

A Just Peace Church Declaration
First Church of Lombard, UCC
Approved by the Congregation March 5, 2017

The Declaration Itself

Giving God thanks for Jesus, the Hebrew prophets, and all who have gone before us on the journey of peace and justice, we are emboldened by the Holy Spirit to declare that First Church of Lombard, United Church of Christ is a Just Peace Church, asking for God's guidance as we live out this Declaration in the life and ministry of our congregation.

Supporting Background Information

Synopsis

First Church of Lombard, United Church of Christ declares itself to be a Just Peace Church. We define *Just Peace* as the interrelationship of friendship, justice, and common security from violence. As a Just Peace Church continuing the work of Jesus, we commit ourselves to charitable work *and* to work toward a world where all persons are treated with dignity and equality, where societies are structured in ways that promote the well-being of all, where the environment is protected, where justice is sought in order to avoid violence, and where conflicts are resolved through communication and negotiation, without resorting to exploitation or violence – and to embody these principles in our life and witness as individuals and as a congregation.

- *Adapted from the 1985 and 2015 pronouncements of the UCC General Synod, and the Just Peace Statement of the First Congregational Church, UCC, Asheville, North Carolina.*

I. Where did the concept of a Just Peace Church originate?

A Hebrew Prophet. The 8th century BC Hebrew prophet Micah wrote, “[God] shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit

under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.” (Micah 4:3,4, NRSV)

Jesus. Jesus followed the tradition of the Hebrew prophets when he proclaimed and launched God’s imminent reign of peace and justice on earth.

Bible and Theology. A Just Peace is grounded in God’s desire for a sustainable creation (Gen. 1:31a) and a covenantal relationship with creation (Ezek. 37:26). It is rooted in the reconciling activity of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:14) and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Shalom = Just Peace. The Hebrew term *shalom* sums up the meaning of A Just Peace. Although *shalom* is often translated “peace,” it is far more than that. *Shalom* is not merely the *absence* of conflict, but the *presence* of contentment, wholeness, right relationships, social justice, well-being, and harmony. Likewise, a Just Peace maintains that peace alone is not sufficient. As *shalom* suggests, peace must always be wedded to justice. In fact, there is no peace without justice; justice is the only path to God’s peace. As the prophet said, “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation” (peace), *and*, “They shall all sit under their own...fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (justice).

Definition of A Just Peace. A Just Peace envisions a world in which *shalom* is real, a world in which every human being has enough, lives with equality, dignity, meaningful relationships, and is safe. A Just Peace includes the vision of a sustainable environment. A Just Peace proclaims that peace is possible when we work for justice. As revealed in scripture and in Jesus Christ, A Just Peace is God’s will for the world.

The UCC. The United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, cited in the Constitution of First Church of Lombard and often recited in our worship services, gives thanks to God with these words: “You promise to all who trust you... courage in the struggle for justice and peace.” Twice, in 1985 and 2015, the General Synod of the UCC called upon each local UCC congregation to prayerfully study and declare itself to be A Just Peace Church, embracing “just peace” as a faithful alternative to three traditional Christian positions relative to war and peace: crusade, pacifism, and just war.

First Church Mission Statement and History. The First Church of Lombard, UCC mission statement resonates deeply with this understanding of A Just Peace, declaring that our congregation “is called together by a vision of God’s *shalom*, God’s wholeness, justice, and peace.” Its Open and Affirming paragraph suggests that the extravagant welcome and community we extend to those who join our church is the *shalom* that God wants for the entire world. Records from the founding of First Church in 1851 indicate that

fellowship in the congregation was not offered to “slaveholders and apologists for slavery,” a bold application of Gospel values to the most controversial issue of the day.

