“What Language Shall I Borrow?”
How a United Church Congregation Articulates its Choices from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

by

Donna Patricia Kerrigan

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emmanuel College and the Toronto School of Theology
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry awarded by Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto

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Abstract
The thesis of this dissertation is that members of the United Church of Canada who respond to the Report on Israel/Palestine Policy select from its peacebuilding recommendations according to their attitudes to theological contextualizing. Two attitudes give rise to two different methods, which are seldom articulated but underlie choices regarding peace initiatives such as boycotting or ecumenical/multifaith cooperation. The dissertation includes five parts: an investigation of contextual theologies for peacebuilders; a history of the UCC and ecumenical partners who have struggled to assist peace in Israel/Palestine; strategies for peace-minded ministers; a case-study of one congregation choosing peace strategies; and recommendations for denominational communications and peacebuilding.

This thesis poses a taxonomy for theologizing in context, moving from initial interaction with the other by translating local systems of thought into terms of the Gospel message. Contextualizers proceed either to immerse in the local culture (anthropological) or to engage with locals in mutual learning (synthesis). Anthropological attitudes tend toward praxis method. Synthetic attitudes tend toward transcendental method.
An examination of the UCC and its ecumenical partners shows how anthropological/praxis and synthesis/transcendental modalities have led to differing approaches to, and varying levels of grassroots engagement in, peacebuilding in the Middle-East. For UCC members, the IPP Report offers initiatives that cohere with both modalities, and the case study here shows selected congregants investigating all possibilities and choosing according to their theological commitment to love.

This thesis advocates for improved communications and more persuasive reports from the national church, more frequent qualitative research at the grassroots, and persistent search for “a small way” into peace by privileging many voices.
Acknowledgements

All research projects are the product of many generous hearts and minds, and this thesis is a fine example. I am indebted to members of my congregation for their encouragement, and most particularly for having faith in me as we arranged Peace Sunday. This project depended upon peer-reviewers and participants in the focus group, who were outstandingly generous with their time and insights in ways I can never repay. I’m also deeply grateful for the guidance of my professors, especially Dr Joseph Schner at Toronto School of Theology and Drs Pamela Couture and Thomas Reynolds at Emmanuel College. Finally, my family members have sustained me along the way, and I acknowledge that I can’t even borrow language to thank them for their patience and love.
Glossary of Key Terms

Abrahamic faiths
the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths—all of which trace the birth of their religion to the patriarch, Abraham

BDS
Boycott, Divestment and Sanction—a movement many hold to be a form of nonviolent protest, currently against Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. BDS seeks to boycott a wide range of Israeli-made goods, shed investments in corporations that are seen to profit from or assist in the occupation, and support sanctions against Israel and its presence on various international forums. The United Church, by adopting the Report of the Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy (2012), rejected participation in BDS on the grounds that it is too broad and the movement has in some cases had unacceptable goals. (See “Focused Economic Action,” IPP Report, 100.) That aspect of UCC policy was revisited by the 42nd General Council, 2015, with the responsible commission recommending consultation and education on the issue of BDS as part of the denomination’s policy.

contextual theology
the over-arching recognition of all theologians that our attempts to understand our faith as God’s living creatures occur in, and are influenced by, the time and place of our existence. This recognition or sensibility has become particularly keen thanks to twentieth century developments such as feminist theology, Asian theology, liberation theology, and the like. For this Doctor of Ministry thesis project, the sensibility toward contextualization is primary, based on Clemens Sedmak’s observation, “Humility is the art of living in a village, the art of being down to earth. . . . Doing local [i.e. contextual] theology is a service, like washing
The claim in this thesis is that doing theology in another’s context involves one of two primary pre-dispositions—the anthropological and the synthetic—leading to the choice of two methodologies—praxis and transcendence.

cornerstone

face-to-face speaking encounters that, to be genuine, require of participants an openness to discovering new truths about the world, about each other, or perhaps about themselves. Such encounters require participants to maintain a balance between a strong commitment to their faith values and a willingness to appreciate the other speaker’s perspective, perhaps even to consider the possibility of conversion under the influence of that perspective.  

economic action

a recommendation of the United Church to its members regarding their purchase of goods produced by Israelis on the occupied territory of Palestine. The group working on the *Israel/Palestine Policy Report* (2012) preferred the term “economic action” to “boycott,” which had been used in a motion brought to the 40th General Council (2009), ostensibly to distance their recommendation of “focused action” from the BDS movement (see above).

ecuménical

late Latin from Greek oikoumenikos, from oikoumēnē ‘the (inhabited) earth.’ The word has a distinctly Christian meaning, denoting dialogue, cooperation or unity among Christian

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2 Here I am indebted to both Gadamer and Lonergan for notions of what constitutes the hallmark of genuine encounter with the other. Gadamer sets the bar at appreciating another’s perspective to the point of eliminating the sense of threat that comes of not appreciating. See Hans-Georg Gadamer with Carsten Dutt, and others. *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed and trans by Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 11. Lonergan on the other hand stresses the possibility of conversion when one is exposed to a different perspective and then undertakes the often difficult task of understanding and judging. See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 239-41.
denominations. Used familiarly, the word has in some contexts broadened to include a multi-faith (Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, etc) or even no-faith, dimension—perhaps suggesting a return to its earlier embrace of all earth’s human inhabitants.

**embedded theology**
theological content that shapes, often unconsciously, the thoughts and opinions of the faithful. In this thesis, the word “predisposition” is used to set aside the issue of consciousness while indicating theological formation.

**GC 40, GC 41, GC 42** 40th General Council (Kelowna, 2009) and 41st General Council (Ottawa, 2012), 42nd General Council (Corner Brook, 2015) of the United Church of Canada, a conciliar church

**grassroots**
the most basic level of an organization, “the ordinary people.” In the United Church, each congregation’s official governing body constitutes a “court” with voting rights and responsibilities, for example in the case of some types of remit.

**HMUC**
Henson Mills United Church (pseudonym), the research site for this thesis.

**IPP Report** formally titled *The Report of the Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy* (2012). Commissioned by the 40th GC (2009), this report was adopted as United Church policy and offered to the membership for “study, prayerful discernment and personal action” in relation to Israel and Palestine.³

**justice/peace**
denotes the interdependent relationship between justice and peace. Tannenbaum peacebuilder Yehezkel Landau suggests that the six points of the star of David indicate study of the Torah, worship, acts of lovingkindness, truth, justice and peace. Peace

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must be a complicated entity, closely related to all other qualities, he explains. Particularly, he draws from Zachariah 8:16: “Render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace.” A comprehensive peace, he concludes, needs inclusive justice, which is grounded in truth.⁴

Kairos Palestine Complete title is A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine. (Not to be confused with KAIROS, a Canadian ecumenical movement dedicated to the pursuit of justice in peace in Canada and internationally.) Kairos Palestine was introduced in 2011 to Canadians by the Canadian Churches’ Forum for Global Ministries as a document written by Christian Palestinians who speak “from the heart of Palestinian suffering.”

mission for members of the United Church in the case study presented here, faith put into action. Outreach activities at the congregational level are frequently organized under the banner of Mission and Service. Describing itself as “more than a charity; M&S is the church,” M&S takes its scriptural foundation from “the Micah mandate,” namely Do Justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God (6:8). M&S proclaims its dedication to “being compassionate together.”⁵

peacebuilding relates to building infrastructure for a peaceful society, according to Pamela Couture.⁶ In this thesis, peacebuilding refers to (a) the denomination’s efforts to establish policies and encourage actions aimed at assisting peace in Israel/Palestine, and (b) efforts of

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church members to build networks for communicating and doing theology toward peaceful cooperation.

settler/non-settler an expression that takes into account the complex relationship between those of Canada’s First Nations, those who arrive from elsewhere, and the land which they all must occupy. The settler/non-settler paradigm bypasses the question of race, as contemporary settlers derive from many races, and focuses attention on the question of land-use, which is at the heart of so many disputes. Calling attention to the dichotomy between Canadian settlers and non-settlers (or indigenous peoples) challenges us to consider commonalities with land-use tensions elsewhere.
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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Thesis

1.1 United Church of Canada, 40th General Council, 2009

Walking in the uplands just north of Kelowna, Theresa and I remarked on the blessed respite. We’d left GC40 and its clamor for a few hours to enjoy a hike to the famous wooden trestle-bridges that had opened the mountains for cross-continental trade and communication. We were grateful for the free-time. Yet even in tranquility conversation returned to the sore-spot of contention. Council had been bitterly divided about proposals for boycott against Israel. What was behind these proposals anyway?

Theresa had a ready response. These were social justice issues. Jesus calls us to follow his preferential option for the poor. Israeli and Palestinian multi-faith partners and peace-activist organizations were begging us to launch a boycott. We simply had to do something. To a great extent, I agreed: there were deep injustices, and Christian discipleship means bringing the gospel of hope to the poor. But what if “doing something” meant a boycott that severed links with our Jewish inter-faith dialogue partners or disrupted academic and cultural exchanges? How could such action follow from Jesus’ commitment to conversation among Jews and Gentiles, or his acceptance of the cross—symbol of weakness and forgiveness in the face of coercive power? Theresa offered the crucial defense of boycotters: “This is a justice issue! Boycott worked in South Africa!” To which I sputtered, “That was then and this is now!”

After a moment, Theresa apologized for an upset stomach and turned back, leaving me to continue alone. On our lofty quest to inspect bridges, we plunged into a chasm of disagreement. In my dismay, I found both cause for concern and a reason for research.

Theresa and I were not alone among members at the 40th General Council who found themselves at an impasse when peacebuilding initiatives in Israel/Palestine were discussed. Moreover members at GC41 (2012) and GC42 (2015) similarly found themselves at loggerheads. Along with Christians of many different denominations throughout the western world, UCC members now view aspects of the Zionist project, which once seemed to hold such promise for the devastated population of European Jews, as a threat to the peace and security of Palestinians, the entire Middle East and beyond. Many church members, including those who have never visited the Holy Land or were not even born when Israel was
proclaimed a state, now feel called to address the injustices suffered in the occupied territories and Jerusalem. My claim here is that when would-be peacebuilders find themselves at odds about the initiatives they advocate, their disagreements do not primarily arise from the famously complex politics in the Holy Land but from the differing contextual theologies that underlie those initiatives.

This thesis identifies two distinct attitudes, anthropological and synthetic, that peacebuilders bring to the contextualizing task. In previous debates about how to assist peace in the Holy Land, UCC members have seldom if ever articulated these attitudes. I suggest that these dispositions nonetheless give rise to different methods, whether praxis or transcendental, for justice/peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians. My aim is to give readers an appreciation of both attitudes and the way they shape contextualizing methods, so that individuals and congregations can continue to debate the most appropriate tactics for pursuing peace, even beyond the Israeli/Palestinian context. With a better understanding of the choices, individuals may discuss within a theological framework that hedges against the argument that “This tool is the most effective” and admits the argument that “This way most faithfully follows Christ, and this is the Christology in view.”

1.2 GC40-41 and the Continuing Conversation

Regarding peacebuilding in the Middle East, the conflict Theresa and I and other commissioners experienced at GC40 was reflected in the church at large. Finally, commissioners voted for further study and a report, as well as for inter-conciliar discernment
throughout the church-courts regarding possible peacebuilding actions.\(^1\) It remained for GC41 (2012), in response to the findings of the Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy, to offer recommendations that together formed an ample-sized platform for peacebuilding. Members or congregations might choose to implement some, or none, of those recommendations:

- Investing for peace, by supporting companies that work toward peace, security and viability for a Palestinian state and for Israel
- Identifying the importance of trust-building programs between Israelis and Palestinians (See below)
- Investing in visits to the Holy Land, especially tours conducted by Palestinians or, more particularly, Palestinian Christians
- Taking economic action against “any and all products produced in the settlements and through the occupation” (often called boycotting)
- Participating in ongoing ecumenical projects of accompaniment for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).\(^2\)

A distinctive feature of the recommendation about building relationships with Jewish and Palestinian communities is that it appeared separately and seemed to apply to policy-makers rather than rank-and-file church-goers.\(^3\) The recommendation was for the United Church to “identify the importance of trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis by (a) encouraging stronger connections between United Church programs and organizations that build understanding between Palestinians and Israelis [and by] (b) exploring and supporting initiatives for increasing connections in Canada between Palestinian Canadians and Jewish


\(^3\) IPP Report, section 12, subsection 4.
As we shall see, this recommendation occasioned a further motion at GC42 (2015), so lower church-courts might be enabled for the implementation process.

After GC41, however, it is debatable whether the majority of UCC members were aware of the range of the IPP Report’s peacebuilding recommendations. Many who relied on popular media for information assumed the church’s strategy to encourage justice/peace in Israel/Palestine relied entirely on boycott—easily the most unpopular tool in the peacebuilder’s kit—and that misconception contributed heavily to controversy. Heated conversations were fueled no doubt by a limited understanding of the church’s approved policy on the issue. As a commissioner to GC40 and an ordained minister dedicated to maintaining the link between my small-town congregation and the national church, I watched the debate with growing concern. Would congregations, especially those geographically isolated from Canadian Jews and Palestinians and their concerns, refuse to engage? Or would congregations vulnerable to the stress of conflict simply drop the subject after Council rose? What then of the UCC’s part in the struggle for justice/peace?

1.3 Scope and Sequence of This Thesis

- In this Doctor of Ministry thesis, I investigate and articulate the contextual theologies that are fundamental to the disagreements UCC members face when they work for peace in Israel/Palestine. An understanding of these attitudes and methods may be helpful.

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4 See Record of Proceedings of the 41st General Council, “Reports,” 104 (my italics).
especially—though not exclusively—to ministers in small-town congregations as they seek to engage in the church’s peacebuilding efforts in that troubled land.\(^5\)

- This thesis examines how the UCC and some ecumenical partners have historically defined their roles and sponsored conversations to support the struggle for peace in Israel/Palestine.

- A case study, offered as qualitative research, investigates one UCC congregation articulating its theological grounding while discerning its peacebuilding strategy from the IPP Report, accepted by GC41. The experience of this single site should not be projected as normative across the denomination, but is provided as insight into grassroots predispositions that may figure in other congregations’ conversation on peacebuilding.\(^6\)

- Given the differing theologies individuals and congregations might advance, I advocate for a theology of ministry that fosters conversation in a church’s decision-making process. Regarding UCC policy on Israel/Palestine, this conversation would examine the peacebuilding congregation’s notions of mission and the relationships it might nurture in the struggle for justice/peace in the Abrahamic family of faiths.

- The thesis also offers a number of short narratives to help readers imagine the texture of conversations that evolved over several years of the Israel/Palestine campaign.

\(^5\) Generally, I prefer the broader term of *peacebuilding* to *peacemaking* or *peacekeeping* throughout this thesis. *Peacebuilding*, according to Pamela Couture, refers to a process of relating and building infrastructure for peaceful society. *Peacemaking*, on the other hand, often denotes movement toward negotiated settlement of issues regarding land-holding, water distribution, etc. *Peacekeeping*, especially in the Canadian milieu, refers to military intervention and over-sight to prevent violence. “Books and Bytes,” *The Clergy Journal* 84, no 6 (April 2008), 39.

\(^6\) Approval for this single-site case study received from the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board, October, 2014. See Appendix Three.
• The thesis concludes with a summary of what ministry can learn, including recommendations for writing persuasive communications to UCC peacebuilders, involving grassroots members in qualitative research to prepare for peacebuilding, and bridging the gap between contextual theologies by seeking “the small way in.”

• An epilogue describing one congregation’s experience of multi-faith relationship-building is also offered, in the hope that other faith communities will find encouragement in their justice/peace work.

