

## **Behind the News**

**Issue 21 - Special Edition - 10 March 2003**

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As war in Iraq becomes increasingly likely, people of faith are compelled to act and be a living sign of hope. On every continent, in every country, and in every community, people are resisting the rush to war and standing against violence that will not, and cannot, bring peace. Churches and religious leaders have been a strong and prophetic part of these global anti-war protests, the largest the world has witnessed since the Vietnam War. The struggle to be peace-makers must continue and grow, even if - especially if - bombs begin to fall on Iraq.

### **Open your churches**

#### **Pray**

#### **Say "no" to war**

#### **Give generously to save lives**

#### **Share experience and encourage others**

Churches and religious leaders around the world are making powerful statements and taking courageous actions -- sometimes against the positions of their political leaders. Such actions have been strengthened because they are linked with those of many other churches and religious traditions, showing a unified voice and a common witness against war in Iraq and for efforts that promote a just and sustainable peace in the Middle East and world-wide.

The [Behind the News](#) editorial group has received hundreds of statements, reports, and calls to action from around the world. Rather than summarize and list all we have received, we have chosen instead, in this special edition, to focus on five areas of action that churches around the world have called for .

Share these ideas. Forward this bulletin to your friends and family, and ask them to do the same. But more importantly, take up these actions as part of your contribution to building peace.

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### **Open your churches**

Local churches and parishes have always been places of welcome, care and refuge in times of danger and fear. Plan now for what your church can do if indeed the conflict escalates and bombs begin to fall in Iraq. Throw open the doors of your church. Offer a space for quiet prayer or holding a simple liturgy. Be prepared to spread the word rapidly in your community and inform the local media so they can help inform others. Make links with other churches or cooperate on an interfaith basis.

*"The beliefs we profess are not important, neither are the religious buildings we worship in. The important thing is that wherever we are and whenever we meet, we should raise our prayers to Heaven, asking God to cover us with the mantle of peace which only God can provide, and asking that light disperse the dark clouds of war so that a spirit of understanding and peace might prevail."* Pastoral Letter from the Dominican Evangelical Church, 27 February 2003

#### **Pray**

Religious leaders of all traditions have issued calls to pray for peace. On Ash Wednesday and with the beginning of the Christian observance of Lent, the World

Council of Churches and Pope John Paul II made strong pleas that all Christians pray for peace. Millions prayed together, and are called to continue in prayer.

The WCC has collected prayers and suggests some resources in different languages to be included in prayer services for peace:

<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/iraqprayers-e.html>

The Vatican has placed background information on the Day of Prayer for Peace, including resources for peace from the catechism at:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/special\\_features/peace/prayer-peace\\_index.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/peace/prayer-peace_index.html)

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops offers a collection of resources called “The Way to Peace” that includes prayer and liturgy materials, educational resources, suggested activities and actions. <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/peace/index.htm>

The Peace and Justice Support Network of the Mennonite Church USA offers a sample candlelight prayer vigil to be used on the eve of war, prayers and liturgies, and other resources for action (including a “work sabbath” to emphasize the seriousness of an event by stopping everyday activities to take time for special prayer and action). <http://peace.mennolink.org/>

*"It is a duty of believers, regardless of the religion to which they belong, to proclaim that we will never be able to be happy if we are against one another; the future of humanity will never be able to be assured by terrorism and the logic of war."* Pope John Paul II, 23 February, 2003

### **Say “no” to war**

Join efforts around the world to say “no” to war, resist violence, and build peace with simple and effective actions.

Support the advocacy efforts of the World Council of Churches and churches around the globe by adding your name to the international church leaders' declaration against war in Iraq: <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/signatures.nsf/iraq-e>

The WCC will use the number of supporters, their names, and their country of origin in their ongoing communication and advocacy efforts with the UN Security Council members, WCC member churches, and general public.

Actions suggested by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance include:

a) Express your views to a wider audience through the media in an op-ed or letter to the editor.

[Writing a letter to the editor](#)

[Writing an op-ed piece](#)

[Sample themes for op-eds or letters to the editor from religious leaders](#)

(See <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/bulletin21-annex.html>)

b) Prepare a simple petition or a book for messages to be collected and place it in your church so that people can sign it and express their views about war. Then arrange to deliver these to governmental decision-makers.

[Sample petition](#)

c) Take part in or lead non-violent public demonstrations that call for peace. Ensure that the faith community is present and visible at these events.

d) Lift up powerful images and symbols for peace. The cross is the most powerful and unifying image among Christians – across centuries, borders, language and tradition. Consider and utilize symbols and images, in your own experience and context, that stand against war, symbolize hope, demand justice, and build peace. These might include: the cross, the ashes of Ash Wednesday and the ashes that coat streets and homes after bombing, the sounds of church bells and falling bombs,

the light of candles and darkness of mourning, torn fabric that remembers the tearing of Christ's garments and the brokenness of our world.

e) Preach and teach about peace.

