



Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

The Power and Promise of Peace

LENTEN FAST – WEEK FIVE

FASTING FROM THE PERVASIVE VIOLENCE OF WAR IN IRAQ

Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27 NRSV).

Following the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States military, the Church of the Brethren General Board and Annual Conference issued this statement:

In the wake of the war in Iraq, and the subsequent scandal of prisoner abuse, we as a church call all people to prayer and repentance. We also call upon the current United States administration and Congress to acknowledge and take responsibility for our involvement and culpability and to join in this time of repentance.

Amid the present realities of war and violence, the Church of the Brethren calls upon its congregations and its members to be in steadfast prayer and petition. The death, wounds, and pain of war have touched us all. Iraqi lives, American lives, and those of the international community have been lost as a price of our violence against one another. The lands of a sacred and historical time have been scarred by our weapons of destruction. The lives and spirits of young men and women who have been assigned to fight this battle have been affected in ways we cannot yet fully realize. The inhumane abuses of person through body, mind, and spirit are images of this conflict we will never forget. War has been unleashed, and war has captured the worst within us.

Our deepest prayers of confession, our compassionate prayers of care, and our faithful prayers of hope are the strength we find in the realities of this day. We call upon the administration of our government and the leadership of nations in all places to join us in these prayers of confession, petition, and hope. Scripture continues to offer lessons for today, for all people: "Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and violence that is in their hands" (Jonah 3:7-9 NRSV).

Members of the Church of the Brethren continue to turn to the words of Christ for wisdom and direction. Our call as a church in this annual meeting is to love God and neighbor. This greatest commandment fits well as our response to the conflict of Iraq. With all our heart, soul, mind, and strength we must love our God, and we must love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28). Our living witness to these words of Christ can bring places of comfort and peace in our local communities, and in our wider world, even in the midst of a time of such distrust and misunderstanding.

As we commit ourselves to love God and the people created by God's hands, and in prayerful consideration of all things of war and violence, we the General Board, meeting in Charleston, West Virginia, July 5, 2004, call for members and congregations across our denomination to join in being a constant witness to Christ as a living peace church of today against all war and the violence of its nature."

Numerous other denominations and faith based groups have issued similar statements of remorse and confession around our involvement in the issue of violence against the people of Iraq.

Please visit these sites to explore Christian Statements on War with Iraq

Archbishop of Canterbury Statement

<http://www.pcusa.org/iraq/canterbury.htm>

Disciples of Christ Resolution on Nonviolent Resolution of Conflict

<http://www.pcusa.org/iraq/canterbury.htm>

ELCA Lutheran Statement on Peace in God's World

<http://www.elca.org/dcs/peacein.html>

Episcopal Church: Finding Our Way, a Christian Perspective

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_11203_ENG_HTM.htm

Episcopal Bishops Pastoral Letter: In the Shadow of War

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/1866_1283_ENG_HTM.htm

United Methodist Bishops Pastoral Letter

<http://www.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=21&mid=1614>

Statement of United Methodist President, Council of Bishops

<http://www.wisconsinumc.org/bishopsletter4oct2002.html>

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Statement

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/international/bush902.htm>

The National Council of Churches Annual General Assembly meeting on November 15, 2001, only weeks following the events of September 11, 2001, issued the following statement; well aware of the violence that any "reactive" violent response to 9/11 might bring:

We lift up "Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century," a 1999 Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. We reaffirm and highlight the Statement's call to build a culture of peace with justice characterized by these convictions:

1. *"the transcending sovereignty and love of God for all creation and the expression of that love in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose mission was to reveal understanding about that divine presence, to proclaim a message of salvation and to bring justice and peace;*
2. *the unity of creation and the equality of all races and peoples;*

3. *the dignity and worth of each person as a child of God; and*
4. *the church, the body of believers, whose global mission of witness, peacemaking and reconciliation testifies to God's action in history."*

Through policy statement and/or faith resolutions, the Christian church has attempted to respond to the violence brought about by war, one nation of people against another.

More than Statements

While mourning the loss of life suffered in the tragic events of 9/11, the church has also cried for the tragic loss and mistreatment of life suffered by the Iraqi people.

Violence has pervaded the life of Iraqis for generations. Violence has been pervasive in Iraq as a result of dictatorial leadership and also by the unbending restraints of economic sanctions. Even in such violence, these persecuted, hungry people have amazingly found ways to survive in the midst of starvation and persecution.

In this season of Lent, in this period of reflection and self-awareness, people of faith are once again called to consider their personal involvement in this violence. We are called to recognize our actions at the expense of others motivated by our own perceived needs and our fears of the unknown. Does the discomfort or violence we fear grant us the permission to force that discomfort or violence on another?

