

**Israel-Palestine Statement**  
**With Perspectives from Those with Greater Sympathy for Palestine or Israel**  
**Southwest California Synod**  
**May 2011**

**ELCA and Synod Timeline**

- August 2005 – At the Churchwide Assembly, resolution calls for awareness, accompaniment and advocacy, including stewarding financial assets for a just peace, and establishes Peace Not Walls Campaign.
- August 2007 – At the Churchwide Assembly, Assembly action affirms Peace Not Walls Campaign and issues travel recommendations, list of products to avoid from settlements and a purchasing policy guide to encourage purchasing products from Palestinian providers. Purchasing policy not to include divestiture.
- August 2009 – At Churchwide Assembly, Assembly action reaffirms Peace Not Walls Campaign, adding balanced... care for all parties.
- January 2010 – ELCA Analysis of December 2009 Kairos Palestine Document is released. The Kairos Palestine Document is a document signed by Bishop Younan and other interfaith leaders of the Holy Land “calling on churches to be attentive to the fact that some Christian theologies have legitimized the injustice experienced by Palestinians” [from ELCA Analysis] and endorsing “the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel” as a form of nonviolent resistance [Section 7 of Kairos].
- May 2010 – At Southwest California Synod Assembly, Resolution 10-11 To Divest, Boycott and Sanction Israel until It Complies With International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights, which was submitted to 2010 Synod Assembly, is referred to Synod Council.
- March 2011 – Presiding Bishop Hanson joins interfaith leaders in a letter to President Obama expressing regret that the US vetoed the UN Security Council resolution reaffirming that settlements are illegal.
- April 19, 2011 – ELCA Presiding Bishop Joins Interfaith Call for Middle East Peace 11-056-JB. The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and 32 Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders, said a new peace initiative by former Israeli government, intelligence and security officials offers a useful sign for Middle East peace. The initiative, along with previous Middle East peace initiatives, offers "key principles and ideas for negotiations to achieve comprehensive Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace," the religious leaders said in a letter to President Barack Obama. See <http://www.elca.org/News/Releases.asp?a=4750> and <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Advocacy.aspx> . (These are printed on pages 5 and 6 of this statement.)
- May 2011 – The work of the Israel-Palestine Committee of the Southwest California Synod is available in a 6-page or 13-page document. The shorter document contains only areas of agreement. The larger document also includes perspectives of those who would have greater sympathy for either Palestine or Israel. Both documents are available online at [www.socalsynod.org](http://www.socalsynod.org) . For a hard copy, please contact the Synod Office at Southwest California Synod, 1300 E. Colorado St., Glendale, CA 91205-1406.

## **2010 Synod Assembly**

At our May 2010 Synod Assembly, after a respectful exchange of ideas regarding Resolution 10-11 To Divest, Boycott and Sanction Israel until It Complies With International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights, a motion was passed as follows:

“To refer Resolution 10-11 to the Synod Council with the instruction that the Council form a Committee made up of persons from the Justice Team and those who have spoken in opposition to resolution 10-11 to form a possible joint statement for action by the Assembly. The committee shall report on its work to the Synod no later than at the 2011 Synod Assembly.”

## **Israel-Palestine Committee**

In March 2011, the Committee was formed including Bishop Dean Nelson, Pastor Wayne Christiansen, Pastor Roger Rogahn, Pastor David Berkedal, Jane Affonso, Lee Carlson, Garrett Biehle, Pastor George McLeary, Ross McConnell, Ron Nelson, Lillian Simons, Ray Huff and Lori Splinter. The first meeting was held March 10, 2011.

With the command of Jesus in John 15:12 and even the more simple form John 15:17 compelling, “This is my command: Love each other,” how do we love these neighbors? How do we love those who abuse power, disregard human rights and use violence to promote their view? How do we speak to justice and righteousness in a world that won’t listen and, truthfully, doesn’t care because their minds are made up? How do we hope to make a difference in a world so far away and yet so connected to the core of who we are?

The Committee believed that it was best to present a statement that endorsed core Christian values, such as God’s love for all people (John 3:16), a concern for the oppressed (Exodus 3:7) and a desire for justice (Amos 5:24). While our discussion did not lead us to a shared understanding of how to balance questions of responsibility for injustice or victimization on either side, we did find areas where we agreed.

We found that we could all agree that those around the table were people of good will who were seeking to apply their Christian faith to very complicated issues. While we could not agree on how best to address those issues, we agreed that inaction is not an acceptable option.

We therefore call upon the people of God in the Southwest California Synod, as people likewise of good will, to seek the will of God and take action, upon the discernment of that will, choosing from whichever of the possibilities we present below seems right to them and to the Holy Spirit in order to present a just and balanced approach to the historically difficult challenges presented by both sides in the peace process.

### **We agree to:**

- Pray for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine;
- Sign the document “For the Peace of Jerusalem” at [www.PeaceofJerusalem.org](http://www.PeaceofJerusalem.org) organized by Churches for Middle East Peace, [www.cmep.org](http://www.cmep.org);
- Evaluate and refine its peace-making efforts to demonstrate as full as possible the “balanced...care for all parties” expressed in the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine (2005; Sect. II.A), while continuing our unique relationship with and accompaniment of Palestinian Christians and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Holy Land (ELCJHL);
- Learn more about the experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians and their mutual fears, aspirations, and hopes;
- Work to convey the concerns and perspectives of Palestinians and Israelis that dispel stereotypes and caricatures and promote better understanding;
- Lift up the voices within both communities, especially those of victims of violence, that seek peace with justice through nonviolent responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
- Continue to help alleviate the humanitarian needs of all of those affected by the conflict;
- Support U.S. efforts that promote peace and cooperation for all parties to the conflict; and
- Continue to pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

### **Awareness –**

- Before we can speak truth, we have to learn truth. We must dedicate ourselves to the task of educating ourselves and our congregations. We cannot rely on American media alone. We must learn the truth of what goes on in the Holy Land.
- Study the letters and statements from the Presiding Bishop and use them as a point of discussion and possible action.
- Copy and share letters from people who are there. Also, get to know all people who live, work and worship there.
- Read the books and listen to the voices that reach out to us – voices that cry for justice.
- Continue to pray for wisdom, justice and peace.

