

Participant Workbook



A CURRICULUM  
BY DR. LORI  
BRANDT HALE

# Lessons from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a House Divided and a World on Fire



An offering for congregations from  
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania and the  
International Bonhoeffer Society -  
English Language Section



# Lessons from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a House Divided and a World on Fire

## **CURRICULUM FOR CONGREGATIONS** BY DR. LORI BRANDT HALE

A complete four-week series:

**Lesson 1** – Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life

**Lesson 2** – It’s About the Neighbor

**Lesson 3** – Faith is Worldly

**Lesson 4** – Taking a Stand

Additional “modules” could be added for a six- or eight-week program:

**Lesson 5** – Reading Bonhoeffer Today

**Lesson 6** – Life Together

# INTRODUCTION

Through our work at the intersection of civic life and faith, we often encounter a Church and world grappling with deep divisions and deep questions about what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ. How does one hold onto their convictions while staying in relationship with their neighbor? How does one engage passionately and peacefully? What is the most faithful path to take where hatred and spite seem to reign?

Like many, we turned to the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Not because of the superficial tendency of any “side” to equate the “other side” with Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, but because Bonhoeffer’s writings give us great insight to the struggle of figuring out what is the next most faithful step in a broken and imperfect system.

We were delighted that our wonderings about what wisdom Bonhoeffer might offer us led us to Dr. Lori Brandt Hale of Augsburg University. In her role as the President of the International Bonhoeffer Society – English Language Section, which marks its 50th anniversary this year, she is well-versed in talking about Bonhoeffer with nuance, scholarship, and wisdom. And the Society was wondering about ways in which they could make the academic conversations happening around the anniversary more accessible to more people. We were happy to be a catalyst to make that happen.

As Lutherans, we know that there are certain hermeneutics, ways of reading and interpreting, that can lead to grace-filled understanding, or that lead to condemnation. We practice distinguishing these in the ways we read the Bible, remembering Luther’s exhortation that the Bible is “the cradle in which the Christ child is laid.” Where other harmful hermeneutics ignore Christ in favor of ideological interpretations, we hold Christ at the center.

Dr. Brandt Hale helps us understand that a similar tactic is needed in approaching the work of Bonhoeffer. Like the Bible, one can read any number of agendas or ideologies into Bonhoeffer’s words. But like any good Lutheran theologian, Bonhoeffer himself would insist that centering him and his words would be a mistake. “Who is Christ for us today?” is the question Bonhoeffer came back to again and again, in his writing and in discerning steps to take in his discipleship. Centering that question led him to reject the Nazi regime and other forces that sought to harm his most vulnerable neighbors.

This curriculum encourages us to ask that question for ourselves. In this particular time and place, who is Christ for us? How are we to best love our neighbors? What is the ethic of love and discipleship that will help us to be most faithful? What are the tools at our disposal to live this out?

The answers to those questions, we believe, are crucial for us to answer as individuals and as a Church. We are so grateful for the work of Dr. Brandt Hale in giving us a space and the resources to ask them, and to discern the answers together.

We hope this curriculum inspires your congregation or community to enter into deeper relationship with Christ and our neighbors, and to be bolder in calling out forces that breed misinformation and violence. May we always seek to answer the call of Christ to be with and love our neighbor, this year and always.

*Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa)*

# INTRODUCTION

Dear Facilitators and Participants,

I am deeply grateful that you have chosen to dive into this multi-week series on the life and lessons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and hope it will move and comfort and challenge you – all at the same time. Bonhoeffer has been doing just that – moving and comforting and challenging me – for more than thirty years. Over and over again, I return to his words and wisdom. “I am still discovering to this day,” he wrote from Tegel Prison on July 21st, 1944, “that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life... living fully in the midsts of life’s tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities...” See what I mean? Moving, comforting, challenging. Exciting!

The curriculum is designed to take 4–6 weeks to complete, includes lesson plans, slides, facilitator scripts, and handouts. Each week also contains an activity and/or discussion questions. The lessons build on one another and should be done in order. Lessons 1–4 offer a complete program. Lesson 5 is optional. There is an additional supplement that can be used at any point along the way, or not at all. The slides are a critical component of the materials. Using a meeting space with projection capabilities would be optimal.

