

Memorial Service – anniversary of the beginning of the war on Iraq - 20 March 2004

You are welcome to adapt material from this liturgy for use in church and community settings

This is the text of the service which Rev. Dr. Ann Wansbrough prepared and led at Pitt St Uniting Church in Sydney's Central Business District, at the request of the Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition. It is intended for a mixed group in which some identify as Christians and want Christian symbols and, some identify as not Christian.

The Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition have asked that clergy wear clerical dress – preferably liturgical dress, at all events, so that the church presence is evident. So the minister leading this service was robed. Extending the logic of this request, the worship table was dressed in the appropriate liturgical colours, and held a cross and an open bible. A seasonal banner(Lent) was also in its normal place at the front of the worship space.

Throughout the text, there are spaces with These are spaces where a silence may be observed, perhaps only of a few seconds, but enough to signal a transition from one section to the next.

Pitt St Uniting Church has a superb pipe organ that was played at three times during the service. The organist played hymns. . This meant that those who were familiar with hymns were reminded of some of the excellent hymns that express our faith, while those who were not church people simply enjoyed the music. Choose music (organ, piano, other instruments, live or recorded) appropriate to your group and the place.) The themes reflected in the three music segments were mourning, contemplation/vision, and commitment

Many people valued the spaces in this service provided by the music and the silences.

Symbols, activities and actions during the service are indicated in bold type.

Anniversary of the official beginning of the war on Iraq Saturday 20 March 2004

The gathering

As we gather, music is played to allow people time to become quiet and reflect. The music is appropriate to the sense of mourning that begins the service.

Acknowledgement

As we come to this service, we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which it is built, the Gadigal people and the Eora nation, and the elders who cared for this land from time immemorial.

...

Welcome

On behalf of the Uniting Church, I welcome you to this place and this memorial service.

The Uniting Church welcomes this opportunity to work with the Sydney Peace and Justice Network. The Uniting Church is committed to non-violent resolutions of disputes. We oppose the use of military force as the basis of security. We believe in a God who loves all human beings, of all races, cultures and religions. We believe in a God who reaches out to every person here, whether you are a person of faith or not, to offer comfort to those who mourn, and hope to those who despair. We believe in a Christ who was crucified by a military power, the Romans, who is persecuted every time a human being is persecuted, and killed every time a human being is killed. We believe that he lived an uncompromising life and through his death brings life and hope to all those who long for a more inclusive, peaceful and just world.

This is a memorial service. It is an opportunity to care for one another, but it is also a significant political act.

Some groundrules for today:

- We are a mixed group – people with no belief in God, people who are Christian, perhaps Muslim or some other faith. All are welcome, all belong.
- Some of us may be Iraqis, grieving our dead or injured, or concerned about relatives in Iraq. Some of us may be concerned about members of the Defence Forces in Iraq; some ADF personnel went to Iraq this week. Some of us may be grieving dead family or friends in Spain. For some of us, our main concerns are more abstract but no less real: the profound political and human rights issues.
- So we need to respect each other, as we use the different words and symbols we each need to fully express our grief and hope.
- We come to this service with strong emotions – grief, anger, frustration, hatred, fear, despair. We will need to allow one another room for emotions, room to engage, and room to be distant if that is the only way to cope.
- I invite each of you to take what is offered today with a sense of goodwill, and to use it in a way that suits your needs.
- So we commit ourselves, that in this memorial service, we respect each other, we make space for each other, we listen to each other. We may share our emotions, and our concerns for the world.

.....

As we commence this service, **we light a candle for human rights and peace.**

Whom do we grieve?

We have before us **body bags**. We mourn the dead.

We have before us **a bowl of tears**. We weep for the dead and the injured in Iraq, Afghanistan, Spain and other places, those who have died from economic and military intervention by the West; and those who died or were tortured under Saddam Hussein).

.....

This is your service. So I invite you to spend **2 or 3 minute talking to the person next to you** about why we are here, and what we most grieve.

Speaker 1 – summary of the situation on the first anniversary of the commencement of the war on Iraq.

