



A CALL TO HOPE

Living as Christians in a
VIOLENT SOCIETY

Vera K. White

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Introduction

At its initial publication in 1997, *A Call to Hope: Living as Christians in a Violent Society* was a prophetic witness calling the church to respond to violence in the world. Violence was on the rise, as White recounts, pointing to gun violence and domestic violence using concrete examples and statistics. In taking on the issue of violence in North America, White identified this epidemic as an important justice issue that was going unnoticed and was largely unaddressed by the church. She ably notes the intersections of violence with a myriad of social ills, including homelessness, war, poverty, and forms of physical abuse.

This update comes on the heels of the twentieth anniversary of *A Call to Hope*. Twenty-plus years later, this call for the church in North America to be a part of ushering peace in the world is still relevant, in an era where mass shootings, community violence, racial violence, religious violence, and extrajudicial killings plague our communities and are on the rise. As churches and other faith communities continue to find themselves on the front lines of the despair that lingers in the aftermath of violence, this update is a viable resource for paving pathways to hope.

This updated edition of *A Call to Hope* is timely as churches ask about and point to the church's role in ensuring safe communities and addressing the many ways in which violence is plaguing our communities. While White focused on the church in *A Call to Hope*, its call to action as well as the data and resources can be utilized by any faithful community. The resource is user-friendly, with prompts for individuals or groups to study and create a plan for action. With her pragmatic approach to the subject, White leaves room for communities to center their experiences under the guidance of her work.

The book focuses on addressing the church's response to violence and is a study resource for Christian communities. The question White seeks to answer is, How will churches respond to the violence in the world? White presents a clear and concise case for Christians to address violence and provides a valuable resource that gives concrete measures for learning about and reducing violence. Her idea was original and continues to be relevant in its contribution in calling attention to this issue by the church. She uses local examples to point to a global problem.

With gratitude to Vera K. White for her willingness to see this work updated and republished, expressions of gratitude also extend to

Dr. Denise Janssen, Dr. Mai-Anh Le Tran, and Sean Calhoun for their copious and dedicated hours spent updating the book. Their time and efforts produced a valuable update for this twenty-first century engagement with White's timely question on how churches are called to respond to the violence in the world.

This publication includes an update of all the statistics White utilized to make her case. The reader will also be helped by the updated resource list provided for community and national agencies addressing violence. These are practical resources that will provide ways for the church to be collaborative in its efforts to ensure that peace is possible for all.

As you open these pages, you are invited to use this resource to inspire hope amid the fear, to bring hope to communities in fear, and to remember that hope is built on love.

Rev'd Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson



CHAPTER ONE

Violence: A Christian Response

*God saw everything that he had made,
and indeed, it was very good.*

Gen. 1:31a

A WORD AT THE START

We have become intensely aware in recent years that we live in a world where violence reigns. Through television and movies we visit intimately scenes of war, riots, and murder that occur far away. Crimes of violence encroach on our own backyards and violate our safe neighborhoods. We have become a frightened people. We escape to suburbia, add deadbolts to our doors, train our pets to attack strangers, and suspect anyone who is different from us.

Yet throughout scripture God's people are admonished, "Be not afraid." Is this a message that still has relevance for Christians in North America as they look forward to the third millennium? What does God have to say to us about the culture in which we live? How can we be secure in God's protective love when we live in a world where violence is out of control?

Christians are an Easter people with a message of hope for the world. God's hope was not just for a small group of Jewish people living in a faraway corner of the world thousands of years ago but for all people of all times. The future of this world depends on people of faith and hope. We dare not sit back in the safety of our pews and watch our society self-destruct. We need to be "ambassadors of Christ" in our world today.

A young man fleeing two pursuers with automatic weapons ducks into a church during a worship service, believing he will be safe there. His assailants don't even pause at the church door as they rush in and open fire. The choir stops singing, the preacher dives under the pulpit, and the congregation crouches beneath the pews as the sanctuary is sprayed with bullets.