

Disciples assembly opposes Iraq war: Rejects torture too

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After keeping a collective silence in 2003 and 2005, the majority of delegates to this year's biennial General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) expressed moral opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

"It is high time this church got off its duff and spoke the truth regarding this war," said delegate Tom Plumbly, pastor of the First Christian Church of Fort Worth, the Texas city where the July 21-25 assembly was held.

DisciplesWorld, a magazine tied to the denomination but editorially independent, said the measure passed in a standing vote—though it "was far from unanimous," since many delegates stood to vote no. The approved statement will be "very divisive" in his own congregation, said pastor Rob Scofield of Hill Memorial Christian Church of Fort Worth.

The resolution approved said the assembly went "on record as conscientiously opposing the war in Iraq as an action inconsistent with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, and as a violation of the traditional standards of just war."

The statement also quoted approvingly an assessment of the invasion by the U.S. Conference of the World Council of Churches in early 2006, which said, "We lament with special anguish the war in Iraq, launched in deception and violating global norms of justice and human rights."

The Disciples Peace Fellowship drafted the resolution, which survived two motions that would have effectively killed the statement, according to *DisciplesWorld*. The resolution also said that the Indianapolis-based denomination affirms "the God-given right of conscience and offers moral support to men and women who volunteered for military service but who, on the grounds of Christian conviction, refuse deployment to Iraq" even though such action may subject them to military discipline.

Among other resolutions approved by delegates was one affirming an absolute ban on all torture by the United States, echoing the outrage of ecumenical partners in the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

Delegates also urged that Disciples members support efforts at humane and compassionate immigration reform and that they be hospitable to immigrants. In addition, they called for improved health care for the nation's children and a better plan to bring more "people of color" into Disciples leadership posts.

On a literally more weighty issue, delegates approved a resolution which noted that internal studies show that between 60 and 70 percent of Disciples pastors are "clinically obese." They urged the clergy to "model ministries of self-care" and well-being. Obesity leads to individual health problems, the statement said, that could sap vibrant leadership in a denomination trying to start 1,000 new churches by 2020 and could increase medical insurance costs for congregations and other ministries.