**Recent Resolutions by the UCC and NH Conference Calling to “Boycott and Divest”**

***How will the First Congregational Church of Lebanon respond?***

**Background:** Following several months of study and prayer, our Diaconate has recommended that our congregation take a formal position in response to resolutions adopted in 2014 and 2015 by both the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ (the UCC’s national meeting) on “the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” These strongly-worded resolutions call upon the national UCC and its member churches to “boycott and divest” from companies doing business in the West Bank.

Our congregational structure and governance mean that these actions are non-binding; that each congregation is free to adopt its own position (or none at all); and that actions taken by the NH Conference and national UCC do not necessarily reflect endorsement by UCC member churches, including our own.

**The First Congregational Church of Lebanon did not endorse or vote on these NH Conference and national UCC resolutions**. Some within our congregation did communicate with state and national church leaders in advance of these actions, expressing serious concern and opposition, but did so only as individuals and not in any formal capacity on behalf of the First Congregational Church of Lebanon.

**Concerns:** Our discussions within the Diaconate have raised serious concerns with both the **substance** of these resolutions and with the **process** by which they were adopted at the state and national levels. In addition, the Diaconate believes that in the absence of a formal position taken by our own local church, people in our community and region may wrongly conclude that we and other UCC congregations are supportive of these actions. This misperception is harmful to our relations with the public and with other faith communities, particularly the Jewish community here in the Upper Valley.

**Call to Action:** At its November meeting, the Diaconate adopted a draft statement opposing the UCC and NH Conference’s “boycott and divest” resolutions and brought this recommendation to the December Church Council meeting to request consideration and action by our congregation as a whole. The Diaconate’s recommendation is based in part on these core principles:

* We believe we are called to offer a different witness on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than that communicated by recent UCC and NH conference actions.
* We believe that the best future for all residents of the Middle East is a peaceful future.
* We believe that peace and justice in the Middle East should be pursued in ways that do not promote anti-Semitism at home or abroad.
* We believe that the UCC should take an active role in promoting peace in the Middle East—as peacemakers, not partisans. UCC peacemakers should work to develop ties with and to encourage both sides; we should act in ways that promote and bring about real change for good.
* We believe that partisan resolutions like those adopted by the NH Conference and the UCC can make peace harder to achieve by alienating Jews and Israelis and enabling some Palestinians to believe they do not need to negotiate for peace.

Regardless of the intent of the “boycott and divest” resolutions, we have seen that they impair our ability to engage in important interfaith dialogue with our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community and impede our ability to offer an effective, credible, and compelling public witness as a church.

***The Diaconate therefore recommends that the First Congregational Church of Lebanon offer a public witness opposing these UCC and NH Conference resolutions. We must state that they do not speak for our church.***

With **support from our congregation**, we would allow our Diaconate, Pastor, and other church representatives to **communicate our witness** to our brothers and sisters in the **Jewish community**, including the Upper Valley Jewish Community, Dartmouth College Hillel, and Congregation Shir Shalom in Woodstock; to **other UCC churches** in New Hampshire and Vermont; to the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association, the NH Conference, the national UCC, and their leaders; and to **the public** via articles or letters submitted to the *Valley News* and other publications, and statements on our church web site.

**Additional Background:** Some in the “boycott, divest, and sanction” movement seek to punish Israel and dictate how Israelis and Palestinians should resolve the core issues of their conflict. At a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise, our denomination’s embrace of this movement can unfortunately be perceived as maligning and undermining Israel and the Jewish people.

The General Synod’s 2015 “boycott and divest” resolution was one of three singling out Israel for punitive action, among a total of five resolutions on international affairs. The UCC has taken no similar action on other pressing regional concerns, such as Islamic State terrorism and beheadings, Boko Haram’s kidnapping and trafficking, or Hamas and other groups dedicated to eliminating the state of Israel. Before approving the resolution, the UCC Synod invited presentations only by speakers advocating action against Israel, and much of the justification was based on the “Kairos Palestine” document, a highly partisan narrative from 2009 that overlooks the Jewish people’s historical ties to the land of Israel.

As Christians, we recognize and repent of a long history of anti-Semitism supported and advocated by the institutional church. Our denomination’s recent actions threaten to undermine the peaceful and fruitful relationship, the healing and reconciliation, experienced between Christians and Jews in the last 100 years. The complex issues surrounding the Middle East conflict deserve more even-handed treatment—especially within the UCC and other Christian churches—allowing meaningful dialogue and healing to take place.