The Board of Directors has recommended this resolution be sent directly to a Plenary Session of the General Synod.

RESOLUTION MARKING THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JUST PEACE PRONOUNCEMENT BY RECOMMITTING OURSELVES TO BE A JUST PEACE CHURCH

Submitted by: Christ Congregation (Princeton, NJ), Circle of Mercy (Ashville, NC), Clackamas United Church of Christ (Milwaukie, OR), Congregational Church of Laconia United Church of Christ (Laconia, NH), First Congregational United Church of Christ (Berea, OH), First Congregational United Church of Christ (Washington, DC), Grace Immanuel United Church of Christ (Louisville, KY), Kenwood United Church of Christ (Chicago, IL), New Ark United Church of Christ (Newark, DE), Olmsted Community Church (Olmsted Falls, OH), Peace United Church of Christ (Duluth, MN), Plymouth Church United Church of Christ (Milwaukee, WI), St. John’s United Church of Christ (Belvidere, IL), St. Peters United Church of Christ (DuBois, IN), St. Peters United Church of Christ (Lamar, IN), Trinity United Church of Christ (Fulda, IN), Trinity United Church of Christ (North Park, MI), Union Congregational United Church of Christ (West Palm Beach, FL)

A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

In 1985 the Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ made a landmark decision to become a Just Peace Church and called on congregations, associations, and conferences to become communities of Just Peace. Moving beyond traditional Christian approaches to war and peace, the General Synod affirmed Just Peace as “the vision of shalom, linking peace, and justice” and the “interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.” Since that time the need for a vigorous Just Peace movement in our world has only intensified. Nations and regions of the world, and non-national entities, have entered into seasons of nearly perpetual warfare, in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Colombia, Israel/Palestine, Sudan and The Republic of Congo. In our own country, the rise in gun violence and mass shootings speak to the need for Just Peace, as does the rapid increase in income inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation.

With each new conflict on the global scene a call to “do something” arises and military intervention is frequently the first option considered. Domestic conflicts are met with increasingly militarized policing and incarceration. Just Peacemaking expresses our commitment to engage practices to resolve conflict at every level - in ourselves, in our families, in our communities, and in our world - without violence whenever possible; when it is not possible, to then restrain, contain and reduce violence; and finally to work actively to bring it to a swift, sustainable, and just conclusion. The power of the Just Peace movement is that it does not
simply respond to violence and sources of conflict like inequality and exclusion, but it works to address these challenges at their roots by changing the structures that give rise to conflict and injustice. It is a highly active response to the ever-changing nature of conflict and injustice most fitting for the Christian Church following Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

As the 1985 Pronouncement says:

“A Just Peace is grounded in God's activity in creation. Creation shows the desire of God to sustain the world and not destroy. The creation anticipates what is to come: the history-long relationship between God and humanity and the coming vision of shalom.”

“Just Peace is grounded in covenant relationship. God creates and calls us into covenant, God's gift of friendship: "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore" (Ezekiel 37:26). When God's abiding presence is embraced, human well-being results, or Shalom, which can be translated as Just Peace.”

“A Just Peace is grounded in the reconciling activity of Jesus Christ. Human sin is the rejection of the covenant of friendship with God and one another and the creation and perpetuation of structures of evil. Through God's own suffering love in the cross, the power of these structures has been broken and the possibility for relationship restored.”

“A Just Peace is grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit. God sends the Holy Spirit to continue the struggle to overcome the powers ranged against human bonding. Thus, our hope for a Just Peace does not rest on human efforts alone, but on God's promise that we will 'have life and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).

“A Just Peace is grounded in the community of reconciliation: the Just Peace Church. Jesus, who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14), performed signs of forgiveness and healing and made manifest that God's reign is for those who are in need. The church is a continuation of that servant manifestation. As a Just Peace Church, we embody a Christ fully engaged in human events. The church is thus a real countervailing power to those forces that divide, that perpetuate human enmity and injustice, and that destroy.”

