced healing through these events?

How can rushing to "recovery" and "hope" (and not acknowledging the pain and trauma) limit or hurt the process of healing for communities? Where is the church called to be in this process?

How does a sense of "community" help in the process of healing after public violence events?

In the bible, the Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam* ("world repair" or "world healing") describes the work in which people of faith are called to be engaged. What does "world repair" mean to you? How are you, and your community of faith, participating in this calling in your community?

Are there circumstances and places in your community where you and/or your congregation might help create a "tapestry" for healing and wholeness?

Close the Session

reading together Psalm 23, beginning with "Yea, though I walk..."

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,
You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
God makes me lie down in green pastures, and leads me beside still waters.
God restores my soul.
God leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

Part Four: Next Steps: *Following Paths of Righteousness*

*Participate in or host an annual community-wide vigil or service of remembrance for victims and survivors of public violence. Most sheriff's departments host these services annually.

*Have your group write prayers and reflections to create a daily devotional for a month of awareness of public violence, to be shared with your community of faith. You might make this a six week process for the season of Lent, or a month-long series for Advent.

*Form a "Tapestry" work team to develop ways to reduce violence in your community.

*Host a community-wide screening of "Trigger: the Ripple Effects of Gun Violence." Learn more at the Trigger web site: <http://triggerdoc.com/>

*Find advocacy opportunities on the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness web site: <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/washington/>

*Commit to collecting the "One Great Hour of Sharing" offering so that PDA can continue this work.

*For a more in-depth several week study program, see "Gun Violence, Gospel Values," developed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/gun-violence-gospel-values-mobilizing-response-god/>

*Learn about the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program: Transforming cultures of violence into communities of peace: <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/>

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