

Methodist mother joins war protest in Texas: Celeste Zappala with Cindy Sheehan

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Celeste Zappala, a United Methodist from Philadelphia, went to Texas last month to join friend Cindy Sheehan—also a mother who lost a son in Iraq. Their roadside antiwar protest near George W. Bush's ranch in Crawford drew international media attention as both sought to question the president about his rationale for the war.

Zappala's son, Sergeant Sherwood Baker, 30, died in Iraq last year. "He literally was killed looking for the weapons of mass destruction that never existed," Zappala said to United Methodist News Service. Sheehan, who has her detractors as well as supporters, vowed to stay through Bush's monthlong vacation unless he agrees to listen to her concerns.

Zappala said her faith and her church, First United Methodist Church of Germantown, have helped her through the ordeal.

On August 12, several United Methodists visited the protest camp, including Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; retired bishop Joe Wilson, now in residence at Southwestern University; and William McElvaney, professor emeritus at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University.

Edgar, who spoke the previous day at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America biennial assembly in Orlando, Florida, said his trip to the antiwar site was "not a political or partisan visit." But he added that an in-person session with the mothers would give the president an opportunity "to articulate more clearly" to the nation and mothers "who gave all to a war they are increasingly unable to understand."

Sherwood Baker was a foster child whom Zappala raised from infancy. He became a social worker who helped mentally challenged adults, according to United Methodist News Service. After his Pennsylvania National Guard unit was called to active duty,

Baker was protecting an Iraq Survey Group searching the country for weapons of mass destruction—the purported existence of which was a major U.S. reason for invading Iraq.

“When the report came out [that] there were no weapons of mass destruction, I was screaming and crying that somebody needs to come here and apologize to me,” Zappala said.

Beth Stroud, who works in a lay position at Zappala’s church, said the congregation was devastated by word that Baker, married and a father, was killed in an explosion in Baghdad. Baker grew up in the church. “I visited Celeste shortly after she got the news,” said Stroud, who has been in the news herself recently because her admission that she is in a homosexual relationship has jeopardized her ordination status.