

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL COORDINATING COMMITTEE — RESOLUTION 2012-B019

Membership

The Rev. John Kitagawa, *Chair*
The Rt. Rev. Thomas Breidenthal, 2015
The Rt. Rev. Philip M. Duncan II, 2015
Ms. Lelanda Lee, 2015
The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, *Ex Officio*
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, *Ex Officio*
Mr. Alexander Baumgarten, *Staff*

Summary of Work

Mandate: Established pursuant to AN-008, adopted by Executive Council in February 2013, to assure the effective and thorough implementation of the policies adopted by the 77th General Convention through Resolution B019 and referred to multiple interim bodies. Representation from specific committees and commissions and a report to Executive Council for inclusion in its Blue Book report were mandated.

I. SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

The summary below is in response to Resolution B019 and refers to the resolution's clauses and resolves.

Lines 1 through 8 “regret the lack of progress in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians toward a just and peaceful resolution of the long-standing conflict [‘the Conflict’] between the two peoples.” We have seen the devastating result of this lack of progress, particularly during the summer of 2014. If the Executive Council were to advance a resolution for the 2015 General Convention, stronger language than “regret” might be used.

Lines 9 through 14 commend the Presiding Bishop's leadership. The Coordinating Committee would support further affirmation if there is to be a 2015 resolution.

Lines 15 through 20 contain the first action item, “to engage actively in the discipline of advocacy, education, and prayer for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as in the provision of humanitarian aid that promotes peace and reconciliation.” The Office of Justice and Advocacy Ministries (JAM) has actively responded to this call for advocacy and action. In Lent 2014, JAM published a seven-part educational series, “Peace in the Land of the Holy One,” to draw Episcopalians into a comprehensive study of the Conflict and concerted advocacy toward a two-state solution. JAM further engaged, through its work with Churches for Middle East Peace and in support of the Presiding Bishop's ministry of advocacy (including in the National Interfaith Leadership Initiative), a steady pattern of direct congressional, White House, and State Department advocacy in response to the positions of The Episcopal Church adopted through the General Convention.

JAM sponsored travel for staff and a member of the B019 Coordinating Committee in a “dual narrative” study trip to the Holy Land in November 2013, and further supported and accompanied three primatial visits to the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem during the triennium, each of which contained an advocacy and educational component for the wider Church. Finally, at the time of writing, JAM is preparing to launch, later in the triennium, a comprehensive page on the website of The Episcopal Church providing study materials and advocacy resources to Episcopalians.

Lines 21 through 25 “affirm the importance of interfaith dialogue, and decries religious extremism and fundamentalism.” The Convention did not mandate any specific action for the triennium.

Lines 26 through 30 “urges all congregations to seek, over the next triennium, to engage with local Jewish and Muslim congregations to study peace with justice in the Middle East, and urges that the theologies that inform the conversations on peace with justice in the Middle East be particular focuses of attention.” While this section is primarily directed at local congregations, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society staff lived, in the spirit of the request, through participation in a series of high-level, Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogues about Holy Land issues; and further engaged both formal and informal bilateral dialogues with Muslim leaders and groups and with Jewish leaders and groups. The Presiding Bishop’s office sponsored additional leadership-level dialogue through invitations to prominent Muslim and Jewish leaders to spend extended time with the House of Bishops during the triennium (and in turn, receiving from two major Jewish organizations an invitation to be address high-level gatherings of their community.)

Lines 31 through 37 asks “the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns, the resources of the Episcopal seminaries, and the Advocacy and Networking Committee of the Executive Council be called upon to support, through the triennium, the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian study on peace with justice in the Middle East and to produce an annotated bibliography of resources to be posted on the website of The Episcopal Church.” This was an unfunded directive of the Convention. The House of Bishops Theology Committee declined to engage the request of this resolution to produce an annotated bibliography due to workload and resource scarcity. At the time of writing, the Presiding Bishop and staff continue to explore ways to identify resources to fund the work of a scholar of note, with the goal of presenting a draft bibliography to the Theology Committee for their consideration before the end of the triennium.

Lines 38 through 42 refer to the “resolve” in Lines 26-30. Without funding or staff, a systematic empowering and resourcing of local peace studies initiative was not possible. By extension, collecting and summarizing local reports for General Convention edification was not possible.

