

# **An Overview of the UCC Just Peace Church Program**

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Primary Source- **A Just Peace Church** Susan Thistlewaite ed. New York: United Church Press 1986

**Just Peace** This is our understanding of God's will for human kind. It is based on the concept of peace expressed by the Hebrew work shalom as it is used biblically. The Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad defines shalom not as some inner, personal, pietistic possession, but as a communal well being in which God's creation is justly ordered. Shalom is a state of existence in which all aspects of God's creation play their individual roles harmoniously for the good of the whole.

Just Peace is the real peace which Jesus referred to when he approached the great city Jerusalem. There on the hillside as he looked down at the city, seeing its injustices, hunger, corruption, violence and the vying for power he wept and said "If only today you knew the things which make for peace." Peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of just social relations.

**Just Peace Church** A Just Peace Church is an individual church, association, conference, or denomination (like the United Church of Christ) which makes an intentional, public commitment to work to create "Just Peace" in the lives of its members, internal structure, and the world. It is a church committed to social action, and to creating right relationships in the world. The Just Peace Church is a covenantal community that recognizes its calling and accepts the risks of being faithful. It seeks reconciliation within the world and builds human community despite the determination of some to remain divided. It affirms the rich diversity of patterns of political and economic relationships that reflect a shared vision of the intended wholeness of God's creation. It offers hope to all and nurtures those who lack the discipline of the trust in God's promise of peace and justice. It works unceasingly to expand the world's vision of peace and justice.

## **History**

In the early 1981, based on the "traditional stand of the UCC which called its members to be peacemakers and to work diligently for justice, human rights and peace within with family to nation's" the 13<sup>th</sup> General Synod voted to "become a peace church."

They then asked the Peace Theology development Team for an exploration of what it would mean for the United Church of Christ practically and theologically. Thistlewaite's book and the idea of a "Just Peace Church" is the result of three years of intense work designed to explore all aspects of this idea.

In 1985, the Fifteenth General Synod, meeting in Ames, Iowa, passed a pronouncement "Affirming the United Church of Christ to be a Just Peace Church." They accepted the work of the team and our denominations historic commitments to peace and justice as the basis for understanding what it means to be a Just Peace Church.

Just Peace as I understand it is an organic concept, growing and changing, but always touching back to the concept of shalom, Jesus' call to be peacemakers, and our imperative to create a world of peace and justice for all of God's people.

**Is becoming a Just Peace Church important today?**

It is as relevant today as it was in the 1980's because we have yet to create that world! Most congregations undergo an intensive study process and come up with a Just Peace Church Statement. It may include ideas like the ones expressed in this model statement

**Model Statement**

Because we believe in God's love for all of God's people, and in God's call for shalom, (wholeness and right relationship with all of creation) expressed in the Old and New Testaments and revealed in the Jesus:

We believe in justice and right relationships for all of God's people. We welcome everyone to our church community, and will work actively in the world against racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and the other ways in which people are oppressed.

We believe that economic injustice must end and we must work together to create a world in which none are exploited and all have a home, enough to eat, access to medical care and meaningful work.

We believe that violence, including war, is not the way to resolve personal, local, national or international conflicts.

We believe in the concept of shalom for all of creation, and support protecting and preserving the natural world.

We believe it is our responsibility as Christians to continue to challenge our leaders to act justly and to follow Christ's teachings. We are committed to making our voices heard, and to helping those who have traditionally been silenced to be heard into speech.

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It is important to make a statement to be a Just Peace Church because then everyone will know what you stand for! Each church will come up with your own ideas, and write your own Just Peace Statement! I hope these ideas have been helpful. Send your statement to the National UCC to get listed as a Just Peace Church.