

Pursuant to the action of the session of Clarendon Presbyterian Church, we submit the following motion: That National Capital Presbytery respectfully overture the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) as follows:

- 1) To direct appropriate General Assembly Council staff, as well as to call on all congregations, to enter into a six-year "time of discernment" seeking clarity on whether God is calling us, at this historic moment, to embrace nonviolence as our fundamental response to war and terror. During this season of discernment, the entire church will be invited to study scripture and the history of the Christian Church's response to violence, to engage in faithful direct action against violence, and to pray and labor with one another faithfully to develop a theology of nonviolence to guide us as we respond to the challenges of violence, terror and war in the 21st century. Specific activities would include, but not be limited to, the following:
  - a. Call all Presbyterians to pray and study scripture for guidance about how to respond faithfully to Jesus' call to be peacemakers.
  - b. Direct the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to develop and identify appropriate resources for congregational study about the history of Christian responses to violence, and to disseminate those resources across the church.
  - c. Invite the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship to work collegially with and support the efforts of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and other General Assembly Mission Council programs as they carry out the directives of this overture.
  - d. Invite Presbyterian congregations into a time of study and reflection on root causes of violence and responses to violence that honor the gospel, the history of the church, and the movement of the Holy Spirit as Christ's church attempts to live out his command to love our enemies.
  - e. Invite and equip individual congregations to respond through prayer, direct action and advocacy to prevent and respond to violence on the local level (e.g., action and advocacy concerning gang violence, gun violence, family violence), the national level (e.g., action and advocacy on budget priorities, decisions about investments, concerns about the military-industrial complex and its effect on the lives of Christians), and the international level (e.g., action and advocacy on issues of war and peace).
- 2) To create a broadly representative national committee (appointed by the current and the two prior moderators) to study this issue and report its findings and recommendations to the Assembly of 2014, allowing the entire church to reflect on their report before taking action in 2016, asking the committee to pay particular attention to and bring forth recommendations on the following questions:
  - a. Is Just War theory a relevant and faithful response to violence in our time?
  - b. How are the denomination, our judicatories, our congregations and our members affected by our participation in the military-industrial complex?
  - c. What can we learn from the history of the use of principled nonviolence?
  - d. What ways might we effectively reduce and even eliminate our dependence on violence, military options, and war as a response to the challenges of our time?
  - e. What are the implications for the church of embracing nonviolence for our responses to immediate and emergency situations of genocide and terrorism?
  - f. How are we most faithfully to provide pastoral support to our members who are working in the U.S. military or in industries that support the military and/or benefit financially from a war economy?

## Rationale:

Christian scripture is replete with examples of the Gospel call to nonviolence:

- Jesus calls his disciples to love, pray for and not retaliate against one's enemies (Matthew 5:38-48) and thus sets for guidance for living into the prophetic visions of a day when swords are beaten into plowshares and nations study war no more (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3).
- Peter, Paul and the whole of the apostolic witness in scripture explicitly calls for this same kind of behavior toward those who mean us ill (Romans 12:14-2; 1 Peter 3:9-19a; James 3:13 - 4:3).
- The presumption of the New Testament is that suffering for our faith is a material aspect of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and not something to be dodged or otherwise avoided, but rather embraced (Mark 13:9-13; Matthew 10:17-21; 24:9-14; Luke 21:12-19). That presumption echoes the call of the Old Testament prophets to endure the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap (Malachi 3:2) along the path to justice and shalom.

The history of Christian responses to violence tells a compelling story of the initial embrace of the nonviolent witness of Jesus. From the withdrawal into the countryside of the first-century Jerusalem church in response to the invasion of its homeland (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.3) to the refusal of early Christians in Rome to engage in any violence because they trusted that their love for fellow citizens would point people to the new day dawning in Jesus Christ (Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 14.3; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 8.68. 75; Arnobius, *Against the Nations*, 1.6), the first Christians embraced and lived according to that nonviolent witness of Jesus.

Moreover, early Christian theologians asserted that the coming of the messiah, taking with utmost seriousness the Hebrew prophets, Micah and Isaiah, had obviated the need for members of the beloved community to do anything other than beat their swords into plowshares when it came to matters of violence (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 110; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 5.33; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, 5; cf. also Cyprian, *On the Advantage of Patience*, 14).

