



# The United Church of Canada General Council

## GC33 Statement of Faith on Peace in a Nuclear Age (1990S721)

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### Introduction

The 1984 General Council decided that peace education should become a high priority in the United Church over the next five years. In November 1985, General Council Executive approved a three-point strategy which included that development of a theology of peace-making that would engage the church in a discovery of what it means to be a Christian in a nuclear age, and what it means to be a confessing church in a middle-sized country situated between the major antagonists in the nuclear conflict.

The National Working Group on Peace and Justice developed the peace theology project, "An Invitation to the Kitchen Table," to involve people at the local level in developing a peace theology for the church. Over 227 individuals and/or groups registered to participate in the project. A number of local and neighbourhood groups met to develop peace affirmations. This was followed by regional meetings and it finally culminated in a national meeting where the statement of faith on peace

was finalized for presentation to the 1990 General Council...

## **Context**

We live in a world, rich in resources and diversity. In this world we are dependent on each other and on the environment. This world is threatened.

We live in a world of violence.

- There is growing disparity between rich and poor.
- There is power disparity between women and men, between Native and non-Native, and between the marginalized and the privileged.
- People are treated as expendable commodities.
- Military spending robs the poor and wastes resources. War and nuclear weapons are constant threats to survival.
- Human activity is destroying the global environment.

We live in a world of fear.

- We fear for the future of our children and our children's children.
- We sense the despair of youth caused by the continuing arms race.
- We fear the violence that maintains the systems of domination and oppression.
- We experience a world of mistrust, lovelessness and lack of community.

We live also with signs of hope:

- in the spirit-filled lives of peace-makers;
- in the covenant community, living and speaking God's love;
- in other communities sharing similar aims.

We are encouraged by the witness of the poor and all new voices for peace.

We see hope in the willingness to continue the struggle.

## **Biblical and Theological Foundations**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth, and God created humans; in the image of God were they created...and God saw all that had been made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:1, 27, 31)

We believe the scriptures witness to the creation of the world by God who intends that creation reflect the fundamental harmony we have come to call shalom. The shalom community is one of wholeness, peacefulness, harmony and justice for all creation.

God made us in God's image, to live in covenant with the Creator and all other creatures. Compassionate and just, God renews the covenant in faithful love again and again.

We lament that the creation is lost in fear and conflict. God calls us to be peace-makers to heal a world in brokenness. God calls us to be co-creators, to weave a world in wholeness. We are not alone; God is with us.

(Jesus) is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on Earth. (Col. 1:15-16)

We believe God's nature and intention break into our world in Jesus of Nazareth, who both embraces our humanity and proclaims the redemption of our brokenness.

Jesus is central to our understanding of peace: reconciling, forgiving and manifesting human life with fullness. Jesus frees us from oppression, fear and conflict.

We remember Jesus' teaching, to love our enemies, to care for "the least of my sisters and brothers," to pray and to forgive. We remember Jesus' understanding of his ministry:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus called to account the powerful of the day and lived a new relationship with the powerless and the poor. We remember, particularly, his willingness to die in unconditional love for those who rejected him. Jesus calls us to be sisters and brothers.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you. Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace that the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. (John 14:16-27)

We believe the scriptures witness to the ongoing work of the Spirit who urges and empowers us to be peace-makers in the image of the Prince of Peace, and to work faithfully, using our many and varied gifts. The Spirit is gentle and kind, compassionate and caring, searching and acting; calling us to be open to the whole human family; to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God. Sustaining and nurturing, the Spirit guides and directs if we listen. As the transforming power of God's love and justice, the Spirit works through us to effect change in the world.

We are called to be the Body of Christ, to bring forth shalom in the global community, where all are neighbours, loved by God. As stewards and gardeners, we are called to care for others, to resist systems of destruction, to relinquish power that rules over others and embrace power that enables. And, together with the Spirit, we are to work towards the healing and reconciliation of the world.

God shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:4)

# Confession

We confess that we are a part of a world culture that has broken God's covenant.

- We allow the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons at great social cost.
- We abuse the environment and overuse the Earth's resources.
- We, in our greed, permit the growing gap between the rich and the poor, and the crippling burden of world debt.
- We tolerate mass starvation, homelessness and other misery.
- We stereotype other political systems, races, cultures and religions.
- We, as citizens, abdicate our responsibilities to others.

We confess that as Canadians we share in this brokenness:

- Our treatment of Native peoples is intolerable.
- Our refugee policy is unjust.
- Our economy depends, in some measure, on the manufacture of arms and their sale, even to developing countries and repressive regimes.
- Our contributions to foreign aid are being reduced and our social services are being eroded.
- Our social attitudes and our condoning of personal and family violence have reinforced an ethic of domination which allows for hierarchies, authoritarianism and the undue use of force to maintain order.

We confess as people of The United Church of Canada that:

- We often lose the vision of shalom, despairing and allowing fear to motivate or paralyse us.
- We tolerate a theology which reflects the dominant culture of our time.
- We are not always willing to act respectfully toward children or to be in loving community with them.
- We continue to exercise “power over” others-even within the church.
- We are frequently unwilling to truly listen to those whose views differ from our own.
- We fail to rely on the grace of God through prayer.

## **Commitments**

We the church are called to grow in faith, seeking a truer vision of God; shalom. In partnership with God and creation and the power of the Holy Spirit we act out God’s peace-making call in worship, reflection, education and action. In the shalom community we relate with trust, risking vulnerability; we are called to love our enemies.

We the church commit ourselves to the shalom community, living by the strengths and insights of those we have made powerless, such as the poor, children, women and Native people.

We the church commit ourselves to stand boldly against the powers and principalities of war, militarization, violence, injustice, greed, ignorance, world debt and exploitation of people and resources.

We denounce false beliefs and myths. We name the evils and sins of the church, our culture and the present powers and principalities that govern our lives.

We commit ourselves personally and corporately to a simpler life. We commit ourselves to work towards a world in which wealth and resources are shared equitably.

We commit ourselves to economic conversion: reducing and transforming the arms industry and eliminating its profit motive; standing in solidarity with those who would lose jobs; protecting the rights of persons to reject participation in war or war preparation. We commit ourselves to common security and the adoption of non-threatening policies of defense.

We commit ourselves to learn and to teach our children non-violent conflict resolution skills.

We, the church, commit ourselves to peace-making.

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