

This statement was unanimously approved by the Circle of Mercy Congregation in a called business meeting on Sunday, 25 February 2007.

We Say NO **A Christian statement in opposition to war with Iran**

Circle of Mercy Congregation, Asheville, NC (USA)

Lent 2007

*. . . they are a law unto themselves and promote their own honor.
Their own strength is their god.*
—Habakkuk 1:7b, 11c

Despite assurances to the contrary from the U.S. Administration, we believe our nation's leaders may be seriously calculating the benefits and risks of attacking Iran. Our reading of this moment in history, in light of our commitments as citizens and our convictions as followers of Jesus, impels us to oppose such a move.

We fear that our political leadership—led by the Administration with the complicity of Congress—is pushing us to the brink of moral, financial, ecological and diplomatic bankruptcy.

As with the ancient empire described in the Prophet Habakkuk's oracle, our government is setting its "national interests" above international norms of justice, usurping all authority to itself. With an escalating military budget—already larger than those of all other nations combined—we seem to have established our own destructive threat as the source of national glory and honor.

*Pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment.
Their eyes swell out with fatness, their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.
They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth.*
—Psalm 73:6-9

It is not our habit to engage in partisanship on any political party's agenda. We believe in the separation of church and state. But not in the separation of values from public policy.

In the Reformed legacy of the Christian community (toward which some in our congregation lean) there is a tradition of invoking a status confessionis, of declaring that some moments in history require the church to refuse neutrality and abandon silence. And in the Anabaptist tradition (toward which others of us lean), Jesus' insistence on loving enemies precludes the willingness to kill them.

Not only are these religious convictions suffering scandal; so, too, are the core values of this Republic's founding. It was Thomas Jefferson, in 1807, who asserted, "The spirit of this country is totally adverse to a large military force." Now, with the Administration's 2002 "National Security Strategy" document, the U.S. claims (for the first time) justification for waging preemptive war. This policy undermines our democratic traditions, any and every theory of when war is "just," and the very foundation of international law itself. The contradiction is staggering.

Accordingly, should the U.S. preemptively attack Iran, we shall vigorously protest. For some of us, this commitment includes the willingness to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience.

In the same way, we also pledge vigorous support for any leaders willing to consider Iran's security concerns and national interests alongside those of the United States. Competition in belligerent behavior carries catastrophic risks. The only enduring security is mutual security.

Another way is possible. Waging peace will require at least as much commitment—as much courage, pride, honor and ingenuity—as the pursuit of war.

We say no to war against Iran. It is both a contradiction to the Way of the Cross and a defamation of national honor. We say yes to the strategies of multilateral diplomacy and other nonviolent initiatives. We invite other Christians, other people of faith, and other people of conscience to deliberate these convictions and consider similar commitments.

Postscript

*You have sown much and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough;
you drink, but you never have your fill; you put the wages you earn in a bag full of holes.*
—Haggai 1:6

We make this statement in the midst of Lent, the Christian season leading up to Easter. The traditional emphases of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving, all of which focus the mind and heart on the way gluttony corrupts our personal and common life. Appetites have a way of overwhelming wisdom. Righteousness is pursued by a commitment to clarifying disciplines: prayer, to calm the heart's fretfulness; fasting, to purge the body's toxic buildup; almsgiving, to recall God's bias on behalf of those denied access to the earth's bountiful table of provision.

Sisters and brothers, especially in the household of faith: the Apostle Paul's instruction—overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21b)—is both a spiritual truth and the foundation for politically realistic strategies to transform conflict. The Way of the Cross leads home.

The following media release was distributed following adoption of the We Say No statement.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday 26 February 2007

CONGREGATION SPEAKS OUT AGAINST PREEMPTIVE WAR ON IRAN

ASHEVILLE, N.C.—In a called business meeting Sunday, Circle of Mercy Congregation voted unanimously to endorse a statement opposing a preemptive U.S. military strike against Iran.

The statement, beginning with a citation from the prophet Habakkuk (“ . . . they are a law unto themselves and promote their own honor. Their strength is their god.”), warns that the nation's leaders, “despite recent assurances to the contrary . . . may be seriously calculating” such a move.

