

Oil Lamp Blessing



BACKGROUND: An MCC delegation visited Iraq May 20–26. They presented hand-made oil lamps and letters from James Schrag and Dan Nighswander, leaders of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, to leaders of the Evangelical Protestant, Syrian Orthodox, and Chaldean Catholic churches in Iraq.

In letters accompanying the lamps, Schrag and Nighswander wrote, "We are calling our leaders to pursue peace and not war." Their letters continue: "As a sign of the light of God that lightens the path between us, we offer this oil lamp, which bears the symbol of the Mennonite Church—the dove of God's spirit of peace. When you light it, know that your brothers and sisters in the United States and Canada are praying for you. We too will light candles and lamps for peace and healing." Iraqi church officials expressed appreciation for these symbols of solidarity and encouraged churches in North America to both pray and work for peace.

This litany was used by Eighth Street Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN) to dedicate the lamps.

Darkness has fallen between the people of North America and the people of Iraq.

Wars and rumors of wars threaten our kinship.

Suspicion and mistrust haunt us.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

God is the light of all nations.

God makes wars cease to the end of the earth.

God breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, saying

"Be still, and know that I am God!"

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

As reflections of God's light, we choose to love, for

Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light.

Over the past years, our love has sent food and medical and educational supplies

to the people of Iraq.

And the people of Iraq have time and again received us with gracious hospitality.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Today we dedicate these lamps as a symbol of our choice for light and love,

And in the tomorrows to come, we will continue to light candles to symbolize our decision to reflect God's love and to pray unceasingly.

We hold our Iraqi sisters and brothers, the leaders of our governments, and ourselves in prayer before our God of justice and peace.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

May the burning of this lamp, and the prayers of our hearts, be pleasing to God

As God calls us to be people of light, of hope, of resurrection.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

This little light

by J. Daryl Byler, MCC Washington Office Director

"We hope that some day your government will not do everything by force," a leader of the Evangelical Protestant Church of Baghdad told our four-person Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) delegation in response to questions about possible U.S. military action against Iraq. "[The U.S. government] will do what they want to do. We will trust God."

For more than a decade now, U.S. and Iraqi government leaders have been deadlocked in a battle of blaming and berating one another as evil, while ignoring their own contributions to the suffering of the Iraqi people.

A more hopeful pattern would be for each country to focus its energy on genuinely and consistently doing good. Paul's words to the church at Rome are also instructive for a more constructive competition between U.S. and Iraqi government officials: "Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. . . .outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:9-10).

At this dark time in U.S.-Iraq relations, the church's light—as small as it may sometimes seem—must shine brightly. Congregations are invited to dedicate their own lamp (and candles for home use) using the Oil Lamp Blessing, and light it each Sunday as they pray for increased trust between our nations. Lamps are available for \$35.00 from Dick Lehman's, Potter, 1-800-952-6670.

In addition, encourage your elected officials to:

- oppose threats and further use of U.S. military force against Iraq;
- end the harsh rhetoric and begin rebuilding trust and mutual respect;
- end the sanctions; and
- support a Middle East regional approach to eliminating weapons of mass destruction.

Additional resources

August 6 marks 12 years of devastating sanctions against Iraq. Mennonite peace staff are developing a comprehensive worship, education, and advocacy strategy to oppose further U.S. military action and work at building trust between our countries, with a major action on August 6. Visit the Peace and Justice Support Network web site (<http://peace.MennoLink.org>) or call the Executive Board Peace Advocate Office, 330-683-6844, for more information.



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