



Bearing Faithful Witness: Statement On United Church – Jewish Relations Today

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38th General Council of the United Church of Canada, August 2003

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Preamble

The United Church of Canada is called to be faithful to Jesus Christ in worship, prayer, word and action in the midst of our neighbours and in the world. Accordingly, the 36th General Council, meeting in Camrose, Alberta in 1997, authorized for the whole church a study of the document "Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church-Jewish Relations Today."

People of the United Church have responded thoughtfully and prayerfully to the study document and to the proposed policy statement. This statement encompasses that response, and seeks to be a faithful expression of our understanding of United Church/Jewish relations.

We believe this statement reflects our faith in Christ and is consistent with our historic witness as part of the Body of Christ. We believe 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 into the hearts of the prophets. We believe, above all, in the faithfulness of God.

Holy Scripture teaches that the eternal Word became flesh in the person of Jesus, a Jew. The One who is "our judge and our hope" lives as a Jew, dies as a Jew and is raised as a Jew. In making these affirmations we seek to bear faithful witness to the Jewishness of Jesus.

We believe that the Holy Spirit calls us to bear faithful witness concerning God's reconciling mission in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has opened the door in a new way to those previously outside the covenant. Our understanding of the faithfulness of God would be at risk if we were to say that God had abandoned the covenant with the Jewish people. As Paul says in Romans 9-11, the covenant is irrevocable because God is faithful.

We believe that our faith issues in action. Jesus commands us to love our neighbours, but all too often Christians have treated Jews, our sisters and brothers, as enemies. We believe that our faith

calls us to repent when the church has been unfaithful in its witness by not loving Jews as neighbours.

Therefore, as an act of repentance and in faithfulness to the commandment that we should not bear false witness against our neighbours, The United Church of Canada ...

a)... Acknowledges:

- a history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism within Christianity as a whole, including the United Church of Canada;
- a history of interpretation of New Testament texts which has often failed to appreciate the context within Judaism from which these texts emerged, resulting in deeply-rooted anti-Jewish misinterpretation;
- a history of insensitivity with respect to the importance of the Shoah for Jews;
- antisemitism and anti-Judaism as affronts to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

b)... Rejects:

- all teaching of a theology of contempt toward Jews and Judaism;
- the belief that God has abolished the covenant with the Jewish people;
- supersessionism, the belief that Christians have replaced Jews in the love and purpose of God;
- proselytism which targets Jews for conversion to Christianity.

c)... Affirms:

- the significance of Judaism as at once a religion, a people, and a covenant community;
- that Judaism, both historically and currently, cannot be understood from knowledge of the Old Testament alone;
- that the gifts and calling of God to the Jewish people are irrevocable;
- the uniqueness for Christianity of the relationship with Judaism;
- that both Judaism and Christianity, as living faiths, have developed significantly from a common root;
- that the love of God is expressed in the giving of both Torah and Gospel;
- that the State of Israel has the right to exist in peace and security;
- our common calling with Jews and others to align ourselves with God's world-mending work;
- the opportunity for growth in Christian self-understanding that exists through closer dialogue with, openness to, and respect for Judaism.

d)... Encourages Members, Congregations, Presbyteries, Conferences and

The General Council:

- to seek opportunities to meet with Jews and to learn about modern Judaism;
- to continue to study the issues raised by the study document, "Bearing Faithful Witness," along with other issues of significance within the Jewish-Christian relationship;
- to be vigilant in resisting antisemitism and anti-Judaism in church and society;
- to create ongoing worship opportunities within the church for highlighting the importance of the Jewish-Christian relationship, such as at the time of Shoah Remembrance in April, or the high Jewish Holy Days in September/October, or Kristallnacht in November or Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week in February.

The BFW National Steering Committee:

- The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton (Chair)
- The Rev. Kerry Craig
- Dr. Alan Davies
- The Rev. Marie Goodyear
- The Rev. Clint Mooney
- The Rev. Dr. Gerald Sheppard
- The Rev. Dr. Andrew Stirling (until Jan. 2001)
- Rabbi Roy Tanenbaum (Jewish Observer)
- The Rev. Dr. Gordon Taylor (from Jan. 2001)
- The Rev. Dr. Bruce Gregersen (staff)
- The Rev. Dr. Peter Wyatt (staff until Sept. 2001)
- The Rev. Chris Ferguson (staff from Sept. 2001)

The BFW writing team:

The following people were part of the task group/writing team who produced the original [Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church Jewish Relations Today](#) which was accepted by the 36th General Council (1997) as a study document for The United Church of Canada.

- The Rev. Don Koots (Chair)
- The Rev. Clint Mooney
- Ms. Linda Payne
- The Rev. Bill Phipps
- Ms. Carolyn Pogue Phipps
- Mr. Fritz Voll