



**Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)**
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Compelled to Witness

A Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Pastoral Letter
Affirming Justice, Rights, and Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine
February 2022

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long? –*Psalm 13:1-2a*

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

–*1 Cor. 12: 12 & 26*

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a part of the Church universal, in communion and partnership with churches and Christian agencies in the US, Canada, and around the world including in the Middle East. Through the Division of Overseas Ministries and Global Ministries, we nurture global partnerships and continue a tradition of participation in God’s mission that dates back to our first missionary, appointed in 1849 to serve in Jerusalem. While our understanding of mission has evolved over the past century and a half, our attention to the world and concern for the circumstances of God’s people and creation are foremost. We rejoice when one member of the body is honored, and we suffer when another member of the body suffers.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as a church denomination committed to racial, economic, and social justice, has spoken clearly and participated actively in movements for civil rights and anti-racism in the US and Canada and for human rights and the just resolution of conflict around the world. We are committed to active participation in interreligious dialogue through which we can seek ways to work purposefully together in common cause and discuss areas of potential divergence of views.

The places of Israel and Palestine are dear to us as Christians—because of the Biblical history centered there, because of the people (siblings in Christ, as well as Jews and Muslims) who are suffering there, and because of the call we accept to seek justice and pursue peace. Between 1973 and 2019, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Assembly has articulated clear [positions in support of justice and peace for Palestinians and Israelis](#). In addition, leadership of our church have issued statements when circumstances merit.

In the recent period, we have witnessed changes in governments – both in the US and Israel – and an especially aggressive period of violations of international law and conventions vis-à-vis Palestinian rights. Recent acceleration of actions and circumstances that have led to the deterioration of hope for a just peace in Israel/Palestine. These include:

- Official US recognition of Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights;
- *De facto* annexation of land and property through the expansion of illegal settlements;

- Demolitions of Palestinian homes and evictions, increased incidents of settler violence toward Palestinians;
- The designation of Palestinian human rights organizations as “terrorist organizations” simply for documenting and reporting violations of human rights;
- The move of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem;
- The diminishment of US support for the well-being and the rights of Palestinian refugees;
- The passage of the Israel Nation State Law (2018) which codified discriminatory policies and practices;
- The May 2021 escalation in violence, including the bombardment and continuing blockade of Gaza.

No tangible positive changes in policy have materialized since the 2021 Israeli elections, with Israel signaling no intention to negotiate toward the realization of a Palestinian state, or to abide by international law, conventions, or UN resolutions, and the US remaining inactive in addressing the deteriorating conditions. Violations of Palestinian rights continue unabated, and without accountability. US military aid – \$3.8 billion annually as a baseline, with additional aid as conferred – flows to Israel whose armed forces control Palestinians living under military occupation and blockade, enhancing its arsenal. The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem repeat their deep concern about the tangible threats to the future of Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. All of this, not to mention the stark difference in access to COVID vaccinations and access to health care between Israeli citizens and Palestinians living under Israeli control. How long can this go on? How long must Palestinians bear this pain in their bodies, souls, and community?

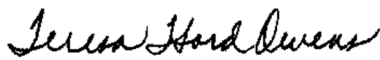
Our Palestinian partners’ urgent call for change compels us to witness in a way that acknowledges new realities and asserts a vision consistent with our long record of engagement in struggles for justice for all people.

It is in this context that our partners – both Palestinian and Israeli – have continued to speak out. Just over a year ago, B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, issued a report entitled, “[This is Apartheid](#),” identifying “a regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea” and naming a number of areas where Israeli policy and practice comports with the international legal definition of the crime of apartheid. These include: Jewish-only immigration; appropriating land for Jewish populations at the expense of Palestinian presence; restricting Palestinian freedom of movement; and denial of Palestinian political participation. Several of our Palestinian partners have been calling Israeli practices and policies apartheid for much of the past two decades. Kairos Palestine, with Global Kairos for Justice, issued its “[Cry for Hope](#)” in July 2020, which [Disciples leadership commended for study and action](#). In it, the “Cry for Hope” authors invite “fellow Christians... to formally reject the oppression of the Palestinian people and any use of the Bible to justify this injustice.” In 2009, Kairos Palestine wrote in “[A Moment of Truth](#),” “the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God.” In the “Cry for Hope,” they assert that “support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, though silence, word or deed, is a sin.”

As leaders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we must not be silent in the face of changes on the ground and further entrenched systemic factors. Consistent with the Disciples’ commitment to wholeness in a fragmented world and to seeking peace with justice for all people, we are compelled to acknowledge and amplify the voices of our partners – in Israel/Palestine and around the world – and to witness to what we know and see.

- ❖ We affirm our faith relationships and partnerships in Israel/Palestine; we hear the urgent concern of church leaders there for the future of the Christian presence in the lands of our scriptures, especially impacted by prevailing circumstances.
- ❖ We abhor and condemn words and actions that insult or injure any person based on any aspect of their identity, including religious identity, and will continue to work against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry.
- ❖ We differentiate between anti-Semitic discourse and action, which is on the rise in our countries and beyond, on the one hand, and legitimate criticism of the State of Israel's laws, policies, and actions on the other.
- ❖ The continuing occupation, denial of rights, and injustice that Palestinians endure is not consistent with our understanding of God's vision of justice for all people, and therefore is sin.
- ❖ Israeli policies and practices that discriminate against Palestinians – Christians and Muslims alike – are consistent with the international legal definition of the crime of apartheid as defined in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA, 1973) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002).
- ❖ Our governments, especially the US government, have done little to hold Israel, a close ally, accountable to international law and conventions, UN resolutions, and even to US laws such as the US Foreign Assistance Act, the Arms Export Control Act, and the "Leahy Laws" which are designed to prevent the use of US military aid to military units that violate human rights. The US should apply such laws and standards consistently by conditioning its immense military aid to Israel upon Israel's compliance with them.
- ❖ We support the use of economic measures to hold countries and companies accountable to standards of human rights and national and international laws. We oppose efforts to criminalize them in states and provinces, and nationally.
- ❖ We reject any theology or use of scripture to justify any system of discrimination, oppression, violation of any person's dignity, or exclusivist claim on land, including Christian Zionism.

In this time when a resolution to the conflict in Israel/Palestine seems as distant as ever, and advocacy for a particular kind of solution may not be effective, we support a rights-based approach that will ensure the rights, equality, and dignity of all people concerned, especially the most vulnerable, based on principles of peace and justice, human rights, and international law. We pray for the day when pain and sorrow are relieved, when peace and justice prevail, for Palestinians and for Israelis. We yearn for the time when all parts of the body are healed and restored. And we will work for this vision, which is eminently consistent with our understanding of the Gospel message, to be realized.



Rev. Teresa Hord Owens
General Minister and President



Rev. LaMarco A. Cable
President
Division of Overseas Ministries



Rev. Sheila P. Spencer
Interim President
Disciples Home Missions