Shared lament: (*After each of the following, pause very briefly*)

As we look at the body bags and wreathes, and as we feel our own tears, we remember:

- All those who died or were injured or traumatised during in the war on Iraq, and Afghanistan.
 - Iraqi and Afghani civilians – men, women and children, the young, the old, the disabled, the pregnant. Iraq body count estimates that between 8000 and 10000 civilians have died during the occupation. (Papers going into the warchest refer to Iraqi health, Iraqi infrastructure
 - Troops of whatever nation – sent into an unnecessary and unjust war – Iraqi, Australian, Spain, the USA and other nations. At the time of mission accomplished, 139 US soldiers had died. Now the count is 560. With the first war on Iraq, most US troop casualties were not evident until well after the battled ended.
- All those who died under Saddam Hussein during the time that the west collaborated with him We remember all those who have fled seeking asylum, all those in detention, and all those Iraqis who lived in fear.
- All those who died in Iraq as a result of the years of sanctions on Iraq
- All those who have died as a result of terrorism by non-government groups, such as the attacks on the Spanish trains last week.
- All those have died as a result of western nations refusing to cancel debt of highly indebted poor nations or as a result of damage global finance has done to their nations
- All those who suffer in Australia, the USA and other nations because money that was needed for health care, education and other essential services has been diverted into war spending.

We mourn for the dead and the injured from the war and from the violence in our world. We **remember them in silence.**

(*Allow 1-3 minutes of silence*).

What do we grieve?

We grieve for people, but we also grieve for society. Violence, terrorism and wars harm us all. So our bowl of tears expresses our grief for every aspect of our lives which has been damaged.

We have before us a **war chest**. War costs us all. War chests are like vacuums sucking in more and more resources. Economists talk about “opportunity costs” – all the alternative things that could be done with the money. **So during this lament we will stuff this chest with all those costs.**

(The war chest can be made from a cardboard Tea Chest; cover it with appropriate newspaper clippings that highlight some of the issues. Have the flaps standing upright, and tape to them “War chest” and “War is not the way”

The words in brackets in the following lament are not said. They are the summary words to print on sheets of paper, and drop into the chest. Whoever does this holds up each piece of paper for all to see before dropping it in the war chest at the end of the relevant clause)

Our lament continues

We grieve for

1. All the harm this war has caused to Iraqi people (*Iraqi lives*)
 - The damage to infrastructure and the things needed for daily life. (*Iraqi health, infrastructure, clean water, energy*)
 - The chaos and violence that people in Iraq experience day by day (*Iraqi security*)
 - The harm caused by the remnants of war – the depleted uranium dust, the unexploded ordinance that lies in wait for innocent victims, the pollution of water, air, and life. (*Environment, Depleted Uranium dust*)
 - The occupation of Iraq by foreigners who do not understand the language or culture (*culture*)
2. The harm done to Australia and the USA because money has been diverted from essential services and programs to fund war instead. All these services cry out for better funding:
 - Schools (*Schools*)
 - Medicare (*Medicare*)
 - Public transport (*Public transport*)
 - Dental care (*Dental care*)
 - Child care (*Child care*)
 - Aged care (*Aged care*)
 - TAFE (*TAFE*)
 - Higher Education (*Higher education*)
3. The political harm
 - Western complicity in the crimes of Saddam Hussein, as the US and other governments provided weapons, loans and technology in the 1980s. (*Truth, integrity*)
 - The hypocrisy of governments who sacrifice people for the sake of their ideology, economic gain, or political power. (*Political trust*)
 - The betrayal of the United Nations charter by nations who refused to let the weapons inspectors complete their job, and instead adopted the doctrine of “pre-emptive strike” -against non-existent weapons (*United Nations*)
 - The betrayal of just war doctrine by claiming a just war when it was not (*Just war theory*)
 - The loss of stability of the world now that the precedent for pre-emptive strike has been set by the West (*international stability*)

- The betrayal of democracy by governments who ignored the protests against the war (*democracy*)
- The disillusionment of people whose protests went unheeded by governments - governments who now pretend that what was obvious to us at the time was not obvious to them (*vision of the people*)
- The harm done to defence forces when they are used for wars that do not satisfy just war criteria and international law. (*defence forces*)
- The lies about those of us who protest. Being against the war does not mean being for Saddam Hussein. (*Truth*)
- The failure to use international law to deal with the crimes against humanity, both east and west. (*The rule of law; international courts*)
- The loss of Australia's independence as we follow the USA (*Australia's independence*)
- We grieve the costs of war

.....

Why do we grieve?

- Because war is not the answer
- Because the deaths and the harm were unnecessary and unlawful
- Because there is a better way to security – the way of social justice and human rights, the way of international law
- Because when we went on the streets last year to oppose the war, it was already obvious to us what governments are now claiming was not obvious to them. They should have listened. This war was always wrong.

