

Pronouncement on affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church

General Synod 15 pronouncement

85-GS-50 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the pronouncement “Affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church.”

Summary

Affirms the United Church of Christ to be a Just Peace Church and defines Just Peace as the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence. Places the United Church of Christ General Synod in opposition to the institution of war.

Background

The Thirteenth General Synod called upon the United Church of Christ to become a Peace Church and the Fourteenth General Synod asked a Peace Theology Development Team to recommend to the Fifteenth General Synod theology, policy, and structure for enabling the United Church of Christ to be a peacemaking church. This pronouncement is based on insights from all three of the historic approaches of Christians to issues of war and peace—pacifism, just war, and crusade—but attempts to move beyond these traditions to an understanding rooted in the vision of shalom, linking peace, and justice. Since Just War criteria itself now rules out war under modern conditions, it is imperative to move beyond Just War thinking to the Theology of a Just Peace.

Biblical and theological foundations

A Just Peace is grounded in God’s activity in creation. Creation shows the desire of God to sustain the world and not destroy. The creation anticipates what is to come: the history-long relationship between God and humanity and the coming vision of shalom.

Just Peace is grounded in covenant relationship. God creates and calls us into covenant, God’s gift of friendship: “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore” (Ezekiel 37:26). When God’s abiding presence is embraced, human well-being results, or Shalom, which can be translated Just Peace.

A Just Peace is grounded in the reconciling activity of Jesus Christ. Human sin is the rejection of the covenant of friendship with God and one another and the creation and perpetuation of structures of evil. Through God’s own suffering love in the cross, the power of these structures has been broken and the possibility for relationship restored.

A Just Peace is grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit. God sends the Holy Spirit to continue the struggle to overcome the powers ranged against human bonding. Thus, our hope for a Just Peace does not rest on human efforts alone, but on God’s promise that we will “have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

A Just Peace is grounded in the community of reconciliation: the Just Peace Church. Jesus, who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14), performed signs of forgiveness and healing and made manifest that God’s reign is for those who are in need. The church is a continuation of that servant manifestation. As a Just Peace Church, we embody a Christ fully engaged in human events. The church is thus a real countervailing power to those forces that divide, that perpetuate human enmity and injustice, and that destroy.

Just Peace is grounded in hope. Shalom is the vision that pulls all creation toward a time when weapons are swept off the earth and all creatures lie down together without fear; where all have their own fig tree and dwell secure from want. As Christians, we offer this conviction to the world: Peace is possible.

Statement of Christian conviction

A. The Fifteenth General Synod affirms a Just Peace as the presence and interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence. The General Synod affirms the following as marks of a Just Peace theology:

Peace is possible. A Just Peace is a basic gift of God and is the force and vision moving human history. The meaning of a Just Peace and God’s activity in human history, especially the life and witness of Jesus, is understood through the Bible,

church history, and the voices of the oppressed and those in the struggle for justice and peace. Nonviolent conflict is a normal and healthy reflection of diversity; working through conflict constructively should lead to growth of both individuals and nations.

Nonviolence is a Christian response to conflict shown to us by Jesus. We have barely begun to explore this little known process of reconciliation. Violence can and must be minimized, even eliminated in most situations. However, because evil and violence are embedded in human nature and institutions, they will remain present in some form. War can and must be eliminated.

The State should be based upon participatory consent and should be primarily responsible for developing justice and well-being, enforcing law, and minimizing violence in the process.

International structures of friendship, justice, and common security from violence are necessary and possible at this point in history in order to eliminate the institution of war and move toward a Just Peace. Unexpected initiatives of friendship and reconciliation can transform interpersonal and international relationships, and are essential to restoring community.

B. The Fifteenth General Synod affirms the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church. The General Synod affirms the following as marks of a Just Peace Church, calling upon each local church to become:

A community of hope, believing a Just Peace is possible, working toward this end, and communicating to the larger world the excitement and possibility of a Just Peace.

A community of worship and celebration, centering its identity in justice and peacemaking and the Good News of peace that is Jesus Christ.

A community of biblical and theological reflection, studying the Scriptures, the Christian story, and the working of the Spirit in the struggle against injustice and oppression.

A community of spiritual nurture and support, loving one another and giving one another strength in the struggle for a Just Peace.

A community of honest and open conflict, a zone of freedom where differences may be expressed, explored, and worked through in mutual understanding and growth.

A community of empowerment, renewing and training people for making peace/doing justice.

