

Kairos Palestine Document

and

A Study Guide

for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



This study guide was written by the Middle East Monitoring Group that was mandated by the 219th General Assembly (2010)

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Leaders' Letter

June 13, 2011

To the members and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The 219th General Assembly (2010) approved a comprehensive report on the Middle East as part of its work last summer, which included a significant set of actions to be taken by General Assembly entities and officers, as well as the creation of a special "Monitoring Group on Middle East Policy." This Monitoring Group was tasked:

... to assist the appropriate General Assembly Mission Council offices and the Middle East staff team in monitoring progress and guiding actions to ensure adequate implementation of policy directions approved by this General Assembly, given the growing complexity and interrelatedness of issues in the region. (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 367; *Minutes*, 2010, Part I, electronic version, p. 1023)

In addition to this overarching mandate to monitor and guide the implementation of General Assembly policy, the General Assembly directed the Monitoring Group to create a study guide for the Kairos Palestine document, stating that it:

Commends for study the Kairos Palestine document ("A Moment of Truth") and endorses the document's emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation. We lift up for study the often neglected voice of Palestinian Christians. We direct the Monitoring Group for the Middle East to create a study guide for the document. (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 368; *Minutes*, 2010, Part I, electronic version, p. 1023)

The Monitoring Group has worked diligently for months to produce a strong resource that simultaneously provides thoughtful attention to the breadth and depth of concerns raised by Palestinian Christians as well as a format that will work well within the adult education program of the average Presbyterian congregation. This study guide represents the fruits of that labor.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a history of engagement in mission and witness in the Middle East for more than a century, with longstanding partnerships among Christians in the region, and a particular concern for Palestinian Christians who maintain a witness to Christ in the land in which he walked. We have maintained a strong witness in relation to the contemporary struggle between Palestinians and Israelis, supporting both the existence of the State of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state, and arguing that both must have secure borders, a viable economy, and a just allocation of resources.

Historically, Presbyterians have always believed that education is an essential component of mission. We see the 219th General Assembly (2010)'s commendation of the Kairos Palestine document to the church for study as one of the most recent examples of that historic commitment. As part of the global church, we have a worldwide responsibility to listen and respond to the voices of our fellow Christians when they call out in faithful concern. Thus, this study process is part of a global Christian con-

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Leader's Letter

versation, both theological and missional, as together we struggle to understand what God is calling the church to be and do, in the Holy Land, in the United States, in our common fellowship, and all across the world.

Therefore, we encourage the members and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to take up this study. This work can be done fruitfully within congregations, but also between congregations, within presbyteries or pastoral peer groups, and with other Christians as well as American Muslims and Jews. Study in each of these contexts will yield new and different insights into the plight of Palestinian Christians as well the possible roles and responsibilities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in its mission work and the larger dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle itself.

In Greek, the word “kairos” refers to a special season or time of discernment, a time distinct from ordinary time (“chronos”). The 219th General Assembly (2010) declared that 2010–2012 should be a “time [for] Presbyterian prayer and action for the Middle East” (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 367; electronic version, p. 1023). We believe that, in acting to prayerfully and thoughtfully take up this study, we are working to fulfill not only that particular declaration, but our larger commitments to be in prayerful and thoughtful partnership with fellow Christians in the Middle East and to work together with them and all peoples of good will for a just and lasting peace to the conflicts plaguing the region.



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Middle East Monitoring Group's Preamble

In July 2010, the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved the following action as part of its work on Middle East peacemaking:

Commends for study the Kairos Palestine document ("A Moment of Truth") and endorses the document's emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation. We lift up for study the often neglected voice of Palestinian Christians. We direct the Monitoring Group for the Middle East to create a study guide for the document.

Accordingly, the Monitoring Group has produced this study guide to fulfill this mandate from the General Assembly. The Monitoring Group has sought to lift up the often-neglected voice of Palestinian Christians through studying this important theological document produced by a group of leading Palestinian theologians. The study guide itself comprises three sessions structured around the document's own governing themes of faith, hope, and love, integrated with the General Assembly's endorsed emphases of hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation.

This study guide is designed for ordinary Presbyterians, who may have little experience with the plight of Palestinian Christians or the dynamics of the larger Israeli-Palestinian struggle, so that they may better understand what our sisters and brothers in Christ from that region are experiencing and saying about faith and life in the Holy Land through the Kairos Palestine document. Thus, in addition to the study guide itself, we have provided background materials on some of the more complex areas of concern that may arise in discussions in an attached leader's guide following the study guide. Even so, we want to remind you that this guide is **not** a comprehensive analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and should not be used nor expected to serve as such. The Monitoring Group is producing a set of narratives (to fulfill a separate General Assembly mandate) that will provide a broader, deeper, and more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the conflict. This study guide, therefore, maintains its focus upon studying the Kairos Palestine document, its endorsed themes, and its embodiment of the often-neglected voice of Palestinian Christians.

In listening to and engaging that voice, the Monitoring Group wishes to emphasize the following points. First, the Kairos Palestine document is written originally in Arabic, and it is always important to realize that some interpretive choices are inevitably made in translation. Second, we have realized ourselves that we need to approach the text recognizing the difference and limitations of our own experience and perspectives from the authors as we seek to interpret their work, and we encourage you to recognize the same about your own context and experience.

Finally, in addition to the text of the document itself, we have included the accompanying letter from the authors and the response from the Heads of Churches in the Holy Land, which the authors have intended to be read in conjunction with any study of the document itself. Before turning to those texts, however, we encourage you to read the brief resources on the background and context of the Kairos Palestine document, which the Monitoring Group itself has created.

Background of the Kairos Palestine Document

The Kairos Palestine¹ document was released publicly on December 11, 2009, in Bethlehem. The document was written by an ecumenical group of Palestinian Christians that, as their website declares, is intended as “the Christian Palestinians’ word to the world about what is happening in Palestine” and that “requests the international community to stand by the Palestinian people.”

The term “kairos” is a Greek word meaning a “point in time” or “moment of decision.” The word appears regularly in the New Testament to refer to a particular moment or season, sometimes in a general sense (such as “harvest time” or “meal time”), and often to describe a moment of particular theological/historical significance that requires a particular response (e.g., Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem in Luke 19:44, or Paul’s discussion of time in relation to Jesus’ salvation and judgment in 1 Thess. 5:1 or 2 Cor. 6:2).

The term was picked up by an ecumenical group of South African Christians in 1985 as the title and governing theme of a theological document describing the experience of life under apartheid and offering a theological analysis of that context and a description of possible responses to it. That document was particularly notable for the way in which it contrasted the contextual realities of life under apartheid with the inadequacy of the typical church responses to it (so-called “church theology”). The South African Kairos Document received significant exposure through the global church and has since inspired similar efforts of contextual Christian theology (from Central America in 1988, Zimbabwe in 1998, and India in 2001). The Kairos Palestine document sets itself squarely in this tradition of contextual theology that calls for a decisive response from Christians across the globe.

