

# WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.  
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110  
Phone: 216.736.3700  
Fax: 216.736.3703



**Geoffrey A. Black**  
**UCC General Minister and President**

## **Witness for Justice #527** **May 9, 2011** **A Call to Prayer for the Pathways to Peace**

**Geoffrey A. Black**

The news that the United States military has located and killed Osama bin Laden at his compound in Pakistan comes as the nation prepares to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the downing of United Airlines Flight 93 over southwest Pa. These tragic events left Americans and people throughout the world in shock and grieving the senseless loss of life resulting from this intentional assault planned and carried out by al-Qaida under the leadership of Osama bin Laden.

From that moment there were those in this country who felt a need for revenge that could only be satisfied by bringing bin Laden to justice, which in the minds of many meant killing him. As of today, that goal has been achieved. Yet, while many celebrate this event and feel that it has provided the nation with a fitting response to the horrific and brutal attack on citizens of the United States, there are others who see no reason to rejoice and instead feel a deep sense of disquiet and unease.

For the past 10 years we have mourned the loss of those who perished in the 9/11 attacks. We mourn, too, the thousands around the world – Muslims, Christians, Jews and others – killed in numerous indiscriminate attacks by al-Qaida. We have been made all too aware of the cost of waging the "war on terror" both in human lives lost in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the financial toll it has taken on our country. We lament that our troops often have returned to lackluster care for the healing of their physical and emotional wounds. Few, if any of us, are without a personal story of loss that connects us to this conflict.

There is no joy in this moment for us, because first and foremost we understand ourselves to be the disciples of Jesus. Jesus calls us in his teachings to do the difficult thing of loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us. If nothing else, Osama bin Laden was an enemy of the United States and other

governments around the world. His death at the hands of our military brings his life as an adversary to an end, but it does not bring us any closer to our ultimate goal – a just peace, healing of the human spirit and reconciliation between human beings and with God. We know that revenge does not lead to healing and reconciliation. It does not move us any closer to peace.

Our disquiet and unease also grows out of the realization that the achievement of the military goal of capturing and/or killing Osama bin Laden may fuel the next round of violence by his followers and only encourage others to join the ranks of al-Qaida or related organizations that share the same violent agenda.

It is likely that the violent death of Osama bin Laden was inevitable, given that he was engaged in an ongoing campaign of violence and threatened violence against the U.S., its allies and leaders in the Muslim world who in his eyes were enemies of Islam. With so many organized forces arrayed against him, it is conceivable that his demise was but a matter of time, even if that time period was almost 10 years. However, as those 10 years passed, the U.S. and its allies have been engaged in two theaters of war in West and Southern Asia. In that time our nation has alienated many in Muslim majority nations, and that reality remains.

Yet, we now have an opportunity to pursue international goals that the United Church of Christ has long advocated: a troop withdrawal and end to combat operations in Afghanistan; the continued hope of a just resolution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians; engaging in meaningful relationships with people of other faith communities, including Muslims; and to use the gained political capital to promote a just peace on many fronts.

Above all else, it is a moment for prayerful reflection. Our *United Church of Christ Statement of Faith* reminds us that God reconciles the world to God's self and that God promises courage in the struggle for justice and peace. For people of faith committed to seeking peace with justice in our nation and the world, turning to God in prayer is most appropriate.

Let us engage in prayer that we might have that kind of courage – a prayer that includes listening deeply and patiently for God to guide our thoughts and actions along the pathways to a just peace, healing of the human heart and reconciliation. I believe our prayers will be a fitting response to the violent death of an enemy, whose cause still lives as a challenge and a threat.

The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black is the UCC's General Minister and President and a member of its five-person Collegium of Officers.

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