

The Ecumenical Community of Branford

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous; therefore judgment comes forth perverted.
Habakuk 1:2-4

To the Members of the Faith Communities of Branford, Connecticut,

As your clergy, we have a responsibility to help the people in our spiritual care frame current events theologically and discern a Christ-like response. As Christians, we are called to speak against injustice and to take direct, nonviolent action to bring positive change and protect the vulnerable. In light of this, we offer you the following words:

On February 28th, we learned that the United States and Israel attacked Iran. Thus far, this attack, which interrupted peace negotiations, has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Iranian civilians and an unknown number of Iranian, Israeli, and American armed service personnel. We are greatly distressed to learn that casualties include students at a girls’ elementary school bombed by American forces and patients at a hospital bombed by Israel. Predictably, this has resulted in the destabilization of the entire region, deaths from retaliatory strikes, and the disruption of trade. This attack was not conducted in service of a just cause. It arguably lacks legitimate (Congressional) authority. It was not done with right intent or with love of neighbor in mind. Therefore, it satisfies no historic criteria for just war. As Christians, we must condemn it as corrupt, unnecessary, and sinful.

We are outraged that Americans in every branch of the military have been told that the attack is “all part of God’s divine plan” and that “President Trump has been anointed by Jesus to light the signal fire in Iran to cause Armageddon and mark his return to Earth.” We wish to be clear that this perspective is completely at odds with the teachings of Jesus, the prophets, and two thousand years of Christian social teaching. It is nothing less than heresy. God does not bless wars. Jesus says that peacemakers are called blessed children of God (Matthew 5:9). Paul commands Christians to live peaceably with all, insofar as it is within our power to do so (Romans 12:18). The prophet Isaiah tells us that God’s vision is a world where instruments of war are transformed into tools for prosperity and life (Isaiah 2:4).

As followers of Jesus Christ, united across a variety of faith traditions, we grieve this latest outbreak of violence and lament the lives lost. We also exhort you not to give in to apathy or despair. Believe that you can make a difference in the world.

First, you can pray. Pray for the people of Iran, Israel, and the United States. Pray for the wider region that has been drawn into the conflict. Pray for our leaders and armed service personnel. Consider your perspective on this conflict, whom you blame and where your anger is directed, and pray especially for the people you love the least. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). As angry and afraid as we may be,

our faith does not allow us to write anyone off as beyond redemption. Calls for accountability and justice must be held in tension with grace.

Do not stop with prayer. James tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Prayer without action is also dead. Reach out to your clergy and ask how your denomination is working toward a just peace. There will be opportunities for you to join your siblings in the work that is already happening. You can also contact your elected representatives and demand that they support a War Powers Resolution that could bring an end to the violence. Engage in whatever acts of resistance the Holy Spirit may call you to. You may be called to live out your faith in numerous ways, and none are less valuable than another. Finally, have faith that the One who called and redeemed us is still sovereign. We are called to be peacemakers who are unafraid amidst wars and rumors of wars, trusting that they will not have the final word (Luke 21:9).

In Christ,

The Reverend Joseph Perdue, Senior Minister, First Congregational Church of Branford

The Reverend Doctor Laurie McKnight, Chaplain, Branford Hospice

The Reverend Esau Greene, Pastor, New Antioch Church of God

The Reverend Doctor AJ Smith, Senior Minister, First Baptist Church of Branford

The Very Reverend Thomas Blake, Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church

The Reverend Chad Adamik, Pastor, Tabor Lutheran Church

The Rev. Margret Hofmeister, First Congregational Church of Branford