

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Witness for Justice #476

May 17, 2010

Innovations of Conscience

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“*War is contrary to the will of God.*” These words were echoed by the Rev. Michael Kinnamon last week at an interfaith gathering to mark the opening of the Nuclear Weapons Non-Proliferation Conference at the U.N. Rev. Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, repeated these words from the first assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, three years after the end of WWII. Listening to these words, I was struck by both their power...and their age.

Where is the unified faith voice today reacting to our current wars and militarism? Where are the faith voices working the reign of a Just Peace? Where is the peace movement? You may be pleased and surprised to hear that those voices are still there- many where they’ve always been- if you listen. Churches and peace organizations calling for peace is hardly a story that will take top coverage on CNN’s Wolf Blitzer’s “Situation Room.” Yet, there are some recent and upcoming events and discussions that I believe are worthy of attention- if not from Wolf, maybe from you.

The first is the recent [Truth Commission on Conscience and War](#) held March 21st-22nd at the Riverside Church in New York.ⁱ This event brought together faith leaders, legal experts, and military veterans and chaplains to hear testimonies and update the conversation on religious Conscientious Objection (CO) to war. The report from the commission is yet to be released, but

the discussion sparked a wave of new dialogue on CO and new regional commissions are planned for later this year. What is clear from the proceedings is that the current CO system is outdated, if not broken, and does not fit our current methods of conducting war or a broader religious spectrum of opposition to war.

U.S. policy states that only those who are “conscientiously opposed to participation in war in *any* form” can be discharged or assigned to non-combatant service. A system that allows for “selective” consciousness objection, that includes non-pacifist traditions and rejection of specific tactics, such as the use of torture, is needed. Our moral consciousness needs to be brought up to date to match our innovation in military technology.

A second movement is the upcoming World Council of Church’s [International Ecumenical Peace Convocation](#) (IEPC) to take place in Kingston, Jamaica in 2011.ⁱⁱ This gathering will celebrate the Decade to Overcome Violence and the release of an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace currently being drafted. This document will be released at the IEPC and will be commended for study by member churches in preparation for the 10th WCC General Assembly in 2013. For the United Church of Christ, this is a welcome development given our own history as a [Just Peace denomination](#)ⁱⁱⁱ. Study materials on the IEPC are available on the WCC’s website and interested individuals are invited to attend a [Peace Among the Peoples Conference](#) pre-event in the U.S. in Elkhart, IN this summer.^{iv}

These are simply two events going on that illustrate that the peace movement is there, if just below the surface. Where is the peace movement? It’s alive and well waiting for you to engage it. See you there?

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.

ⁱ <http://www.conscienceinwar.org/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ucc.org/justice/peacemaking/a-just-peace-church-1.html>

^{iv} <http://www.peace2010.net/>

Filename: BULLETIN INSERT #476.doc
Directory: P:\WITNESS FOR JUSTICE
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\ClementF.NATIONAL\Application Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
Title: February 4, 2002
Subject:
Author: United Church of Christ
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 5/12/2010 2:39:00 PM
Change Number: 3
Last Saved On: 5/12/2010 2:41:00 PM
Last Saved By: ClementF
Total Editing Time: 5 Minutes
Last Printed On: 5/12/2010 2:41:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 2
Number of Words: 664 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 3,372 (approx.)