

# Our Flag — a Symbol of 200 Years of Religious Freedom

*Established in 1809, North Springfield Presbyterian Church, Akron, Ohio, has honored members of its congregation who gave their lives in service to our nation in every conflict since the Revolutionary War. In 1982, Forrest R. Baker delivered these comments to the session of the church where he was a long-time member of the congregation. Without notifying the church membership, the pastor had removed the U.S. flag from the church sanctuary where it had always been located. In the pastor's mind the U.S. flag was a symbol of shame. Forrest, along with several other veterans, shared a differing opinion.*

I want to say that the subject of the placement of the flag is the very last thing I would ever expect to be the reason for me to appear in front of this session.

I know the session has voted on this. I respect your opinion, and you have every right to it.

I also have an opinion.

When I walk into the sanctuary on Sunday morning, the very first thing that I observe is the large white cross up front, up high, as it should be. I know that the cross is a symbol of the Christianity through which we worship God. In my mind we worship God in this house and only God.

Then I look to the left, to floor level – the lowest level in the sanctuary – and see the symbol that represents the citizens of this country and of this congregation. I see the flag.

I respect the flag. I worship God.

The citizens represented by this symbol around the world believe in freedom of religion, of speech, from want, and so on. They are known to many nations as a generous people.

I am sure God would approve of the generosity of the citizens represented by this flag. There is never a crisis anywhere in this world that the citizens of this nation would not help if asked to do so.

The members of this congregation give willingly to our missions to help people in need. These members of our church are also represented around the world by

this flag as citizens of the United States, and must be protected by our embassy in these areas.

If the government of this nation is in any way threatening the freedom

of religion of its citizens, then I would be with you in removing the flag from a church property.

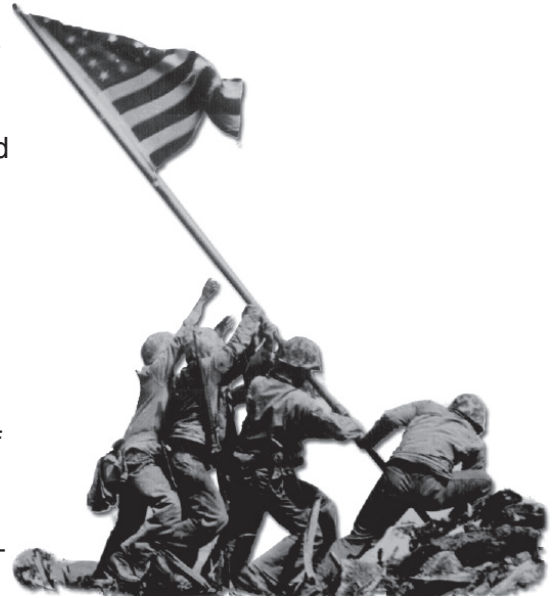
For the present, I believe the people represented by this flag have, through their actions over the past 200 years, made it possible for us to worship openly and freely and in whatever denomination we choose.

The flag is their symbol to respect.

Thank you

Forrest R. Baker

*The U.S. flag was returned to the church sanctuary.*



*A decorated combat veteran of World War II, Forrest R. Baker received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart while serving in the U.S. Army. He enlisted following Pearl Harbor and graduating, along with future wife, Jean Shields, from Akron Central High School in 1942. He was a staff sergeant in the 3rd Army, 80th Infantry Division, 317th Regiment, K Company and participated in continuous combat, through several of the most fierce battles of the war, from the Normandy beaches through the Battle of the Bulge and into Germany, where he was wounded.*

*A member of North Springfield Presbyterian Church, Forrest served as assistant treasurer, elder and deacon. He was also the long-time treasurer of Scout Troop 301, which was sponsored by the church. Forrest worked for the U.S. Postal service for 35 years, retiring in 1979. He passed on Dec. 23, 1994.*

*Jean Baker served several terms as a member of the church session and as an elder and a deacon of the church. A nurse, Jean spent her life helping others. She passed on Feb 12, 2003.*