



FLORIDA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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Declaration of the Florida Council of Churches Regarding Iraq

The Florida Council of Churches, a community of Churches that seeks to follow Jesus' way of love, including love of enemies, deplores the violence of terrorism and grieves over the suffering this violence is inflicting on people all over the world and especially in the Middle East. We also deplore the violence of military action that accepts the deaths of innocent people as a price worth paying in fighting terrorists. We agree with Martin Luther King, Jr., who said, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that."

We are realistic enough to know that this world cannot be governed without the use of force and that the forces of hatred must often be forcefully restrained. Indeed, there are many among us who believe violence itself, though never desirable, is justified under the circumstances set out in the Just War Theory. But for both ethical and spiritual reasons our community of faith always prefers nonviolent solutions to social and political problems. Moreover the nonviolent revolutions of the past century in India, the Philippines, South Africa, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, the United States (the civil rights movement, women's rights) and elsewhere have convinced many of us that principled nonviolence exercised strategically and on a mass scale can be a force more powerful than violence in restraining evil.

Informed by our faith in Jesus and his way of love and nonviolent struggle, we must express grave concern about a U.S. military attack on Iraq at this time. Such an attack has not yet been shown to be necessary. We have not so far exhausted all the alternatives to war. We are not convinced that the present circumstances are causing more suffering than war would. We do not see how a preemptive war undertaken to prevent actions that may never take place can justify placing at risk thousands of military and civilian lives. It is simply not yet clear that the United States has just cause to initiate a war with Iraq.

In addition, we must express equally grave concern over the unilateral nature of the military action currently being contemplated by our government. If Iraq poses a threat to security, it is not to the security of the United States alone but to all nations. The appropriate body to initiate military action against such a threat is the United Nations. We therefore urge our government to continue working with and through the United Nations to address the threat that Iraq poses to the community of nations, to persuade Iraq to cooperate with United Nations' weapons inspectors, and to pressure Iraq to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction. Should military action be necessary as a last resort, we urge that this action be taken under the auspices of the United Nations and with the concurrence and participation of the greater community of nations.

We urge all the judicatory members of the Florida Council of Churches to distribute this statement to their congregations and encourage congregations to discuss it and make their positions, whatever they are, known to the political leaders of their region and of our nation. We also urge the congregations of all our member churches to pray for a just and nonviolent resolution of the problem of terrorism and for peace with justice in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Member Churches: African Methodist Episcopal • African Methodist Episcopal Zion • Apostolic Catholic Church • Catholic Church of the Antiochian Rite • Central Florida Presbytery • Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) • Christian Methodist Episcopal Church • Church of the Brethren • Community of Christ Church • Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida • Episcopal Diocese of Florida • Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida • Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Florida Fellowship of Community Churches • Florida General Baptist Convention • Florida Presbytery • Moravian Church • Philippine Independent Catholic Church • Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. • Presbytery of St. Augustine • Presbytery of Tropical Florida • Presbytery of Tampa Bay • Peace River Presbytery • Southeastern Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends • United Church of Christ • United Methodist Church •

Affiliated Agencies: Church World Service • Church Women United • Farmworkers Ministry • Florida Coalition Against the Death Penalty • Florida Impact • Lutheran Ministries • FIND (Florida Interfaith Networking in Disaster)

Signers on Iraq Statement:

The Rev. David Matthews (Florida Fellowship of Community Churches)
Bishop Timothy Whitaker (Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church)
Bishop Lloyd Knox (The United Methodist Church)
Bishop Leo Frade (Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida)
Bishop John Lipscomb (Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida)
Bishop John Howe (Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida)
Bishop Stephen Jecko (Episcopal Diocese of Florida)
The Rev. Clarke Campbell-Evans (The United Methodist Church)
The Rev. David Guthrie (The Moravian Church)
The Rev. Dr. James Armstrong (UCC)
Jean Lersch (Church of the Brethren)
The Rev. Russell Meyer (ELCA)
The Rev. Fred Morris, (Florida Council of Churches)
The Rev. Harvey Holland (The United Methodist Church)
The Rev. Miriam Haynes Holland (The United Methodist Church)
The Rev. David Heinze (Community of Christ)
The Rev. Dr. Paul Binder (United Church of Christ)
The Rev. Paul Hooker (Presbytery of St. Augustine)
The Rev. William Morrison (The Christian Church [Disciples of Christ])
The Rev. Dr. Harvey Jenkins (Presbytery of Florida)
The Rev. Vicki Walker (The United Methodist Church)
The Rev. Dr. Douglas Borko (The United Church of Christ)
Bishop John Hurst Adams (AME Church)

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