

**Peace-making in the Middle East and The Episcopal Church's involvement
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Churches for Middle East Peace**

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The Episcopal Church has been praying and advocating for peace in the Middle East for a very long time. Through our partnerships in the Anglican Communion, we have supported the work of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem since its beginnings in 1841. During the Second World War, the Episcopal church in Jerusalem took charge of, and sheltered, the Lutheran clergy and congregations in that city. Christians with faith traditions with German and English roots, in the midst of war between those two nations, started making peace in the Middle East. The wider work of peacemaking in that region is still supported, encouraged, and led by Episcopal and Lutheran churches.

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem today is engaged in ongoing peace-making efforts of major importance, particularly through its schools and hospitals in Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The health-care institutions in those places serve ordinary citizens of all kinds and all faiths, as well as special needs populations. The schools educate Muslim and Christian children together, teaching respect for all peoples and understanding for different faith traditions. Bishop Suheil Dawani is a constant and urgent voice for peace through his work in

the five countries of his diocese, as well as in building partnerships for peace in other parts of the Anglican Communion.

In 1948, as Israel was being formed as a state, the bishops of the Anglican Communion joined in urging a just peace between Israel and Palestinians. The measure adopted that year at that Lambeth Conference of all the Anglican bishops called for “Jerusalem and its immediate environs [to be] under permanent international control, with freedom of access to sacred places secured for the adherents of the three religions.”

Since shortly after the Yom Kippur War, The Episcopal Church has repeatedly called for a just and secure two-state solution. Through our General Convention and Executive Council we have more than 30 times repeated our belief that a two-state solution is the only viable avenue to a just peace. The most recent of these policy statements was made this past February. We believe that the necessary elements include: the need to honor Israel’s existence and protect her security; an economically viable and politically secure state for the Palestinian people; and a shared Jerusalem as capital of both states. We believe that an equitable sharing of resources, like water, is also essential. We firmly believe that economic possibilities for both states are an essential part of the solution – we have

not sought a boycott or divestment from Israel, and we have called for positive economic investment in Palestinian territory.

As a Church, we have repeatedly and loudly condemned violence, wherever it has erupted and whoever has promulgated it. We take our mandate from the one we worship as Prince of Peace. We understand our role as Christians to be reconciliation in all spheres of life.

For nearly 40 years The Episcopal Church's presiding bishops, who speak on behalf of the Church to the wider world, have consistently and urgently addressed the need for peace in the Middle East. They have initiated and encouraged work toward peace-making within our own church and well beyond. In the 1970s, Presiding Bishop John Allin first called Episcopalians to prayer in the Christmas season for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and he spoke forcefully against the "inexcusable offense" of equating Jewish Zionism with racism. In the 1980s and 90s, Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning spoke passionately and repeatedly in favor of a Palestinian state, he met with President George H.W. Bush on the issue, and he became a lifelong hero to the peace movement in the Land of the Holy One. In the 1990s and in the beginning of this decade, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold called on all Episcopalians to discern their own deep spiritual connection to the Holy Land, and he became a regular

advocate in Washington. Since taking office three and a half years ago I have made public statements about the folly of violent methods on all sides in Gaza, urged Israel's ambassador to treat justly with Palestinians, made personal visits to Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, met and worked with human rights and peace organizations of all three Abrahamic faiths, and advocated at several levels of our own government. I continue to urge more effective policy toward Israel and the Palestinian leadership, most recently in a letter to President Obama on the Gaza blockade.

The peacemaking work of our church extends more globally as well. A 2007 gathering of Anglicans and Episcopalians in South Korea called Toward Peace In Korea (TOPIK), focused on reunification on the Korean peninsula. The gathering included representatives from the Middle East as one model or example of how peacemaking in one part of the world can both teach and influence peacemaking elsewhere. The last gathering of my counterparts from other Anglican provinces made a strong statement on the violence in Gaza, calling for an end to violence, an increase in humanitarian aid, and pressure on all our governments to achieve a ceasefire and meaningful peace negotiations.

The Episcopal Church first established a Washington office for advocacy work in 1979, under Presiding Bishop Allin. Since its inception, that office has

prioritized peace between Israel and Palestine in its advocacy efforts, helping to found this body - Churches for Middle East Peace - in the 1980s and continuing on its Board of Directors. The office also plays an active role in the National Interfaith Religious Leaders Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI), a unique partnership of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders committed to peace.

The Episcopal Church has always been deeply committed to addressing the obstacles to peace in each religious and political community, including our own. We believe that a balanced approach in seeking justice for all peoples in the Holy Land will ultimately be in the best interests of Israel, of Palestinians, and of the United States. We also believe that peace in the Land of the Holy One is an essential element in achieving peace in many other parts of the world.

The Episcopal Church is not only an American church. We also have dioceses and congregations in Taiwan, Micronesia, Central America, South America, and six countries in Europe. Episcopalians in all those places are praying and working for peace in the Middle East, and will continue to do so. We are partners with Episcopalians and Anglicans in 160+ nations, and in most of those places, peace in the Holy Land is a goal and priority, growing out of our Christian belief in reconciliation. We are urgently committed to helping to build a society of peace with justice – a world of shalom and salaam, the very concept from which

Jerusalem takes its name. We will partner with any group, of any faith or none, who shares our desire to see a just peace in the Holy Land.

I give thanks for your presence and your passion. I thank you on behalf of children, women, and men who live in fear, want, and insecurity in the Middle East, whether they are Jewish, Muslim, or Christian. The God who created us desires something very different for all his children. We can and must engage our brothers and sisters and urge them to sit down with each other, heal old wounds of mistrust, anger, betrayal, and grief. If we are aware, we all share in that suffering. If we do nothing, we share in the sin of continued estrangement. With God's help we can and must do better.

There is a story in the gospels about a widow who wanted justice but couldn't get her grievance heard (Luke 18:1-8). We don't know what the issue was – land stolen or perhaps a goat killed by a neighbor – but we hear about her grief. She starts to go to the judge's home every day and wait outside his door. She stays where he cannot avoid her. She pounds on the door. Day after day after day she pesters him. Eventually, just to get rid of her, he grants her plea and gives her justice.

Some in Israel and in Palestine and in our own government may find all that nagging from here and from around the world tiresome, but we will not go home

until justice has been served. The lives and dignity and holy possibility of far too many people depend on our willingness to nag. The peace of Jerusalem and the world depends on our efforts. Pray for the city of peace.