



Interfaith Communities United For Justice And Peace

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Religious Communities must stop blessing war and violence!

ICUJP Statement of Support for All Saints Church Pasadena's Resistance to IRS Investigation – Adopted September 23, 2006

ICUJP (Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace) expresses its solidarity with All Saints Church Pasadena in the investigation being conducted into its practices by the IRS. Religious organizations in the United States have both a duty and a constitutionally protected right to express their faith in word and action. All Saints Church has long been a beacon of prophetic witness for peace and justice, in the tradition of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah.

Given that history and its continuing mission, it is only proper that All Saints criticize the actions and policies of those officials and institutions that it deems detrimental to its avowed values. The IRS interprets this exercise of religious duty as improper political activity and thus in violation of federal tax law.

It cites in particular the guest sermon preached by All Saints Rector Emeritus, and ICUJP Founder, the Rev. Dr. George Regas on October 31, 2004, two days before national elections, as being in violation of the law.

Dr Regas, however, was very careful to say, "I don't intend to tell you how to vote," and went on to add, "Good people of profound faith will be for either George Bush or John Kerry for reasons deeply rooted in their faith." The thrust of his sermon was about the harmful effects of the recent Iraq war, a war that he is by no means alone in regarding as both illegal and immoral.

The recent decision by the IRS not to pursue a similar case that it had instituted against the NAACP reaffirms these constitutionally protected rights of freedom of religion and freedom of speech, rights which do not get abrogated before a national election. The IRS recognized in that case that the NAACP had the right before the 2004 election to criticize officials whose values and policies it found offensive.

At a time when some religious organizations have been embracing war and militarism, without government censure, ICUJP was created to support the work of faith leaders from Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Baha'i and other backgrounds who say: "Religious Communities must stop blessing war and violence." Grounded in many traditions, and honoring prophetic perspectives of non-violence, ICUJP's activities promote critical examination, from the faith perspective, of the costs of violence at home and abroad. ICUJP members deplore the government's use of the IRS to attempt to repress the constitutional rights of all Americans to freely express their religious conscience.

We therefore applaud and stand behind All Saints Church in its decision to contest these actions by the IRS, which appear to threaten the constitutional separation of Church and State. Religious institutions in this country have long provided a free, public space, where the issues of the day can be addressed from a moral and spiritual perspective within the limits of the law. It is vital for the health of our democracy that they be allowed to do so without intimidation or harassment.