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## The Call



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# Bishop's Perspective

By Ray W. Chamberlain Jr.

## My opinion about war? Remember our principles

My dear sisters and brothers of the Holston Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the powerful name of our resurrected Lord and Savior.

This morning as I drank my coffee, I observed a territorial dispute between a bluebird and sparrow. The bluebird took possession of the feeder built by my son. We place seed in the feeder for all birds that visit our deck. There was enough for all, yet the sparrow was denied seed by the more powerful bluebird.

People often ask for my opinion on the pending war. I have an opinion birthed in struggle with the paradoxes inherent in our current war debate. But far more important than my perspective are the principles hammered out by the United Methodist Church in an attempt to reflect Biblical teachings.

Some ask, "What does the Bible say to us about war – this war?" The answer rests on our interpretation of Scriptures. I often hear, "I like Billy Graham because he simply preaches the Bible." Billy Graham, like the rest of us, interprets the Bible. In the absence of interpretation, the preacher would only read passages from the Bible and sit down. Even then, the selected passages would provide opportunity to reinforce one's own bias.

To assist us in interpretation of Scripture, we turn to the church for its collective wisdom developed over the centuries. The United Methodist Church has shaped these teachings in language reflective of Wesleyan theology. On war and peace we say:

*"We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as a usual instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them ..."* (§165.C, The Book of Discipline)

The United Methodist position troubles people on both sides of this issue. Some are disturbed by the statement that "war is incompatible with the teachings ... of Christ." They conclude that the United Methodist Church condemns and rejects all war. Others are offended by an apparent loophole which suggests that we "reject war as the usual instrument," but we may in

unusual circumstances go to war.

Additionally, there is conflict between people who feel we are taking seriously – and those who believe we are not taking seriously – the admonition that it is our moral duty to "resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises."

There is space for debate on each side of this issue. But it is crucial that we apply the church's social principles to our international disputes and call to arms. If we are not careful, we will divert the debate and dialogue about war to personal attacks over our differences.

I remind you of some additional teachings of the church:

*"God's world is one world ... The enforced unity of humanity ... presents the church as well as all people with problems that will not wait for answer: injustice, war, exploitation, privilege, population, international ecological crisis, proliferation of arsenals of nuclear weapons ... This generation must find viable answers to these and other related questions if humanity is to continue on this earth."* (§165, The Book of Discipline)

Discussion of war with Iraq should be conducted in the larger context of God's vision for creation and humankind. This is a bigger cause than doves vs. hawks, conservatives vs. liberals, or true Christians vs. unfaithful Christians. If we as Christians cannot have healthy debate rooted in respect for each other – if we cannot reconcile our own conflicts – how in the world can we expect resolution among nations? How do we model for the world a commitment to reconciliation in our Christian disagreements over issues of war, doctrine, and sexuality?

As we struggle with our role as a nation, I offer this insight from the church:

*"Some nations possess more military and economic power than do others. Upon the powerful rests the responsibility to exercise their wealth and influence with restraint ... We urge the major political powers to use their non-violent power to maximize the political, social, and economic self-determination of other nations rather than to further their own special interests."* (§165.B, The Book of Discipline)

I wish the bluebird would live by these words. And us, too. ■

## How to submit resolutions & petitions

By James Green

A primer on submitting resolutions and petitions to the Holston Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska, N.C., in June 2003, or General Conference at Pittsburgh in April 2004:

● A resolution is a statement to effect change in policies, procedures, or practices of an annual conference. A resolution may address an issue that the author(s) deem to be important. Resolutions should contain both rationale and the desired result. A resolution should focus on one issue or desired change.

Resolutions should be addressed to Conference Secretary Raymon White, P.O. Box 32939, Knoxville, TN 37930. Resolutions received by the conference secretary by April 7, 2003, can be included in the pre-conference mailing.

● A petition is a statement written to effect change in the policies, procedures, or practices of the United Methodist Church.

A petition to the 2004 session of the General Conference should state both rationale and desired result. Holston Conference Standing Rule 22 states that petitions shall arrive in the office of the chair of the Petitions Committee 60 days before the opening session of Annual Conference, which commences June 8, 2003. Petitions should be addressed to Petitions Committee Chair James R. Green, P.O. Box 32939, Knoxville, TN 37930. The deadline is April 7, 2003.

● Persons or groups submitting petitions to the 2004 General Conference are encouraged to read paragraph 507 in the "2000 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church." Persons or groups do not need to submit petitions to the Annual Conference before the petitions go to General Conference. Petitions can be sent directly to Gary W. Graves, Petitions Secretary, United Methodist General Conference, 302 N. Lafayette St., Beaver Dam, KY 42320. Three hard copies are required. Petitions may also be sent to Graves by fax at (270) 274-4590 or by e-mail at [petitions@umpublishing.org](mailto:petitions@umpublishing.org). The deadline is Nov. 29, 2003.

● Petitions receive equal consideration by General Conference regardless if they are first submitted to the Annual Conference. A petition submitted through the Annual Conference – and upon which the Annual Conference votes non-concurrence – may still be sent by the petitioner(s) to General Conference as stated above. A petition upon which the Annual Conference votes concurrence will automatically be sent to General Conference. ■