



Notes for Interfaith Outreach

Communicating and Connecting with Local Christian Communities

"Thou shalt Love thy neighbor as thyself"

Leviticus 19:18

*"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you,
for this is the Law and the Prophets"*

Matthew 7:12 New American Standard

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Disclaimer:

This document was primarily drafted by two white JVP summer fellows, and was then vetted and improved by full time acting staff. Although we are not experts or scholars, we brought our best knowledge and work ethic to this project. This work, we recognize is bigger than us, as authors, JVP as an organization, and individual experiences. This tool, like other JVP's guides, resources, etc. was created in the spirit of dialogue, and we hope to hear questions, comments, or recommendations from you.

Thank you,

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Introduction

Religious communities are called to act as moral and ethical authorities in world. Interfaith work is exceptionally powerful not only because it is an effective way to achieve a mutual short term goal, but also because it has the capacity to create long-standing, sustainable unions on the basis of common human values. Interfaith work does not tear down boundaries but rather strives to understand that there can be friendship, collaboration, and respect across boundaries. Many conversations with JVP organizers and interfaith partners about their experiences culminated in this booklet; a resource, that we hope, through its distillment of best practices can be brought into the work you are already doing in Palestinian Solidarity.

What does it mean to be a Jewish Voice?

The following voices are not singular people, rather they are threads that run through many of the voices which we have spoken to. They represent three of the central answers we received to the question: What does it mean to be speaking as a Jewish voice?



My Jewish voice strays away from the narrative that Judaism is seeded in justice. I instead use my Jewish Voice to express that our people, among others, are responsible for this occupation. I don't want my people to have a legacy of hatred and oppression. Ideally, I believe that as Jews working for a just peace in Palestine/ Israel, some of our most powerful roles are as interventionists- going to federations, synagogues, and talking to other Jews. I also understand my role as a Jewish person in Palestinian solidarity work is to actively make space for Palestinian voices and leadership. The reason for this movement is that we are responding to a call from Palestine. If the call changed, our work would change. The more we claim authority as Jewish voices on Israel/Palestine, the more we are reinforcing the message that we know better. We are in a movement that is led by Palestinians.

I've identified with Israel for my entire life. I went as a child and since becoming a Rabbi, I've been there more times that I can count. I think we'd all agree that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complicated. But at the same time I think we know that there is nothing complicated about persecution. My voice is just as Jewish, if not more so, when I am speaking for justice in Palestine/Israel. The challenge of reckoning with the meaning of solidarity in its truest, most universal form brought back to me the oldest sense of ethics -- that all life is blessed with the equal divine spark of creation. That is the ethics revealed in the Exodus story, which teaches that God hearkens to the cries of the oppressed, and demands of us the same. My voice is the voice of an observant Jew, a Rabbi, a member of the ever-growing form of Jewish community that is based in a universal ethics of justice and liberation, and not in the tired tribal boundaries of the past.



I am a complicated Jewish voice. I converted to Judaism and I find in interfaith dialogue I am not always the 'Jew' people expect or want to see. According to them, I cannot absolve those looking for someone to tell them that divestment is not anti-semitic. Despite that, I like to stress in conversations about church divestment that we are not divesting from Jews, but from American multi-national companies. I like to frame the conversation with the idea that divesting means ending your complicity; is it not an offensive move against anyone it is actually a neutralizing move.



Creating and Sustaining Long-Term Interfaith Relationships & The Five Virtues of Interfaith Work

There is a certain spirit in showing up for interfaith work. Doing interfaith work takes a level of respect, appreciation and desire to engage with someone's faith tradition. It is not to be taken lightly, because it is an entrance into someone's practice of engaging with the sacred. You need to come to this work with heart, and for the long haul. Building a movement doesn't happen overnight, establishing relationships founded in trust and respect takes time, spirit and skills.



Bringing humility to the conversation is extremely important. You do not come to this work with *the answer*TM, you come with to be a part of the discussion, even when you may have a goal you are there to support. Preaching is less effective than asking humble, open, and honest questions. In this work, some of these questions may be:

"What guides your moral compass and how you make decisions?"

