



Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Peacemaking

Policy Positions

A statement on global security endorsed by the Council's Governing Board on October 26, 2004, includes the following words:

As the Body of Christ, we are called to stand with all humankind in the search for justice. Christians are called, then, to embrace the security that God has given and to pursue the security that God intends for creation. We are called to treat others fairly and justly and to care about the safety of other people's children. We are called to feed the hungry, find shelter for the homeless, create jobs for the unemployed, and work for the day when poverty ends. We are called to turn our swords into plowshares, to love our enemies, to take those actions with other nations that will prevent future acts of terrorism, to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction that threaten to undo God's creation, and to invest in productive lives rather than violent deaths.

Finally, to the extent to which our pursuit of security is motivated by fear instead of faith, or assumes power we do not have, or exchanges freedom for control, we call on God to move our hearts until the barriers which divide us crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease so that we might all live together in justice and peace.

In light of our understanding of current conditions in our country and our world, and in response to a clear biblical/theological imperative as embodied in the previous statement, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches supports:

- Working within the local, state, national and global communities to achieve peace among hostile groups.
- Recognition of the economic disparities and political oppression that are often the root causes of terrorism, genocide, war, and other violence.
- Investing energy and funds into productive activities that will address the problems that lead to conflict—feeding the hungry, providing adequate shelter, fostering good educational systems, and creating jobs that build up society and training people to fill those positions.
- Stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and reducing existing stockpiles of weapons.
- Affirming that God values all people in their rich diversity, and educating our brothers and sisters that discrimination against *any* class of people is a sin and a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Legislation and policy that protects families and individuals from violence and abuse.

Background

We live in a changing world. During most of the previous century, Americans felt safe and insulated from the dangers of war as conflicts raged in other parts of the world. We could watch tensions erupted into violence, with Jews vs. Palestinians in Israel, Catholics vs. Protestants in Northern Ireland, Tutsis vs. Hutus in Rwanda, and numerous other groups pitted against each other in far-flung corners of the world. We have witnessed and continue to witness the work of cruel and powerful dictators who suppressed freedom and speech, and inflicted pain, suffering, and even death on those who opposed them—Hitler and Mussolini, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Augusto Pinochet, the Duvaliers (father and son), and Saddam Hussein, to name some of the more notorious.

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children
of God.**

Matthew 5:9 (NRSV)

We could choose to be involved, if it served our interests, but we had the luxury of staying on the sidelines for most of these years. We felt secure on our own soil. Then things began to change toward the end of the 20th Century. U.S. citizens and military personnel came under attack in other parts of the world as individuals, residence buildings, embassies, and other American installations and symbols became the targets of violence and bloodshed. The threat, for the most part, still seemed distant until September 11, 2001.

Since 9/11, tensions have continued to rise globally. Many live in fear of terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, traditional conflicts throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have continued as well. Often, those in conflict fail to seek peaceful solutions, electing instead to engage in war as a means of settling disputes. The result has been increased fear, death, suffering, and hunger and deprivation among those who are directly involved in areas of conflict. Most Americans still do not witness these conflicts directly, but are affected indirectly when they live in fear for their safety and when national spending to support war and other conflicts takes away from funding that otherwise might support some of the most vulnerable citizens.

While violence continues to escalate at the global level, we also see violence manifesting itself within our own society. Gang warfare has turned some neighborhoods and regions into places of fear. A constant barrage of violent images on television, in movies, in music, and on our streets seems to have desensitized some members of our society, and as a result, women, children, and even whole families live under the threat of violence and abuse.

Seeking reconciliation and peace is not an optional activity. It is an absolute imperative in a time when we threaten to destroy our society and our world if we do not begin the hard work of finding peaceful solutions to the conflicts and the problems that we face.

Theological Perspective and the View of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Peggy Cowan (Department of Religion, Maryville College) provides the following statement on the biblical basis for peacemaking:

The Bible witnesses to the centrality of peacemaking for Christian discipleship in three ways. First, the word "peace"—shalom in Hebrew and eirene in Greek—is widely used in the Bible and has a wealth of meaning. It is through exploring the uses of the word "peace" in the Bible that we come to an understanding of the meaning of peace and peacemaking. Second, the visions and stories of the Bible offer models for the transformation of individuals and communities into peacemakers. It is through wrestling with these stories and making them our own that we grow as disciples of the Prince of Peace. Third, the entire biblical story shapes our calling to be peacemakers. It is through reflections on the themes of the biblical witness as a whole that one is confronted by the significance of peace and peacemaking for thinking about God, God's work in the world, and God's intention for human persons, communities, and creation.

The Council's ***Principles for Public Advocacy*** says:

Peace and reconciliation between persons and within the systems of society are both matters of faith and the result of human beings' partnership with God in God's work throughout the world. Scripture gives a vision of a world at peace in numerous places; brokenness and sinfulness are not the final words for humankind. God is constantly at work healing the brokenness that exists in individual lives, in families, communities, congregations, political processes and systems and in the environment around us.

Peacemaking is the appropriate human response to the divine gift of peace, wholeness and reconciliation. God calls us to reconciliation: between individuals, within families and communities, and among nations. When faced with conflict and brokenness, our first response is to seek a peaceful solution that ensures the health and safety of all involved.

There will never be peace on earth as long as there is injustice. Biblical witness affirms over and over that those who are committed to peace need to work for justice for all of God's people. Peace and justice are integral to faithfulness.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:4 (NRSV)

We witness God's gift of peace most profoundly in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We believe that Christ calls all who profess faith in him to share the gospel message of peace to a broken and insecure world. We, as Christians, are called to respond by working within the world to build a culture of peace and understanding as a means of protecting all who are created in the image of God and preserving the creation that God called good.