Indeed, there exists not a single affirmation of killing or war anywhere in the writings of the pastors and theologians of the early church, nor is there anywhere the idea that Christians making war would make the world a better or safer place. The early writings are replete with prohibitions against killing of any sort, some of which even carried the explicit sanction of forbidding admission to the Eucharist directed at persons engaged in such acts (*Canons of the Synod of Illiberis* 56; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, Canon 16; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 6.20.16-17). The early Christians would not even watch killings either in the form of observing the carrying out of legal death sentences by the government or attending the gladiatorial games (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 30.6, 31.6; Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 35).

The history of the Christian response to violence changed abruptly in the fourth century, when the church took up arms on behalf of the Roman Empire after being offered inducements and blandishments of money, property, and power, such that while in 300 CE it was forbidden for Christians to serve in the military, by the middle of the next century *only* Christians were allowed to serve.

The Christian participation in the wars of the Empire led to the establishment of the so-called Just War tradition, developed primarily by Bishop Augustine of Hippo, which established the ground

rules under which a Christian might be understood to be acting morally when killing another human being.

Even Augustine, though believing that protecting the innocent made killing justifiable, nevertheless taught that a Christian killing in self-defense was immoral. After Augustine, the justification of killing on the part of Christians expanded to include self-defense, and even further, to the killing of other Christians, a practice which has continued until our own times.

The practice of granting exceptions and exclusions to the basic principles of the so-called Just War tradition has resulted in an ever expanding re-definition of the concept of Just War. Thus each new exception becomes the new standard, which then gets broadened to embrace the next exception, with the result that Just War now means whatever the government wants to do militarily, including the use of atomic weapons and the manufacture of thousands of weapons of mass destruction in the name of a country in which a majority profess to be followers of Jesus Christ. It has become ordinary for us to stockpile thousands of nuclear weapons which have the capacity to destroy all life on this planet, and this causes scarcely a ripple in the pews or a sound from the pulpits;

Nevertheless, the General Assembly has spoken consistently over the last thirty years about its opposition to war, particularly with the following actions:

- Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling, adopted by the 192nd General Assembly (1980) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America
- Just Peacemaking and the Call for International Intervention for Humanitarian Rescue adopted by the 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Resolution on Violence, Religion and Terrorism adopted by the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- The endorsement of "the research and development of a "global nonviolent peace force" as recommended by the People's Millennium Forum at the United Nations, May 2000, in order to create and maintain a highly trained group of active and reserve specialists in conflict resolution, nonviolent strategies, negotiation skills, civil social development, and confidence building" by the 213th General Assembly (2001).

The Church must lead the nations of the world into a new understanding of how to respond to violence in our time. The church is called by the scriptures to be a counter-cultural community, much like it was in its first three centuries, pointing the world to God's coming reign in Jesus Christ as its only hope.

The mission of the church in any generation is to be found in "sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world" [G-3.0300c(3)(e)] "even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the author and giver of life, sharing the gospel, and doing those deeds in the world that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ." (G-3.0400);

Beyond the history of the church, two striking and contradictory 20<sup>th</sup>-century developments point increasingly toward the simple necessity of developing practical alternatives to violence:

1. Prior to World War I, civilian deaths were less than 10 percent of war casualties. In the wars of the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more than 90 percent of the casualties are civilians. The reversal of fortunes undermines classic Just War theory for the conduct of war. Such theory requires that acts of war be directed towards enemy combatants, and not towards non-combatants caught in circumstances they did not create. Among actions that would be prohibited under classic Just War theory: bombing civilian residential areas that include no

military targets, committing acts of terrorism, reprisals against ordinary civilians, weapons that cause inordinate civilian casualties. Unfortunately changes in weapons and tactics in contemporary warfare make such actions common, and thus make fighting a so-called Just War all but impossible.

2. At the same time, we have a growing and compelling history of successes in nonviolent resistance. From independence in India to the American Civil Rights Movement to the "velvet revolution" in Eastern Europe to the Peace and Reconciliation work in post-Apartheid South Africa, there are experiences of massive, nonviolent change that can inform the church as we struggle to find effective, nonviolent means of responding to crises in the world.