“A Just Peace is grounded in hope. Shalom is the vision that pulls all creation toward a time when weapons are swept off the earth and all creatures lie down together without fear; where all have their own fig tree and dwell secure from want. As Christians, we offer this conviction to the world: Peace is possible.”

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The 1985 Just Peace Pronouncement issued a call for “churches to organize themselves so as to be effective instruments of God's Just Peace.” It made the provocative declaration that it was not only possible, but our direct call as Christians to join the reconciling work of Jesus Christ and
end war. The Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will re-issue this call for “churches to organize themselves so as to be effective instruments of God’s Just Peace” with a specific call to develop practices, programs, partnerships, and networks of Just Peace at the local, regional, and national levels.

**INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

The Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will request that all churches, associations, conferences, and associated bodies of the United Church of Christ consider how to implement this resolution with the support and encouragement of the Covenanted Ministries.

**PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE**

The 1985 Just Peace Pronouncement made clear: “We have barely begun to explore this little known process of reconciliation.” In the thirty intervening years we have seen the United States’ investment in military spending exceed the rest of the world’s military spending combined. We have since 9/11 waged the longest war in this country’s history, yet have seen that our battlefield successes rarely translate into a sustainable peace. The toll on our nation’s military families and veterans has been considerable and in the coming years we will welcome back into our congregations veterans who exhibit unprecedented levels of post-traumatic stress and moral injury.

With the adoption of this resolution, the United Church of Christ will recommit itself to the inward and outward journey of Just Peace and reaffirm the bold and audacious declaration in our Just Peace Pronouncement: “war can and must be eliminated.”

**Committing Ourselves to the Inward Journey of Just Peace**

We give thanks for the wisdom, expressed in the 1985 Just Peace Pronouncement when it issued the call for an “inward journey of spiritual nurture” and an “inward journey of education.” The Just Peace Pronouncement was clear, as we continue to be clear, that the disciplines of study and prayer are not incidental elements of Just Peace, but foundational, essential elements. The Pronouncement commended the “use of the World Peace Prayer, using the example of the Benedictine Sisters who pray this specific prayer each day at 12 noon:

- Lead me/us from death to life,
- from falsehood to truth.
- Lead me/us from despair to hope,
- from fear to trust.
- Lead me/us from hate to love,
- from war to peace.
- Let peace fill our hearts,
- Our world, our universe.”

Being sustained for the inward journey of Just Peacemaking requires cultivating spiritual disciplines such as forgiveness and grounding ourselves in hope. As in 1 Peter 3:15 “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have”, we are called to be witnesses to the hope that we have found. Just Peacemaking practices have
been revealed, applied, and tested in the last thirty years- often confounding the wisdom of the world with the hope of the Gospel.

The Just Peace practices call us to:
1. Support nonviolent direct action
2. Take independent initiative to reduce threat
3. Use Cooperative conflict resolution
4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice, and seek repentance and forgiveness
5. Advanced democracy, human rights, and religious liberty
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development
7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations

We have seen in the last thirty years how these and other Just Peace practices were applied in South Africa, where geopolitical pundits were sure there would be a bloody race war to end Apartheid. We’ve seen the Berlin Wall come down and East and West Germany peacefully reunited. We’ve witnessed the number of US and Soviet Union nuclear warheads reduce from a high in 1985 of 65,000 to less than a quarter that number today. We watched what many thought was an intractable civil war in Liberia brought to an end by the peaceful demonstration of women who courageously took to the streets. These stories ground our hope in real world experience, contradict and confound the pessimist, and strengthen our resolve to proclaim our faith in God’s future of Shalom.

Committing Ourselves to the Outward Journey of Just Peace

In the words of the Pronouncement:

“We call all local churches to the outward journey of political witness, enabling all members to join the search for the politics of a Just Peace.”

