



Christians call for a shared Jerusalem

Heritage, Hope and Home of Two Peoples and Three Religions

Jerusalem is a sacred city to Jews, Christians and Muslims, the Children of Abraham. All long for Jerusalem to be the City of Peace. For most of its history, the fate of Jerusalem was determined by war. Now the ancient hope for peace can become reality through negotiations.

Israeli leaders hold that Jerusalem should be Israel's capital under the sole sovereignty of the State of Israel. Palestinian leaders hold that traditionally Arab eastern Jerusalem should become the capital of a new State of Palestine.

As Christians committed to working for peace, we support a negotiated solution for Jerusalem that respects the human and political rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the rights of the three religious communities. We urge Jews, Christians and Muslims to open dialogue on these issues.

Jerusalem at peace
cannot belong exclusively
to one people, one country or one religion.

Jerusalem should be open to all,
shared by all...
two peoples and three religions.

We urge the United States government to call upon negotiators to move beyond exclusivist claims and create a Jerusalem that is a sign of peace and a symbol of reconciliation for all humankind.

This statement was signed by 600 individuals and organizations, including:

The Rev. H. George Anderson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • The Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church • The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA • The Rev. Dr. Thom White Wolf Fassett, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, The United Methodist Church • Dr. Richard L. Hamm, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) • The Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA) • Sister Claudette LaVerdiere, MM, President, Central Governing Board, Maryknoll Sisters • Very Rev. Joseph LeVesque, CM, President, Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men's Institutes • Dr. Ronald J.R. Mathies, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee • The Rev. Wesley Granberg Michaelson, Reformed Church In America • The Rev. Dr. Donald E. Miller, General Secretary, Church of the Brethren • Kara L. Newell, Executive Director, American Friends Service Committee; Dr. Randolph Nugent, General Secretary, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church • Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba), Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America • The Rev. Paul H. Sherry, President, United Church of Christ • Fr. Kenneth F. Thesing, MM, Superior General, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers • Joe Volk, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation.

In 1998, ecumenical committees in the following cities published this message in their newspapers: Detroit, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Boston and Los Angeles.





A Brief History of Jerusalem



Jerusalem, whose name is said to be derived from Semitic roots meaning “city of peace,” was a Canaanite (Jebusite) city for well over 1000 years before it was conquered by King David in 1000 B.C. and made the capital of the Hebrew state. The Babylonian conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple in 586 B.C. was followed by Persian rule and the return from exile in Babylonia of the Judeans who built the Second Temple in 516. With the conquest of Judea by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., the Hellenistic era began and lasted until the Roman general Pompey captured the city in 63 B.C. The teaching of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion in Jerusalem took place under Roman rule. In 70 A.D., the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple which had been rebuilt by Herod. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built in 335 A.D. during the Byzantine period. The Muslim period began in 638 A.D. and, except for the Crusader era (1099-1187), Jerusalem remained under Muslim rule until the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1917. The Muslims’ Dome of the Rock was built in 691-692 A.D. on the place where Abraham is believed to have bound his son Issac for sacrifice. This site was sanctified for Muslims by the Prophet Mohammed’s night journey described in the Qur’an, and earlier for Jews by the Temple of Solomon. After World War I, Britain administered the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine from Jerusalem until the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 which resulted in Jerusalem being divided between Israel and Jordan. In 1967, Israel conquered the eastern Arab part of the city, which included the Old City, and annexed it and additional West Bank land into the city.

Christian Voices on Jerusalem



“The story of Jerusalem is a tragic one, and in the web of history members of the three faiths are not innocent of one another’s blood. Today, however, we stand at a special point in history where the future of Jerusalem is open to peaceful negotiations... It is our conviction that a resolution of Jerusalem has the potential for advancing cooperation between the three Abrahamic faiths or sowing the seeds of new religious conflicts between Muslims, Jews and Christians. The future of Jerusalem must not be preempted by the actions of any one party. Only a negotiated agreement that respects the human and political rights of Palestinians and Israelis as well as the three religious communities can lead to a lasting peace.”

– From *Jerusalem: City of Peace*, a 1995 letter to President Clinton by the Heads of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Episcopal and Historic Peace communions



“We call upon all parties concerned to comprehend and accept the nature and deep significance of Jerusalem, City of God. None can appropriate it in exclusivist ways. We invite each party to go beyond exclusivist visions or actions, and without discrimination, to consider the religious and national aspirations of others, in order to give back to Jerusalem its true universal character and to make of the city a holy place of reconciliation for humankind.”

– From *On the Significance of Jerusalem for Christians*, a 1994 statement by the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem.



“Jerusalem is the heart of either warfare or peace. We would see the same sovereignty given to our two peoples and three religions in Jerusalem, with the same rights and responsibilities, and a special status for Jerusalem in order to guarantee all the historical rights of the churches.”

– From the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem on the Occasion of the year 2000.



“A Jerusalem that is called holy by Christians, a place where every Christian can feel at home, cannot reflect values that are at odds with fundamental tenets of our faith. This, too, is our stake in Jerusalem: not a territorial claim, not a political design, but rather a steady insistence that the city we call ‘holy’ and ‘home’ reflects common values of love, sharing and justice... We join our brothers and sisters in the Abrahamic tradition in striving together, in hope and love, for a Jerusalem that remains holy for all.”

– From *City of Holiness and Hope*, a message on Jerusalem in 1996 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ USA



“For some years, the Holy See has sought a ‘special statute’ for Jerusalem...necessary to preserve the unique religious character of the Holy City, and to secure the rights of the living religious communities... [this statute] should be confused neither with the so-called ‘corpus separatum’ proposed by the U.N. in 1947, nor with what is popularly called ‘the internationalization’ of the city.”

– From *The Future of Jerusalem, Some Clarifications in 1998* by Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick, U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops