



Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

## ***The Power and Promise of Peace***

### ***LENTEN FAST – WEEK ONE***

#### **FASTING FROM THE CONSUMPTION OF MEDIA VIOLENCE ESPECIALLY GEARED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

Our children now live in a society where homicide, suicide and trauma are leading causes of death for children, adolescents and young adults up to age 21. Interpersonal violence - experienced from the perspective of being the victim or the perpetrator - is now a more prevalent health risk than infectious disease, cancer or congenital disorders for these same young people. A study by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2001 found that American children between the ages of 2 and 18 years spend an average of 6 hours and 32 minutes each day using media (television, videos, movies, video and computer games, music, Internet and print media). This is more time than they spend on any other activity, including school, except for the hours they sleep.

It is clear that violence has become a commodity to be sold in all forms of media and entertainment venues. And, not unlike tobacco and alcohol, the video game industry is specifically targeting children and young teens in their marketing practices. Is media violence a toxin in a child's environment, not unlike lead poisoning, tobacco, alcohol, or drugs? A look at the statistics and studies done on video violence provides compelling evidence that the answer is "yes."

#### **The connection between viewing violence and increased aggressive behavior**

Three major national studies, the first conducted more than 30 years ago, have confirmed a connection between viewing violence and increased aggressive behavior. The Surgeon General's Commission Report (1972), along with studies conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health (1982) and the American Psychological Association (1992) have been collected in a joint statement issued in 2000, "The Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children:"

*Viewing entertainment violence can lead to increase in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Its effects are measurable and long-lasting. Moreover, prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life. [Excerpt from the Joint Statement]*

In 2001, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued its "Media Violence Policy Statement" which found that "the strength of the correlation between media violence

and aggressive behavior is greater than the correlation between calcium intake and bone mass or the correlation between lead ingestion and lower IQ."

Perhaps the most sobering observation comes from a retired military officer. In his book, *On Killing*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, U.S. Army, writes: "Violent video games hardwire young people for shooting at humans. The entertainment industry conditions the young in exactly the same way the military does."

Another sobering fact: American women and girls are five times more likely to be murdered than women in other industrialized nations. [Journal of the Medical Women's Association, Spring 2002]

## **Follow the money**

Video and computer games have become a highly profitable segment of the entertainment industry. Annual sales in 1995 were \$3 billion. In 2002, annual sales of video and computer games totaled \$10 billion.

## **Who's playing?**

Forty-five per cent (45%) of the 126 million video game players are children and teens with twenty million of those aged 12 and under. A Federal Trade Commission report [September 2000] found that 40% of those who play Mature-rated games (rated for age 17 and older) are under 18. The best-selling game of 2002 was the M-rated *Grand Theft Auto III*. In this game, sexist and racist violence predominates.

## **A fasting from the consumption of violence**

Our culture is saturated with violent images and games which pass as entertainment. It is not a coincidence that the United States is a leader in the world in murders and other forms of violence done to persons (rape, battery, hate crimes, bullying, etc.). If Micah or Jeremiah were alive today, their prophetic words would fall on ears dulled by violent sensations received over a long period of time. But we worship a God who sent to us the Prince of Peace, who said to his disciples shortly before his crucifixion, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." (John 14:27) This is the same Jesus who cried out in anguish when he approached Jerusalem for the last time, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" (Luke 19:41)

Jesus gave us the Great Commandment, to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The kind of violence in many video games, on TV, or in the movies is not just fast paced, action packed drama to get the heart beating. It is too often, based on someone killing or beating up someone else based on their race, national origin, sex or gender or sexual orientation, what side of the railroad tracks they live on, or what side of the street they inhabit. It perpetuates stereotypes and prejudice. Violence in this world becomes the normative way of settling disputes and handling misunderstandings.

The prophet Isaiah brought God's word and judgment to those who went through the motions of religiosity yet whose hearts remained hardened:

*Yet day after day they seek me [the Lord]*

*and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness. (Isaiah 58:2)*

These same people wondered why God didn't notice them:

*"Why do we fast, but you do not see?*

*Why do we humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"*

The fasting which God requires leads to true transformation and awareness. During the first week of Lent, consider engaging your congregation, your family, and/or yourself in the following:

- turn off the TV, or at least do not watch shows that contain violence for violence sake
- don't go to movies that contain violence for violence sake
- ask to play the video games your children play and talk with them about the messages contained therein, especially if there is violence
- have congregational, study group, and/or family discussions about your reactions to seeing or hearing violent actions or words (as in song lyrics)
- develop a list of movies, video games, computer games and TV shows that do not use violence for violence sake but that promote healthy, non-violent resolutions to conflict and problem solving
- learn what your children are listening to, watching, playing and singing along with and use this week as an opportunity to discover together alternatives to violence

For information on developing media strategies for your home and family, visit the "Children's Media Review" at [www.cmi.daylightmedia.org](http://www.cmi.daylightmedia.org).

## **Advocacy**

Found out about legislative initiatives and laws in your local area at the Citizens for Responsible Media at [www.medialegislation.org](http://www.medialegislation.org)

When you see programming that features gratuitous violence, violence against women, racist violence or other forms of violence, call the networks and your local station affiliates to register your opinion. Consider setting up a meeting with the editorial teams of local station affiliates to encourage alternative, nonviolent programming. If the violence appears in corporate advertising, contact their corporate headquarters.

Exercise your power as a consumer - vote with your dollars! It is up to us to hold accountable the designers, manufacturers and retailers who sell and profit from the sale of violent video games. It is up to us to lobby for nonviolent alternatives.

Visit local retailers and find out if they display and enforce regulations related to purchasing R-rated movies and M-rated video games.

Organize a violent toy trade-in through your congregation or community.

## Prayer

*Gracious and Holy God, your peace is a gift to us. Forgive us when we dishonor your name by engaging in senseless activities that fill our minds with violent images and thoughts. We seek to love one another as Christ loves us yet we fear our differences. Grant us strength to believe that our world can be filled with harmony and kindness. Help us to begin with ourselves and those closest to us to bring peace to our homes, to our communities, and to our world. Amen.*

## Education and resources

A list of nonviolent video games can be found at [www.nonviolentgames.org](http://www.nonviolentgames.org)

Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility  
[www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)

National Institute on Media and the Family  
[www.mediafamily.org](http://www.mediafamily.org)

American Academy of Pediatrics  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

Federal Trade Commission  
FTC Consumer Response Center  
[www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)

Mothers Against Violence in America  
[www.mavia.org](http://www.mavia.org)

Center for Media Literacy  
[www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)

Center for Media Education  
[www.cme.org](http://www.cme.org)



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