1.4 What Language Shall I Borrow?

Before initiating the case study here, I expected hesitancy or awkwardness among participants when discussing the seldom-raised issue of a faith-base for congregational decisions, and my expectation was confirmed. For example, when one participant was gently pressed about her understanding of the gospel on a particular point, she opined, “I guess I am not theologically clever.” But during the conversations for this study, participants revealed that their choices were indeed founded upon theological insight and deeply-held personal convictions.

For a more profound iteration and deeper questions about the theological gaps we all struggle with, I consult a variety of sources such as David Bosch, Bernard Lonergan, Pamela McCarroll, and Harold Wells. For peace-minded church leaders seeking to help their congregations articulate their faith and choose peacebuilding strategies appropriate to their sense of mission, there is a wealth of language from which to borrow.
Chapter 2
Theological Context

2.1 Introduction

Assuming that all theology arises from present human context,\textsuperscript{7} I examine here the UCC as a context where members must theologize generally. Since the specific interest is the church’s peacebuilding mission in Israel/Palestine, I must explore methodologies available as it theologizes in the Middle East and in the Canadian multi-faith community, which can support or oppose the UCC’s justice/peace initiatives. I will show that a deeper understanding and a re-visioning of those methodologies, plus a critique of their application, can yield an array of choices for the church’s peacebuilders.

2.2 UCC as Context

Like all faith communities, the UCC is a shifting composite of contexts, cultures and subcultures struggling to discern God’s will and the church’s best way to align itself. Under pressures from shrinking membership and dwindling resources, some members seek to simplify church-life by avoiding conflict, which they may see as un-Christlike; the UCC however has historically offered a different self-image. Conscious of life’s intrinsic complexity, the denomination emphasizes the wrongfulness of expecting humans to pose once-and-for-all truths or solutions. Change and conflict have been accepted as contextual realities from the church’s beginning.

Those who drafted the Basis of Union rejected any notion of “infallibility or finality,” with co-founder Thomas Kilpatrick insisting, “Creed revision is the inherent right, and the continual duty, of a living Church.” He observed that the founders understood the fragility of human pronouncements, declaring “This is our ‘Confession of Faith.’ . . . It will be the duty of those who come after us to find a more fitting intellectual expression for the unchanging and inexhaustible truth of the Gospel.”8 Thus the UCC encourages members to consider the variability and complexity of context whenever they attempt to express theological convictions. One might expect a church thus committed to the work of contextualizing to be familiar with controversy; its long-term concern regarding Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories is indeed such a controversy.

2.3 Taxonomy for Contextual Theologizing

Peace-minded pastors assume their part in the struggle to frame issues contextually. They also wrestle with the question of what theological understandings, in the UCC’s complicated context, ground church members’ various attitudes and methods to better understand the church’s peacebuilding efforts, at home and in the very different context of Israel/Palestine. While Bevans has been a leading voice in discerning an appropriate contextual theology, Vähäkangas cautions that his colleague offers only a hodgepodge of conceptualizations.

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lacking analytical clarity.\textsuperscript{9} With this criticism in mind, I propose a taxonomy of theologizing in context to differentiate approaches, attitudes, and methods.

Figure 2.1: Conceptualizations of Contextual Theology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An approach to initiate interaction between contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on meaning, relevance of Gospel message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects local context by incorporating found symbols and systems of thought while being faithful to the supracontextual message of the Gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can contextualization proceed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anthropological Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assumes posture of a listener, learning from people’s experience in the other culture: How has God spoken here?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthetic Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assumes posture of a dialogic partner, speaking the gospel and learning from context: How can our learning be a two-way street?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Praxis Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proceeds from intense identification with the culture of context. God acts justly through history: What change must be made here? Entains an action-reflection-action cycle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcendental Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proceeds from authentic subjectivity to engage in an ongoing process of theological conversation. Entains a process of deep listening, relationship, transformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{9} Vähäkangas finds that the anthropological and the synthetic “models” Bevans proposes are more accurately designated as attitudes to culture (287), while the transcendental and praxis are more helpfully considered methods; i.e. the system or principles one uses when theologizing (299, 297). The refinement proposed here links the anthropological attitude and praxis method, and the synthesis attitude and transcendental method.
2.3.1 Taxonomy for Contextualizing: Education Analogy

What Bevans proposes as models are in this taxonomy separated according to their function in the task of contextualizing. I hold translation to be the initial approach to interaction in another’s context. To take a non-theological example, translation is the approach most ESL instructors use when first breaching the barriers between themselves and students with another culture or language. With Mexican students, for instance, an instructor might introduce the Canadian custom of celebrating Hallowe’en by translating or comparing it to the Dia de los Muertos. Such rough translations will be found inadequate as the student-instructor relationship develops. Both parties will build confidence and venture more complex questions, necessitating new decisions, conscious or subconscious, to progress in the conversation.

The attitudes each party brings forward will now be significant to the evolving relationship. An anthropological attitude prompts the student to reserve any desire to express his or her own experiences in order to immerse in the context by listening carefully to the instructor’s interpretations and experiences. A synthetic attitude encourages a different relationship, with all parties seeing themselves as learners and instructors in cultural exchange and cooperation. Such synthesis offers rich possibilities for growth but demands that parties negotiate complicated issues of when to speak and how to negotiate conflicting opinions, while learning

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10 See, for example, Bevans, 44, and J. Schner, Class Notes to TSM5015 (Summer 2012), 9.
11 I speak of attitudes and both conscious and subconscious decisions to acknowledge a fairly extensive body of literature that now suggests attitudes have less to do with choice than with predispositions over which we have little or no freedom. See, for example, Sam Harris, Free Will (Free Press, 2011) reviewed by Daniel Menaker in New York Times Book Review —Toronto Star Supplement, July 15, 2012.
each other’s habits of speech and worldview. Progress will thus seem slow when one compares to results attained from the anthropological attitude.

Moving to exchanges in context, one must consider engagement, and those familiar with ESL instruction understand students’ desires to act on new information. Here, however, the analogy of educating in context must end. Ethical guidelines insure that vulnerable ESL learners are not exploited for their desires to align with a powerful teacher, win acceptance in a new context, or act on complex issues they cannot understand. A second analogy envisions a newly naturalized citizen who is sufficiently familiar with the adopted context to engage in public action, such as a fight to protect a local waterway from contamination. The new citizen with an anthropological approach to learning will tend to act out of an intense identification with the values, beliefs and behaviours learned from “instructors.” This engagement is analogous to the praxis method, and involves a dialectic of action and reflection with those who have facilitated contextualization. Those with a synthetic attitude will tend to engage in a slower, less apparent way, building upon the notion that thinking people are both teachers and learners. They bring various perspectives into discussion, include the experiences of life in their former countries, and consider how they themselves misuse resources and need to change their ways. This engagement, analogous to the transcendental method, progresses as slowly as the preceding synthetic attitude, with the process of relationship-building and the exchange of even conflicting perspectives seemingly as important as direct action to protect the waterway.
2.3.2 Translation in Theological Contextualization

Shifting to theological contextualization, I would postulate that while translation is the normative first-step to contextualizing, it is also fraught with complexities. Words such as *ghetto* or *apartheid* seem to be helpful translations of the situation in Gaza or the West Bank but can quickly halt any hope of bridge-building between contexts. A vision of Jesus as the new Moses may be deeply offensive and undermine attempts to establish common ground. Peacebuilders generally find the translation stage transitory and quickly proceed according to their own theological attitudes and methods.¹²

A word of caution is necessary. The taxonomy presented above outlines trends and tendencies but does not offer hard-and-fast declarations. Some with an anthropological predisposition may develop a transcendental method for engagement in the issues, and the synthetic attitude generally leans toward praxis even as it prefers transcendental method. Such flexibility would satisfy Sedmak, who warns against the notion that we must choose one supposedly-correct theology, because we then fail to appreciate the many “forms and colors” available.¹³

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¹² Marc Gopin cites an instance when a Gazan referred to his home as being situated in a concentration camp, and “hammered away” at the metaphor to such an extent that he alienated many of his listeners. Grievous though the situation might have been, Gopin does not see it as necessarily disastrous. “I do not consider such an event a failure of dialogue. I consider it an opportunity that turns into failure when the opportunity is squandered or the encounter suppressed in some way,” See *Holy War, Holy Peace* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18.

2.3.3 Anthropological/Praxis Link

Drawing from the social sciences and aligned with what Niebuhr conceives as Christ of culture, the anthropological attitude seems comfortable in accommodating culture. Theologians who relate through anthropological habits of heart and mind seek to discover how God is speaking and has spoken in another’s society. As newcomers, they are acutely sensitive to cultural influences, thus reading scripture and faith-related documents to discover how they are often interpreted, or imposed, from a Western viewpoint. Mercado suggests that theology rising from an anthropological attitude sees local people as “the best contextualizers, and the less touched they are by dominant western models, the better.” The advantage of this attitude is that it encourages contextualizers to listen to, and learn respectfully from, another’s culture.

Liberation theology exemplifies the anthropological/praxis link. Speaking of the first stages of the liberation theologian’s formation, Gutiérrez advocates reliance on the social sciences for immersion into a culture’s context. Unlike politicized interpretations beholden to the powers of a governing élite, social sciences (anthropology in its broadest sense) present analyses of current problems, their causes and solutions, to assist the theologian in evangelization. Armed with the social sciences’ insights into the country’s poverty and oppression, the theologian is prepared to proclaim the gospel there and preach the healing of broken human relationships. According to Gutiérrez, the theologian’s respect for the distinct skills and

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14 Vähäkangas, 292.
insights of those deeply immersed in the culture’s social problems is key to evangelizing. Theologians do not have such insights nor should they expect to, Gutiérrez concludes: “We must not ask of theology what it cannot and ought not give.”

Informed by those who know the painful realities of the culture they inhabit, contextualizing theologians must be ready to act, to prompt change and foster justice—to do the gospel, not just speak it. The Medellin document entitled “Poverty of the Church” (1968) called for the church to embrace and live out the material poverty of its people, condemning the sin that causes gross inequalities of power and resources while seeking to forge new relationship between humans and God. In dialogue with and guided by Jesus’ life and teachings, the praxis-oriented church commits to raising a new kind of disciple, one “other-directed” and willing to fight for freedom and justice: this is the praxis of engagement in and for a more just society. Gutiérrez called upon fellow theologians to join him in a praxis that demanded a conversion on their part, a willingness to change direction by “abandoning [their] own way…and entering the way of others—namely, neighbors and, in particular, the poor.”

Praxis must mean assisting in liberating the poor and, through them, working toward liberation for all people in a process that Gutiérrez called the “outstanding phenomenon of our times, especially in so-called Third World countries.”

Praxis method holds great appeal for many UCC members. For them, it is unfathomable that any church claiming to follow the way of Jesus would refuse to champion the cause of the

17 Gutiérrez, 48.
poor, the victim and the dispossessed. The UCC’s “New Creed” acknowledges its mission “to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil”—each verb proclaiming a commitment to praxis. Praxiological challenges abound, however, for a national church far removed from a particular locus of oppression. How should members, having received anthropological input regarding the oppression of people in a context very different from their own, champion the praxis of liberation there? Mercado cautions that every theologian should participate in another’s culture as a skilled practitioner who, like a midwife, assists at the birthing of new insight and change. By such an analogy, a UCC peacebuilder cannot expect to be mother, father or partner in liberation, but rather a bystander seeking to cooperate, not interfere, with the process already in motion.

In the case of peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, the church has demonstrated its commitment to anthropological/praxis contextualization. Linking method to attitude, the church received the 2009 *Kairos Palestine* document and in 2010 formally recognized it as the authentic voice of Christian Palestinians suffering under Israeli occupation. With growing concern over reports from Israel/Palestine of tensions, inequality of power, and expansion in settlement projects, the church moved during GC40 to appoint a working group to spend two years studying the context of the area and conducting anthropological research for its

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Israel/Palestine Policy (IPP) Report. Throughout the report, the working group reflected the presuppositions of the praxis method Bevans outlines: that people in the context under focus are good, deserving of dignity, justice and human rights; that they live in a context marred by sinfulness, oppression and distortion; that “liberation and transformation, not just gradual development or friendly persuasion, is the only way that men and women can fulfill their call to be genuine children of God.”

Debated and accepted at GC41 in 2012, the report demonstrated the working group’s praxis methodology in its desire to recommend actions that would contribute, “even in a small way, to justice that leads to peace in Israel/Palestine.”

The report emphasized that Palestinian Christians’ call for help, especially for boycott, should not be dismissed out of hand because “to do so would be to undercut those Palestinians who have argued for non-violence as the way forward.”

The analogy of midwifery is not inappropriate to the church’s desire to assist.

Anthropological/praxis contextualization encounters resistance from those dissatisfied with the notion that contextualizing theologians must be midwives rather than full partners in the growth of justice/peace, whether in Canada or Israel/Palestine. First, they feel the

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23 A former moderator and two experienced staff-members from General Council met with “countless people with every possible perspective” over two years and then spent twelve days in Israel/Palestine, with one committee member returning to spend an additional three months in a Palestinian village. Mike Milne, “General Council in focus,” United Church Observer (hereafter UCO) (July/August 2012), 35–36.
24 Bevans (my italics), 73.
26 Report of the Working Group on Israel/Palestinian Policy: Questions and Answers, israel-palestinefaq from www.gc41.ca, June 19, 2012, S. “Q: What right does the United Church have to say anything about the Middle East conflict? A: “…The church has about 120 partner relationships in almost 40 countries. We respond to requests from partners for assistance. This is one of those situations. Palestinian Christians have asked churches around the world to intervene. They have called out for help.” (Accessed July 2012).
27 IPP Report, 13. The specific non-violent action referred to here is no doubt taken from Palestinian Christians’ document (2009), which combined a call for boycott and divestment (which it saw as “peaceful resistance”—“corrective, not vengeful”) with repentance and peacebuilding. A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine, 30, 36.
anthropological attitude’s reticence about bearing Western influence may encourage what Bevans calls cultural romanticism. If, for instance, Christians with an anthropological attitude tour a Middle Eastern country, they would learn about its ancient culture and rich history but might also be embarrassed about Western Christianity’s history of missteps, all the way back to the Crusades. Humbled by this legacy they would rightly resist any impulse to impose naïve or ill-informed insights about controversial issues such as conflict between that country and its neighbours. Cultural romanticism takes over if individual members of the tour fall in love with the country’s antiquity or its brave citizens to such an extent that they set aside their ability to critique injustices seen from their own admittedly Western, Christian perspective. The anthropological attitude that encourages practitioners to develop a predisposition to look, listen and learn from another’s culture—while admirable in so many ways—may elicit criticism if that attitude also instills among contextualizers a fear of authentic engagement with that culture’s citizens. When contextualizers do not share personal experiences or critique what seems inappropriate in the other’s response to a certain situation, then hosts and visitors are deprived of the opportunity for life-giving conversation. At risk is potential freedom and growth in both countries when citizens gaze together toward a new and different horizon.

Praxis methodologies are rightly embraced for their insistence on the rights and freedoms of the poor: rights to clean air and water, freedom from land expropriation by the wealthy and powerful, peace without fear of violence and intimidation. But praxis methodologies also encounter criticism for their emphasis. Harold Wells argues that too frequently the word

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28 Bevans, 60.


praxis is oversimplified to mean merely practice—whatever works in the service of life and liberty—without sufficient regard for the dialectic of theological reflection on our best understanding of Jesus, as complex as that understanding must be when the interpretation of scriptures and the leadership of the Christian academy come into play. Wells argues that “liberal” (liberational) and “conservative” (evangelical) Christians, who find their spiritual home in a single denomination, must engage in deep, humble and respectful listening to each other. The goal is not to derive a single agreed-upon theology but to appreciate how the living Word has called all parties in different directions. The rich variety of Christologies must give rise to an equally rich diversity of perspectives on how to live out the call to do God’s justice. To honour such diversity, one would not expect a single path toward peacebuilding to win acceptance in the denomination. Acceptance will be especially illusive if members feel that deep, humble and respectful conversations are treated preemptively.

2.3.4 Synthesis/Transcendence Link

Those seeking more expansive conversation may hold the second attitude toward contextualization, which synthesizes approaches to culture and context and is necessarily more complex than a purely anthropological attitude. Vähäkangas relates synthesis to Niebuhr’s conceptualizations of both Christ and culture rather than of Christ as against, above or transformative of culture. Vähäkangas draws from Bevans’ synthetic “model,” which parallels the mindset of theological reflection by bringing into conversation elements of local context (experience, culture, social trends) with elements of the past (scripture, doctrine,

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30 Vähäkangas, 292.
Like those who proceed from an anthropological attitude, theologians with a synthetic attitude listen to and learn from the other; synthesizers do not however see themselves as midwives but full partners in a creative and ongoing dialogue of cultures, faith-groups, and perspectives.

Practitioners with synthetic attitudes toward contextualization endeavor to set aside any naïveté about culture and proceed from a viewpoint that all cultures (theirs included) are complex, have shared and unique elements, bear marks of sinfulness, woundedness and grace. Through honest dialogue, practitioners hope to uncover more about themselves and their context of origin and about the other individual, community, or society. All such learning, with authentic selves truly engaged, is considered to have potential for fostering human growth, but growth can happen only when contextualizers risk transformation in the process. This attitude and process take enormous effort; theologians preferring an easier route can find whatever fits their own horizon. But Lonergan insists that taking this easier route means they never leave their own homes nor understand that context nor become masters there. Only by travelling beyond home and family and encountering others whose perspectives they can appreciate and critique will they learn the limitations of their horizons and test their self-understanding.32

Transcendental method proceeds contextually when authentic selves act as authentic partners inside and outside their community or faith group. They must own their experience of receiving God’s revelation by being attentive to God’s working within them, then be prepared

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31 Bevans, 88.
to build upon that experience and to be repeatedly converted to a richer relationship with the divine.\textsuperscript{33} This conversion, or self-transcendence, is possible only when attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible individuals are willing to undertake the work of self-extending into other contexts, encountering other authentic selves who listen and critique the unfolding truths offered them. Lonergan identifies the ultimate goal of self-transcendence as a total being-in-love, where the individual is primed for self-giving love that surpasses even the pursuit of justice as a means for transforming the world.\textsuperscript{34}

One might critique synthesis/transcendence contextualization for its commitment to protracted conversation, which generally preferences articulate persons educated to Western standards. Lengthy conversation on one’s self-transcendence is usually time-consuming, non-directional, and inward-looking to the point of encouraging passivity to the oppressed, who continue to struggle against injustice.\textsuperscript{35} Praxis-oriented critics demand that the church act decisively to support communities already working toward transformation and liberation; where they are overwhelmed by the powers of this world, the church must act prophetically to label injustice and bring pressure to bear through public and concerted action against wrong-doers. In this way, critics argue, the church cooperates with the Spirit. Praxis theologians challenge that synthesis/transcendental contextualizing is insufficiently prophetic, that followers of Jesus

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid, 246-253. Lonergan adds that if such learning and testing results in conversion, the discerning theologian will have a new self to begin understanding, making dialectic an ongoing, slow moving process.

\textsuperscript{34}Lonergan, 55, 241.

\textsuperscript{35}Bevans, 95. O.S. Olagunju adds that the synthesis process in its early stages results in a “jumble” of ideas, discouraging to those from another culture who see clarity neither in expressions from their own context or from the interfacing culture. O.S. Olagunju, “An Evaluation of Bevans’ Models of Contextual Theology and its Contributions to Doing Theology in the 21st Century Church, \textit{Ogbomoso Journal of Theology} 17, no 2 (2012): 42-58 (ebscohost, Feb 3, 2014).
must not just hear the word but do it—all of which is consistent with Bevans’ suggestion that any contemporary theology must be rooted in praxis to be considered adequate.\textsuperscript{36}

2.3.5 Challenge of Praxis

Sedmak prompts contextualizers to wake up and honestly assess their attitudes and methods of doing theology, while acknowledging that there is no one correct theology for all contexts.\textsuperscript{37} Those with anthropological and synthesizing attitudes agree in their dedication to respecting the other context’s culture and learning from its people through listening and building relationships. Differences become apparent in day-by-day interactions with the other’s community. The extremes of the anthropological/praxis orientation choose to be wholly other-directed, cooperating with the other’s process of birthing a new and liberated society; the extremes of the synthetic/transcendental orientation choose the role of conversation partner, working in community toward an unseen goal that, through the self-transcendence of the individual, somehow involves more peace, harmony and transcendence of previously un-breached horizons.

In reality, however, practice of “extreme” synthetic/transcendental orientation is unlikely, because synthesizing insists upon interaction with a range of attitudes, including the anthropological and the praxiological. For UCC members the notion of analysis to paralysis at the expense of the world’s marginalized is unacceptable. Praxis for synthetic/transcendental thinkers must, however, cooperate with purposeful relationship-building to assist the theologian and others in context to self-transcending growth and innovative problem-solving.

\textsuperscript{36} Bevans, 77.
\textsuperscript{37} Sedmak, 9.
I believe that McCarroll, in her rationale for retrieving a theology of the cross, offers a means for synthesis/transcendence practitioners to articulate their standard for a praxiological dimension.

2.4 Theology of the Cross

McCarroll notes the inability of “the modern Western narrative of hope” to fulfil our expectations of progress and concludes that all notions of using power or coercion to create a more just world have come to naught: we must admit our fragility and dependence and seek hope at the foot of the cross. Hope is synonymous with waiting by the cross for the revelation of God’s love, which is active—in God’s own ways and at God’s own pleasure—in the midst of weakness and seeming hopelessness. Our waiting must involve relinquishing all notions that we can impose our ready-made solutions upon the world’s problems, and thus a theology of the cross is deeply subversive in a culture that demands strong-willed doers rather than watchful waiters.  

McCarroll rejects the notion that theologians of the cross are passive about injustice, looking instead toward the active cooperation that synthesis/transcendence contextualizers advocate; that is, they continually search for signs of God’s hidden ways of transforming the world, wherever and in whomever God seeks transformation. Such hope trusts the power of love and resists the desire to control or coerce others, even where we perceive gross injustice. From a

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posture of trust, Christians see the hope of the cross and anticipate “fullness of being for all through open dialogue, communication, communion, and a willingness to be changed by encounters with otherness.”

But communication is not the only goal of theologians of the cross nor of synthesis/transcendental contextualizers. Communication, McCarroll insists, is part of the spiritual discipline that enables self-transcendence and steels practitioners to tolerate the tensions of daily encounters with unresolved violence and injustice. Theologians of the cross “work to wait,” acknowledging that waiting for God or human others springs from love that refuses pretense of knowing or mastering what cannot be known or mastered by humans alone. But hope is both internal and external, passive and active in the face of injustice, McCarroll maintains. Hope is passive in refusing to act too quickly to satisfy that desperate reactivity one has to do something, even for only temporary and false hope. Hope actively resists all compulsion to exert mastery or suggest finality but acts on behalf of victims with compassion, love and solidarity modeling “God’s ways of working in the world revealed in Jesus and the fullness of waiting as hope.” The praxis she envisions would support organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, who work selflessly for the poorest and most oppressed, without coercive methods that arise from fear or bitterness. Rather, such organizations rely on hope

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and trust in the mysterious God who works beyond human expectations. Active hope, McCarroll affirms, critiques the world’s ethos of power-over.41

Thus McCarroll bridges the gap between anthropology/praxis and synthesis/transcendence orientations, offering a praxis that preserves the latter’s preference for extensive conversation and transformation—within the self and with the other—while honouring the commitment of the former for visible action in the cause of justice and liberation. What is rejected is any sense of triumph we might harbor in using power over others; what is retrieved is a sense of our fragility while we wait in sure hope for the God whose strength shatters our darkness.

2.5 Choices for Contextualizers

“We are not alone. We live in God’s world,” begins the UCC’s New Creed, giving members joy in celebration, courage in despair. The creed continues, “We proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.” All Christian theology, it seems to me, is practiced between these two poles of judgment and hope, separate only in our feeble imaginations.

The anthropological attitude helps me love and serve others when it urges me to reject self-interest and listen to their experience in the context of their culture and amid, to me, previously unknown challenges. This is an attitude I trust, until I am confronted in context with the inevitable contradiction in all cultures: how is the divine kingdom both here and yet to come, seemingly foiled at every turn by human sinfulness? Here the synthesis attitude

trains anthropological eyes and ears on the evidence but insists that I remember my struggles and sins and successes, and those of my culture. My compassion for the other grows as our conversation illuminates our common, fragile humanity. It is not a given that compassion will diminish when our views conflict; on the contrary, that may be the very instance when the work of love is done.42

We have seen the need for a praxiological modality, whether labeled praxis _per se_ or part of transcendence. If Wells is correct, all praxis must be in dialogue with our best theological reflection,43 though the Christology we choose inevitably colours the actions we take toward justice/peace. The Christology founded upon a theology of the cross, as McCarroll suggests, preferences the paradoxical strength in weakness at the foot of the cross; the Christology founded upon God’s preferential option for the poor, as a liberation theology suggests, inclines toward Jesus’ saving action to release captives and unbind the oppressed (Lk 4:18). Neither orientation is passive toward injustice, although the waiting-posture at the cross and the inclusive nature of synthesis/transcendental conversation may be too slow or non-directional for those keen to see praxis-driven results. I agree with Wells, however, that contrasting theologies reside in one church and all may learn from the others, through patient dialogue and humble willingness to embrace even when conflicted.

Given the understanding that no theology suits every situation, the context where a theologian feels called to contextualize must affect his or her choices. In the case of the UCC’s

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43 Wells, 14-16.
peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine there are two contexts to consider: the tormented context of the Holy Land, where the church focused its anthropological research, and the context of Canada, where members live a daily experiment in intercultural and interfaith cooperation. Some can and do opt out of that experiment, especially in compartmentalized, uni-cultural neighbourhoods of large cities or towns. But all can learn ways our country and church have failed in the cause of intercultural justice—in the marginalization of First Nations, abuse of the land, historic charges of anti-Semitism never quite eradicated.44

An anthropological attitude that prompts peacebuilders to assume complete other-directedness in contextual theologizing in Israel/Palestine would allow us to ignore the limitations of our horizons and those of our culture. Praxis that allows us to focus solely on fighting injustices in Gaza would also allow negligence about injustices in Attawapiskat First Nation, or at least compartmentalization of the two situations. A synthesizing attitude however encourages peacebuilders, wherever and whenever we practice theology, to listen and learn as anthropologists, but with a humble attitude that remembers our culture’s tendency to ignore the poor, cheat the indigenous, refuse the immigrant, or shun the differently abled.

### 2.6 Conclusion

My theology takes shape out of a painful awareness of such social memories. I know that I am the product of a settler culture and that others suffer the consequences of historical wrongs that culture committed. But as a member of a church that has expressed sorrow and sought forgiveness for the harms done to First Nations People, I am heartened to see peacebuilding

initiatives begin to take shape here, especially where recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) have prompted action.\textsuperscript{45} Subscribing to a synthetic attitude and committed to lifelong conversations toward transformation and self-transcendence, I see myself in another context offering encouragement to others who also struggle toward justice/peace and reconciliation. I welcome the opportunity to join them in scanning the horizon for new directives on attaining those goals. I believe I am a better peacebuilder when I imaginatively keep Gaza and Attawapiskat together. I look to the UCC for opportunities to be such a peacebuilder.

Chapter 3

Historical Context

3.1 Introduction

August 17, 2012. The former UCC moderator swivelled in his chair, addressing one speaker after another. Behind him sat the current moderator, recused from this debate. Close by, another moderator stood at the podium to meet challenges to the report on Israel/Palestine policy, which he co-authored. On the floor, two other former moderators waited to speak against that report’s recommendation on “economic action” against Israeli goods produced in the occupied territories.

Five UCC moderators facing off; fifteen years of leadership represented; one contentious issue, vigorously debated: Should the United Church accept the report and its recommendations, including the controversial call to economic action, generally accepted as “boycott”?  

3.2 UCC Response to Israel/Palestine Conflict

GC41 provided a dramatic illustration of the deep divisions in a church struggling to define its policy regarding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. By accepting the IPP Report’s recommendations, especially regarding economic action, the UCC followed the World Council of Churches and became the first Canadian denomination to join those committed to such action. But the proposals forwarded in 2012 were not indicative of a new interest in peace in Israel/Palestine; for almost half a century the church had tried to effect change, as well as counter controversy in the press and among its members. Here I examine the church’s historic involvement in the conflict and trace how a broader conversation on theological perspectives could support attitudes and methods of engagement that previously tended to

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46 Researcher’s observations from the floor of GC41.
47 According to a document circulated to UCC Executive Council staff in advance of GC41 (August 2012), two other churches, the United Methodist (USA) and Presbyterian Church (USA), and three other Christian organizations on the international scene had voted to boycott settlement products: the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Quakers (UK) and the Methodist Church (UK).
organize along political rather than theological lines. I also offer a glimpse into the ways Canadian ecumenical partners have dealt with the concerns of Israel/Palestine.

3.3 Voices in the Observer

Tracking that debate necessitates investigation of a number of sources, not the least of which is the *UCC Observer*, which since 1939 has presented its understanding of Canadian Christian opinion—a lengthy publishing record by any reckoning.\(^{48}\) One must be judicious about relying on the *Observer*’s coverage, however, since articles and letters are chosen by editors and cannot fully represent the opinions of the church.\(^ {49}\) Still, even as the unofficial UCC voice, *The Observer* provides a preliminary sounding of its core readership’s reactions to the long-standing Israel/Palestine debate, which has pastoral implications for lay or ordered leaders seeking to inform congregations about the church’s policy and the centrepiece of its international peacebuilding mission.

In the past the *Observer* showed a discernible pattern of reporting on the Middle East. First delegations visited Israel/Palestine and met inter-faith partners for informal anthropological study; then a member of the tour published impressions of the conflict witnessed on the ground. Readers’ reactions took ample space until the subject was exhausted. Between such

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\(^{48}\) Supporters of *The Observer* are proud of what they count as a 185-year history, achieved through various mergers. The *United Church Observer* proceeded from *The New Outlook*, which was formed in 1925 by the union of the *Presbyterian Witness*, *Canadian Congregationalist*, and *Christian Guardian*. In 1939, *The Observer* came into being with the merger of *New Outlook*, *Christian Advance*, and *United Church Record and Missionary Review*. Today, *Observer* retains its UCC focus but is independent from the church in its operations and editorial perspectives, in part because federal funding regulations require an arm’s-length relationship. Accessed November 2015, https://www//ed.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_Observer.

\(^{49}\) It is reasonable to suggest here that the *Roman Catholic Register* and the *Anglican Journal*, to which I will refer in the following pages, are similarly restrictive.
visits, Observer articles featured Jewish or Muslim lifestyles, before the next round of policy-making regarding Israel/Palestine.

Such treatments in the Observer generally lack the depth of formal scholarship but are useful for estimating support or opposition among readers, and occasionally for correcting errors in previous letters to the editor. A reading of the Observer over the last few decades reveals that problems in Israel/Palestine seem dauntingly complex for church members. While some readers support the church’s peacebuilding efforts, others question whether the church can discern a balanced approach in such a complicated context or whether it should be involved in politics. The typical response to this latter challenge is that the prophets and Jesus were involved, and suffered, because of politics. Seldom, if ever, has the Observer reported calls for theological reflection on how Jesus was involved, how the churches can be involved, and how social, peacebuilding and communication theories might help in their involvement.