Throughout the lessons, primary source material used is from the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English collection and is abbreviated as DBWE. There are 16 volumes, plus an index volume, which are listed with titles in the “Recommended Bonhoeffer Bibliography” included in your respective guides. For example, the passage I cited in the first paragraph of this letter is from DBWE 8: 486, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English (Fortress Press), Volume 8, page 486. Volume 8, by the way, is Letters and Papers from Prison. In a few places, I have also included the page numbers from The Bonhoeffer Reader, or TBR. The Bonhoeffer Reader is an anthology of Bonhoeffer’s works, with helpful introductory pages by the editors, and a great way to access portions of Bonhoeffer’s most important contributions without buying sixteen books!

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania for inviting me to write this curriculum. In our often fraught and superficial world of sound bites and social media posts, the opportunity to share materials that encourage and support sustained engagement with the life and legacy, theology and ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a gift. It is also a delightful way to mark the end of my first year as the President of the Board of Directors of the International Bonhoeffer Society – English Language Section and the end of the 50th Anniversary Year of the Society. I am lucky – we are all lucky – to be surrounded by Bonhoeffer colleagues and friends, from across the United States and around the world, who engage profoundly with Bonhoeffer’s work and with one another.

With all my best wishes for you and with love for the coming generations,

Lori

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# LESSON 1

## DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S LIFE: 10 KEY TURNING POINTS

**“WHAT KEEPS GNAWING AT ME IS THE QUESTION, WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY,  
OR WHO IS CHRIST ACTUALLY FOR US TODAY?”**

*LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON (DBWE, VOLUME 8: 362)*

### **Objectives:**

- Introduce Dietrich Bonhoeffer through key turning points in his life and historical context.
- Encourage participants to think about critical turning points in their own life stories.
- Identify key turning points in Bonhoeffer's life and historical context.
- Recognize the humanity of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

### **Outcomes:**

By engaging in this session, participants will learn (more) about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and will recognize that his life choices were shaped by his faith commitments, family values, life experiences, deep reflection, and a particular historical context. They will consider the ways their own choices are shaped in the same way, paying particular attention to their own historical and political context.

### **Notes:**

# HANDOUT

## 10 KEY TURNING POINTS IN YOUR LIFE

What childhood or family events and experiences shaped you?  
What educational and career choices did you make?  
Which friendships or relationships formed you?  
Who influenced or mentored you? Who have you influenced or mentored?  
What political or social events impacted your life, your convictions, and/or your actions?

	When	What Happened?	Why is it a Turning Point?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

	<b>When</b>	<b>What Happened?</b>	<b>Why is it a Turning Point?</b>
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Additional notes:

# HANDOUT

## DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S LIFE: 10 KEY TURNING POINTS

	When	What Happened?	Why is it a Turning Point?
1	April 28th, 1918	Impacted by the death of his brother, Walter, who was killed in action in WWI.	Walter's death raised profound questions for 12-year-old Dietrich that contributed to his decision to study theology.
2	1930	Studied at Union Theological Seminary in NYC on a Sloane Fellowship (1930-1931).	Bonhoeffer studied with social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr and studied American philosophy (pragmatism) with Eugene Lyman. He also developed important friendships (with Jean Lassere, Paul and Marion Lehmann, and Erwin Sutz) that transformed his thinking.
3	1930	Attended Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, NYC, while a student at Union. It was during the Harlem Renaissance.	Bonhoeffer participated in worship and community with this dynamic, politically engaged African-American church, and saw - through his friendship with fellow Union student Albert Franklin Fisher - the horrors of racism.
4	1933	Hitler appointed Chancellor in January; Enabling Act signed in March; Dachau Concentration Camp opened in March; Anti-Jewish Boycott & "Aryan Paragraph" adopted in April.	These political developments fundamentally changed Bonhoeffer's context, and that of the whole world. He immediately recognized the dangers of a leader who becomes an idol of the people, and issued a public warning against making Hitler into one (via the radio). He also pushed back against the Nazification of the church.
5	1935	Directed the Confessing Church Seminary at Finkenwalde.	Bonhoeffer was appointed the director of pastoral training at the newly formed (underground/illegal) seminary at Finkenwalde. He gave up an opportunity to study non-violent resistance with Mahatma Gandhi to take the post. One of the seminarians, Eberhard Bethge, became Bonhoeffer's best friend, theological confidant, and (eventual) biographer.



