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On Responsible Travel to the Holy Land

Sponsors: Reverend Dr. Melanie Duguid-May, Thomas H. Foster

Resolved, that the 92nd Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester submits the following resolution to the 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church:

Resolved, that the House of _____ concurring, the 81st General Convention recommends that pilgrimage travelers to the Holy Land explore and engage the realities of the circumstances and conditions impacting the lives of today's Palestinians and Israelis, paying particular attention to the Israeli military Occupation of Palestinian territories, to the violations of human rights, and to Palestinian national aspirations. It further recommends that visits to the sites of biblical stories be accompanied by "Living Stones," i.e., Palestinian Christians who are descendants of the first Christians and who feel a special responsibility for maintaining Christian worship in the Holy Land; and be it further

Resolved, that Jesus' ministry of love and justice can be witnessed in today's Palestine and Israel in locations of suffering and hardship such as refugee camps and military checkpoints, as well as in churches and historical sites; and be it further

Resolved, that the 81st General Convention encourage travelers to arrange trips, either whole or in part, with agencies or companies that are Palestinian-owned and/or offer itineraries that include encounters with Palestinians who are experiencing the conditions of Occupation.

30 **Explanation**

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32 1. Even after two millennia, the Holy Land still beckons. The call to go and see is
33 powerful. Today's Holy Land is at the center of the faith of most people of the world,
34 followers of the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions. For Christians, to make
35 pilgrimage in the place where Jesus lived out his life and ministry and among the very
36 people who are his spiritual descendants offers a completely unique way to encounter
37 his teachings and make them real.

38 2. Holy Land pilgrims encounter a place that has not been frozen in time. Today's Holy
39 Land is so much more than stones and stories of ancient history. It is comprised of
40 distinct political entities, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the state of Israel, that
41 are often at the center of world news headlines. There, the past 100 years have been
42 fraught: the end of a world war and an empire; decades of Mandatory rule by a colonial
43 empire; immigration of settler colonists seeking shelter from harm coming up against the
44 inhabitants of centuries; United Nations intervention and partition of lands and peoples;
45 a bloody protracted war resulting in a new "Jewish state" built on conquered and
46 confiscated lands that rendered hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced,
47 dispossessed and made refugees; and the imposition of the longest military occupation
48 of one people by another in today's world, now in its 56th year. Inevitably over decades,
49 there have been death; injuries; loss of human rights; family disruption; loss of homes,
50 jobs, and educational opportunities; forced evacuation from long-held lands alongside
51 the restricted personal movement enforced by military occupation; and poverty, hunger,
52 and illness.

53 3. The circumstances of today's Holy Land, then, are compellingly redolent of Jesus'
54 own time under a Roman military occupation. The conditions are right for authentic
55 *pilgrimage* that seeks to see, understand, and be transformed. The stories, parables,
56 and narratives of Jesus' ministry that comprise our liturgical worship tell of encounters
57 with the oppressed, the poor and ill, and the marginalized. Surely then, pilgrims to the
58 Holy Land today should seek the same by traveling not to sites long since fallen silent,
59 but to checkpoints, refugee camps, prisons, hospitals and clinics, and encounters with
60 people living in conflict and under occupation and oppression. The few Christians
61 remaining in the Holy Land are Palestinian. Let them be our guides and companions,
62 not those who ignore the very places and conditions where Jesus would be found today.

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