

Session Five: A Church Confession

Objectives:

- *To explore the concept of structural sin and violence, in order to understand theologically how we as U.S. Christians contribute to the suffering articulated in the Kairos Palestine and Kairos USA documents, and how we can contribute to making meaningful change.*

Preparation:

- *Participants should read Kairos USA Section, part 2 “A Church Confession” in advance of the session.*
- *Facilitator should print out and copy Handout 5.1 (enough for all to read, e.g. 1 copy per 2 people); Print out Handout 5.2 and create 6 packets using additional materials from KUSA website (or use Handout 5.2 Sample); and choose a closing prayer or litany (Handouts 5.3 or 5.4 are examples and can be adapted).*

Welcome and Opening Reflection (5 min)

- *Read the following, quoted in Kairos USA Preamble:*
 - *“The crisis is not only in our society. The crisis is in our churches... For the churches, too, this is a kairos moment in which we are called to conversion, our structures, values, habits and assumptions in need of basic transformation.”*
— *“On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee,” U.S. Kairos document, 1994*
- *If you would like to include scripture as well, here are some possible scripture passages. Because different communities read these passages differently, the facilitator should choose something that fits for his/her context. The aim is to begin reflection on “sin” and “confession” for structural violence and oppression.*
 - 1 John 1:5-10
 - Rom 8:12-17
- *Today we are going to delve into the confessional aspect of this document, and use the theological concept of sin to understand our role as U.S. Christians in this ongoing situation.*

Understanding Structural Sin (15 min)

- *Introduce the Concept of Structural Violence and Structural Sin*
 - *Distribute “Handout 5.1: The Machine”*
 - *Note to Facilitator: You can simply go over the text on the handout, but some further points might be helpful for you to consider as you explain this concept of “structural sin”:*

- Structural sin is a theological concept we can give to the fact that there are larger systems in place that we are caught up in, that can create harm or benefit on our behalf, whether we realize it and support it or not.
- Structural sin means that there are systems in place that create harm on our behalf, even if we don't agree with it.
- We may benefit from these systems, or we may be harmed ourselves by these systems.
- As part of these systems, we bear at least some responsibility for our participation in them. We bear this responsibility even if we are ignorant of our role. Once we become aware of our role, however, we bear a new level of responsibility.
- As part of these systems, **we also have the power to make changes, if we know how these systems work.** This is why it is important to understand how they work.

A Church Confession: Part One (30 min)

- *Have participants divide up into groups or pairs to focus on particular parts of the section titled “A Church Confession” (the second half of Part I) (6 groups—if you have fewer than 12 participants, individuals can also work on this, or you can combine groups)*
- *Distribute packets to each group that includes the portion of the confession they are to study, plus additional materials that give examples of these sins in action (Use “**Handout 5.2: Small Group Confessions**” plus check kairosusa.org for additional materials).*
- *Each group then reads their portion of the confession statement, then looks over the short reading or fact sheet, and discusses the questions on the handout.*

Break (10 min)

Announce to groups that they will be reporting back when they return from break.

A Church Confession: Part Two (40 min)

- *Large group report back. Facilitator can write on board/flip chart what groups report back, or small groups can write up their answers on flip chart paper as they are working, and then bring to the front and present to the group.*
- *Discussion:*
 - Which of these do you have questions about or disagree with?
 - Which of these refer to something that you feel like you need more information about?
 - What does it mean for us as Christians to talk about these dynamics in terms of “sin” that we confess?

- *Closing thought:* If we are parts of a “machine” that is creating harm on our behalf, we are complicit in this harm. The good news is, this also means we can change the way the machine operates by changing how we act within it!

Closing Litany (10 min)

- *Facilitator: Please consult **Handouts 5.3 or 5.4** for some sample liturgies that you can use as a closing litany of confession. Or, you are welcome to create your own. **Total time = 110 minutes***