	When	What Happened?	Why is is a Turning Point?
6	Nov. 9, 1938	Witnessed <i>Kristallnacht</i> - The Night of Broken Glass.	Bonhoeffer was horrified by the Nazi terror carried out against Jewish communities vandalizing and destroying Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues. He was also horrified by the silence of the churches in the aftermath. Bonhoeffer's worldview was forever changed by the November pogroms.
7	Summer 1939	Traveled to NYC, but returned almost immediately to Germany. WWII begins with the German invasion of Poland on September 1	In June, Bonhoeffer returned to NYC at the insistence of his friends and colleagues who were worried about his safety, but he was unsettled and felt that his place was in Germany, in the midst of the crisis. On July 7th, he boarded a ship heading back to Europe.
8	Oct. 30, 1940	Appointed Secret Agent of the Abwehr (German Military Intelligence) - the seat of the resistance to Hitler and the Nazis.	Bonhoeffer knew about the plans for a coup before he left for America in 1939, but did not join the effort - as double agent for the Abwehr - until the fall of 1940. He was prepared to sacrifice his life on behalf of others. At the same time, he continued to support pastors in the Confessing Church and work on his Ethics. He faced and wrote about real, concrete ethical challenges.
9	April 5, 1943	Arrested and imprisoned at Tegel Prison in Berlin.	Bonhoeffer was arrested on tenuous charges unrelated to the conspiracy. During his time at Tegel Prison, Bonhoeffer continued to write and think through new theological ideas, including the idea of religionless Christianity, which he recorded in letters and sent to Eberhard Bethge.
10	July 20, 1944 April 4, 1945	Failed attempt on Hitler's life at the Wolf's Lair.  Executed at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp.	When the attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20th, 1944 failed, it sealed Bonhoeffer's fate. The resistance group's secret files were discovered in September, and Bonhoeffer was implicated in the plans. In October he was moved from Tegel to the Reich Central Security Headquarters, then to Buchenwald, and finally to Flossenbürg, where he was executed by hanging.

# LESSON 2

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NEIGHBOR: THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL IDEAS

**"THE ATTENTION OF RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE IS DIRECTED TO CONCRETE NEIGHBORS IN THEIR CONCRETE NEED."**

*ETHICS (DBWE, VOLUME 6: 261)*

### **Objectives:**

- Introduce Bonhoeffer's key theological and ethical themes.
- Recognize the interconnection and continuity of these themes.
- Highlight Bonhoeffer's lifelong theological and ethical commitment to the neighbor.
- Begin to consider Bonhoeffer's understanding of responsibility, or responsible action.

### **Outcomes:**

By engaging in this session, participants will be introduced to Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical thinking about the "neighbor," starting in his earliest writing in his dissertation to his latest work in his letters and papers from prison. They will begin to think about the relevance of Bonhoeffer's thought for our politically fraught and divisive times.

### **Notes:**

# HANDOUT

## EIGHT ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CLAIMS ABOUT THE NEIGHBOR IN THE WORK OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

	Date	Source	Theological or Ethical Claim
1	1930	<p style="text-align: center;">DBWE, Volume 1: <i>Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dissertation</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“[Christian love] <i>loves the real <b>neighbor.</b></i>” DBWE 1:169</p> <p>“This being-for-each-other must now be actualized through acts of love. <i>Three great, positive possibilities of acting for each other</i> in the community of saints present themselves: <i>self-renouncing, active work for the <b>neighbor</b>; intercessory prayer; and, finally, the mutual forgiveness of sins</i> in God’s name. All of these involve giving up the self ‘for’ my <b>neighbor’s benefit</b>, with the readiness to do and bear everything in the neighbor’s place, indeed, if necessary, to sacrifice myself, standing as a <i>substitute</i> for my neighbor. Even if purely vicarious action is rarely actualized, it is intended in every genuine act of love.” DBWE 1:184 (or TBR 51)</p>
2	1931	<p style="text-align: center;">DBWE, Volume 11: Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931-1932 “Draft of a Catechism: As You Believe, So You Receive”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Catechism</b></p>	<p>“How then should the Christian behave politically? As much as the Christian would like to remain distant from political struggle, nonetheless, <b>even here the commandment of love urges the Christian to stand up for his neighbor.</b>” DBWE 11:263 (or TBR 326)</p>
3	1934	<p style="text-align: center;">DBWE, Volume 13: London: 1933-1935 “Sermon for Evening Worship Service on 2 Corinthians 12:9” in London</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sermon</b></p>	<p>“Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and <b>with its plea for the weak.</b>” DBWE 13:402</p>
4	1940	<p style="text-align: center;">DBWE, Volume 6: Ethics “Ethics as Formation”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ethics</b></p>	<p>“Christ was not concerned with whether “the maxim of an action” could become “a principle of universal law”, but <b>whether my action now helps my neighbor to be a human being before God.</b>” DBWE 6:98-99</p>