"What do you know about Israel/Palestine and divestment?"

"What questions have you heard/or you have yourself about I/P and divestment?"

"How does your church make decisions? What goes into those decision?"

It is also to remember that tone can completely change the feel of the question. One JVP organizers told us that they also ways adopt an 'excited to be here' type tone and explicitly tells Christian partners that the fact that their church is taking on this issue means so much to them.

Leading with affirmation: *"Wow! I'm really excited about the I/P decisions that have been suggested, taking on this issue means a lot to me!"*

Offer up information on yourself: *"Oh! Here is what I know! This is inspires my personal moral compass..."*

Know that you are entering into this with a shared goal - not to prove your knowledge, or demonstrate moral superiority to the opposition -- but rather, justice for Palestine.

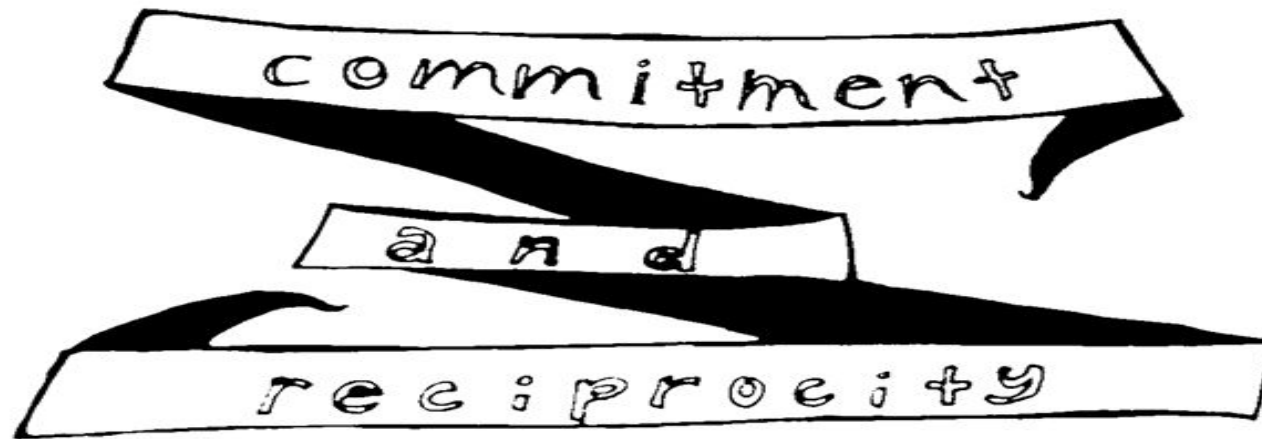


Successful interfaith collaborations are built on clear communication around faith and culture. Take as an example JVP's relationship with the Presbyterian Church (USA): In JVP's longstanding relationship with the Presbyterian Church, JVPers entering into church spaces have taken the time to learn the customs, vocabulary, structures and practices of the church. This has been possible because Presbyterian partners have been generous in teaching this to JVPers. As JVP's partnership with the church has continued to grow over time, JVPers who have become very familiar with church culture have taken it upon themselves to educate other JVPers on the culture of the church.

It is valuable to learn about the culture of the spaces that we are entering into as guests for many reasons, but also for the reason that if we do not do so we will not succeed. If we maintain open lines of communication and work from a place of understanding and respect, we will be able to build together.

Coming with knowledge about the faith tradition your are interacting with is a sign of respect and can be strategically important. Recognize that every faith tradition is different. Assuming that experience the Presbyterian church will inform conversations with Methodist might create unwanted distance. A way to avoid this is to ensure that you are well versed in the language. In terms of the church gatherings, making sure you know simple things like to pronounce Synod [not as SINODE]. Knowing that particular church's history on divestment, on social issues, anti-racist practice, and the way they talk about that are integral to creating common ground. Additionally, become familiar with the basic structure of the church, who the political players are, and the basic theology. It is of the utmost importance to demonstrate respect for traditions because you want to be identified as an someone trustworthy who understands what is at stake. It is a tricky thing to maintain a space as outsiders, in order to be perceived as partners and not over zealous agitators threatening the church, but also to be seen as insiders who understand the church, and truly wish to enhance its religious, and ethical life.

