



Advocacy as Discipleship

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness

Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry

Raising a Prophetic Voice through the Social Justice Policy of Presbyterians since 1946

Holy Discontentment: Boycott!

The Power of the Pocketbook to Create Social Change

*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

-Isaiah 58:6 (NRSV)

When we read the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, there is an overwhelming proclamation: discontentment with public life coupled with an alternate reality. This alternative is God's vision for the earth. The above passage from Isaiah continues in verse 12 to show us an example of God's reality: *"The Lord will guide you continually...your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt...you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to live in."*



As Christians, we also see this work of **holy discontentment** in the life and story of Jesus Christ. A review of the New Testament reveals that Jesus talked most about the kingdom, or reign, of God. This reign of God is breaking into our reality. The beautiful thing about Christ's story is that we are invited to participate in it. We are called to usher in this reign of God, to participate with God in repairing the breach, in sharing our bread with the hungry, and lifting up our voices on behalf of the oppressed. Sometimes that means us, as God's people, are called to speak truth to power in love, to live into, and call on the powers and principalities at hand, in order to influence change.

The situation in Israel/Palestine engenders **holy discontentment** for people who yearn for all of God's children, including Palestinians and Israelis, to live in peaceful

coexistence. Through this resource on boycotting Israeli settlement products, the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness hopes that Presbyterians can channel their holy discontentment in the service of a just peace in Israel/Palestine.

"Advocacy as Discipleship" is produced by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness as a resource to advocates, providing theological background and context on why we, as Christian Citizens, engage in public witness ministries. The "Holy Discontentment" series provides practical tools for people of faith seeking to engage in public witness ministries.

Fall 2014
Boycott Resource

Presbyterian Involvement in Israel/Palestine and the Middle East: A Brief History

The Background:

Since the conclusion of the Six Day War in 1967, Israel has built settlements for Israeli citizens in expropriated land throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, sometimes bulldozing Palestinian homes and villages or separating farmers from their land. Many of the settlements are similar to suburban developments in the United States, complete with gates, swimming pools, parks, schools, and economic subsidies for residents. Other settlements, referred to as “outposts,” are smaller and are often deep within the heart of the West Bank. Though not officially sanctioned by the Israeli government, they nonetheless receive government assistance and military protection. Israelis living in settlements receive protection from the Israeli military and have the full rights of Israeli citizenship, while Palestinians who live in the surrounding areas are afforded no citizenship rights or protection from the Israeli military. Settler violence toward Palestinians living in neighboring villages is well documented by reputable international human rights organizations, including the Israeli group B’Tselem.ⁱ Separating Palestinian villages from one another, the settlements put a tremendous strain on Palestinian access to infrastructure. While Israeli settlements have fountains and other amenities, many Palestinian villages right next door are left without adequate access to water and have sporadic electricity. Settlements are considered illegal according to international law, as expressed by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In 2012, the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted by an overwhelming majority to boycott all goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements. Concerned with the growing economic exploitation of Palestinians, buttressed by the Israeli settlement industry, the General Assembly endorsed a non-violent economic measure to last “until significant progress toward Palestinian rights and independence can be reported to the General Assembly or [Presbyterian Mission Agency].”ⁱⁱ In the time since the Assembly adopted the boycott, little if any progress has been made to improve the lives of Palestinian living under the weight of a military occupation.

The decision to boycott goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements is yet another example of the denomination’s deeply held commitment to a just and peaceful resolution to the situation in Israel/Palestine. As World Mission notes, “The denomination’s long-standing witness in Israel and Palestine has spanned a range of efforts: supporting mission personnel; working with partner churches; programs supporting peace, justice and human rights movements, engaging in constituency education; and mobilizing to influence public policy.”ⁱⁱⁱ Presbyterian witness extends beyond Israel and Palestine, with a rich history of involvement throughout the region.

Currently, mission personnel serve in multiple locations across the Middle East, including Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel/Palestine. Through their work on the ground, our mission workers partner with local entities and connect Presbyterians to the realities faced by our brothers and sisters in the region.^{iv}

Since 1948, multiple General Assemblies have considered the situation in Israel/Palestine. “The Presbyterian position,” explains World Mission, “has consistently been to affirm the right of Israel to exist as

a sovereign state within secure, internationally recognized borders and the right of Palestinians to self-determination, including the right to the establishment of a neighboring independent, sovereign state toward the end of establishing a just and durable peace.”^v At the 221st General Assembly (2014) in Detroit, the PC(USA) once

“As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to practice peace in all of our relationships, including our economic ones. Desiring to be faithful to that call, the 220th General Assembly endorsed ‘a boycott of all Israeli products coming from the occupied Palestinian Territories.’ The General Assembly has chosen the witness of this boycott as a non-violent strategy for bringing the daily realities faced by Palestinians and Israelis alike closer to God’s vision for the world.”

– Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Rev. Gradye Parsons, in a letter dated March 6, 2014

again reaffirmed **"its commitment to a two-state solution in which a secure and universally recognized state of Israel lives alongside a free, viable, and secure state for the Palestinian people."**^{vi} The boycott endorsed by the 220th General Assembly (2012) specifically confronts the exploitation rendered by the illegal settlements and is not directed toward the state of Israel, its commerce, or the Jewish people.

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Boycotts

A boycott is a movement to stop buying certain products as a form of protest. Not buying products from companies puts pressure on these companies to improve their ethical standards, and draws attention to their unethical practices.

Throughout its history, the Presbyterian Church has employed boycotts as one way to bear witness to the Christian faith. Commended for study by the 1979 General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, the report, "'Boycotts: Policy Analysis and Criteria,' explains how the church considers boycott activity in light of God's requirement of justice and because of the existence of alleged injustice." ***While the intended result is to change policies of injustice through exerting economic pressure, Christians engage in boycotts as one way to actively embody their faith.*** As early as 1937, the United Presbyterian Church "[favored] the adoption by the Congress of

legislation...which forbids the shipment of Child Labor goods in interstate commerce, and which requires informative labels to be attached to Child Labor goods.' (Presumably for the purpose of discouraging buyers, thus an implicit consumer boycott.)"^{vii}



Presbyterians 4 Fair Food Join Tomato pickers and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.

More recently, the 214th General Assembly (2002) voted to "endorse and support the national boycott of Taco Bell restaurants and all Taco Bell products until Taco Bell, SixLS Corporation, and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers mutually agree to begin negotiations that can lead to resolution of inhumane working and living conditions." With farmworkers forced to labor under dangerous and exploitative working conditions, Presbyterians saw joining the boycott as way to confront injustice and stand in solidarity with oppressed workers. The boycott, which included people of faith and human rights activists across the nation, concluded in 2005 after Farmworkers and Yum! Brands/Taco Bell signed an agreement.^{viii}

As members of the Reformed tradition, Presbyterians take seriously the way in which a sovereign God continues to be at work in the world, equipping God's people to strive for a more just and whole world. In *A Brief Statement of Faith*, a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions, the authors write, "In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage...to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives..."^{ix} By choosing not to purchase certain products because of a company's business practices, Presbyterians join in the vision of the prophet Amos, who called for "justice [to] roll down like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

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The boycott of Israeli settlement products, like previous boycotts endorsed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), arose out of a deep concern for injustice – in this case, injustice perpetrated by the occupation of Palestinian territories. Growing Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law, threaten the economic and political livelihood of Palestinians and serve as one stumbling block to a viable Palestinian economy. In boycotting settlement

products, we are responding to a direct call from our Palestinian brothers and sisters, and joining a growing number of American ecumenical and interfaith partners, as well as several Jewish peace groups within Israel, who see boycott as a non-violent economic measure to bring about a just resolution to the conflict. As with any boycott, one hope is that through such an action we can invite those exploiting Palestinian labor and land to cease their unjust practices and work together for a future in which Israelis and Palestinians can live as peaceful neighbors.

What can you do?

Become more informed:

First, take some time to become more informed about the situation in Israel/Palestine. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) launched a website providing ways Presbyterians can learn more about the boycott. Check out the "resource" section for links to leading human rights organizations in Israel and Palestine, as well as ecumenical and interfaith partners. For more information, visit the website:

www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/mrti/boycott/

The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (IPMN) is an official Mission Network of the PC(USA). As one of several regional mission networks, IPMN was "established by action of the 2004 General Assembly" and "encourages congregations and presbytery mission committees, task groups and other entities, toward specific mission goals that will create currents of wider and deeper involvement with Israel/Palestine."^x Visit IPMN's website at www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main to learn more about what is happening in the region, and for ways to join the boycott of Israeli Settlement products.



So what can(t) I buy?



Boycott participants protest Soda Stream sales.

By joining the boycott, Presbyterians affirm that our daily choices should ultimately reflect our faith in God and our commitment to God's vision for the world. Tracking down information about what products are made in the settlements can be a difficult task. Yet making informed decisions about the products we purchase helps to ensure that what we place in our shopping carts is consistent with our theological and ethical convictions. Some of the most commonly cited Israeli settlement products to boycott are produced by SodaStream, Ahava beauty products, Keter Plastics, and Edushape. WhoProfits, a joint Israeli-Palestinian peace organization, provides consumers with a more complete list of Israeli settlement products available through their website.

