

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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WNC Congregation Asks President to Send Food, Not Bombs, to <焯>Iraq

ASHEVILLE—As U.S. military intervention in Iraq looms near, a small Christian congregation in Asheville added its voice to the growing chorus of American people of faith imploring their government not to wage war on the people of Iraq.

Sunday night about 30 members of the Circle of Mercy, an ecumenical congregation rooted in the Baptist and Congregational traditions, gathered for their weekly worship. In the center of the circle, on the table where the Communion was about to be served, four young children from the congregation filled small Ziploc bags with rice. Earlier the children had colored in the letters of a pre-printed note that read:

Dear President Bush,

Please send this rice to the people of Iraq. Do not attack them. "If your enemies are hungry, feed them."
—*Romans 12:20*.

The members of the Circle of Mercy wrote their own messages on the notes, signed them, slipped the notes into the bags of rice, and put the bags into envelopes addressed to the White House.

The Circle of Mercy is one of many faith communities in Western North Carolina and across the nation whose members are speaking out, individually and as a congregation, against the headlong rush to war. Ten members of the Circle of Mercy attended last week's demonstration in Washington opposing war with Iraq.

A member of the congregation's three-person pastoral team, the Rev. Ken Sehested, will go to Iraq in February as part of a peacemaking delegation sponsored by Voices in the Wilderness. Sehested, the founder and former director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, traveled to Iraq on a similar mission in 2000.

The Circle of Mercy also asked its members to join in a national day of fasting and prayer on Monday, Jan. 27—the day the chief weapons inspector in Iraq, Hans Blix, makes his report to the UN Security Council, and the day before the State of the Union message.

The National Council of Churches issued a statement "calling on all people of faith to observe Monday, Jan. 27, as a national day of prayer and fasting for a peaceful resolution of the Iraq crisis." The National Council of Churches, founded in 1950, comprises 36 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox member denominations that include more than 50 million people in 140,000 local congregations across the nation.

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