Additionally, keep in mind that many faith spaces are hierarchical, and while you are often encouraged to forge relationships with 'the leader' it is also crucial (and good!) to have more than one contact in the community with other kinds of leadership. Think of the people who hold the community together.



Maintaining relationships with interfaith partners is key to building trusting and strong collaborations. Interfaith work doesn't begin and end at massive assemblies, it continues locally. Establishing and building local connections is a crucial part of JVP's interfaith work. In any relationship, reciprocity and longevity go hand in hand. In interfaith work, if you are a guest in faith spaces, consider sharing your own faith traditions with those you have been working with.

Example:

Durham, NC

Many of the people and groups that Durham JVP had established interfaith organizing relationships with had invited them into their religious and sacred spaces and were interested in being a part of Jewish ritual and tradition. While the JVP chapter was not very involved in traditional religious activities, they organized themselves to host a sukkot. They invited the chapter and local faith leaders. The chapter leaders worked with the Rabbinical Council to create sukkot for BDS resource, which was great. The event was a big success. Now, within the chapter, there is someone whose role has been established to lead Jewish Ritual. Rituals are a chance for us to recommit ourselves, bring people in, and get sustenance. Incorporating these practices into their organizing, they have been able to create relationships that last through years and campaigns.



It is always important to be aware of the historical structures that circumscribe our ability to act, our way of acting, and how we are heard in conversation. This section is written with Ashkenazi/ White Jews doing interfaith Palestinian solidarity in mind. The purpose is to intentionally navigate the multitude of layers of power and privilege relating to skin color, ethnicity and race that arise with an anti-racist framework. As the organization *Southerners on New Ground* (SONG) says, “Our call is to act, to organize, and to move rather than to analyze and espouse politics that are disconnected from collective work.”

JVP’s work for a just peace in Israel/ Palestine is founded in an anti-racist ethos, and interfaith work is an opportunity to engage with anti-racist practice. In this work, anti-racism can often be practiced through conduct. This begins with arriving with a complete tone of respect. Remember that to be invited into someone’s community is a gift. Dress up. Be conscious of your body odor, and the kinds of language that you are using. Think of how you would go visit your grandmother. Be mindful of your presentation of yourself and the groups that you are representing. How we show up is also a form of communication. One way to do this is to commit to not working solo to be the “good white person”, and rather have a partner to be accountable with- what SONG deems an “accountibili-buddy”. Many communities are already involved in anti-racist work. This a great opportunity for connection and coalition building. Ask them about the work the are involved with, and maybe even join in. A thorough and practical compilation of thoughts in this vein can be found in a resource from SONG, [*On the Role of White People in the Movement in this Time*](#).

Example- Oxford, NC -- The pastor of a rural Episcopal church in North Carolina invited JVP members to come and speak and read from the Hebrew scriptures. The two JVPers realized this was a huge honor. They took time to dress up and arrive on time. Once there they realized the church was incredibly unique -- the service was entirely bilingual (in Spanish and English), women were in leadership, and the church congregation was majority African American and Latino. When the donation plate was passed, one of the JVPers ran out to their car to get a couple of dollars to give. After service, the two stayed for coffee hour and tried to sit with and talk to as many church members as they could. They discussed the church’s work to confront poverty and racism in their rural community and his family’s struggles with elder care. The pastor invited them back and they asked if JVP could host a future church coffee hour, to give something back and continue building the relationship with this special congregation. The next time they visited, they invited church members to take pictures in support of the chapter’s BDS campaign and shared “the food of their people” (kugel + grape juice!).

Speaking Together not Speaking Over:

Nuances in the power of Jewish voices in relationship with Palestinian voices

At times, we can find ourselves so focused on our goals that we forget to take time to reflect on how we are going about achieving them. We need to remember what the goal of this work is and make sure that that is being held in every step along the way.

That being said, feedback from some of JVP's past interfaith partners have underscored the importance of finding a balance between being an active Jewish voice and centering the voices and experiences of Palestinians. Something is wrong if your interfaith campaign becomes a proxy war between differently positioned American Jews. This can be a result of a number of dynamics, but can also indicate that there may have been a lack of partnerships with Palestinians and Palestinian organizations.

