

## UNITED METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE RESOLUTION ON HOLY LAND TOURS

### 292. HOLY LAND TOURS

Concern has been raised across the church about special opportunities that are often being missed by United Methodists traveling to Israel/Palestine, often called the Holy Land. Christians indigenous to the area have also sharpened the question by wondering why they are so often ignored by Christian pilgrims to the region. Why, they ask, do travelers tend to honor the inanimate stones that testify to Jesus' life and ministry while ignoring the "living stones," the indigenous Christians who represent an unbroken line of discipleship to Jesus in the land that he called home?

Travelers to this land have the opportunity to be ambassadors of unity and concern to the churches and Christians in a troubled land. They also have an opportunity to learn from the spiritual traditions of the churches indigenous to the Middle East. Further, they have a special opportunity to discover firsthand the realities of a region of deep meaning and vital importance to Christians, as well as to Jews and Muslims,

*Therefore, The United Methodist Church:*

1. strongly affirms the resolution of the 1984 General Conference, offering "encouragement of all leaders of and participants in 'Holy Land tours' to contact indigenous Christian leaders in the Middle East, and to hear the concerns of both the Israelis and Palestinians who live there, as well as visit the biblical and historical sites" ("The Arab-Israeli Conflict," *The Book of Resolutions, 1984*, page 280);

2. asks the bishops, clergy, members, agencies, and congregations of The United Methodist Church, as they plan visits to the Holy Land, to devote at least 20 percent of the program time to contact with indigenous Christian leaders and to hearing the concerns of Palestinians and Israelis on the current crisis of Palestinian self-determination;

3. recommends that United Methodists planning individual or group tours to Israel/Palestine consult with the United Methodist liaison in Jerusalem and the Middle East Council of Churches Ecumenical Travel Office to seek opportunities to worship with indigenous Christian congregations and to visit United Methodist-supported mission sites;

4. asks the General Board of Global Ministries and the General Board of Church and Society to prepare specific recommendations for United Methodists traveling in the Middle East and other sensitive regions of the world;

5. recommends that United Methodist-sponsored tours use the denomination's joint seminar program in pre-departure seminars for the travelers;

6. urges that travelers use, as advance study materials, positions adopted by General Conference and by general church agencies relating to the Middle East;

7. extends sincere appreciation to those United Methodists who have facilitated the implementation of the above recommendations in tours they have sponsored or participated in during the first quadrennium following adoption of this resolution;

8. expresses deep concern that many tours sponsored or arranged by United Methodist bishops, pastors, and laity do not schedule opportunity for all participants

to enter into partnership with the indigenous Christians for the recommended program time and, therefore, fail to “Walk With the Living Stones” in their strides toward Palestinian self-determination, their rich spiritual heritage, and their faithful contemporary witness;

9. expresses deep concern that evidence continues to accumulate that Christianity is dying in the land of Jesus through economic, social, and political pressures, which have greatly diminished the numbers and percentage of Christians in the Holy Land. United Methodist bishops and other organizers of Holy Land tours have a special responsibility to adhere to these recommendations to strengthen the witness of the remaining Palestinian disciples of the Living Lord;

10. affirms the presence of The United Methodist Church in Jerusalem through our liaison office;

11. encourages tour leaders to consult with the United Methodist liaison office in Jerusalem in order to facilitate adherence to these recommendations;

12. instructs the Joint Panel on International Affairs of our general agencies to monitor and report to the General Conference regarding the implementation of this resolution;

13. underscores the significance of Bethlehem 2000, which celebrated two millennia of Christianity in the land of Jesus;

14. urges close cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches and other indigenous Christian groups to facilitate informed, alternative travel opportunities to the region; and

15. commends the General Board of Global Ministries for initiating visits to the Bible lands that explore issues of justice and peace among all participants in the region, with special emphasis upon the concerns of our Palestinian Christian colleagues.

ADOPTED 1992

AMENDED AND READOPTED 1996

AMENDED AND READOPTED 2000

See “Social Principles,” ¶¶ 165A, B, and D, *The Book of Resolutions, 2004*. Used by permission.