The USA Decade to Overcome Violence Committee challenges members of the Christian community to consider their conscience in regards to war. In a recent statement the USA DOV committee offers the following in regards to becoming conscientious objectors to war:

- During the 20th Century many members of the churches in the United States refused to serve in the military for reasons of conscience, believing that serving in combat was contrary to their faith. If there is to be military conscription again, we anticipate that as before individuals within our churches will believe themselves called to conscientious objection to participation in training for, and participation in, military service.
- Recognizing both the difficulty and the necessity of discerning God's will for oneself in a particular context, the churches and other faith communities have regularly exercised pastoral concern for those members who have been led to refuse participation in military training and service.
- The U.S. Committee for the Decade to Overcome Violence of the World Council of Churches urges churches to continue to consider the integrity of the position of conscientious objection under any new military conscription and to seek to ensure that conscientious objectors are offered humane and socially productive alternatives to military service, as has been done in the past (*US Decade to Overcome Violence Committee, June 2004*)

Prayers

It is time for all Christians, for all those who celebrate the renewal of a time of Lenten fast, and the wonder of Easter, to join in a time of unified prayers of confession, compassionate prayers of care, and faithful prayers of hope for our nation, and for all nations. It is time to end war.

May we participate in this fast gaining strength from our Creator, the Creator of all. May we seek not only to celebrate democratic elections in far away places, but may we seek a true understanding of peace for all people, in all places, in all times.

Prayer of Peace In Times Like These

*Loving God,
In the not so distant past matters of war and peace have caused much
division and pain in our churches.*

*Please guide us through our discussions about war, the draft, and
conscientious objection.*

*Help each of us to be prayerfully open to your calling in our lives. Remind
us to be in continuous prayer for one another so that we can support and
respect one another even when we do not agree.*

*May our churches provide a rare sanctuary in our society where people
seek to genuinely understand and love one another.*

*Help us to create a place of safety for differences of opinion. Let this be a
place where all can speak gently and truthfully without fear of judgment
and hate.*

*Teach us how to be united by your love even when we are not united in
our opinions. Amen (Audrey Osborne Mazur, Black Rock (PA) COB)*

A Prayer for the Bombed Out, Burned Out, Driven Out

*Lord God, we pray for all the bombed out, burned out, driven out, relocated,
wondering , wandering, unwilling pilgrims in this world. Forgive us for our
part in uprooting them. Restore their lives, make us partners with them in the
rebuilding of their lives. We pray in the name of the Son of Man, who had no
place to lay His head.*

*(by Arnold Kenseth and Richard Unsworth in Prayers for Worship Leaders,
Episcopal Peace Fellowship)*

A Prayer to Open Our Eyes

*Take all hate from our hearts, O God, and teach us how to take it from the
hearts of others. Open our eyes and show us what things make it easy for
hatred to flourish and hard for us to conquer it. Then help us to change these
things. (by Alan Paton, EPF)*

A Christian Prayer of Confession

Spirit of God, forgive us. For 2000 years, we Christians have failed to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Instead of sharing with our sisters and brothers, instead of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and healing the sick; we have stored up treasures and sent the vulnerable, sick, hungry and homeless from our door.

Instead of forgiving, we have sought vengeance, retribution, harsh punishment and death. We have asked the state to kill in our name.

Instead of crying out against injustice, we have dominated, discriminated and demeaned; and we have benefited from the economic oppression of our neighbors.

Instead of holding your Creation in sacred trust, instead of respecting the inter-connectedness and beauty of our universe; we have wasted and polluted, disrupted the balance, and ignored our responsibility to those who come after us.

Instead of loving our enemies, we have demonized them. Instead of peace, nonviolence and reconciliation; we Christians have unleashed in your name, violent crusades, slavery, the Holocaust, and nuclear war. We have killed through landmines, depleted uranium, bombing runs, smart weapons and economic sanctions.

We confess that we have neglected our prayer life and community building. We have lost our way and are not the people you called us to be. Accept our prayer and restore us. In your mercy, forgive us. Forgive us. Forgive us. Amen. (By Janet Chisholm, Vice Chair of EPF)

RESOURCES

One way to avoid violence against Iraq is to become better informed about Iraq.

Below you will find a list of helpful resources in getting to know more about the people of Iraq, as well our country's involvement in violence against Iraq.

History/Culture of Iraq

<http://countrystudies.us/iraq/34.htm>

<http://countrystudies.us/iraq/31.htm>

General

www.wichurches.org/iraqresources.html

www.brethren.org/genbd/WitnessWashOffice.html

www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/ohanlon/20050221.htm

<http://epic-usa.org>

www.ecapc.org/mainframe.asp

www.afsc.org/IRAQ/Default.htm

www.sojo.net

<http://electroniciraq.net/news/index.shtml>

Monetary Cost of War

www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar/index.html

<http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/weekly/aaIraqwarcost.htm>

Civilian/Solider Casualty Count

www.iraqbodycount.net

www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm

www.antiwar.com/casualties

<http://icasualties.org/oif>

Action Suggestion

Live out of your faith, in a conscious decision making process.
Give voice to the violence, give witness to the peace of Christ.



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