

Session Six: Call to Action

Read aloud the passage describing a particular form of action called for in the Kairos USA document. Then as a group, review some of the resources provided, as well as brainstorm other ideas and share other resources group members may know about. Choose a scribe to take notes on these. Then discuss the questions below.

Education and awareness

“Education ... [helps] us get to know the other as he or she really is rather than through the prism of conflict, hostility or religious fanaticism.” (Kairos Palestine document, 9.2) There is a rich and growing body of study materials produced by denominational and ecumenical organizations for this very purpose. We encourage our congregations, church networks and denominations to make use of written and video materials about the history, facts and people of Israel and Palestine as part of Bible study, adult and youth education and community-based events.”

Discuss:

What does this particular action item entail? What are some concrete examples we’ve heard about or participated in? (review and brainstorm resources)

What can we imagine doing in our congregation along these lines?

What can we imagine doing as personal actions?

What can we imagine doing as communal actions?

Do we have any reservations or concerns about actions along these lines? What might be our challenges? What do we think is not appropriate for our context at this time?

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Come and see

“The Kairos Palestine document invites us to observe the Palestinian reality first hand. ‘In order to understand our reality, we say to the churches: Come and see. ...You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.’ (6.2) There is no substitute for witnessing directly the reality of Palestine today and for direct contact with the people of the land. We commit ourselves to facilitating the ‘coming as pilgrims,’ as the Kairos Palestine document urges, to see ‘the truth of our reality.’ We urge those who are unable to make such a pilgrimage to listen to those who have visited, lived and worked with Israelis and Palestinians. We call for a new openness to the testimony of those who have tasted the hospitality of the people of the land.

We urge all who visit to forgo the comfort and allure of heavily-subsidized travel with its slanted perspective and selective experience. In particular we call upon clergy and laypersons not to accept ‘free’ trips to the Holy Land, since these trips most often seek not to reveal but to obscure the truth about the occupation of Palestinian lands, the oppression of the Palestinian people and the damage that this situation inflicts on Israeli society.”

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Relationship with and support for civil society

“We urge American Christians to reach out in friendship to Palestinian Christians, to Palestinian Muslims and to Jews in Israel who are working to foster relationships with their Palestinian neighbors. Specific ways of pursuing these relationships include: sister relationships with churches and communities in Israel and Palestine; alliances with and support for civil society organizations, including schools, hospitals and non-governmental agencies in Israel and Palestine; selling Palestinian crafts and agricultural products at church events and conferences; support for specific development and education projects; and volunteering for peace and reconciliation work through church and civil society organizations—for example, the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel and Christian Peacemaker Teams.”

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Worship, spiritual disciplines and congregational life

“Worship and spiritual practices are central to Christian discipleship and, as works of piety, they are themselves powerful actions we take to embody our commitment to glorifying a God of radical love and grace. We encourage Christians to remember their baptism as a special calling to a new life of discipleship, a calling that at times may require bold and unpopular action. Jesus taught us to pray for God’s reign to come “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10) and to persevere in prayer (Luke 11:5–12). We therefore urge Christians to pray fervently and persistently for a just peace in Israel and Palestine; for those who are oppressed that they may be freed; and also for those who have constructed and promoted the unjust system, that their hearts and minds might be healed and changed, and to do this both in private devotions and in public liturgies. In the ritual of communion, Christians can experience unity with Christ and with Christians worldwide. Remembering our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters during World Communion Sunday or in other communion liturgies strengthens our bonds of love across geographical and political boundaries. Practices of fasting and almsgiving, often observed during the season of Lent, are acts of sacrifice that can both express contrition for our complicity in injustice and offer concrete means of support for those suffering oppression.

Selling Palestinian olive oil and crafts at church Christmas markets is a powerful way to support Palestinian civil society and to educate people about Palestinian life. Many congregations have established a social justice committee to deal specifically with Israel and Palestine in sponsoring educational programs, pilgrimages and mission programs. Finally, we urge preaching from the pulpit on this topic, connecting the Gospel to the urgent cry for justice in Palestine and Israel.”

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Theology

"Jesus enjoins us to 'interpret the present time' (Luke 12:54–56). Theology is one way by which we discern the signs of the times—making meaning of what is happening in our lives and in the world around us, and clarifying what we are called to do as followers of Jesus. We acknowledge, however, that too often theology has become the handmaiden of uncritical support of the State of Israel on the part of church institutions, state bodies and the academy. Unwritten 'red lines' block any challenge—in the classroom, from the pulpit, in the press and in the halls of our government—to the theological and political assumptions that underlie our unquestioning support for the State of Israel. This captivity of theology is an intolerable and frankly dangerous situation. If there is ever to be peace in Israel and Palestine, it is essential that there be open discussion and active theological inquiry—in our churches, communities and institutions of higher learning. We look forward to the production of books, articles and features in scholarly journals, popular media and church publications, church and community education and Bible study and the vigorous treatment of this topic in conferences and symposia across a wide range of disciplines."

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Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

“For years most of the world has condemned Israel’s human rights violations, while the United States has effectively blocked any actions to bring pressure to bear on the policies of the State of Israel with respect to the Palestinians. In 2005, Palestinian civil society initiated the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign as a legitimate, nonviolent movement to uphold human rights and international law. Participation in the BDS movement by U.S. churches, notably in the form of initiatives to divest church funds from companies profiting from the occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza, has generated critically-important discussions at local, denominational and ecumenical levels about the responsibility of the church to act. It has also generated intense controversy. Opposition, from Jewish organizations as well as from voices within the churches, has often been fierce, claiming that such actions will inflict grievous damage on hard-won positive relationships with the Jewish community. Many express fear that these actions may encourage anti-Semitism. We note with distress that many have confused these actions with anti-Jewish discrimination and persecution in the Christian past. But BDS is directed at Israeli policy, not the state itself or its citizens, and certainly not against the Jewish people. Divestment and other forms of socially responsible investing (SRI) are not directed against groups, nor are they intended to hurt individuals, corporations or states. They are, rather, directed at unjust, oppressive policies and are about promoting our own values and stated commitments by noncooperation with evil. Furthermore, methods to exert economic pressure on governments and companies, in addition to being a legal, ethical and time-tested way of influencing the political process and corporate behavior, serve to increase awareness, promote open discussion and create the grassroots support required to urge governments to take effective action and to change unjust policies. We urge congregations, clergy and church leaders to become educated about the BDS movement and to consider the many forms that it can take on personal, local and national levels.”

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Political advocacy

“A just and sustainable peace in Israel and Palestine depends on a political solution based on justice and fairness. We hold our own government largely responsible for the continuation of conflict and suffering on the part of both Palestinians and Israelis because the actions that stand in the way of such a peace are financed and diplomatically protected by our government. We therefore urge Christians in the United States to advocate with our government for a foreign policy that demonstrates a commitment to justice for Palestinians and to a sustainable peace for all the peoples of the land.”

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