The authors of the Kairos Palestine document are also connected with a more recent thread of Christian theology and participate in the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC formed an umbrella group called the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum to provide support to Palestinian Christians and to link them with churches across the globe. This group was the genesis of The Amman Call in 2007, which included commitments to “furthering theological and Biblical perspectives and Christian Education resources around those issues central to the conflict,” and “strengthening the churches’ response to the occupation.” In 2008, this same group convened in Bern, Switzerland, and produced The Bern Perspective, which called for more attention specifically to the theological and biblical understandings of “Promised Land” and to do so in conversation with sociopolitical, economic, and historical realities. The Kairos Palestine document, then, pays particular attention to this intersection of biblical and theological interpretation with contemporary realities, particularly in relationship to the question of the land.

¹ This is the colloquial name of the document, which is most commonly the name used for it; its official title is *A Moment of Truth: a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*. This article and the larger study guide will use the colloquial name for the sake of convenience.

Background of the Kairos Palestine Document

The release of Kairos Palestine garnered significant attention, both from church bodies across the globe and from other groups. Many international church leaders and bodies, including a group of South African theologians that included signers of the South African Kairos Document, made public statements endorsing or supporting the Kairos Palestine document. At the same time, aspects of the document were considered controversial by others, who took issue with various aspects of both its theology and its contextual analysis.

At its 219th General Assembly (2010), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) overwhelmingly approved a recommendation to commend the full document to the church for study and to endorse its emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation, and affirmed the need to lift up and hear the “often neglected voice of Palestinian Christians.” This study guide was commissioned by act of the General Assembly to support the church’s study of the Kairos Palestine document and attention to Palestinian Christian voices.

Context of Kairos Palestine Document

The Middle East Monitoring Group feels that it is important to include a basic introduction to the key elements and issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a way of understanding the context from which the Kairos Palestine document arises.

We will be releasing a set of diverse narratives and an annotated bibliography on the history and current reality of the conflict for study in the near future, as mandated by the 219th General Assembly (2010). Until that work can be completed, however, we felt it important to offer some provisional examples of the different understandings of the background of the conflict that has led to the current realities in which the Kairos Palestine document was written, noting that they differ somewhat in approach, style, and emphasis.

The most recent effort by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in developing a historical synopsis for study was approved by the 213th General Assembly (2003). It was part of a “Resolution on Israel and Palestine: End the Occupation Now,” and can be found at <http://oga.pcusa.org/publications/endoccupation03.pdf>.

In addition, the 218th General Assembly (2008) affirmed the need for us to “not over identify with the realities of the Israelis or the Palestinians.” An example of this kind of approach can be found at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pdf/promiese/promises-timeline.pdf>. As part of its *Point of View* documentary film series, PBS produced a historical synopsis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that illustrated the multiple narratives around this history by breaking out Palestinian and Israeli perspectives separately on key events and issues.

Accompanying Letter from Patriarchs and Heads of Churches

Jerusalem

WE HEAR THE CRY OF OUR CHILDREN

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, hear the cry of hope that our children have launched in these difficult times that we still experience in this Holy Land. We support them and stand by them in their faith, their hope, their love and their vision for the future. We also support the call to all our faithful as well as to the Israeli and Palestinian Leaders, to the International Community and to the World Churches, in order to accelerate the achievement of justice, peace and reconciliation in this Holy Land. We ask God to bless all our children by giving them more power in order to contribute effectively in establishing and developing their community, while making it a community of love, trust, justice and peace.

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox

His Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Church

His Beatitude Patriarch Torkom Manougian, Armenian Orthodox

Very Revd Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Custody of the Holy Land

H.E. Archbishop Dr. Anba Abraham, Coptic

H.E. Archbishop Mar Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox

H.E. Archbishop Paul Nabil Sayah, Maronite

H.E. Archbishop Abba Mathaios, Ethiopian

H.E. Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek Catholic

Bishop Gregor Peter Malki, Syrian Catholic

Bishop Munib A. Younan, Lutheran

Bishop Suheil Dawani, Anglican

Bishop Raphael Minassian, Armenian Catholic

Jerusalem—December 15, 2009

Accompanying Letter from the Authors

This document is the Christian Palestinians' word to the world about what is happening in Palestine. It is written at this time when we wanted to see the Glory of the grace of God in this land and in the sufferings of its people. In this spirit the document requests the international community to stand by the Palestinian people who have faced oppression, displacement, suffering and clear apartheid for more than six decades. The suffering continues while the international community silently looks on at the occupying State, Israel. Our word is a cry of hope, with love, prayer and faith in God. We address it first of all to ourselves and then to all the churches and Christians in the world, asking them to stand against injustice and apartheid, urging them to work for a just peace in our region, calling on them to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land.

In this historic document, we Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed, a call to justice and equality among peoples.

This document did not come about spontaneously, and it is not the result of a coincidence. It is not a theoretical theological study or a policy paper, but is rather a document of faith and work. Its importance stems from the sincere expression of the concerns of the people and their view of this moment in history we are living through. It seeks to be prophetic in addressing things as they are without equivocation and with boldness, in addition it puts forward ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and all forms of discrimination as the solution that will lead to a just and lasting peace with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds as its capital. The document also demands that all peoples, political leaders, and decision-makers put pressure on Israel and take legal measures in order to oblige its government to put an end to its oppression and disregard for the international law. The document also holds a clear position that nonviolent resistance to this injustice is a right and duty for all Palestinians including Christians.

The initiators of this document have been working on it for more than a year, in prayer and discussion, guided by their faith in God and their love for their people, accepting advice from many friends: Palestinians, Arabs, and those from the wider international community. We are grateful to our friends for their solidarity with us.

As Palestinian Christians we hope that this document will provide the turning point to focus the efforts of all peace-loving peoples in the world, especially our Christian sisters and brothers. We hope also that it will be welcomed positively and will receive strong support, as was the South Africa Kairos document launched in 1985, which, at that time proved to be a tool in the struggle against oppression and occupation. We believe that liberation from occupation is in the interest of all peoples in the region because the problem is not just a political one, but one in which human beings are destroyed.

Accompanying Letter from the Authors

We pray God to inspire us all, particularly our leaders and policy-makers, to find the way of justice and equality, and to realize that it is the only way that leads to the genuine peace we are seeking.