3.3.1 Observer’s Troubled History

The determination to do something to reprove Israel’s political obduracy regarding its treatment of Palestinians was readily seen in the work of A.C. Forrest, the Observer’s editor from 1955 to 1978. Forrest was the éminence grise behind UCC policy and opinion on Zionism and the plight of the Palestinians during the mid-20th century, though seldom mentioned in the Observer now. Nonetheless, his basic quarrel with Israel’s settlement

See John Webster Grant’s comments on the popular press’s efforts to marshal support for confederation, in “Canadian Confederation and the Protestant Churches,” Church History 38 (1969): 330.

See however Isabelle Hill’s letter to the editor, in which she recalled Rev. Al Forrest as one “maligned for his courageous stance on the Middle East. . . . Every time we wrote about the human rights abuses we were bombarded with criticism. As a people whose heritage includes the prophets...we are called to name injustice
projects would resonate with today’s supporters of justice/peace for Palestinians. For example, in 1970 Forrest wrote this assessment:

Many military excuses have been advanced for Israel remaining in the Sinai, on the West Bank of the Jordan, and in Syria. But Israel, contrary to the … principles of the UN, and the Geneva Conventions to which she is signatory, not only occupies but is settling her own people on such territories; and contrary to every decent principle of enlightened peoples she has removed by intimidation and force, many of the civilians of those countries. Israel flouts the UN’s unanimous declaration, insults her friends, and worst of all makes homeless sufferers of innocent civilians whose homes and property she has taken in defiance of humanitarian principles and international law.  

Popular with the church’s rank and file and a tireless champion for the poor, Forrest identified the UCC as “the church that does things in this country, and one of the Observer’s jobs is to point out the things that need doing.” As a world traveler and WCC representative, he argued for reconsideration of UCC support for Israel, which he deemed to have “a master-plan to rid Palestine of its [Arab] citizens.” In time his provocative journalism led the Observer and the church to a 1972-73 libel suit and counter-suit with Toronto’s B’nai Brith, as Genizi has detailed. He finds that whether Forrest was an anti-Semite or not, most Canadian Jews and many UCC members felt he was; and the majority agreed with N. Bruce McLeod that he was “insensitive to the Jews” and intransigent in his opinions. Those inclined toward what is here known as a synthesis/transcendental contextual
theology would no doubt find Forrest’s abrasive style too great a threat to the web of conversation they wished to build with Canadian Jews.

3.3.2 Desire for Fairness

When drawn into the unfamiliar politics of Israel/Palestine, Observer contributors have shown a desire, at the very least, to be fair-minded. John Asling caused a stir when, in May 2001, he wrote of his “pilgrimage to justice” in Israel/Palestine, on tour with Hamilton Conference. Asling did not critique Israel’s right to exist but queried, “How do we challenge the military might of the Israeli state unleashed on the Palestinian people, supported to the tune of $10 billion annually by the US, the most powerful nation on earth, and not slip into anti-Semitism?” Responses in subsequent issues demanded a more balanced approach, with one noting it was sad Asling’s delegation didn’t speak to Israelis and he shouldn’t pass judgment on this “complex situation.” Another letter-writer called the article “extraordinarily ill-informed and one-sided.” Even the more positive response-letters suggested readers were vigilant against bias and would upbraid any author for unwarranted criticism of Israel.

More recent discussions suggest a similar disposition. Feedback after GC40’s discussions regarding boycott against Israel included a letter from a “former” UCC member challenging, “Should we not boycott Arab oil? There can’t be a double standard, can there?” Following Ruth Russell’s article (2012) pleading for social justice initiatives that convey “the tragic and complex history” of Palestinian and Israeli grievance, letters were insistent that the church not act dismissively against Israel. One letter-writer responded, “I do not see [the UCC’s]

59 Fredelle Brief, Allie Vered, letters to the editor, UCO, July/August 2001, 4.
60 B. MacKenzie, letter to the editor, UCO, October 2009, 6.
position as anti-Israel, but as anti-occupation. . . . After spending the better part of two
decades in the Middle East, the only thing I clearly understand is how tragic the situation is
for both peoples." In short, letters in the Observer suggest readers tend not to challenge the
Zionist project but to support Israel’s existence as a sovereign state; for members who care
about the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the focus has been the degree of
involvement and the strategies the church contemplates in its policies toward the region. And
about these issues they have been deeply divided.

3.3.3 Against Involvement

Grassroots arguments against the church taking up any political and, especially, any foreign
political cause have influenced debate on Israel/Palestine from the beginning. For example,
John S. Morrison, responding to Forrest’s “Israel Flouts” article, argued the church has no
business expressing such opinions and ought to “stick to religion, that is what the church is
for.” Morrison continued, “The church and politics do not and should not mix and if they do
the church will continue to decline.” The complaint that politically activist church leaders
misrepresented rank-and-file members did not diminish when the Forrest debacle finally
resolved. The debate regarding boycott at GC40 (2009) prompted this response: “The United
Church is not exactly busting at the seams. Why is it taking such volatile stances?” And
more recently, one UCO reader chafed about the church’s political involvement that produced
the I/PP Report’s recommendation to boycott: “Why do we tilt at wind-mills like this? These

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61 Ruth Russell, “Israel’s History Counts Too,” UCO, June 201, 40; and Linda Bell, letter to the editor, UCO, September 2012, 7-8.
62 John S. Morrison, letter to the editor, UCO, April 1, 1970, 2. (Morrison’s letter highlights an error, perhaps common among UCO readers, that equates the magazine’s editorial stance—in this case, Forrest’s perspective—with the church’s policy.)
63 Janice Alaimo Brophy, letter to the editor, UCO, October 2009, 6.
situations should be left to professional diplomats. United Church statements on the subject make our church more and more irrelevant.”

Online debates rose from secular sources as well, with the *Calgary Herald* and the *Globe and Mail* equally critical of UCC’s “meddling” in Israeli politics. So heated was debate in 2012 that moderator Mardi Tindal complained of her difficulty drawing the attention of the mainstream media to any pressing spiritual or moral issue—but should action regarding Israel/Palestine be contemplated, she claimed, “the media come to us.” Her comment underlined a perceived disparity: the church’s peacebuilding efforts in Israel/Palestine seemed to arise from something other than a “pressing spiritual or moral issue.” Grassroots members seemed to conclude that the issue was almost entirely political.

### 3.4 Boycott Proposals, in the Press and at GC

No peacebuilding issue of the last decade divided UCC members more painfully than the issue of a boycott against Israeli products, especially preceding and directly following GC40

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64 James Maffre, letter to the editor, *UCO*, September 2012, 8.
in 2009. For months tension built between the UCC and the Canadian Jewish Congress over the church’s relationship with a group known as Independent Jewish Voices, “a small, radical rump group” that did not speak for Canadian Jews, according to CJC’s executive officer Bernie Farber, but also an organization known for its desire to network with Christian churches and introduce their policy-makers to Palestinian grievances. Finally, tension became hostility when the Toronto Conference forwarded to General Council its proposals for a wide-ranging boycott of Israel’s goods as well as of its academic and cultural institutions. Many members of the Jewish and UCC communities were shocked to read the proposals’ background, which demanded that the world condemn Israel and stop treating her “with kid gloves,” suggested that Canadian members of Parliament received “bribes” with trips to Israel, and insinuated that MPs with Canadian/Israeli citizenship had tainted the political process through their “sensitive roles” in government. Subsequently, the Observer quoted the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles as voicing “strong outrage” against such suggestions, calling the background materials “better suited to propaganda of Hitler’s Germany in the ’30s than the largest Protestant Church group in Canada.”

When it met, General Council repudiated such language as “provocative, unbalanced and hurtful,” before debating the boycott proposals. In the end, it elected to “recommend that the United Church conferences, presbyteries, congregations and community ministries

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66 I am excluding debate concerning the marriage and ordination of gays and lesbians here, which though it has peacebuilding overtones as well should, I think, be categorized as a social issue.
immediately enter into consultation, dialogue, study and prayer, and then to take appropriate action toward ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and enter into conversation as to how to move the two peoples toward reconciliation (including, but not limited to, economic boycott).”

Confusion on how to interpret the decision ensued, and a motion was immediately made to reconsider the decision while CJC’s representative, Rabbi Reuven Bulka, stormily concluded the vote had been in favour of boycott. UCC chief program officer Bruce Gregersen clarified to the press, however, that the church had neither begun nor approved a boycott but had encouraged the lower courts to discern their own initiatives to end the occupation in Palestine.

If letters in the Observer are indicative of reaction in the broader church, attention remained fixed on justice as an aspect of political power and dissent. One Toronto activist for Palestinian causes hailed the decision as “a sign that UC people are empowering themselves to speak up for justice rather than political accommodation.” Another regretted the decision was not forceful enough, querying when the church would recover its historically prophetic voice on behalf of the Palestinian people. More positively, it was suggested that the spirit of compromise was typically Canadian and would keep the UCC talking to all sides in the struggle. Curiously, in all the fervor represented in the Observer’s issues following GC40,

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71 United Church of Canada, Record of Proceedings. 46th General Council, 187-188.
72 United Church of Canada, Record of Proceedings. 40th General Council, 188. To date, there is no means of assessing whether the majority of those church courts did indeed launch such initiatives.
73 Karin Brothers, letter to the editor, UCO, September 2009, 3.
74 Sid Rowles, letter to the editor, UCO, October 2009, 6.
only one voice framed the issue as needing peacebuilding: “A boycott against Israel will not promote peace, and peace is what the church should stand for.”

Though peacebuilding and politicking are not contradictory, this letter-writer noticed that in the popular press boycott was generally discussed in the language of politics, and one commissioner to the 41st General Council suggested that would be entirely appropriate: “In a time when [professional] diplomacy and politics have failed to find a just peace, it is incumbent on the Christian church to engage in society and in political discourse and even take a side.” Moderator Mardi Tindal agreed, noting the UCC was not just a voice in the political fray but rose above politics. She likened the church’s concern for justice in Israel/Palestine to that of anti-slavery activist William Wilberforce and suffragette Nellie McLung, who followed their faith and confronted opposition that might destroy politicians in secular institutions. It is this historical perspective that many boycott supporters referred to when defending boycott: though it was to be, as one reporter stated, “a small-scale, targeted campaign against the relatively few products made in the settlements,” supporters saw themselves as part of a religious protest like the one that defeated South African apartheid, though it took six years to accomplish.

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3.5 “A Different Sensibility”

These comments from church-goers suggest a degree of comfort with the overtly political tone of the conversation surrounding the IPP Report’s passage through General Council—comfort that would suit an anthropological/praxis orientation of contextual theology. Others expressed a desire for something different, however. Responding to the report, a number of church members posted comments to the church’s blog, Wondercafé, including the following:

- “It [the report] is not a departure [from previous UCC statements] in the fact that we make what to our social justice trained ears sound like sensible social justice statements which fall like lead balloons on the ears of people who have been trained in a different sensibility.” From revjohn, 05/02/2012

- “I find it odd the Church is thinking of vengeful ways rather than healing ways to bring peace. This kind of action has never worked to bring lasting good, or peace. . . . Is it the Church of Christ's work to follow, or be complicit, in other's need/call to take this sort of action? . . . Have we not learned by now the call of God in Jesus is to not to follow tempting worldly ways, but to follow the ways of Jesus to offer healing and trust in God? Perhaps our need for solutions to age old problems needs to settle into trusting in God's timing, not our human timing. . . . Surely, depth of spirituality at General Council can bring us to more creative ways in this matter. Anger is deadly...a break in relationship with the Creator's Love. It takes more strength to stand up for peace than it does to take on the broken ways of judgment and punitive action” [his/her emphasis]. From spirit wind 7, 07/16/2012

- “Boycott may seem to be a peaceful reaction to what seems to be an unfair situation, but boycott is a gentler term for embargo. Look up the words in the dictionary and understand the meanings and actions behind both throughout history. A boycott is a passive aggressive embargo…. Boycotting is related to embargo. Without doubt. It matters not who is in power and who exerts power. It matters that power is involved. And frankly, history speaks and we need to hear the stories, from all sides, and if we listen carefully, there would be more consideration around this proposed embargo.” From redhead, 07/16/2012. 

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80 See www.wondercafe.ca/discussion/global-issues/united-church-release-report.

In the days leading up to debate on the IPP Report and its recommendations at GC41, an organization calling itself Faithful Witness, with co-chairs Rev. Andrew Love (UCC) and David Koschitzky (Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs), sought to make its constituents' voices heard. Faithful Witness, through Galdalf Group
These members express a desire for a “departure” from what seems to them wrongheaded, unfruitful or unfaithful ways to build acceptable peace. Central to their conversation is the issue of boycotting, both a visible action and symbol of a “sensibility” or theology they reject. They argue that justice/peace, though laudable quests for Christians, cannot be achieved by judging and exerting power over the other; instead they advocate extended conversation so all parties may share their stories, listen to one another, and reconsider proposed solutions. These arguments reflect the precepts of the synthesis/transcendental orientation to contextualization. Wondercafé participants might thus welcome a richer vocabulary to engage in conversation about all contextualizing theologies, not to replace one with another but to allow for a broader exchange so all might critique, develop and understand their own horizons as well as understand, critique and appreciate the other’s.

The struggle for a synthetic/transcendental theology to express itself and be heard continued long after GC41 rose, and resurfaced as preparations for GC 42 (2015) were underway. After the 2014 uprising between Israel and Gaza, several proposals were forwarded to extend the church’s Unsettling Goods campaign or to augment the present policy of economic action against goods from the illegal settlements to include a more general boycott, sanctions and divestment (BDS) program. One petition, however, supported a different recommendation from the IPP Report. Bedford Park UC, Toronto Southeast Presbytery, proposed:

researchers, surveyed 501 active UCC members and determined the following: 78% believed the church should remain neutral on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with “overwhelming opposition” to the report’s recommendation for boycott; only 5% cited settlements as the greatest obstacle to peace; only 7% believed boycott would advance the cause of peace; only 9% believed a policy “favouring one side over the other” would strengthen the church’s credibility. Source: Unsolicited Letter, Survey Results, July 31, 2012.
[That] the 42nd General Council (2015) direct the General Secretary of the General Council to allocate resources of staff time and money to work on developing a resource listing organizations both in Canada and in Israel/Palestine that foster the building of relationships of trust between:

• The United Church of Canada and the Canadian Jewish community,
• The United Church of Canada and Canadian Palestinian groups,
• Palestinian and Jewish groups in Canada, and
• Palestinians and Israelis in Israel/Palestine (identify groups within Israel and Palestine doing this kind of trust-building work, to facilitate possible partnerships between these groups and United Church bodies such as congregations, special interest groups or presbyteries.)

[Bedford Park United] further proposes that these resources be communicated to congregations, groups of interested United Church people, presbyteries and conferences with encouragement for them to undertake this work.

[The proposal offers the following background:] The 41st General Council adopted the policies regarding peace in Israel/Palestine that call on the United Church to "identify the importance of trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis by: (a) encouraging stronger connections between United Church programs and organizations that build understanding between Palestinians and Israelis; and (b) exploring and supporting initiatives for increasing connections in Canada between Palestinian Canadians and Jewish Canadians." Since the 41st General Council, the United Church has primarily focused on the boycott of goods produced in settlements, and has undertaken only limited work on trust-building programs. This has led to a deep rift in Jewish/United Church relations in Canada. Focusing on a punitive and disciplinary form of action may not properly reflect United Church roots of progressive activism and spirituality and the historic recognition of Canada as being a leader in productive and positive peaceful engagement.81

Once again, “a different sensibility” rejected judgment and punishment as the road to peacebuilding in context, in this case supporting what appears to be a synthetic/transcendental approach in Canada among Canadian Jews, Palestinians and UCC members as well as in the Holy Land, between Palestinians and Jews. The proposal was passed by a commission of GC 42 by a strong majority.82

82 This observation was made by student-observer Megan Jones at GC 42. Jones also noted commissioners’ concern for funding research and resource preparation at a time of scarce financial reserves. (Email interview with the researcher, October 2015.)
3.6 Ecumenical Partners and the Israel/Palestine Conflict

The UCC is not alone in struggling to influence Israelis and Palestinians to resolve their conflicts. Thus it is instructive to contextualize by considering debates and decisions in other churches, particularly Anglicans and Roman Catholics, who with UCC neighbours line up—steeple, spire, and bell-tower—along most of Canada’s Main Streets. Though with very different church polities, these ecumenical partners are likely to cooperate in World Day of Prayer services or social initiatives such as stocking local food banks, all motivated by civic hospitality and tradition. The Anglican and RC churches also offer their own witness and desire to mitigate the troubling conflicts besetting the Holy Land, sometimes in tones very distinct from those of the UCC.

3.6.1 Canadian Roman Catholics

The RC approach, both nationally and internationally, has in the past seemed low-keyed in public statements about peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. In September, 2012, when UCC members were passionately deliberating on the IPP Report, then-pope Benedict XVI was travelling to Lebanon and urging Christians “to ‘esteem’ the region’s dominant religion, Islam, [while] lamenting that ‘both sides have used doctrinal differences as a pretext for justifying, in the name of religion, acts of intolerance, discrimination, marginalization and even of persecution.’” Benedict encouraged Arabs to “move beyond tolerance to religious

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83 In the three small-town congregations I have served, friendly cooperation was certainly the norm, in spite of acknowledged differences in theology and polity. Moreover, the small-town orientation is important in the UCC. According to recent findings, “More than 50 percent of United Church congregations and 30 percent of members are in communities with populations of fewer than 2,000. Twenty-three percent of congregations and 26 percent of members are in communities with a population between 2,000 and 30,000.” (See “The State of the Church,” Record of Proceedings of the 40th General Council 2009, 69–77, http://gc40.united-church.ca/downloads/rop, quoted by United Church of Canada General Secretary to General Council, in “The State of the Church 2012,” Workbook: 41st General Council, 5, accessed August 2012, http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/info_1-23.pdf
freedom” and to protect the Christian minority’s rights, but omitted any mention of conflict with Jews in neighbouring Israel/Palestine.  

With a new papacy, however, a more insistent voice for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim dialogue is calling out, and the world’s Catholics and non-Catholics are taking note. In May, 2014, Pope Francis toured the Holy Land and applauded Caritas Jordan and its work in “caring for the needy without distinction of religion, ethnicity or ideology.” Then he invited Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli President Shimon Peres to the Vatican to join him in prayers for peace. When hostilities broke out between Israel and Gaza in the summer of 2014, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace rallied support for Caritas Jerusalem, providing medical supplies and care for Gazan refugees and advocating for war-weary children. Without sounding particularly partisan, CCODP ended one report with a determined tone: “Development and Peace will continue to support its partners in the Palestinian Territories, not only in delivering aid, but also in working to establish the conditions for long-term peace, that so many in the region pray for.”

Perhaps most surprising of all, for Catholics accustomed to non-confrontation regarding Middle Eastern affairs, was the voice of Cardinal Rodriguez Maradiaga, writing for CCODP’s

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84 Francis X. Rocca, “Mideast Catholics Must Engage Neighbours,” The Register, Sept 23, 2012, 2. A related article in the same issue noted the Pope’s call to young people in the Middle East to “courageously resist everything opposed to life: abortion, violence, rejection of and contempt for others, injustice and war”—a list that clearly prioritizes abortion, a familiar Catholic theme. See Francis X. Rocca and Doreen Abi Raad, “Mideast Youth Urged to Stay and Make Peace,” Register, September 23, 2012, 2.


87 At the time of this writing, Rodriguez Maradiaga was the Cardinal of Honduras, president of Caritas Internationalis, and a former Vatican spokesman for the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
online news. He challenged Israel and Hamas: “Why do you keep pointing out the speck in the eye of your brother while missing the plank in your own eye? Instead, you should put down your arms and pick up a pair of binoculars so you can see that most of your victims are innocent people.” While praising the work of Caritas, Maradiaga was forceful on the political roots of the conflict and its solution: “We call for the lifting of the blockade on Gaza to allow Gazans to protect their lives and livelihoods and so they can live a dignified life.”88 Such a directive suggests Catholics are demanding “a radical change in attitudes,” not just among leaders in Israel/Palestine but in the international community.89

Beyond the gaze of the national popular press, the CCODP has for many years sponsored peacebuilding initiatives in Israel/Palestine, supporting dialogue between Jews and Arabs—namely, through the Friendship Village to promote understanding between young people of various faiths and political affiliations; through Sabeel, an ecumenical organization known in UCC circles for promoting inter-religious peace; and through the Society of St Ives, which helps Palestinians defend themselves through the Israeli judicial system when seeking redress after housing demolition, separation of families, or loss of property.90

All these efforts speak to the distinct advantage Catholicism enjoys in being a living presence in the Holy Land. Catholic peacebuilders gather information from local sources with an anthropological attitude toward assisting, but also with synthetic attitude, as when intervenors

such as Rodríguez Maradiaga offer their input, critical if necessary. For Catholics, praxis here tends to follow the transcendental method, with a commitment to networking and openness to transformation. Through the leadership of institutions like the CCODP, Catholics are called to a change of attitude and engagement in the cause of justice/peace.

3.6.2 Canadian Anglicans

Canadian Anglicans have regarded affairs in Israel/Palestine with particular interest since 2009, when the Kairos Palestine document appeared with the signature of Bishop Suheil Dawani, from the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East. Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, was vocal in his support of the diocese as a special interest for Canadian Anglicans and advocated the establishment of a new advisory body by the Council of the General Synod in November, 2011. Advisors, or “Canadian Companions,” have thereafter fostered learning about the diocese and its mission and struggles, guided Canadian pilgrims to the Holy Land, worked with ecumenical partners for peace in the region, and identified projects for fundraising. Liaison between the diocese and Canadian Companions has been provided by Padre John Organ, appointed to Jerusalem in 2012. The padre’s first blog-entry was telling of the Anglican approach to the region’s famously complex affairs:

It has been said if visiting the Middle East for one week, a person can write a book. If here for a month, a person can write an article. If longer, one keeps silent. I can relate to

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91 The diocese takes in a large territory: Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Lebanon.
92 Archbishop Hiltz was speaking to a resolution of the General Synod of 2012, which prompted deepening ties with the Jerusalem diocese. In calling for the formation of an advisory council, Hiltz spoke of strengthening “support and awareness.” See “Companions to Deepen Ties With Jerusalem,” Anglican Journal, January 2012, 7.
such an assessment. The Middle East is beautiful but also complex. Rushing to any conclusion is never wise as it is seldom correct.\textsuperscript{94} 

Organ interpreted his appointment as supportive of Palestinian Christians, who now form only a small fraction of the population. Nonetheless, Anglican hospitals and schools in the region, maintained by the Anglican community worldwide for over a century, testify to the church’s ongoing spiritual and financial support for the hard-pressed Palestinians.\textsuperscript{95} 

Curiously, the \textit{Kairos Palestine} document itself had limited influence on grassroots Anglicans. During the ACC’s General Synod (2010), when delegates resolved to study documents from the church and its ecumenical partners to encourage justice/peace, Andrea Mann, the synod’s Global Relations Director, spoke about the need to review \textit{Kairos Palestine}. Particularly, she wanted to use the document “[to] challenge beliefs and language about the roots and nature of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.”\textsuperscript{96} But in a telephone interview in late 2012, Mann lamented the fact that \textit{Kairos Palestine} was generally neglected by ACC members, noting that a hundred copies had been distributed with more available for sale, but the document had “not had much of an impact.” She regretted that the church was mandated to do much more than was at that time accomplished, and that attempts to work with the KAIROS Canada ecumenical organization and the UCC had been unfruitful, because of dwindling staff and financial resources within the Anglican organization.\textsuperscript{97}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{97} Andrea Mann [telephone interview with researcher], December 12, 2012.
\end{footnotes}
Regarding boycott, a primary recommendation of *Kairos Palestine*, Mann noted that Bishop Dawani encouraged Canadian Anglicans’ cooperation with KAIROS and the United and Presbyterian churches. “Historically, Anglicans have been slower than others on boycott initiatives,” she explained, “apace with Roman Catholics more so than Protestants.” Nonetheless, she regarded boycott as “a seed or a nut that is unfolding” in Anglican consciousness. She concluded with the following observation:

> Despite what appears to be a lack of follow-through, there are groups, parishes and dioceses that are committed to the *Kairos Palestine* document and would like to see the Anglican Church pick up the pace regarding the situation in Israel/Palestine. And they want to see a change at the government level, at the United Nations level, and at the level of statements coming out of that region. Anglicans are interested, but it’s a grassroots commitment. They are uplifted by the work of the United Church of Canada and others they are networking with.\(^98\)

The General Synod of 2013 saw movement on this issue when the church conducted “a long and passionate debate” on justice/peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. Synod reaffirmed Anglican recognition of the needs of both parties to live in peace within secure borders, while calling for the end of Israeli occupation and the cessation of settlement in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Synod edged toward new territory by committing the church to act in concert with ecumenical partners to enable “a deeper church-wide awareness of and response to the call of the *Kairos Palestine Document: A Moment of Truth,*” as well as to educate the church “about the impact of illegal settlements on the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis; about imported products identified as produced in or related to the illegal settlements and misleadingly labelled as produced in Israel; about the complexities of economic advocacy measures.”\(^99\) Debate spanned the breadth of opinions for and against the

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\(^{98}\) Ibid.

resolution, and according to the Anglican press focused for a time on the UCC’s recommendation to boycott:

There was also a concern that this resolution followed in the footsteps of a United Church of Canada resolution that called for a boycott of goods produced in the occupied territories that are labelled as Israeli products. Bishop Michael Ingham of the diocese of New Westminster responded, saying this resolution “calls for nothing approaching that. It calls us to learn more about these products.”

Although Anglicans were manifestly tentative in 2013 about sponsoring a boycott of Israeli goods from occupied Palestine, they have maintained two other platforms for peacebuilding, founded upon their historic work in Jerusalem and the Middle East. First, they provide on-the-ground humanitarian intervention, as during the attack on Gaza in the summer of 2014. Throughout the hostilities, Bishop Dawani kept the church informed about the needs of Gazans and in particular of the diocesan Al-Ahli Hospital, which through damaging airstrikes continued to receive wounded people and provide critical care. The second platform for peacebuilding involves hospitality and education for Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land, particularly at St. George’s College in Jerusalem. Veteran guide Richard Le Sueur insists that “encounters” the church offers differ from the quick-paced and superficial tours popular with westerners. Le Sueur encourages visitors to be pilgrims, not sight-seers, challenging themselves with reflection and prayer to discover the land and its people, and risking transformation and encounter with God—unlike tours that he says are often underwritten or

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100 Ibid.
101 Bishop Suheil Dawani (letter from the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, July 14, 2014) and Fred Hiltz, “Violence in the Middle East,” (July 17, 2014), accessed September 8, 2014, http://www.anglican.ca/news/violence-in-the-middle-east-primate-calls-for-peace-prayers/3003605/ Ali-Ahli hospital is owned and operated by the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem. The bishop appealed to all Anglicans to support the humanitarian work both during the war and during the reconstruction period afterwards.
controlled by the Israeli government.\textsuperscript{102} An online example of a Middle Eastern pilgrimage such as Le Sueur conducts shows interviews with educators and nurses in Anglican facilities. Those interviewed repeatedly stress their institution’s openness to Christians and Muslims from all backgrounds, and lament the poor health and oppression suffered by the Palestinians they strive to teach and heal—as Jesus did.\textsuperscript{103} If other pilgrimages from St. George’s typically follow the example offered on the \textit{Anglican Journal} website, one might deduce that Anglicans are eager to educate the world about their “faith-in-action” peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, especially for undernourished and psychologically traumatized children.\textsuperscript{104}

Anglican contextualizing theology follows many paths with regard to the Middle East. The church sometimes takes an anthropological attitude by staying silent, learning from the people and refusing to rush to conclusions, as Padre Organ suggests; on the other hand, Anglicans are scarcely praxiological midwives but rather partners in transformation, promoting intense encounter and dialogue while striving to provide for the people’s needs. Canadian Anglicans plot a cautious course regarding boycott, educating members about restricted products but avoiding public confrontation that sabotages communication with Israelis, which the episcopacy in Jerusalem needs for ongoing humanitarian work.\textsuperscript{105} I would conclude that Anglicans prefer a synthetic/transcendental theology, with a strong emphasis on doing the

\textsuperscript{102} Richard Le Sueur, “Tourist or Pilgrim—It’s Up to You,” May 12, 2014, accessed Sept 8, 2014, \url{http://cep.anglican.ca/tag/living-stones/}


\textsuperscript{104} “Faith-in-action,” is Bishop Dawali’s description of his mission in the Diocesan Episcopacy of Jerusalem and the Middle East. See Barry, 2014.

\textsuperscript{105} Andrea Mann [telephone interview], December 12, 2012.
work they believe follows Jesus’ healing ministry, while drawing from a network of support around the world.

3.6.3 Canadian Quakers

The Canadian Society of Friends, largely because they are fewer in number, have less presence than RCs or Anglicans in Canadian towns and villages, and thus are seldom named as the UCC’s ecumenical partners. Nonetheless it is interesting to note how Friends, who hold peace as their earliest testimony and increased peace and conflict resolution as essential to their mission, have struggled with the question of how to assist peace in Israel/Palestine. When Friends in the United Kingdom voted on April 2, 2011, for a boycott of settlement products, their decision responded to Quakers in Palestine decrying continual encroachment by settlements. The UK Society considered boycott “a non-violent move for peace” and claimed support from “most Jewish Israeli peace groups.” Canadian Friends received the same Palestinian petition and studied the matter, but at their 2013 meeting (CYM) judged themselves unready “to reach unity on a broad statement supporting the specific goals of the official BDS Campaign.” After that meeting, however, many Friends declared their openness to boycotting specific goods from the occupied territories, and an addendum was circulated for consideration at various monthly meetings and worship groups. Finally, at the 2014 CYM, Friends authorized dissemination of information on BDS, called upon the Canadian government to require accurate labeling of goods from Israeli settlements, and

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108 “Epistle from CYM, 2014,” Appendix 4, 34.
encouraged members to boycott those goods. One member’s attached comment asked for Friends to do even more than what the CYM approved. Interestingly, the sources of information provided for further study included materials from the Unsettling Goods Campaign available through the UCC website.¹⁰⁹

Friends’ radical interpretation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) suggests inclusion of the broadest range of contextual theological approaches and methods. Given the widely consultative nature that characterizes their peacebuilding initiatives and yearly meetings, it is reasonable to suppose that Friends take a synthetic approach to contextualizing in the case of Israel/Palestine. Unlike some in the Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Churches, however, Friends do not seem concerned about jeopardizing communication channels with Israelis by participating in the BDS campaign. In fact, they point to support for the BDS movement among such organizations as Independent Jewish Voices (in Canada), Jewish Voice for Peace (in the US), Boycott from Within (in Israel), and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Quakers draw from their tradition of employing creative non-violent actions to thwart entrenched injustices,¹¹¹ arguing that the power imbalance between the State of Israel and the Palestinian peoples is so great that such actions are again required.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ “A Far from Complete Sampling of Resources on BDS,” Appendix to “Epistle from CYM,” 2014.
¹¹¹ Against the slave trade from Africa, for instance.
¹¹² See CFSC, FAQ #7, “Why do you think BDS will work?”
3.7 Conclusion

The ecumenical peacebuilding effort shows a range of strategies for contextualizing, according to each denomination’s history of engagement and global presence. Canadian Friends, by their decision to employ BDS tactics until the Israel/Palestine conflict ends, indicate that a synthetic approach to contextualizing may very well lead to the same kinds of praxiological solutions an anthropological approach may choose. Quakers, however, have a tradition that seeks unity before such decisions can be effected. None of their peacebuilding church-partners mentioned here can count on having such internal unity on their side.
Chapter 4

A Theology of Ministry for Peacebuilding at the Grassroots

4.1 Introduction

A few weeks before commissioners gathered in Ottawa for GC41 (2012), “GordW” joined an impassioned online debate. At issue was the upcoming vote on the IPP Report circulating through the UCC’s courts. To online posts supporting or rejecting the report, Gord offered this unique perspective:

I would suggest that few presbyteries, unless there is a group within the presbytery pushing the issue [i.e. of boycotting Israeli goods from occupied Palestine], would take the time to discuss something that is none of their business. . . . I also suggest that the majority of people in the UCCan are far less interested in this discussion (or most discussions that will happen at GC41) than one would like to believe. Now I also believe an argument can be made (not sure if it convinces me but it can be—and is being—made) that this is none of General Council's business either. As one posting I saw somewhere put it, “Why do we think we are important enough to meddle in the affairs of another country?” I might add, particularly when we do such a bad job of meddling in/advocating for issues in our own country.113

Upon reading Gord’s post, church members might have fallen into somber reflection. They would consider the enormous amount of energy the UCC had invested before GC40 and 41: assessing conditions in the occupied territories of Palestine, reporting the plight of Palestinian

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Christians and their pleas for assistance, debating the faith-filled response to make.

