

LAKE WORTH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

JUST PEACE CHURCH

Study Guide & Participant Workbook

“Justice and peace shall embrace.”

— Psalm 85:10

SESSION 1 | Scriptural and Theological Foundations

SESSION 2 | Peace with the Earth

SESSION 3 | Peace in the Marketplace

SESSION 4 | Peace in the Community

SESSION 5 | Peace Among the Peoples

SESSION 6 | Statement Writing Workshop

Becoming a Just Peace Church Together

**JUST
PEACE**
CHURCH



Together

a Support Group for Practicing Faith and Action

Wednesdays @ 6:30 PM
April 22nd - May 27th
lakeworthucc.org/together



LAKE WORTH
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

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A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Friends,

Your hand contains an invitation, and while this invitation invites you to participate in a study series; it also calls you to take a journey. Like many journeys that are worthwhile, this journey requires something from each person participating. This journey asks each participant to see the world as it truly is - to sit down and ponder difficult questions and to rely upon the fact that the community surrounding them is strong enough to carry anything they bring.

Lake Worth United Church of Christ has consistently proven to be a community of believers willing to follow difficult paths. The Open & Affirming designation (Open & Affirming churches are communities that publicly declare their welcoming nature - particularly towards LGBTQ+ individuals) was not made lightly. It took discernment, difficult conversations, and a deep understanding that radical hospitality is simply not optional for followers of Jesus. Now begins the next leg of that same journey.

When the United Church of Christ declared itself a "Just Peace Church" in 1985, it became the very first Christian denomination to make such a declaration. At the time, this declaration was not a new policy for the UCC; rather, it represented a theological commitment - that peace and justice are interdependent, that justice can never come about through violent means, and that the God of Shalom is calling His church to be more than merely neutral in the face of warring factions.

As we gather within Lake Worth, a community which has witnessed its share of both inequality and resilience, we find ourselves situated among the Atlantic Ocean - and the rising tides of water which are threatening our fellow human beings, our coastlines, as well as the planet's most vulnerable populations. In Palm Beach County, where extraordinary wealth and extreme poverty coexist uncomfortably close, there exists a diverse community of native-born residents, immigrants, young, old - people whose lives have all been impacted by various aspects of injustice that this study series will address.

This workbook will provide direction for our gathering over the course of six study sessions. Within each these sessions, we will explore the scriptural and theological foundations of just peace and the four pillars related to the concept of just peace. These studies will be rooted in biblical teachings, connected to our local community, and will ultimately lead us toward developing a covenant statement that represents how Lake Worth UCC believes --- and what Lake Worth UCC commits to doing.

At the completion of Study Session Six, you will have developed the covenant statement. It will be included here in this book - fragments of conviction and hope which were formed during our 5 previous study sessions. During our sixth and final study session, we will take the fragments of conviction and hope you have collected throughout our time together, and weave them into a statement we may offer to God and to one another.

Lake Worth UCC, A Just Peace Church I am sincerely hopeful regarding where we are headed. Not because I am certain of where we will ultimately arrive ---but because I trust who we will become once we arrive.

In faith and solidarity,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor Jason".

Jason Fairbanks, Pastor
Lake Worth United Church of Christ

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UCC JUST PEACE MOVEMENT

It began with a young person asking a hard question.

At the United Church of Christ's 13th General Synod in 1981, a youth delegate brought a resolution to the floor calling on the denomination to become a "peace church." The word they first used was "pacifist." Two years later, it became "peacemaking." But even that word didn't quite capture what the UCC was reaching for – a third way beyond the familiar options of pacifism, just war theory, and crusade theology.

The denomination had leaned historically toward just war thinking – the tradition that certain conflicts can be morally justified under specific conditions. But the late twentieth century made that framework feel inadequate. The Vietnam War had revealed the limits of military solutions. The Cold War kept the world under the shadow of nuclear annihilation. And the UCC's own prophetic tradition demanded something more coherent than managed violence.

In 1983, the UCC's Office of Church in Society assembled a Peace Theology Development Team. For two years, they studied, prayed, consulted, and argued – incorporating feedback from across the denomination. Their work arrived at the 15th General Synod in Ames, Iowa in 1985 as a landmark pronouncement: Affirming the United Church of Christ to be a Just Peace Church.

It passed with broad support. The UCC became the first Christian denomination in history to declare itself a Just Peace Church.

What Is Just Peace?

The 1985 pronouncement defined Just Peace as "the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence." It was a holistic vision – one that named the connections between peace and justice, between violence and systemic forces like environmental degradation, racism, economic disparity, and the loss of civil rights. It was grounded in the biblical concept of shalom: not merely the absence of conflict, but the full flourishing of all creation.

The pronouncement offered two prophetic convictions: that "war can and must be eliminated" – and that "peace is possible."

Growing Beyond the UCC

In the decades following 1985, the Just Peace movement grew. Scholars from multiple traditions developed what they called "Ten Just Peacemaking Practices": concrete approaches with a proven track record for reducing conflict and building lasting peace. The World Council of Churches took notice.

In 2011, the WCC issued its Ecumenical Call to Just Peace, inviting member churches around the world to join a "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace." That document organized the work of Just Peace around four pillars: peace in the community, peace with the earth, peace in the marketplace, and peace among the nations.

In 2015, the UCC's 30th General Synod marked the 30th anniversary of the Just Peace Church designation with a resolution calling on all settings of the church to renew or make new Just Peace covenants.

Now It's Our Turn

Lake Worth United Church of Christ is part of a community of congregations that have said yes to this vision. The study series you are beginning is how we take our turn at that yes – not as followers of a

trend, but as a congregation with our own story, our own community, our own sense of what God is calling us to be and do in this place and time.

