



SHINE, GOD'S PEOPLE STRUGGLING FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

We are a peace with justice church



LIGHT A CANDLE

Creator God,
God of all people,
Lead us from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead us from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts,
our world,
our universe.¹

TAKE A MOMENT TO PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER the words of this prayer. Reflect on the following questions:

- » What kind of peace do you seek in the world? Where do you see evidence of God's peace and justice?
- » What are the injustices in our world that weigh most on your heart?
- » How does your faith shape what you believe and do about peace and justice?
- » What are specific situations and places in our nation and world that you often bring to God in prayer?

A SHINING MOMENT

Imagine walking along a road, part of a long line of quiet people moving in the same direction. You are thirsty and hungry. The sun is high in the sky and burning, but you have nothing to cover your head. You can only carry some of your belongings. You know that the walk will be a long one. You do not know where, or how, it will end, nor do you know what may happen along the way. The people around you are generally silent—all moving with a sense

of urgency, but resigned to this trip. They know they may never again see the family members who began this trek with them.

You are walking this long road with people forced to flee their homes because of war or threat of injury, because of unrest in their community that would result in their deaths. You are walking away from the extreme poverty in your homeland toward a dream of work in another land.



The UCC's Commission for Racial Justice organized new "Freedom Rides" in 1986 to protest African-American voter intimidation in Alabama.

You are trying to find a safe place to live and do not know where that is. In this journey, you could be among refugees and displaced people of the Sudan, the Balkans, East Timor, Iraq, Colombia, Mexico, or people of many other places.

Now imagine yourself in the midst of General Synod in 1985. Quite a different setting, don't you think? At this Synod, the United Church of Christ has just adopted an historical pronouncement proclaiming it to be a just peace church. What does "Just Peace" mean? In the pronouncement, the church hears God's call to "work to end the institution of war" and to work to eliminate the root causes of violence and war.² We seek to be in solidarity and join in the journey of those are victims of war, violence, and injustice.

Even with war raging today, with falsehoods presented as facts to justify risking precious lives, even with peace ever more elusive, the shining moment that was lit in 1985 remains lit today.

OUR TRAVEL IN THE LIGHT

Poverty and hunger, war and violence, racism and sexism, and other "isms" all threaten the human community.

Throughout our history, the UCC has spoken in ways that offers hope to those who experience such social maladies and challenges the powers that seek their perpetuation. Calls to action as the Just Peace resolution have spoken to both national and international situations challenging us to engage in God's acts of peace, love, and justice.

We have engaged in this work of God's peace not on our own, but in vital partnerships with Christians and non-Christians in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Southern and East Asia, and the Middle East. Through the insights and bold witness of these partners, we have access to voices and perspectives not normally available.

For example, when Lebanon was under siege in the summer of 2006, we discovered the extent of the destruc-

**"I act with steadfast love, justice,
and righteousness in the earth,
for in these things I delight ..."**

— Jeremiah 9:24

tion from our Christian partners there who not only called for the war to end, but who also lived out their Christian witness by establishing relief centers and shelters. The Near East School of Theology, a major Lutheran and Reformed seminary located in Beirut, established with the help of our church, became such a center of provision of basic needs in the midst of daily bombing. Mary Mikhael, president of the seminary, states that "Just peace is the will of God for our world. As a church, we are all called to promote just peace in all we do and say."

Members of the UCC have served as witnesses for peace in places such as Colombia and the Middle East,



“FROM THE UCC’S BEGINNING UNTIL NOW, justice and peace has been a crucial part of our faith and what it means to be Christ’s Church. Challenging unjust systems often takes us to uncomfortable and unpopular places, but Jesus’ words are clear: we must stand with the least of these.

— *Edith A. Guffey, associate general minister, United Church of Christ*

offering a presence among people suffering as a result of the wars that rage around them. For example, volunteers have served three-month terms with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. This program of the World Council of Churches, initiated at the request of the Jerusalem churches, offers solidarity through presence with Palestinians and Israelis who seek a nonviolent resolution of that enduring conflict. We listen to those who don’t have others to hear their compelling stories of lives challenged by an occupation, nearly forty years old. Such programs and partnerships call us to engage the world intelligently and with a faith that we share with so many.

Throughout our history, God has led us to be keenly aware of the connections between injustice and war, between justice and peace. UCC members have recently advocated against such high levels of military spending in the government’s budget through the Justice and Witness Ministries’ office for public life and social policy in Washington, D.C. Most recently, in 2005, the twenty-fifth General Synod passed the resolution “Another World is Possible: Building a Peace with Justice Movement.” The resolution affirms the many justice commitments of the UCC, including being a Just Peace church and moves us into a more comprehensive vision of peace with justice.³

Another world can be realized — one in which our connections to sisters and brothers around the world are

bonds of common commitment to ending war and participating in God’s reign of justice and peace.

SHINE INTO THE FUTURE

In your congregation, let God’s light of justice and peace shine! Local action has global impact. Global injustice includes that which is closest to home, as well as situations in faraway places.

Even though you may feel a strong wind threatening to extinguish God’s light, shine. Let your light shine stronger, and be light to all the nations. Shine because people in the world, and in your own community, desperately need to know that there is a light. Often they strain to see it. Shine brightly so God’s vision of peace with justice, of shalom, of salaam, may prevail for God’s people everywhere.

Prayerfully reflect on these questions:

- » What connections does your congregation directly have with persons that suffer injustice and violence, locally and globally?
- » In what ways have you and your local congregation witnessed for justice and striven for peace? What inspired you to do something?
- » How does your congregation nurture children and youth to live out God’s justice and peace?

» At this moment in history, what injustices and conflicts, locally and globally, weigh heavy upon the heart of your congregation? What is God saying to you about those concerns?

God is calling the United Church of Christ to a deeper commitment and witness as a peace with justice church. Let the wider church know what your congregation hopes

for our future together. Please respond to these questions online at <www.ucc.org/50/questions>:

- » What are the ways that your local congregation has lived out the commitment to be a peace with justice church within your own community?
- » What hope does your congregation have for the broader UCC's future as a peace with justice church?

¹ Adapted from the World Peace Prayer based on Hindu scripture. Copyright © 1985 by G.I.A. Publications, Inc. Also available in *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995), 581.

² View the 1985 pronouncement of the fifteenth General Synod "on affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church" online at <www.ucc.org/justice/jpc.htm>.

³ View the 2005 pronouncement of the twenty-fifth General Synod, "Another World Is Possible: Building a Peace with Justice Moment in the UCC," online at <www.ucc.org/justice/newresource.htm>.

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