

An Open Letter to the Baltimore Jewish Community:

Last month the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) met in Richmond, Virginia. The General Assembly is the highest deliberative body of the denomination, and speaks to and for the national church.

A number of its actions spoke about Israel and Judaism. We are acutely aware that these actions have been painful to many within the Jewish community and have called into question our friendship and support. Many of us Presbyterians were surprised by these actions and wish to go on record stating that they do not fairly represent our views.

What were the Assembly's actions?

The General Assembly stated its "opposition to the construction of a wall and other barriers," "welcomes the possibilities for peace contained in the 'Geneva Accord,'" described the "horrific acts of violence and deadly attacks on innocent people, whether carried out by Palestinian 'suicide bombers' or by the Israeli military, as abhorrent and inexcusable by all measures," and authorizes exploration of a selective divestment of church funds from those companies whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm or suffering to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli." What troubles us is that taken as a whole, these statements were not even-handed or adequately analyzed - especially in the call for our denomination to proceed with "selective divestment" of companies that do business with Israel and the expressed concern for the plight of Palestinians without an equal concern for the terror inspired by the actions of the Palestinian Authority or the jihadist terrorist groups.

On the domestic front, the assembly called for a re-examining and strengthening of the relationship between Christians and Jews while at the same time it refused to suspend the funding of a Presbyterian congregation in Pennsylvania, that calls itself "Avodat Yisrael" and whose minister calls himself a rabbi. Many in our denomination and those who sign this letter feel that the approach of this congregation in Pennsylvania is deliberately deceptive and contradictory to the theological commitments of our denomination. Furthermore, the Presbytery of Baltimore has gone on record rejecting efforts to proselytize Jews by removing just such a Messianic congregation from its membership over a decade ago. We are sorry that our denomination has not suspended this funding. We share in the Jewish community's dismay at this insensitivity, and will continue to take steps to communicate our disagreement with these actions.

Although previous General Assemblies have expressed strong support for Israel, and described Jews and Christians as "partners" who both stand in covenantal solidarity with God, the actions of this Assembly dealt a disturbing setback to the vitally important relationship between our two communities. In our opinion, these actions failed to convey a sense of balance and fairness in regards to the struggle between Israel and the Palestinian people. It also failed to recognize the inappropriateness of a Presbyterian congregation expropriating Jewish symbols and rituals for the purpose of bringing Jews into Christianity.

We, the undersigned disagree with these actions by the national church but find some hope in the Assembly's call for a new dialogue between Presbyterians and Jews. We pledge ourselves to work

within our denomination for increased sensitivity to the concerns of our Jewish neighbors regarding Israel, while seeking to work as true partners to hasten an end to the conflict that has caused so much pain for Jews, Christians and Muslims. In the coming weeks and months, we will seek greater dialogue with our Jewish brothers and sisters and will work within our presbytery to take actions opposing both the divestment proposal and further funding for congregations that adopt Jewish symbols and rituals for the purpose of evangelism within the Jewish community.

Signed:

(The following ministers are listed alphabetically; organization for identification only)

Rev. Thomas W. Blair – Pastor, Second Presbyterian Church
Reverend Wayne G. Boulton - Pastor, Roland Park Presbyterian Church
Reverend Christa Burns – Pastor, Faith Presbyterian Church
Reverend Andrew Foster Connors -- Pastor, Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church
Reverend George R. DeMass – Pastor, Perry Hall Presbyterian Church
Reverend Mary D. Galt – Pastor, Maryland Presbyterian Church
Reverend Alison Halsey – Pastor, First & Franklin Presbyterian Church
Reverend David Harris – Parish Associate, Govans Presbyterian Church
Reverend William L. Hathaway – Pastor, 1st Presbyterian of Annapolis Church
Reverend James G. Kirk - Pastor, Harandale Presbyterian Church
Reverend Kenneth E. Kovacs – Pastor, Catonsville Presbyterian Church
Reverend Christopher Leighton – Executive Director, The Institute on Christian & Jewish Studies
Reverend Terry Martin-Minnich – Associate Pastor, Roland Park Presbyterian Church
Chaplain Ronald Martin-Minnich – Chaplain, Maryland Army National Guard
Reverend Brett Porter Morgan - Pastor, Ashland Presbyterian Church
Reverend Peter Nord – Executive Presbyter, Baltimore Presbytery
Reverend C. Edward Richardson – Director of Christian Education, Govans Presbyterian Church
Reverend W. Terry Schoener – Pastor, Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church (Severna Park)
Reverend John R. Sharp – Pastor, Govans Presbyterian Church
Reverend Timothy S. Stern – Pastor, Ark and Dove Presbyterian Church
Reverend Gretchen van Utt – Pastor, Springfield Presbyterian Church
Reverend Herbert Valentine – Moderator of the 203rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church