

A Just Peace Covenant for Friedens UCC: What You Need to Know

Prepared by the Just Peace Exploratory Team
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JPET Roster

Adam Hayden (team lead)	Austin Hayden
Rev. Sarah Haas (clergy consultant)	Kalen Hernandez
Erica Bair (emeritus member)	Jim Jensen
Susan Blossom	Janet Raker
Rev. Tom Blossom	Mark Raker
John Charles	Carrie Sorensen
Lindsay Eichelman	Lindsey Spurgeon
Rev. John Gantt	Ellen Tuttle
Lisa Haver	Ellen Weimer

Just Peace Covenant

The following Covenant was created by JPET and reviewed by both the Executive Committee and the Council of Friedens UCC. The Covenant was presented to the congregation on September 19, 2021.

We, the disciples in the community of Friedens United Church of Christ, commit to embody God's love in all that we do and share with the world. We seek peace and equity for all people and promote care for all of creation.

We acknowledge that the work toward justice and peace is a continuing process, and we commit to ongoing education, public witness, and action.

We recognize accountability as a Just Peace congregation to actively dismantle systems that impede peace and justice and disrespect the dignity of others, such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, ableism, and ideologies that separate us from the Creator and one another.

We seek shared economic prosperity where food, clothing, shelter, safe neighborhoods, medical care, education, and a fair living wage for work done are established as a basic human right.

For the sake of all humanity and each new generation, we advocate for the racial equity of all shades of people, and to be free from unfair systems that elevate one race over another. We seek to embrace and celebrate the rich diversity of the United States in all our ministries and witness.

We pray and advocate for peace and justice through nonviolent action. In the mirror of history, we see injustice, violence, and harm inflicted by one race or country over another; we will seek to repair damage done as we contribute to future peacemaking near and far.

As followers of Jesus, we seek to be fully present in the world to hear and respond to the cries for justice, peace, and equity.

We, disciples in the community of Friedens United Church of Christ, an Open and Affirming, and Just Peace Congregation, covenant to devote our time, talent, and resources to the loving, transformative ways of Jesus.

What is the Just Peace Exploratory Team?

In July 2020, the Council approved a Just Peace Exploratory Team, what we've been calling "JPET," with the specific objectives to: (1.) discern the needed steps toward proclaiming that Friedens United Church of Christ, aligned with the United Church of Christ national body, is a *Just Peace Church*, and commensurate with the *Resolution on Systemic Racism*, adopted at the Indiana-Kentucky Conference 57th Annual Meeting, (2.) to recommend a pathway toward educating, involving, and mobilizing the disciples of Friedens UCC toward promoting justice in all its forms and dismantling racism everywhere that it is encountered.

How is this work taking place?

A call for JPET team members was sent to the congregation, and 14 disciples of Friedens responded to that call and joined the team. To achieve our objectives, JPET turned to the United Church of Christ [Just Peace Handbook](#). The Handbook provides steps to become a Just Peace church. These steps and our corresponding actions include:

1. Create a space for the just peace process: JPET meets on the third Sunday of each month via Zoom

2. Form a Just Peace committee: JPET includes 14 disciples of Friedens UCC, under the clergy consultation of Pastor Sarah and Council governance through the Christian Education and Equipping ministry teams
3. Ground the process in biblical texts: Monthly meetings include prayer and devotion to ground our work in sacred texts
4. Organize all church activities: Several book and multimedia studies, guest speaker events, and workshops were completed
5. Write a Just Peace Covenant: JPET drafted a JP Covenant, and the Executive Committee and Council reviewed and offered feedback
6. Call a congregational vote: A date for congregational vote is currently being discerned by the Council
7. Determine what body will oversee Just Peace work: The newly formed Friedens Moving Outward (FMO) ministry team will oversee Just Peace work
8. Publicly declare that Friedens is a Just Peace church: A Just Peace page has been added to the church website. Relevant community events will continue to be hosted under the Friedens Just Peace banner. The Just Peace Covenant will be added to the Friedens website
9. Go forth and act on behalf of justice and peace: JPET was authorized to discern ways to “educate, involve, and mobilize the disciples of Friedens UCC.” Several of our programs uphold the vision for peace and justice, and the revised Friedens [Constitution](#) describes Friedens’ purpose:

The avowed purpose of this church shall be to worship God, to share the love of Jesus Christ, celebrate the Sacraments, realize Christian fellowship and unity within this church and the Church Universal, render loving service toward humankind, and to strive for justice and peace.”

What is the Just Peace Covenant?

The Just Peace Handbook describes the step to draft a Covenant this way:

The Just Peace Committee will write a Just Peace Covenant to be presented to the church governing board and the congregation. Also – address your current mission statement and long range plan to see if these need editing in any manner to reflect your church’s decision to become a Just Peace Church. Present this covenant to the governing board of your congregation for their endorsement.

In July 2021, both the Executive Committee and the Friedens Council reviewed the Covenant and endorsed that the Covenant be presented to the congregation. In September 2021, Adam Hayden [presented](#) the Covenant to the congregation. To align JP Covenant with Friedens’ mission, the revised Constitution explicitly includes justice and peace. To align Just Peace with the long-range plan, a newly formed ministry team, FMO, is added to the church Council.

The Just Peace Handbook calls for a congregational vote, describing it in the following way. This is the step we are preparing to undertake at Friedens:

At the meeting, present your process, Just Peace Covenant and Revised Mission Statement (if necessary) to the congregation. Move to accept the Just Peace Covenant

and Revised Mission Statement (if necessary). A formal vote is required to declare your church a Just Peace Church

The Council is currently discerning an appropriate date to vote on the Just Peace Covenant. The JPET recommendation is to vote on this Covenant at the December congregational meeting.

Questions that You May Have on Your Mind

The following FAQ-style questions may help you understand more about the Just Peace process at Friedens.

I haven't heard anything about this. How would I find out?

We are all living in a world dominated by busy schedules and competing priorities. We've advertised each of our offerings in the e-newsletter and by personal invitation. Events have been advertised on the Friedens Facebook page and on the Just Peace page on the church website. We've also offered testimonials and mission moments in Sunday morning worship. Recorded worship services are available anytime on the church website. We know it's hard to keep track of everything, but we've made every effort to keep the congregation informed. The e-newsletter and Sunday morning worship are important pieces for congregational vitality, and we encourage all disciples to prioritize worship—in-person or remote—and remain alert to the news of the church.

What is the purpose of this covenant?

Let's turn again to the Just Peace Handbook of the UCC:

Becoming a Just Peace church is of spiritual value to a congregation's Christian practice. Christians live by faith, God's promises and living out their covenants. To make a covenant that will consider justice, peace and the sacredness of creation in all your church's decisions and life is a big commitment, but it is what the Gospel calls us to do. This was clear in Biblical times and other periods of Christian history, but now in our society of radical individualism and polarization, this call to stand for justice and peace for all needs to be intentionally stressed. When we go about our faith practice with the deep belief that this societal engagement within culture does make a difference in God's world, we become aware of God at work in the societal/political setting and in the entire natural world. We open ourselves to truly hearing God's call to join in God's full mission not only to individuals but also to the social/political structures of a world that God loves. (John 3:16).

At Friedens, we see ourselves as partners with God and sharing the love of Christ in all that we do. A Just Peace Covenant declares to us and to our community that we are committed to following the way of Jesus in all that we do, inside and outside of our church walls.

We already treat others with kindness and welcome all people. Why do we need a covenant?

A covenant is a special relationship between God and God's people. Though our Covenant is expressed as words on a page, the document itself commits us in a deep and steadfast way to live out our values and beliefs. A covenant is a guiding document that reminds us who and

whose we are, and compels our commitment to love and serve like Jesus. A covenant is also a proclamation to our community that lets others know, outside of Friedens, what we stand for in our ministry and practices.

What do I have to do?

Continue to live out your life in a way that promotes peace and justice! Our Covenant is the foundation for further outreach into our community to live out new ways of peace-seeking and justice-doing, and the Friedens Moving Outward ministry, along with our other teams, are tasked with keeping opportunities for justice and peace front and center in our church and in our lives. We intend for this covenant to continue the objective set forth in our July 2020 proposal to the Council to “educate, involve, and mobilize Friedens disciples.”

What is the UCC doing to support this?

The UCC national body proclaimed itself a Just Peace church in 1985, and our Indiana Kentucky Conference is also a Just Peace conference. The UCC establishes criteria and steps to become a Just Peace church, and the Network of UCC Just Peace Churches is an informal network of UCC local churches that share resources and ideas for living out justice and peace in our communities. The UCC provides resources to celebrate an annual Just Peace Sunday to recognize this meaningful day across the country and around the world, and each year at the General Synod, several resolutions around peace and justice are introduced under the Just Peace banner.

What's next after a congregational vote?

With congregational approval of the Just Peace Covenant, we are proclaiming our commitment to be peace-seekers and justice-doers, and this Covenant recognizes many activities that are already thriving at Friedens, like addressing food insecurity through our Bread for the World Offering of Letters, baking pies for Wheeler for the Thanksgiving Day meal, and providing Weekender Food Sacks. Inspired by the Covenant, we may find ourselves asking what unjust systems of education, health care, and job opportunities may be contributing to food and housing insecurity and ask what we can do to bring about change. We may decide to invite businesses around the schools we serve to partner in making donations, increasing community awareness and action to address childhood hunger in our community. When we find ourselves in a situation where racism, derogatory jokes against people with disabilities, or negative comments about the LGBTQ+ community show up, we may find the conviction to interrupt these comments. The weekly installments of Peaceful Prose appearing in the e-news throughout 2020 and 2021 were a terrific gift of reflection that is already shifting many words and phrases that we use, previously unaware of negative, harmful, and discriminatory origins of common idioms.

Folks from our congregation may join with neighboring congregations and groups to get involved with the Indianapolis Pride Festival, in support of our LGBTQ+ siblings. Two of our Friedens disciples, Adam Hayden and Rev. John Gantt serve on the Indiana-Kentucky Conference Racial Justice Task Force, and disciples of Friedens, empowered by the Just Peace Covenant, may choose to become active in these efforts to dismantle systemic racism in practices related to church structure and leadership.

Some ways our congregation may engage together in study for how to live our JP Covenant include book studies, discussing together media such as documentaries, podcasts, and on-line seminars, and hosting presenters and events at Friedens. Several of these opportunities have,

and continue to be, organized by the Just Peace Exploratory Team and our Engaging Young Adults/Conscious Caring Community.

Already our church Council is introducing for 2022 our Friedens Moving Outward Ministry team, which joins our Outreach ministry with our Just Peace and ONA Covenants to provide intentional opportunities for peace-seeking and justice-doing, working together across our Friedens ministry teams to welcome and affirm all into our faith community that extends beyond the walls of our church into communities near and far.

[Some of the words sound political. Is this a political thing?](#)

The Just Peace Handbook says this:

When we go about our faith practice with the deep belief that this societal engagement within culture does make a difference in God's world, we become aware of God at work in the societal/political setting and in the entire natural world.

We acknowledge that the Covenant includes language that is broadly political in nature, but we remind ourselves that God envisions a society organized around love, generosity, caring for the stranger, fair and equitable economic structures, and Jesus embodied these ancient prescripts in all that he did. Jesus's death was ultimately at the hands of the Roman empire; that was the political reality of the early Jesus movement. Through study and action, the JPET group has worked to create a Covenant that reflects Friedens core values, while also serving as an aspirational document to realize God's kin-dom in the here and the now. We resist the idea that our lives of discipleship and lives as citizens are distinct. Indeed, as followers of Jesus, we aspire to organize society around justice and peace.

Jesus, who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14), performed signs of forgiveness and healing and made manifest that God's reign is for those who are in need. The church is a continuation of that servant manifestation. As a Just Peace Church, we embody a Christ fully engaged in human events. The church is thus a real countervailing power to those forces that divide, that perpetuate human enmity and injustice, and that destroy."

For questions, feel free to reach out to JPET leader, Adam Hayden
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