

***Peace, Justice, and Sanctuary Affirmation***  
***First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, California***  
***December 18, 2002***

Members and friends of the First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto affirm that we are an inclusive people of faith, working for peace with justice. We have no faith that violence can ever, in the long run, produce peace. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate."

We, the Session (or governing body) of First Presbyterian Church, believe that in the case of relations between the United States and Iraq, all avenues to peace have not been traveled. It follows that we are strongly opposed to a war with Iraq and, further, that we are called to reaffirm our congregation's longstanding commitment to offer *sanctuary*, or sacred refuge, to people in need, including those who may in the coming months re-examine commitments to military forces in the light of the call of conscience.

We recognize that many thoughtful people cannot fully endorse all of the statements we make below. Members and friends of our own congregation embrace diverse views about the circumstances that might justify the use of force. Even as we go forward to shoulder responsibilities in the world, as we must if we hope to follow Jesus, we hold all children of God in our hearts with love and respect.

**Our faith reminds us that:**

- Jesus taught us, saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God";
- The gospel of Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to work nonviolently for good; even when he was being arrested, Jesus insisted that there be no violence, and he healed the wounded soldier;
- Our denomination has urged us to oppose both "a precipitate U.S. attack on Iraq" and "the Bush administration's new doctrine of pre-emptive military action";
- The Iraqi people are members with us in the family of God; in harming them we harm ourselves;

**In the light of recent history:**

- We acknowledge our nation's grief and fear in light of the attack on September 11, 2001;
- We acknowledge the need, in our country and around the world, to eliminate the causes of terrorism and protect people against it;
- We acknowledge the danger presented to all people by the development of weapons of mass destruction in any country;

**In our nation and the world at this crucial moment:**

- Regime change in the sovereign nation of Iraq is the stated policy of the administration of President Bush, as are the legitimacy of pre-emptive strikes, "counter-proliferation," and the use of nuclear weapons;

- Sanctions against Iraq have already resulted in the deaths of one million Iraqis, according to UNICEF and the World Health Organization, as well as the destruction of basic infrastructure needed to sustain life;
- U.N. arms inspectors are currently at work in Iraq searching for evidence of existence or manufacture of weapons of mass destruction;
- The U.N. Security Council warned in its resolution 1441 of November 8, 2002 that Iraq may face "serious consequences" should it fail to cooperate fully with UNMOVIC (The United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission), but did *not* give the United States permission to launch a unilateral attack;
- President Bush has stated that he is willing to attack Iraq even without authorization from the U.N.;

### **We are gravely concerned that:**

- A war on Iraq could cost the lives of tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians and thousands of U.S. citizens; given the absence of the draft, these U.S. citizens would likely be drawn primarily from poor communities and communities of color;
- A war on Iraq could destroy land and infrastructure and create environmental disaster; in particular, it could leave behind land mines, unexploded mortar, and radioactivity, taking additional lives, often the lives of children, long after the war has ceased;
- A war on Iraq could destabilize the Middle East, fuel further terrorism, and might even result in the use of weapons of mass destruction, the very outcome we say we are trying to prevent;
- What we are calling a "pre-emptive" strike against Iraq could also be described as military aggression on the part of the United States;
- The threat of terrorism is not simply or primarily a military problem requiring a military solution, but a complicated problem that requires a multifaceted solution;

### **Therefore, we call on our leaders**

- To support fully and in good faith the U.N. weapons inspection process and give it time to work;
- To reject unilateral military action against Iraq or any other country and to reject as well the idea that the use of violence increases security;
- To rescind the new pre-emptive strike policy and immediately halt threats of the use of nuclear weapons;
- To terminate sanctions against Iraq that affect mainly civilians;
- To use nonviolent methods to work for economic and social justice for all people;

### **at the same time as we pray**

- for the people of Iraq,
- for the safety of those who decide that they have the responsibility or obligation to participate in this or other wars,
- for a world in which "[people] shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."