### **Advocacy –**

- Speak the truth. Awareness and Advocacy are closely linked. Once we are aware of the truth, then we have to speak it. We need to be discussing the Holy Land in our congregations, in our newsletters, on our web-sites and on every level of the church.

This is easy to say and very difficult to do. People stop listening – especially if they perceive our voice as strident. We need balance, love, and prayer.

- Support the Christian leaders and workers in Jerusalem so that they may provide God’s light and hope.
- Write or call your congress representatives. A written letter or phone call makes a stronger impact than email.
- Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed for your local newspaper.
- Write a letter to President Obama using the statement on page 5 of this document as a guide, as you find agreeable.
- Speak the truth with love.

**Accompaniment –**

- To those who say these problems can never be fixed, we say continue to hope.
- Support schools that teach peace and reconciliation.
- When travelling, in addition to Israeli and Palestinian sources, follow travel recommendations as suggested by the ELCA and in consultation with the Bishop’s office in Jerusalem. Do not go and see just the tourist sites but also meet the people, explore the situations and learn about the area.
- Consider what impact your actions have on those living and working in Israel, Jordan and Palestine. There are shopkeepers with inventory who are living on the margins and rely on visitors to purchase their goods.

**In concluding this Value Statement**

The Committee was presented the monumental task “to form a possible joint statement” amongst passionate people of differing perspectives. There were areas of agreement and, obviously, areas where we just could not agree. Our goal was to provide information for action.

It’s not that everyone will do everything, but everyone can do something. Do what you are gifted to do. Learn, teach, write, buy, travel – whatever you can do in love. And do it all with prayer.

**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative  
for Peace in the Middle East**

E-Mail: [usicpme@aol.com](mailto:usicpme@aol.com)

Website: [www.nili-mideastpeace.org](http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org)

April 14, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President,

The launching of a new peace initiative by a group of former Israeli government, intelligence and security officials prompts us to write to you as leaders of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim national religious organizations who are committed to strong U.S. leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Given the current stalemate in negotiations, the threat of escalation of violent confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians, and the goal and expectation that peace can be achieved this year, we believe the Israeli peace initiative, the earlier Arab Peace Initiative, and the Geneva Accord, taken together, offer key principles and ideas for negotiations to achieve comprehensive Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The main elements of these peace initiatives reflect years of official and informal, unofficial negotiations and include: creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, based on the 1967 borders with possible limited land swaps as mutually agreed; a fair negotiated resolution of the issue of refugees that does not threaten the demography of Israel; the sharing of Jerusalem by Israel and the Palestinian state with both having their capitals in the city; and Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights as part of a peace agreement with Syria. We believe the United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should support these elements being addressed in negotiations on an urgent basis. In addition, of particular concern to our communities are guarantees for free access to Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy places.

We encourage you to visit Jerusalem and the region soon to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to discuss next steps toward achieving peace based on the principles and ideas in these peace initiatives.

We pledge our prayers and public support for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in this urgent endeavor. We believe you can count on substantial support from members of churches, synagogues, and mosques across the country.

Sincerely yours,

(List of Endorsers follows)

Cc: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

National Security Advisor Tom Donilon

**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative  
for Peace in the Middle East**

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**Letter to President Barack Obama, April 14, 2011**

**List of Endorsers**

**Christian Leaders:**

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington \*

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace, USCCB\*

Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, Director, Ecumenical Affairs, Armenia Orthodox Church in America\*

Fr. Mark Arey, Director, Office of Ecumenical Affairs, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America\*

The Reverend Peg Chamberlin, President, National Council of Churches of Christ USA\*

The Reverend Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ USA\*

Bishop Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America\*

Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church\*

The Reverend Geoffrey Black, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ\*

The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister, President, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)\*

The Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)\*

Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader, Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church\*

Richard Stearns, President, World Vision United States\*

The Reverend Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries, Board Member, World Vision US\*

David Neff, Editor in Chief and Vice-President, Christianity Today\*

The Reverend John M. Buchanan, Editor and Publisher, Christian Century\*

**Jewish Leaders:**

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism\*

Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis\*

Rabbi Peter Knobel, Past President, Central Conference of American Rabbis\*

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Past President, Central Conference of American Rabbis\*

Rabbi Alvin Sugarman, Vice President, A Different Future\*

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University\*

Rabbi Burton Visotzky, Professor of Midrash & Interreligious Studies, Jewish Theological Seminary\*

Rabbi Shawn Zevit, Director of Congregational Services, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation\*

Dr. Carl Sheingold, Former Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation\*

Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly\*

**Muslim Leaders:**

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America\*

Imam Mohammed ibn Hagmagid, Vice President, Islamic Society of North America\*

Naeem Baig, Executive Director, Islamic Circle of North America\*

Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain, Georgetown University\*

Dawud Assad, President Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA\*

Eide Alawan, Interfaith Office for Outreach, Islamic Center of America\*

Iftekhhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America\*

\*Organizations for Identification Only