



Research Report: The Episcopal Church and Middle East Advocacy

The Episcopal Church's involvement in mission and ministry in the Middle East has led to a long and substantial history of advocacy. Its most long-standing effort is the traditional [Good Friday Offering](#). Largely dedicated to benefitting Christian work in the area, the Offering began in 1922. In 1949, following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, concerns broadened to include advocacy for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine with special attention to the [status of Jerusalem](#) and [the needs of Arab refugees](#). The Church's core Middle East policies began to take shape by the late 1970s; these have consistently included commitment to the establishment of a just and lasting peace for and between Israel and Palestine as independent states. Care and support for the Christian minority, including Anglican Church members who live and work in the region, have been compelling motivations for the Church's peace and justice advocacy.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Advocacy

The Episcopal Church began [actively working](#) toward improved relations between Christians and Jews in the 1970s and by the early 1990s its [interfaith dialogues](#) expanded to include Muslims, a direction which took on increased importance after 2001. Early fruits of these efforts included published [guidelines](#) for Christian-Jewish relations and a growing perception of the need for a balanced understanding of the situation in the Middle East.

From at least 1988 forward the General Convention encouraged dioceses to engage in [study and discussion](#) regarding Middle East issues, and in 1994 the Convention directly urged congregations to engage in [conversations](#) with Jews and Muslims around mutual concerns regarding peace and justice in the region. In support of these efforts, the Church's program advocates developed and disseminated Middle East and interfaith study resources steadily throughout the 1990s. Interfaith dialogue and education efforts after 2001 included workshops, a manual, and a website developed by the Interfaith Education Initiative. In 2015, the General Convention advocated for development of educational materials and ongoing interfaith study and dialogue among its members and staff at all levels about and with Jews, Muslims, and the complex situation in the Holy Land. In response, the Office of Government Relations sponsored a 2018 [webinar](#) on The Episcopal Church and the Middle East.

The Church's Middle East public policy development and advocacy efforts include valuable collaborations with ecumenical and interreligious partners. In 2005, the Church joined with other prominent Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders (in an [interfaith effort](#) described at the time as "unprecedented") to announce a major appeal regarding renewed U.S. leadership in the Middle East peace process. The appeal was subsequently endorsed by local religious leaders of all three faiths in 15 major cities. In 2009, the Presiding Bishop [signed a statement](#) on Middle East Peace drafted by Churches for Middle East Peace and in 2012, Episcopal leaders participated in a three-day Christian-Muslim peace conference held in Beirut, the second of four planned meetings to work toward peace in the region.

Practicing Christian Witness and Presence

Since the late 20th century, the Church's leadership has [encouraged Episcopalians](#) at all levels to visit the Holy Land for educational and advocacy purposes. [Pilgrimages](#) of bishops, clergy, and lay ministers travel there regularly, often as members of interreligious delegations to meet with local churches, activists, and officials in Israel and Palestine. Organizations such as the Episcopal Peace and Justice Network began in the 1990s to lead important [fact-finding visits](#) by groups of Episcopal "peace pilgrims" to Israel, Jordan, and the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank. The Presiding Bishop and other leaders participate in this work at one level of dialog, but many lay and clergy leaders stand ready to contact their legislators and travel to Washington for briefings and advocacy events. In 2015, at the request of the General Convention, Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori developed an [interfaith pilgrimage](#) with equal representation of Episcopalians, Jews, and Muslims to model and encourage similar efforts and dialogues by others.

Taken altogether, such visits have built greater understanding of complex relationships in the region. They also have provided visible signs of support for the Diocese of Jerusalem and the Christians who constitute a minority population in the area, as well as helping to build relationships and understanding.

Advocacy for International Peace as Public Policy

In the recent decades of impasse, the Church's advocacy in the Middle East has been a personal, conversational, and principled engagement with those most affected by the tragic unfolding of conflict and distrust. Drawing on the General Convention's thoughtful study, testimony, and witness, the Church has navigated the competing claims to territory, identity, and national self-determination to evolve a public advocacy agenda based on equitable principles of peace and justice.

The 2012 and 2015 General Conventions both solidly reaffirmed the Church's [long-standing policy](#) of reconciliation and restorative justice in the Middle East, including commitment to a negotiated settlement resulting in two secure, recognized, and viable states. The Conventions also reaffirmed and urged Episcopalians to engage in [study, dialogue, and pilgrimages](#) to increase their understanding of the issues and enable them to support and advocate for the achievement of a just peace.

Both of the most recent Conventions also addressed the use of [investments](#) to assist with achieving peace in the region. One of the Church's most powerful advocacy tools is its discretionary use and investment of money. The [Good Friday Offering](#) is the most well-known and long-standing such practice, a gift undertaken by parishes annually since 1922 for support of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. The funds support the medical, educational, and refugee efforts of the four dioceses in that Province. In 2014 [the offering](#) totaled \$377,663.51.

At the corporate level, the Church engages in advocacy by following "positive investment" practices with its funds as outlined in its [corporate engagement policy](#), intentionally choosing to do business with companies whose presence and actions in the region align with Church policies. In 2013, the Executive Council's advocacy took a more direct form with the purchase of a [\\$500,000 CD](#) with the Bank of Palestine, an action that empowered local business opportunities and development. In 2015, the General Convention commended this action and urged the DFMS to expand the loan investment at least twofold in the next triennium. The Convention adopted this activist investment strategy as an alternative to member proposals to shift from its longstanding positive investment strategy toward divestment and boycotts of companies whose goods and services support Israel's occupation or are produced in Israeli-occupied Palestine.

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