Lines 43 through 47 requested “that the Presiding Bishop develop an interfaith model pilgrimage composed equally of Episcopalians, Jews, and Muslims in order to further encourage the travel of pilgrims and witnesses to the Holy Land in order to experience the multiple narratives of the diverse peoples who call the land their home;” the Presiding Bishop, in partnership with a senior Jewish leader and a senior Muslim leader will lead, in January 2015, the pilgrimage requested by the General Convention. It will be preceded by shared study of sacred texts by the leaders and participants; and will be followed by advocacy and educational materials designed to engage all three traditions in a united program of advocacy toward a two-state solution, and by suggestions for how such pilgrimage might be carried out at the local level.

Lines 58 through 61 commend the work of the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and of the Good Friday Offering to the Church. Any 2015 resolution would appropriately continue to support this work.

Lines 48 through 57, and 62-65 “affirm positive investment as a necessary means to create a sound economy and sustainable infrastructure in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ... [and that] as a component of this Church’s support for positive financial investment in the Palestinian territories, the General Convention urge the Economic Justice Loan Committee to consider a loan of at least \$200,000 to strengthen the economic infrastructure of the Palestinian territories.” In partnership with the staff of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, the Economic Justice Loan Committee in 2013 thoroughly studied the request for economic investment in the Palestinian Territories and, as a result, invested \$500,000 — more than double the amount called for by the Convention — in a Certificate of Deposit in the Bank of Palestine that empowers community-level business opportunities and economic empowerment in the Occupied Territories.

Based on that investment, at least one diocese has made its own investment, while others have reported that they are studying the matter.

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The following remarks offer some historical perspective on the broader context of The Episcopal Church's engagement in Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East.

Since at least 1979, the General Convention has passed a variety of resolutions at each successive Convention on the subject. Some clear themes have been consistently raised for the past 36 years, including our support for a negotiated two-state solution in which a universally recognized and secure state of Israel exists side-by-side with an independent and viable Palestinian state, with a shared Jerusalem as the capital of both. Also consistent has been the Church's condemnation of violence by all parties. The Church's response to other dynamics of the conflict, such as how international partners both governmental and nongovernmental should engage economically with the parties, has varied and evolved as the conflict itself has varied and evolved.

A list of resolutions can easily be obtained from the Archives of the Episcopal Church. Some of the concurred resolutions have addressed significant topics such as: "Urge a Full accounting of the Use of Foreign Aid in the Middle East (1991-A149)"; "Support a Two-State Solution for Israel and the Palestinian People (1991-A147)"; "Recognize Jerusalem as the Capital of Both Israel and Palestine (1997-A107)"; "Oppose Construction of the Israeli Security Wall (2003-D081)"; "Urge Israel to End Policy of Demolition of Palestinian Homes (2003-D008)"; "Pray for the Wall around Bethlehem to Come Down (2009-A037)."

The Convention has also rejected several significant resolutions on: "On the Topic of Israel's Occupation of Palestine (2006-A012)"; "On the Topic of Peace Between Israel and Palestine (2006-A011)"; and "On the Topic of Peace and Statehood in Historic Palestine (2009-B027)."

It must be noted that some Episcopalians have strongly advocated for a boycott of investments in Israeli businesses as a way to pressure the Israeli government to change some of its policies toward Palestine. The boycotts of South African businesses are often cited to support this approach. The Church rejected divestment in 2006 through a resolution of Executive Council after the Council, in partnership with the Church's Social Responsibility in Investment Committee (now called the Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility), spent more than a year studying the issue.

Instead, the Council affirmed constructive corporate dialogue and positive investment. That policy was further clarified by the Executive Council in 2013 in response to inquiry from some Episcopal advocates of boycott, divestment, and sanctions when the Council passed a resolution holding that "this Church does not support boycott, divestment, and economic sanctions against the state of Israel nor any application of the Church's corporate-engagement policies toward such ends.

III. LOOKING FORWARD

The summary of triennial actions related to B019 suggested several actions that were hampered by the lack of funding and of needed personnel support. The 2015 General Convention could advance this work and the cause of peace in Israel and Palestine by providing the funding to achieve the underachieved action items, as well as by sharing the fruits of the January 2015 Interfaith Pilgrimage as one model for local interfaith conversations and study.