

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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WITNESS FOR JUSTICE #327

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Pastoral Letter on the Iraq War

**Collegium of Officers
UCC Related Seminary Presidents**

**Conference Ministers
General Synod XXVI**

“The war in Iraq is now in its fifth year. Justified as a means to end oppression, this war has imposed the new oppression of terror on the people of Iraq. Justified as the only way to protect the world from weapons of mass destruction, this war has led to the massive destruction of communal life in Iraq. Justified as a means to end the rule of terror, this war has bred more terror. Every day we look for justice, but all we see is bloodshed. Every day we yearn for righteousness, but all we hear is a cry.

“Thousands of precious American lives have been lost; thousands more have been altered forever by profound injuries. We grieve each loss and embrace bereaved families with our prayers and compassion. Tens of thousands more innocent Iraqi lives are daily being offered on the altar of preemptive war and sectarian violence. They, too, are precious, and we weep for them. In our name human rights have been violated, abuse and torture sanctioned, civil liberties dismantled, Iraqi infrastructure and lives destroyed. Billions of dollars have been diverted from education, health care, and the needs of the poor in this land and around the world. Efforts to restrain the real sources of global terrorism have been ignored or subverted. Trust and respect for the United States throughout the world has been traded for self-serving political gain. Every day we look for justice, but all we see is bloodshed. Every day we yearn for righteousness, but all we hear is a cry.

“We confess that too often the church has been little more than a silent witness to evil deeds. We have prayed without protest. We have recoiled from the horror this war has unleashed without resisting the arrogance and folly at its heart. We have been more afraid of conflict in our churches than outraged over the deceptions that have killed thousands. We have confused patriotism with self-interest. As citizens of this land we have been made complicit in the bloodshed and the cries. Lord, have mercy upon us.

“In the midst of our lament we give thanks – for pastors and laity who have raised courageous voices against the violence and the deceit, for military personnel who have served with honor and integrity, for chaplains who have cared for soldiers and their families with compassion and courage, for veterans whose experience has led them to say, ‘no more,’ for humanitarian groups, including the Middle East Council of Churches, who have cared for the victims of violence and the growing tide of refugees, for the fragile Christian community in Iraq that continues to bear witness to the Gospel under intense pressure and fear, for public officials who have challenged this war risking reputation and career. The Gospel witness has not been completely silenced, and for this, we are grateful.

“Today we call for an end to this war, an end to our reliance on violence as the first, rather than the last resort, an end to the arrogant unilateralism of preemptive war. Today we call for the humility and courage to acknowledge failure and error, to accept the futility of our current path, and we cry out for the creativity to seek new paths of peacemaking in the Middle East, through regional engagement and true multinational policing. Today we call for acknowledgement of our responsibility for the destruction caused by sanctions and war, thereby, we pray, beginning to rebuild trust in the Middle East and around the world. Today we call for repentance in our nation and for the recognition in our churches, that security is found in submitting to Christ, not by dominating others.

“To this end may we join protest to prayer, support ministries of compassion for victims here and in the Middle East, cast off the fear that has made us accept the way of violence and return again to the way of Jesus. Thus may bloodshed end and cries be transformed to the harmonies of justice and the melodies of peace. For this we yearn, for this we pray, and toward this end we rededicate ourselves as children of a loving God who gives ‘light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.’”

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,700 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.