With thanks

His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah

His Eminence Archbishop Atallah Hanna

The Reverend Dr. Jamal Khader

The Reverend Dr. Rafiq Khoury

The Reverend Dr. Mitri Raheb

The Reverend Dr. Naim Ateek

The Reverend Dr. Yohana Katanacho

The Reverend Fadi Diab

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Mr. Rifat Kassis—Coordinator

**Kairos Palestine Document:
A Moment of Truth:
A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from
the Heart of Palestinian Suffering**

Introduction

We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection, and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant, in God's divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God's love for all, the mystery of God's divine presence in the history of all peoples and, in a particular way, in the history of our country, we proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging—a word of faith, hope, and love.

Why now? Because today we have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The decision-makers content themselves with managing the crisis rather than committing themselves to the serious task of finding a way to resolve it. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel, and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing? The problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church.

We address ourselves to our brothers and sisters, members of our Churches in this land. We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our religious and political leaders, to our Palestinian society and to the Israeli society, to the international community, and to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Churches around the world.

1. The reality on the ground

1.1 *"They say: 'Peace, peace' when there is no peace"* (Jer. 6:14). These days, everyone is speaking about peace in the Middle East and the peace process. So far, however, these are simply words; the reality is one of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, deprivation of our freedom and all that results from this situation:

1.1.1 The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, a large part of which has been confiscated for this purpose, has turned our towns and villages into prisons, separating them from one another, making them dispersed and divided cantons. Gaza, especially after the cruel war Israel launched against it during December 2008 and January 2009, continues to live in inhuman conditions, under permanent blockade and cut off from the other Palestinian territories.

1.1.2 Israeli settlements ravage our land in the name of God and in the name of force, controlling our natural resources, including water and agricultural land, thus depriving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and constituting an obstacle to any political solution.

1.1.3 Reality is the daily humiliation to which we are subjected at the military checkpoints, as we make our way to jobs, schools or hospitals.

1.1.4 Reality is the separation between members of the same family, making family life impossible for thousands of Palestinians, especially where one of the spouses does not have an Israeli identity card.

1.1.5 Religious liberty is severely restricted; the freedom of access to the holy places is denied under the pretext of security. Jerusalem and its holy places are out of bounds for many Christians and Muslims from the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Even Jerusalemites face restrictions during the religious feasts. Some of our Arab clergy are regularly barred from entering Jerusalem.

1.1.6 Refugees are also part of our reality. Most of them are still living in camps under difficult circumstances. They have been waiting for their right of return, generation after generation. What will be their fate?

1.1.7 And the prisoners? The thousands of prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons are part of our reality. The Israelis move heaven and earth to gain the release of one prisoner, and those thousands of Palestinian prisoners, when will they have their freedom?

1.1.8 Jerusalem is the heart of our reality. It is, at the same time, symbol of peace and sign of conflict. While the separation wall divides Palestinian neighbourhoods, Jerusalem continues to be emptied of its Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. Their identity cards are confiscated, which means the loss of their right to reside in Jerusalem. Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace.

1.2 Also part of this reality is the Israeli disregard of international law and international resolutions, as well as the paralysis of the Arab world and the international community in the face of this contempt. Human rights are violated and despite the various reports of local and international human rights' organizations, the injustice continues.

1.2.1 Palestinians within the State of Israel, who have also suffered a historical injustice, although they are citizens and have the rights and obligations of citizenship, still suffer from discriminatory policies. They too are waiting to enjoy full rights and equality like all other citizens in the state.

1.3 Emigration is another element in our reality. The absence of any vision or spark of hope for peace and freedom pushes young people, both Muslim and Christian, to emigrate. Thus the land is deprived of its most important and richest resource—educated youth. The shrinking number of Christians, particularly in Palestine, is one of the dangerous consequences, both of this conflict, and of the local and international paralysis and failure to find a comprehensive solution to the problem.

1.4 In the face of this reality, Israel justifies its actions as self-defence, including occupation, collective punishment and all other forms of reprisals against the

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Palestinians. In our opinion, this vision is a reversal of reality. Yes, there is Palestinian resistance to the occupation. However, if there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity. This is our understanding of the situation. Therefore, we call on the Israelis to end the occupation. Then they will see a new world in which there is no fear, no threat but rather security, justice and peace.

1.5 The Palestinian response to this reality was diverse. Some responded through negotiations: that was the official position of the Palestinian Authority, but it did not advance the peace process. Some political parties followed the way of armed resistance. Israel used this as a pretext to accuse the Palestinians of being terrorists and was able to distort the real nature of the conflict, presenting it as an Israeli war against terror, rather than an Israeli occupation faced by Palestinian legal resistance aiming at ending it.

1.5.1 The tragedy worsened with the internal conflict among Palestinians themselves, and with the separation of Gaza from the rest of the Palestinian territory. It is noteworthy that, even though the division is among Palestinians themselves, the international community bears an important responsibility for it since it refused to deal positively with the will of the Palestinian people expressed in the outcome of democratic and legal elections in 2006.

Again, we repeat and proclaim that our Christian word in the midst of all this, in the midst of our catastrophe, is a word of faith, hope and love.

2. A word of faith

We believe in one God, a good and just God

2.1 We believe in God, one God, Creator of the universe and of humanity. We believe in a good and just God, who loves each one of his creatures. We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and that every one's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us. This means for us, here and now, in this land in particular, that God created us not so that we might engage in strife and conflict but rather that we might come and know and love one another, and together build up the land in love and mutual respect.

2.1.1 We also believe in God's eternal Word, His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God sent as the Saviour of the world.

2.1.2 We believe in the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the Church and all humanity on its journey. It is the Spirit that helps us to understand Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, showing their unity, here and now. The Spirit makes manifest the revelation of God to humanity, past, present and future.

How do we understand the word of God?

2.2 We believe that God has spoken to humanity, here in our country: *"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last*

days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Heb. 1:1–2)

2.2.1 We, Christian Palestinians, believe, like all Christians throughout the world, that Jesus Christ came in order to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and in his light and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we read the Holy Scriptures. We meditate upon and interpret Scripture just as Jesus Christ did with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. As it is written in the Gospel according to Saint Luke: *“Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Lk 24:27).*

2.2.2 Our Lord Jesus Christ came, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near. He provoked a revolution in the life and faith of all humanity. He came with *“a new teaching” (Mk 1:27)*, casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land. We believe that the Word of God is a living Word, casting a particular light on each period of history, manifesting to Christian believers what God is saying to us here and now. For this reason, it is unacceptable to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter. This dead letter is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land.

Our land has a universal mission

2.3 We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

2.3.1 God sent the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles to this land so that they might carry forth a universal mission to the world. Today we constitute three religions in this land, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Our land is God’s land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God’s land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God’s land: *“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Ps. 24:1).*

2.3.2 Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land,

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resonant with the connectedness of any other people to the land it lives in. It was an injustice when we were driven out. The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our account and in our land. They tried to correct an injustice and the result was a new injustice.

2.3.3 Furthermore, we know that certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights. Thus, the promises, according to their interpretation, have become a menace to our very existence. The “good news” in the Gospel itself has become “a harbinger of death” for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples.