	Date	Source	Theological or Ethical Claim
5	1942	DBWE, Volume 6: Ethics "Ethics as Formation" <b>Ethics</b>	"The attention of responsible people is directed to <b>concrete neighbors in their concrete reality.</b> " DBWE 6:261 (or TBR 639)
6	1942	DBWE, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison "An Account at the Turn of the Year 1942-1943" <b>Christmas Essay</b>	"The ultimately responsible question is not how I extricate myself heroically from a situation but <b>how a coming generation is to go on living.</b> " DBWE 8:42 (or TBR 766)
7	1942	DBWE, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison "An Account at the Turn of the Year 1942-1943" <b>Christmas Essay</b>	"It remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, <b>from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering.</b> " DBWE 8:52 (or TBR 775)
8	1944	DBWE, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison "Outline of a Book" <b>Prison Theology</b>	"[O]ur relationship to God is a new life in 'being there for others,' through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the <b>neighbor within reach</b> in any given situation. God in human form!" DBWE 8:501 (or TBR 813)

### Discussion Questions:

- Who is your neighbor? Who are your neighbors?
- How broadly are you willing to define the category?
- Who is not your neighbor? Anyone? Why?
- What are the outcomes of defining the category of neighbor broadly?
- What are the outcomes or consequences of defining the category of neighbor narrowly?

# LESSON 3

## FAITH IS WORLDLY: BONHOEFFER AND "THIS-WORLDLINESS"

**"ONE ONLY LEARNS TO HAVE FAITH BY LIVING IN THE FULL THIS-WORLDLINESS OF LIFE... LIVING FULLY IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S TASKS, QUESTIONS, SUCCESSES AND FAILURES, EXPERIENCES, AND PERPLEXITIES - THEN ONE TAKES SERIOUSLY NO LONGER ONE'S OWN SUFFERINGS BUT RATHER THE SUFFERING OF GOD IN THE WORLD."**

*LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON (DBWE, VOLUME 8: 486)*

### **Objectives:**

- Review Bonhoeffer's key theological and ethical themes in light of his key turning points.
- Revisit and underscore Bonhoeffer's humanity.
- Discuss the meaning of the term "justice."
- Explore Bonhoeffer's understanding of what it means to be Christian (hint: justice is important).

### **Outcomes:**

By attending this session, participants will continue to consider Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical themes, but now in light of his thinking about justice. They will continue to think about the relevance of Bonhoeffer's thought for our politically fraught and divisive times.

### **Notes:**

# HANDOUT

## WHAT IS JUSTICE?

**WRITE DOWN FOUR WORDS YOU ASSOCIATE WITH "JUSTICE."**

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**WITH A PARTNER, AGREE ON FOUR WORDS YOU ASSOCIATE WITH "JUSTICE."**

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**IN GROUPS OF FOUR, AGREE ON FOUR WORDS YOU ASSOCIATE WITH "JUSTICE."**

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# HANDOUT

## THIS-WORLDLY CHRISTIANITY: THREE EXAMPLES OF BONHOEFFER ON “DOING JUSTICE AMONG HUMANS”

	Source	Doing Justice
1	<p>DBWE, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison May 1944 – Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger Bethge* Written in Tegel Prison in Berlin</p> <p>*Son of Eberhard Bethge and Renate Schliecher Bethge (Dietrich’s niece); Godson of Dietrich Bonhoeffer</p>	<p>“You are being baptized today as a Christian. All those great and ancient words of the Christian proclamation will be pronounced over you, and the command of Jesus Christ to baptize will be carried out, without your understanding any of it. But we too are being thrown back all the way to the beginnings of our understanding. What reconciliation and redemption mean, rebirth and the Holy Spirit, love for one’s enemies, cross and resurrection, what it means to live in Christ and follow Christ, all that is so difficult and remote that we hardly dare speak of it anymore. In these words and actions handed down to us, we sense something new and revolutionary, but we cannot yet grasp it and express it. This is our own fault. <b><i>Our church has been fighting during these years only for its self-preservation, as if that were an end in itself.</i></b> It has become incapable of bringing the word of reconciliation and redemption to humankind and to the world. So the words we used before must lose their power, be silenced, and <b><i>we can be Christians today in only two ways, through prayer and doing justice among human beings</i></b>” (DBWE 8:389, emphasis added).</p>
2	<p>DBWE, Volume 7: Fiction from Tegel Prison Summer 1943 – “Speech of the Major” from fragments of a novel drafted in prison Written in Tegel Prison in Berlin.</p>	<p>“For me, the main issue for individuals and for peoples is whether or not they have learned to live with other human beings and peoples. That’s more important to me than all their ideas, thoughts, and convictions” (DBWE 7:167).</p> <p>“I look only at people and their task of living with other people, and I view succeeding at this very task as the fulfillment of human life and history” (DBWE 7:168).</p>

