



National Council of Churches USA
OFFICE OF INTERFAITH RELATIONS

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May 10, 2005

To:

Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, Anti-Defamation League

Betty Ehrenberg, Orthodox Union

Dr. David Elcott, American Jewish Committee

Ethan Felson, Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Rabbi Eugene Korn, American Jewish Congress

Mark Pelavin, Union for Reform Judaism

Mark Waldman, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for your letter of April 22nd, and its frank expression of your concerns and intentions. We appreciate the clarity of your communication with us, and hope that we can be as clear in return.

We were surprised that your letter, addressed to us as the Christian participants in a national dialogue with you, was released to the media at about the same time we received it. We are saddened that you chose to communicate in the public forum, rather than by an exchange of letters between us.

Nevertheless, we appreciate the concerns you are raising in your letter. We are also committed to continued engagement with you, and with all who seek peace, in the work that needs to be done to hear those suffering on all sides, and to support efforts for peace and justice for all Israelis and Palestinians.

We are troubled by your description of the actions of one of our churches, the Presbyterian Church (USA), as something that, if taken by "any Protestant denomination," would potentially "make constructive dialogue almost impossible." Surely dialogue is not only possible but necessary also among those who differ strongly in their deeply held convictions.

You are aware that in our churches there are a variety of approaches, at various stages of development, to the question of using economic leverage as one part of a strategy to end violence and support justice in the creation of lasting Palestinian-Israeli peace. The Episcopal Church

(USA) is considering engaging companies that "contribute to the infrastructure of Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip," along with companies that "have connections to organizations responsible for violence against Israel." The United Church of Christ will be considering resolutions suggesting the adoption of this sort of strategy at their General Synod this summer, and you have seen their resource on "The Palestinians, Israel and the Churches' Economic Leverage," which offers several options for engagement. The Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has urged the church not to adopt a divestment strategy. The United Methodist Church is undertaking a study of divestment.

This is an issue, in other words, that will engage all of us in our various denominations, in various ways, for some time to come. It is, therefore, not a time to picture the situation in "make or break" terms. We will continue to be guided by our conversations with one another and with our sisters and brothers, the Palestinian Christians, as well as with you.

We urge you to continue with us in healthy, even if sometimes difficult, discussion of the problems related to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and how to address them creatively, as one part of the broader conversation about all that prevents, and all that can contribute to, Israeli-Palestinian peace.

We look forward to discussing these matters further with you at our meeting in Washington, on Friday, May 13th.

Yours sincerely,

Rt. Rev. Christopher Epting, The Episcopal Church, USA
Rev. Brian Grieves, The Episcopal Church, USA
Dr. Darryl Jodock, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Dr. Peter Makari,* United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ
Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens, United Methodist Church
Dr. Shanta Premawardhana, National Council of Churches, USA
Dr. Jay Rock, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Dr. Frank Sherman, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Jim Winkler, United Methodist Church

* Out of Country at the time of signing, but is expected to endorse upon return.