By the time we finish, we will have written our covenant. It will be ours.

A THEOLOGY OF JUST PEACE

The Hebrew word is shalom. We translate it as “peace,” but that translation is too thin. Shalom is fullness. It is the state of the world as God intends: whole, just, flourishing, free from fear. When Psalm 85 declares that “justice and peace shall embrace,” it isn’t describing two separate goods that happen to coexist. It is describing a single reality – a world where right relationship has been restored, where the widow and the immigrant and the child and the earth itself can live without threat.

Just Peace theology begins here, in this thick, demanding, beautiful word. And it insists that you cannot have shalom without justice. A peace that is purchased through oppression isn’t peace – it’s managed violence. A peace that ignores the suffering of the poor isn’t peace – it’s the comfort of the privileged. Shalom is indivisible.

How Just Peace Differs from Other Frameworks

Christian traditions have approached war and peace through three primary frameworks. Crusade theology holds that God commands or blesses particular military campaigns. Pacifism refuses all violence on moral and religious grounds. Just War theory holds that war can be morally justified under certain conditions – proportional force, just cause, proper authority, last resort.

Just Peace does not fit neatly into any of these categories. Rather than asking when violence is permissible, it asks what practices and structures make violence unnecessary. It is proactive rather than reactive – about building the conditions for peace, not managing the conditions for justified war.

The UCC’s 1985 Pronouncement named it clearly: Just Peace is “the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.” Friendship across difference. Justice in social, economic, and political structures. Security that doesn’t depend on the threat of mutual destruction.

The Four Pillars

The World Council of Churches organized the Just Peace vision around four pillars:

Peace with the Earth – so that life is sustained. Environmental destruction falls hardest on the poorest and most vulnerable. Care for creation is an act of justice.

Peace in the Marketplace – so that all may live with dignity. Economic systems that concentrate wealth and impoverish billions are systems of structural violence.

Peace in the Community – so that all may live free from fear. Racism, domestic violence, mass incarceration, the erasure of immigrants – these are community-level violations of shalom.

Peace Among the Peoples – so that human lives are protected. Nuclear weapons, militarism, and the constant threat of war are incompatible with a vision of human flourishing.

The Theological Spine

Just Peace is grounded in God’s activity in creation. Creation itself testifies to God’s desire for wholeness and flourishing.

Just Peace is grounded in the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. The cross is where the power of structures of sin and violence was broken. The resurrection is God’s confirmation that love, not force, has the final word.

Just Peace is grounded in hope. The Psalmist’s vision – justice and peace embracing – is not wishful thinking. It is the direction of history as God holds it.

“Peace is possible” is not a slogan. It is a conviction born of resurrection faith.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is yours. Write in it. Underline things. Disagree in the margins. Bring it to every session, and keep it when the series is done.

Each session follows the same structure:

Session Header – A key scripture and framing paragraph orient you to the session’s theme.

Scripture Reflections – Key biblical passages with brief pastoral context and reflection questions to engage before or during discussion.

Discussion Questions – Questions moving from personal reflection to communal discernment. There’s a small note space beside each.

Congregational Connection – A prompt inviting you to connect the session’s pillar to Lake Worth UCC’s specific community and context.

Statement Writing Exercise – The heart of every session. You’ll write 2-4 sentences completing a prompt about what Lake Worth UCC commits to as a Just Peace Church. These sentences are the raw material for our Session 6 covenant.

Between-Session Homework – One concrete, manageable assignment. An invitation, not an obligation.

Resource Sidebar – One or two books or articles for those who want to go deeper.

A Note About the Statement Writing Exercises

The Statement Writing Exercise in each session is not busywork. It is the thread that connects all six sessions. By the time you arrive at Session 6, you will have already written across five pillars of Just Peace – in your own words, from your own experience.

Session 6 is not a blank-page drafting session. It is an assembly. Together, you’ll read, find shared language, negotiate differences, and shape a covenant statement ready for congregational adoption.

Take the Statement Writing Exercises seriously. Your words will matter.

SESSION I | SCRIPTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Psalm 85:10 – “Justice and peace shall embrace.”

Every journey needs a map, and ours begins with a word: shalom. Not the thin peace of a temporary ceasefire, but the thick, demanding, beautiful wholeness that God desires for all creation. This session does double duty: it roots our Just Peace journey in the specific biblical passages that have grounded the UCC’s Just Peace vision since 1985, and it names the theological convictions that give that vision its spine. By the time we’re done, we will have a shared language – a common set of images and convictions – to carry through the five sessions ahead.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Engaging the Word

The following three passages form the biblical backbone of the UCC’s Just Peace vision. For each one, read the full passage aloud together if possible, sit with the pastoral reflection, then move to the questions.

Psalm 85:8–13

*I will listen to what you have to say, YHWH—
a voice that speaks of peace, peace
for your people and your friends
so long as they don’t return to their folly.
Your salvation is near for those who revere you
and your glory will dwell in our land.
Love and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.
Fidelity will sprout from the earth
and justice will lean down from heaven.
YHWH will give us what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.
Justice will march before you, YHWH,
and peace will prepare the way for your steps.*

Notice what the Psalmist is doing here. He’s not issuing a command – he’s describing a vision. Justice and peace aren’t being argued for; they’re being seen. They meet. They kiss. They are already moving toward each other in God’s future, which is also God’s promise for the present. This is what we mean when we say shalom – not a policy goal, not a program, but a vision of the world as God intends it, already on its way.

1. The Psalmist describes righteousness and peace as though they are people moving toward each other. Where in your own life or community do you see them moving apart? What would it look like for them to meet?
2. This passage is a promise before it is a program. What does it mean to live from a promised future rather than an achieved present?

