

On Building Peace in Iraq: Action of the 218th General Assembly (2008)

The 218th General Assembly (2008) adopted the following recommendations to:

1. Pray, in a spirit of deep humility, for God's justice and peace to prevail in Iraq; and recognizing and heeding God's call to love all persons as made in God's own image, and even to pray for our enemies, encourage all Presbyterians to be in intentional and regular prayer for everyone in and of Iraq: for Iraqi civilians, Christian, Muslim, Jew, Yezidi; for soldiers and armed actors; for the refugees and the displaced; for the tortured and their torturers; and for insurgents, kidnapers, and terrorists, for all are God's beloved, all are in need of the transformation of God's love and God's peace.
2. Commend and thank the peacemakers who have worked nonviolently to end the war in Iraq through prayers, vigils, and acts of resistance and witness such as the actions organized by the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq; and encourage all Presbyterians to participate enthusiastically in peacemaking efforts to end the occupation of Iraq.
3. Commend and thank members of the armed forces, and their loved ones, for their service and sacrifice.
4. Call upon the United States government to support our military personnel by granting speedy discharges to conscientious objectors; fully funding veterans' benefits; ensuring that injured service personnel and veterans have the best medical, mental health, and rehabilitation care available; and providing generous benefits to surviving family members.
5. Call upon the United States government to develop and implement a lasting peaceful solution, responsibly bring the troops home, and reaffirm the call of the 216th General Assembly (2004) for the United States government to engage with the international community through the United Nations and other international agencies to cooperate with the government of Iraq in providing security, peacekeeping forces, and funding the rebuilding of the country.
6. Call upon the United States and all member states of the United Nations to establish and fully fund a United Nations peacebuilding mission for Iraq to work in partnership with Iraqi leaders, neighboring nations, and appropriate international governmental and nongovernmental organizations to establish security in Iraq, rebuild institutions and infrastructure, resettle and assist refugees, and initiate a process of truth and reconciliation to promote healing and forgiveness.
7. Call upon the United States and other responsible nations to voluntarily make restitution in an amount adequate to repair war damage; to fully investigate, and where appropriate, in accordance with the principles of due process recognized in U.S. and international law, to prosecute all charges of war crimes including torture and mistreat-

ment of prisoners; and to cooperate completely with any international investigations of war crimes committed by any party to the conflict in Iraq.

8. Call upon the United States to remove all weapons, mines, depleted uranium, and other military waste products from Iraq; to repair other damage to the environment, including priceless archaeological sites.

9. Call upon the United States to return full direct control of Iraq's oil resources and oil revenues to Iraq.

10. Direct the Stated Clerk to communicate this action to the president of the United States, members of the U.S. Congress, and the secretary-general of the United Nations.

11. Receive the study paper (as found in Item 11-24), *To Repent, Restore, Rebuild, and Reconcile* and direct that it be posted on the website of the Office of the General Assembly and be commended for study throughout the church.*

12. Commend to the church the call of the 216th General Assembly (2004) for the church to express its pastoral concern for and offer pastoral care to members of the United States armed forces serving their country in the war in Iraq and their families as well as for veterans of the war who have returned home (*Iraq: Our Responsibility and the Future, Minutes, 2004, Part I, pp. 864ff*)*.

13. Direct the General Assembly Council to continue to expand the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s commitment to relief efforts in Iraq in cooperation with our ecumenical partners, to ministries that address human needs in Iraq caused by the war, and to long-term development efforts to assist in the rebuilding of the country.

14. Call upon all presbyteries, congregations, and members within the PC(USA) to intentionally, personally, and concretely work to bring healing, peace, justice, and care to all affected by the war in Iraq, not only through our prayers but through the giving of our resources, time, money, and very selves to improve the lives and future of all involved, especially the hurting, the poor, the oppressed, and those whose lives have been damaged by the war.

15. Pray for, call for, and work for a just and peaceful future for the nation and people of Iraq, which includes the establishing of a just, stable, and democratic government and the timely departure of U.S. military forces and their contractors as soon as it is possible to leave the nation in an appropriately stable, just, and self-sustaining form.

*The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) is also distributing this Iraq statement and the Background Study, as well as other resources, such as the 2004 Iraq report.

Rationale

Most of the sixth chapter of the book of Luke is dedicated to Jesus' teachings about the act of courage that it will take to strive for right relationships even with our enemies or those who hate us. Toward the end of the chapter, Luke recounts Jesus' exasperation with his followers, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them" (Luke 6: 46–47). The call to act on Jesus' radical notion of security based on loving one's enemies is clear.

In the two thousand years since the time of Jesus, Christians have often wrestled with these difficult teachings of Jesus. The ethical questions regarding how we respond to evil have always been difficult, and people of good will and solid faith conviction have often disagreed with one another. Still, Jesus' words remain, beckoning us into an act of faith that challenges us to defy our deepest fears.

In *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, the 192nd General Assembly (1980) declared, "The church is faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking. ... To deny our calling is a disservice to the church and the world." Although a just resolution to the conflict in Iraq requires finding solutions to complex and challenging problems, we accept our responsibility to be advocates for nonviolence and reconciliation as those solutions are developed and implemented.

Fortunately, some consensus has begun to emerge from qualified groups studying strategies for ending the war and occupation in Iraq. The first, and most important, conclusion is that the U.S. military operations in Iraq have failed to provide security for citizens and have motivated an extremely violent civil-war-like conflict, and therefore must be ended. This overture includes suggestions from the proposals of several of these groups: "Towards Peace in and with Iraq," from The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research (www.transnational.org); "The Iraq Study Group Report: The Way Forward—A New Approach," from the United States Institute of Peace (www.usip.org); "Pastoral Message on the War in Iraq," from The General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (www.ncccusa.org); and "Iraq: Our Responsibility and the Future," from the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (available with other excellent resources at www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/).

Two groups of people deserve the special concern of the General Assembly: the civilian population of Iraq and U.S. military personnel and their families. This overture takes the position that the best leadership for the Iraqi people is an elected government free of any U.S. influence and that the best channel for international assistance is the United Nations. The problems of adequately equipping our troops and providing the best medical care for the injured have been well covered in the U.S. press. A good exploration of the mental health problems caused by long and uncertain deployments, insufficient rest, and prolonged exposure to combat may be found in the May 2007 Pentagon mental health survey of troops in Iraq.

Many Presbyterians have been called to the work of peacemaking in this time of war. Christian Peace Witness for Iraq (CPWI) is a network of Christian churches and organizations that coordinates national and local actions that incorporate spirituality with public witness. Rick Ufford-Chase, a former Moderator of the PC(USA), and other Presbyterians are part of the CPWI leadership team. The CPWI has organized worship services, public vigils and fasts, and nonviolent direct actions to give voice to its message: end the U.S. war and occupation, support our troops, support an Iraqi-led peace process, say NO to torture, and say YES to justice. More information on the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq may be found on its Website, christianpeacewitness.org and on the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship website, www.presbypeacefellowship.org.

From an overture from the Presbytery of Baltimore with concurrences from the presbyteries of Chicago, Santa Fe, and Twin Cities Area.

For further information and resources, please contact the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, www.pcusa.org/acswp, 1-800-728-7228 x.5823.