



let it shine

Courage in the Struggle for Peace and Justice

Jean Lovell, a lifelong member of a UCC congregation in New Haven, Connecticut, courageously struggled for peace and justice throughout her 102 years. Why such passion and persistence? The day before the Armistice of November 11, 1918 ended World War I, her brother was killed in France. This devastating tragedy seared Jean's soul with the senselessness and sinfulness of war. She took to heart Jesus' teaching, "Blessed are the peacemakers," vowed to commit herself to peacemaking, and did just that.

Believing in education as a pathway to peace with justice, Jean created a scholarship fund so New Haven youngsters of limited means could attend college. She also built bridges of international peace through her generosity, friendship, and hospitality to hundreds of overseas students who studied in New Haven. Her door and her heart were always open; hers was an extravagant welcome. In practical and irrepressible ways, her soul magnified the God of peace and justice.

The United Church of Christ always has sought to magnify the God of peace and justice. Our passion and persistence for this witness is deeply rooted in scripture and in the nonviolent teachings and prophetic ministry of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord" has been upon us, as it was upon Jesus, anointing us "to bring good news to the poor... proclaim release to the captives... let the oppressed go free..." [Luke 4: 18]. Like Jean Lovell, the UCC has taken to heart Jesus' blessing of peacemakers and his uncompromising commandments in the Sermon on the Mount: Do not repay evil for evil, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.

From its beginning, the United Church of Christ has pursued this ministry of radical love and reconciliation, defining its mission with Jesus' prayer: "That they may all be one." At General Synod 25, the Church re-affirmed its commitment to that prayer and to a culture of nonviolence and peace, passing the resolution "Another World is Possible," a world where we respond to Jesus' call to break down the "dividing wall, the hostility between us" [Eph. 4:14].

"That they may all be one," has inspired and sustained the UCC's peace and

justice witness these 50 years. Neither an idealistic nor sentimental prayer, it has been a mandate. But, in the words of a popular Central American song, "No basta rezar," prayer alone is not enough. The UCC uses many strategies to bring peace with justice: the faithful ministry of individual UCC members like Jean Lovell; General Synod resolutions; public policy advocacy; resolutions and pronouncements by Conferences; congregational decisions to become Open and Affirming and to become Just Peace churches; boycotts; socially responsible investment, and more.

The United Church of Christ has, in the words of William Sloane Coffin, a "lover's quarrel with the world." Our Office of Communications challenged the Federal Communications Commission, winning a ruling that declared the airwaves public property. The UCC supported Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers in their fight for economic justice. In the 1980's the Conference Ministers issued a statement, challenging our government's military funding for wars in Central America. In 2005, General Synod supported a resolution supporting same-gender marriage equality.

The issues abound: fair housing, access to health care, racial justice, disarmament, human rights, woman's rights, gun control, equal marriage, the integrity of creation. God is still speaking, calling the UCC to continue to speak, in love, the truth that "another world is possible," God's world of peace with justice. And always God promises us courage for that struggle.

Reflections:

- How has your life been changed by someone's passion for justice and peace?
- How is God now speaking to you and/or your congregation, calling you to shape your living by Christ's nonviolent love?

Resources:

- *Another World Is Possible: A Resource Guide.*
- *Peacemaking Day by Day.* Pax Christi USA. 1985.
- Walter Wink, Ed. *Peace Is The Way.* New York: Orbis Press. 2000.

"*Courage in the Struggle for Peace and Justice*" was written by The Rev. Dr. Alice de V. Perry, Worship Coordinator, Shalom UCC, New Haven, CT and steering committee member, *Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice.*

Our Mission and Ministry Legacy

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