



Global Ministries *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ*

June 1, 2010

*God executes justice for the oppressed; God gives food to the hungry.
God sets prisoners free....God will reign forever.* [from Psalm 146]

This week is the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel. Churches and people around the world are participating by praying and learning about issues of peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians. The May 31, 2010 deadly Israeli attack on the flotilla bringing humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza has proven the need for people of faith and conscience to speak out against the use of force and to work for peace.

The Israeli isolation and closure of Gaza these past years have resulted in a humanitarian crisis marked by insufficient nutritional aid, high unemployment, and inadequate medical care. When Israel withdrew settlements from Gaza in September, 2005, it maintained control over Gaza's borders, air and sea space, and shore, making this densely populated strip a virtual prison. The people of Gaza are unable to enjoy any modicum of normal life.

In a March 15 letter to President Obama, Rev. Sharon Watkins, General Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Rev. Geoffrey Black, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, joined 16 other US Christian leaders, stating: "We urge, therefore, that your administration use America's unique relationship with Israel to persuade it to lift the closure of its border crossing with Gaza now." The situation in Gaza is serious, as identified in that same letter:

- 70% of the 1.5 million Gazans survive on \$1 a day. 40% of workers are unemployed.
- There were on average 850 trucks daily with food, goods and fuel entering from Israel, pre-closure; there are 128 today.
- 11% of Gaza's children are malnourished, due to poverty and inadequate food imports.
- 281 of 641 schools were damaged and 18 destroyed in the [January 2009] war. But because of the closures few have been rebuilt, and thousands of students lack books or supplies. There are daily eight-hour power outages.
- The war and Israel's refusal to allow imports of cement and material to rebuild 20,000 destroyed or damaged homes have left many more thousands of Gaza's people in tents, temporary structures, or with other families.
- Many war-damaged or deteriorating water and sewage facilities are health and environmental hazards, for lack of rebuilding supplies and equipment.
- The war damaged 15 of 27 hospitals and 43 of 110 clinics. Imports of medicine and equipment are delayed.
- Movement of people in and out of Gaza, including students, aid and medical workers, journalists, and family members, is severely limited.

The call to lift the closure is as timely now as ever. The Free Gaza aid flotilla was attempting to deliver 10,000 tons of humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza. We join those the world over who have responded in indignation over the Israeli raid on the flotilla. We reiterate the urgency of the plea that Israel's closure of Gaza be lifted. Gaza must not be ignored in any negotiations toward a two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As people around the world pray for peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians, we join in prayer with the heads of churches of Jerusalem, who offer these words of prayer:

...In the land you made holy, free us all from the sin of indifference, contempt and violence which only brings hatred and killing. Free the souls and hearts of Israelis and Palestinians. Give liberation, freedom and dignity, to the people of Gaza who live under trials, threats and blockades. ...Speak your word of love for all to hear, guide us to justice in all lands, grant us power to proclaim your reign, bridge the gaps that divide and unsettle us and let your Kingdom come....Amen.

*Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries, United Church of Christ,
and Co-Executive of Global Ministries*

*Rev. David Vargas, President, Division of Overseas Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
and Co-Executive of Global Ministries*