Say "no" to war with the International Peace Bureau, which offers an International Anti-War Action Guide with links and resources on current actions and plans:

[www.ipb.org](http://www.ipb.org).

Take action using resources from the "Win Without War" coalition, supported by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, [www.ncccusa.org](http://www.ncccusa.org).

As part of this coalition, US and international church leaders have met with the heads of governments in Germany, France, United Kingdom, and Russia, as well as Pope John Paul II. Following the meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair in London, the church leaders' delegation developed a six-point plan as an alternative to war, and encouraged people to read it, and through the web site, send it to political leaders:

<http://www.sojo.net/action>.

*"The events of recent days show that doubts still persist about the moral legitimacy as well as the unpredictable humanitarian consequences of a war with Iraq. We recognize that the moral alternative to military action cannot be inaction, passivity, appeasement or indifference. It is vital therefore that all sides in this crisis engage through the United Nations fully and urgently in a process, including continued weapons inspections, that could and should render the trauma and tragedy of war unnecessary."*

Joint statement by Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury, and Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, 20 February 2003.

### **Give generously to save lives**

Give generously and contribute to the emergency and disaster relief fund or appeal of your church and the work it does through the global alliance of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International. Your support is vital and your gift can make a huge difference in providing humanitarian aid to the people of Iraq. For a list of ACT members around the world, click on:

[http://act-intl.org/act\\_links\\_to\\_members.html](http://act-intl.org/act_links_to_members.html)

*"...ACT's members and the member churches of the World Council of Churches have made a clear and strong commitment to humanitarian aid being delivered in an impartial and independent way. Therefore, as humanitarian NGOs likely to be engaged in Iraq during and after a war, ACT members will not act as instruments of foreign policy of donor governments nor accept government funding that promotes military or geopolitical interests in the conflict. The preferred sources of funding are from general public funds and other institutions without military forces engaged in Iraq...."*

From the Statement by Action by Churches Together (ACT) International relating to humanitarian principles in the event of a war in Iraq, Geneva, March 4, 2003. Full text at:

[http://act-intl.org/news/dt\\_nr\\_2003/statement\\_iraq0103.html](http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2003/statement_iraq0103.html)

### **Share your experience and encourage others**

The power of our prayers, our words and our actions are magnified when taken together. Consider taking some of these actions together with your family. Talk with children about what is happening in the world and listen to their fears - and their ideas for peace. Invite and engage classmates, neighbours and colleagues at work in reflection and action. Share ideas and plans more widely among local churches, ecumenical and inter-religious structures. Everyone who takes the sometimes difficult step of standing for peace needs to be supported, encouraged and reassured that they are not alone.

Share your experience and actions with us. We will try to use [Behind the News](#) (website and newsletter) to tell the story of the churches responding to the threat of war. Send us a short message about what you have done or plan, or to share resources (e.g., prayers or liturgies) by writing to us at: [bulletins@wcc-coe.org](mailto:bulletins@wcc-coe.org)

***Behind the News: Visions for Peace - Voices of Faith***

*focuses on alternative voices and perspectives behind stories in (or conspicuously absent from) the international news.*

*highlights statements, ideas and actions that aim to build peace and reconciliation in situations of conflict and violence.*

*shares information particularly from churches, ecumenical organizations, and other faiths, emphasizing different regional perspectives.*

**Behind the news: Visions for Peace – Voices of Faith** is a joint initiative of:

**World Council of Churches (WCC)** - a fellowship of 342 churches, in more than 100 countries in all continents from virtually all Christian traditions. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member church but works cooperatively with the WCC.

**Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance** - a global action network of 87 churches and church-related organizations who have pledged themselves to change unjust policies and practices related to global trade and HIV/AIDS, and to take up as a special concern work on peace and conflict resolution by forging strategic partnerships.

**Action by Churches Together (ACT)** - an international alliance of churches and relief agencies assisting thousands of people recovering from emergencies in more than 50 countries worldwide.

***This bulletin/website is intended to provide an ecumenical space for visions for peace and voices of faith; these materials do not necessarily reflect official policy of WCC, ACT, or EAA.***

Please circulate the Bulletin to friends, colleagues and people who are looking for alternative perspectives on the current situation.

To subscribe to the bulletin, contact [bulletins@wcc-coe.org](mailto:bulletins@wcc-coe.org)

To share resources, reflections or information, contact [bulletins@wcc-coe.org](mailto:bulletins@wcc-coe.org)

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Web: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews>