DISARMAMENT BEGINS AT HOME

There's a fresh idea growing in the United States disarmament movement. People all across the country are organizing their communities to become Nuclear Free Zones.

This idea takes its inspiration from the international treaties which have established Nuclear Free Zones in South America, Antarctica, outer space and the seabed, and from the adoption by the islands of Belau in Micronesia of a nuclear free constitution. Over one hundred municipal councils in the United Kingdom, along with many more communities in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and now in the United States have followed this precedent.

Frustrated by the snail's pace of international arms control negotiations, and alarmed by the world's headlong rush toward nuclear conflict, people all over the world have declared their opposition to the continued nuclear buildup. Millions of Americans have joined the Nuclear Freeze movement as a way of pressuring governments to end the arms race.

Now, without waiting for politicians and generals to act on our behalf, we have an opportunity to play a direct role in reversing the arms race: We can end our participation by making our communities Nuclear Free Zones.

A Nuclear Free Zone is an area or community that prohibits the research, testing, production, transportation, storage and deployment of nuclear weapons. The nuclear power plants, nuclear waste dumps, uranium mines and other means of support to the arms race are dismantled. In this process community alternatives to supporting the arms race are investigated and implemented. Local capital, skills and resources made available from a Nuclear Free Zone are used to provide housing, health care and other community needs.

Why Nuclear Free Zones For The Communities Of Faith?

Nuclear Free Zones are a particular application of our belief in the essential holiness of the earth. In the book of Genesis after each day of creation, God repeats the insistent affirmation that earth, water, sky, man and woman and all life are "good and very good." (Genesis 1) This fundamental spiritual vision of the holiness of time and space also finds a powerful expression in the Mother Earth tradition of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. "It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things, for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit." (**Black Elk Speaks**, John G. Neihardt, Pocket Books, 1975)

For Christians, this view of the world is rooted in the belief that in the person of Jesus creation is filled "more abundantly" with life and meaning in a new and mysterious way. (John 10: 10)

Nuclear warfare and all related institutions and support systems represent a fundamental violation of this holiness of creation because they threaten its very survival. To declare a city, a community, a synagogue, church, mosque or home a Nuclear Free Zone and to work towards making this a reality is to reestablish God's loving dominion over this particular piece of creation. It is an act of faith by which we declare this space to be "holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

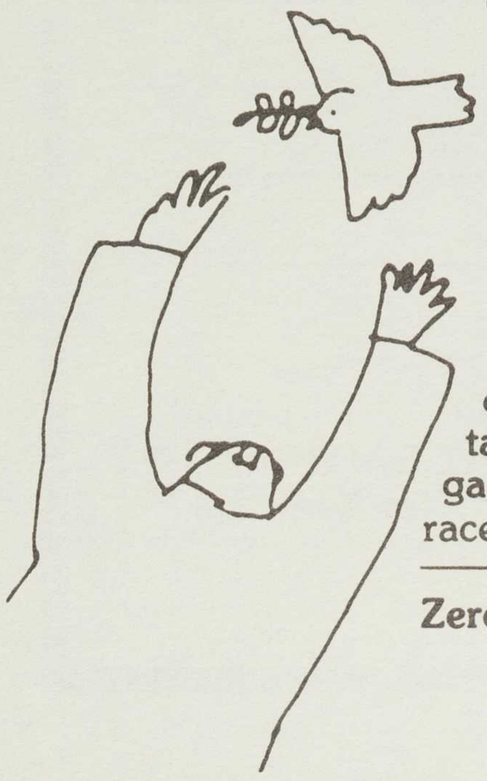
In so doing, we are healing the earth by rejecting all the demonic forces which militate against its sacred character. We pledge ourselves to oppose any research, testing, production and transportation of nuclear weapons and all connections to the nuclear culture in our corner of the new Jerusalem.

By connecting Nuclear Free Zones to our community's human needs and to issues of economic and social justice, we are also creating true peace—**Shalom**—as the Bible interprets it. Shalom is not merely the absence of war, but the creation or restoration of perfect harmony through peace with justice in the full sense of the word.

The Nuclear Free Zone Campaign, in all its ramifications, is a resounding concrete application of the divine blessing in Genesis that creation is and must be kept "good and very good."

Think Globally—Act Locally

While national and international problems such as the arms race appear far removed from us and beyond our influence, their roots often lie in our own communities. Our local congresspersons vote on defense policy, our local corporations rely on defense contracts and our local social service programs are cut back because of increases in military spending. There is solid evidence that the reliance on our military/industrial economy creates inflation and unemployment in our communities. By establishing a Nuclear Free Zone and disengaging our own community from the arms race, we are taking a concrete nonviolent step against the forces of war and environmental destruction on the local level.



This effort can begin by **declaring our own church, synagogue, diocese, religious school, hospital or home a Nuclear Free Zone**. Besides the valuable process of dialogue, disagreement and education which such a decision entails, it can help to change the self image of a congregation from a static building to a dynamic, spiritual center for transforming your community and the world. Many churches are designated civil defense shelters—thus contributing to the myth that a nuclear war can be survived or won. The transformation of such a shelter into a Nuclear Free Zone can be an important step in redefining the church's role in a community.

Your local congregation can exert its influence on local government to have your community declared a Nuclear Free Zone. This can involve a congregation working to halt nuclear research at a local university, close a uranium mine or convert a local weapons facility into a mass transit equipment plant. Such a campaign can help us to move beyond what we don't want—nuclear facilities and arms production—**to what we do want**—communities that provide for our social needs, economic survival and a decent quality of life for everyone. As we press local institutions to stop using local resources for destructive purposes, we can demand that they be used to meet our area's human needs.

Such a Nuclear Free Zone campaign will help a local religious community to look at its own locale with more searching, critical and even prophetic eyes.

The Campaign For A Nuclear Free Future—Action Suggestions:

- Have your congregation pass (discuss and pray over) a resolution declaring it a Nuclear Free Zone. Petition your national organization/denomination to become a Nuclear Free Zone, or at least endorse the concept. (The RTF will serve as a registry of Nuclear Free Zones in the religious community. **Please notify the RTF of new religious Nuclear Free Zones.**)
- Publicly renounce your right to be defended by nuclear weapons. Notify the Department of Defense, State Department, the President, news media and others.
- If your church or synagogue is a Civil Defense Shelter, reject this designation and consider converting it into a Nuclear Free Zone, which might include a Peace and Justice Center, a shelter for the homeless, a soup kitchen, etc.
- Investigate the financial corporate holdings of your congregation and denomination as to their military connections, and explore a divestment or shareholder resolution strategy. (Contact the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115 for information and advice.)
- **Research the nuclear related facilities in your community**