

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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MFSA Board Speaks Out Against War and Commits to Strengthen and Expand MFSA Witness Within the UMC

Meeting in Chicago, Illinois from April 18-21, 2002, the National Board of Directors of the Methodist Federation for Social Action called for an end to U.S. military action in Afghanistan and for a just, sustainable and secure peace for the peoples of the Middle East.

"We believe the Palestinian people have the right to live in freedom and peace, in a nation unoccupied by an oppressive, foreign, military force and in Israel's right to live within secure borders," said a statement released by the Board.

The Board expressed its support for "Palestinians and Israelis who are pursuing the goal of a Palestinian state and an end to Israeli-Palestinian conflict through non-violent resistance." The Board also affirmed the current stance of the UMC in the Book of Discipline 2000 which calls for a stop to "military assistance and arms exports to the region." (Page 758).

The Board spent long hours in dialogue about the world situation including a presentation by Bishop C. Joseph Sprague and a working session with the Rev. Martin Deppe, a retired clergy member of the Northern Illinois Conference connected with the Chicago Peace Museum.

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MFSA: An Independent Voice for Justice in the UMC

Why join MFSA? This was the question posed to members of the national board of directors of MFSA at our recent meeting in Chicago. It's a valid question, particularly considering the fact that the board was about to take a vote on launching a membership campaign to double MFSA's membership.

Why join MFSA? The answers came quickly.

MFSA:

- *is action-oriented;*
- *offers fellowship with other justice-seeking Christians;*
- *is deeply concerned with the future of the church;*
- *is led by the Holy Spirit in following Christ;*
- *deals with justice issues as interrelated;*
- *boldly and unapologetically lives out an understanding of the merciful, inclusive love of Christ;*
- *is faithful to our Wesleyan heritage of openness and of combining spirituality and social action;*
- *isn't afraid to ask tough questions;*
- *supports the justice work of the UMC's national boards and agencies;*
- *is one of the few voices in the UMC today exposing the agenda and actions of the "religious right" and its impact on the UMC; and*
- *provides an alternative, progressive voice within the church.*

Georgia Harkness and other faculty members at Garrett Theological Seminary said it well some 50 years ago. In an "Open Letter" they state:

The Methodist Federation for Social Action has been an unofficial agency within the Church which for nearly fifty years has attempted to direct the attention of church people to the relevance of the Christian faith to current social problems. Although unofficial by its own choice, it has been regarded as a recognized and important agency of the church, speaking only for its members but nevertheless belonging to the Church and serving it in important ways....

Georgia Harkness and her colleagues go on to say that they are all members of the Federation and that "they commend it to others for their consideration and support."

Fifty years later, MFSA continues to serve the church in important ways. If you are not a member of MFSA, please consider joining. If you are already a member of MFSA, please invite others to join. ❖

Photo by John Goodwin (c)



Bishop C. Joseph Sprague and the Rev. Martin Deppe speak to the MFSA board about war and peace

Backing Up: Looking at the "US War on Terrorism" Through a Just War Lens

by Bob Campbell

Religious and secular theorists have different lists of just war principles – those criteria that must be met in order to fight a “morally justified” war. Here are nine:

1. War must be waged by a legitimate authority.
2. The ultimate goal of a just war must be to restore peace.
3. A just war must have a just cause, such as defense against attack or retaliation for an attack.
4. On balance, more good must be done than harm inflicted.
5. The war must have a reasonable chance of success.
6. A just war can only be waged after all peaceful options are exhausted.
7. The war must be fought using proportionality – violence inflicted must be proportional to the injury suffered.
8. The weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Civilians are never legitimate targets of war.
9. The war must be fought with “right intention,” that is, not to dominate others, exact disproportionate vengeance, or take resources.

The current US “war on terrorism” does not satisfy many of these principles. If we continue on our current path, it will become harder and harder to justify our actions. Let’s look more closely at where we are falling short.

The United States clearly meets the first three criteria as listed above. We have been the victims of an horrific attack. But that does not allow us to ignore the remaining principles. We can disagree about whether more good than harm is being done (# 4), which is often impossible to determine except in hindsight. Also, the determination of the reasonableness of our success (#5) depends on how we define our objectives. Are we in fact seeking to defeat “every terrorist group of global reach,” as stated by President Bush in a speech on September 20,

2001? If so, we are embarking on a protracted and impossible conflict, which will grow without limit.