...

The turning point

We grieve the dead and injured, and the damage that has been done. But we also come here committed to the future.

We place on the table flowers, as a sign of comfort, life, and hope. (*Someone places on the table flowers*)

We express our grief and our anger, not to give in, but to recover our hope.

Our grief comes from our belief that alternatives are possible, that there are better ways, that people of goodwill do have the power to change the world

We affirm one another

We empower one another

We join with people around the world on this day of action.

And all the forces for good in this world and in this universe– whom some of us call God - join with us, willing us to hope, empowering us to act

The peace

If we are to offer ourselves to work for peace and justice, then we need to be at peace with one another. **I invite each of you to shake the hand of those near to you**, and greet them with the word “Peace”. For some of us it will be a greeting, for others a prayer.

What do we hope for? What are we committed to?

So what do we hope for? What are we committed to?

We yearn for peace, for human rights and for justice. I invite you to spend a couple of minutes imagining the future of the world as you hope it will be, getting in touch with the deepest yearnings of your own heart. When you are ready **come forward and light a candle** to express that yearning and hope.

As you wait for others, use this time to become still and silent, and to be aware of your own hopes and the hopes of others.

(During this time, meditative music is played)

Speaker 2: What are some ways forward? How do we rectify the mess that this war has created?

...

Statement:

There *are* ways forward. They include:

- A change within each person, a commitment to human rights, the rule of law, non-violent resolution of disputes.
- A change in the approach of the Australian, USA and allied governments
- The USA and the allies funding the rebuilding of Iraq and Afghanistan, but under the direction of the UN and the Iraqi people – and without profiteering
- Payment of reparations
- Cleaning up the environment
- A renewed United Nations
- Respect for the international rule of law – including the International Criminal Court
- Disarmament and an end to the arms race

If you are committed to these things, then join with others to work for peace by joining the Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition. Or you might like to come to the Uniting Church social justice expo on Saturday May 8, where the theme will be overcoming violence, building a culture of peace. Come to the Palm Sunday Rally on April 4... *(Replace this section with whatever announcements or suggestions are appropriate in your context).*

.....

Assurance of hope

We often wonder whether we can make a difference. The Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition website includes an article in which Robert Muller, a former assistant secretary of the United Nations, describes the debate about the Iraq war as a miracle. In February 2003, Dr Muller said:

"Never before in the history of the world has there been a global, visible, public, viable, open dialogue and conversation about the very legitimacy of war".

"The whole world is in now having this critical and historic dialogue-listening to all kinds of points of view and positions about going to war or not going to war. In a huge global public conversation the world is asking - "Is war legitimate? Is it illegitimate? Is there enough evidence to warrant an attack? Is there not enough evidence to warrant an attack? What will be the consequences? The costs? What will happen after a war? How will this set off other conflicts?"

What might be peaceful alternatives? What kind of negotiations are we not thinking of? What are the real intentions for declaring war?"

"All of this, he noted, is taking place in the context of the United Nations Security Council, the body that was established in 1949 for exactly this purpose. He pointed out that it has taken us more than fifty years to realize that function, the real function of the UN."

The war occurred. But the debate continues.
We were among those who made the debate happen.
We can keep the debate going and change people's attitudes.
Future wars are not inevitable.

Commitment

I invite you to talk to in pairs for two or three minutes about what you will do in the next month, and the next year, to work for peace with justice in our world.

Sending out.

As we go from this place of Christian worship, I would like to offer you a Christian blessing.

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless you with Discomfort ...
at Easy Answers, Half-Truths, and Superficial Relationships,
so that you may live Deep Within Your Heart.

May God bless you with Anger ...
at Injustice, Oppression, and Exploitation of People,
so that you may work for Justice, Freedom, and Peace.

May God bless you with Tears ...
to shed for those who suffer from Pain, Rejection, Starvation, and War,
so that You may reach out Your Hand to Comfort them
and to turn their Pain into Joy.

And may God bless you with enough Foolishness ...
to Believe that You can Make a Difference in this World,
so that You can Do
what others claim cannot be Done. Amen

(This blessing is from <http://www.nccusa.org/iraq/firstanniversary/iraqanniversarythree.html>)

We go in peace to work for a just world. Thank you for coming. Feel free to sit for a few minutes as the organ is played or to go if you need to. (*Music that expresses hope and commitment*).