



Contact: M. Theresa Basile
Email: communications@kairosresponse.org
Telephone: 323-253-9087

Grassroots peace movement welcomes new United Methodist investment fund

Notes the need to apply long-standing church policy on Israeli occupation to other church funds

United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) welcomes the introduction of the Equity Social Values Plus Fund (ESVPF), created by Wespath Benefits and Investments (Wespath), our denomination's investment agency.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, United Methodists strive for obedience in all we do, including how we steward God's gifts. Therefore we seek to have our church investments reflect our values as much as possible. Many in our church, including in UMKR and Wespath, have struggled with how best to accomplish this in regard to the 50-year military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. We believe the ESVP fund moves us closer to a goal we share as United Methodists.

For decades, the United Methodist Church has stated its strong objection to the continuing Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory. Statements from the General Conferences of 2004, 2008 and 2012 have clearly identified our church's "[Opposition to Israeli settlements in Palestinian Land](#)," as well as the destruction of Palestinian homes, confiscation of Palestinian land and water, "and any vision of a 'Greater Israel' that includes the occupied territories and the whole of Jerusalem and its surroundings."

Reflecting that long-standing church policy, in the last ten years, fifteen annual conferences have adopted resolutions asking the church to divest from companies that maintain and profit from this destructive occupation; eleven of those resolutions have named three companies for divestment: Caterpillar, HP, and Motorola Solutions; nine have named all three.

Those companies have been named for a very good reason: for up to ten years, [religious investors and ecumenical groups have asked them](#) to stop providing products and services that the Israeli government needs to maintain the settlements and the occupation, and they have refused. It is time to admit that other methods of corporate advocacy have failed with these companies, to cease making profit from the misery of this occupation, and to use the option that [our Book of Discipline cites](#): excluding investments in companies that fail to uphold our values and protect human rights.

In 2016, Wespath [developed a policy](#) that responds to annual conference divestment resolutions, a policy they have now implemented. It states their intention to remove from the Equity Social Values Plus Fund companies that are named by seven to ten annual conferences representing three or more jurisdictions. In accordance with that policy, the three companies named above have been eliminated from the ESVPF.

We must note that, while UMKR commends this response to widespread church support for divestment from the Israeli occupation, we see the need for all United Methodist investments, not just the ESVPF, to [reflect the call of our denomination](#) for "all nations to prohibit any financial support for the construction

and maintenance of settlements.” As long as our church continues to invest in many companies that support the settlements, it is our view that those words and actions are not fully aligned.

It should likewise be noted that UMKR and all those United Methodists concerned with achieving a just peace in the Holy Land do not seek to harm any business or its employees, but rather to alter the behavior of companies that help maintain a truly dehumanizing system of oppression.

We therefore ask all members and agencies of our church to [hear the testimony of all our missionaries](#) to the Holy Land and, most urgently, to [heed the witness of our sisters and brothers in the Palestine church](#), who have told us of their suffering under the Israeli occupation and have asked that we support divestment as a means to help all Israelis and Palestinians achieve “justice, peace, security, and love.”

To that end, UMKR Co-Chair the Rev. John Wagner has said, “While we expect the conversation to continue, UMKR welcomes the Equity Social Values Plus Fund as an important step in our church’s commitment to Christian stewardship through moral investing. We hope United Methodist clergy, lay employees, and investment managers will consider using the ESVPF by choosing it for some of their equity investments.”

United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) is an international grassroots peace movement in the United Methodist Church responding to Palestinian Christians’ urgent call, in *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*, for effective action to end the Israeli occupation and achieve a just peace in the Holy Land. UMKR seeks – through nonviolent action and in partnership with our Palestinian sisters and brothers in Christ – freedom, justice and equality for all Palestinians and Israelis. Learn more about our work: www.kairosresponse.org

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