



## **A pastoral letter to congregations in a time of global turmoil from the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board**

We live in troubled times. In the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, and the threat of new terror attacks, many feel anxious and afraid. Our congregations and communities have been directly impacted by the war on terror, with the deaths of nearly 1,000 U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq and injury to additional thousands. Worldwide, there are serious conflicts in 19 areas. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently summarized the global situation this way: "The world is a really messy place. I have not seen it this bad ever since my association with the U.N."

We acknowledge that failures of both the church and of national policy have contributed to this current global disorder. The church has not consistently been the world's salt and light, nor has it always extended God's grace, healing and hope. In the war on terror, our nation has increasingly acted as an imperial power, eschewing the counsel and concerns of other countries.

In this time of turmoil, we call upon the members of Mennonite Church USA to:

**Embrace our baptism.** In our baptism we identify fully with Jesus Christ. We are *united* with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4), *committed* to follow him daily in life (Mark 10:38-44) and *joined* with his body -- the church -- which transcends national borders, and bridges divisions of class, gender and race (Gal. 3:27-28). This global body is God's new creation, which witnesses to God's mighty power to reconcile and, as Christ's ambassadors, has been given the ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:16-21).

**Remember our confession.** The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* offers helpful guidance for this time: "Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance even in the face of violence and warfare. . . . beginning in the church, we witness to all people that violence is not the will of God. We witness against all forms of violence, including war among nations, hostility among races and classes, abuse of children and women, violence between men and women, abortion, and capital punishment" (Article 22).

**Acknowledge our national citizenship.** While our primary identity is rooted in Christ and the church, we cannot escape the fact that we are citizens of the world's dominant economic and military power. Given this context, our sisters and brothers around the world have asked us to exercise our right and privilege to speak out on their behalf. In the past 15 months, our nation has waged war against Iraq and overthrown its government. But war has failed to create stability and security. Thousands of innocent Iraqis have been killed in the war and its aftermath and Iraqi prisoners have been abused, humiliated and killed. In response, an insurgency movement daily targets foreigners and Iraqi officials, doctors and others thought to be cooperating with the U.S.-led coalition. As the transition of governmental authority takes place in the coming weeks, Iraqis face even greater uncertainty.

**Pray and act together.** War and peace are not partisan issues. As the Executive Board, we commit ourselves to and call the church to a time of repentance, prayer and action in the spirit of II Chron. 7:14, Hab. 3:2 and Luke 18:9-14. As we identify with the God of peace, love and compassion, we encourage prayer for all who have been touched by violence -- friends and foes (Matt. 5:43-48). Specifically, we invite the church to pray for Iraq and especially to remember its one million Christians. We encourage church-to-church visits as this becomes possible, and urge generous support for the efforts of Christian Peacemaker Teams and Mennonite Central Committee in Iraq. We also urge pastoral care for those in our congregations and communities who have been directly affected by the war in Iraq. Finally, we invite congregations, as Christ's ambassadors, to pray for and call upon the U.S. government to "move toward justice, peace and compassion for all people" (Article 23, *Confession of Faith*).

Mennonite Church USA Executive Board

Meeting at Harrisonburg, Virginia, June 26, 2004, [www.MennoniteUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org); [info@MennoniteUSA.org](mailto:info@MennoniteUSA.org)