

PEACEMAKING IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.): AN OVERVIEW



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www.pcusa.org/peacemaking

INTRODUCTION

“Blessed are the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).” Presbyterians engage in peacemaking as individuals, congregations, presbyteries, synods, and other groups within the church and in the community. Guided by *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling*, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program provides resources, sponsors events, and offers programs to assist Presbyterians on all levels as they “Seek peace and pursue it.” (Psalm 34:14) Ervin Bullock, Associate for Network Support, contacts peacemaking committees in synods and presbyteries twice a year. These conversations, combined with connections made by other members of the Peacemaking Program staff, provide an overview of peacemaking ministries across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

- When peacemaking is understood in the Biblical sense—as working for the well-being of God’s children and the wholeness of God’s creation in the name of Jesus Christ—it becomes clear that most, if not all, congregations do peacemaking.
- On the presbytery level, 65 presbyteries have separate peacemaking committees and 67 presbyteries have committees with a variety of responsibilities that include peacemaking. In 35 other presbyteries, the Peacemaking Program has a contact person.
- Peacemakers in six synods, Alaska-Northwest, Covenant, Living Waters, Mid-Atlantic, Southern California and Hawaii, and Trinity, support for peacemaking that range from grants and scholarships to networking and programming.
- The *Commitment to Peacemaking* is a tool that congregations and other entities use to shape their peacemaking ministries. As of March 2008, 4,526 congregations have adopted the *Commitment*. Holston Presbytery adopted the *Commitment* in 2007.
- The Peacemaking Offering, the *Commitment to Peacemaking*, and the International Peacemakers Program remain basic peacemaking ministries throughout the denomination.



After participating in the Peacemaking Program’s 2006 travel study seminar to Palestine and Israel, Peter Mann of Minnesota Valleys Presbytery created *Import Peace* to provide a market for fair trade olive oil. See www.importpeace.org.

JUSTICE AND COMPASSION

- Fourteen Presbyteries identified nonviolence as an area of concern; ten noted they work on domestic violence; four more seek to address violence within their communities. The Peacemaking Program arranged workshops on the Christian roots of nonviolence in two presbyteries and a synod.
- Presbyterians in Sacramento Presbytery and Chicago Presbytery are addressing the violence in the Philippines. A highlight was a presentation by church leaders from the Philippines before a U.S. Senate subcommittee.
- Disaster response is a significant ministry for 11 presbyteries and many congregations, particularly along the Mississippi coast and in New Orleans. Often groups make return trips—Palisades Presbytery has sent eight teams.
- Working on issues related to the Middle East, in particular Israel and Palestine, was cited as significant international peacemaking efforts by 53 presbyteries. A number of presbyteries have sponsored trips to Israel and Palestine. Iraq was cited as an international focus by 24 presbyteries, Colombia by four, Sudan and Darfur by nine. Thirty other countries were identified as an area of concern by at least one presbytery.
- National Capitol Presbytery participates in vigils outside the Sudanese Embassy.
- A staff person helps Baltimore Presbytery help state address advocacy issues.
- East Tennessee Presbytery works to address the dangers of nuclear weapons.
- Presbyterians played a key role in the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq. The Peacemaking Program and the Presbyterian Washington Office held an event for about 100 Presbyterians to debrief and network after the March 16 event.
- Twenty-eight presbyteries identify environmental justice as a major concern.
- Scioto Valley Presbytery itinerated a speaker on ending torture. Several presbyteries

and congregations have used the video *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* to address this issue.

EVANGELISM AND WITNESS

- Issues related to immigration continue to emerge with 24 presbyteries identifying such issues as an area of ministry. Concerns range from developing relationships with new neighbors to border issues to the rights of immigrants. Lake Michigan Presbytery compiled and distributes resources on hospitality and immigration.

- In 2007, ten International Peacemakers from nine countries traveled to 49 different presbyteries in the United States to tell their stories of peace and justice. Three Presbyterian colleges hosted International Peacemakers as did Campbell Farm in Central Washington Presbytery and the Interreligious Task Force on Central America in Cleveland. Two International Peacemakers spoke at the World Mission '07 event in Louisville.
- Peacemaking Program staff provided a retreat for some twenty pastors, educators, and spouses in Philadelphia Presbytery that focused on the tools created by the Kaleidoscope Institute for creating competent leadership in a diverse and changing world.
- Working to overcome racism and build the Beloved Community remains a strong concern with 13 presbyteries identifying such efforts. Detroit Presbytery sponsored a bus trip to Little Rock for the 50th anniversary of the integration of Central High School. The Presbytery of the Western Reserve held a weekend on addressing racism with Beverly Daniel Tatum.

SPIRITUALITY AND DISCIPLESHIP

- Some 300 peacemakers gathered for the conference, *Jesus: Proclaiming Peace*. The conference included worship, reflective and contemplative times, issue briefings, films, and more.
- The Spiritual Nurture section of the Peacemaking Program Web page provides weekly prayers on peace and justice concerns. Other worship resources are posted for special days and seasons.
- Twenty-four presbyteries report interfaith ministries. These ministries range from shared worship to workshops to advocacy. This number represents a significant increase over previous years.
- An Interfaith Listening Team of a Christian and a Muslim from the Philippines visited six presbyteries and engaged with 1,600 people from churches and educational institutions. The visit to National Capital Presbytery included briefings on the situation in the Philippines with congressional representatives and their staffs.
- International partnerships (such as the Joining Hands Against Hunger networks) provide opportunities for growth in faith and growth in discipleship following Jesus for presbyteries and congregations.
- Caring for Iraq War veterans and their families as well as Iraqis impacted by the war are growing areas of concern.



Peacemakers at the 2007 Peacemaking Conference marched in the July 4 parade at Montreat, NC.



International Peacemakers bring a global perspective to Presbyterians. A number of partnerships with sisters and brothers in Christ in other countries have grown from seeds planted during these visits.

LEADERSHIP AND VOCATION

- Twenty presbytery peacemaking leaders participated in a training event prior to the 2007 Peacemaking Conference. This allowed for the sharing of ideas and nurtured the leaders for ministry.
- Eastminster Presbytery holds a "Listening Project" at pre-presbytery meetings in which participants use guidelines and a modest structure to talk about difficult theological issues.
- An Athens, GA congregation has created two peacemaking teams. One deals with community issues, the other presents forums on international concerns.
- The weekly Peacemaking Program electronic listserv and Web page and listserv provide a sense of connection for leaders and individuals in a variety of situations.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE MINISTRY

The Peacemaking Program has identified several emerging opportunities for ministry. These include:

- working with partners in the new Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry;
- promoting the Peacemaking Offering;
- building on existing international partnerships;
- nurturing personal connections with and among peacemakers; and



- supporting congregations and Presbyterians in areas where little peacemaking ministry occurs on the presbytery or synod level.