I am especially concerned that the United States seems to have violated the last four criteria listed here. Each of these principles is an important component of waging a just war. To ignore even one of these is to begin a long slide toward becoming a nation not of law, but of unjustified and unilateral emotional response.

The time between the attacks on September 11 and our nation’s response seemed to go on forever. I was angry, and I felt a need for us to do something – and so did everyone else. In retrospect, however, we should have waited even longer before beginning military action. We didn’t exhaust all peaceful options (#6) – we barely considered them. The American people

...we must curtail the increasing escalation of violence...

wanted revenge, and so we pushed headlong into a violent response. Instead of working through the World Court of Justice or the United Nations, we pulled together some of our allies and attacked.

And when we attacked, we attacked without thought of proportionality (#7). We began with high-altitude bombing runs and quickly moved to ground-directed bombings against enemy forces. An Afghanistan already devastated from years of conflict and Taliban rule was thrown once again into the terror of all-out war in our heated desire to chase down Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

Comparing violence is at best difficult. Body counts and injury reports don’t serve us well, because they are faceless and nameless. When we see thousands of people who have become homeless due to our efforts, is that enough? Or will we kill until we have evidence that bin Laden himself is dead? And will even that satisfy our thirst for revenge? Our President has said that the use of nuclear weapons is not out of the question. Is that possi-

bility in any way a proportional use of force? Cooler heads must prevail; we must curtail the increasing escalation of violence.

The most disturbing violation of just war criteria for many Americans has been the high number of civilian casualties. War always puts some civilians in harm’s way, and they are considered “collateral damage.” But when the civilians killed begin to number in the hundreds, I must suggest that we are not really adhering to the principle that the weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants (#8). The burden is on the attacker to see that civilians are left unharmed.

Last, and most difficult, is the rule that war must be fought with “right intention” (#9). The President has brought this into question by widening the scope of the war to many other countries who were not participants in the September 11th attacks. Has our war effort broadened to include every country with which we disagree? And are some of them targets for the US because they may threaten either our position of strength in the world or our access to oil in the future? If so, this cannot be interpreted as “right intention.”

Our intentions become clearer as the war effort continues in a different direction, helping the Administration to justify additional military aid (to Colombia, for instance, where we are seeking to protect oil resources) and training (both in Colombia and the Philippines, which is a strategic location for us in the Pacific).

Given our failure to meet several of the criteria for just war, we must stop, regroup, and re-think our future actions. It is not too late to revise our strategies so that more civilians are not killed, more children are not made homeless, and more young people around the world do not firm up the opinion that we are the “Great Satan,” acting indiscriminately, violently, unilaterally, and unjustly. This is an opportunity for the US to strengthen the UN, the World Court of Justice, and our desired reputation as a moral player on the international stage. Let’s back up now, so that real justice may move forward. ❖

Bob Campbell is a pastor in the Northern Illinois Conference and a member of MFSA's national board of directors.

CHAPTER NEWS

MFSA chapters throughout the country will be meeting at Annual Conference sessions during these next few months. The range of speakers and topics points to the broad range of justice issues upon which MFSA takes action. A sample of some of the events planned follows.

The West Ohio MFSA Chapter will hear the Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell speak on the topic of **"Racism and Homophobia: Different, Yet Similar"** when they gather for their June 7th luncheon.

Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society will be the keynote speaker for the Virginia Chapter of MFSA on June 18th.

"The Relevance of the Church in an Age of Terrorism" will be the topic of John Swomley, Professor Emeritus, St. Paul School of Theology at the Iowa MFSA Chapter Annual Banquet.

Bishop Melvin Talbert will speak to the New England Conference MFSA Chapter focusing on the impact that the "religious right" is having on our denomination.

The June 7th Annual Conference Luncheon of the Northern Illinois Conference MFSA Chapter will focus on peace in the Middle East with speaker Cindy Levitt of **"Jewish Unity for a Just Peace."**

At the California-Nevada Annual Conference MFSA dinner, Mary Gaddis will speak on **"Eye Witness to Terror: U.S. Links to Colombian Death Squads."** Mary recently traveled to Colombia with a Witness For Peace/Global Exchange labor delegation.

Several MFSA Chapters will be holding candlelight vigils for peace in Palestine and Israel. They will be responding to an initiative of the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron **"Light A Candle in the Dark: A Call for Christians to Pray, Preach and Pester for Peace."** To see a full copy of the suggested actions related to this initiative go to the Action and Advocacy section of the MFSA web page and click on Action Alerts. www.mfsaweb.org



Chuck Smith and Mark Harvey of the Missouri East MFSA Chapter participate in a Palestinian peace rally.