Visit <http://www.whoprofits.org/involvement/settlements-products>

Jewish Voice for Peace, an American peace organization, offers multiple ways to get involved in the boycott of SodaStream through direct action. Visit their website at <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/sodastream-burst-the-bubble> to see if there are demonstrations to join in your area. If not, consider organizing one.

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Contact Stores:

The boycott website — bit.ly/PCUSASettlementBoycott — includes materials for concerned consumers to adapt and send to business to urge them not to sell products made in the settlements. Consider assembling a group from your congregation to write personal letters to companies like Target, Amazon, and Wal-Mart who all stock various settlement products. Writing a personal letter is a powerful advocacy tool. Sample letters are available to help guide you through the process.

Concerned Consumer Cards:

Gather with local partners to fill out and deliver “concerned consumer cards.” These cards let businesses know that valued customers are upset by the store’s decision to stock products made in the settlements. The boycott of illegal Israeli settlement products does not mean one must boycott the store in which these products are sold. Use your power as a customer to convey your displeasure with the store’s decision to sell products that contribute to the human rights violations of Palestinians throughout Israel/Palestine.

Add your name to the growing list of Presbyterians (and ecumenical/interfaith partners) who support the PC(USA) Israeli settlement boycott by signing your name to the petition bit.ly/boycottpetition. In addition to individuals, congregations and Presbyteries are encouraged to sign as well.

Screen a documentary:

A number of documentaries exploring the conditions in Israel/Palestine have gained national and international prominence. Organize a movie night at your local church to screen a documentary highlighting the situation in Israel/Palestine. A few possibilities include:

My Neighborhood — <http://www.justvision.org/myneighborhood>

Five Broken Cameras — <http://www.kinolorber.com/5brokencameras/>

Budrus — <http://www.justvision.org/budrus>

The Gatekeepers — <http://www.sonyclassics.com/thegatekeepers/site/>

Invite ecumenical and interfaith partners to join for the movie and a discussion afterward. Many of these documentaries offer discussion questions that can guide your post-movie talk.

Organize a day of prayer:

The 221st General Assembly (2014) of the PC(USA) approved a Commissioners’ Resolution calling for “a season of prayer for justice and peace in Israel/Palestine.” The Resolution specifically called for “gatherings on regional and congregational levels that may include off-the-record discussions to share their hopes and concerns for peace in Israel/Palestine, the feelings they may have experienced in relation to the conflict, and their understanding of what makes for peace in the region.”^{xi} Get together with other Presbyterian churches in your area, as well as ecumenical and interfaith partners, and organize a day of prayer. While the conflict may seem intractable, prayer reminds us that God is still at work in the world and equips God’s people to work for justice and peace in Israel/Palestine and throughout the world. Also consider lifting up the concerns of Palestinians and Israelis in your own personal prayer time and during prayer at Sunday worship.

With tension and violence seemingly always on the rise in Israel/Palestine, many question the possibility of peace. As Presbyterians we trust in God’s sovereignty over creation. We are invited to participate in the transformation of God’s world through acts of service, justice, and worship. The PC(USA) Office of Public Witness supports the efforts of Israelis and Palestinians committed to a non-violent solution to the situation in Israel/Palestine.

ENDNOTES

- i. "Settler Violence: Lack of Accountability" http://www.btselem.org/settler_violence
- ii. Resolution 15-02 "On Boycotting Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories and Hadiklaim" <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=3775>
- iii. <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/global/israel-palestine/>
- iv. <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/global/middle-east/>
- v. <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/global/israel-palestine/>
- vi. Resolution 4-04 "On Supporting Middle East Peacemaking" <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4595>
- vii. "Boycotts: Policy Analysis and Criteria" http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/boycotts_policy_analysis_criteria.pdf
- viii. See PC(USA) Campaign for Fair Food: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/fairfood/background-on-the-fair-food-campaign/>
- ix. "The Brief Statement of Faith" <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/101/brief-statement-faith/>
- x. <http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/home/who-we-are>
- xi. 04-13 "On a Commitment to Prayer for Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation in Israel and Palestine" <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=5107>



About the Author: *Kyle Cristofalo* served in the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC, from January to August 2014, first as a Spring Intern for his seminary internship and continuing as a Summer Fellow. A native New Yorker, Kyle just received his Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. After completing his undergraduate degree in Peace and Conflict Studies, Kyle moved to Israel/Palestine, where he spent a year as a service worker with the Mennonite Central Committee. At the Office of Public Witness, Kyle worked primarily on issues relating to Israel/Palestine, as well as immigration. A life-long Presbyterian, with membership at Central Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Atlanta, GA, Kyle hopes to serve the church through work in the non-profit or private sector in organizations committed to peace and justice issues.

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