In observance of Veterans Day, November 11, the Rt. Rev. Dr. James “Jay” Magness, the Episcopal Church’s Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries, and the Rev. Dr. Wollom “Wally” Jensen, Canon to the Bishop, offer a special message:

“This year marks the beginning of the centennial of the outbreak of World War I. Much will be written, much will be debated and much will be remembered about that Great War and the terrible slaughter that stained the face of Europe and left the whole world forever diminished. Beginning with a murder in Sarajevo and ending with an unjust peace in a rail car at Versailles, the sacrifices of poets and artists, musicians and architects, physicians and farmers, rich and poor, brave and faint of heart seem to have been in vain. Today our world continues to be marked by the sacrifices of warriors at the altar of death, and there seems to be no end to violence and destruction in sight. But as the poppies grow blood red anew each year in Flanders, so hope for peace continues to spring like white lilies afresh each year in the hearts of women and men of good will around the world. May each of us commit ourselves to the enduring work of peace-making and the work of relationship-building.

“This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the war in Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of our men and women served in that war, and over 56,000 lost their lives in combat-related deaths. While many members of our church and the greater Christian community have expressed a wide range of opinions about this war, we will do well to remember that those who served in Vietnam have similar points of view. Therefore, this would be a good year to thank these veterans for their acts of courage, love of country and willingness to sacrifice, always a virtue of faith.

“While remembrance is important, the act of remembering is insufficient. We have among us a significant number of combat veterans, many of whom have invisible though enduring wounds, which must be recognized and healed. It is not enough to thank a veteran for her or his service as though we were wishing them a ‘good day.’ It is incumbent upon each of us to engage in ongoing care for veterans and to ensure that we provide meaningful assistance in rebuilding their lives and their futures. Providing shelter for the homeless, medical care for the ailing, spiritual care for those who have lost hope, and jobs for those who are unemployed are the responsibilities of a grateful nation to those who have stood the lonely watches, born the heavy burdens and carry the wounds of war for each of us.

“In large measure, we who are part of the community gathered around Word and sacrament, and who are disciples of the One who gave himself for us, are called to serve those who have served us. We can begin with remembrance. First, to remember that in caring for the veteran we are not celebrating war. Second, by remembering that the sacrifices made by veterans and their families are sacrifices made on behalf of each one of us. Third, by remembering that though we have asked our sons and daughters to endure the unspeakable, we all stand in need of the reconciliation and forgiveness that comes from the One who gave his life for each of us.”

Collect for Peace
By the Rt. Rev. Dr. James Magness and the Rev. Dr. Wollom Jensen

Lord, we pause on this Veterans Day weekend to remember those who have served this nation so well. We honor their many sacrifices and the sacrifices of their families, friends and loved ones as well. Today we pray for that time when all will beat their swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and none will neither study nor practice war anymore. Give to each of us the heart of peace, the determination to work for it, and the courage to defend it. Grant us humility in our relations with all people, and give us the gift of trust that our faith in you may be fulfilled, and bless us with your peace that passes all understanding. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

(Photo by Mike Mozart)