

Bishops call for Jerusalem Christmas Offering along with prayer, advocacy and learning in response to war in Holy Land



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Dear People of the Diocese of Massachusetts,

As we enter into the sacred season of Advent, our hearts are heavy at the continuing devastation, trauma and grief in the Holy Land. We call upon all our people and congregations to pray fervently, and to participate in a special Jerusalem Christmas Offering along with opportunities for advocacy and learning. Details on each follow below.

In a [recent statement](#) on the war between Israel and Hamas, our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry issued this call:

"Today I raise my voice for love because more than 10,000 people have died in Gaza, including more than 4,000 children. ... The violence is horrific, and the geopolitics are complex, but my call to love is simple: Stop the killing. Stop all of it. Stop it today. ... Staying quiet in this moment would be a stain upon our souls and would deepen our complicity ... Every human child of God – Palestinian and Israeli – deserves safety and security. We need to stop the killing. Today."

At our own Diocesan Convention last month, the [Bishop's Annual Address](#) included this reflection:

"I do not know the solution to the intractable hostilities of the Middle East. I don't think you do either. But I am certain we must reject the easy dualities and reductionist platitudes of blame and blamelessness; of good and bad; of the primacy of ancient history versus recent history. Our task is to condemn indiscriminate violence and cruelty

wherever we see it; to extend compassionate care wherever we can support it; to join calls for an immediate ceasefire; to demand humanitarian action on the part of our own government and others; and to pray fervently for people of all faiths who are acting as agents of peace with justice."

In the past few weeks the situation has continued to worsen and our posture remains the same. We condemn unreservedly the use in Gaza of innocent persons as a human shield, while we condemn likewise the use of that reality as a legitimizing pretext for the death of thousands of those same innocents. With our presiding bishop we cry, "Stop the killing!"

At this writing, a small glimmer of hope has been provided by a "pause" in active warfare, the release of some hostages and an increase in the still-limited humanitarian aid convoys entering Gaza. We call for our own U.S. leaders to advocate for this pause to be extended by all sides into a full ceasefire, that all may recommit to a process which can lead to a lasting peace with justice.

Our Christian partners in the Middle East are led with courage and hope by the Most Rev. Hosam Naoum, Archbishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East. As Episcopalians we center the voice of Archbishop Hosam and his fellow Christian leaders not because we view their lives as more valuable than any others, but because we have long and deep personal relationships with them that enable us to move beyond polarized and theoretical political analyses to get to the current human reality of dwelling in the crossfire. Indeed, the Christian voice in Israel and Palestine is often the least audible as their numbers continue to dwindle, even while their institutions reach into multifaith communities and serve as beacons of hope for reconciliation. The Ahli Hospital in Gaza, twice struck by recent rocket fire, is but one such institution. The oldest hospital in Gaza and its only Christian hospital, Ahli continues to provide urgent medical care, including pediatric care, to people of all faiths.

In this moment, Archbishop Hosam and Christian leaders have called for our support and response with them: to grieve the trauma and terror seizing the region, praying and advocating for renewed peace and genuine justice; to understand more deeply the context of the crisis; and to respond with generosity to those ministering in the midst of war.

As your bishops, we call for all congregations and individuals to mark this Advent season of hope and expectation by engagement in each of these ways. Specific opportunities and resources for such engagement are below.

We extend to you our blessing in this season when we prepare to hail anew the Prince of Peace.

Faithfully and fondly,

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates
The Rt. Rev. Carol J.W.T. Gallagher

Pray

Archbishop Hosam Naoum says, “Our fervent prayer is for a new horizon for Israelis and Palestinians as children of Abraham. We must work for a brighter future for all our children.” Some prayer resources include:

- [A Litany and Collects from the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem](#)
- [A prayer blog from Churches for Middle East Peace](#)
- A Prayer by Archbishop Hosam Naoum:
God of all justice and peace we cry out to you in the midst of the pain and trauma of violence and fear which prevails in the Holy Land. Be with those who need you in these days of suffering; we pray for people of all faiths – Jews, Muslims and Christians and for all people of the land. While we pray to you, O Lord, for an end to violence and the establishment of peace, we also call for you to bring justice and equity to the peoples. Guide us into your kingdom where all people are treated with dignity and honour as your children for, to all of us, you are our Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Support: Diocese of Massachusetts Jerusalem Christmas Offering

Your bishops call upon each congregation in the Diocese of Massachusetts to conduct a special collection during the Advent and/or Christmas season in support of the ministries of the Diocese of Jerusalem in this time of crisis.