There is always a need to hear from Palestinian voices. For many interfaith church partners, it is possible that their membership is more likely to have had met Jewish people in their communities than Palestinians. Being a bridge with churches and Palestinian perspectives can bring a reality to the church that they otherwise may not get to be exposed to. Bringing in Palestinian voices at every opportunity is critical. However, there is also a need to be attentive to make sure that individuals are not being tokenized. In this work, we can look to the Black Lives Matter movement for lessons on leadership and working in line with the vision of the group of people who the movement is supporting.

Example at the UCC Conference:

"Among the JVP contingency at the UCC synod, we were very aware that it is not the role of Jews to "give permission" to Christians to be able to be critical of Israel, and even less so, to listen directly to Palestinians. But we also knew that sometimes people give more credibility to, or are more receptive to, a Jewish voice on this issue, and that might pave the way for further engagement. So how do we leverage our voices in support of justice for Palestinians in a way that at the same time challenges the way in which others are more willing to listen to us first?

At the synod, we worked with others to ensure that Palestinians were there and available to give testimony about their personal experiences and overall perspectives on the occupation and the UCC's resolution. Our presence wasn't playing the role of making space for them to be heard because they were well received, but still in other instances our conversations were more about relationships with Jewish colleagues than Palestinians under occupation. Sometimes we could redirect the conversation, and other times it felt necessary to have that conversation with people who wanted to work through those concerns."

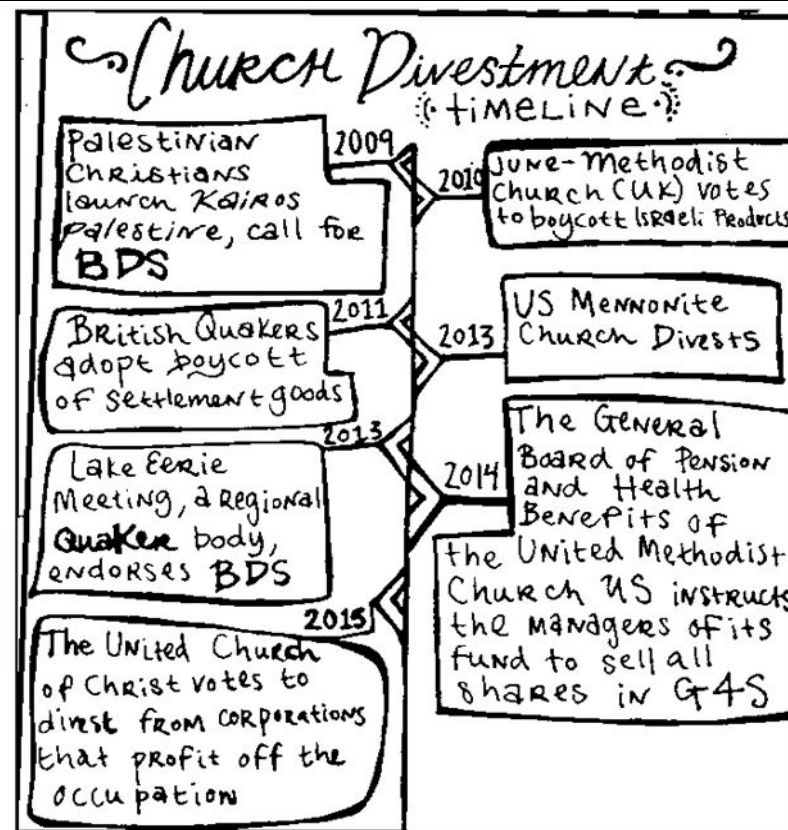
Ilana Rossoff (JVP Staff)

Church Divestment

One goal of JVP's interfaith work with Christian communities is to support church-led motions for divestment of their funds from companies profiting from the occupation and from the oppression of Palestinians. Church divestment is complicated -- sometimes responding to the Palestinian civil society call for BDS, sometimes not explicitly responding to that call but responding to internal guidelines for ethical investment, and for many churches the key documents is the Kairos document which is call by Palestinian Christian Churches:

Kairos Palestine, 4.2.6 and 5.3

"Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations, NGOs and certain religious institutions call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. We call on Christians to remain steadfast in this time of trial... Be active and, provided this conforms to love, participate in any sacrifice that resistance asks of you to overcome our present travail..."



