

May 11, 2025
Mother's Day Proclamation
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You have heard me say many times that human beings are messy, families are messy, and love is messy. This is why Mother's Day is so messy...it's very people-y and sometimes the people who are supposed to love us well don't. Sometimes the people who love us well leave too soon. Sometimes what we hoped for our lives and families doesn't come to be. Sometimes women choose not to be mothers and would like to be celebrated for who they are, not what society wants them to be. And days like today hit us in the gut. That's why we will leave Mother's Day celebrations to Hallmark and to each of us individually. At DCC, the second Sunday in May is a Celebration of Women...all women, whether they are mothers or not. Women are, after all, in the words of my friend, Rev. Dr. Lisa Davison, "more than a womb."

It is important to highlight this, especially in a time when our nation's president talks about giving women a medal for having babies. The fact that anyone would imagine that a medal would be a better incentive than universal healthcare, affordable childcare, and mandatory paid family leave for women to have babies is absolutely ridiculous and an indicator of just how out of touch this administration is with the lives of women in this country. Not to mention that of high-income nations, the United States has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality. There were about 22 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births in the United States in 2022, the most recent year for which data is available. That rate was more than double, sometimes triple, that seen in most other high-income countries that year, according to the report released last summer by the Commonwealth Fund. It is important to note, too, that the rate of maternal death for Black women in the U.S. is more than double the combined number of 22. Bad policy always impacts the most vulnerable people the greatest. So, the U.S. had 22 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2022. Since Marit is here today, let's guess how many Norway had. ZERO. Switzerland had 1. Sweden had 3. The highest rate after the U.S. was Chile, and they had 14, still much lower than the U.S.¹

There are many reasons for these disparities, but one of them is the accessibility of healthcare for women, especially women in vulnerable populations. This includes prenatal healthcare, emergency healthcare, and the availability of midwives. If we asked legislators about women's healthcare inaccessibility, they would tell us it's all about money. It isn't that they don't care about the health of women; it's that there isn't enough money to fix the problems. And yet, other high-income countries don't have the same outcomes we do.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/06/04/health/maternal-deaths-high-income-nations/index.html#:~:text=The%20data%2C%20which%20came%20from,deaths%20per%20100%2C000%20live%20births.,> accessed, 5/10/25.

In an analysis that summarized and reflected on 2018 research that asked the question, “Do military expenditures crowd out health expenditures?” the data showed that when military spending increases by 1%, spending on health decreases by .62%. To be clear, the analysis shows a correlation, not causation.² So the numbers seem to be related, but the research does not say that one causes the other. I looked up the percentage of GDP that nations allocate to military spending. In 2023, the U.S. spent 3.4% of its GDP on the military. Norway spent 1.6. Switzerland spent .7 and Sweden 1.5%.³ Hmmm. I wonder what would happen if we spent less money on war and more money on healthcare.

In 1870, long before President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday of May a national holiday, author, poet, suffragist, and abolitionist Julia Ward Howe worked to establish Mother’s Peace Day. She wasn’t interested in a day to celebrate mothers, she hoped for a day set aside to cast a vision for the eradication of war, a vision for peace. This is the proclamation Julia Ward Howe wrote in 1870.

*Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be that of water or of tears!
Say firmly: “We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies, our
husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.*

*“Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach
them of charity, mercy and patience. We women of one country will be too tender of
those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.”*

*From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says,
“Disarm, disarm! The sword is not the balance of justice.” Blood does not wipe out
dishonor nor violence indicate possession.*

*As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women
now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let
them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them then
solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human
family can live in peace, each learning after his own time, the sacred impress, not of
Caesar, but of God.*

*In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of
women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed
most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the
alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international
questions, the great and general interests of peace.*

² <https://warpreventioninitiative.org/peace-science-digest/when-countries-increase-their-military-budgets-they-decrease-public-health-spending/>, accessed, 5/10/25.

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>, accessed 5/10/25.

In her book, *Reminiscences*, Howe talks about why she wrote this proclamation. The Franco-Prussian War was raging in Europe, and she had strong opposition to Napoleon and his violent ways. She knew that war and other violent conflicts could easily be avoided without bloodshed. She asked this question of herself, "Why don't the mothers of mankind interfere in these matters, to prevent the waste of that human life of which they alone bear and know the cost?" She had not considered this before, and she could think of no better way to address the question than to appeal to all women. Howe believed that if women united against war, if they refused to bear the burdens of war anymore, there would be peace. She knew what we know, when women get involved, stuff gets done.

