



## St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben

For almost 20 years, I served on the board of Preble Street, a social service agency in Portland Maine that worked with people experiencing hunger and homelessness. Many of our clients were homeless veterans, still suffering from moral and physical trauma from the Vietnam War. With the help of grants, we established Veterans Housing Services which now serves vets around the whole state of Maine.

About ten years ago I had the opportunity to travel to Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, I visited museums, climbed on rusting remains of American, Russian and Chinese equipment and had drinks in a bar on the Mekong River that was built and decorated with shells from America bombs. The most disturbing moments during that trip were when I saw fields and buildings freshly painted with warnings about the presence of unexploded ordnance, heard stories of children and adults still being killed or maimed by coming in contact with the remnants of cluster bombs dropped more than 50 years ago, and forced myself to look photos of horrific birth defects and deformities still being caused by Agent Orange.

Today Vietnam is a trading partner that welcomes American business and tourists. The war seems like ancient history. For aging homeless veterans and young children who have lost limbs, however, it has never stopped.

I could argue against the current war using Just War Theory or by debunking crazy so-called "Christian" claims that this war is needed to start Armageddon and prepare for the second coming of Christ. (Click [here](#) and [here](#) for articles about both.) There are many moral and spiritual issues related to all of this. Today, however, I want to focus on the human cost.

I'm not just talking about the more than 169 girls killed in a school, the six members of the US Military, more than 1000 Iraqis, and countless others known and unknown who have died or will be killed in as this goes on. I'm also talking about the long-term generational impact on those who somehow survive, including our own service members who one day will have to reckon with what they are doing today. I have personally responded to suicides in our military and have dealt with the after-effects of people who self-medicate trauma with alcohol and drugs. I have traveled in cultures where memories of mistreatment by foreigners last hundreds if not thousands of years.

We fool ourselves into thinking that this will be over in a few days or weeks after which we can wipe off our hands and move on. That simply isn't true. There is a reason that in Just War Theory war is a last resort and that the Constitution and the rule of law make going to war a difficult thing. As people of faith, we have a responsibility to remember the human cost... and our moral responsibility of doing everything we can to make sure that cost doesn't need to be paid.

More resources: A [letter](#) from the Presiding Bishop  
A [letter](#) from the Bishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East  
A [prayer](#) from an Episcopal priest and military mom.