



June 1, 2016

Bishop Jeffrey Barrow
2016 Synod Assembly

Dear friends in the Greater Milwaukee Synod,

For many years, we have worked closely on issues of shared concern. Both the ELCA and the American Jewish community are dedicated to a world in which all people are treated with dignity and afforded equal and full human rights. We both hold tightly to the concept that all people were created in the image of God, and have worked as partners in our shared community.

Today, however, we write with great concern about 2016 Resolution 4: Holy Land Investment, which you will consider at the Synod Assembly. We believe that most people of goodwill share a deep desire for a peaceful and prosperous Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. We also believe that our voices can play an essential and instrumental role in paving the path to peace. By teaching, learning, and traveling together, we can invest in peace and promote positive investment. Boycott and divestment, though, will not take us to this place.

This resolution, unfortunately, is rejectionist and divisive; it turns away from dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation, the principles and practices that may indeed lead to justice and peace for both peoples. Specifically, it condemns Israel while exempting the Palestinians from any meaningful responsibility to pursue peace. Unfortunately, such a simplistic caricature of evil oppressor victimizing the powerless victim is a distorted and inaccurate view of the conflict. We contend that those who truly care about peace between Palestinians and Israelis will expand the space in their hearts to embrace both peoples – their hopes and hurts, collective narratives and national aspirations. Both peoples have harmed and both have suffered. Both have missed opportunities for peace. This is not a zero-sum game and there is no easy answer, but one thing is certain: Choosing only one of the peoples in this conflict adds fuel to the fire, making prospects for negotiation and peace even more distant.

It must be noted that divestment harms Palestinians. Not only does it fan the flames of a movement that does not support a Jewish State alongside a Palestinian state, but it quantifiably damages the Palestinian economy, to the detriment of the human beings who live there. Many have framed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as one between moderates and extremists. Efforts like divestment fuel extremism, thereby setting both peoples back on the path to peace.

Socially responsible investing is a high moral calling. Our hope is that it can be done in a nondiscriminatory fashion. But failing to see the multiple narratives in this conflict and placing all the blame for it fails that test.

We believe that the Milwaukee Synod has the opportunity to use its voice to call for peace and justice by investing in positive initiatives that practice restorative justice and help both peoples come together and deepen ties. There are many organizations and individuals in the region who are doing the difficult work of looking each other in the eye and choosing a constructive path of state-building and community building. We invite you to meet two of those people, leaders in the Parents Circle/Families Forum, a group of bereaved Palestinians and Israelis who are dedicated to reconciliation, during their visit to Milwaukee in September 2016.

We hope you will choose to approach this resolution with open hearts and open minds, with a commitment to seeing complexity and recognizing the humanity and aspirations of both peoples. We hope you will choose a path of investment rather than divestment, of bringing people together rather than driving them apart. We believe in the power of your voice to add to the chorus of true justice and peace.

Yours in commitment to our shared community and shared values,

Elana Kahn
On behalf of the Milwaukee Jewish community

Safeguarding rights and pursuing
social justice since 1938.

Chair
Michael Pollack

Director
Elana Kahn

1360 N. Prospect Ave
Milwaukee, WI 53202-3094

P 414.390.5777
F 414.390.5782

JCRC@MilwaukeeJewish.org
www.MilwaukeeJewish.org

Milwaukee Jewish Federation

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