Considering all the media attention (especially from the church’s harshest critics) and all the internal conflict, church members might well ask, “What if the majority among us truly do believe, as Gord suggests, that the affairs of Israel/Palestine are none of our business?”

This chapter moves from the denominational to the congregational perspective, examining the reasons grassroots UCC members may resist participating in peacebuilding initiatives in Israel/Palestine. Such resistance arises when a congregation defines itself and its “business” as somehow separate from external pressures that the national church absorbs and transmits for consideration in its courts. My claim here is that the individual congregation may self-define, and self-protect, as a family, making this an ambiguous metaphor, to be sure. But a theology of ministry arises even in the midst of resistance and ambiguity. The peace-minded minister can use the family metaphor to prompt healthy conversation that encourages even the overly introspective congregation to consider embracing change and committing to a global perspective.

4.2 Call to Double Justice

If GordW was correct in speculating that grassroots members generally believed the conflict in Israel/Palestine was none of their business, then the church’s peacebuilders faced even more fundamental questions than whether individual members or congregations tended toward praxis or transcendental theological methods. Widespread disengagement on the topic would impede the UCC’s peacebuilding efforts in general. How could the denomination honour its creedal pledge to seek justice and resist evil if a call to prophetic action failed to
inspire even a modest number of members at the grassroots? Wouldn’t such apathy dishearten any minister called to lead a congregation in peacebuilding?

Israeli-American peacemaker Yehezkel Landau warns that even middle-of-the-road neutrality in the face of persistent injustice is an option unfitting for people of faith—in his view, any member of the Abrahamic family of faiths. Referring to Deuteronomy 16:20, Landau insists that God directs us to a narrow path we would not by ourselves seek out: *Justice, justice you shall pursue so that you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you.* This double justice is both our justice and the other’s, even the adversary’s, and pursuit requires empathy, skilful listening, and enlightened self-interest. Thus a comprehensive peace—ours, the other’s and the world’s—crucially involves inclusive justice, achieved only when peacebuilders painstakingly unblock the truth the other longs to tell.¹¹⁴

With great faith in Track II diplomacy (and, one might speculate, a strong transcendental inclination), Landau encourages the development of grassroots organizations to reach out to all parties and listen to the stories of loss, pain, and anger that cause divisiveness and violence when they are unacknowledged and undervalued. He advocates for the development of training programs to assist interfaith partnerships that inch ordinary people closer to *Shalom,* that eschatological state of wholeness and integration we glimpse when contemplating reconciliation between what have formerly seemed irreconcilable opposites, but to God are complementarities in the fullness of creation.¹¹⁵

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¹¹⁴ Yehezkel Landau (speech, Chautauqua NY), July 4, 2012.
¹¹⁵ Ibid.
4.3 Impediments to Peacebuilding

4.3.1 Open or Closed to Others’ Conflict?

With GordW’s arguments against action on one hand and Landau’s insistence that ordinary people can and must work toward Shalom on the other, the peace-minded minister is prompted to draw the congregation into deep discernment about its disposition toward assisting justice/peace on the interfaith, intercultural scene. First, the minister must listen carefully to discover how open the congregation is to outsiders or, conversely how deeply and exclusively it identifies as family. The metaphor of family—or family in faith, or “come-as-you-are church-family,” as one website proclaims—is particularly attractive in small-town congregations, where members know each other and have historical inter-family relationships. While there are real liabilities associated with the family metaphor, which are explored below, the minister should be prepared to meet members on common ground and encourage “family conversation” to explore what may be primary issues affecting engagement in a project such as the UCC’s policy on peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. Do members of the congregation characterize their interfaith relationships as courageous or risk-adverse? Are they confident handling conflict, or fearful to the extent of avoiding interactions rather than raise powerful emotions?116

116 Donald M. Mackenzie gives an insightful account of an interfaith relationship he has developed with an imam and rabbi. After a trip to the Middle East, and in the midst of writing a book about the experience, the three experienced a breakdown in communications when dealing with the subject of the separation barrier. What kept the relationship intact, Mackenzie demonstrates, was the commitment to relationship as the place where healing may occur: “A certain level of trust that comes through vulnerable willingness to tell our stories, our fears and our hopes, can help us, over time, to reach a place where conversations of substance can really happen, and where we can find the resources to stay in conversation, in spite or radically different experiences and perspectives.” In “The Relationship with Other Religions as Conversation,” in Under the Oak: The Church as
Understandably, strong emotions can be uncomfortable if one is attempting to communicate with troubled parties, such as the Israelis and Palestinians, whilst they remain locked in conflict. Here, the minister and congregation might find encouragement from peacebuilder Thomas Porter, who suggests that we can transform conflict by re-visioning it as the arena where the work of love is performed; then we see the presence of conflict as indicative of the important work accomplished against evil and injustice. Porter describes conflict as part of God’s created order, with conflicted humans relying on the Spirit’s gifts of creativity and empowerment to overcome painful disorders that rupture community. Conflict thus defined suggests an aspect of felix culpa—fortunate fallibility—that drives us closer to God and each other.

Thus a minister might discern with the congregation that Christians have a duty to engage and seek reconciliation in Israel/Palestine, as Landau suggests. When they take time and meticulous care to hear stories from each conflicted side, they courageously stand in the gap between the parties. Peace thus understood is not merely absence of conflict in the Holy Land but an achievement demanding our commitment to accommodation, trust and compassion—even in the midst of conflict. Trust in the conflicted parties is essential, but trust must also prompt our search for evidence of God’s peace, which is as sure as Easter peace after the emptiness of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The peace-minded minister must be willing to stand with congregation members in the necessary time-gap that separates their faith-filled lives.

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117 Porter, 7, 14.
118 Porter, 17.
commitment to extend compassion from evidence that a tolerable justpeace or right relationship is being achieved.\textsuperscript{120}

4.3.2 Globally Engaged or World Weary?

A second set of questions involves the suspicion that congregation members may dispute the church’s involvement in foreign conflict, as GordW speculates. Does a congregation in the process of discerning its peacebuilding role feel that global communication has helpfully linked them with far-away individuals holding similar interests and passions? Or is the congregation overwhelmed by the multiplicity of problems that daily assault the consciousness —climate-change, earthquakes, disease, civil war, and displaced refugees? Does assistance from this remove seem paltry, ineffective, even misguided? Might such a notion prompt a backlash against others’ desire for inclusive community, both here and around the globe?

Church-goers may indeed be world-weary. Cormie suggests that they have witnessed national programs with goodwill, ecumenical commitment and links to an international movement faltering under internal and external pressure. He traces, for instance, the efforts of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, with its agenda of social activism to cancel the monumental debt shouldered by victims of global injustice. This initiative sprang hopefully to life in 1998, but its brave attempts at interfaith dialogue and collaboration achieved only modest results, while overwhelming debt remained. Cormie’s balanced appraisal of CEJI’s brief history includes some notable successes, such as its ability to motivate ordinary Christians to think creatively and theologically about a rapidly changing world; nonetheless,

\footnote{\textsuperscript{120} Cf Porter, 28.}
he acknowledges that congregations still see economies struggling under debt-loads their citizens can never repay.\textsuperscript{121} Jaded UCC church-members who see these injustices and, as GordW suggests, add them to intractable conflicts in their own country, are tempted to despair that their efforts toward justice/peace will never produce measurable change. Is it not preferable, they ask, to preserve the congregation as an oasis of calm, giving members respite from the chaos outside the church-doors?

4.3.3 Networking or Withdrawing?

Although ethicist Marilyn Legge is sympathetic to those who react against the tidewaters of globalized injustice and to their desire to withdraw for safety, she warns against the desire to become so reserved that community—in this case, the church family—devolves into an enclave of unhealthy protectionism.\textsuperscript{122} Peace-minded ministers must provide a worldview that, without denying widespread and entrenched injustice, also draws attention to the positive aspects of globalization, encouraging the congregation to define itself as part of a prophetic web of interdependent relationships committed to the cause of justice/peace for society and the environment. Peacebuilding is hard work. Some parishioners may criticize initiatives that involve chronically conflicted parties, especially those overseas, as a waste of time and energy. If the peace-active congregation is to stay open rather than merely self-interested and self-protective, the minister must encourage communication skills for reaching out and provide spiritual guidance for sustaining members’ patience during the long, creative engagement for justice/peace.


Being part of a globally interconnected network presents a metaphor that counter-balances the church-as-family paradigm, which sometimes belies a too-comfortable milieu where members resist what could be healthy challenge and stimulus to growth as Christians. Connectivity may prevent the church from becoming a dysfunctional family, shut in upon itself. Then intercultural peacebuilding becomes impossible, with parishioners erecting a bulwark of resistance to even exploratory conversation with outsiders. Worst of all, though exclusivity in the too-cozy church-family may seem to hurt no one, it erodes the congregation’s ability to witness to the good news of Christ for not-so-distant Jewish or Muslim neighbours in Canada, let alone for conflicted Israelis and Palestinians.

4.4 Opening to Conversation

Its tendency to exclusivity notwithstanding, the family metaphor offers three strengths that ministers who wish to encourage positive response to the UCC’s peacebuilding policies might wish to develop. First, when it is functioning appropriately, the church-family can imbue the individual with a coherent worldview: to take just one example, that the world though fallen has been loved into being, the individual is essentially good, and all have been redeemed by the cross of Christ. Such a coherent worldview provides a baseline, but for growth the individual needs other members to stimulate social, intellectual and spiritual development by offering differing perspectives from their separate horizons. We have seen, for instance, how

123 Anthony B. Robinson, “Quit Thinking of the Church as Family.” Personal Blog accessed July 17, 2013, http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog/02-24-2010/anthony-b-robinson-quit-thinking-the-church-family. Robinson suggests that the church is about changing people’s lives and the world around them, not keeping them “happy” as some parishioners would insist. Peter L. Steinke offers a nuanced perspective of birth-families and church-families: “The church is not a family. Families are more committed and intense. Their relationships are repeatedly reinforced and deeply patterned. Nonetheless, the church is an emotional unit. The same emotional processes experienced in the family operate in the church.” Steinke also demonstrates that our current fascination with families as dysfunctional and blameworthy belies the opposite interpretation, that families are the place of deep healing power, as seen in the joyful reunion of Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers. See Peter L. Steinke, How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems (Bethesda MD: Alban Institute, 2000), xi, 37.
Wells recommends that liberal and conservative Christians in the same denomination must dedicate themselves to deep and humble listening and speaking so each can appreciate the different paths God sets before them.\textsuperscript{124} Lonergan goes further, suggesting that many horizons become available through human community, none in themselves sufficient but each available in a functioning cooperative setting. To continue the family analogy, a youngster can profit immensely from the reported experiences of parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters who through their own roles as workers, students, pray-ers and citizens provide contrasting and complementary views, each from a unique viewpoint. Metaphorically, one can think of the child being held on the shoulders of an elder to see further and imagine more fruitfully; otherwise, what lies beyond the horizon is beyond the youngster’s comprehension, interest or care.\textsuperscript{125} Ministers in small-town congregations who wish to support the UCC’s peace initiatives in Israel/Palestine must be particularly active in inviting and encouraging such broadened perspective-taking.

A second ability of the functioning family arises when it recognizes that a horizon not only frames a member’s interest but also describes the limits of his or her capacity for imagining and assimilating. Church-families are naturally restricted in their ability to explore horizons due to their physical location or social stratification as, for example, the small-town congregation whose members have never visited the Holy Land nor made neighbourly contact with Canadian Jews or Muslims. If the congregation models the appropriately functioning family, it can sponsor its members’ growth by reaching out to “cousins, aunts or uncles” from the church’s higher courts, larger communities or other faiths who can offer first-hand

\textsuperscript{124} Wells, 14-16, 21. See page 18, above.
\textsuperscript{125} Lonergan, 235-237.
knowledge. To extend collective or individual horizons, church-members must develop communication skills—listening, asking questions and speaking their own wisdom. Thus they develop conversations that foster the freedom, creativity, and respect needed to imagine justice/peace with the neighbour and in the world. When such conversations become a stated goal of the congregation, members can learn to appreciate the otherness of another’s horizon of understanding, so that other no longer presents a threat.\textsuperscript{126} A minister hoping to promote such growth will encourage conversations by pointing the way to discovery and appreciation.

In time, a new horizon may prompt a departure from previous learnings, and thus a moral, intellectual or religious conversion may be effected in the individual. For such a conversion to be genuine, Lonergan cautions, it must be accompanied by an arduous process of experiencing, understanding and judging the new information offered from a different perspective.\textsuperscript{127} If at a meeting at his church, “Duncan” is exposed to various opinions about the need for a separation barrier in Israel, he may be prompted to reassess the perspective he once considered permanent. If he draws his congregation and minister into conversation and (like concerned family members) they support his engagement in the question, all are likely to endure dislocation as Duncan attempts to experience what separation means to a community, to understand the various arguments witnesses present, and to judge the situation according to his best abilities. Duncan’s quest for a new, authentic opinion will depend upon challenging conversations about the separation barrier with outsiders, but also upon the supportive (but often equally challenging) conversations in the family, where he tests his still developing opinion.


\textsuperscript{127} Lonergan, 239-41.
Here a third ability of the functioning family comes into view. The family can impart God’s love to members and thereby provide a life-giving and stabilizing centre so they may go out (literally or imaginatively) into a precarious world—with its myriad, constantly shifting horizons and abundance of material to experience and sort. With the love of God channeled through caring souls in the church-family and beyond, all conversation partners can avoid becoming overwhelmed and discouraged; otherwise, they no longer care about learning from others or their perspectives, and abandon the conversion process.

4.5 Fostering Conversation

As minister to my congregation, I hope to see us emulate the appropriately functional family by communicating love and a Christ-centred worldview, to one another and beyond. Far from defining myself as minister to a congregation that exists merely to protect its own interests, I encourage its essential and life-giving conversations at the local level, with the national church and with multi-faith neighbours, about who God is and where God is leading us. I am not naïve about the challenges such conversations present. Congregations are as susceptible as other institutions to biases that skew our notions about conversation: whether in the public square, boardroom, or family kitchen, western society seems to prefer confrontation or debate, which individuals feel they can win. I estimate that a congregation’s peacebuilding ministry will not endure if it relies on winning to go forward.

