

For Peace in God's World by Victor Thasiah

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Present-day fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other places, and soldiers returning home from war continue to remind us that as much as we desire peace, it's a challenge to attain. To remember the church's calling to be a peacemaker and explore what international peace means, the ELCA adopted a social statement in 1995 titled "For Peace in God's World." The text attempts to strengthen the ELCA's global perspective in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

According to the statement, the church's vocation is peacemaking. "God's final peace, the peace of God's eternal reign" serves as the basis of this calling, which has two main expressions: 1) proclaiming the gospel of God's final peace; and 2) working for earthly peace—that is, "relationships among and with nations that are just, harmonious, and free from war."

Affirming that God creates and preserves us for community (making earthly peace possible), the statement views sin as destroying community. The text sets out God's resolve for peace, embodied in the people of Israel, who were chosen to be a blessing to all and through whom God promises a reign of justice and peace. Jesus Christ is the

fulfillment of this promise, bringing this very peace. The statement explains, "Jesus taught love for one's enemies; he reached out to the oppressed, downtrodden, and rejected of the earth; he prayed for his enemies while himself being rejected on the cross; [and] above all, through Jesus' violent death, God redeemed the world..."

In this way, the big picture is life in community with God and one another. "The God of peace suffers with and for a suffering and sinful world so that all of creation will enjoy the loving community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

How does this affect us? "The Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15) heals our broken relationship with God, removing the ultimate root of violence and injustice. The Gospel breaks down the dividing walls of hostility among people, creates a new humanity—making Christ Jesus 'our peace' (Ephesians 2:13–22)—and promises the reconciliation of all things in Christ."

It is this promise that the Holy Spirit uses to call and gather "a people from all nations to worship and witness to the God of peace." This public gathering to proclaim and celebrate God's peace is identified as the church's unique contribution to peace. "In praying for

peace in the world, in interceding for all who suffer from war and injustice and for those in authority, the Church acts for peace.”

A PEACEMAKING PRESENCE

The church also contributes to earthly peace by equipping the faithful to act for peace within and outside the Christian community. The church does the latter as “a presence for peace that disturbs, reconciles, serves, and deliberates.”

Concerning political responsibility, the statement advocates that governments should “vigorously pursue” less coercive measures over more coercive ones: “consent over compulsion, nonviolence over violence, diplomacy over military engagement, and deterrence over war.”

Though the statement focuses throughout on peacemaking, it also includes an important section on deciding about wars: “While permitting recourse to war in exceptional circumstances, these principles intend to limit such occasions by setting forth conditions that must be met to render military action justifiable. We begin with a strong presumption against all war; support for and participation in a war to restore peace is a tragic concession to a sin-

ful world. Any decision for war must be a mournful one . . . The principles for deciding about wars include right intention, justifiable cause, legitimate authority, last resort, declaration of war aims, proportionality, and reasonable chance of success. The principles for conducting war include noncombatant immunity and proportionality. The principles for post-war conduct include showing mercy to the defeated and assisting them to rebuild.”

In addition to these principles, the rejection of nuclear war, and support for “selective conscientious objection,” the statement acknowledges the importance of Christian pacifism. “This church today needs the witness of its members who in the name of Jesus Christ refuse all participation in war, who commit themselves to establish peace and justice on earth by nonviolent power alone, and who may suffer and die in their discipleship . . . We must continue the perennial discussion in the Church universal about whether Christian love and discipleship prohibit participation in war in all circumstances, or whether they may permit it in some circumstances.”

What should we do to keep and build international peace today?

The text concludes with tasks:

- Foster a dynamic vision of difference in unity.
- Promote respect for human rights.
- Counter and transform attitudes that encourage violence.
- Strengthen the will and ability to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Insist that peace and economic justice belong together.
- Support just arrangements to regulate the international economy.
- Revitalize economic assistance to poorer nations.
- Evaluate carefully the balance between legitimate security needs and other priority uses of government revenues, and reduce military expenditures wherever necessary.
- Strengthen international cooperation.
- Improve structures of common security.
- Give high priority to arms control and reduction.
- Control and reduce the arms trade.
- Advocate participatory and accountable political structures within nations.
- Encourage non-governmental organizations and their work for peace.
- Encourage and support nonviolent action.
- Care for the uprooted. 🌸

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