

*A Pastoral Response to the Hamas Attacks and the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza.*

Beloved friends of SPC,

As we continue to pray through the heinous attacks by Hamas last week and the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza, the geo-political has become for us profoundly personal and pastoral.

We pray with those in our community with Jewish heritage and relationships who experience the attacks by Hamas on a visceral, existential level, evoking the generational trauma of centuries-long anti-Jewish hate.

We pray with members and friends of our community involved in military movements in the United States and internationally who may be called upon to deploy in response to the attacks.

We pray with Kristen and Joel Blunk, who landed in Tel Aviv just hours after the attacks had begun [they are safe in Greece], and others in our community who have feared for family and friends in the region, including those named by Georgia Jeppeson and Bill Ashforth [Max] and Cari Simon [Sam].

We pray with families in our congregation with Middle Eastern heritage and connections to other countries in the region, whose concern for the decades-long Palestinian cry for justice has been ignored for too long.

We pray with a member of our presbytery - from Front Royal, Virginia - who serves as the national Presbyterian mission co-worker in Jerusalem, telling us that Palestinian citizens of Israel and the Occupied West Bank feel trapped in their own homes amid a crackdown of a system the Presbyterian national church just last summer labeled *apartheid*.

We pray with our Palestinian Christian mission partners, both through SPC and through the national denomination, who fear the Israeli response to Hamas will not only worsen what was already a humanitarian crisis in a Gaza under siege but will also further set back their aspirations for statehood and an end to the occupation of their ancestral homelands.

My own story includes training for ministry at an intentionally inter-religious Divinity School, studying alongside Jews and Muslims, Catholics and Unitarians, all working to deconstruct the legacy of anti-Judaism. In that context I also served for two years as a seminary intern with a congregation composed of Palestinian and Lebanese Presbyterians. This experience led me to write my Masters thesis on how to integrate post-Holocaust theology with Palestinian Christian non-violent liberation theology. If that sounds impossible, I can affirm it is really, really hard. And yet, if the prayers of our community are any indication, it continues to be essential.

We at SPC have declared ourselves to be a church that is *committed to being and becoming people of radical compassion, working for justice and wholeness in ourselves and in the world.*

To that end, I am compelled by faith to remind us that we follow a non-violent thoroughly Jewish Jesus who was murdered by an occupying military power when he got lumped together with those who violently resisted that occupying power. Today, the crucified Christ joins his voice with *everyone* in the land we call holy- indeed with everyone in every land - who cries out *My God, my God, WHY have you forsaken me!?*

There is still, I believe in my soul, good news for us and for the world: resources remain from within all three Abrahamic traditions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - that can lead us in a path toward a truly just and sustainable peace. We simply have to decide to use them. Many of us are. These are the stories I will continue to lift up in the weeks and months to come.

In the meantime, let us live in the light of resurrection hope, as people who pray for Beloved Community to come on earth as it is in heaven, bearing witness to a God who *will* show us how to make that way out of what truly does seem like no way. And as we work for that way, let us pray first and foremost for the children.

In the peace that passes all understanding,  
Pastor Gusti