Tracy offers guidelines for real conversation, even while admitting it has become a rare phenomenon. Many would hesitate, especially where peacebuilding in life-and-death

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circumstances is at issue, when Tracy names conversation a “game.” But his “hard rules” for the conversation-game are helpful in any circumstances a congregation may face. He tells us: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different from your own views; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, and to change your mind (and, I would add, be prepared to reconcile with an opponent) if the evidence suggests it.

While I might as a minister prepare a congregation to follow Tracy’s “hard rules” as it enters into relationship-building conversation with Canadian Jews and Palestinians, I would do so with a great deal of reassuring. I would encourage church-members not to be reticent about their call to live and work as followers of Jesus Christ. This reassurance is neither hasty nor facile but a reminder of our Christian identity when we venture into exchanges with partners who are equally conversant but differently focused. Such reassurance regarding Christian identity is especially important for those who sense that, when we extend our authentic selves and receive other authentic selves, we may indeed be changed in the process. For some in the congregation, this vulnerability produces high anxiety, and no obvious resolution. Jay McDaniel summarizes the paradoxical truth of interfaith conversation: Christians must both proclaim the wisdom of Christianity and maintain a disposition that is “willing to be

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129 This is not to suggest that “game” is meant as frivolity. Gadamer also refers to conversation as a game, one that demands participation as a partner, getting caught up in the process with no pre-determined outcome. See “On Phenomenology,” with Alfons Grieder (112) and “Hermeneutics,” with Carsten Dutt (59), *Gadamer In Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed and trans by Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

130 Tracy, 19.
converted, again and again, by the healing wisdom of others insofar as it is conducive to love.”131

4.6 Conclusion

The national church, through GC41’s approval of the IPP Report, invited its members and congregations to boycott products from the occupied territories but also to support global partners in the ecumenical and inter-faith community as well as to enter into relationship-building conversations with Jewish and Palestinian Canadians. Some members would see the invitation to build stronger relationships as an opportunity to climb higher and survey further, to share the wider perspectives that some General Council members had already achieved by networking through the WCC and various peacebuilding organizations.132 But others would resist the demands of such peacebuilding and suggest the church relegate peace-activism to the political realm. Church and politics don’t mix, they might have insisted, with many respondents in the Observer over the years.133

However, Kathryn Tanner’s essay, “How My Mind Has Changed: Christian Claims,” supported my hope that members of one congregation would participate in a case study,

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132 During his tenure as moderator, Gary Paterson frequently exhorted the UCC faithful to engage in courageous and creative conversation on a range of topics, including a re-visioning of the church and peace work in Israel/Palestine. In the weeks leading up to GC 42 (2015), however, he grimly summarized the state of the church. “The system is experiencing difficulties,” he reported, citing the church’s loss of influence on the nation’s public and political scene, its diminished capacity for justice work due to declining resources at the Conference and General Council levels, and a tendency to “professionalize” outreach ministry to the point that individual church members might long for a more hands-on approach, rather than one that requires only ongoing charitable donations. “The Call to Justice, Part Two,” Gary Paterson, blog, www.garypaterson.ca July 22, 2015.

133 See, for example, Morrison’s and Maffre’s letters in UCO, cited above, 32.
willingly complicating their lives to join in conversation about justice/peace. Like Tanner, I dreamed that those members would refuse to surrender all responsibility to the strategies of contemporary political powers.\textsuperscript{134} Writes Tanner:

A theology that starts from, and uses as its toolbox for creative ends, materials gathered from the widest possible purview is, in my opinion, a theology with imaginative expansiveness. Such a theology looks to the Christian past not for models for simple imitation but for a way to complicate one’s sense of the possibilities for present Christian expression and action.\textsuperscript{135}

With a purposeful study of the conflict in Israel/Palestine and the United Church’s proposals for engagement as a toolbox for creative networking, my hope remained that a case study would show a congregation engaging in such conversation and perhaps extending itself to the interfaith community. Might participants resolve to follow that conversation wherever it goes, acknowledge the complexity of issues, and bless a variety of peacebuilding options?

\textsuperscript{135} Tanner, 43.
Chapter 5
Case Study Site, Methodology, Process and Procedures

5.1 Introduction: Community and Congregation

For the locus of my ministry-in-action project, I chose a UCC congregation in Hensen Mills, population 40,000, with two factors in mind. First, the congregation considers itself mission-minded and had previously shown interest in the IPP Report (though without taking any of its recommended actions.) Second, both congregation and community had experienced the complexities of settler/non-settler relationships. Tensions between Henson Mills and its First Nation neighbours rose during the decade preceding this study, especially during a confrontation over land-use that provoked a dramatic stand-off. Focus group members who witnessed those events expressed concern during our deliberations that, below the surface, anxiety persisted about the relationship between native and non-native neighbours, and some members hinted at lingering resentment against outside agitators, the media, and police officers brought in from other jurisdictions to preserve the peace during the confrontation. During this study, however, tensions were at a low ebb, and Henson Mills United Church (HMUC) was preoccupied with issues confronting all mainline Protestant congregations: lack of youth participation, renovations to accommodate seniors, declining donations (although the church still showed remarkable energy for outreach activities.)

While the church considered itself mission-minded, it was challenged by the UCC’s recommendations for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. Congregants were confused about the
purpose and extent of “the boycott” proposed and frustrated about what they presumed to be General Council’s directives. Their Official Board considered writing a protest-letter, and engaged a guest speaker familiar with conditions in the Middle East and the IPP Report. But the presentation did not settle the matter, and many in the congregation disputed the speaker’s conclusions. Eventually, discussion of peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine fell off the congregation’s agenda. Two years later and with the minister’s approval, I brought my invitation to the congregation to review the recommendations of GC41.

5.2 Research Methodology

“A conversation,” writes David Tracy, “is not a confrontation. It is not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go.”

The research I contemplated aimed to afford adult participants the opportunity of focused questioning and conversation about the IPP Report’s recommendations. I was eager to study how conversation, and in this case, how pursuit of a controversial question wherever it might go, could serve the HMUC congregation in determining if, and how, they wished to follow the national church’s lead in peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. To afford maximum freedom for this conversation, I chose a Case Study methodology with a Hermeneutic Phenomenology dimension.

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Primarily, this project was structured according to the norms of case study, which is appropriate for qualitative research of a bounded system focused on a single activity,⁴³⁷ case study being defined as the study of a bounded system with focus on an issue that is illustrated by the case to provide an in-depth study of the system, based on diverse data collection materials so research might situate that system in its larger context.⁴³⁸ For this ministry-in-action, I considered the bounded system as the UCC’s strategies for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, the case as the HMUC congregation discerning its strategies within that system, and the UCC and its work in the service of justice/peace as the larger context. The study also served a practical purpose for the congregation. The IPP Report and its recommendations, once approved by GC41, were transmitted to the denomination’s members for study, prayer and personal action.⁴³⁹ Potentially, this study would offer the opportunity for members to follow UCC policy by studying its recommendations and discerning action both for the participant and, possibly, for the entire congregation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985)⁴⁴⁰ propose a problem/context/issues/lessons-learned sequence for developing a qualitative research study. Since the problem of selecting from peacebuilding strategies was to be explored in the context of a congregation, I spent considerable time at

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⁴³⁷ John W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Second Edition (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 73, 74. Creswell defines a “collective case study” as one where a single issue is selected but multiple case studies are chosen to illustrate the issue.
⁴³⁸ Creswell, 244.
⁴³⁹ Motion to GC41, 2012: 1) receive the report of The Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy; (2) direct that United Church policies and actions, in relation to Israel and Palestine, reflect the content of the report as these have been affirmed in the motions number 3 through 13 and recommend the report and its policies to its members for study, prayerful discernment and personal action. Accessed June 2013, http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/israel-palestine-policy-summary. pdf
⁴⁴⁰ Creswell, 75.
HMUC gathering information about the faith community, its demographics and its exposure to and interest in the IPP debate. Initially, I had two concerns regarding the fact that the IPP Report was debated and adopted in August 2012, two years before this project. First, some UCC congregations might have chosen action-plans based on the report’s recommendations, thus becoming ineligible for study. Second, other congregations might have decided that Israel/Palestine’s problems are unsuitable for UCC preoccupation and would be unwilling to participate. HMUC was in many ways an ideal site, with interest in the debate but no plan regarding the recommendations or other peacebuilding strategy.

5.3 Data Collection

In keeping with suggestions from Creswell (2007) and Yin (2003),\textsuperscript{141} I gathered information from the HMUC focus group in several ways: from my own observations noted during group discussions, interviews with participants, documents and participant-observations. Acknowledging that case study is often used to understand a complex situation,\textsuperscript{142} I prepared for the complexity of choosing from IPP’s recommendations by providing participants with background in several forms:

a) audio-visuals to immerse participants in the Israeli and Palestinian context, to highlight debate on the IPP Report at GC41, as well as to reprise Cindy Blackstock’s address before the court’s final vote on the Report, to help the participants appreciate the First Nations’ perspective

b) extracts from the IPP Report and UCC Records of Proceedings from the 41\textsuperscript{st} and other General Councils when participants thought them helpful.

\textsuperscript{141} Creswell, 75. My own observations were monitored and supplemented by peer reviewers.
\textsuperscript{142} Creswell, 75.
c) a scripted presentation from one who had completed a Come-and-See tour. The script was vetted by at least one other participant on the same tour, to insure that the information was an accurate reflection of the tour-group’s experience.

d) research materials (on-line and otherwise) on at least one peace-minded corporation and grassroots organization—Israeli, Palestinian, Christian or non-Christian—and on Ecumenical Accompaniment programs, as examples of opportunities for investment and support. I also encouraged participants to search online for other organizations that attracted their interest and investment.

e) material from the Unsettling Goods campaign to encourage investigation of the recommendation for economic action (boycott).

By thus varying the format of materials offered to participants, I hoped to appeal to the preferred styles of both visual and auditory learners.

Discussions and interviews for the study followed a semi-structured format, with participants exposed to materials concerning each separate peacebuilding strategy recommended in the IPP Report and then invited to comment and participate in discussion. Before moving to the next recommendation, participants were encouraged to record in their notebooks any further input they might wish to offer—a strategy I found helpful for including those who preferred more time to process information or who communicated most effectively when writing. Typically, I observed participants sharing their insights regarding a video or resource material,

• first by round-table 1-minute comments
• then by open discussion until no new information was offered
followed by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired, initiated with an invitation: “If you have further thoughts on this subject and you’d like to share them in your notebook, please take this time to do so, before we go on.”

Since I selected a case-study methodology as suitable to analyze an event, problem, program or activity in an unusual situation involving more than one individual, I expected to gather data on the who, where, what, how and when factors of each individual’s decision-making. The question why, however, and particularly in this instance why a participant would choose a particular set of recommendations for peacebuilding, is the purview of hermeneutic phenomenology, which extracts the essence of a participant’s experience from significant statements and textural and structural description. To elicit participants’ deeper reflections on their reasons—particularly on the theological basis for their choices—and to allow that they might contribute data on their lived experience as Canadians confronting settler/non-settler issues, I chose the freedom offered by a case study with hermeneutic phenomenological dimension.

5.4 Limitations and Risks

Before beginning the research and analyzing results, I acknowledged possible limitations with representation in the focus group. First, no First Nations participant might be available, eliminating an important UCC voice. (This concern will be developed below, see “Focus

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143 Creswell, 75-78.
Group Formation.” Second, few younger adults might be available, a common problem for congregations because 20-40-year-olds face challenges that retired members do not experience when committing to focus groups or committees. As will be explained later, two young adults did participate, though not initially and not during scheduled meetings; nonetheless, their input was highly valued and accepted by the entire group as valid and helpful.

One potential limitation to the focus group’s sense of commitment could neither be resolved nor assessed in terms of its significance. Since the study was not longitudinal and could not assess whether the congregation or focus-group participants would eventually enact their peacebuilding choices, a question arose about whether participants would feel less committed to choosing or even persevering for the entire study. I hoped that at least partial evidence would indicate their interest to enact their choices for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. Perhaps individuals or the group would prompt their congregation’s willingness to assist the process of justice/peace in Israel/Palestine or among Canadian Jews and Palestinians. But as I prepared to meet HMUC’s participants I understood my task as exposing the group to the IPP Report’s recommendations and presenting materials to help participants envision strategies for living into those recommendations; the group’s task was to make heartfelt choices and at least consider implementation. My strong desire was to understand the group and its choices, not to persuade participants into action.

A final risk concerned my own demeanor as researcher, that I might impose my views on participants or on my analysis, or be unclear about my role or perspectives and thus impair the
data-gathering, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating of data. Could I, for example, avoid imposing my predisposition to conversation during a research project so dependent upon conversation? For the study, I resolved to monitor my input and reactions to participants’ statements and queries, and consult often with my thesis advisor and peer reviewers that they might offer their counsel as data-gathering and processing continued.

5.5 Focus-Group Formation

Originally, the study was planned to include First Nations representation on the focus group, partly to reflect the UCC’s dedication to honouring First Nations/Metis input,145 and partly to gauge whether concerns about or lessons learned from dealing with settler/non-settler land rights in Canada might parallel concerns or potential for learning about such rights in Israel/Palestine.146 My initial investigation at HMUC, however, showed that the congregation included no First Nations or Métis representation, and the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board expressed concern that discussion within the focus group might contribute to feelings of isolation or discomfort for any representative selected. Instead, collaboration was sought with a First Nations elder who agreed to act outside the focus group as a research assistant, giving input and interpretation of coded data after discussions and interviews were complete. Elder L.C. was unaffiliated with the case site but is a well-known and respected

145 Pamela Couture notes that the UCC’s initiative (GC41, 2012) to change its crest to include First Nations’ signing of the Basis of Union is a unique example of the social witness process, brought about largely through the church’s commitment to respectful conversation and partnership. See “Social Witness as Conversation,” in Under the Oak Tree. The Church as a Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World, ed Ronald Allen, et al. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013) 199.

146 Commissioners at GC41 (2012) may have drawn such parallels when, just before the final debate on the IPP Report, First Nations activist Cindy Blackstock presented her findings on Canada’s record regarding education of aboriginal children on the nation’s reserves. See 6.3.4.1, “Interpolation: Canadian Angst,” below.
source of knowledge in native and non-native communities.\textsuperscript{147} The broader First Nations community was unlikely to be affected by the study and therefore not engaged, in accordance with the Tri-council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.\textsuperscript{148}

Following procedures outlined in the thesis proposal (see Appendix One), a focus group broadly representative of the adult demographics of HMUC and the composition of its decision-making council was formed when seven females and two males volunteered to participate. One male and one female withdrew almost immediately due to work and family commitments. With seven participants, and just one male, the focus group was considerably reduced from the desired ten to twelve members to represent the congregation. One peer-reviewer remarked, however, that the group was typical of a UCC church study-group—a half-dozen members, usually females—so it was decided that research should continue at the chosen site.

I welcomed volunteers to a preliminary meeting and the proposed protocol was followed for informing them of the study’s purpose and process, their right to withdraw, and methods of storing and securing data. After signing a letter of permission and agreeing to the purpose and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In accordance with the Tri-council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2nd Edition, Chapter 9, Article 3.2(i), the researcher interviewed the First Nations elder to determine whether he wished to be named in the completed study (TCPS 9.16). The researcher agreed to comply with his decision to be named as Elder L.C. No personal information about L.C. will be disclosed to the UCC or the Aboriginal community regarding his documented consent. See http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
conditions of the study, each participant filled in a brief questionnaire to share the following general demographic information: three participants were 60-75 years of age and four over 75; all were members of the UCC for over 30 years; all were members of HMUC, residing in or close to the town. For the purpose of data gathering, the group agreed to meet in a comfortable meeting room at their church on four occasions over a six-week period. The fourth meeting was dedicated to having participants complete a questionnaire regarding their own preferred strategies for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, and those strategies they would recommend for their congregation.\textsuperscript{149} I conducted one-on-one interviews after the group finished deliberating, then reconvened a fifth group-meeting for review and evaluation.