	Source	Doing Justice
3	<p>DBWE, Volume 13:  London, 1933-1935  1934 - Sermon for  Evening Worship Service  on 2 Corinthians 12:9  Delivered in London</p>	<p>“Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and with its plea for the weak” (DBWE 13:402).</p> <p>This sermon is included in Isabel Best’s 2012 volume of <i>The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer</i>, which only includes 31 texts. Best offers some context; she notes that some of Bonhoeffer’s work with the Emergency Pastors’ League had taken place at Bethel, a care facility in Bielefeld, Germany for persons with mental and physical disabilities. He had been struck by their vulnerability – especially in the Nazi context – and what he imagined to be their “better insight into certain realities of human existence” (Best 167).</p> <p>In July of 1934, Bonhoeffer arranged for his congregations in London to send donations to Bethel. His concerns for these people – lingering nearly a year after he met them – are resonant with his early understanding that the “Other” places an ethical demand on me, calling me to respond.</p> <p>Moreover, his concerns for these folks, and others on the margins, continue to shape his theological thinking until his last days, when he writes about the importance of seeing the events of the world from the “view from below” (DBWE 8: 52) and, later, from Tegel prison that “human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world, [toward the false concept of] God as deus ex machina. The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and the suffering of God; only the suffering God can help” (DBWE 8:479). This shift in perspective, he goes on to say, will be the starting point for his “worldly interpretation” of (Christian) faith (DBWE 8:480).</p>



# LESSON 4

## TAKING A STAND:

### “IS THIS A BONHOEFFER MOMENT?” IS THE WRONG QUESTION

**“THE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE QUESTION IS NOT HOW I EXTRICATE MYSELF HEROICALLY FROM A SITUATION BUT [HOW] A COMING GENERATION IS TO GO ON LIVING.”**

*LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON (DBWE, VOLUME 8: 42)*

#### **Objectives:**

- Consider six lessons from the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
- Explore the relevance of these lessons for our politically fraught times.
- Ask the right Bonhoeffer question(s).

#### **Outcomes:**

By attending this session, participants will consider lessons from Bonhoeffer formed by paying attention to the intersections of his biography, theology, and ethics. They will continue to think about the relevance of Bonhoeffer's thought for our politically fraught and divisive times, and consider what responsible action looks like in their own lives.

#### **Notes:**

# HANDOUT

## LESSONS FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was a German pastor, theologian, ecumenist, and peace activist. He wrote profoundly about Christian faith, community, grace, and ethics, centered on the question, 'Who is Christ for us today?' The unspeakable human suffering resulting from the atrocities of the Nazi Regime compelled him first into church resistance and finally into political resistance culminating in a conspiracy against the Hitler regime aimed at installing a new government that would end the war and those atrocities. Imprisoned during the last two years of his life, Bonhoeffer was executed just weeks before the end of the war.

<p><b>Ask Questions</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Challenge Assumptions</b></p>	<p><b>Pay Attention!</b></p>	<p>“What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or <b>who is Christ actually for us today?</b>” DBWE 8:362</p>
<p><b>Make friends</b></p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><b>Care for others</b></p>	<p><b>It’s about the neighbor!</b></p>	<p>“The attention of responsible people is directed to concrete <b>neighbors</b> in their concrete reality.” DBWE 6:261</p> <p>“It remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the <b>perspective of the suffering.</b>” DBWE 8:52</p>
<p><b>Stand up for justice</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Take Responsibility</b></p>	<p><b>It’s about the coming generations!</b></p>	<p>“The ultimately responsible question is not how I extricate myself heroically from a situation but how a <b>coming generation</b> is to go on living.” DBWE 8:42</p>