A community of financial support, developing programs and institutions for a Just Peace.

A community of solidarity with the poor, seeking to be present in places of oppression, poverty, and violence, and standing with the oppressed in the struggle to resist and change this evil.

A community of loyalty to God and to the whole human community over any nation or rival idolatry.

A community that recognizes no enemies, willing to risk and be vulnerable, willing to take surprising initiatives to transform situations of enmity. A community of repentance, confessing its own guilt and involvement in structural injustice and violence, ready to acknowledge its entanglement in evil, seeking to turn toward new life.

A community of resistance, standing against social structures comfortable with violence and injustice.

A community of sacrifice and commitment, ready to go the extra mile, and then another mile, in the search for justice and peace.

A community of political and social engagement, in regular dialogue with the political order, participating in peace and justice advocacy networks, witnessing to a Just Peace in the community and in the nation, joining the social and political struggle to implement a Just Peace.

C. The Fifteenth General Synod affirms friendship as essential to a Just Peace.

1. We affirm the unity of the whole human community and oppose any use of nationalism to divide this covenant of friendship.

2. We reject all labeling of others as enemies and the creation of institutions that perpetuate enemy relations.

3. We affirm diversity among peoples and nations and the growth and change that can emerge from the interchange of differing value systems, ideologies, religions and political and economic systems.

4. We affirm nonviolent conflict as inevitable and valuable, an expression of diversity and essential to healthy relationships among people and nations.

5. We affirm all nations developing global community and interchange, including:

- a. freedom of travel,
- b. free exchange of ideas and open dialogue,
- c. scientific, cultural, and religious exchanges,
- d. public education that portrays other nations fairly, breaking down enemy stereotypes and images, and
- e. knowledge of foreign languages.

D. The Fifteenth General Synod affirms justice as essential to a Just Peace.

1. We affirm all nations working together to insure that people everywhere will be able to meet their basic needs, including the right of every person to:

- a. food and clean water,
- b. adequate health care,
- c. decent housing,
- d. meaningful employment,
- e. basic education,
- f. participation in community decision-making and the political process,
- g. freedom of worship and religious expression,
- h. protection from torture, and
- i. protection of rights without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or national or social origin.

2. We affirm the establishment of a more just international order in which:

- a. trade barriers, tariffs, and debt burdens do not work against the interests of poor people, and developing nations,
- b. poor nations have a greater share in the policies and management of global economic institutions.

3. We affirm economic policies that target aid to the most needy: the rural poor, women, nations with poor natural resources or structural problems, and the poor within each nation.

4. We affirm economic policies that will further the interests of the poor within each nation:

- a. promoting popular participation,
- b. empowering the poor to make effective demand on social systems,
- c. encouraging decentralization and greater community control,
- d. providing for the participation of women in development,
- e. redistributing existing assets, including land, and distributing more equitably future benefits of growth,
- f. reducing current concentrations of economic and political power, and
- g. providing for self-reliant development, particularly in food production.

5. We affirm nations transferring funds from military expenditures into programs that will aid the poor and developing strategies of converting military industries to Just Peace industries.

6. We oppose the injustices resulting from the development of national security states that currently repress the poor in organizing society against an external enemy.

7. We affirm a free and open press within each nation, without hindrance from government.

E. The Fifteenth General Synod affirms common security from violence as essential to a Just Peace.

1. We affirm that national security includes four interrelated components:

- a. provision for general well-being,
- b. cultivation of justice,
- c. provision for defense of a nation, and
- d. creation of political atmosphere and structure in which a Just Peace can flourish and the risk of war is diminished or

eliminated.

2. We affirm the right and obligation of governments to use civil authority to prevent lawlessness and protect human rights. Such force must not be excessive and must always be in the context of the primary responsibility of the state in creating social justice and promoting human welfare. Any use of force must be based in the participatory consent of the people.

3. We affirm that war must be eliminated as an instrument of national policy and the global economy must be more just. To meet these goals, international institutions must be strengthened.

4. We affirm our support for the United Nations, which should be strengthened developing the following:

- a. more authority in disputes among countries,
- b. peacekeeping forces, including a permanent force of at least 5000, able to police border disputes and intervene when called to do so by the U.N.,
- c. peacemaking teams, trained in mediation, conflict intervention, and conflict resolution,
- d. support for international peace academies,
- e. a global satellite surveillance system to provide military intelligence to the common community,
- f. international agreements to limit military establishments and the international arms trade,
- g. an international ban on the development, testing, use, and possession of nuclear and bio-chemical weapons of mass destruction, and
- h. an international ban on all weapons in space and all national development of space-based defense systems and Strategic Defense Initiatives.

