

Excerpt from Alan Claassen's Sermon, "What's Going on?" September 20, 2015

The History of Just Peace in the United Church of Christ.

Every two years, General Synod brings together thousands of members of the United Church of Christ for formal church witness, inspirational worship, and fellowship with friends.

In June 2015, thousands from across the country, and abroad, gathered for General Synod 30 in Cleveland, Ohio – the birthplace of the United Church of Christ.

Together, the delegates discerned resolutions of social justice and church structure function and they worshipped each day to lift up the Still-speaking God.

The resolutions that came before the delegates this year included:

- **Dismantling Discriminatory Systems of Mass Incarceration in the United States**
- **A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions Toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**
- **Transition from Fossil Fuels to Renewable Energy**
- **Developing Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged Congregations for Mental Health**

At this year's General Synod, the United Church affirmed the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the resolution that was passed in 1985 at the 15th General Synod in Ames, Iowa, that articulated for the first time a United Church of Christ position on war and peace as distinct from other historic Christian approaches, namely the theories and practices of Crusade, Pacifism, and Just War, namely Just Peace

The Just Peace Pronouncement of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Synod has at its core a call to alleviate systemic injustice of all kinds using non-violence, challenging us to explore the intersections between economic and social justice peace, offering to the world the prophetic message, grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus.

In preparing for this sermon I learned something wonderful about the history of the Just Peace Pronouncement in 1985 and re-affirmed in 2015.

The history of the Just Peace movement within the United Church of Christ began in 1981 when at the 13th General Synod, a youth delegate brought a resolution to General Synod calling on the UCC to become a “peace church.”

A youth delegate. One person taking a stand in a community willing to listen.

This resolution passed, but it became clear that further study was needed throughout the life of the church to define what a UCC approach to war and peace would be.

First the inspiration that wells up from the human heart and soul, which is where God resides and then the details.

Just Peace was defined in the pronouncement as the “interrelation of

friendship, justice, and common security from violence” and was grounded – in the biblical concepts of **covenant** and **shalom**.

Just Peace offered a holistic view of working at the intersection of peace and justice, acknowledging the connections between violence and systemic issues like environmental degradation, racism, economic disparity, homophobia, and the loss of civil and human rights.

Speaking from the hope in the Gospel that God’s peace is a gift promised for all, the pronouncement offered with prophetic conviction the vision that “war can and must be eliminated” and the shared hope that “peace is possible.”

In preparing for this sermon I came across something else that provided me with some reassurance, some comfort, some courage in light of this frustration of wondering, “What is going on?”

I found these words that come from the Just Peace Handbook written for this 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Just Peace Resolution.

**“Sustain** yourself amidst struggle.

At some point, you may hit an emotional and spiritual wall, either individually or as a group. The issues will seem too big. It will seem like conversations need to be

repeated over and over.

Work may come to a standstill or the group may meet resistance in the church or elsewhere. Group members may feel anxious or maybe even embarrassed about what seems like a lack of progress. They may feel angry, sad, or powerless at this moment. As a group or individually, you may wonder if this is the time to quit or quietly fade away.

Anyone who has been involved with social justice work for any length of time has an experience like this at one time or another. It's a normal and natural result of hard work and honest assessment.

However, there's another side to this, too. These feelings often come to us right before a significant breakthrough. These moments can be an invitation from the Spirit to go deeper.”

A couple of years ago this congregation had a planning retreat that designated four themes you wanted to focus on; Earth Care, Worship, Fellowship, and Peace. The recent resolution that laid out a process on how this congregation will make decisions presented by Garen and Ellen was one way of living into a Peace Church.

There is much more to be done.

And we are called to live within our means and do what we can do at this time, realizing that the search process for a new minister, and the work of congregational assessment that happens during the interim time,

wasn't in the plans a couple of years ago.

But maybe there, just maybe, there is something in this time that invites us to go deeper.

To look at something very strange, and see in it a gift of sustenance from God.

What is it?

What's going on?