

35 Ways to live more faithfully as a Just Peace / Peace With Justice congregation

By the Rev. J. Bennett Guess

1. Being a "Just Peace Church" is more than a congregational label, it is a shared ministry, a theological outlook, a community identity! Be a visible presence on matters of peace and justice. Bear witness to international and national issues on the local level. Many UCC congregations promote their "Just Peace Church" vision as a way of reaching out to individuals and organizations in their communities. Remember: Justice is an effective tool for evangelism!
2. Just do it! Decide—from this point on—to live intentionally as a congregation that is committed to doing justice, seeking peace, and building community. While, in the past, many congregations have cemented this identity with an official vote, it is more important that a general understanding and commitment exist among your people to live as a congregation committed to peace with justice advocacy.
3. A "Just Peace Church" understands that peacemaking and justice advocacy are intertwined. Without justice, there will be no lasting peace. In describing the UCC's Just Peace Movement in 1971, the Rev. Robert V. Moss said, "We now need to put as much effort into defining a just peace as we have done in the past in defining a just war." Therefore, Just Peace congregations are committed to confronting all manifestations of racial, economic, and social injustice. Consider the issues that God is calling your congregation to address, then get busy!
4. If your congregation became a "Just Peace Church" more than five years ago, consider revisiting your covenant to incorporate, if necessary, the realities of the 21st century.
5. Apathy is the greatest enemy of the would-be-engaged congregation. Explore ways to make justice and peace issues an integral part of your church's life. Bring advocacy into your congregation's everyday activities and projects, including worship, liturgy, prayers, sermons, Bible studies, discussion circles, fellowship dinners, and mission trips.
6. Order the "Peace With Justice / Just Peace Church" provisional packet from Justice and Witness Ministries at [@ucc.org](mailto:ucc.org) or 216-736-3712. This interim packet includes information on a broad range of justice and peace issues that will encourage your congregation to get more involved in advocacy work.
7. Read the 1985 General Synod Just Peace Pronouncement and discuss it within your congregation. The text can be found on-line at [.ucc.org/justice/jpc.htm](http://ucc.org/justice/jpc.htm)
8. Read *A Just Peace Church*, edited by Susan Thistlethwaite. Copies are available from United Church of Christ resources at 1-800-537-3394 or on-line from Pilgrim Press at [.pilgrimpress.com/getpage.cfm?file=books/book-0587-7.html&userid=37534153](http://pilgrimpress.com/getpage.cfm?file=books/book-0587-7.html&userid=37534153)
9. Read *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*. Copies are available from United Church of Christ resources at 1-800-537-3394 or on-line from Pilgrim Press at [.pilgrimpress.com/getpage.cfm?file=books/book-1266-0.html&userid=37534153](http://pilgrimpress.com/getpage.cfm?file=books/book-1266-0.html&userid=37534153)
10. Utilize the Overcoming Violence Bible Study from Justice and Witness Ministries, which includes six themed sessions for discussion. Available on-line at [.ucc.org/justice/biblestudy.pdf](http://ucc.org/justice/biblestudy.pdf)
11. Do more than talk about it. Organize around issues of justice. At Friends Congregational UCC in College Station, Texas, seven is the magic number! If there are at least seven people in the church who care passionately about an issue, then a new action committee is formed. In turn, this committed group works to educate, advocate, and agitate the congregation and the larger community.

12. Take a stand. Yes, controversy does occur, and that's okay! The engaged church realizes that sometimes, for the sake of the Gospel, the church must articulate its vision on issues of justice and peace. Archbishop Desmond Tutu—the Nobel Peace Prize laureate—once said, "If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." In other words, Jesus is calling us to get off the fence. We are called to side with those who are hurting and oppressed.

13. Become a member of the UCC's Justice and Peace Action Network. Commit to getting a certain percentage of your congregation to join as well. It's easy. Sign-up instantly by visiting [.uccTakeAction.org](http://uccTakeAction.org)

14. Familiarize yourself and others with the UCC's new innovative advocacy website. [.uccTakeAction.org](http://uccTakeAction.org) allows you to send faxes and e-mails to federal and state officials, newspapers and corporate executives; edit pre-written sample letters or write your own personalized messages; learn the pressing issues and take action instantly; join the network and receive regular e-message on important public policy matters.

15. Learn more about justice and peace issues. A wealth of information is available here. [.ucc.org/justice/issues.htm](http://ucc.org/justice/issues.htm).

16. Get your congregation involved in the World Council of Churches' **Decade to Overcome Violence**. More information is available here. [.ecumenismnow.org/overcome_violence.html](http://ecumenismnow.org/overcome_violence.html)

17. Consider, discuss, and adapt the following working definition of a Just Peace Church created recently by the Peace and Justice Task Force of the Rocky Mountain Conference, UCC:

A Just Peace Church:

- trains itself in the skills and spiritual disciplines of non-violence, and in knowledge about issues related to justice and peace.