2016 Assemblies

The Methodist Church

The Methodist *General Conference* is an international body of nearly 1,000 delegates, which meets every four years to redefine the church's duties and powers. The General Conference votes on resolutions ranging from editing judicial procedures and authorizes the official hymnal and book of worship, to stating the Church's official stance on sexuality, abortion, war and peace, and the allocation of funding.

Two separate powers manage the church's money:

- The Board of Pensions -- for retired staff and ministers,
- The Foundation -- money for building more churches.

Voting:

- Delegates are elected by annual conferences and can vote
- Bishops attend general conference but cannot vote, some serve as presiding officers while cannot speak unless given explicit permission

History of Divestment:

The Methodist church has been involved with a variety of boycotts and divestments over the past years. They have divested 77 million from South Africa, divested from K-Mart, and Boycotted Sodastream.

In their statement on the Sodastream boycott, they wrote: "The United Methodist Church does not support a boycott of products made in Israel. Our opposition is to products made by Israeli companies operating in occupied territories". The church also operates on a series of financial guidelines. Their endowment fund guidelines exclude investment in any companies that generate more than 10% of income from 'sin'. The category of 'sin' includes alcohol, tobacco, gambling, adult entertainment and weapons. Additionally, the church's human rights investment guideline encourages fund managers to divest from a company that receives 10% of its revenue or raw materials from countries 'demonstrating a prolonged and systematic pattern of human rights violations' or 'conflict-affected areas where significant human rights violations have been widely documented.'

The major group pushing for divestment from I/P is the United Kairos Response, with whom JVP partnered with in 2012.

In 2012:

- JVP and UMKR went around the conference floor in Shirts that said “*Hi, I’m Jewish (Christian, etc.) ask me about Divestment*” → *very useful for centering discussion*
- UMKR led the charge = United Methodist Kairos Response = organization of clergy and lay people committed to responding to the Kairos Palestine document, not an official church committee like IPMN (Presbyterian)

Looking Forward to 2016

- Wait for cues from UMKR

The Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is a protestant denomination Christian church with a membership of approximately 2 million people. The Church has recently had a largely liberal leaning towards social issues such as the Civil Rights movement, ordination of women, and ordination of gays and lesbians. However, it also has a history of involvement in colonial expansion in the United States, and the church split into two churches over views on slavery and abolition in 1861. They merged again in 1983.

The General Assembly (GA) is a bi-annual three day event wherein the Presbyterian Church makes decisions ranging from everyday operating issues to official stances on gay marriage, divestment, and ordination. This coming June it will take place in Portland, Oregon. The resolutions that will be voted on are brought to the General Assembly through local presbyteries (groups of Presbyterian churches). A single GA can see *more than 20* resolutions relating to Israel/ Palestine. Resolutions are discussed in committees before being brought to the floor for the final decision the 600+ voting delegates. Resolutions pertaining to Palestine and Israel are usually brought to the Middle East committee. Once on the floor, the committees make recommendations for the final vote. The voting delegates, many of whom may have never heard of the particular issues prior to serving at the GA, look to the committees for voting guidance.

Voting and Non-Voting Delegates

(Note: Voting delegates are selected every year and usually have never attended a General Assembly prior to that one.)

- The TEC (Teaching Elder Clerics) = Ministers (board members)
- The REC (ruling Elder Clerics) = Lay People (board members)

Non-Voting Delegates: provide their recommendations to the voting delegates through an advisory vote.

- The YAD (Young Adult Delegates)
- The TSADs (Theological Seminary Advisory Delegates)
- The MADs (Missionary Adult Delegates) → have particular international concerns

Presbyterian Church Divestment Timeline

2006

The GA reaffirms that talks with named corporations are continuing. An overture seeking immediate divestment from Caterpillar doesn't pass.

