

Pastoral Message from the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on the Crisis in the Middle East

As we have listened to and watched the tragic developments in the Middle East these past two weeks, especially the current situation of escalating war between Israel and Lebanon, the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, on July 22-25, 2006, expresses its deep concern and prayers for the victims of this conflict on all sides (Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and others). Particularly we express our concern for the victims who have been caught in the cross-fire of indiscriminate bombing and who now suffer the growing humanitarian crises in the wake of the destruction of their homes, schools, hospitals, businesses, highways, bridges, and electric power stations. Villages are being destroyed; children and families are being torn apart and suffer.

We urge people everywhere to work for a just peace throughout the Middle East through non-violent and diplomatic means, rather than acts of war; and, we reaffirm our church's commitment to critical presence in the region through persons in mission and accompaniment ministries with partner churches and other religious organizations. We are neither pro-Palestinian nor pro-Israel; we are "pro" peace and justice for all parties and nations. We thus call upon all sides in the conflict to cease the current hostilities and to exercise restraint in their actions.

We denounce the provocative, violent actions of both Hezbollah and Israel that threaten to destabilize the Lebanese government, and thereby the stability of the entire region.

The General Board affirms the witness of our General Minister and President, The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, as she joined with fifteen other Christian leaders here in the United States in signing a letter on July 21, 2006, urging President George W. Bush to work with other world leaders "to secure an immediate cease-fire in the violent conflict raging between Hezbollah and Israel" and calling upon President Bush to apply his leadership and the full weight of the United States, acting in concert with the international community, "to launch an intensive diplomatic initiative for the cessation of hostilities."

A recent statement by the National Council of Churches of Christ USA and Church World Service addressing the current crisis in the Middle East began with the biblical image of Jesus "as he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace.'" (Luke 19:41-42a, NRSV)

Today, we hear Jesus' lament in the crisis of the Israelis, Lebanese, and Palestinians; Christians, Jews and Muslims; and others whose lives are threatened by the escalating violence and war. Jesus' tears wash across the landscape of the Middle East today, and his words echo in the hearts of Christians and peoples everywhere: "let us embrace those things that make for peace."

The Rev. William Lee, Moderator,
on behalf of the General Board
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
July 24, 2006