



600 Shaftesbury Blvd  
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4  
(204) 896-1616  
office@mennochurch.mb.ca  
www.mennochurch.mb.ca

May 15, 2024

Dear congregations of Mennonite Church Manitoba,

Today is Nakba Day. It is the day set aside by the Palestinian people each year to mark the Nakba (“Catastrophe”) of 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were violently dispossessed and displaced to make way for the expanding new nation of Israel.

This year’s Nakba Day comes in the midst of a new catastrophe for the Palestinian people. Since the events of October 7, over 35,000 Palestinians—15,000 of them children—have been killed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Another 90,000 have been wounded or are missing, and 90% of Gaza’s 2.3 million people have been displaced. A majority of homes have been damaged or destroyed, along with many hospitals, schools, and places of worship. All this while Israeli settlers continue to claim Palestinian lands, displacing Palestinian people in the West Bank.

Of course, “the events of October 7” were not as neutral as that sounds. Israel experienced its 9/11 at the hands of Hamas: over 1,100 people killed including nearly 800 civilians, with another 3,400 injured and just under 250 taken hostage. Around 130 of these hostages remain in Hamas hands, hidden somewhere in the rubble of Gaza. October 7, 2023, was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust—and it evoked all the memories of those horrific events eight decades ago.

So much death. So much destruction. God, have mercy.

**I urge us as Mennonites, as those claiming to be followers of Jesus, not to view these events through the lens of partisan political interests or lobby groups. I urge us to view these events, and the people impacted by them, through the eyes of Jesus.**

Jesus lived under occupation. He knew about military checkpoints and oppressive practices. He died a violent death at the hands of the occupying Roman state. According to Matthew’s story of Jesus, he even knew what it meant to be a refugee—the child Jesus and his family fled a murderous tyrant, through Gaza to Egypt.

Jesus was also a devout Jew. As a child he learned the Shema, and he prayed it evening and morning every day of his life: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). As an adult he taught that this greatest of commandments was given focus by another one he said was just like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

*“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.”  
1 Corinthians 3:11*

**This is the Jesus we as Mennonites seek to follow, the exiled and oppressed and crucified and resurrected Jesus who calls us to love our neighbours, even our enemies, by elevating their needs to the level of our own.**

And so we stand with any and all who experience bigotry, cruelty, violence, injustice, and oppression. We stand with Palestinians here and around the world, and certainly with those in the West Bank and Gaza, even as we also stand with Israeli families grieving loved ones killed by Hamas and awaiting news of those still held hostage. We stand with Jews against growing antisemitism, and we stand with Muslims against increased Islamophobia.

We call for an end to all violence, including violence done in revenge or retribution, and even violence done in the cause of peace and justice. We call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the immediate and safe return of all remaining hostages, and for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to come together again in pursuit of a lasting, just peace for both Palestine and Israel.

Mennonites have been present in Palestine and Israel for many decades. As Mennonite Church Canada, and through Mennonite Central Committee, we have especially partnered with Palestinian organizations and walked with Palestinian people. We have borne witness to the harms experienced by Palestinians under Israel's occupation. We have divested from companies that support the IDF. We have written letters to politicians. We have stood with our Palestinian neighbours at rallies. We have prayed with them at vigils.

We have not done these things perfectly. There is still work for us to do as Mennonites. We have not fully acknowledged the depth of antisemitism in our heritage, and we still have both antisemitism and Islamophobia to root out among us. We still have more ways we can lend our voice to speak out against injustice, or to amplify the voices of those experiencing oppression. No, we have not followed Jesus perfectly, and there is still work for us to do.

**May we have the courage to continue on this path with all peace-loving Palestinians and Israelis, all Jews and Muslims of goodwill, until there is a just peace in Palestine and Israel, where Palestinians and Israelis alike, Jews and Muslims and Christians and more, can live in the region in freedom, in peace, and in safety, finding flourishing life.**

And on that day, when sword is no longer taken up and war is no longer learned, the vision of the Prophet Micah will finally be fulfilled: "all shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).

In the persistent hope of Christ,



Michael Pahl  
Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Manitoba