

## **GS14 CHALLENGING ANTISEMITISM IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA**

**Origin: General Secretary, General Council**

### **1. What is the issue?**

Antisemitism is an ongoing reality in Canada and around the world. In addition, hate crimes have been on the rise. In Canada, [hate crimes targeting Jewish populations](#) are among the most common types of hate crimes reported by police (13%). The United Church has a responsibility to examine its own complicity in antisemitism and to educate about, and counter, antisemitism within the church and in the world.

We believe God: Creator/Christ/Holy Spirit is calling us to:

- Raise awareness about how antisemitism manifests itself in The United Church of Canada. This might include education; increasing awareness of theologies and scripture interpretations that contribute to antisemitism; advocacy; and working towards changing antisemitic church practices.

### **2. Why is this issue important?**

Christianity has a long history of antisemitism, based to a large extent on some interpretations of particular scripture passages. Some examples of antisemitism are the beliefs that: the New Testament replaces the Old Testament; Jesus came to abolish the laws of Judaism; Judaism is legalistic, but Christianity is about grace.

These examples of antisemitism are among the ones that manifest themselves in The United Church of Canada. Our key document and statement regarding Jewish-Christian relations in the United Church, *Bearing Faithful Witness*, was adopted by General Council in 2003. The statement acknowledges a history of antisemitism within Christianity as a whole and within the United Church and names antisemitism and anti-Judaism as affronts to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition, the statement calls for all members of the United Church “to be vigilant in resisting antisemitism and anti-Judaism in church and society” and affirms “that the State of Israel has the right to exist in peace and security.” The church needs to continue to learn and challenge ourselves to identify and act against antisemitism in biblical interpretation, worship, study groups, Sunday school, our work for justice, and in all aspects of shared life together. We are reminded in *Bearing Faithful Witness* that “the God whom we know in Jesus Christ is the One who called Sarah and Abraham, gave the Torah to Moses, and put passion for justice in the hearts of the prophets. We believe, above all, in the faithfulness of God.”

As *Bearing Faithful Witness* notes, in a glossary entry in the report on Antisemitism and the State of Israel:

“Because of the powerful bond on many levels between the State of Israel and the larger Jewish world, and because of the sensitivities engendered by the Holocaust, severe criticism of the Jewish state is often regarded by pro-Israel Jews and Christians as a mask for antisemitism. Those who make this claim are not always wrong. For one

thing, anti-Zionist language has served to disguise antisemitism since the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”

“The problem is to distinguish legitimate criticism from illegitimate assaults driven by a concealed prejudice. Certain signs indicate the difference. Criticisms of Israel that dwell on its Jewish identity rather than the exigencies of power as the cause of its real or imagined misdeeds are highly suspect. Any attempt to demonize Israel as intrinsically evil and thus a nation unlike other nations (although all nations are guilty of evil deeds) betrays its true nature. . . . Legitimate criticism, on the other hand, concerns itself with specific policies and actions on the part of Israeli leaders and governments, as well as the enduring problems and tensions of Israeli society. Legitimate criticism is always able to distinguish between a regime and a people, between what is transient and what is enduring in the history of a particular country.” (p. 11-12, *Bearing Faithful Witness*, 2003).

*Bearing Faithful Witness* is now twenty years old and while it remains relevant and a useful resource, engaging in a new education and action program, with concerted animation throughout the church, would be timely.

### **3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church’s commitments on equity?**

Over the course of several years, General Council has made the following commitments on equity. This proposal engages with some of these principles:

- [opposing discrimination](#) of any kind on the basis of identity; and
- developing an anti-racism policy and committing to becoming an [anti-racist denomination](#).

This proposal is connected to the above two principles. As antisemitism is based on religious and ethno-cultural identity, countering antisemitism is part of becoming an anti-racist denomination. This proposal can also help us live into our church’s commitments to becoming an intercultural church as we continue to live into the complex, nuanced, and complicated reality of seeking justice. A commitment to addressing antisemitism needs to be held alongside the church’s commitment to seeking just peace in Palestine and Israel.

### **4. How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

**The General Secretary proposes that the General Council could:**

- Direct the General Secretary to:
  - develop an education program about antisemitism for the United Church;
  - ensure that such a program include actions for advocacy within the United Church and in Canada; and
  - ensure that adequate staff time and resources are made available to animate this education and advocacy program throughout the church.

- Encourage communities of faith (including but not limited to congregations, camps, and networks), to engage with this education and advocacy program.

**5. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal? Is this proposal in response to a previous proposal, motion or action? If so, please name the previous action(s) and proposal number(s).

- [Commitment to becoming an anti-racist church](#)
- [opposing discrimination](#)
- [Bearing Faithful Witness](#)

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to [info@generalcouncil44.ca](mailto:info@generalcouncil44.ca).