

The Rev. Dr. Cornel Barnett
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
1 Peter 3:8-22
“Good News of Peacemaking”

World Communion Sunday is celebrated by Christian churches throughout the world. It takes place on the first Sunday of every October and promotes Christian unity and global/ecumenical cooperation.

We emphasize peacemaking on this day and support the Peacemaking Offering. We agree whole-heartedly with Jesus who says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9). We affirm peace because Jesus affirms it and it makes good sense.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) assists churches as they respond to God’s call to “seek peace and pursue it” as stated by the writer of 1 Peter. The Peacemaking Program of our denomination looks for specific ways to help local churches grow in evangelism, discipleship, servanthood, and diversity.

Two examples of peacemaking as evangelism, or the good news of peacemaking, are the subjects of today’s sermon. The first comes through young good news ambassadors to the U.S. and the second, a ministry of evangelism within the U.S. involving a local church and a high school.

The good news of peacemaking to the U.S. is expressed by 15 international peacemakers representing the International Peacemaker Program. They come from different countries around the world and are currently visiting churches, presbyteries and colleges in the U.S. They are sharing stories about church-based ministries in their countries that seek peace and justice in the name of Jesus Christ.

This year’s peacemakers come from Colombia, Honduras, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Northern Ireland, Palestine, the Philippines, Russia and Syria. The International Peacemaker Program is sponsored by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

Linda Macktaby is a member of the National Protestant Church in Beirut, Lebanon. She is the youth program coordinator for the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue. In 2009, she earned her master of divinity degree from the Near East School of Theology.

Jerry van Marter of the Presbyterian News Service interviewed her. Ian and I will enact the interview. I’ll be Jerry and Ian will be Linda.

What is the situation in your country that you will be addressing in your presentations around our country?

“I will be speaking about peace and conflict in the Middle East and also in North Africa because our work involves both regions. I will be speaking about the Christian presence in the Middle East and the role of the Christian community, particularly young people, in bringing peace.”

How are the faith communities addressing this situation?

“Many religious and political leaders are trying to do something positive, but hidden agendas make it very difficult. In the Middle East so many people are so dependent on the leaders — blind followers almost — that it’s harder for religious leaders because they usually don’t have so much power. In many places faith is so connected to politics that everything is being destroyed because politics is so corrupt.”

What lessons from your situation are you trying to communicate to U.S. Presbyterians?

“I should deal with the person right in front of me as a human, not as a label, because humanity is worldwide. I also don’t believe in ‘levels’ of society, because they destroy community. Love is the basic tool for peace — love in Jesus’ way. ‘Give and take’ is totally together and must be the way of peace.”

What is the primary message you want to communicate to U.S. Presbyterians?

“You and I don’t just want peace — we NEED peace in the world. That must be the driver.”

Thank you for your wonderful work. We are moved and challenged. Thank you Ian.

Imagine Linda multiplied in all the countries mentioned earlier and that’s only a fraction of what we are doing through the Peacemaking Program and other denominational agencies.

The good news of peacemaking within our country deals with the issue of bullying. A recent Pew Research study stated that one in five teens reported being bullied in the past year.

Although definitions of bullying vary, most agree that bullying involves an imbalance of power, the intent to cause harm, and repeated offenses. Bullying is not limited by location, age, gender, or education level. It now reaches far beyond the confines of school yards and neighborhood street corners into our digital lives, especially in social media forums.

To combat bullying in Bend, Oregon, the First Presbyterian Church partners with Bend Senior High School in a mentoring program called Link Crew, in which seniors and incoming freshman are paired to ease the transition into high school.

Peacemaking Offering funds from First Presbyterian are used to train staff members in working with student mentors and to provide the necessary materials for the year’s activities. Program sponsors believe the culture at Bend Senior High will become healthier as more freshmen become connected to this program.

This use of one congregation's Peacemaking Offering portion truly helps high school students answer the call of Romans 12:18: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Congregations keep 25 percent of Peacemaking Offering receipts for peacemaking efforts such as this in their community. Another 25 percent is kept by mid councils, such as Synods, for their peacemaking efforts and the remaining 50 percent goes to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

Our 25 percent portion has been earmarked by our Mission Outreach Committee for the Center for Domestic Peace, formerly known as the Marin Abused Women's Services, in San Rafael.

Peacemaking is a believer's calling. This church was called long ago to support peace in our world. If I was addressing this sermon to surfers I'd say that I am "stoked" that this church is a strong advocate of peace and justice in our world. Peacemakers are indeed blessed by God. Amen.