5. We affirm our support for the International Court of Justice and for the strengthening of international law, including:

- a. the Law of the Sea Treaty,
- b. universal ratification of the International Covenants and Conventions which seek to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and
- c. recognition of the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and removal of restrictions, such as the Connally Amendment, which impair the Court's effective functioning.

6. We reject any use or threat to use weapons and forces of mass destruction and any doctrine of deterrence based primarily on using such weapons. We also reject unilateral, full-scale disarmament as a currently accepted path out of the present international dilemma. We affirm the development of new policies of common security, using a combination of negotiated agreements, new international institutions and institutional power, nonviolent strategies, unilateral initiatives to lessen tensions, and new policies that will make the global economy more just.

7. We affirm the mutual and verifiable freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons as the most important step in breaking the escalating dynamics of the arms race and call upon the United States, the U.S.S.R., and other nations to take unilateral initiatives toward implementing such a freeze, contingent on the other side responding, until such time as a comprehensive freeze can be negotiated.

8. We declare our opposition to all weapons of mass destruction. All nations should:

- a. declare that they will never use such weapons,
- b. cease immediately the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons,
- c. begin dismantling these arsenals, and
- d. while the process of dismantling is going on, negotiate comprehensive treaties banning all such future weapons by any nation.

9. We declare our opposition to war, violence, and terrorism. All nations should:

- a. declare that they will never attack another nation,
- b. make unilateral initiatives toward dismantling their military arsenals, calling on other nations to reciprocate, and
- c. develop mechanisms for international law, international peacekeeping, and international conflict resolution.

Address by Rev. Allan Boesak

President Avery Post introduced Rev. Allan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, who addressed the General Synod. (See Appendix 14.)

President Post then called on Rev. Charles Cobb to lead General Synod in prayer.

Proposal for action on organizing the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace church

The Assistant Moderator, Ms. Janeece L. Dent, called on Rev. Virginia Derr, who moved the Proposal for Action, "Organizing the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church" with additions as follows:

Section IV,I,add after first paragraph:

"We commend to all local churches the use of the World Peace Prayer,using the example of the Benedictine Sisters who pray this specific prayer each day at 12 noon:

Lead me/us from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead me/us from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead me/us from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart, our
world,our universe."

Section IV, 4, paragraph 2, after first sentence add following sentence:

"We call upon local churches to be understanding and even supportive of persons who out of individual conscience take the responsibility for such non-violent extraordinary witness."

After discussion, Rev. Ross McGuire moved an amendment as follows:

Reword IV,4,paragraph 2 to read:

"While respecting the claims of responsible governments on the loyalty and good will of their people, because the times are now so critical, we call our churches to recognize and support the right of persons to witness in extraordinary as well as ordinary ways for a just peace.

"Such a witness may include acts of non-violent challenge to laws and policies which promote war and injustice in the world and a willingness to go to jail to call attention to specific outrages."

Following discussion, the motion was defeated.

Mr.Jeffrey Schragg of the Business Committee moved to divide the question, separating Section VI, "Call for Increased Funding, "All Church Offerings, from the proposal for action so that it could be considered during the report of Committee 13. The motion was adopted.

After further discussion, it was,

85-GS-51 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Proposal for Action "Organizing the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church."

Summary

Calls upon churches to organize themselves so as to be effective instruments of God's Just Peace. Calls for organizing the United Church of Christ regionally and nationally for more effective Just Peace witness. Calls for a two-year Just Peace offering and effective long-range funding.

Background

This Proposal for Action builds on the proposed pronouncement, also submitted to the Fifteenth General Synod, "Affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church." Like the pronouncement, the Proposal for Action has been developed in response to the request of the Fourteenth General Synod to recommend theology, policy, and structure for enabling the United Church of Christ to be a peace-making church.

Directional statement

The Fifteenth General Synod calls on all in the United Church of Christ to recognize that the creating of a Just Peace is central to their identity as Christians and to their Baptism into the Christian community.

A. Call To Local Churches

The Fifteenth General Synod calls on local churches to organize their common life so as to make a difference in the achieving of a Just Peace and the ending of the institution of war.

