

**Subject: Moving Toward a Positive Investment Strategy to Promote Peace Between the Israeli and Palestinian People, While Repairing the Relationship Between the Presbyterian Church and the Jewish People in the United States of America**

**I. Relationship between Bethesda Jewish Congregation and Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland**

For forty years, the congregations of Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church and Bethesda Jewish Congregation have shared the same building for worship, education, and fellowship. The congregations have undertaken a joint campaign to raise money for building renovations and for the addition of a space suitable for worship by both Jewish and Presbyterian congregations. The two congregations have undertaken joint social service and community outreach projects, have participated in pulpit exchanges, have engaged in annual joint Thanksgiving services, have held Kristallnacht Memorial Services, and over many years have sustained Bible study and extensive dialogue about shared moral and ethical values.

The scriptural vision that our two congregations share comes from the Pentateuch and the prophetic writings that portray justice as righteousness and integrity in the relations among all people and in all God's creation. In our belief systems, the central concepts of justice and righteousness are one and the same. Ultimately, as spiritual partners sharing faith in God, we believe, as Isaiah proclaimed in chapter 32:17, "...the work of justice shall be peace."

Because of the history of our two congregations who have shared sacred space as spiritual siblings, we feel uniquely able and obligated to address the fracture in Jewish-Presbyterian relations growing out of actions taken by the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA).

**II. Honoring the Covenant Relationship**

We reaffirm Psalm 133:1, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity." This very Psalm hangs in our joint congregational space. We value our interfaith relationship and share a belief (articulated by PCUSA's study paper of 1987) that both Jews and Christians are in covenant with God and therefore Jews are not appropriate subjects for proselytizing by Christians. It is entirely appropriate that Presbyterian churches throughout the United States have called attention to the fact that PCUSA's actions of the 216th General Assembly have been exceedingly disturbing to the American Jewish community and, we would add, to many Presbyterians as well. Prominent among these actions is funding for the Avodat Israel, a messianic congregation in the Presbytery of Philadelphia that focuses on Jews for conversion and is funded by presbytery, synod, and General Assembly funds. Our experience leads us to believe that targeting Jews for conversion is not an expression of justice, and we believe funding for Avodat Yisrael and similar congregations should be ended.

**III. Toward a Positive Investment Strategy**

The other General Assembly action that concerns us is the decision to begin a phased process of selective divestment from corporations supporting Israeli military activity. With regard specifically to the introductory statement on "historical background" of the General Assembly resolution, we believe the statement should note that all parties bear responsibility for the current situation, and that no party should be singled out as bearing primary responsibility.

We note with approval a positive development that has occurred since the General Assembly resolutions were adopted in June 2004, that is, the progressive evolution represented by amendments to guidelines made by the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI)

committee on November 6, 2004 to include language applying to Palestinians as well as to Israelis..

There is no consensus within our two congregations or between our congregations as to the wisdom of the divestment possibility. However should any action be taken by MRTI pursuant to the General Assembly resolution, it should be applied in accordance with the recommendations and actions below.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

- a. Interventions by PCUSA of any sort should represent an evenhanded application of our commonly held principles of justice and peace.
- b. Positive interventions should be emphasized.
- c. Any changes in the investment portfolio of PCUSA should focus on a positive redirection of Presbyterian resources to companies doing business in the region, following standing PCUSA investment guidelines, i.e., encouraging activities that are positive, helpful and peaceful and avoiding those that serve as obstacles to peace.
- d. We underscore that any interventions in the region should not have the intent or actual effect of the following:
  - i. An attack on the Israeli or Palestinian economy or on the future viability of either state
  - ii. A boycott of either party in any respect
  - iii. A net loss of investment from either the Israeli or Palestinian economy
- e. Any intervention by PCUSA should have the objective of encouraging activities leading toward peace, while condemning and taking action against violators of human rights on all sides of the conflict.

#### **V. Immediate Actions**

Recognizing the evolution in thinking from the original General Assembly divestment strategy to the November 6, 2004 MRTI guidelines for the implementation of the action of the General Assembly, we propose the following additional changes to this policy going forward.

- a. As profitable investment opportunities arise that involve multi-national companies operating in both Palestinian and Israeli economies or that involve cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli companies, then PCUSA should especially explore these opportunities.
- b. We propose identifying companies for investment that satisfy either of the following criteria:
  1. Creating equitable employment and building capacity in the Palestinian and Israeli economies as an outcome of the companies' business in the region. If possible, such business should be to the mutual benefit of both Israeli and Palestinian societies.
  2. Joint ventures between Palestinians and Israelis in the region and/or companies that supply and support them.

#### **VI. Related Actions**

We encourage the Stated Clerk of the PCUSA to work with its international ecumenical and interfaith partners in Europe and the United States to explore and identify means to press countries providing budgetary support to the parties to the conflict to use this support as a means of encouraging progress towards a long-term peace between Palestinians and Israelis and discouraging acts of terrorism and violations of human rights. Any such support should be conditioned on a full, transparent public accounting of how it is used.

## **VII. Our Hope and Vision for the Future:**

- a. A reaffirmation of our affection for each other and our respect for one another's faith;
- b. An end to violence and conflict in the land that is precious to Jews, Muslims, and Christians;
- c. Two nations, Israel and Palestine, co-existing peacefully within mutually respected borders, with both nations thriving and participating fully in the world economy and community.