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Introduction

How to Use This Study Program

Welcome to the Engaging Nonviolence Study Program (*Engaging*). This fifteen-part study and action program offers participants a wide variety of principles, stories, exercises, and readings for learning, practicing, and experimenting with the power of creative nonviolence for personal and social transformation. We invite you to join with others and embark on this exploration of, and experimentation with, nonviolence.

This book is primarily a manual for discovering the range and scope of nonviolence. We have made it as experiential as possible, so that its users can develop not only a philosophical understanding of the subject, but also gain basic skills and make the material their own.

The element of surprise is very important in experiential learning; hopefully people will have new insights while they engage in each exercise. Therefore, we strongly encourage people who are not facilitating, but participating as students in the program, to read the book only **during** and not before the sessions. In some instances participants will need to read some text as homework, especially in the third part of the book. We have also included a journaling section where people can write down their personal learnings and insights, so this book can be kept as a diary of their progress.

The facilitators, on the other hand, are asked to familiarize themselves with the material as thoroughly as possible before facilitating the sessions. Reading through the entire book will give a sense of the intention of this introduction to nonviolence. To help the facilitators, we start each session with an agenda and bullet points that list the required preparations. This allows facilitators to think of how they want to shape the sessions: Should there be a centerpiece or decorations for the space? Will there be refreshments? And at what pace should the sessions proceed? Ideally, we think that one session per week is best in order to allow people to digest and internalize the material. Be sure to read “Organizing an Engaging Nonviolence Study Group” in the Resources section at the back of the book for more guidance on how to properly prepare for each session.

As was explained in “A Word From the Authors,” this book is structured so that people start by building a basic understanding of nonviolence, then gain skills and more thematic knowledge, and afterwards learn to analyze and strategize to put what they have learned into action. With this solid introduction, our hope is that the participants will continue their learning process, deepen their commitment, and find ways to contribute to a culture of nonviolence once they complete the course.

The Need For Skills For Personal And Social Change

Everyday, people throughout the world face the daunting challenge and consequences of violence and injustice. Some people confront this violence with violence. Others remain passive in the face of this destruction. Neither of these approaches, in our estimation, lead to long-term solutions because they often fail to address the root causes of violence or stop the cycle of destruction, resentment, and retaliation that violence and injustice create.

There are a growing number of people around the world, however, who are using the more effective approach of creative nonviolence, the subject of our study program, to bring about change in their societies. People are also using nonviolence to challenge personal, interpersonal, and social patterns of violence in their own lives. The more we are equipped with the vision and skills of nonviolence, the greater the chance for the emergence of an effective nonviolent culture bringing healing to our lives and to the world.

The Engaging Nonviolence Study Program

Engaging offers participants an orientation and process for introducing the ongoing integral journey of the nonviolent life. It recognizes that this journey is life-long. It does not pretend that one “achieves” a nonviolent life in fifteen sessions or even fifteen years. Pace e Bene regards this training as a relevant and updated introduction to some tools and techniques with which to experiment and understand what a nonviolent life requires from us. It offers a vision and toolbox that may be handy in applying grounded nonviolence to the challenges of our lives and to the cry for change so many people are demanding.

Guided by a commitment to building relationships, diversity, spiritual practice, and nonviolent action, *Engaging* seeks to support the deep, slow work of becoming a compassionate and whole humanity. It seeks to do this by:

- ☒ Cultivating the integration of the whole person: mind, heart, body, and spirit;
- ☒ Connecting personal transformation and social change;
- ☒ Offering spiritual grounding for the nonviolent life;
- ☒ Exploring the global history and practice of active nonviolence in concrete terms;
- ☒ Providing practical skills for putting nonviolent power into practice;
- ☒ Creating a safe space for transforming personal and social violence;
- ☒ Helping people make connections with many different movements for change;
- ☒ Offering a leadership training program for those interested in facilitating and supporting workshops, retreats, and study groups.

The Structure Of The Engaging Study Program

This program is designed to be a small-group learning process in personal and social transformation, appropriate for a wide range of settings. It can be led by people with minimal facilitation experience, not only by those with significant backgrounds in leading group processes. Useful guidelines are offered in “Organizing an Engaging Nonviolence Study Group” in the Resources section of this book.

The more people from all walks of life participate and work together in a nonviolence formation process, the more widely the tools of nonviolence will be distributed. Even more significantly: the more people gain these skills, the more nonviolence will become mainstream throughout the culture, changing conventional violent or passive responses. A new vision—“as old as the hills,” as Gandhi said—offers a proven, effective alternative: nonviolence.

The Engaging Study Program is composed of fifteen two-hour small-group sessions. Part I (Sessions 1-6) explores aspects of violence and nonviolence as a power for change. Part II (Sessions 7-11) explores the impact of nonviolence in the life of the person and society. Finally, Part III (Sessions 12-15) guides participants in learning about nonviolent strategic response and action organizing.

Each session uses a multiplicity of learning styles and methods to explore nonviolence: storytelling, role-playing, small- and large-group discussions, creative imagination exercises, journaling, and action.

For more details on facilitating this fifteen-part process, please see “Engaging Nonviolence Study Program Facilitation Guidelines” in the Resources section of the book.

An Inclusive Spirituality

The development of this study program has been guided by a desire to offer a nonviolence education process that is inclusive and accessible to people from many backgrounds and orientations. We did not want to sacrifice spiritual depth for the sake of accessibility. If nonviolence is regarded or approached only as a political, economic, cultural, or sociological phenomenon, it loses its heart. Nonviolence is rooted in depths that make alternatives to cruelty and injustice possible: love, compassion, hope, possibility, and self-transcendence. These are powerful forces and energies that draw human beings to our innermost elemental foundations, even as they urge us to change the world.

These depths are central to nonviolence, and therefore it is appropriate to consider the nonviolent life as a spiritual journey. But to take this approach does not mean that a spiritually-grounded nonviolence must only reflect a particular religious tradition. At the

same time, we acknowledge that there is great richness and depth in specific theologies and practices of nonviolence, peacemaking, and justice in many religious traditions, and there is enormous power in the members of each tradition understanding, claiming, and deepening its particular visions and practices designed for personal and social transformation.

Inclusive spirituality is the living, unfolding experience of our journey toward wholeness (forming a harmonious unity) in relationship to our ultimate value and meaning as persons, communities, and humanity. Put simply, inclusive spirituality is creatively and compassionately seeking the wholeness and well-being of all.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost we acknowledge all the known and unknown cultures, peoples, and communities throughout the world who have experienced enormous violence and have experimented creatively throughout history with the possibilities of active and powerful nonviolence. We especially acknowledge communities of color and all communities who have faced the searing violence of racism, poverty, war, and ecological and cultural destruction. Without their experiments in truth and relentless persistence there would be no body of nonviolent theory or practice of nonviolence as we know it. The book in your hands is based on this powerful tradition, and we gratefully honor this reality.

This sequel to *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*, is rooted in its prequel and the continuous work of its authors Ken Butigan, Veronica Pelicaric, Ken Preston-Pile, and Laura Slattery. Our gratitude to them and to all the people who contributed to the making of *Engage* and its success over more than a decade is immense. We want to also thank Ryan Hall, Pace e Bene's executive director, for his generous and unfailing support in bringing this book to completion. He is a true nonviolent warrior. Thanks also to Erin Bechtol for the proofreading and the design. It is not an exaggeration to say that thousands of people's wisdom, compassion and struggles for a better world are the essence and soul of this program. To all of you, a heartfelt thanks.