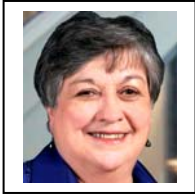


WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister

Witness for Justice #502

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In Service of Country

M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister

Every time the United States is engaged in war, which is way too often, we come out of the experience with a new resolve. That resolve is to do everything possible to avoid going to war again. Sadly, there always seems to be a compelling reason to forget our promise to pursue peace in place of war.

World War I fought in the first decade of the 20th Century was intended to be the “war to end all wars.” It was shortly after the end of that war that Armistice Day was endorsed by Congress in 1919. On the first Armistice Day, November 11 of that year, President Wilson said that we thank those who have served their country and for “*America to show her sympathy with peace and justice...*” Armistice is defined as a truce, a ceasefire, a peace agreement, a resolution. Why has armistice turned into a time focused completely on honoring veterans of war and not acknowledging all who work for peace and justice?

I do salute those who make a significant sacrifice by serving in the armed forces in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. I take it very personally as many others who have family members now serving in such places. I lift up my nephews who committed to serving their country, one in Iraq and the other in Afghanistan. They know that I love and respect them but I do not accept the tragedy of war. I do not believe that war is the way to peace. I do not believe that we as a nation have lived up our commitment to armistice made nearly a century ago.

The United States has spent \$1.121 trillion in just the last nine years specifically directed at war efforts. However, the cost of war is far higher than the actual dollars would portray. There is a moral price that we cannot continue to pay. Day after day we hear of heartbreaking suicides due to the conflict in

conscience by members of our military. Military Chaplains know full well the emotional, spiritual, and physical cost to the individual and family lives of our sons and daughters.

The United Church of Christ’s Head Chaplain, Rev. John Gundlach, affirms that the moral conflict faced by many of our troops deserves serious consideration. “One’s participation in a war that can be morally justified is challenging enough for those who are required to fight them,” Gundlach said. “To be required to go against one’s conscience to participate in a war that one regards as morally wrong is soul-damaging.”

Just as we respect the decision of those to join the military, we should also respect the choice of those who cannot serve based on their own conscience. I’m a part of the generation who was accused of not supporting our troops in Viet Nam some 40 years ago. For the majority of peace seekers, it was not that we did not support our troops; it was that we did not support the war. But that story was rarely told.

There are so many ways in which thousands serve our country. They serve urgent human needs in homeless and domestic violence shelters, foster homes, elder care, emergency food distribution, etc. There are many who serve as volunteers in our schools, libraries, churches, and communities. This year as we lift up those who have served our country in war, let’s remember Armistice Day as “*America showing her sympathy with peace and justice...*”

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 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.