

## Modeling Reconciliation

by Kristen Walling  
Justice and Peace Fellow

The recent violence committed by the Islamic State for Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, in northern Iraq is rapidly unraveling the hope for peaceful transitions of power in the region. Ethnic tensions continue to rise, millions of people are being displaced from their homes, infrastructure is crumbling, and the death toll rises by the thousands.

Sadly these concerns are not driving the conversation between our country's leaders and the international community; instead all that's being discussed is who's to blame for the situation at hand. "It's W's fault for starting a war we had no business fighting to begin with." "It's Obama's fault for pulling out troops too soon, and for not intervening in Syria when we had the chance." "It's Iraqi leaders' fault for intentionally fueling an ethnic conflict." Instead of discussing the immediate concerns and how to best address them we are politicizing a humanitarian crisis, pointing fingers at who is responsible for the mess. We're not talking about how to clean up the mess; we're standing around arguing about who should have to clean it up.

There are moments when this impulse is understandable. We are humans, searching for meaning in an imperfect world. We want to know why things are the way they are, and in seeking to identify cause and effect we wind up placing blame. In a political setting it is also understandable—albeit frustrating—that a politician would want to advance a particular initiative or a party's agenda. The unfortunate result is partisan division and growing resentment among our nation's leaders.

It's easy to spot such glaring division in a global crisis, but the reality is the same dynamic happens within the walls of our churches and in our communities. Though we strive to live as Christ did, we often fall short. I can't even remember how many times I've seen someone in a church grow

so outraged about something that it has led to irreparable damage. I've seen fellow church members get upset because their favorite community outreach program was cut, or grow absolutely livid because the property committee decided to repaint a door red instead of the same shade of brown it's been for thirty-seven years. Unfortunately more often than not, I've seen these situations unravel to the point that members disengage from leadership and involvement in the congregation, or even leave the community. Instead of trying to work through the tension, we quit. We gossip about each other, we blame our fellow parishioners, we work behind the scenes to oust the pastor, we throw up our hands and declare that clearly our opinions don't matter anymore and we just shouldn't be involved.

I don't know how to solve the growing crisis in Iraq, but I do know that pointing fingers will get us nowhere. We must call upon our leaders to put differences aside and address the real issues at hand. As people of faith, we need to start setting a better example within our own churches. We can—and must—model the process of productive dialog, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Kristen Walling is a Justice and Peace Intern with the United Church of Christ's Justice and Witness Ministries.*

**LEARN**

[ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice)

**DONATE**

[bit.ly/donatejwm](http://bit.ly/donatejwm)

**ARCHIVE**

**WJ**  
*f*

[bit.ly/witness4justice](http://bit.ly/witness4justice)

*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*