MFSA BOARD

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Recommitting themselves to the mission of MFSA as an independent, progressive voice within the church and society, Board members launched a campaign to increase MFSA membership by 2002 members in 2002. Celebrating the addition of the Desert Southwest Chapter to the MFSA network, the Board also affirmed organizing work that is going on in the Yellowstone and Oklahoma Annual Conferences.

New leadership of the Board was elected with the Rev. Joe Agne of New York and the Rev. Marcia Hauer of Oregon elected as the new Co-Presidents.

On Saturday evening, April 20th, MFSA honored the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) at its annual Ball Awards Banquet. The Ball Award, named after social justice champions Lee and Mae Ball, was awarded to Stephanie Anna Hixon and Cecelia M. Long, both recent members of the COSROW General Secretariat. Kiyoo Fuji accepted the award on their behalf and read a statement written by Hixon and Long who could not be present.

Saying they were "deeply moved and honored to be recipients" of the award, Hixon and Long said that "each of us, no matter where we are in the life and ministry of the church, is called to stay the course, speak the truth, and continue the efforts for the full and equal responsibility and participation of women in every aspect of

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The UMC and Conscientious Objectors

The following is found in the Social Principles in the 2000 UMC Book of Resolutions on page 61:

We reject national policies of enforced military service as incompatible with the gospel. We acknowledge the agonizing tension created by the demand for military service by national governments. We urge all young adults to seek the counsel of the Church as they reach a conscientious decision concerning the nature of their responsibility as citizens. Pastors are called upon to be available for counseling with all young adults who face conscription, including those who conscientiously refuse to cooperate with a system of conscription.

The General Board of Church and Society makes available a system of filling out a card as a Conscientious Objector to be kept on file by the board. In doing, this a young person registers his/her beliefs concerning war. Should conscription in the US once again become mandatory, this file will establish a record of the person's stance. Contact Janet Horman in the Peace with Justice Program at 202-488-5647 for more information.

The Center on Conscience and War is also a valuable resource. Located in Washington DC, the center has spent decades seeking to extend and defend the rights of conscientious objectors. They work to end peace-time conscription as well. Phone and web address information for the center is as follows: 202- 483-2220 or www.nisbco.org. ♦

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MFSA BOARD
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the life and mission of the Church." Several former and current members of COSROW lifted up the significant work of Hixon and Long over the past decade as well as the vital role COSROW plays within the denomination.

Additional actions taken by the board included:

- celebrating the recent release of the 100th former death row prisoner, Ray Krone of Arizona, and encouraging local MFSA Chapters and the UMC at large to continue to work toward abolition of the

Photo by John Goodwin (c)



Ms. Koyo Fuji accepts the Lee and Mae Ball Award on behalf of COSROW and Stephanie Hixon and Cecelia Long

death penalty including working for a death penalty moratorium as a step toward abolition.

- stating that MFSA continues to abhor racism in all its forms including the evil of racial profiling whether it involves motorists on our nationals' highways, young people in urban setting, immigrant workers or Middle Eastern people unjustly detained in the wake of the tragedies of September 11.

The Board also expressed its support for the vital work of Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries and of the faithful work of the General Board of Church of Society. ❖

2002 NEW MEMBERS IN 2002!!

BECOME PART OF MFSA: AN EXCITING MOVEMENT AT THE HEART OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH!

Are you a member of MFSA? If not, now is the time to join! Working primarily through the ministries of the United Methodist Church, MFSA supports and augments peace and justice ministries at the local, conference and national levels. As an independent organization, we call our church to expand its understanding and embodiment of the radical call of the gospel to be the inclusive, justice-seeking, risk-taking Body of Christ.

MFSA has chapters in annual conferences throughout the country. Becoming a member of MFSA means you will be joining other activists who care about justice issues and actively work to make a difference.

At the annual conference level, chapters publish newsletters, work cooperatively with Boards of Church and Society and other conference agencies, introduce legislation at annual conference sessions, sponsor seminars and hold other events to inform, educate and motivate people to take action for justice. **JOIN MFSA!**

To join MFSA send the following form to the national office (address just below):

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Ann Conf: _____

Annual National Membership dues are \$35/individual, \$53/family and \$20 or less/low income and student. No one is denied membership due to inability to pay. If you are in a conference with a local chapter you will receive information from the chapter soon.



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