2.3.4 Our connectedness to this land is a natural right. It is not an ideological or a theological question only. It is a matter of life and death. There are those who do not agree with us, even defining us as enemies only because we declare that we want to live as free people in our land. We suffer from the occupation of our land because we are Palestinians. And as Christian Palestinians we suffer from the wrong interpretation of some theologians. Faced with this, our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that “the good news” remains what it is, “good news” for us and for all. In face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, we renew our faith in God because we know that the word of God can not be the source of our destruction.

2.4 Therefore, we declare that any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth.

2.5 We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.

3. Hope

3.1 Despite the lack of even a glimmer of positive expectation, our hope remains strong. The present situation does not promise any quick solution or the end of the occupation that is imposed on us. Yes, the initiatives, the conferences, visits and negotiations have multiplied, but they have not been followed up by any change in our situation and suffering. Even the new US position that has been announced by President Obama, with a manifest desire to put an end to the tragedy, has not been able to make a change in our reality. The clear Israeli response, refusing any solution, leaves no room for positive expectation. Despite this, our hope remains

strong, because it is from God. God alone is good, almighty and loving and His goodness will one day be victorious over the evil in which we find ourselves. As Saint Paul said: *“If God is for us, who is against us? (...) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long” (...) For I am convinced that (nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God”* (Rom. 8:31, 35, 36, 39).

What is the meaning of hope?

3.2 Hope within us means first and foremost our faith in God and secondly our expectation, despite everything, for a better future. Thirdly, it means not chasing after illusions—we realize that release is not close at hand. Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it. We see nothing in the present or future except ruin and destruction. We see the upper hand of the strong, the growing orientation towards racist separation and the imposition of laws that deny our existence and our dignity. We see confusion and division in the Palestinian position. If, despite all this, we do resist this reality today and work hard, perhaps the destruction that looms on the horizon may not come upon us.

Signs of hope

3.3 The Church in our land, her leaders and her faithful, despite her weakness and her divisions, does show certain signs of hope. Our parish communities are vibrant and most of our young people are active apostles for justice and peace. In addition to the individual commitment, our various Church institutions make our faith active and present in service, love and prayer.

3.3.1 Among the signs of hope are the local centres of theology, with a religious and social character. They are numerous in our different Churches. The ecumenical spirit, even if still hesitant, shows itself more and more in the meetings of our different Church families.

3.3.2 We can add to this the numerous meetings for inter-religious dialogue, Christian–Muslim dialogue, which includes the religious leaders and a part of the people. Admittedly, dialogue is a long process and is perfected through a daily effort as we undergo the same sufferings and have the same expectations. There is also dialogue among the three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as different dialogue meetings on the academic or social level. They all try to breach the walls imposed by the occupation and oppose the distorted perception of human beings in the heart of their brothers or sisters.

3.3.3 One of the most important signs of hope is the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the “Nakba” (catastrophe) and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here.

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3.3.4 In addition to that, we see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored. Public awareness of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing, and Jewish and Israeli voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation.

The mission of the Church

3.4 Our Church is a Church of people who pray and serve. This prayer and service is prophetic, bearing the voice of God in the present and future. Everything that happens in our land, everyone who lives there, all the pains and hopes, all the injustice and all the efforts to stop this injustice, are part and parcel of the prayer of our Church and the service of all her institutions. Thanks be to God that our Church raises her voice against injustice despite the fact that some desire her to remain silent, closed in her religious devotions.

3.4.1 The mission of the Church is prophetic, to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.

3.4.2 The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity. Our vocation as a living Church is to bear witness to the goodness of God and the dignity of human beings. We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries.

3.4.3 Our Church points to the Kingdom, which cannot be tied to any earthly kingdom. Jesus said before Pilate that he was indeed a king but "*my kingdom is not from this world*" (Jn 18:36). Saint Paul says: "*The Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom.14:17). Therefore, religion cannot favour or support any unjust political regime, but must rather promote justice, truth and human dignity. It must exert every effort to purify regimes where human beings suffer injustice and human dignity is violated. The Kingdom of God on earth is not dependent on any political orientation, for it is greater and more inclusive than any particular political system.

3.4.4 Jesus Christ said: "*The Kingdom of God is among you*" (Luke 17:21). This Kingdom that is present among us and in us is the extension of the mystery of salvation. It is the presence of God among us and our sense of that presence in everything we do and say. It is in this divine presence that we shall do what we can until justice is achieved in this land.

3.4.5 The cruel circumstances in which the Palestinian Church has lived and continues to live have required the Church to clarify her faith and to identify her

vocation better. We have studied our vocation and have come to know it better in the midst of suffering and pain: today, we bear the strength of love rather than that of revenge, a culture of life rather than a culture of death. This is a source of hope for us, for the Church and for the world.

3.5 The Resurrection is the source of our hope .Just as Christ rose in victory over death and evil, so too we are able, as each inhabitant of this land is able, to vanquish the evil of war. We will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active Church in the land of the Resurrection.

4. Love

The commandment of love

4.1 Christ our Lord said: *“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another”* (Jn 13:34). He has already showed us how to love and how to treat our enemies. He said: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (...) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matt. 5:45–47).

Saint Paul also said: *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil”* (Rom. 12:17). And Saint Peter said: *“Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called”* (1 Pet. 3:9).

Resistance

4.2 This word is clear. Love is the commandment of Christ our Lord to us and it includes both friends and enemies. This must be clear when we find ourselves in circumstances where we must resist evil of whatever kind.

4.2.1 Love is seeing the face of God in every human being. Every person is my brother or my sister. However, seeing the face of God in everyone does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather, this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression.

The injustice against the Palestinian people which is the Israeli occupation, is an evil that must be resisted. It is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed. Primary responsibility for this rests with the Palestinians themselves suffering occupation. Christian love invites us to resist it. However, love puts an end to evil by walking in the ways of justice. Responsibility lies also with the international community, because international law regulates relations between peoples today. Finally responsibility lies with the perpetrators of the injustice; they must liberate themselves from the evil that is in them and the injustice they have imposed on others.

4.2.2 When we review the history of the nations, we see many wars and much resistance to war by war, to violence by violence. The Palestinian people has gone the way of the peoples, particularly in the first stages of its struggle with the Israeli occupation. However, it also engaged in peaceful struggle, especially during the first

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Intifada. We recognize that all peoples must find a new way in their relations with each other and the resolution of their conflicts. The ways of force must give way to the ways of justice. This applies above all to the peoples that are militarily strong, mighty enough to impose their injustice on the weaker.

4.2.3 We say that our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy. Seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator to end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence.