Saying that both Christian convictions and “the core values of this Republic's founding” are at stake, the statement pledges “should the U.S. preemptively attack Iran, we shall vigorously protest . . . which for some includes the willingness to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience.”

In closing, the statement quotes the Apostle Paul, saying the instruction to “overcome evil with good” is “both a spiritual truth and the foundation for politically realistic strategies to transform conflict.”

Commenting on the church's action, Rev. Ken Sehested, Circle of Mercy's co-pastor who drafted the document, said that his first goal in initiating this conversation with the congregation “is a pastoral one—to encourage the spiritually-forming work of standing at the boundary between Word and world to interpret and speak, as best we can, about the will of God and the mind of Christ.”

In addition, though, the congregation urged him to circulate this statement as widely as possible to encourage others to have this discussion. “We would love to see a chorus of opposition” arise in protest to any planned military attack, he said.

Mentioning that the congregation had just begun its observance of Lent, Sehested said he hopes other Christians “will say why such an attack is wrong not simply on political grounds but is a contradiction of the Way of the Cross.”

Circle of Mercy congregation, which is affiliated nationally with the Alliance of Baptists and the United Church of Christ, has previously spoken out against the war in Iraq. Sehested himself was in Iraq with a Christian Peacemaker Teams delegation shortly before the March 2003 invasion by the U.S.

FOLLOW-UP planned for the “We Say No” statement

We encourage everyone to

- Send a copy of the statement to President Bush and congressional leaders, along with your own brief letter say why you endorsed this document. (Addresses are at bottom. Copies of the statement will be on the communion table Sunday. You can also print a copy from our website: www.circleofmercy.org)
- Pay close attention to the news about U.S.-Iranian relations. If you want to actively look for news and analysis, I would recommend this website <http://commondreams.org> for an alternative to mainstream media coverage. They’ve reprinted several articles on Iran in recent days.
- Beth Maczka’s recent note with the website showing the photos of Iran is an excellent way to resist. Creating human empathy by giving faces to our “enemies” is a powerful antidote to enmity. Encourage your friends, family, coworkers to view the brief slideshow: <http://www.lucasgray.com/video/peacetrain.html>

Considering acts of resistance, should a war break out

- Such resistance could be as simple as having conversation with your children, with family members, with neighbors, friends and co-workers. (•It might mean focused reading about Iran or writing letters to elected officials.
- Or it might mean taking part in public demonstrations against the war or even a conscientious act of nonviolent civil disobedience. The options are many.

If you are willing to make some particular commitment, please sign the sheet as you come forward for communion.

Some theological commentary on these actions

At the heart of our convictions is the affirmation that each must discern the Mind of Christ and follow that Light. No one gets promoted for doing more; no one gets demoted for doing less. Such comparisons only reinforce the kind of self-absorption from which grace is at work to free us. Serious discipleship is not a barter with God, nor a competition with each other. Rather, it is the response of the loved to the Beloved—and to that fearless, tearless future to which we are called.

We live in a culture where opinions are easily made, conveniently offered and inexpensively held. Resisting corrupt cultural forces, swimming against the tide, altering what often seems to be the inexorable flow of history (i.e., living “against the world,” in biblical language)—requires intentional effort. It’s never easy, is often inconvenient and is occasionally costly.

Find a leverage point close to where you are; decide what you have to give; and put your heart into it. Afterwards, think critically about your decision and make adjustments as appropriate.

Names/addresses

- President George W. Bush, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20500
- Senator Richard Burr, 217 Russell Senate Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510-3306
NC office: 2000 W. First St., #508, Winston-Salem, NC 27104
- Senator Elizabeth Dole, 555 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510-3301
WNC office: 401 N. Main St. #200, Hendersonville, NC 28792
- Representative Heath Shuler, United States House of Representatives, 512 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3311. District Office: 356 Biltmore Avenue, Suite 400, Asheville, NC 28801 NC Senate

—KLS 3.3.07