Dear Disciples: A Statement on Ukraine
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Last week, we witnessed the beginning of the tragedy of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We are seeing with each passing day the continued destruction of homes, communities, and human lives. As a follower of Jesus Christ and a minister of the gospel, I must condemn this premeditated and unprovoked aggression and violence against the people of Ukraine. The Russian initiative to occupy and annex Ukrainian lands and populations stands in contradiction to the value of human life as well as principles of international law that deem the acquisition of territory by force illegal. In this season of Lent when we lament our sin, we must also lament the fact that diplomacy was so hastily dismissed as an option and that human rights continue to be egregiously violated. Russia and its leaders, including and especially Mr. Putin, must be held accountable in ways that respect international institutions and laws.

In a joint statement from Global Ministries, a common witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, to which I am a signatory along with my counterpart, John Dorhauer of the UCC, we oppose any further militarization of the conflict by Russia, as well as by NATO, the United States, and other parties, recognizing the right of Ukrainians to resist the assault on their homeland. Even so, de-escalation is required, not heightened belligerence.

The outpouring of care and concern for the now more than 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons is inspiring. And yet, I must also note that the racism and discrimination being faced by Africans, Middle Easterners and others as they, too, attempt to flee Ukraine for their own safety, must be named and condemned. Disciples will continue, as always, to work through Week of Compassion and Global Ministries with our partners around the world to provide care, support and compassion for all who are in need. I hope that you join me in calling for leaders in the US, Canada and around the world to stand in solidarity to work actively for an end to this hell that is war, being so brutally visited upon the people of Ukraine. We must work and act even as we pray.

In the words of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Elie Wiesel: “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, [or I might add, nationality or geography] that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe.”
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Protect the bodies and spirits of the women and children fleeing and those who have endured the hailstorm of bombs. Stand with those valiantly protecting their homeland and freedoms against unprovoked aggression. Especially for the children, O Lord, do we pray, that this trauma might not rob them and their families of hope. Lord, you are able. Grant us, grant them your peace. May it be so, Amen.