4.2.4 Christ our Lord has left us an example we must imitate. We must resist evil but he taught us that we cannot resist evil with evil. This is a difficult commandment, particularly when the enemy is determined to impose himself and deny our right to remain here in our land. It is a difficult commandment yet it alone can stand firm in the face of the clear declarations of the occupation authorities that refuse our existence and the many excuses these authorities use to continue imposing occupation upon us.

4.2.5 Resistance to the evil of occupation is integrated, then, within this Christian love that refuses evil and corrects it. It resists evil in all its forms with methods that enter into the logic of love and draw on all energies to make peace. We can resist through civil disobedience. We do not resist with death but rather through respect of life. We respect and have a high esteem for all those who have given their life for our nation. And we affirm that every citizen must be ready to defend his or her life, freedom and land.

4.2.6 Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations, NGOs and certain religious institutions call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. The aim is to free both peoples from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation. In this spirit and with this dedication we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems, as indeed happened in South Africa and with many other liberation movements in the world.

4.3 Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both. We call on Israel to give up its injustice towards us, not to twist the truth of reality of the occupation by pretending that it is a battle against terrorism. The roots of “terrorism” are in the human injustice committed and in the evil of the occupation. These must be removed if there be a sincere intention to remove “terrorism”. We call on the

people of Israel to be our partners in peace and not in the cycle of interminable violence. Let us resist evil together, the evil of occupation and the infernal cycle of violence.

5. Our word to our brothers and sisters

5.1 We all face, today, a way that is blocked and a future that promises only woe. Our word to all our Christian brothers and sisters is a word of hope, patience, steadfastness and new action for a better future. Our word is that we, as Christians we carry a message, and we will continue to carry it despite the thorns, despite blood and daily difficulties. We place our hope in God, who will grant us relief in His own time. At the same time, we continue to act in concord with God and God's will, building, resisting evil and bringing closer the day of justice and peace.

5.2 We say to our Christian brothers and sisters: This is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers, the prisoners, the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent handicaps, the children who cannot live their childhood and each one who mourns a dear one. The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my brother is killed, then I too am killed. We face the same challenges and share in all that has happened and will happen. Perhaps, as individuals or as heads of Churches, we were silent when we should have raised our voices to condemn the injustice and share in the suffering. This is a time of repentance for our silence, indifference, lack of communion, either because we did not persevere in our mission in this land and abandoned it, or because we did not think and do enough to reach a new and integrated vision and remained divided, contradicting our witness and weakening our word. Repentance for our concern with our institutions, sometimes at the expense of our mission, thus silencing the prophetic voice given by the Spirit to the Churches.

5.3 We call on Christians to remain steadfast in this time of trial, just as we have throughout the centuries, through the changing succession of states and governments. Be patient, steadfast and full of hope so that you might fill the heart of every one of your brothers or sisters who shares in this same trial with hope. *"Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Be active and, provided this conforms to love, participate in any sacrifice that resistance asks of you to overcome our present travail.

5.4 Our numbers are few but our message is great and important. Our land is in urgent need of love. Our love is a message to the Muslim and to the Jew, as well as to the world.

5.4.1 Our message to the Muslims is a message of love and of living together and a call to reject fanaticism and extremism. It is also a message to the world that Muslims are neither to be stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists but rather to be lived with in peace and engaged with in dialogue.

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5.4.2 Our message to the Jews tells them: Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.

5.4.3 The word of faith says to anyone engaged in political activity: human beings were not made for hatred. It is not permitted to hate, neither is it permitted to kill or to be killed. The culture of love is the culture of accepting the other. Through it we perfect ourselves and the foundations of society are established.

6. Our word to the Churches of the world

6.1 Our word to the Churches of the world is firstly a word of gratitude for the solidarity you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a word of praise for the many Churches and Christians who support the right of the Palestinian people for self determination. It is a message of solidarity with those Christians and Churches who have suffered because of their advocacy for law and justice.

However, it is also a call to repentance; to revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people. It is a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all rather than to turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed. The word of God is a word of love for all His creation. God is not the ally of one against the other, nor the opponent of one in the face of the other. God is the Lord of all and loves all, demanding justice from all and issuing to all of us the same commandments. We ask our sister Churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed upon us. Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?

6.2 In order to understand our reality, we say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfil our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

6.3 We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations. At the same time we call on you to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. As we have already said, we see boycott and disinvestment as tools of non violence for justice, peace and security for all.

7. Our word to the international community

7. Our word to the international community is to stop the principle of "double standards" and insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties. Selective application of international law threatens to leave us vulnerable to a law of the jungle. It legitimizes the claims by certain armed

groups and states that the international community only understands the logic of force. Therefore, we call for a response to what the civil and religious institutions have proposed, as mentioned earlier: the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat once again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for all.

8. Jewish and Muslim religious leaders

8. Finally, we address an appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders, Jewish and Muslim, with whom we share the same vision that every human being is created by God and has been given equal dignity. Hence the obligation for each of us to defend the oppressed and the dignity God has bestowed on them. Let us together try to rise up above the political positions that have failed so far and continue to lead us on the path of failure and suffering.

9. A call to our Palestinian people and to the Israelis

9.1 This is a call to see the face of God in each one of God's creatures and overcome the barriers of fear or race in order to establish a constructive dialogue and not remain within the cycle of never-ending manoeuvres that aim to keep the situation as it is. Our appeal is to reach a common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security. We say that love is possible and mutual trust is possible. Thus, peace is possible and definitive reconciliation also. Thus, justice and security will be attained for all.

9.2 Education is important. Educational programs must help us to get to know the other as he or she is rather than through the prism of conflict, hostility or religious fanaticism. The educational programs in place today are infected with this hostility. The time has come to begin a new education that allows one to see the face of God in the other and declares that we are capable of loving each other and building our future together in peace and security.

9.3 Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another. We appeal to both religious Jews and Muslims: let the state be a state for all its citizens, with a vision constructed on respect for religion but also equality, justice, liberty and respect for pluralism and not on domination by a religion or a numerical majority.

9.4 To the leaders of Palestine we say that current divisions weaken all of us and cause more sufferings. Nothing can justify these divisions. For the good of the people, which must outweigh that of the political parties, an end must be put to division. We appeal to the international community to lend its support towards this union and to respect the will of the Palestinian people as expressed freely.

9.5 Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity. She is the city towards which all people are in movement – and where they will meet in friendship

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and love in the presence of the One Unique God, according to the vision of the prophet Isaiah: *“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it (...) He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Is. 2: 2–5). Today, the city is inhabited by two peoples of three religions; and it is on this prophetic vision and on the international resolutions concerning the totality of Jerusalem that any political solution must be based. This is the first issue that should be negotiated because the recognition of Jerusalem’s sanctity and its message will be a source of inspiration towards finding a solution to the entire problem, which is largely a problem of mutual trust and ability to set in place a new land in this land of God.

