



# Issue Paper

## The United Methodist Church and War

### **Official Position of the 2004 Book of Discipline**

164.V.I — **Military Service** -- We deplore war and urge the peaceful settlement of all disputes among nations. From the beginning, the Christian conscience has struggled with the harsh realities of violence and war, for these evils clearly frustrate God's loving purposes for humankind. We yearn for the day when there will be no more war and people will live together in peace and justice. Some of us believe that war, and other acts of violence, are never acceptable to Christians. We also acknowledge that many Christians believe that, when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may regrettably be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide. We honor the witness of pacifists who will not allow us to become complacent about war and violence. We also respect those who support the use of force, but only in extreme situations and only when the need is clear beyond reasonable doubt, and through appropriate international organizations. We urge the establishment of the rule of law in international affairs as a means of elimination of war, violence, and coercion in these affairs. 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. We support and extend the ministry of the Church to those persons who conscientiously oppose all war, or any particular war, and who therefore refuse to serve in the armed forces or to cooperate with systems of military conscription. We also support and extend the Church's ministry to those persons who conscientiously choose to serve in the armed forces or to accept alternative service. As Christians we are aware that neither the way of military action, nor the way of inaction is always righteous before God.

¶165.VI.C — **War and Peace** -- We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as a usual instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them; that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled; and that the production, possession, or use of nuclear weapons be condemned. Consequently, we endorse general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

### **Resolutions From the 2004 Book of Resolutions**

Resolution Number 336: Plan to Eliminate Terrorism (2004)

Resolution Number 339: Rejection of Unilateral First-Strike Actions and Strategies (2004)

Resolution Number 341: Prohibition of Arms Sales to Foreign Countries for Purposes of War (2004)

Resolution Number 333: Saying No to Nuclear Deterrence (amended and readopted in 2004)

### **Background**

War has been a constant in the human experience. At a time when war seems to dominate the headlines it helps to remember the parts of our tradition in which Christian views of war and peace are rooted. In the history of the church there are two approaches to the problem of war and conflict. One is known as the just war theory, and the other is the path of pacifism and nonviolent resistance. Christian people advocate both these approaches and many positions in between. Both of these traditions have been a part of the United Methodist experience,

### **Why This Will Be an Issue**

In 2005, bishops of the United Methodist Church called on President George Bush to draw a timeline to withdraw U.S. troops and urged a global effort to develop a plan to rebuild Iraq and other Middle East nations. The resolution stated, "The continuing loss of Iraqi civilian lives, especially children, and the increasing death toll among United States and coalition military grieves the heart of God." In the two years after this Episcopal resolution, the number of civilian and military deaths has decreased, but plans for a withdrawal for U.S. and Coalition forces remains an issue. The General Board of Church and Society also called on the United States to withdraw its troops from Iraq.

At this General Conference at least two Annual Conferences are asking the church to call on "the United States to remove all troops as logistically practical and relinquish all military bases on Iraqi soil" Two conferences are calling on the conference to send formal letters of protest to the U.S president and Congress , urging the government to expeditiously bring all Guantanamo detainees to trial or release them without further delay, and that Congress be urged to rescind the Military Commissions Act of 2006, restoring the writ of habeas corpus to any and all detainees. One caucus wants the conference to ask Israel to end its military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. It also wants delegates to call on Palestinian officials to condemn violence against Israeli civilians. The Women's Division also wants to press for peace in the Middle East, including security for the state of Israel and justice and sovereignty for the Palestinian people.