

# Children in a violent age

Someone does care, Ms. Meagher said. For many 15-year-olds "don't believe life goes on" when problems arise.

Ms. Meagher is in charge of sacrament preparation programs and the CCD program at Holy Trinity. Asked to define violence, she explained it is "anything that kills the spirit." This includes physical violence but also psychic violence.

Many youths talk about the psychic pressure they feel from moving about in a large, impersonal environment, she added. If their schools and parishes are huge, students can worry that they "may fall through the cracks of the system."

Holy Trinity puts a high priority on confronting different kinds of violence in its high school program, especially in social justice courses. Ms. Meagher explained why: "We want our students to develop a Christian perspective and response to violence."

In describing how a program might treat violence, the pastoral minister mentioned a unit on the Christian worldview. It deals from a Christian perspective with what currently is in the news headlines.

One year the headlines were full of the Middle East crisis. So refugees from that region were invited to talk about their ex-

periences with the students.

Violence in the abstract doesn't have much meaning for students, Ms. Meagher remarked. They need to be able to "attach names and faces to violence, to see it's people who hurt."

When violence is viewed this way, students get interested in trying to do something about it, the pastoral associate commented.

The war-peace issue also attracts lots of attention at Holy Trinity. In courses two years running, students studied the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace." The first year they "were overwhelmed," finding the violence of war a hard topic to handle, Ms. Meagher indicated.

So, to bring the topic down to a more manageable level, at one point the 10th-graders and their teachers discussed war and peace in terms of conflict resolution. They "talked about methods of conflict resolution within daily life" and about the need for compromise, Ms. Meagher said.

In discussing violence in its many forms, she said, students see that "the Scriptures are clearly against aggression. And clearly are open to the gospel message if it's given in concrete terms."

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

# FOOD...

## ...for thought

What happens when millions of viewers become witnesses via TV news reports to the violent and deadly results of a battle fought in war that very day?

What happens when a violent attack on the life of a pope or president is seen on television?

What happens when violence strikes close to home?

—One possibility: People grow numb as they witness episode after episode of violence. They begin to accept violence as the normal, uncontrollable course of the world.

—Another possibility: People grow more and more fearful, retreating from a world they regard as too violent.

—Yet another possibility: People grow in the desire to build up their world, to heal its wounds, to make it more just and loving.

One suburban parent who works in Washington, D.C., tells the story of the day he arrived home from work to find one of his children terribly agitated. It was the day in 1981 when President Reagan was shot in Washington. An afternoon TV program the child was watching had been interrupted with a vivid report of the shooting.

This child's father did not work near the scene of the shooting. All the child understood, however, was that

her father was in Washington where a terrible shooting had occurred. The child wondered if her father would be safe. She was not content until he arrived safely home.

Via television, the child had become virtually a firsthand, and frightened, witness of a shooting.

Teachers and parents who caution children against taking rides from strangers or walking alone on darkened streets can experience a sense of discomfort in this role. They want to teach children about risks that exist in society. Still they worry that children will begin to regard the world as an evil and violent place.

Will the goodness of the world as a place where God acts recede from the child's gaze? Will the child grow to think of himself as a powerless victim rather than as a potential healer? What can be done about this?

Violence is a factor in the human equation. It is present in society in many forms. And it can take a toll. For example, it has been reported that youths tend to lose hope in the future when they think about the violent risks of nuclear war.

Violence can obstruct hope. What kind of vision do people need in light of the violence they are exposed to?

## SECOND HELPINGS

"Television Awareness Training: The Viewer's Guide for Family and Community," edited by Ben Logan. Many people spend several hours each day watching television without developing "any real guidelines for viewing," the authors say. They suggest using the book "to make possible a self-determined trip of exploration and discovery" into television viewing. Take a look at the "positive and negative messages received over the years," the authors recommend, and see how, if at all, those messages change how you feel, think and believe. The book is divided into many short sections, followed by work sheets to help evaluate TV programs and relate them to a family's values and beliefs. One section discusses theology and television. Other topics included: violence, stereotypes, advertising, minorities, sexuality, news, sports. (Abingdon Press, 201 8th Ave. S., Nashville, Tenn. 37202. \$12.95.)

# shall we use the sword?

forbade his followers to use violence in his defense.

"When the companions of Jesus saw what was going to happen they said, 'Lord, shall we use the sword?'"

In Matthew's version of the incident, Jesus says: "Put back your sword where it belongs. Those who use the sword are sooner or later destroyed by it" (Matthew 26:52).

Later, when Pilate asks Jesus if he is a king, Jesus replies, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my subjects would be fighting to save it" (John 18:36).

I believe the clear implication is that authentic subjects of Jesus' kingdom do not resort to violence.

Jesus was practicing what he preached. The Beatitudes spell out the basic attitudes which, by contrast, have to do with violence: "Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs...Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me" (Matthew

5:7,9,11).

This theme of positive gentleness and kindness recurs frequently throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

For instance: "You have heard the commandment, 'You shall love your countryman but hate your enemy.' My command to you is love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are children of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and on the good" (Matthew 5:43-45,48).

Jesus turned the accepted value system on its head. In situations which normally called for violence, he urged gentleness, non-resistance.

Crazy? Impractical? So impractical that people who took him seriously changed the whole course of human history. Violence breeds violence. Only love can bring peace. The great Cardinal Suhard of Paris once said: "The world will belong to those who love it."

(Father Castelot teaches at St. Johns' Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)

## ...for discussion

1. Do you think everyone is touched by violence in one way or another? In what ways?

2. Cindy Liebhart talks about TV violence. What does she mean when she speaks of the subtle ways TV violence can mar the human spirit?

3. It has been said that fear of a violent nuclear war diminishes the sense of hope in some youths. What are some other ways violence affects people?

4. Our writers suggest that violence takes many forms. What are some of those forms?

5. How would you discuss the effects of violence with your family or friends? How would you discuss it with youths?