

Resolution 292: Holy Land Tours

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For many years, some Palestinian Christians have expressed deep dismay that too many United Methodists and other Christian groups traveling to Israel/Palestine, also called the Holy Land, have missed an extraordinary opportunity for ecumenical fellowship and sharing with other followers of the Prince of Peace. Our Christian sisters and brothers indigenous to the area continue to wonder why they are so often ignored by Christian pilgrims to the region. Why, they ask, do travelers tend to honor the inanimate stones that testify to Jesus' life and ministry while ignoring the "living stones," the indigenous Christians who represent an unbroken line of discipleship to Jesus in the land that he called home?

Travelers to this land have the opportunity to be ambassadors of unity and concern to the rapidly dwindling churches and Christians in a troubled land. They also have an opportunity to share in the vocation of peacemaking and to learn from the spiritual traditions of the churches indigenous to the Middle East. Further, they have a special opportunity to discover firsthand the realities of a region of deep meaning and vital importance to Christians, as well as to Jews and Muslims.

We recognize the tragic history that Christians share with Jews, and the complex relationships between particular nations and the state of Israel. We encourage dialogue between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders.

Therefore, The United Methodist Church:

1. strongly affirms the resolution of the 1984 General Conference, offering "encouragement of all leaders of and participants in 'Holy Land tours' to contact indigenous Christian leaders in the Middle East, and to hear the concerns of both the Israelis and Palestinians who live there, as well as visit the biblical and historical sites" ("The Arab-Israeli Conflict," The Book of Resolutions, 1984; page 280);

2. asks the bishops, clergy, members, agencies, and congregations of The United Methodist Church, as they plan visits to the Holy Land, to devote significant program time to contact with indigenous Christian leaders and to hearing the concerns of Palestinians and Israelis on the current crisis of Palestinian self-determination;

3. urges *all* United Methodists planning, organizing, and/or participating in a trip to the Holy Land to apply the guidelines outlined in the General Conference resolution "Responsible Tourism" to their trip – especially 1) to "ask travel agents/agencies whether local people [i.e., Palestinians] are involved in the development of the 'tour packages', 2) "Practice 'low impact' travel and tourism, which do minimal damage to local culture," and 3) "Monitor ethical, responsible travel practices of conferences, boards and agencies of The United Methodist Church" regarding holy land trips;

4. recommends that United Methodists planning individual or group tours to Israel/Palestine consult with the United Methodist liaison in Jerusalem to seek opportunities to worship with indigenous Christian congregations, to include at least one overnight stay in Bethlehem, and to visit United Methodist-supported mission sites;

5. supports the purchase of local Palestinian-made fair trade products and crafts in keeping with the guidelines in the General Conference resolution on “Responsible Tourism”;
6. asks the General Board of Global Ministries and the General Board of Church and Society to prepare specific recommendations regarding preparation, participation in, and follow-up education and advocacy actions for United Methodists traveling in the Middle East and other sensitive regions of the world;
7. recommends that United Methodist-sponsored tours use the denomination’s seminar program in pre-departure seminars for the travelers;
8. urges that travelers use, as advance study materials, positions adopted by General Conference and by general church agencies relating to the Middle East as well as resources from the 2007-2008 Mission Study on Israel/Palestine;
9. urges seminaries and United Methodist-related colleges to apply the guidelines in this resolution to any school-sponsored trips, internships, and/or semesters of study in Palestine/Israel;
10. extends sincere appreciation to those United Methodists who have facilitated the implementation of the above recommendations in tours they have sponsored or participated in since the adoption of this resolution;
11. expresses deep concern that many tours sponsored or arranged by United Methodist bishops, pastors, and laity do not schedule opportunity for all participants to enter into partnership with the indigenous Christians for the recommended program time and, therefore, fail to “Walk With the Living Stones” in their strides toward Palestinian self-determination, their rich spiritual heritage, and their faithful contemporary witness;
12. expresses deep concern that evidence continues to accumulate that Christianity is dying in the land of Jesus through economic, social, and political pressures which have greatly diminished the numbers and percentage of Christians in the Holy Land. United Methodist bishops and other organizers of Holy Land tours have a special responsibility to adhere to these recommendations to strengthen the witness of the remaining Palestinian disciples of the Living Lord;
13. affirms the presence of The United Methodist Church in Jerusalem through our liaison office and through our ongoing partnership with Palestinian and Israeli organizations working for reconciliation and to establish equal rights for all under international law;
14. encourages tour leaders to consult with the General Board of Global Ministries and the United Methodist liaison office in Jerusalem in order to facilitate adherence to these recommendations;
15. instructs annual conferences and general agencies to monitor and report to the General Conference regarding the implementation of this resolution;
16. urges close cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches and other indigenous Christian groups to facilitate informed, alternative travel opportunities to the region; and
17. commends the General Board of Global Ministries for initiating visits to the Bible lands that explore issues of justice and peace among all participants in the region, with special emphasis upon the concerns of our Palestinian Christian colleagues.

ADOPTED 1992, AMENDED AND READOPTED 1996, AMENDED AND READOPTED 2000, AMENDED AND READOPTED 2008, RESOLUTION #292 2004 *BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*, RESOLUTION #271, 2000 *BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*.
See Social Principles, ¶ 165A, B, and D.