- *Through the Years of Grace, a history of the First Church of Lombard by Ardyce Gilna Mons, 1979, page 3.*

First Church Liturgy and Signage. As our worshipping congregation often sings, “We are called to act with justice.” We are called to serve the world with *agape* love until the “city of God” comes on earth, and “all hatred and blindness will be no more.” Talking, learning, praying, and singing are not enough; we must “act with justice.” As the words in Hatfield Hall declare, “We believe the United Church of Christ is called to be a prophetic church,” and “We believe in the power of peace.” Our peace pole at the Main Street entrance proclaims in six languages, “May peace prevail on earth.” The second word on the Hebrew panel is *shalom* – A Just Peace.

- *The hymn reference is to “We Are Called” by David Haas.*

II. What are implications of becoming a Just Peace Church for Educational and Worship Ministries, and Internal Practices of First Church of Lombard?

This Just Peace Church Declaration will guide the life and ministry of First Church of Lombard in significant ways. By adopting this Declaration, we embrace the *concept* of a Just Peace and commit ourselves to *act* for God’s reign of *shalom* so that it may come, as Jesus prayed, “*on earth* as it is in heaven.” The following are examples of how being a Just Peace Church will affect the life and ministries of First Church.

Educational Ministries

- Develop awareness and discuss courses of action concerning the social justice aspects of topics such as mental health, LGBTQI issues, the environment, employment, hunger, homelessness, housing, healthcare, disabilities, education, violence, safety and security, racism, ageism, sexism, war, peace, and public and corporate policy
- Include justice and peace components in Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, adult education, confirmation, Youth Community, Women’s Fellowship, retreats, etc.
- Utilize Bible translations and educational curricula that are inclusive and sensitive to issues of peace and justice

- Promote interfaith learning, relationships, and solidarity with people of other faiths and cultures
- Learn about global concerns, and how to act for justice and peace internationally

Worship

- Embrace sermons, prayers, hymns, anthems, mission statements, and guest speakers that reflect the wide range of commitments and values of a Just Peace Church
- Observe Sundays such as World AIDS Day, Peace and Justice Sunday, UCC Women's Sunday, Genocide and Holocaust Sunday, Earth Day, Pride Sunday, World Peace Day, and World Communion Sunday
- Adopt inclusive and sensitive language in worship services
- Feature a diversity of cultural expressions and celebrations
- Include bulletin inserts about global ministries
- Engage in interfaith worship opportunities
- Perform baptisms and weddings for all families
- Invite all people to the communion table

Internal Practices

- Establish a justice and peace ministry, currently the Amos Project, that is accountable to the Wider Church Ministry Team, and thus to the Church Council and congregation
- Treat employees justly in terms of salary and benefits
- Invest in socially responsible funds, companies, and products
- Use environmentally responsible materials and products

- Implement practices regarding transgender people which honor the names and pronouns they prefer, as well as their choices of bathroom and sleeping facilities, both in our building and on trips

III. What are implications of becoming a Just Peace Church for Outreach Ministries and External Partnerships?

A Just Peace Church lives this identity both internally and externally. In word and in deed, a Just Peace Church engages in bold actions of public witness, proclaiming that God's *shalom* (peace and justice) is possible for this world.

Charity AND Justice. A Just Peace Church affirms that ministries of charity *and* ministries of justice are essential. They are the “two legs” that move the body of Christ forward in demonstrating God's *agape* love to the world. Ministries of charity address the immediate needs of human beings. Ministries of justice ask why those needs exist in the first place, building power through relationships to change the social systems and structures that *cause* poverty, war, violence, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, environmental destruction, disease, loneliness, and hatred or discrimination of any kind. Ministries of justice provide hope for a world in which there will one day be no need for ministries of charity, while acknowledging that ministries of charity are indispensable until that day comes. The scriptures provide many examples of ministries of charity *and* justice, and of God's call for God's people to be engaged in both.