Ezekiel 37:24–28

My servant David will be their ruler over them, and they all will have one shepherd. They will obey my laws and carefully follow my decrees. They will live in the land I gave my servants Jacob, Leah, and Rachel—the land of your ancestors. They and their children and their grandchildren will live there forever. And my servant David will be their leader for all time. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will bless them and multiply them. And I will set my Holy Place among them forever. My Presence will rest upon them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And when my Holy Place is in their midst forever, the nations will know that I, YHWH, have made Israel sacred.’ ”

Ezekiel is writing to a people in exile – displaced, disoriented, wondering if God has forgotten them. Into that context God speaks a covenant of peace. Not a treaty between nations. Not a ceasefire. A covenant – the deepest form of binding promise in the Hebrew tradition. God’s shalom is not a temporary arrangement. It is God’s own dwelling place pitched in the middle of the community. That’s the foundation Just Peace stands on – not human willpower or political strategy, but the God who moves in.

1. Ezekiel’s audience was in exile – far from home, far from what they thought God had promised. When has your own faith felt like that? What does a covenant of peace mean when everything feels uncertain?
2. The passage says God’s sanctuary – God’s dwelling place – will be set “in the midst of them.” Where do you see God dwelling in the midst of Lake Worth UCC? Where do you wish God’s presence were more visible?

Ephesians 2:11–18

Bear in mind that at one time the men among you who were Gentiles physically—called “the Uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the Circumcised,” all because of a minor operation—had no part in Christ and were excluded from the community of Israel. You were strangers to the Covenant and its promise; you were without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For Christ is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart. In his own flesh, Christ abolished the Law, with its commands and ordinances, in order to make the two into one new person, thus establishing peace and reconciling us all to God in one body through the cross, which put to death the enmity between us. Christ came and “announced the Good News of peace to you who were far away, and to those who were near”; for through Christ, we all have access in one Spirit to our God.

Paul is writing to a community where the deepest social division of the ancient world – Jew and Gentile – has been blown open by the gospel. The wall that separated them wasn’t just cultural. It was religious, economic, political. It was the kind of wall that people built entire identities around. And Paul says: Christ has broken it down. Not smoothed it over. Not asked both sides to be nicer. Broken it down – in his body, through the cross. This is what the church is supposed to be: the living proof that the dividing wall can come down. That’s a high calling. And it’s exactly what Just Peace is asking of us.

1. Paul names a specific dividing wall in his context – the hostility between Jew and Gentile. What are the dividing walls in Lake Worth, in Palm Beach County, in our congregation? What would it mean for the church to be the place where those walls come down?
2. “He is our peace” – not “he taught peace” or “he modeled peace” but “he is our peace.” What is the difference? What does it mean for peace to be a person rather than a principle?

The 1985 Pronouncement: Three Foundations

The UCC's Just Peace Pronouncement – adopted at the 15th General Synod in Ames, Iowa in 1985 – identified six theological foundations for Just Peace. Three are especially central to our work in this series. Read them slowly. They are not bullet points – they are convictions.

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. The world as God made it is not a neutral backdrop for human history – it is itself a testimony to God's desire for wholeness. When we work for Just Peace, we are working with the grain of creation, not against it.

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. The cross is not just a personal transaction – it is the decisive act by which God takes on and dismantles the systems of enmity and injustice that divide humanity.

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. This hope is not optimism – it is not a sunny disposition about human nature. It is a conviction born of resurrection faith: that God's future is already breaking in, and we are invited to live toward it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Reflecting on the Foundations

1. Which of the three theological foundations – creation, reconciliation, or hope – speaks most directly to where you are right now? Why?

2. The 1985 Pronouncement says peace is “a basic gift of God and is the force and vision moving human history.” Does that claim feel true to you? Where do you see evidence for it? Where does it feel hard to believe?

3. The Pronouncement defines Just Peace as “the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.” Which of those three elements – friendship, justice, or common security – feels most neglected in our public life today?

4. What would it mean for Lake Worth UCC to publicly commit – in covenant – to being a Just Peace Church? What excites you about that? What concerns you?

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION

Lake Worth UCC and Just Peace

Lake Worth UCC sits at the intersection of many communities – immigrant families, longtime residents, people navigating economic hardship, LGBTQ+ neighbors who know what it means to be excluded and included. How has our congregation’s experience of welcome and exclusion shaped our understanding of what peace requires?

STATEMENT WRITING EXERCISE

Writing the Covenant — Session I

In 2-4 sentences, complete this thought: As a Just Peace Church, Lake Worth UCC is grounded in the biblical vision of shalom, which we understand to mean...

BETWEEN-SESSION HOMEWORK

Before Next Session

◆ This week, read Psalm 85 slowly – out loud if possible. Then spend ten minutes with this question in a journal or quiet reflection: Where in my daily life do I see justice and peace pulling apart from each other, rather than embracing? What one small thing might I do to help them move toward each other?

GOING DEEPER

Resources

Peace to the City – Walter Brueggemann

Brueggemann’s exploration of shalom as the animating vision of biblical faith – rich, accessible, prophetic.

A Just Peace Church – ed. Susan Thistlethwaite

The foundational text produced by the UCC’s Peace Theology Development Team. Essential background reading.

UCC Just Peace Pronouncement (1985)

See Appendix C in this workbook for the full text of the founding document of the Just Peace Church movement.

SESSION 2 | PEACE WITH THE EARTH

Genesis 2:15 – “The Lord God took the human and settled them in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it.”

