

## **In Defense of Creation**

In 1986 after two years of study the United Methodist Council of Bishops issued a foundation document and pastoral letter entitled *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace*. In the pastoral letter, after summarizing a theology for peace with justice and the threat of nuclear weapons to the human family and planet earth itself, the bishops stated:

Therefore, we say a clear and unconditional No to nuclear war and to any use of nuclear weapons. We conclude that nuclear deterrence is a position that cannot receive the church's blessing.

In the foundation document the United Methodist bishops outlined a set of policies for a just peace, including:

Comprehensive test ban to inaugurate a nuclear freeze.

Consolidation of existing treaties and phased reductions leading to the eventual goal of a mutual and verifiable dismantling of all nuclear armaments.

Bans on space weapons.

No-first-use agreement as a transitional measure.

Here is the pastoral letter in its entirety.

### **A Pastoral Letter to All United Methodists**

From your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, the Council of Bishops, to all those people called United Methodist in every land: Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. With hearts and minds open to Christ, who is our peace;

In obedience to his call to be peacemakers; And in response to the biblical vision of a wholistic peace, shalom, revealed in Scripture to be God's will and purpose for all of creation:

We, the bishops of The United Methodist Church, have been moved by the spirit of Jesus to send you a message that we have titled **IN DEFENSE OF CREATION: THE NUCLEAR CRISIS AND A JUST PEACE**, a message we believe to be of utmost urgency in our time.

This message has been prepared over a span of two years during which time we have earnestly sought to hear the Word of God through the Scriptures. At the same time we have prayerfully and penitently reflected on the continuing buildup of nuclear arsenals by some of the nations. We have become increasingly aware of the devastation that such weapons can inflict on planet earth. We have watched and agonized over the increase in hostile rhetoric and hate among nations. We have seen the threat of a nuclear confrontation increasing in our world. We have been motivated by our own sense of Christian responsibility and stewardship for the world God created.

This brief Pastoral Letter is an introduction to a substantial Foundation Document that we have produced as the major portion of our message. In our Foundation Document we have attempted to state with clarity the biblical basis for our concerns and our conclusions about the issue we are addressing. We have set forth a theology for peace with justice in our time that reflects our understanding of the mind and will of Jesus Christ. This theology for a just peace reflects also our understanding of those insights of both pacifism and just-war theory that speak with relevance to the issues of the present nuclear crisis.

We write in defense of creation. We do so because the creation itself is under attack. Air and water, trees and fruits and flowers, birds and fish and cattle, all children and youth, women and men live under the darkening shadows of a threatening nuclear winter. We call The United Methodist Church to more faithful witness and action in the face of this worsening nuclear crisis. It is a crisis that threatens to assault not only the whole human family but planet earth itself, even while the arms race itself cruelly destroys millions of lives in conventional wars, repressive violence, and massive poverty.

Therefore, we say a clear and unconditional No to nuclear war and to any use of nuclear weapons. We concluded that nuclear deterrence is a position that cannot receive the church's blessing. We state our complete lack of confidence in proposed "defenses" against nuclear attack and are convinced that the enormous cost of developing such defenses is one more witness to the obvious fact that the arms race is a social justice issue, not only a war and peace issue.

Our document sets forth a number of policies for a just peace, including such disarmament proposals as a comprehensive test ban, a multilateral and mutually verifiable nuclear weapons freeze and the ultimate dismantling of all such weapons, and bans on all space weapons. However, the nuclear crisis is not primarily a matter of technology; it is a crisis of human community. We encourage independent US and Soviet initiatives to foster a political climate conducive to negotiations. We urge a renewed commitment to building the institutional foundations of common security, economic justice, human rights, and environmental conservation. And we make appeal for peace research, studies, and training in all levels of education.

This message we are sending to United Methodist people is not meant to be a consensus opinion of our church or a policy statement of our denomination on the nuclear crisis and the pursuit of peace. It is given from the bishops to the church as both a pastoral and a

prophetic word. It is pastoral in that we as bishops will seek to lead the church in study, prayer, and action related to this issue and this theme, using the Foundation Document as a basic resource and guide. It is prophetic in that the Foundation Document is our response to the Word of God. It faithfully states our understanding of that Word to our world at this moment in history.

Our message is the result of many months of prayerful study, research, and reflection. It is not given to the church with any feeling that it should be the final word on this issue or with the hope that it will silence all contrary opinions; but rather, we are sending this statement to the church seeking the fullest and fairest possible discussion of our understandings and convictions, together with an honest consideration of difference and critical opinions.

Peacemaking is ultimately a spiritual issue. It is a sacred calling of Jesus. All dimensions of church life offer openings for peacemaking: family life, Christian education, the ministry of the laity, pastoral ministry in every respect, political witness, and the great fact of the church as a worldwide company of disciples that transcends all nations, governments, races, and ideologies.

Now, therefore, we ask you, our sisters and brothers, to join with us in a new covenant of peacemaking; to use the Bible together with our Council's Foundation Document as basic resources for earnest and steadfast study of the issues of justice and peace. We call upon each local pastor and lay leader to give leadership in a local church study of the issues surrounding the nuclear threat. We ask you all to open again your hearts, as we open our hearts to receive God's gracious gift of peace; to become with us evangelists of shalom, making the ways of Jesus the model of discipleship, embracing all neighbors near and far, all friends and enemies, and becoming the defenders of God's good creation; and to pray without ceasing for peace in our time.

Now we draw this Pastoral Letter to a close with prayers for all of you and for all the nations and peoples of the earth.

We humbly pray that God will accept and use our lives and resources that we dedicate again to a ministry of peace.

May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace and remembering the poor, choosing life and coming to life eternal, in God's own good time.

Amen.

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