We are a long way from 1870 and still a long way from Howe's vision of peace. Depending on who you ask, there are between 32 and 56 armed conflicts in the world today. According to the United Nations, one of the dominant drivers of conflict is the scarcity of resources exacerbated by climate change."⁴ These are the conflicts that occur because people are afraid, so they guard resources, steal resources, and see other people as competition for the resources they need. In addition to climate change, the scarcity of resources is caused by people with power exerting control by withholding resources from the people who need them.

We've heard a lot about USAID in the last hundred days or so. This is because the current administration has drastically cut USAID's funding, taking the stance that resources sent to other places would be better used to benefit the U.S. There is more than one problem with that attitude. The first is that we ought to care about what happens to other people, regardless of how far away they live. And the second is that the aid given by USAID does benefit us because it makes the world a more peaceful place. People who don't have to fight for food and water and medicine often don't fight at all.

There will not be peace in the world while people are starving. There will not be peace in the world while some children are protected from deadly diseases and others, based on where they live, are not. Isaiah 2:4 says, "God shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore." The prophet was casting a vision of peace. This peaceful kin-dom will come to be when we convert our death-dealing tools of destruction into life-giving, life-sustaining, tools of agriculture.

Isaiah was on to something here. Put simply, we need to feed people instead of killing them. From a federal perspective, tax dollars should be spent making sure people, no matter where they live, have food. I don't throw around the word sin very much because it's one of those church words that has been used to hurt people I love. But this is true: the corporate sin of people starving to death is something we should all

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>, accessed 5/9/25.

be deeply concerned about. There is enough food produced in the world that nobody should be starving. And yet...about 9 million people die of hunger and hunger-related diseases each year. That is sin. And it is on all of us.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) uses the resources we, as part of our covenant with the General Church, give through the Disciples Mission Fund. One of the ways the denomination uses those funds is to address food scarcity in the United States and globally. In addition to our DMF giving, we can, and do, tackle food scarcity in our neighborhood and community. We give money monthly to CONCERN, and we maintain a 24/7 food pantry outside our front door. Our support of these ministries not only puts food in bellies, but it also plants seeds of peace.

People who are hungry are not at peace. Anyone who has ever been hangry (so hungry you are angry) knows this is true. The moments I am least proud of my behavior during any given week are the ones when the switch flips and I need food immediately. Anyone who has been responsible for the care of a child after school knows that people who are hungry are not at peace. For some of us, these examples are our only experience with hunger. And these experiences don't scratch the surface. They are nothing like not eating for days. They are nothing like going to school with an empty belly and trying to learn. They are nothing like holding a baby who is crying and you have nothing to put in a bottle. They are nothing like knowing the kids are coming home from school, and there is nothing to eat in the house.

It must be gut-wrenching. And so unnecessary. I think this must have been Julia Ward Howe's point. Women (all humans) should be against anything that kills other human beings, whether it is the bombs of war, the displacement of war, or the hunger and thirst that come from humanitarian aid being cut off or food being too expensive for families to afford. Withholding life-saving anything is the opposite of peace. It is the opposite of what it means to be a human. And it is certainly the opposite of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

On Thursday, we saw the white smoke appear from the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Not being Catholic, I am sure I do not understand the emotion that so many were feeling as we waited to hear who the next Pope would be. I will admit, I was a little bit proud when I learned that the Cardinal from Chicago had been chosen. I now imagine deep dish pizza and Chicago-style hot dogs served regularly at the Vatican. When Pope Leo XIV stepped out on the patio to address the crowd, the TV cameras caught people sobbing as they welcomed him with cheers.

He began his remarks, "Peace be with you," the same words Jesus used to greet that group of grieving disciples gathered in Jerusalem in the aftermath of his death. Remember...CleOpas was there, telling them about his encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The Pope greeted the crowd and people all over the world who were listening and watching. He said, "I would like this greeting of peace to enter your

hearts, to reach your families, and all people, wherever they are, all of the people, all over the earth.”

Can you imagine? Can you **imagine** what the world would be like if peace or even the desire for peace, truly entered every heart all over the world? The world would be different.

In preparation for the naming of the new Pope, I watched the movie Conclave last week. If you have not seen it, I recommend it.

In the movie, one of the Cardinals, trying to encourage the other Cardinals to move beyond their preferences and pettiness and do what is best for the Church, said this, “The church is not the past. The church is not tradition. The church is what it does next.” The Catholic Church will be what it does next. And the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will be what it does next. And DCC will be what it does next.

I hope we will be a church that, like Julia Ward Howe, believes in the power of women to change the world for the better. I hope DCC will always be a church where women are leaders, dreamers, and doers. I hope we will be a church that nurtures the seeds of peace that have been planted in our hearts and the hearts of our neighbors. I hope we will work to plant seeds in the hearts of our legislators. I hope we will be peacemakers in our little corner of the world. We will not be what and who we have been. We will be whatever we do next. Peace be with you. Amen.