The ecological crisis is not a secular problem that happens to affect the church. It is a justice crisis – and it falls hardest on those least responsible for it. In South Florida, we know this intimately: rising seas, intensifying storms, urban heat islands, and flooding that threatens our neighbors’ homes and livelihoods. This session explores what Just Peace demands of us as stewards of God’s creation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Group Conversation

1. What does it mean to you that the very first human vocation described in Genesis is caring for the earth? How does that frame the ecological crisis as a spiritual issue?

2. The WCC Statement says care for creation is part of Just Peace “so that life is sustained.” What connections do you see between environmental destruction and other forms of injustice?

3. In Lake Worth and Palm Beach County, how have you personally witnessed the effects of climate change or environmental inequity? Who in our community bears the greatest burden?

4. Environmental racism is the reality that toxic facilities, flooding risk, and pollution disproportionately affect communities of color and low-income communities. How does that reality shape what it means to care for creation?

5. What practices – personal, congregational, or civic – feel most urgent to you as a response to the ecological crisis?

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION

Lake Worth UCC and Peace with the Earth

Lake Worth sits on Florida’s Atlantic coast – one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in North America. Our congregation includes neighbors who have experienced flooding, neighbors whose countries of origin are among the most threatened by rising seas. How does our particular place on earth shape what “peace with the earth” means for us?

STATEMENT WRITING EXERCISE

Writing the Covenant — Session 2

In 2-4 sentences, complete this thought: As a Just Peace Church, Lake Worth UCC commits to peace with the earth by...

BETWEEN-SESSION HOMEWORK

Before Next Session

◆ Take a 20-minute walk in your neighborhood this week – not for exercise, but for attention. Notice: Where do you see nature thriving? Where do you see it under threat? Where do environmental burdens fall unevenly across your community? Bring one observation to share at the next session.

GOING DEEPER

Resources

Braiding Sweetgrass – Robin Wall Kimmerer

A botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation weaves indigenous wisdom and plant science into a compelling vision of reciprocal relationship with the earth.

WCC Statement on the Way of Just Peace – “For Just Peace with the Earth” section

See Appendix A. Read the section beginning “Human beings are to respect, protect and care for nature...”

SESSION 3 | PEACE IN THE MARKETPLACE

Amos 5:24 – “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

There is something profoundly broken when the wealth of a handful of individuals exceeds the combined GDP of dozens of nations. Economic injustice is not a byproduct of the market – it is a form of violence, slower and less visible than a bomb but no less real in its effects on human lives. In Palm Beach County, we live inside one of the sharpest wealth divides in America. This session asks: what does Just Peace demand of us in the marketplace?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Group Conversation

1. Amos preached to a prosperous society that had confused economic success with divine favor. Where do you see similar confusion today – in our culture, our congregation, or your own life?

2. The WCC defines “economies of life” as systems that promote workers’ rights, fair trade, redistributive growth, and the universal provision of clean water and clean air. What would an economy of life look like in Palm Beach County?

3. How does economic inequality create conditions for violence – in families, in communities, across national borders?

4. What does it mean for a congregation to practice economic justice? Are there ways Lake Worth UCC is already doing this? Where might we go further?

5. Labor rights, living wages, fair trade purchasing, food security – which of these issues feels most connected to your own life and community?

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION

Lake Worth UCC and Peace in the Marketplace

Palm Beach County contains some of the wealthiest zip codes in America – and some of its most food-insecure families. Lake Worth has long been a community where working-class families, immigrant workers, and artists have built lives alongside one another. How does our particular experience of economic diversity shape what “peace in the marketplace” means for us?

STATEMENT WRITING EXERCISE

Writing the Covenant — Session 3

In 2-4 sentences, complete this thought: As a Just Peace Church, Lake Worth UCC commits to peace in the marketplace by...

BETWEEN-SESSION HOMEWORK

Before Next Session

✦ This week, read Amos 5:10-24 and spend 10 minutes reflecting: Where in my daily economic life am I participating in systems that create injustice? Where am I participating in systems that create justice? Write one concrete thing you could change.

GOING DEEPER

Resources

The Cry of the Poor – Gustavo Gutiérrez

A foundational text of liberation theology, grounding the church's call to economic justice in both scripture and the lived experience of poverty.

Bread for the World – www.bread.org

A Christian advocacy organization working to end hunger through policy change. Excellent resources on food justice and poverty as policy choices.

SESSION 4 | PEACE IN THE COMMUNITY

Micah 6:8 – “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The work of Just Peace begins at home – in our neighborhoods, our schools, our families, and our congregation. This session focuses on racial justice, nonviolent direct action, and the work of building communities where all people can live free from fear. We draw on the prophetic tradition of the American civil rights movement and the specific realities of Lake Worth’s diverse and complex community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Group Conversation

1. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” How does that claim function as an act of faith? Does it resonate with you?

2. What is the difference between the absence of conflict and the presence of peace? Where in our community do we have the former but not the latter?

3. Nonviolent direct action – marches, sit-ins, boycotts, public witness – has a long history in justice movements. What is your own relationship to this kind of action?

4. How has Lake Worth UCC’s Open and Affirming identity shaped our congregation’s understanding of what community peace requires?

5. William Barber II speaks of “fusion politics” – building coalitions across race, class, and geography around shared moral commitments. What would that look like in Lake Worth?

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION

Lake Worth UCC and Peace in the Community

Lake Worth is one of the most culturally diverse cities in Palm Beach County, with significant Haitian, Guatemalan, Mexican, and Puerto Rican communities alongside long-established Black and white residents. How does Lake Worth UCC’s location in this particular community shape what racial justice requires of us?

STATEMENT WRITING EXERCISE

Writing the Covenant — Session 4

In 2-4 sentences, complete this thought: As a Just Peace Church, Lake Worth UCC commits to peace in the community by...