10. Hope and faith in God

10. In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here “a new land” and “a new human being”, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters.

Study Guide



Study Session #1 *A Moment of Truth: Hope for Liberation*

Opening Prayer

Let us then, my [brothers and sisters], endure in hope. Let us devote ourselves, side-by-side with our hoping, so that the God of the entire universe, as he beholds our intention, may cleanse us from all sins, fill us with high hopes from what we have in hand, and grant us the change of heart that saves. God has called you, and you have your calling (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 313–386 C.E.).

Biblical Passage:

Read Romans 8:24–25

“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Rom. 8:24–25)

Questions for Discussion

History of the Kairos Palestine Document

Read the first paragraph of the Introduction of the Kairos Palestine Document, p. 10.

We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection, and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant, in God’s divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God’s love for all, the mystery of God’s divine presence in the history of all peoples and, in a particular way, in the history of our country, we proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging—a word of faith, hope, and love.

Study Session #1

Read the letter from authors (pp. 8–9); read the letter from Patriarchs and Heads of Churches, (p. 7).

According to the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document, what was the purpose of this document? How did the Patriarchs and the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem according to their letter respond to the authors?

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Engagement and Mandate

Read the letter from the leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), pp. 1–2.

According to the letter from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s leaders in this study guide, why is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) studying the Kairos Palestine Document?

Read Handout #1 (Moral Principles and Historic Commitments), p. 25.

After reading these Moral Principles and Historic Commitments, what did you learn about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s long standing witness in the region?

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Read Kairos Palestine: 3.1–3.3, (pp. 14–15).

The Kairos Palestine document affirms that Christian hope remains strong “despite the lack of even a glimmer of positive expectation.” How have you experienced this hope in your life? How do you hear that experience expressed in this passage from the document?

Homework

Read Kairos Palestine Document: 1.1–1.5.1, pp. 10–12.

Ponder: What are the realities from which the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document seek liberation?

Handout for Session #1

Affirmation of Human Rights & Moral Principles (*Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 366*):

In accordance with past policy statements and the theological-ethical bases of our confessions, the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the following human rights, moral principles, and goals guiding its recommendations:

- a. The human right to self-determination through free elections and the rule of law, including the right to enjoy such basic freedoms as those of speech, press, and assembly.
- b. The human right to religious freedom, including full access to religious sites and freedom from all discriminatory practices based on religious identity.
- c. Those additional rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights conventions, including the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- d. The moral principle of applying humanitarian laws regarding warfare to all nations. These laws protect civilians and nonmilitary facilities prohibit such internationally recognized violations as the use of anti-personnel weapons and weapons of mass destruction, the assassination of political opponents, collective punishment, detention without due process, and the torture or abuse of prisoners.
- e. The moral principle of applying these same humanitarian laws regarding warfare to nongovernmental combatants as well. These laws prohibit such practices as suicide bombing, kidnapping, shelling civilian populations, and torturing or abusing prisoners.
- f. The moral principle of granting to Red Cross, Star, or Crescent inspection teams access to all prison facilities.
- g. The moral principle that all refugees have an individual right to return or to adjudicate or negotiate compensation for the loss of home and homeland, wherever those may be.
- h. The moral goal for nations to create a nuclear-free world and, toward that goal, to sign and comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other relevant treaties.
- i. The moral goal of demilitarizing conflict situations to levels consistent with a state's or people's right to self-defense.
- j. The moral principle of respecting United Nations observers and peacekeeping forces and imposing disciplinary sanctions when nations or entities target UN facilities and personnel.

Study Session #1

- k. The moral principle of nonintervention in, noninterference with, and non-destabilization of other countries.

Historic Commitments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Since 1948, the Presbyterian church has consistently advocated for a just peace in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The following are historical commitments that were reaffirmed by the 219th General Assembly (2010) (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 367):

- a. an immediate cessation of all violence, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians;
- b. the reaffirmation of Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions;
- c. the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and diversion of water resources;
- d. an immediate freeze both on the establishment or expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and on the Israeli acquisition of Palestinian land and buildings in East Jerusalem;
- e. the relocation by Israel of the Separation Barrier to the 1967 border;
- f. the withholding of U.S. government aid to the state of Israel as long as Israel persists in creating new West Bank settlements;
- g. continuing corporate engagement through the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment with companies profiting from the sale and use of their products for nonpeaceful purposes and/or the violation of human rights;
- h. a shared status for Jerusalem;
- i. equal rights for Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel;
- j. the cessation of systematic violation of human rights by any party, specifically, practices of administrative detention, collective punishment, the torture of prisoners and suspects, home demolitions and evictions, and the deportation of dissidents;
- k. the immediate resumption by Israel and Palestine of negotiations toward a two-state solution.

Study Session #2
A Moment of Truth:
Love of Enemy and Nonviolent Resistance

Opening Prayer

What earthly joy remains untouched by grief?
What glory stands forever on the earth?
Frail shadows—all, delusive dreams;
which death will one day sweep away.
But in the light of your countenance, O Christ,
and in the enjoyment of your beauty,
give rest to those whom you have chosen and taken
for you are the Lover of all humanity. (St. John of Damascus, 676–749 C.E.)

Biblical Passages

Read: John 13:34, Matthew 5:45–47, Romans 12:17, 1 Peter 3:9

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (Jn. 13:34)

“so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” (Mt. 5:45–47)

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.” (Rom. 12:17)

“Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.” (1 Pet. 3:9)

Questions for Discussion:

1. Read 1.1–1.5.1 (pp. 10–12).

What are the realities from which the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document seek liberation? From the text, what aspect of Palestinian suffering were you unaware of prior to reading the Kairos Palestine Document?

Study Session #2

2. Read 4.1–4.2.4; 8; and 9.1 (pp. 17–18; 21)

How is it countercultural for people in the United States to practice love as non-violent resistance? What are some historical and contemporary examples?

When have you experienced love from someone you considered an enemy? When have you extended love to someone you considered an enemy? What did that look like? What happened?

The authors of the Kairos Palestine Document hold up the seeming paradox that “resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian,” “but it is resistance with love as its logic.” How does the document answer this paradox? Where does it struggle with this paradox? How do we as American Presbyterians answer this paradox? Where do we struggle?

3. Read 4.2.5–4.3, 7 (pp. 18–19, 20–21)

In affirming “resistance with love as its logic” requires non-violence, what methods are available to you?

In the Kairos Palestine Document’s discussion of non-violent resistance, it supports a call “on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation.” The Presbyterian Church has struggled with its response to this call. Is this an appropriate form of “resistance with love as its logic”? What is at stake in your answer? What is at stake for those involved in the conflict on both sides?

