

Ideas for Marking the Fifth Anniversary of the War in Iraq March 19, 2003-2008

Prepared by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the Office on Women's Advocacy, the Office on the Middle East, the Presbyterian United Nations Office, and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy of the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202; (888) 728-7228.

Whatever we think about the need for the war in Iraq, we grieve the deaths and wounding of so many. Part of the church's work and witness is to provide opportunities for God's Spirit, who grieves with us, to help us honor all those who have suffered and at the same time point the way toward repentance, reconstruction, and reconciliation. Thus we present these liturgical and public witness ideas that look toward an end to hostilities and restoration of peace with justice.

- Pray for those who have been impacted by the war in Iraq. Prayers are available at www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/prayers.htm.
- Toll your church bells five times—once for each year of the war.
- Light five candles during worship—one for each year of the war.
- Light several candles to mark all the people who have died in Iraq: soldiers, children, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters.
- Hold a silent candlelight vigil for those who have been impacted by the war in Iraq. This might be in a public park, churchyard, or sanctuary. It is suggested that you have candles, a large container of sand to hold the candles, and someone to monitor this activity.
- Remember those who have died by placing crosses, stars and crescents, Stars of David, or grave markers on your church lawn.
- Invite families, Sunday School classes or other groups in your church to create *Ropes of Hope* for use in your congregation. Learn more at www.christianpeacewitness.org/node/409. Use six-foot lengths of light rope (multi-colored easy-tie clothesline is ideal). Attach to the rope: ribbons or bands of cloth with your own hopes for a peaceful Iraq, your own prayers for peace, your own definitions of peace. Imagine something like Buddhist prayer flags. Leave a foot at each end of your length of rope (so they can be tied together) and fill the remaining four feet. You may want to keep the ribbons or bands of cloth or prayer flags to two feet or shorter (so they can be carried without dragging the ground), and make them whatever width you like (keeping in mind that people will want to be able read your hopes and prayers). You may want to use some of them as liturgical paraments or décor in worship services.
- Send greetings to soldiers and their families who are part of your congregation.
- Visit a veteran of the Iraq war in a VA hospital.
- Read the names of all the soldiers who died in Iraq for each week and pray for their families. Also pray for the Iraqis who died that week, giving the number if possible. Find the names of member of U.S. forces at: www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/casualties/2008.02.html and click on “view by date.”
- Remember the Iraqis who have died during the war. Records of Iraqi deaths are difficult to find. One source is Iraq Body Count at www.iraqbodycount.org. For more information on the number of Iraqi deaths, including the work of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, visit mit.edu/humancostiraq/.

- Follow overtures related to the war in Iraq that will go to the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at www.pcusa.org/ga218/business.htm. For the 2003 and 2004 General Assembly statements, see www.pcusa.org/acswp or www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/index.htm.
- Invite members of your church or presbytery to sign letters to Iraqis, our service men and women, and Presbyterians in Iraq expressing our concern for their situation. Suggestions for letters:

1. *Send letters to the citizens of Iraq in care of their UN Ambassador:*

H.E. Dr. Hamid Al-Bayati, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
 Permanent Representative
 Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations
 14 East 79th Street
 New York, NY 10021
 Fax: 212-772-1794

Dear Iraqi Citizens,

We the undersigned want to express our grief over all that you and your country have gone through for the last five years. We believe that we are all children of God, which means that we see you as our brothers and sisters. We understand we cannot know much of what you have endured and are enduring. However, we want you to know that you are in our hearts and prayers and that we pray for justice and peace for you and your country.

2. *Send letters to our military personnel serving in Iraq to the Rev. Ed Brogan who will post your letter and send it to all PC(USA) chaplains.*

The Rev. Ed Brogan
 Director of Presbyterian Council for Chaplains
 4125 Nebraska Ave. NW
 Washington DC, 20016
edbrogan@pccmp.org

Dear Servicemen and Servicewomen,

We the undersigned want to express our appreciation for the sacrifices you have made in our name for us and our country. We understand that we cannot know all that you have been through. However, we want you to know that we believe we are all children of God and we see you as our brothers and sisters. We are keeping you and your families in our hearts and prayers.

3. *Send letters to our Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq to Debby Vial who will forward your letter to Iraqi Christians in an appropriate manner.*

Debby Vial
 100 Witherspoon, Room 3229
 Louisville, KY 40202-1396
dvial@ctr.pcusa.org

Dear Iraqi Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We the undersigned want to express our grief over all that you and your country have gone through for the last five years. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are deeply grieved that your life has been made more difficult. We understand that we cannot know much of what you have endured and are enduring. However, you are our beloved brothers and sisters and we hold you in our hearts and prayers.