BETWEEN-SESSION HOMEWORK

Before Next Session

◆ Read the Letter from Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King Jr. (widely available online – about 30 minutes). Pay particular attention to what King says about the “white moderate” and the timing of justice. Bring one sentence from the letter that stopped you.

GOING DEEPER

Resources

The Third Reconstruction – Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II

Barber’s account of the Moral Monday movement and his vision for a new fusion politics rooted in prophetic faith.

Jesus and the Disinherited – Howard Thurman

The spiritual and theological text that Martin Luther King Jr. carried throughout the civil rights movement. A profound meditation on faith and nonviolence.

SESSION 5 | PEACE AMONG THE PEOPLES

Isaiah 2:4 – “They shall beat their swords into plowshares... nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

The most audacious claim of the Just Peace vision is that war itself can and must be eliminated. In a world of ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and beyond – where military spending dwarfs investment in human needs and nuclear arsenals threaten all life on earth – this claim sounds either naïve or prophetic. This session explores what Just Peace demands at the global level, and takes seriously the theological question of when, if ever, violence can be justified.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Group Conversation

1. Isaiah’s vision of swords beaten into plowshares is one of the most famous peace images in scripture. What would it mean to take that vision literally as a policy goal, not just a poetic metaphor?

2. Christian traditions have approached war and peace through three frameworks: Crusade (God blesses certain wars), Pacifism (all violence is wrong), and Just War (violence can be justified under strict conditions). Which of these frameworks have you encountered? What draws you toward or away from each?

3. The Just War tradition holds that war can be morally justified only under conditions including: just cause, last resort, proportional force, and protection of civilians. Looking at current conflicts – in Gaza, Ukraine, or elsewhere – how do those criteria hold up?

4. The WCC Statement says we must “refuse to accept that any nation’s security requires the capacity to annihilate other nations.” How does that statement land for you?

5. Many Lake Worth UCC members have family members or friends who have served in the military. How do we honor that service while also questioning the systems and policies that send people to war?

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION

Lake Worth UCC and Peace Among the Peoples

South Florida is home to significant populations of people who have fled war – from Haiti, from Central America, from other conflict zones. Our congregation includes people whose families have experienced war firsthand. How does our community’s particular experience of war and migration shape what “peace among the peoples” means for us?

STATEMENT WRITING EXERCISE

Writing the Covenant — Session 5

In 2-4 sentences, complete this thought: As a Just Peace Church, Lake Worth UCC commits to peace among the peoples by...

BETWEEN-SESSION HOMEWORK

Before Next Session

◆ Spend 15 minutes this week with the WCC’s “Statement on the Way of Just Peace” in the appendix. Read the section “Just peace among the nations – so that human lives are protected.” Write down: one thing that surprised you, one thing that challenged you, and one thing you want to bring to Session 6.

GOING DEEPER

Resources

Interfaith Just Peacemaking – ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars collaborate on the new paradigm for the ethics of peace and war.

WCC Statement on the Way of Just Peace – Appendix A

See the section on peace among the nations and the specific commitments recommended to member churches and governments.

SESSION 6 | STATEMENT WRITING WORKSHOP

Jeremiah 29:7 – “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

You have already written the covenant. It is here in these pages, in your own handwriting, gathered across five sessions of reflection and discernment. Today’s work is not to begin from scratch – it is to weave together what the Spirit has been forming in us, to find the shared language, to negotiate the differences, and to shape a statement worthy of who we are and who God is calling us to be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Group Conversation

1. Looking back at your Statement Writing Exercises from Sessions 1-5, what themes or phrases appear most often? What language feels most alive to you?

2. What do you most want the Lake Worth UCC Just Peace Covenant to say to our congregation? What do you want it to say to our neighborhood and community?

3. Where do you notice areas of agreement in the room? Where do you notice tension or difference? How might we hold both?

4. The UCC defines Just Peace as “the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.” How has your understanding of that definition deepened over these six sessions?

5. What specific commitments do you believe Lake Worth UCC is ready to make – and should make – as a Just Peace Church?

CONGREGATIONAL CONNECTION

Lake Worth UCC and Statement Writing Workshop

Our covenant will name who we are in Lake Worth – not a generic congregation, but this congregation, in this neighborhood, in this moment. How does our specific community context – our diversity, our coastal vulnerability, our immigrant neighbors, our ONA identity – need to be visible in the covenant we write?

STATEMENT WRITING EXERCISE

Writing the Covenant — Session 6

Working from your previous five Statement Writing Exercises, draft 3-5 sentences that could serve as the core of Lake Worth UCC's Just Peace Covenant. Don't worry about perfection – write what is true.

BETWEEN-SESSION HOMEWORK

Before Next Session

◆ After Session 6, the work continues. Before the congregational vote, spend time with the covenant draft in prayer. Read it slowly. Ask: Is this honest? Is this faithful? Is this ours?

GOING DEEPER

Resources

Just Peace Church Handbook – UCC (2015)

See Appendix B – especially “Steps to Becoming a Just Peace Church” for guidance on the formal adoption process.

UCC Just Peace Network – www.ucc.org/just_peace

Examples of Just Peace covenants from other congregations are available here.



God of life,
lead us to
justice and peace

**World Council of Churches
10th Assembly**

30 October to 8 November 2013
Busan, Republic of Korea

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ADOPTED

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Original

Statement on the Way of Just Peace

Just peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.

Those who seek a just peace seek the common good. On the way of just peace, different disciplines find common ground, contending worldviews see complementary courses of action, and one faith stands in principled solidarity with another.

Social justice confronts privilege, economic justice confronts wealth, ecological justice confronts consumption, and political justice confronts power itself. Mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation become shared public experiences. The spirit, vocation and process of peace are transformed.

