

Becoming a Just Peace-Making Church

As Disciples of Christ seek to live out our witness to God's gift of peace and reconciliation in Jesus Christ and to God's call to justice in a broken world, we declare our intent to be a "just peace-making church," with the understanding that this commitment represents an essential mark of our life and mission as a church. In affirming this declaration, we identify five foundational affirmations that give content and direction to our pursuit of peace and justice in our society, nation and world:

1. From our earliest beginnings, leaders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) – including Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell – have taken strong positions in opposition to war as a denial of the Gospel command "to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself," and as a betrayal of our commitment to seeking unity and oneness with all Christians. Throughout our history, Disciples have understood that God's gift of reconciliation is for the *world* – for all persons and all nations; and that the *church*, in the words of the apostle Paul, is entrusted with this message of reconciliation.
2. We understand that *shalom* (the biblical concept of God's peace that is sometimes translated into English as "wholeness") is not seen to be simply the absence of war or the cessation of armed conflict; but rather, we understand peace-making as an indispensable part of our common faith and a

witness to Jesus' teaching to "love one's enemies." Ephesians 2:14 calls Christ 'Our Peace' who breaks down the dividing walls and hostility among people. This is the promise of reconciliation between nations and in everyday relationships. Peace is inextricably related to the love, justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ. It constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for the world.

3. The call to just peace-making comes not only from the biblical witness and our Disciples tradition, but also from the global ecumenical movement. Following the "Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2011)," churches throughout the world have been invited to study and reflect on the document, "*An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*." In that document Disciples affirm that "just peace-making" includes four key tasks:
 - **Seeking Peace in the Community** . . . so that all may live free from fear (Micah 4:3-4); To seek to build cultures of peace where prejudice, racism, domestic violence and abuse are addressed and where all can live safely and feel protected;
 - **Seeking Peace with the Earth** . . . so that life is sustained (Romans 8:20-22) To care for God's precious gift of creation and to strive for ecological justice;

□ **Seeking Peace in the Marketplace** . . . so that all may live with dignity (Isaiah 65:17-23); To work for equitable and just sharing of resources and to address over-consumption greed, and the unjust economic distribution of wealth;

□ **Seeking Peace among the Peoples** . . . so that human lives are protected (Matt. 5:43-44). To break the spirit and logic of violence that is deeply rooted in human history, to work to end all war and the proliferation of weapons, and to build trust with peoples of other faiths and religions.

** (A full description of these four aspects of peace can be found in An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace, the document produced by the International Ecumenical Peace Conference in Kingston, Jamaica, May, 2011 (go to <http://goo.gl/KSGkm1> to download copy of the statement)*

4. The way of just peace-making is fundamentally different from promoting the concept of “just war.” It is much more than living out criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force and silencing weapons of war. Just peace-making embraces work and advocacy for social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security. It embraces our call as Disciples to seek unity with our ecumenical brothers and sisters. It includes binding-up the wounds of the veteran, the widow(er), the orphan and all those who have been in harm’s way. It is, in a word, to seek to establish God’s *shalom* within our life as individuals, as families, as churches, and as nations.
5. Finally, we know, and lament, that God’s peace and justice have not been achieved. Christians are called to speak a ‘no’ to violence in our society and in our world. The principalities and powers of this world, though not sovereign, still enjoy too many victories. Too often, brave men and women must still take up arms. And so we remain restless until peace prevails. In the closing words of the *Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*, “. . . our peace-making will, of necessity, criticize, denounce, advocate, and resist – as it will also proclaim, empower, console, reconcile, and heal. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for;

tear down and build up; lament and celebrate; grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of just peace-making will continue as the flicker of God’s grace.”