- conveys a spiritual depth in which justice is not "Just-Us" and thereby experiences the full amplitude of God's Creation.

- weaves the Just Peace Principles into all the aspects of its life; worship, education, fellowship, stewardship, choice of priorities, and relationships to the world.

- enables everyone to journey inward toward soul-peace and to journey outward through opportunities to work for peace in the world.

- embarks on a journey of mutual and extra-ordinary respect and commitment to change.

18. Just Peace Churches have learned the difference between charity and justice. While both are important, they are not the same. Teach your congregation to understand and appreciate the distinctions. Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil once said, "I gave bread to the poor and they called me a saint: I asked why the poor had no bread and they called me a communist." Charity addresses short-term needs, while justice advocates for long-term change. The Just Peace Church must be engaged in both.

19. Interested in Hunger and Poverty? Join with other UCC congregations who are participating in Bread for the World's "Offering of Letters Campaign" and the "Hunger No More" curriculum. Former President Jimmy Carter said recently, "When people of faith get behind something, it moves. I urge you to join with thousands of churches across the country whose members are writing Congress. You can help ensure that our government's leaders take seriously the President's commitment to reduce world hunger and poverty. When your letters reach Capitol Hill, you will be speaking for millions of people around the world whose voices cannot be heard." Contact the Rev. Maria deLourdes Porrata at @ucc.org or 216-736-3710.

20. Invite Justice and Witness Ministries into your congregation. Host an informational display. Ask a staff member to conduct an issue forum or participate in a worship service. Contact at @ucc.org or 216-736-3700. 21. Show up for others! Consider an important issue that does not affect your congregation directly but is definitely important to other persons, congregations, and communities. Take a supportive role and learn from the leadership of others. By aligning yourself with others' concerns, you can effectively build a stronger multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-issue movement for justice and peace. Too often, we remain

isolated based on self-serving pursuits rather than joining our energies with others. Real solidarity does not seek or demand "paybacks" but instead, realizes that friendship builds lasting trust. 22. Connect the dots. War has been called a "weapon of mass distraction." Consider all the problems and programs that are not being adequately addressed when we are distracted by war and militarism. What communities at home are the most adversely affected by the financial costs of war? Help others to make these often-overlooked connections.

23. Do the right thing! Just Peace congregations are concerned about being faithful, even if a few feathers get ruffled in the process.

24. Support the UCC's Neighbors in Need Special Mission Offering. Received each year on the first Sunday of October, Neighbors in Need is the national offering that supports the UCC's justice and peace work. For more information, click here. [.ucc.org/steward/nin/](http://ucc.org/steward/nin/)

25. Learn more about the Social Policy Statements of the UCC General Synod. Copies are available for \$5 from United Church of Christ resources at 800-537-3394.

26. Explore the biblical and theological vision of being and becoming a multiracial, multicultural church. Resource packets are available for \$8 by calling United Church of Christ Resources at 800-537-3394.

27. Become an Open and Affirming Congregation. Learn more here. [.ucc.org/justice/lgbt/ona.htm](http://ucc.org/justice/lgbt/ona.htm)

28. Through the lens of faith, learn more about the U.S. Federal Budget. An excellent Bible study resource called "Winners and Losers" is available by clicking here. [.ucc.org/justice/budget03.pdf](http://ucc.org/justice/budget03.pdf)

29. Make sure your congregation's prayer life includes concerns about injustice and violence. Too often, corporate prayers are reduced to only individual issues of health and wellness, while community concerns of peace and justice are ignored. Bring the events of world news into your church's worship life.

30. Take part each year in the "Lenten Fast from Violence." Information is available at [.ecumenismnow.org](http://ecumenismnow.org)

31. Participate in a Justice Camp! Justice and Witness Ministries is organizing justice camps to help young people deepen their understanding of and commitment to justice advocacy. Camps are held at the UCC's historic Franklinton Center in eastern North Carolina. For more information, contact the Rev. Mari Castellanos, minister for the Justice and Peace Action Network, at 202-543-1517 or [@ucc.org](http://ucc.org)

32. Involve your congregation in community economic development projects that will assist the economically marginalized to more fully participate in the economic life of their communities. Information is available from Edith Rasell, minister for labor relations and community economic development, at 216-736-3709 or [@ucc.org](http://ucc.org)

33. Create environments for honest dialogue on complex issues, and be a community committed to remaining flexible especially when changing circumstances will call for the church's faithful witness in new and different ways. There is no such thing as "one right way" to be a peace with justice congregation.

34. Sing! Dance! Laugh! Eat together! Build community to sustain your commitment to peace with justice for the long haul.

35. Tell others what you are doing. Share your ideas and enthusiasm with Justice and Witness Ministries at [@ucc.org](http://ucc.org) or 216-736-3704.

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