Pr. Jerry Pedersen, now 95 years of age, has been invited to be a guest of honor aboard the USS Missouri at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Japanese surrender on Sept. 2, 1945, ending World War II. He hopes to deliver on that occasion the prepared remarks printed below, and asks our prayers of support as he travels with his two sons to Pearl Harbor, and participates in the commemoration.

Jerry served his internship at St. John’s, Sacramento, in 1950. After receiving his doctorate in theology and teaching one year at a Lutheran seminary, he served many years in campus ministry, including at the University of Tanganyika, the first college in that newly independent nation. Returning to the U.S., he served at San Francisco State University from 1967 to 1973, and at Stanford University as interim pastor at University Lutheran, Palo Alto. Jerry also served for 20 years as senior pastor for a large and growing congregation in Mission Viejo, CA, and enjoyed interim assignments in San Juan, PR, St. Thomas, VI, and St. Paul’s, Lodi.

Jerry retired to Sacramento and engaged in social justice activities in the state capitol and as a member of St. John’s. He has authored “Unfinished Journey: from War to peace, from Violence to Wholeness.” Jerry and his late wife, Dru, were married for 71 years. His entire career was marked by a passion for peace and justice.

1945 – I WAS THERE
2020 – WE ARE HERE

I WAS THERE on AUGUST 6, 1945 as a 19-year old U.S. Marine out
on the Pacific Ocean toward the end of World War II, serving aboard the USS Missouri battleship. That day I listened as the ship's loudspeaker announced “Now Hear This: We’ve just dropped a special bomb, an Atomic Bomb, on Hiroshima, destroying the city!” I remember the cheers and bedlam of the men. “Wonderful, it’s over. Let’s drop another on Tokyo and kill a million of the bastards” were the expressions of many of the excited sailors and marines. At first, I too was as excited as the others. Later, I remember going up to the bow of the ship, alone, surrounded by a mysterious presence, and a host of questions, of disappointments, of hopes. What is happening to us... and to me... I wondered? A whole city destroyed, thousands of civilians, women and children, killed, and we, I... am cheering and wildly celebrating. Have we, have I... lost our humanity? Is this what happens to people in war? Is this really the way to Peace? Is there a better way?

I WAS THERE on AUGUST 9th, 1945 when we again heard “Now Hear This: We have just dropped another Atomic Bomb on Nagasaki, destroying the entire city!” I remember feeling whether this was cause for more celebration, or, for repentance? Wasn’t this a horrific atrocity and were we not simply rationalizing the evil of these deeds of war, even as our enemies had rationalized the Holocaust or Pearl Harbor? Were we in deep danger of becoming a mirror image of the Nazis and the Japanese? Is this truly the way to a Peace, OR is there a better way?

And I WAS THERE that day, SEPTEMBER 2nd, 1945 aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, for the Peace Surrender - bringing World War II to an end! I was honored to be part of the Honor Guard that day, standing near General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. My heart was thrilled to hear the General say: “Today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended. A great victory has been won... the entire world lies quietly at peace.” However, I then heard MacArthur say: “We have had our last chance. If we do not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door.”

The dawn of a Nuclear age had forever changed the immense power of war, and killing. There was no doubt in my mind - I resolved, I must be a Peacemaker. My dream and vision that September 2nd - was to commit myself to helping bring that more pervasive peace, ever fuller democracy with equity, and a greater loving community in the years ahead.

NOW 2020 – WE ARE HERE! It is 75 years later, and as Wizened Warriors - who have lived our lives, who love our families, our nation, the whole mess of humanity, and dear God how we love the world - our challenge remains, to do our best to protect this World - without destroying it.

Jerry Pedersen

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.