2009

With talks with Caterpillar failing, MRTI votes to recommend a statement to the 219th GA renouncing Caterpillar's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories.

2011

MRTI recommends divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions.

2014

Presbyterian Church votes to divest holdings to sanction Israel in 310-303 vote. Companies named are Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola.

2004

The 216th GA in Richmond, VA, votes to begin selective divestment from US corporations that support the Israeli govt in sustaining the occupation of Palestinian territories.

2008

The 218th GA, under recommendation from the MRTI (Mission Responsibility Through Investment), focuses on corporate engagement, despite the appearance of a divestment overture.

2010

The MESC (Middle East Study Committee) issues recommendations to denounce Caterpillar's practices in Israel and the occupied territories and is approved. The GA votes against divestment in lieu of a final attempt at corporate engagement.

2012

The highest governing body of the church in non-Assembly years, the General Assembly Mission Council, approves sending MRTI's recommendation on divestment to the 220th GA.

JVP Allies and Actions:

Within the Church, the strongest proponents for resolutions supporting divestment have been the *Israel Palestine Mission Network (IPMN)*. Part of IPMN's work within the church is to educate the church at large around the situation in Palestine/ Israel. To support that project, they have created several educational tools, including a 2014 publication titled [*Zionism Unsettled*](#) and a study guide, [*Steadfast Hope- The Palestinian Quest for Justice*](#). We have worked with the Presbyterians for over 10 years. JVP now knows Presbyterian culture well, and we know the language and the process.

The opposition has been really good at convincing Presbyterians that this vote will drive them away from their Jewish neighbors and friends. One of the challenges we face is: *how do we convince Presbyterians (pastors, lay members and commissioners) not only that divestment isn't anti-semitic, but that it doesn't have to drive a wedge between Presbyterians and Jews.*

In 2016:

The biggest priority for 2016 is to defend the divestment decision of 2014.

At the 2014 General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church approved in a 310 to 303 vote a resolution to divest \$21 million dollars from three US companies profiting from the Israeli occupation. Most people within the church are already operating under the assumption that the occupation is wrong and that Israel should not be in the settlements. Most (but not all) Presbyterians believe there should be a two state solution.

The main difference between 2014 and 2016 is that this year the strategy stops short of asking the church to support BDS. The second goal is to push forward a little bit, but not really make a huge splash. Divestment was the big move, and there has been backlash. This is focused on quietly pushing forward to conserve victories.

1. Continue to educate the church of Israel/ Palestine. This is done through advocating for overtures. This is a part of the ongoing work.

▣ ***What to Do and How to Do It!*** ▣

This resource is intended for people engaging in local interfaith outreach! If you are going to go to one of the annual conferences/assemblies this coming year more complete trainings will be provided. However, building solid relationships with church partners before the conferences is a crucial component of supporting Church divestment campaigns.

- ❖ Contact your local church to see if they want to have an Israel/Palestine event or conversation
- ❖ Stay up to date with JVP National and their partner's plan for the conferences/assemblies!
- ❖ Contact local religious leaders to ask them questions about the upcoming conferences and let them know you would love to participate in educational events or as speakers if they are planning events
- ❖ Contact local university religious leaders for one-on-ones, who might have contacts in the wider community and whose information is readily available to students
- ❖ For Presbyterian outreach: If local JVP chapters could reach out with Presbyterians in their areas (first pastors, then sessions of the churches and congregations) to talk about the JVP perspective. That would be really powerful. JVP is in a good position to address this challenge.
- ❖ Visit your friends' churches! Learn about their beliefs and practices and connect with people who might be interested in your work with JVP
- ❖ Learn more about:
 - [Talking Points on Church Divestment](#)
 - [Tips for Cold Calling Towards Relationship Building](#)
 - [2015 Toolkit for UCC and Episcopalian Church Divestment Organizing](#)

Keep in mind: Interfaith work is not necessarily just promoting action but also engaging in productive conversation to get people talking more

t h a n k y o u !

to the everyone who we interviewed, who edited,
and whose work for justice is a daily inspiration:

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SONG (Southerners on New Ground)