Archbishop Hosam Naoum notes that his diocese of only 27 congregations also conducts the work of 35 institutions – hospitals, schools, rehabilitations centers and more – manifesting Christ’s work among people of all faiths. We need to support this ministry.

Congregations should conduct their own ingathering according to whatever timetable and method suits their congregation. Aggregated gifts payable to the Diocese of Massachusetts and earmarked for **Jerusalem Christmas Offering** may be sent to the diocesan offices (Attn: Jerusalem Christmas Offering, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, 138 Tremont Street, Boston MA 02111) through Jan. 6, when the ingathering will be forwarded through the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (AFEDJ).

Congregations or individuals wishing to make their offering online can do so via the diocesan website at www.diomass.org/give-now.

Information on the AFEDJ and print resources for support of the Ahli Hospital and other ministries of the Diocese of Jerusalem are available [here](#).

Advocate

The Episcopal Church’s Office of Government Relations serves to advance positions approved by our church through its direct work in legislative advocacy, and through equipping Episcopalians to make their own voices heard. The Office of Government Relations provides updates and simple channels for action regarding the conflict in the Holy Land [here](#).

Learn

- **Online conversation with Archdeacon Paul Feheley:** The Diocese of Massachusetts has scheduled an online conversation with Archdeacon Paul Feheley, Presiding Bishop’s Partnership Officer for the Middle East, to take place on **Friday, Dec. 15 at noon**. [Register here](#).

Archdeacon Feheley will give an overview of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, discuss some of the issues and background of the current conflict, particularly as they affect Gaza and the West Bank, and our Episcopal Church's response. There will be time for questions and answers

• **Bearing Witness: A Journey with Holy Land Christians:** This is a free, video-based study program from the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem that shares the stories of people living in Palestine and Israel and the remarkable ministries of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem that bring hope and healing in this volatile part of the world. [Access it here](#).

• **Israel, Palestine and the Anglican Communion:** This new Church Next course (for groups [here](#) and for individuals [here](#)) is available at no cost through the diocesan Church Next membership. Contact Martha Gardner, Missioner for Networking and Formation, at mgardner@diomass.org to get access.

• **Online book discussions:** Contact Martha Gardner, Missioner for Networking and Formation, at mgardner@diomass.org to register for one or both of the following book discussions:

- **Thursday, Jan. 4 at 7 p.m.:** An online gathering to share and discuss book suggestions focused on the Middle East.
- **Thursday, Jan. 18 at 7 p.m.:** A book discussion, facilitated by Max Sklar, of *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine* by Miko Peled.

• **Archbishop Hosam Naoum in conversation with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry:** A recording of their Nov. 21 webinar is available for viewing [here](#).

• **“Mission Challenges amid Israel-Hamas War”:** This Nov. 16 Global Episcopal Mission Network (GEMN) webinar (recording available [here](#)) features AFEDJ's communications director, Diana Branton, and the Rev. Canon Nicholas Porter, an AFEDJ trustee, former priest of the Diocese of Jerusalem and founding director of Jerusalem Peacebuilders.

• **More sites to visit:** In addition to those already linked above, visit the following sites to learn more.

- Churches for a Middle East Peace [website](#) and [Resource page for Hamas and Israel War](#)
- [The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem](#)
- Friends of the Holy Land (UK) [website](#) and [blog](#)
- [Jerusalem Peacebuilders](#)
- St. George's College, Jerusalem [website](#), [resource page](#) and [videos](#)

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