As the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace (ECJP) stated, to take the path of just peace is to enter a collective, dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

1. TOGETHER WE BELIEVE

Together we believe in God, the Creator of all life. Therefore we acknowledge that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and we seek to be good stewards of creation. In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in the fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity.

Together we believe in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Therefore we acknowledge that humankind is reconciled with God, by grace, and we strive to live reconciled with one another. The life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, point toward the peaceable kingdom of God. Despite persecution and suffering, Jesus remains steadfast in his way of humility and active non-violence, even unto death. His life of commitment to justice leads to the cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. By God's grace we too are enabled to take the way of the cross, be disciples and bear the costs.

Together, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Giver and Sustainer of all life. Therefore we acknowledge the sanctifying presence of God in all of life, strive to protect life and to heal broken lives.

Based on the teaching of St Paul (Romans 8:22) "For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with pain together until now", as explained by St Peter (2 Peter 3:13) "nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells", we can state that: the Holy Spirit assures us that the Triune God will perfect and consummate all of creation at the end of time. In this we recognize justice and peace as both promise and present – a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

Together, we believe that the Church is called to unity. Therefore we acknowledge that churches are to be just and peaceful communities reconciled with other churches. Grounded in the peace of God and empowered through the reconciling work of Christ, we can be “agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures at the global level” (8th WCC Assembly, Harare, 1998).

2. TOGETHER WE CALL

The way of just peace provides a basic frame of reference for coherent ecumenical reflection, spirituality, engagement and active peacemaking.

For just peace in the community – so that all may live free from fear

Many communities are divided by economic class, race, colour, caste, gender and religion. Violence, intimidation, abuse and exploitation thrive in the shadows of division and inequality. Domestic violence is a hidden tragedy in societies everywhere.

To build peace in our communities, we must break the culture of silence about violence in the home, parish and society. Where religious groups are divided along with society, we must join with other faiths to teach and advocate for tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect, as Christian and Muslim leaders are doing in Nigeria with ecumenical support.

Local churches working for peace reinforce international church advocacy for peace, and vice versa. Ecumenical advocacy at the International Criminal Court is one reason why at least some war criminals today face justice in a court of law, a historic advance in the rule of law.

Churches can help build cultures of peace by learning to prevent and transform conflicts. In this way they may empower people on the margins of society, enable both women and men to be peacemakers, support non-violent movements for justice and human rights, support those who are persecuted for their refusal to bear arms for reasons of conscience, as well as offer support to those who have suffered in armed conflicts, and give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools.

For just peace with the earth – so that life is sustained

Human beings are to respect, protect and care for nature. Yet our excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other resources is doing great violence to people and the planet. Climate change, only one consequence of human lifestyles and national policies, poses a global threat to justice and peace.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the first to warn about the dangers of climate change. Now, after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate change. Concern for eco-justice is evident in the attention given to victims of climate change in international negotiations and at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The 10th WCC Assembly meeting in Busan strongly reiterated the ecumenical commitment to climate justice.

“Eco-congregations” and “green churches” are signs of hope. The churches and parishes of many countries around the world are linking faith and ecology – studying environmental issues, monitoring carbon output, and joining in WCC-led advocacy for governments to cut emissions of green-house gases. Some governments, such as the Seoul city government, are collaborating with local churches to help Korea’s sprawling capital conserve energy and recycle waste. In the wake of the Fukushima disaster, Christians and Buddhists already united against nuclear weapons are now united against nuclear power plants as well. They are raising a prophetic call for a nuclear-free world.

To care for God's precious gift of creation, the reform of lifestyles and the pursuit of ecological justice are key elements of just peace. Concerted ecumenical advocacy is needed so that governments, businesses and consumers protect the environment and preserve it for future generations.

For just peace in the marketplace – so that all may live with dignity

There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world's three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world's 48 poorest countries. Such deep socio-economic injustice raises serious questions about economic growth which ignores social and environmental responsibility. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

Churches should be strongly committed to economic justice. The WCC and its member churches join with peoples' movements and partners in civil society to challenge poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. The churches' analysis of wealth and poverty has led to an ecumenical emphasis on sufficiency and to a strong critique of greed. Some churches have now developed indicators to test how well individuals, corporations and nations are sharing God's abundant gifts.

Establishing "economies of life" is one key to building peace in the marketplace. Economies of life promote careful use of resources, sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, workers' rights, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provision of clean water, clean air and other common goods. Regulatory structures must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to human need and ecological sustainability. Responding equitably to the different dimensions of fair labour is increasingly important in our times.

Just peace among the nations – so that human lives are protected

History has seen great advances in the rule of law and other protections for humanity. Yet the present situation of the human race is in at least two ways quite unprecedented. Now as never before humanity is in a position to destroy much of the planet environmentally. A small number of decision makers are in a position to annihilate whole populations with nuclear weapons. Radical - threats of ecocide and genocide demand of us an equally radical commitment to peace.

There is great potential for peacemaking in the nature of who we are. Churches together in the WCC are well-placed for collective action in a world where the major threats to peace can only be resolved transnationally.

On that basis, a diverse network of member churches and related ministries advocated with success for the first global Arms Trade Treaty. The witness of churches in war-torn communities was heard in high places. Churches from different regions pressed governments from those regions to agree on a treaty to regulate the international arms trade for the first time. A similar approach is now building inter-regional support to make nuclear weapons illegal, a goal consistent with the Vancouver Assembly's indictment of the production, deployment and use of nuclear weapons as "a crime against humanity", and its challenge that "the nuclear weapons issue is, in its import and threat to humanity, a question of Christian discipline and of a faithfulness to the Gospel".