# HANDOUT

## LESSONS FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

<b>Pay Attention!</b>	<b>What questions will you ask? What assumptions will you interrogate?</b>
<b>Ask Questions Challenge Assumptions</b>	
<b>It's About the Neighbor!</b>	<b>Which of your friends help you challenge your assumptions? How? How will you care for Others? Neighbors? Strangers?</b>
<b>Make Friends Care for others</b>	
<b>It's About Coming Generations!</b>	<b>How will you stand up for justice? What are ways to take responsibility?</b>
<b>Stand up for Justice Take Responsibility</b>	

# OPTIONAL LESSON 5

## READING BONHOEFFER TODAY

### READING BONHOEFFER AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Note: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has a long history of standing against Christian Nationalism. For more resources on this and other topics of faithful civic engagement, please see the new draft social statement on *Civic Life and Faith*. This week is an intentionally optional lesson because we recognize not every congregation is able to have productive conversations around Christian Nationalism, due to the deep divides in our country and our congregations. LAMPa is here to walk with leaders, individuals, and communities as we navigate the ways in which we are called to show up for and with our neighbors, in fraught times and in disagreement, seeking justice for a world God loves.

#### **Objectives:**

- Review Weeks 1-4.
- Define Christian Nationalism.
- Understand how Bonhoeffer helps us stand up to Christian Nationalism.

#### **Outcomes:**

By attending this session, participants will consider lessons from Bonhoeffer in direct conversation with the threat of Christian Nationalism. They will continue to think about the relevance of Bonhoeffer's thought for our politically fraught and divisive times, and consider what responsible action looks like in their own lives.

#### **Notes:**

# OPTIONAL SUPPLEMENT

## LIFE TOGETHER: BUILDING COMMUNITY

Note: This supplement can be used either as a fifth or sixth week in the series, or as a shorter activity at any point. Additionally, if you wish to view the documentary *Bonhoeffer* (2003) by Martin Doblemeier, this could be used as a group activity in conjunction with a discussion on the movie.

*Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's account of the Finkenwalde experience, is full of practical recommendations for living in and sustaining community as the body of Christ. Life together, he thought, should include time together, time alone, service, confession, and the Lord's Supper.

Time together at the seminary was marked by morning and evening worship and praise, hymn singing, psalm reading, prayer, and an evening meal.

**"Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate"** (DBWE 5: 38).

To build community among the participants in this series on the life and legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, discuss the following questions in small groups:

1. What is your favorite hymn?
2. What is your favorite popular song?
3. Do you have a favorite psalm? What is it?
4. What is your favorite place to be still?
5. Would you rather retreat to the mountains or the ocean?
6. Would you rather do a silent retreat or challenging pilgrimage?
7. What is your favorite book?
8. What is your favorite place to read?
9. What is your favorite food or meal?
10. What is your favorite dessert?
11. Do you prefer home-cooked meals or going out to eat?
12. What is your favorite indoor game?
13. What is your favorite outdoor activity?
14. Do you practice any spiritual disciplines? Which one(s)?
15. In what ways do you serve others?
16. Add your own questions...

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In August of 1944, when Dietrich Bonhoeffer had been in prison for nearly a year and a half, he wrote an "Outline for a Book," in which he wanted to take stock of Christianity. In his concluding thoughts, he wrote:

**"The church is only the church when it is there for others"** (DBWE 8: 503).

What does this statement mean to you?

Does a strong (church) community help live out this calling to be there for others? How so?

# RECOMMENDED BONHOEFFER BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR FURTHER READING

## Primary Sources

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English* (DBWE), Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, with various editors and translators, (1996–2014). General Editors: Wayne Whitson Floyd (1993–2004), Victoria J. Barnett (2004–2014)

- DBWE 1: *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*
- DBWE 2: *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*
- DBWE 3: *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*
- DBWE 4: *Discipleship*
- DBWE 5: *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*
- DBWE 6: *Ethics*
- DBWE 7: *Fiction from Tegel Prison*
- DBWE 8: *Letters and Papers from Prison*
- DBWE 9: *The Young Bonhoeffer, 1918–1927*
- DBWE 10: *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928–1931*
- DBWE 11: *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work, 1931–1932*
- DBWE 12: *Berlin, 1932–1933*
- DBWE 13: *London, 1933–1935*
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