Study Session #3

A Moment of Truth: Faith and Reconciliation

Prayer

Blessed is the Messenger who came bearing a great peace.
By the mercy of his Father, he lowered himself to us.
Our own debts he did not take up to him.
He reconciled (his) Lordship with his chattels ...
Glorious is the Compassionate One who did not use violence,
and without force, by wisdom he was victorious ...
Blessed is your flock for you are her gate
and you are her staff and you are her shepherd
and you are her drink; you are her pilot and her healer.
(Ephrem the Syrian, 378 C.E., from *Hymns of on the Nativity*)

Biblical Passages

2 Corinthians 5:16–20

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor. 5:16–20)

Questions for Discussion

1. Read 2.1 (p. 12).

How does the Kairos Palestine Document define humanity based on our relationship with God? What implications does the document identify on how Palestinians and Israelis should relate to each other?

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2. Read 2.3.1–2.5 (pp. 13–14).

According to the Kairos Palestine Document, who owns the land? What is the responsibility of the land dweller to the owner of the land? What are the barriers to achieving this according to the authors of the Kairos Palestine Document?

There are many who claim that they have a right to the land. How do we understand these multiple claims in light of the document's affirmation that we must "together build up the land in mutual love and respect"?

According to the Kairos Palestine Document, some biblical interpretations have been used to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people by supporting an exclusive claim that only one people has the right to the land. Some critics of the Kairos Palestine Document have also asserted that the Kairos Palestine Document echoes a broadly rejected teaching that the church of Jesus Christ has replaced the Jews as the people of God (eg. 2.2.2, p. 12). The Kairos Palestine Document affirms that God wills both Palestians and Jews to live in the land as a way forward for both people. Does this affirmation address these two concerns? Why or why not? What does the Kairos Palestine Document say that it will take for both peoples to live in the land?

According to the Kairos Palestine Document, the people of the West contributed to the problem (eg. 2.3.2, p. 13). What roles can we as people of the West and those beyond the region play in seeking reconciliation?

3. Read 5.2 (p. 19).

How do you feel that the Spirit of God is calling you to respond in light of the communion of love that binds us together with our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters?

Ongoing Engagement

Our faith in Christ calls us to continue to envision that peace and justice are possible. The authors of the Kairos Palestine Document present us with the challenge of keeping faith, hope, and love alive in dealing with the crisis between Israelis and Palestinians in peace-loving and nonviolent ways. Their call to us for solidarity with their struggle is a call to understanding, support, prayer, and action. We hope that you will continue to be engaged in the process of healing and peacemaking through some of the following suggestions:

1. Pray during worship for Palestinian Christians and their continued faith, hope, and love. Pray for peace and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.
2. Continue to be informed about the current developments and struggles of the Palestinian Christians. A great resource is the e-mail updates our mission worker, Douglas Dicks, provides. To sign up, please e-mail Doug at overthejordan@gmail.com. Also, you may read the updates of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations and the Office of Public Witness at gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/un/ and gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/washington/.
3. Look for opportunities to meet and talk with Palestinians (in your community, online, etc.) and get their perspectives on the struggle.
4. Read and study as a group some books written by Palestinian Christians about their faith and their experience in life.
5. Take a study tour of Israel/Palestine. This is a great way to connect personally with the daily realities and struggles of the people of Israel and Palestine. It is important as you arrange for such a tour to visit with the local churches and leaders of the area. This is different from religious tourism of holy sites. It is an invitation to make human connections. If you are interested in planning such a trip, please contact the Middle East office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Louisville at am-gad.beblawi@pcusa.org.
6. Build a church partnership with a Palestinian Christian church. For more information, you may find more resources at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/global/israel-palestine/>.
7. Engage in an interfaith dialogue with Jewish and Muslim communities in your area. Consult our General Assembly's resources regarding such dialogue: <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/interfaith/>.
8. Write to your government officials to keep working on this issue and to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians a priority for our involvement in the Middle East. Consult our General Assembly's Office of Public Witness: <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/washington>
9. Opportunities for financial giving include a variety of ministries and missions in which our Christian partners are involved: These are listed at <http://www.pcusa.org/search/?criteria=Israel+palestine&collection=donate&submit=Search>.

Ongoing Engagement

10. Link to recommendations done/made by the General Assembly:
<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/global/israel-and-palestine-general-assembly-statements/>. The most recent policies that were approved by the 219th General Assembly (2010) can be found in the *Minutes*, 2010, Part I, pp. 366–70 (electronic copy, pp. 1021–26), “Breaking Down the Walls.” The rationale for these policies, based on a just and lasting peace, can be found on pp. 1026ff of the electronic copy.
11. Link to the website of the Israel/Palestine Mission Network, mandated by the 216th General Assembly (2004) “for the purpose of creating currents of wider and deeper Presbyterian involvement with Palestinian partners, aimed at demonstrating solidarity and changing the conditions that erode the humanity of Palestinians living in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza”: <http://israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/>.
12. Other groups working within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) engaged in the issues of the region include:
 - National Middle East Presbyterian Caucus:
<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/middleeastern/national-middle-eastern-presbyterian-caucus/>.
 - Presbyterians for Middle East Peace: <http://www.pfmep.org/>.
 - Presbyterian Peace Fellowship: <http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/>.
 - Presbyterians Concerned for Jewish, Christian, Muslim Relations:
<http://www.pcjcr.org/>.

Leader's Guide for Study

The following information and resources are intended to enable interested individuals or leaders of group study to more fully understand some of the issues and theologies that are reflected in the Palestine Kairos document.

Background for Study Session #1

Dwindling Christian Presence

The Kairos Palestine document was written by Christians in the Palestinian territories. While this is a very vibrant Christian community, a great concern is that they are dwindling. As of 2008, Christians number only 51,710 in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem, and thus comprise only 1.37 percent of the Palestinian population.² “This dwindling presence of Christians in the Middle East is a deep concern due to the role that Christians have played in being a mediating, reconciling presence. Without that presence, we fear a more religiously polarized Middle East, more prone to extremism.”³

The following link will allow you to learn more of the Christian community in the Middle East: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4499668.stm.

Background for Study Session #2

Sanctions and Divestment and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

“The PC(USA), in particular, and churches of the Reformed tradition, in general, have long grappled with how to be a responsible agent in society. One effective strategy for bringing about positive change in the face of continued injustice, is leveraging the economic power of the church through a responsible and deliberate process of phased, selective divestment. This strategy has been used successfully in South Africa, Sudan, Indonesia, and elsewhere. The General Assembly has continued this emphasis through divestment in corporations engaged in military-related production and tobacco-related businesses.”⁴

“Since 1948, Presbyterian General Assemblies have been active in calling for a solution to the conflict in the Middle East that would ‘return to the principle of faithful devotion to the welfare, needs, and rights of both the Jewish and Arab peoples.’