The Fifteenth General Synod calls for the development of four key components within local churches: spiritual development, Just Peace education, political advocacy, and community witness.

1. We call all local churches to the inward journey of spiritual nurture: prayer for a Just Peace, study of the Scriptures, theological reflection upon the work of the Holy Spirit, and celebration and worship that center the life of the community in the power and reality of the God who creates a Just Peace. We call for the development of Christian community that nurtures and supports members in the search for a Just Peace. We commend to all local churches the use of the World Peace Prayer, using the example of the Benedictine Sisters who pray this specific prayer each day at 12 noon:

Lead me/us from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead me/us from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead me/us from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts, our
world, our universe.

2. We call all local churches to the inward journey of education. Knowing that there are no easy answers to the creating of a Just Peace, we call for churches to establish the climate where all points of view can be respected and all honest feelings and opinions shared in the search for new answers and directions. We call for a steady program of Just Peace education and a steady flow of information on Just Peace issues into the life of the congregation.

3. We call all local churches to the outward journey of political witness, enabling all members to join the search for the politics of a Just Peace. Just Peace is both a religious concept and a political concept, and participation in the political arena is essential. We call for each church to appoint a contact person for the United Church of Christ Peace Advocacy and Hunger/Economic Justice Networks to follow closely those political issues most critical to the development of a Just Peace and to alert members of the local church when it is most appropriate to write or contact their Senators and Representatives.

4. We call all local churches to the outward journey of community witness. We call for local churches to make their convictions known in their communities through public forums, media, and presence in the public arena. We call for local churches to help shape public opinion and the climate in which the issues of a Just Peace are shaped. We call for churches to explore with military industries the opportunities for conversion into Just Peace industries. We call for evangelistic outreach, inviting others to join in the search for a Just Peace.

Because the times are so critical, we call for extraordinary witness as well as ordinary political involvement to break the power of the structural evils that prevent a Just Peace. We call upon local churches to be understanding and even supportive of persons who out of individual conscience take the responsibility for such nonviolent extraordinary witness. Examples of such witness might include: becoming a conscientious objector to war; refusing acceptance of employment with any project related to nuclear and biochemical weapons and warfare; refusing any and all assignments to use weapons of mass destruction as a member of the military; withholding tax money in protest of the excessively militaristic policies of our government; and engaging in acts of non-violent civil disobedience, willingly going to jail to call attention to specific outrages.

B. Call to Conferences and National Bodies

The Fifteenth General Synod calls upon Conferences and national bodies of the United Church of Christ to organize their common life so as to make a difference in the achieving of a Just Peace and the ending of the institution of war.

The Fifteenth General Synod calls for the development of four key components in developing the United Church of Christ so that it can make a real difference over the next years: regional centers, Washington advocacy, international presence, and national programs.

1. We call upon Conferences to develop regional centers able to link local churches into effective regional and national strategies. A variety of options are possible at the Association and Conference levels:

The development of regional United Church of Christ peace centers that resource local groups through educational, organizational, advocacy, and funding efforts;

The development of ecumenical regional Just Peace centers, in partnership with other denominations;

The funding of part-time, contract, or full-time Just Peace staff at the Association or Conference; and

The funding of ecumenical peace staff in states or metropolitan areas.

2. We call for the strengthening of our advocacy work in Washington, D.C., with more funding to develop the capacity of the United Church of Christ to make its witness known in the national political arena, to expand its capacity for policy analysis, to increase its presence on Capitol Hill in shaping legislation, to develop stronger communication links with churches around the country to share political developments and urge action, and to build coalitions.

3. We call upon the United Church of Christ Board for World Ministries to explore and develop new models of peace and justice ministries globally to address particular situations of injustice, oppression, and real or potential violence, and to develop communication links between Christians in these critical situations and Christians in the United States, developing global partnership and global awareness in the search for a Just Peace.

4. We call upon all national bodies to continue to develop effective programs of advocacy, empowerment, and education. We call for more resources to develop national strategies of advocacy and action to increase the witness of the United Church of Christ for a Just Peace. We call for the Office for Church in Society to facilitate the coordination of this work.

Implementation

Churches, Conferences, and national bodies, including the Office for Church in Society, the Executive Council, the United Church Board for World Ministries, and the Stewardship Council, have been requested in this Call to Action to respond to various directions. These bodies are responsible for developing the strategies and programs to fulfill the goals outlined here.

Note: Implementation of this Proposal for action is subject to the availability of funds.