



**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

**Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
In the United States and Canada**



“As Jesus was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen.... As he came near and saw the city [of Jerusalem], he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!’” —Luke 19: 37 & 41-42.

In the beginning of Holy Week, marking the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem, his suffering and his death, we watch with sadness and grief the tragic violence of the past several days throughout the Middle East. Our prayers, our solidarity, and our support are with the people of the region, as it remains a place of conflict in which innocent people become victims of senseless and horrible violence, and restrictions.

- ❖ Yesterday, 45 people, including worshippers and police guards, were killed and more than 100 people were injured from explosions in Coptic Orthodox churches in Tanta and Alexandria, Egypt. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the killings. We offer our condolences and support to the Christian community in Egypt, who try to make sense of these acts of terror in their places of worship; and to all citizens of the country, who cope with the fear such acts foment. We share with religious leaders in Egypt, both Christian and Muslim, and leaders from around the world, in our condemnation and abhorrence of these heinous attacks, fervently praying that the dignity and safety of all people are respected and honored, and that such violence may end.
- ❖ Last week, more than 80 residents of Khan Shaikhoun, Syria were killed, and numerous others were affected by the inhumane chemical attack in that town. We condemn this use of chemical weapons as we do any use of offensive weapons against innocent people. We equally condemn last Thursday’s military action by the Trump administration as a violation of international law and Congressional oversight. Such a U.S. response will only deepen the crisis and ultimately fail to bring about a peace in the region. In the midst of all of this, we take note that on Friday, a Presbyterian church in Muharda, Syria, was damaged by a rocket attack. We are grateful that no one was hurt. Even so, we mourn the continued suffering of the Syrian people and call for our nation to welcome Syrian refugees fleeing violence. We urge all parties to avoid any further military escalation without exploring all diplomatic means available for bringing about a resolution to this crisis, now in its seventh year.
- ❖ Over the weekend and continuing into this week, fighting in Lebanon’s largest refugee camp for Palestinians has continued, with multiple deaths reported. We join UNICEF and UNRWA in condemning this violence, recognizing that high levels of tension caused by decades of Palestinian displacement in Lebanon, compounded by the more recent advent of Palestinian refugees fleeing the Syria crisis perhaps doubling the camp’s population in a short time, have only been exacerbated. We urge just and fair resolution to the Palestinian refugee crisis, now almost 70 years in duration. We pray for Lebanon’s stability, as it copes with the impact of internal uncertainty and external challenges.
- ❖ This week, as our attention turns to Jerusalem, we are keenly aware of restrictions on access to that city and its places of worship, holy to all three Abrahamic faiths, for Palestinians who do not receive the necessary Israeli permission. Muslims wishing to pray at al-Aqsa mosque are frequently denied access. Christians from the West Bank and Gaza, in this special week, must apply for a limited number of permits, often resulting in the inability of families to share in Holy Week celebrations together, and the inability of Christians to visit this most desired destination. We yearn for the day when Jerusalem is a city where all Jews, Christians, and Muslims will be welcome, and when the violence of occupation, now in its 50th year, will end.

In this Holy Week, we rejoice that Christians around the world of different traditions will celebrate together the resurrection, the hope of Easter, and the day when violence and hatred may cease. We imagine the moment when love of God and love of neighbor, common to the faith traditions of the region, are realized.

Even so, we lament that the Middle East remains marked by tragedy and pain, so that sisters and brothers in Christ, indeed, all of the people of the region, cannot fully realize the joy of the season.

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Rev. Dr. James Moos, Executive Minister,
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Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon, Acting Executive Minister,
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