² Collins, Rania Al Qass; Rifat Odeh Kassis; and Mitri Raheb, Editors, *Palestinian Christians: Facts, Figures and Trends 2008* (Bethlehem, Palestine: Diyar Consortium, 2008), p. 6; see also http://www.diyar.ps/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28:palestinian-christians-facts-figures-and-trends-2008&catid=33:books&Itemid=71

³ “Breaking Down the Walls,” <http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/middleeastpeace-finalreport.pdf>, p. 26.

⁴ <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/global/resolution-israel-and-palestine-phased-selective-d/>

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“While affirming, repeatedly, Israel's right to exist within permanent, recognized, and secure borders, General Assemblies have also recognized Palestinian rights to self-determination, calling for a negotiated settlement of differences, by the parties themselves, where issues and their resolution can be mutually defined and accepted.

“In 2003, and again in 2004, the General Assembly made explicit its long term conviction: ‘An end of the occupation is essential to achieving peace and the common good of the two peoples and three faiths that are deeply rooted in this land.’

“As a means of pursuing peace and the common good of Israelis and Palestinians, the 2004 General Assembly adopted a seven-part resolution that affirmed its long-standing position against the Occupation and sought to go beyond mere words to taking action to demonstrate its convictions. One of the action steps instructed the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee (MRTI) to initiate a process of phased selective divestment in accordance with General Assembly policy on social investing.”⁵ Specifically the Assembly approved the following motion:

Refers to Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee (MRTI) with instructions to initiate a process of phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel, in accordance to General Assembly policy on social investing, and to make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly Mission Council for action.⁶

Due to the response to this action, the 217th General Assembly (2006) took the following action:

We acknowledge that the actions of the 216th General Assembly (2004) caused hurt and misunderstanding among many members of the Jewish community and within our Presbyterian communion. We are grieved by the pain that this has caused, accept responsibility for the flaws in our process, and ask for a new season of mutual understanding and dialogue.

The above instructions from 2004 General Assembly were replaced with the following instructions:

To urge that financial investments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, be invested in only peaceful pursuits, and affirm that the customary corporate engagement process of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investments of our denomination is the proper vehicle for achieving this goal.⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/global/pdf/ga217response.pdf>

The 218th General Assembly (2008) debated and then affirmed the role of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment by approving the following motion:

In continuing the process of corporate engagement with companies supporting or profiting from the occupation of Palestine and/or other violence in the region, instructs the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to report regularly to the General Assembly Council on its communication and the compliance, or lack thereof, by Caterpillar, Motorola, and other corporations involved with regard to General Assembly guidelines and concerns for justice and human rights.⁸

In 2010, economic divestment was again debated by the 219th General Assembly (2010). The assembly then approved the following action against Caterpillar, who repeatedly refused to engage with MRTI:

“Strongly denounces Caterpillar’s continued profit-making from non-peaceful uses of its products and presses Caterpillar to review carefully its involvement in obstacles to a just and lasting peace in Israel-Palestine and to take affirmative steps to end its complicity in the violation of human rights.”⁹

This action is short of divestment and was made in an attempt to change the unjust business practices of Caterpillar in Israel-Palestine.

Action was also taken in 2010 to encourage proactive investment in the region. The following was approved:

“Calls on denominational agencies and entities, presbyteries, congregations, and individual members to invest positively, after due vetting, in sustainable economic development projects for the West Bank and Gaza (that do not support the occupation) sponsored by Palestinians or jointly by Palestinians and Israelis in equitable partnership.”¹⁰

With regard to the issue of sanctions, the 219th General Assembly (2010) approved the following action:

“Calls on the U.S. government to exercise strategically its international influence, including making U.S. aid to Israel contingent upon Israel’s compliance with international law and peacemaking efforts.”¹¹

“Calls on the U.S. government to exercise strategically its international influence and the withholding of financial, economic, and military aid to countries other than Israel, as we might with Israel, until such a time as the civil, reli-

⁸ <https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=507>

⁹ *Minutes*, 2010, Part I, printed version, p. 367, “Breaking Down the Walls,” Recommendation 3.c.; see also <http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/middleeastpeace-finalreport.pdf>, p. 40.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Recommendation 3.d.; see also <http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/middleeastpeace-finalreport.pdf>, p. 40.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 368, Recommendation 4.b.; see also <http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/middleeastpeace-finalreport.pdf>, p. 41.

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gious, and other freedoms of their peoples are fully exercised; and to end U.S. taxpayer support for regimes that perpetuate inequality and popular frustration.¹²

No General Assembly has taken action with regard to a boycott related to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Background for Study Session #3

Supersessionism

The teaching that the church of Jesus Christ has replaced the Jews as the people of God is called supersessionism. While supersessionism was widely held by Christians, including Presbyterians, for centuries, it has now been strongly denounced by the action of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)¹³ and many other Christians. Presbyterians affirm that Jews are heirs of God's covenant with Abraham and that the church of Jesus Christ has been made fellow heirs of this covenant. The church thus stands alongside of the Jewish people rather than replacing them as the people of God. The church has affirmed the following:

We affirm that the church, elected in Jesus Christ, has been engrafted into the people of God established by the covenant with Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. Therefore, Christians have not replaced Jews.¹⁴

For further study, we recommend "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews," approved by the 199th General Assembly (1987), pp. 8–12. <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/toward-theological-understanding-relationship-betw/>.

Land Theology

A very important religious issue in the Israel-Palestine conflict is "land theology." The Old Testament contains promises made to the people of Israel regarding the land. How are we to understand these promises today? The following documents frame this issue and present a way that Presbyterians understand it.

1. "Breaking Down the Walls," 219th General Assembly (2010), <http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/middleeastpeace-finalreport.pdf>, pp. 15–19.

¹² Ibid, p. 369, Recommendation 5.h. ; see also <http://oga.pcusa.org/pdf/middleeastpeace-finalreport.pdf>, p. 42.

¹³ "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews," approved by the 199th General Assembly (1987), pp. 8–12. <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/toward-theological-understanding-relationship-betw/>

¹⁴ "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews," approved by the 199th General Assembly (1987), <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/toward-theological-understanding-relationship-betw/>, p. 8.

2. "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews," commended for study by the 199th General Assembly (1987), pp. 13–15. <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/toward-theological-understanding-relationship-betw/>

Christian Zionism

A popular view concerning the second coming of Christ is the theological affirmation that the return of Jews to the land and the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 is fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and is necessary prior to the return of Jesus. The most common form of Christian Zionism arises from this theological perspective, which often results in an unconditional political affirmation of Israel's actions. This is an example of a distorted Christian faith that can stand as a barrier to justice and peace.

The 216th General Assembly (2004) took action that stated that Christian Zionism is in opposition to Presbyterian theology. For a complete summary of the actions of the 216th General Assembly (2004), visit this site:

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/global/resolution-confronting-christian-zionism/>.