

## **Lenten Fast from Violence 2006:**

### **Week 2**

---

#### **FASTING AND REPAIRING THE BREACH**

In recent years, public theologians, historians, sociologists, and statesmen- and women have spoken and written about a growing breach in public debate within North America. We need but tune-in to particular news programs, with newscasters yelling at their guests, to understand the state of debate in our everyday lives. A breach (as a gap, rift, or rupture) in public debate is where the public capacities, tools, and resources for engaging in dialogue become less accessible and tangible to the very public that needs these things. The result can be a “breach” in healthy conversation.

Debate presupposes open dialogue, or at least the capacity for two or more parties to talk uncoerced with one another. Open debate is healthy where opinions are shared and refined, and where consensus are formed, with the understanding that in consensus we speak Truth with (and not against) one another. Open debate is necessary both to a democracy and to the life of the Church, because the outcomes of debate affect official statements and policies in institutions, be they church or government related.

In recent years, churches in North America have been debating a number of issues central to their identities: Will a particular church ordain gay and lesbian persons? How does a congregation worship with those in a mosque down the street? What is the mission of the Church in a pluralistic and less centralized world? What is the role of the Gospel in speaking truth in both church and government? These are but a few pressing concerns of public debate for churches today.

But public debate is also central to a healthy democracy. Debate must continue even when governments pursue wars for freedom that of themselves germinate from fabrication of the truth. Debate must likewise continue where religious belief wraps the Idles of war in the cause of the divine. Healthy public debate must see through mere appeals to freedom and the divine. Through healthy debate, a self-reflective idea of freedom is always better than ambiguous appeals to freedom, and the God of creation is always richer than the reduction to a national deity.

How do we repair breaches to public debate in an age of yelling and accusation, instead of provocative conversation and thoughtful dialogue? First, we become aware of our predicament by informing ourselves about the issues of our day and how they are handled. What are the issues of debate in your church and government today? Next, we look to those institutions – such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) – and assess the ways they understand their own mission and identity as well as current issues. The WCC Decade to Overcome Violence is one effective way in which public distress is addressed in a context of world Christianity. Finally, we speak with those in our congregations and communities, in our campus ministries or ministries at camps, and

think together about what matters to us as Christians and as members of a larger democracy within the North American continent.

Finally, in public debate, we must trust ourselves to not merely speak truth to power (or for that matter to powerlessness), but to speak such truth with clarity and conviction that is at the heart of the freedom of a Christian.

**Prayer:**

Merciful God, We confess that given opportunities to speak, we have remained silent and given opportunities to listen, we have ignored our brothers and sisters. The freedom you have given us to share opinions and refine ideas we have used to oppress others and distance ourselves from our neighbors. Stir up in us a desire to speak to one another in open, uncoerced, dialogue so that we may debate with clarity and conviction. Bless us in our endeavors to speak truth to power that peace and justice will reign in all the earth.

**Resources:**

World Council of Churches Decade to Overcome Violence

<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/>

Church of the Brethren Decade to Overcome Violence resources

<http://www.brethren.org/dov/>

National Council of Churches in Australia Decade to Overcome Violence resources

[http://www.ncca.org.au/special\\_projects/dov](http://www.ncca.org.au/special_projects/dov)

Ecumenical Advocacy Days

<http://www.advocacydays.org/>

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe

<http://www.eyce.org/>

Religions for Peace

<http://www.wcrp.org/>

The Institute of Interfaith Dialog

<http://www.interfaithdialog.org/index.php>

World Jewish Congress

<http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/news/news.html>

Ecumenical News International

<http://www.eni.ch/>

Worldwide Faith News

<http://www.wfn.org/>

**Contributed by Dr. Michael Trice, Associate for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**