

Confronted by a National Crisis - - A War With Iraq

Our Statement of Social Principles in the 2000 Book of Discipline gives the United Methodist Church this guidance:

C) War and Peace

We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as a usual instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them; that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled; and that the production, possession, or use of nuclear weapons be condemned. Consequently, we endorse general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

G) Military Service

*We deplore war and urge the peaceful settlement of all disputes among nations. From the beginning, the Christian conscience has struggled with the harsh realities of violence and war, for these evils clearly frustrate God's loving purposes for humankind. We yearn for the day when there will be no more war and people will live together in peace and justice. Some of us believe that war, and other acts of violence, are never acceptable to Christians. **We also acknowledge that most Christians regretfully realize that, when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide.** We honor the witness of pacifists who will not allow us to become complacent about war and violence. **We also respect those who support the use of force, but only in extreme situations and only when the need is clear beyond reasonable doubt, and through appropriate international organizations.** We urge the establishment of the rule of law in international affairs as a means of elimination of war, violence, and coercion in these affairs.*

We reject national policies of enforced military service as incompatible with the gospel. We acknowledge the agonizing tension created by the demand for military service by national governments. We urge all young adults to seek the counsel of the Church as they reach a conscientious decision concerning the nature of their responsibility as citizens. Pastors are called upon to be available for counseling with all young adults who face conscription, including those who conscientiously refuse to cooperate with a system of conscription.

*We support and extend the ministry of the Church to those persons who conscientiously oppose all war, or any particular war, and who therefore refuse to serve in the armed forces or to cooperate with systems of military conscription. **We also support and extend the Church's ministry to those persons who conscientiously choose to serve in the armed forces or to accept alternative service.***

As you can see our church is schizophrenic on the issue of military service and war.

We are an intensely loyal and patriotic people. We desperately long to breathe free. The events of September 11, 2001 have caused all of us to cling to each other and tell each other how much we love.

Our nation has been attacked by a shadowy foe that somehow seems to elude us. This foe hides in the darkness and shadows and attacks without any provocation. Make no mistake, our foe is not the Islam religion, it is a group of Islamic fanatics who are hiding their terror behind the cloak of their religion.

Our national leaders are now pursuing a course of action that almost surely will take us into war. We have world class bullies on our hands. This "axis of evil" is now making itself known in some very provocative ways. Missiles here, bombs there, weapons of mass destruction everywhere and the sobering potential of nuclear weapons in several of these hotbeds of evil.

Just this week I received the following email from a retired United Methodist elder:

"I have extreme difficulty understanding the chant of people who have lived in this country for a lifetime of any length and are not willing to give themselves for the Christian ideal of liberty than have made us safe thus far and still let it be the responsibility of others to care of them as though they owe nobody anything. I was in war and saw the death of young men not old enough to vote. I, too, was in combat as a Chaplain. The words of a 17 year soldier still ring in my ears till today, "Chaplain, I am glad that I had 17 years to give, could you share communion with me?" We did and he died before we completed. This was in the jungles of the South Pacific. A battle was raging. My son was to be called into the Air force for Vietnam but was not shipped out before that war was over. I still do not love war, but would return in my same capacity if I could be accepted. But my loyalty is the same as ever. I lost hearing along with other injuries. Is what is worth living for not worth dying for? How many missionaries have died FOR my sake? God forbid that I should "snivel" while others pay a price for my life?"

What is worth dying for? Is this war we are about to prosecute with Iraq worth that kind of price? Will replacing the Saddam regime, with a free democratic government, bring stability to that area of the world? Does Iraq, in fact, have hidden weapons of mass destruction that they will, without provocation, unleash on their neighbors.

Our government leaders are telling us that the answers are all YES!

I am reminded of the political joke about this old pol who was running for the umpteenth time for reelection was asked how he stood on an issue, to which he replied "well some of my friends are fer and some or agin' it! I stands with my friends!"

Some days I say lets unleash our military and go kick some Iraq butt! Some days I find myself longing for our President to just cool it and wait for the inspection process to run its full course.

Everyone who has talked about prosecuting this war has used the term "collateral damage" - - that translates to the unintentional loss of innocent life.

We love to sing "God Bless America" - - but Yahweh is not a national God.

Every human life is precious to God - - no matter the color or nationality. To de-personalize and de-humanize the people of Iraq would be a grievous national sin on our part.

I guess that I am just as schizophrenic as our church is.

"Some of my friends are fer and some or agin' it! I stands with my friends!"

There is one thing that I do know - - there is an awesome power unleashed by God's people in prayer!

Whether we are "fer or agin' it!" - - with heads and hearts bowed we can be in constant prayer - -

For Peace!

For All of our World Leaders!

For all of the sons and daughters - for every mother's child - of every nation and religion who will be called and sent to war and placed in harms way!

For every one who calls on the name of God - - by whatever name - - to bind together!

“Bind us together, Lord, bind us together in cords that will not be broken, . . . bind us together in love!”

Shalom!
Peace!
Sala'am!
Amen!

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