



Church of the Brethren General Board

Terrible Belligerence

October 1984

In this time of terrible Belligerence

Never in the span of human existence have we known such ultimate threat to life itself. Under the banner of national security, our nation fuels a nuclear arms race; but it has not made us more secure. We seek to intimidate enemies with the threat of nuclear weapons, calling it deterrence; but it has not deterred other nations in their weapons buildups. It has only heightened the mutual threat.

In growing devotion to military preparation, our national spending priorities have changes. More of our wealth is being moved into war making. The planned outlay of just under \$300 billion for national defense in 1985 is an increase of 70% within four years. At the same time, there are for 1985 planned cuts in spending for programs to assist low-income people. We are not investing our resources wisely. The spending is not consistent with Christian stewardship.

Our nation has contributed to a world situation in which few serious negotiations are taking place to reduce the danger of nuclear annihilation. We assume that all liberation movements are “communist” inspired and controlled. We reduce international relationships to a conflict between “the free world” and “an evil empire.” We replace diplomacy with military confrontation as a means to world stability. We place missiles in Europe. We refuse to renounce first strike use of nuclear weapons. Intervention by the United States in regional disputed in areas like the Middle East and Central America has increased the level of violence and contributed to conflict rather than resolving it.

In this time of terrible belligerence,

- As a people of God, as members of the body of Christ, as members of the Church of the Brethren, we feel impelled to declare our concern about present national direction.
- Our nation is not alone in creating conditions of enmity, in engaging in terrorist activity, and in threatening human survival. Our task is not to make a dispassionate, “even-handed” assessment of national blame among the nations of the world. Rather, we must assess the action of our own nation. We must acknowledge and confess our own responsibility for that action. And we must determine the steps we will take as a people convinced that “all war is sin.” Ours is a sobering assignment. We come to this time with and awareness that in the eyes of most of the world and in the judgment of most of the Body of Christ, our nation is the most threateningly belligerent on earth. We call for initiatives by our government toward true security for all and away from belligerence.

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- We believe events have already demonstrated the negative results of basing Pershing II ballistic missiles and ground-launched Cruise missiles in Western Europe. The announced intention to deploy the weapons unless new arms agreements were reached between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has not resulted in agreement. Rather those negotiations are terminated and the Soviets have deployed submarines armed with nuclear weapons near our coastlines. Our relationships with the nations of Western Europe are strained because of opposition by so many people to the presence of the missiles. We call for an end to the deployment of the missiles and the elimination of their presence in Western Europe.

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- The MX missile is a dangerous and expensive weapon. IT is a first-strike weapon with great accuracy and a “hard target kill capacity” far exceeding land based missiles now possessed by either the USA or the USSR. It is a weapon that invites a pre-emptive strike and an early launch as a response.
- The future threat to human life is a great cost. But a greater cost is the present one of human suffering in poverty that the same resources could be used to alleviate. To produce the first twenty-one missiles, \$2.5 billion has been budgeted for the 1984 fiscal year. To build the proposed 100 MX Missiles would cost an estimated \$25-\$30 billion. In spite of those costs, reports came of the government’s intention to build 200 MX missiles. The cost in weaponry is increased by inflated and accelerated charges. What is already committed represents locked-in long-term costs for the future.
- The MX missile is promoted as a “bargaining chip” in arms control negotiations. Such is obviously not the case. Even such justification for the MX missile is a dangerous gamble in a game of violence. We call for an end to the development and production of the MX missile.

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- The Trident II submarine-based missile is an even greater threat than the MX. This counterforce weapon is designed to destroy enemy missile silos. It is seen as a threat to the entire Soviet nuclear deterrence force. While the MX would require one-half hour to reach the Soviet Union, the Trident II can be launched near their shores. The projected development of 20 submarines, each with 24 missiles, is estimated to cost more than \$40 billion. We call for a cancellation of the development of this first strike nuclear weapon.