For peace among the nations, churches must work together to strengthen international human rights and humanitarian law, promote multilateral negotiations to resolve conflicts, hold governments responsible for ensuring treaty protections, help eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and press for reallocation of unnecessary military budgets to civilian needs. We must join other communities of faith and people of good will to reduce national military capacities and delegitimize the institution of war.

3. TOGETHER WE COMMIT

Peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for all creation.

Together we commit to share God's love for the world by seeking peace and protecting life. We commit to transforming how we think about peace, how we pray for peace, how we teach peace to young and old and deepen our theological reflections on the promise and practice of peace.

Together we commit to building cultures of peace in families, the church and society. We commit to mobilize the gifts within our fellowship to raise our collective voice for peace across many countries.

Together we commit to protect human dignity, practice justice in our families and communities, transform conflicts without violence and ban all weapons of mass destruction.

We understand that the protection of life is a collective human obligation today as never before in history. We commit to turn away from planet-changing patterns of consumption as the engine of economic growth, and refuse to accept that any nation's security requires the capacity to annihilate other nations or to strike alleged enemies at will anywhere on earth.

We reaffirm the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace which states "While life in God's hands is irrepressible, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. 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 peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace."

4. TOGETHER WE RECOMMEND THAT THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

- a. *Undertake*, in cooperation with member churches and specialized ministries, critical analysis of the "Responsibility to Prevent, React and Rebuild" and its relationship to just peace, and its misuse to justify armed interventions;
- b. *Lead and accompany* ecumenical just peace ministries and networks in the practice of violence prevention, non-violence as a way of life, collective advocacy and the advancement of international norms, treaties and law;
- c. *Encourage* its member churches to engage in cooperative interfaith programmes in order to address conflicts in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies;
- d. *Request* its member churches and partners to develop communication strategies that advocate for justice and peace, proclaim the hope of transformation and speak truth to power;
- e. *Facilitate* a programme of reflection and environmental action in member churches and related networks to build sustainable communities and bring about collective reductions in carbon emissions and energy use; promote the use of alternate, renewable, and clean energy;
- f. *Develop* guidelines within the concept of "economies of life" for the right sharing of resources and the prevention of structural violence, establishing useable indicators and benchmarks; and
- g. *Convene* churches and related organizations to work for human rights protections through international treaty bodies and the United Nations Human Rights Council; to work for the elimination of nuclear and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction, cooperating with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; and to seek ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty by their respective governments and monitor its implementation.

- h. *Reiterate* its existing policy (2009 study) and reaffirm its support for the human right of conscientious objection to military service for religious, moral or ethical reasons, as churches have an obligation to support those who are in prison because they object to military service.

5. WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS

- a. *Adopt* by 2015 and begin implementing binding regulations with targets for lowering greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the recommendations in the 2013 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;
- b. *Negotiate and establish* a ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law;
- c. *Ensure* that all remaining stocks of chemical weapons are destroyed under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention and cluster munitions are destroyed under the Convention of Cluster Munitions at the earliest possible date;
- d. *Declare* their support for a pre-emptive ban on drones and other robotic weapons systems that will select and strike targets without human intervention when operating in fully autonomous mode;
- e. *Reallocate* national military budgets to humanitarian and developmental needs, conflict prevention and civilian peace-building initiatives amongst others; and
- f. *Ratify and implement* the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by 2014 and on a voluntary basis include weapon types not covered by the ATT.

God of life, guide our feet into the way of just peace!

APPROVED

JUST PEACE CHURCH HANDBOOK

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries – 2015

In 2015, the 30th General Synod marked the UCC's 30th anniversary as a Just Peace Church and called for a renewal of the UCC's Just Peace witness. This handbook is a resource for all levels and areas of the church, especially to local congregations declaring or recommitting themselves as "Just Peace Churches."

Courage in the Struggle for Justice and Peace! – The Just Peace Steering Committee

Introduction

The Just Peace Church vision is a hallmark of United Church of Christ's theological identity. The Just Peace pronouncement, affirmed in 1985 at the 15th General Synod, articulated for the first time a UCC position on war and peace as distinct from other historic Christian approaches – the theories and practices of Crusade, Pacifism, and Just War.

WHAT IS JUST PEACE? Grounded in UCC polity and covenantal theology, the Just Peace Pronouncement has at its core a call to alleviate systemic injustice of all kinds using non-violence, challenging us to explore the intersections between peace and justice, offering to the world the prophetic message, grounded in the hope of reconciliation in Jesus, that "Peace is possible!"

I. Prophetic Hope: Just Peace History

The history of the Just Peace movement began in 1981 when a youth delegate brought a resolution to General Synod calling on the UCC to become a "peace church." In 1983, a Peace Theology Development Team was commissioned to lead a process of discernment. In 1985 at the 15th General Synod, the pronouncement "Affirming the United Church of Christ to be a Just Peace Church" was affirmed with broad support – designating the UCC as the first Christian denomination to declare itself a Just Peace Church.

Just Peace was defined as "the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence" and was grounded in the biblical concepts of covenant and shalom. The pronouncement offered the prophetic conviction that "war can and must be eliminated" and the shared hope that "peace is possible."

II. Expanding Peace: The Just Peace Movement

Many UCC churches, conferences, seminaries, and other entities declared themselves "Just Peace" and incorporated the principles into various ministries. A group of Christian and later interfaith scholars agreed upon ten "Just Peacemaking Practices" – actions with a proven track record for eliminating conflict and building peace.

The World Council of Churches issued in 2011 an Ecumenical Call to Just Peace and in 2013 the "Statement on the Way of Just Peace" affirmed at the 10th General Assembly in Busan, South Korea.

