

Just Peace Church Statement
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Asheville, North Carolina

As a just peace church continuing the work of Jesus, we declare our intention to express by word and deed that God seeks a world in which:

- Persons are nurtured and challenged to grow in grace, inner peace, love, forgiveness and strength;
- All persons are treated with dignity, justice and equality as children of God.
- Communities function in a cooperative, reconciling way, honoring conflict so that our knowledge and love for each other can grow:
- Societies give priority to providing for the well-being and fulfillment of each and every member without regard to race, religion, class, age, gender, physical condition, mental health or sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Violence and exploitation by nations, corporations, and groups are replaced by dialog and negotiation when disputes arise.

We commit to pursuing these aims both internally in our structures, programs and relationships, and externally in our social advocacy, investment of personal and financial resources, and acts of witness and service. We acknowledge that our understanding of God is still evolving and therefore our understanding of just peace will evolve as well.

A shorter statement:

As a just peace church continuing the work of Jesus, we commit to work towards a world where all persons are treated with dignity and equality, where societies are structured in ways that promote the well being of all people, and where conflicts are resolved through communication and negotiation, without resort to exploitation or violence – and to embody these principles in our life and witness as individuals and as a congregation.

Some historical and contextual information

The Just Peace Church vision is a hallmark of United Church of Christ theological identity. For nearly two decades, the Just peace Church program has been a grassroots movement of UCC congregations committed to corporately naming and boldly proclaiming a public identity as a justice-doing, peace-seeking church.

The movement traces its history to the 1985 General Synod, when a Just Peace Pronouncement called upon all settings of the UCC to be a Just Peace Church, underscoring the words of Dr. Robert V. Moss, the second president of the UCC, who wrote in 1971, “We now need to put as much effort into defining a just peace as we have done in the past defining a just war.”

The General Synod defined “just peace” as the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence. The pronouncement called the church to a vision of shalom rooted in peace with justice and placed the UCC General Synod in opposition to the institution of war. Over the years, the Just Peace Church identity has become an important symbol for many of our congregations, as both a means of shaping congregational identity and as a theological framework for doing justice-based theological reflection.

For many Just Peace congregations, this identity has helped to underscore their ministries of direct service, legislative advocacy, and courageous witness. The approach has differed from place to place. Some became immersed in anti-war and anti-militarism issues, while some focused their energies on US policies affecting Central America. Others strengthened their multi-racial, multi-cultural witness. Some developed neighborhood ministries, and so forth.

Our congregation already does a lot of what is considered to be Just Peace work: our feeding the homeless each Sunday morning in Pritchard Park, our hosting Room in the Inn twice a year, our concerns around immigration and poverty issues, our being an Open and Affirming church and working for equality for LGBT folk, and so much more. This designation makes clear our intent to always seek just peace in every way we know how to do. The statement will also support the peace pole we have in front of our sanctuary building.

The History of Our Statement

Our Just Peace Statement was written by several members of the church who had an interest – including several members of the Christian Action Committee and Rev. Joe Hoffman. The statement was reviewed and edited several times – most recently by three of the writers of the statement and the moderator of the church. While the congregation has already approved our being a Just Peace Church, we were asked to bring this particular statement back to our May 4 congregational meeting for approval.