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- Millions of dollars are being spent to design and create space weaponry. Even as the nation engages in a limited debate about the desirability of such arms, scientists are openly skeptical about the possibility of developing the proposed defensive nuclear shield in space. Whether possible or not we abhor even the idea of militarizing outer space. We believe an international agreement should be sought to keep outer space weapon-free and that funds should not even be used for “star wars” research.

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- Continuing efforts are made to produce new chemical weapons after a fifteen-year moratorium on such production. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually on chemical warfare. These chemical weapons, most threatening to unarmed civilians, are rejected for deployment by European allies. They should also be rejected by this nation. We call for an end to research and weaponry for chemical warfare.

In this time of terrible belligerence,

- We know God’s love. Even in our sin of participation in belligerence, God’s grace is available to us. Even in the midst of alienation and conflict, we experience forgiveness within the Body of Christ. Even in the midst of death and threats of death, there is resurrection. We are, therefore, encouraged to respond, not only in fear, but also in genuine hope.

In this time of terrible belligerence,

- We must pray to the God of all creation.
- We pray for the people of El Salvador. May they know an end to the violence of their own government with its death squads, the military, and the guerillas. May they know an end to the United States supplying the arms used by both the military and the guerilla forces. May they experience a peaceful and just national reconciliation.
- We pray for the people of Honduras. May they know an end to the militarization of their country by the United States. May they know an end to the militarization of their country by the United States. May they know an end to perpetual military exercises and the building of permanent military bases.
- We pray for the people of Nicaragua. May they know an end to the ravages of war by mercenaries funded and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency, and by private interests in the United States. May they experience a new unity within the body of Christ.
- We pray for all the people of Central America. May they have the opportunity to determine their own destiny without outside intervention, May the nations of the world prove neighbor to them by assisting in economic development without exercising political control. May the siege of poverty be lifted. May there be a new devotion to human rights. Let the refugees who are victims of these times be welcome and secure in their own homes.
- We pray for the people of the Middle East. May they know an end to the violence of nation against nations, sect against sect. May they live securely within national borders and within their own homes. May the rights of minorities such as Palestinians and Kurds and Baha's be respected. May the resources of the area contribute to the well-being of the citizens and the welfare of the world through just world markets. May people of faith - Baha'i, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian-live in mutual respect and support.
- We pray for the people of the Soviet Union that they and we shall not be implacable foes locked into devastating enmity. May they know with us a mutual search for freedom from the tyranny of war.
- We pray for the people of Afghanistan. May they be free of occupation by a foreign power.
- We pray for the people of the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, and South Korea. May they know and end to the repressive measures by their governments. May they have a new birth of freedom and justice.
- We pray for the people of the United States if America. May we become aware of the dangers of the time and the elements that offer hope. May we identify our own salvation with the saving of other peoples. May we belligerency to peacemaking,

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We must pray and we must act.

We the General Board, meeting in October, 1984 urge the Brethren

- to assist our government in making a change in national priorities to favor life instead of death;
- to declare their own properties as nuclear-free zones as a signal of their rejection of nuclear warfare;
- to oppose military aid to other nations, now especially for countries in Central America;
- to support economic development assistance that is multilateral especially that which can be offered through the church;
- to oppose intervention and covert activities against other nations by our intelligence agencies;
- to seek political efforts those officeholders and those policies that will embody the yearnings of what we have declared and what we have prayed.

Finally, in this time of terrible belligerence,

- We know that “we cannot retreat from the world” but must move “from where we are to where God’s power and purpose have begun to define new possibilities and new necessities.” (from a Statement of the Church of the Brethren of Justice and Nonviolence, 1977). May God help us and strengthen us in these steps.

The biblical base and the policy foundations for this statement came from the following Annual Conference actions:

“Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience” 1969

“Statement on War” revised 1970

“The Church’s Responsibility for Justice and Nonviolence” 1977

One additional resource for study is “The Biblical Basis of a Peace Witness,” a four page listing of scriptures dealing with peacemaking.