And we have seen our congregations; members and church officers become powerful constituents and advocates for peace in places like Sri Lanka, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. We have been a powerful voice for third world debt relief, nuclear arms reduction, the protection of our environment, and the dangers of a growing income inequality.

“We call all local churches to the outward journey of community witness.”

And we have seen our members take up vigils to end gun violence in the streets of their communities, stand in solidarity against the militarization of our police forces, and raise warning about this country’s incarceration crisis.

“We call for local churches to make their convictions known in their communities through public forums, media, and presence in the public arena.”

And we have seen our churches lead difficult conversations around the need to defend hard fought rights of minorities, women, and the LGBT community.

One of the boldest statements in the Just Peace Pronouncement is a simple sentence: “War can and must be eliminated.” The world doubts, believing instead that violence is an inherent part of
human nature. But our hope is rooted in deeper soil; that being created in the image of God, we can transcend violence as the way to resolve conflict. Forgetting this, losing the imagination to picture peace as a real possibility, is a temptation with tragic consequences. Believing that with God all things are possible; believing that God promises peace; believing that it is peace that Jesus leaves with us; these are foundational beliefs for the United Church of Christ and are central to the inward and outward journey of being a Just Peace Church.

**TEXT OF MOTION**

WHEREAS, scripture calls us to seek God’s shalom and participate in the reconciling mission of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

WHEREAS, at its Fifteenth General Synod in Ames, Iowa the General Synod adopted the pronouncement “Affirming the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace Church,” and called on its local churches, conferences and national bodies to “organize their common life so as to make a difference in the achieving of a Just Peace and the ending of the institution of war.”

WHEREAS, in the thirty years since the adoption of the Just Peace pronouncement, we have seen protracted violent conflicts, intractable systemic injustices, and crippling cultural prejudices resolved using just peacemaking practices.

WHEREAS, in the thirty years since the adoption of the Just Peace pronouncement, many United Church of Christ Conferences, Seminaries, Institutions, and congregations have declared themselves Just Peace communities and have adopted policies and strategies to live out this call.

WHEREAS, in the year 2001, the United Church of Christ along with other global faith communities affirmed and participated actively in the World Council of Churches “Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace” program, and joined with other communions in marking the end of the decade in 2011 at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica.

WHEREAS, the World Council of Churches commended for study and action an “Ecumenical Call to Just Peace,” and re-affirmed at its General Assembly in Busan in 2013 a “Statement on the Way of Just Peace,” highlighting a growing ecumenical consensus toward Just Peacemaking, calling on member churches to join an “Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” by seeking peace in four distinct contexts:
- For Just Peace in the Community- so that all may live free from fear,
- For Just Peace with the Earth- so that life is sustained,
- For Just Peace in the Marketplace- so that all may live in dignity,
- For Just Peace Among the Nations- so that human lives are protected

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod mark the 30th Anniversary of the Just Peace Pronouncement by reinvigorating the Just Peace movement in the United Church of Christ and beyond. In common cause with all who seek peace with justice, a renewed Just Peace movement will most surely include ecumenical relations with Christian Churches
throughout the world, interfaith partnerships in the United States and beyond, and strong new alliances wherever they may be made.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that each congregation of the United Church of Christ be invited to become a Just Peace congregation, if they have not already done so.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod invites a litany of covenant making to be celebrated throughout the church and spread liberally across the minutes, publications and communication media of the United Church of Christ. Let this litany give God Praise for the first thirty years of witness in the United Church of Christ as a Just Peace church and covenant all who pray it into a common bond of love and service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod invites congregations of the United Church of Christ to mark the Sunday preceding September 21 (which the United Nation recognizes as the “International Day of Prayer for Peace”) as Just Peace Sunday.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod invites all settings of the church who have committed themselves to Just Peace to create local, regional, and national partnerships and networks with the encouragement and support of the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ; to raise awareness of conflictual justice issues, share concerns, stories, and experience of Just Peace practices at work, and build constituencies around Just Peacemaking.

**FUNDING**

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.