A Just Peace Church in Action. Social change happens when people are organized around issues, creating “people power” to influence those with personal and institutional power to make needed change. A Just Peace Church does this through its justice ministries. Examples of such ministries:

- Writing letters to elected officials regarding matters of public and corporate policy
- Writing letters to the editor regarding matters of public and corporate policy
- Appearing before legislative committees, town councils, school boards, etc. regarding matters of public and corporate policy
- Engaging in acts of public solidarity and direct action with those who lack justice, such as low-wage workers; people with disabilities; members of religious, racial, and ethnic minorities; immigrants and refugees; the LGBTQI community; people

with mental illness; police officers and other first responders; and women whose equality, safety, and healthcare are threatened

- Engaging in acts of public witness and direct action on behalf of the environment
- Building public relationships with people with personal and institutional power to create positive change, such as chiefs of police who have decision-making influence and authority regarding the training of police officers; real estate developers who have influence and power to build apartment buildings for people with low-incomes and disabilities; corporate decision makers; non-profit executives; and elected public officials

How It Works. Deciding which issues to address is determined by First Church’s social justice ministry (currently the Amos Project) as it builds relationships between members of our congregation. These relationships are developed by techniques such as “one-to-ones” and listening sessions which reveal the issues that First Church members are so concerned about that they are ready to act and lead on. As opportunities to act on those issues arise, our social justice ministry brings members together to work for change, seeking through the above techniques to identify issues that have widespread support throughout the congregation. When in doubt, the ministry will seek the input of staff and Church Council leaders before proceeding with action.

Political, but Non-Partisan. Because ministries of peace and justice engage society on behalf of God’s reign of *shalom*, they can be described as “political” in the broad sense of that term. That is, they do address social issues, and social and political structures. However, such ministries are always *non-partisan* in nature. That is, they do not support any particular political party or candidate. Rather, our social justice ministry strives to bring together all First Church members, regardless of political beliefs and affiliations, who desire to make meaningful social and political change around particular problems.

Joining with Others. As vital as it is to unite members of First Church in “people power” that brings God’s *shalom* to earth, it is even more effective when our congregation joins with other congregations and institutions, adding more voices, minds, hearts, and prayers to the effort. Thus, a Just Peace Church seeks external partners to support and magnify the power and influence we apply to a social justice issue. When First Church joins with such partners, it does so not on behalf of the church’s social justice ministry only, but *as a congregation*. Ministries of peace and justice in a Just Peace Church, including their relationships with external partners, exist because of the commitment of the entire congregation. Therefore, as a Just Peace Church, we pledge to support these

partners financially and by attending meetings and providing leadership. First Church of Lombard will participate in the processes of our external partners to identify issues to act on together. When issues identified for action by external partners do not align with issues identified by First Church, we are free to not participate in those actions.

Examples of external partners:

- DuPage PADS as it seeks to build more affordable housing in our County
- Church World Service/CROP and Bread for the World as they seek to influence anti-hunger legislation
- Global, National, Conference, Association, and Cluster settings of the United Church of Christ as they work for peace and justice
- DuPage United, an “organization of organizations” that brings together synagogues, churches, mosques, and educational institutions for meaningful social change in our County
- Arise Chicago, an interfaith coalition that builds relationships between faith communities and workers to fight workplace injustice
- Individual congregations of any faith that we may desire to build relationships with and work with on specific issues

Conclusion

First Church of Lombard, UCC has a long and impressive tradition of effective public ministries in the areas of worship, music, education, children, youth, care, and charity. By declaring ourselves a Just Peace Church, we joyfully add ministries of peace and justice to that list. Not all members of First Church are actively engaged in all ministries of the church, but are nonetheless proud to belong to a church that is committed to those ministries. Likewise, not all members of First Church will be actively involved in our ministries of justice and peace, but can nonetheless rejoice that they belong to a church that seeks to follow Jesus Christ in this way.

We do not know with certainty where this Declaration will lead us. God’s future is open, and we cannot precisely predict what circumstances will arise or what bold responses

will be required of those who are called to ministries of peace and justice. We also cannot foresee exactly what forms those responses will take at First Church of Lombard. What we can be certain of is that God will be with us as the future unfolds, that God will still be calling us to these ministries, and that God will still be speaking. We pray that we will be listening with faithful ears, and trusting God and one another with eager hearts.