III. Biblical and Theological Grounding

Ezekiel 37:26: "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.' When God's abiding presence is embraced, human well-being results, or Shalom, which can be translated as Just Peace."

John 10:10: "A Just Peace is grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit. 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.'"

Ephesians 2:14: "A Just Peace is grounded in the community of reconciliation: the Just Peace Church. Jesus, who is our peace, performed signs of forgiveness and healing and made manifest that God's reign is for those who are in need."

1 Peter 3:15: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have." As Christians, we offer conviction to the world that peace is possible.

Theological Affirmations from the 1985 Pronouncement

"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."

“A Just Peace is grounded in the reconciling activity of Jesus Christ. Through God’s own suffering love in the cross, the power of structures of evil has been broken and the possibility for relationship restored.”

“A 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. As Christians, we offer this conviction to the world: Peace is possible.”

IV. Steps to Becoming a Just Peace Church

Step 1 – Create a Space: Propose a discernment process on becoming a Just Peace Church. Work in relationship with the pastor, justice and witness committee, and governing board.

Step 2 – Form a Just Peace Committee: Build a Core Team from a wide variety of congregants. Commit to about six hours of teamwork a month. The process takes 8-12 weeks.

Step 3 – Ground Your Process in Biblical Text: Engage Luke 4:18-19, Luke 1:46-55, Micah 6:8, Hosea 2:18, James 2:14-26, Amos 5:6-15.

Step 4 – Organize an All-Church Study or Retreat: Establish an ongoing study of about six sessions. Engage as many congregants as possible.

Step 5 – Write the Just Peace Covenant: The Just Peace Committee writes a covenant to be presented to the governing board and congregation. Examples at www.ucc.org/just_peace.

Step 6 – Call a Congregational Meeting to Vote: A formal vote is required to declare your church a Just Peace Church.

Step 7 – Determine Ongoing Oversight: Determine whether your Just Peace Committee will continue or an ongoing task force is needed.

Step 8 – Publicly Declare: Declare through signs, marketing, and a press release. Submit a copy of your Covenant to uccjustpeace@gmail.com.

Step 9 – Go Forth and Act: Revisit your Just Peace Covenant regularly. The act of becoming a Just Peace Church should influence every church decision going forward.

V. Suggested Resources

Interfaith Just Peacemaking – edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War – Glen H. Stassen

A Just Peace Church – edited by Susan Thistlethwaite

For more information: www.ucc.org/just_peace | uccjustpeace@gmail.com

PRONOUNCEMENT ON AFFIRMING THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AS A JUST PEACE CHURCH

15th General Synod of the United Church of Christ – Ames, Iowa, 1985

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. 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. 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.

B. The Fifteenth General Synod affirms the United Church of Christ as 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.
- A community of worship and celebration, centering its identity in justice and peacemaking.
- A community of biblical and theological reflection, studying the Scriptures and the working of the Spirit.
- A community of spiritual nurture and support, loving one another in the struggle for a Just Peace.
- A community of honest and open conflict, a zone of freedom where differences may be expressed and worked through.
- A community of empowerment, renewing and training people for making peace and 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.
- 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.
- A community of repentance, confessing its own guilt and involvement in structural injustice and violence.
- 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 in the search for justice and peace.
- A community of political and social engagement, in regular dialogue with the political order, witnessing to a Just Peace in the community and in the nation.

C. Friendship as Essential to a Just Peace

- We affirm the unity of the whole human community and oppose any use of nationalism to divide this covenant of friendship.
- We reject all labeling of others as enemies and the creation of institutions that perpetuate enemy relations.
- We affirm diversity among peoples and nations and the growth that can emerge from the interchange of differing value systems, ideologies, religions and political and economic systems.
- We affirm nonviolent conflict as inevitable and valuable, an expression of diversity essential to healthy relationships among people and nations.
- We affirm all nations developing global community and interchange, including freedom of travel, free exchange of ideas, scientific and cultural exchanges, public education that portrays other nations fairly, and knowledge of foreign languages.

D. Justice as Essential to a Just Peace

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

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

We affirm the establishment of a more just international order in which trade barriers and debt burdens do not work against the interests of poor people and developing nations, and poor nations have a greater share in the policies of global economic institutions.

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

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.

E. Common Security from Violence as Essential to a Just Peace

We affirm that national security includes four interrelated components: provision for general well-being, cultivation of justice, provision for defense of a nation, and creation of political atmosphere in which a Just Peace can flourish and the risk of war is diminished or eliminated.

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.

We affirm our support for the United Nations, which should be strengthened developing: more authority in disputes among countries; peacekeeping forces; peacemaking teams trained in mediation and conflict resolution; international agreements to limit military establishments and the arms trade; an international ban on nuclear and biochemical weapons of mass destruction; and an international ban on all weapons in space.

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 declare our opposition to all weapons of mass destruction. All nations should: declare that they will never use such weapons; cease immediately the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons; begin dismantling these arsenals; and negotiate comprehensive treaties banning all such future weapons.

We declare our opposition to war, violence, and terrorism. All nations should: declare that they will never attack another nation; make unilateral initiatives toward dismantling their military arsenals; and develop mechanisms for international law, international peacekeeping, and international conflict resolution.

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

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:

1. The inward journey of spiritual nurture: prayer for a Just Peace, study of the Scriptures, theological reflection, and celebration and worship that center the life of the community in the power and reality of the God who creates a Just Peace.
2. The inward journey of education: establishing 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.
3. 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.
4. The outward journey of community witness: making convictions known in the community through public forums, media, and presence in the public arena. 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.

For more information on the UCC’s Just Peace program visit www.ucc.org/just_peace

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