

# Stand in solidarity with the Christians of Palestine

Support the General Conference Resolution:

“Aligning UM Investments with Resolutions on Israel/Palestine”

*A Message from Bishop Mary Ann Swenson*

January 13, 2012

The beautiful season when we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace has just concluded, and this year it had a special meaning for me unlike any year in the past. Just before the Advent season began, I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with an ecumenical group of women bishops.

What I experienced on this trip affected me deeply, in ways I was not fully prepared for.

We visited Bethlehem, where I saw Christ's birthplace surrounded by an imposing concrete wall, with access granted to its residents through a dehumanizing checkpoint. We visited Hebron, a Palestinian town with a couple of hundred Israeli settlers planted in its midst, being guarded by well over 1000 Israeli soldiers. There are streets in Hebron that the residents are not allowed to use, not even to reach their own homes. I watched as a child climbed a ladder to a second story window to get into her home, and I was appalled to see a mother, carrying her baby in her arms, having to do the same.



*Ecumenical Delegation of Bishops, Israel-Palestine trip, November 2011. Bishop Mary Ann Swenson: front row, second from the left.*



We learned how the occupation has created segregated communities, where freedom of movement and access to the basic necessities of life - such as water and medical care - are determined by ethnic identity. I found myself moved to tears on a daily basis by what I heard and saw.

Yet, despite all the despair that we witnessed, we also met courageous men and women of all three Abrahamic faiths who continue to work for peace. They have kept hope in their hearts that real peace, security and justice will be achieved for all the people of Israel and Palestine. Among those who will never give up their faith in God's justice

and God's peace are the 'living stones' - the Christians of Palestine.

## SOLIDARITY, DIVESTMENT

The Palestinian Christians have given the world a statement of faith and a call to action, named **Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth**. This **heartfelt and profound document** includes an urgent plea to Christians around the world, asking what we are willing to do to resist the injustice of the (now) 45-year-old occupation of Palestine. They name *divestment* as a courageous step forward we can take: ethical, non-violent action that will help them in their long struggle for freedom and equal rights.

I came home from this pilgrimage firmly believing that United Methodists must stand in solidarity with our Christian brethren in Palestine. Some in our church are doing that today, in a global grassroots movement named **United Methodist Kairos Response (UMKR)**. The laity and clergy of UMKR

*educate* United Methodists about the reality of the Israeli occupation that we saw on our trip, and *advocate* that our church should not have financial investments that support that occupation.

You may be surprised to learn that the church does invest in the occupation, although our General Conference has adopted resolutions for more than a decade saying clearly that our church is opposed to the occupation of Palestinian land and wants to see it ended.

## TAKE ACTION

UMKR is supporting a resolution coming to General Conference 2012 from The General Board of Church and Society and several annual conferences. It calls on all United Methodist agencies to align their investments with our church's resolutions regarding Israel and Palestine and, specifically, *to end our investments in companies that help to sustain and expand the occupation.*



I commend the efforts of United Methodist Kairos Response; **I am writing to you to ask for your support of their work.**

### **Here are some things that you can do now:**

- » **Please SHARE this message** with your congregation, with other organizations, and forward it widely to family, friends and colleagues, asking them to take action too.
- » **Read and endorse the resolution** that is coming to General Conference. If you receive any services from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, you can **sign the petition** also.
- » **Consider donating** whatever you are able to this grassroots movement: They are working with limited resources to reach United Methodists around the world.
- » **Become a volunteer.** There is much to be done between now and General Conference. If you would like to be more involved, UMKR would welcome your help. You can contact them at: [info@kairosresponse.org](mailto:info@kairosresponse.org).

### ***I have a special request for General Conference Delegates who read this message:***

I know you will be concerned with many matters during General Conference that will shape the future of our church. But please do not neglect this God-given opportunity for our church to show that we truly mean what we have said in past resolutions, and that we will not knowingly support the injustice of the occupation with our investment funds. Take a little time to visit the UMKR website ([www.kairosresponse.org](http://www.kairosresponse.org)) and talk with your fellow delegates about the importance of supporting the resolution "Aligning UM Investments" at General Conference 2012.

Our calling as Christ's disciples includes challenging injustice and refusing to support systems of injustice wherever they are found. I hope you will prayerfully consider this justice initiative and join me in supporting it, both now and at General Conference. I look forward to seeing many of you in Tampa, Florida this spring.

Shalom, Salaam, Peace,  
*Bishop Mary Ann Swenson*  
California-Pacific Annual Conference  
United Methodist Church