During the latter part of the data-gathering period, a member of the focus group nominated two younger congregants for inclusion in the study. This married couple volunteered for two interviews in their home, following the same protocol for permissions and information gathering. With this addition of one male and one female in their 30s—one a lifelong member of the UCC, the other a new Christian, and both HMUC members living in the town—the entire focus group achieved a more satisfactory demographic balance.

The nine participants brought a wealth of interests and experiences to the study:

Aura\textsuperscript{150} was at the time of the study a relative newcomer to the congregation and a member of its Official Board. She travels frequently and understands herself to be devoid of prejudice.

\textsuperscript{149} See Appendix One, and sub-appendix G.

\textsuperscript{150} All personal names are pseudonyms. Transcriptions of meetings and interviews identified participants by these pseudonyms only, to preserve confidentiality.
She reaches out to those she meets and hopes – not just to “do good” – but to “make good.” She values a church that is friendly, inclusive, and busy in its mission outreach.

Nancy, a senior member of the group, once sponsored a multi-cultural writing group and learned to appreciate many different perspectives. She is keenly aware of the complexity of protracted inter-cultural disputes and tends to seek common ground, expecting no quick remedies but remaining hopeful that humanity can do better in the future.

Lydia, an active participant in discussions, is a champion of community-minded outreach. She was perceived to have responded emotionally to settler/non-settler confrontations in her own area and at the time of the study still grieved the upheaval. Lydia values the congregation’s busy-ness and expresses a good-humoured understanding that churches sometimes move forward, sometimes backwards, sometimes remain stalled for a time.

David expressed a guarded view of inputs from outside sources in conflicts both domestic and foreign. With his wife, Lydia, he is very committed to serving the needs of others, a commission he accepts from Jesus’ teachings about being a neighbour. David affirms that he is not a “pew-sitter” and welcomes the challenges that come with community living.

Frances, the group’s most senior member, toured Israel twice with Christian travel groups and welcomed into her extended family a Canadian Jew, so she was ready to explain to the group the Jewish point of view as she had seen and experienced it. A longtime member of the congregation, she contributed a great deal over the years to its social activities, and now sees her role as supportive rather than active.

Emily understands herself as activated by a powerful sense of love and forgiveness. She is emotionally affected by the conflict in Israel/Palestine and willing to dream of resolution, but skeptical that such a dream is likely to be fulfilled within her lifetime. Emily expresses a great deal of fondness for HMUC, which offers her comfort, both through its people and in its worship service.

Lorraine describes herself as a fence-sitter, an expression that during the study had some traction with other group members too. She is willing to entertain the complexities of a conflicted situation and through personal experience has come to value being tolerant, taking the long-range view, acting out of love, and controlling anger.

Roslyn is a newcomer both to the Christian faith and to the UCC. She is a scientist, takes an active role in the church, and is an eager participant in conversations on controversial topics. Born in a country that has seen social upheaval caused by war, she brings a young person’s perspective of a complicated world.

Jason went “church shopping” with wife Roslyn shortly after their marriage and both were attracted to HMUC for its sociable, family-like atmosphere and mission outreach. A lifelong
UCC member, he takes an active and responsible role in the congregation. He works in media and brings a historical perspective to discussions.

5.6 Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation Procedures

In accordance with University of Toronto ethics standards, all data was collected onto a password-protected external hard-drive and encrypted for protection against theft or other misuse. The external hard-drive and all hard copy of materials were stored in a secure, fire-proof container, and peer reviewers were asked to conform to identical safety and storage procedures.

To analyze the data, the materials were read several times for complete familiarity with the details and the patterns that emerged (Agar 1980). Following Creswell’s data analysis spiral, data was coded for these emergent patterns, with a view to finding evidence of multiple perspectives within each pattern, so that detailed descriptions of each might be developed and co-related to perspectives on peacebuilding and theological developments on mission as recorded in the literature, especially in UCC sources. During the process of developing a thick description of the case, researcher-observations of participants in the process of choosing were clearly identified.

Referential adequacy for this research was attained in two ways. First, the three peer reviewers were selected for their capacity to critique conclusions drawn from the data (Ely et

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151 Creswell, 150.
152 Ibid, 151.
Elder L.C. provided valuable insight into the land-dispute issues experienced by Henson Mills and its First Nations neighbours, as well as his observations about aboriginal traditions of circle conversations and their growing popularity as a vehicle for inter-cultural understanding. T.B., a retired UCC minister, contributed a deep understanding of the church’s history and ethos, and drew from his interest in congregational structures and communications patterns. D.P. offered insights as a lay person and committed peace-activist with an international network of correspondents. All three, in providing different perspectives, offered challenges that contributed to a multi-layered understanding of the case at hand. Meetings were held as often as necessary and written accounts of discussions kept.

As a second strategy for insuring referential accuracy, participants were invited after data-gathering discussions to a fifth meeting for general review and “member checking” (Ely et al., 1991, among others), that is, participants were provided with transcripts of their data input and summaries of preliminary findings with regard to the theology they expressed to obtain their comments on accuracy and suggestions for refinement of the language or possible alternate interpretations. When the entire case study was written, a final debriefing session gave participants the opportunity for feedback about its accuracy and completeness, with further opportunity for online correspondence. Participants were informed about the online

153 Ibid, 208.
154 The First Nations elder and I met separately, to allow for a different kind of conversation but also to accommodate our schedules.
155 Cresswell, 208.
availability of the final thesis, and I promised to keep the group informed about when and how they might access that material.
Chapter 6 - Discovery

6.1 Predispositions: Distress, Confusion, Hope

During the first meeting, after consent forms were signed and general information questionnaires completed, I asked focus group participants to describe their congregation, and consensus gradually disclosed that HMUC is a “busy,” “interesting” and sometimes “challenging” church with “warm and caring” members. Aura said the congregation was mission-minded and, when prompted, explained that mission for her meant “busy” with Messy Church, Sunday School, Church Council, etc. Throughout this introductory meeting, I cultivated a comfortable atmosphere so participants, who knew one another from previous activities, could develop trust in this researcher bringing them a wealth of challenging information to discuss. I endeavoured to openly and confidently provide information and answer questions to facilitate participants’ sense of ease, cooperation and confidentiality.

With all seven participants at the next meeting, Kegan and Laskow Lahey’s “Ten Propositions for Communication” was distributed and read, as follows:

1. There is probably merit to my perspective.
2. My perspective may not be entirely accurate.
3. There is some coherence, if not merit, to the other's perspective.
4. There may be more than one legitimate interpretation.
5. The other person's view of my viewpoint is important information to my assessing whether I am right or identifying what merit there is to my viewpoint.
6. Our conflict may be the result of separate commitments each of us holds, including commitments we may not always be aware we hold.
7. Both of us have something to learn from the conversation.
8. We need to have a two-way conversation in order to learn from each other.

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156 Two members, needing to absent themselves from this first meeting, were met separately, with identical procedures followed.
9. If contradictions can be a source of our learning, then we can come to engage not only internal contradictions as a source of learning but interpersonal contradictions (i.e. conflict) as well.

10 The goal of our conversation is for each of us to learn more about ourselves and the other as meaning-makers.¹⁵⁷

Discussion of these propositions followed. Participants were familiar with “Holy Manners” and with nods and short statements agreed to hold respectful conversation and keep open possibilities for learning throughout the study.

To determine group-members’ prior opinions, I asked them to speak about what they had learned or thought about GC41’s policy on Israel/Palestine. Two themes were immediately evident: participants spoke of being “confused” about the conflict, and I observed from their tone a sense of distress regarding ongoing hostilities. Frances, who had toured the Holy Land, spoke sympathetically of Jewish people’s strong defense of “the way they live” as opposed to their religion per se, while Emily remembered the establishment of Israel after the war and her doubts about where the people already there might go. David perceived a “deep hate and deeper concerns” arising from the conflict, and Lydia summarized her impression that “they fight to be right” in the Middle East. Throughout the conversation, I noted references to external opinions: what someone’s husband said about weapons of mass destruction and why Israel occupied the West Bank, what a daughter said about religion causing war, what an Israeli tour-guide said about Palestinians neglecting the land and Israelis planting orange trees “to help make things better for people.”

Despite their intense feelings, participants were unclear about whether the Israeli/Palestinian conflict had been a major part of their congregation’s discussions, and were puzzled about the UCC’s commitment. One suggested that HMUC was “far removed” even from the presbytery, but that people generally refused to engage in serious conversation anyway. David expressed frustration with the IPP Report (which he “read and reread” without much comprehension) and with “the ego we have here thinking we can make any changes at all over there.” He likened Canadians fostering changes in the complicated affairs of the Middle East to changing the colour of icing on a cupcake. “In a way,” he explained, “it’s a frustration on my part that we can’t do anything.”

Lorraine seemed to echo others’ thoughts by describing the conflict as a serious one that, unfortunately, was characterized by lack of listening on both sides. Then, she edged toward a third theme for the conversation: hope. “I really don’t feel I have much hope for a solution, when people get their backs up—” she paused, then continued, “We have this thing around here with the natives and so on. It’s called the Grandmothers’ Tea and the conversation’s good. It’s a small way in, compared to the situation in the Middle East, but it’s a start.”

6.2 UCC Peacebuilding, Two Facets of Israel

At the end of the round-table discussion, I asked participants to hold their opinions in the spirit of the ten propositions, to participate in conversation without a desire to control or win, and to turn attention to the UCC’s recommendations on peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. Especially to reach out to visual learners, I presented three short videos. The first featured

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158 At one of our subsequent meetings, participants recalled the meeting with one of the IPP Report authors, and the controversy that ensued; none, however, had been present at that meeting.
Senior program officer Bruce Gregersen explaining GC41’s decision to accept the *IPP Report*. He emphasized three facts: first, there was lengthy debate before 75 to 80 per cent of commissioners voted their support; second, the report distinguished between *boycott* from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (which the report rejected) and *economic action* against illegal settlement goods; third, the UCC does not force but encourages members’ reflection and personal action. The second video, entitled “Visit Israel: You’ll Never Be the Same” showed Israel as a tourist destination. The third, “Israel’s Apartheid Wall,” by an Australian Christian group, showed the effects the separation barrier has on Palestinians and their relationship with Israelis. I observed participants watching attentively and making notes that I gathered as data.

Participants received the first video without comment. They were more engaged with the Israeli tourism-video, agreeing it was very positive but a sales technique, even “propaganda” as one noted. The video on the separation barrier drew more responses, most of them sympathetic to Palestinians. Two likened the barrier to the Berlin Wall. Emily summarized the group’s feelings: “My overall impression after both videos is one of sadness—sometimes, especially with the video of the wall, they give me feelings of hopelessness for both peoples.” Nancy called it a blot on the landscape which, with the settlements, represented “a sad and horrible division between peoples,” swaying her sympathies to Palestinians. But she also expressed some hopefulness: “Israel was established as a Jewish state by the allies after

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160 Infinity Concepts, “Visit Israel, You’ll Never Be the Same” (YouTube: 2008), accessed June 2014.

161 Sonjakarkar, “Israel’s Apartheid Wall” (YouTube: 2008), accessed June 2014.
WWII, and they deserved it after how they were treated in the Second World War. Solutions, if we could find them, would apply in many situations, even the Six Nations.”

6.3 Peacebuilding Options

6.3.1 Investment in Zatoun

To initiate discussion on positive investment in Palestinian companies, I offered participants samples of Zatoun olive oil and spices, which are legally produced in Palestine and supported by the UCC’s Unsettling Goods campaign, whose literature I distributed. Participants viewed an interview with Robert Massoud, a Canadian Christian from Palestine who suggests consumers purchase and share Zatoun products for “positive intervention” to build bridges and relationships with Israel/Palestine. While I observed generally positive responses from participants, I also noted a divide between the women’s perceptions and David’s, the group’s only male. Referring to his earlier comment about Canadians attempting change in the Middle East, he questioned Massoud’s desire to bring peace by marketing Zatoun: “After two thousand years of no peace,” he challenged, “this can somehow be the answer?”

The women, however, seemed cautiously positive about Massoud’s enterprise and efforts at “building bridges.” “He’s heading in the right direction,” Lydia said, with approving nods from others. Nancy agreed, “I was very impressed with what he said, that if peace could

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162 Robert Massoud [interview with Lorna Dueck], Context. “Does Peace-making Have a Spiritual/Religious Dimension?” (YouTube: 2013), accessed April 2014. Massoud spoke of the diaspora of Christian Palestinians, whom he judged to have more opportunities to leave Palestine than Arabs or Muslims. The focus group made no comment about the problems either group faced.
actually be accomplished in Israel/Palestine, it would lead to world peace, because everything that causes battles seems to be there—the religious differences and the battle over land.” One wondered why other such ventures were not initiated by Palestinians, and another questioned the long-term effectiveness of Zatoun for peacebuilding: “I don’t see how it can help in peace. But I can see it restore Palestinian self-respect, because they’re actually doing something.”

6.3.2 Come-and-See Tourism

At the next meeting, I welcomed Rev Dr Barbara Fullerton to speak to the group about her experience of a come-and-see tour conducted through a UCC conference. I had previously arranged with Fullerton to speak for twenty minutes from a script she prepared, then vetted with another member of the tour, and to answer questions from the group. She explained her desire to take the tour and see Palestinians living in occupied territories. Among her slides was a map showing 55 per cent of the land occupied by Jews after the war and the displacement of three-quarters of a million people. She showed how the land proposed for Palestinians had been steadily reduced over the years, particularly through the Israeli settlement program.

Fullerton described many experiences during her nine-day tour. She spoke of displaced families keeping keys to their former homes, hoping someday to have the right of return for refugees—an international convention forestalled by Israelis. She told of interviews with a young woman from the UK who immigrated to Israel, then turned to advocacy work for Palestinians suffering intolerable injustices. Fullerton heard of Bedouin children walking ten kilometers to school, in danger of being struck by settlers intentionally driving off the road to
commit hit-and-runs, sometimes with lethal consequences. She spoke of a “typical story” of a Palestinian family whose home was uninhabitable, with the water turned off in an effort to run family-members off their land. She showed a slide introducing the family and explained that settlers beat the pregnant wife and caused a miscarriage. Fullerton described workers lining up at checkpoints, women dying when prevented from travelling to obstetricians, children jailed for playing in their backyards, families and businesses ruined as the separation barrier cuts essential life-lines for travel and communication.

I observed tension in the group during the presentation, which unexpectedly extended for most of the two-hour meeting. Questions and comments from the group indicated what I judged to be outrage, that the Canadian government supports Israel and western media outlets may not be reporting fairly “on both sides” of the conflict. Some participants commented on a shared guilt they had regarding the question, “What did we do to the Jewish people?” Another recalled, “There’s also this fear of Islamic people.”

Fullerton cautioned against demonizing Jews. “It is a fact that Jewish money has caused a lot of the immigration and so on. But I really don’t want us to get sucked into the spirit of Matthew’s gospel.” Instead, she reflected on cooperation. “Can we find the way forward in finding our common heritage? We’re all people of the book, and we each hold a piece of the puzzle. We may look at God differently, but we are coming from a very ancient history that

\[163\] David spoke of wanting to take notes but “every few seconds you [Dr Fullerton] would say something more that bothered me, upset me, that it was hard to jot anything down.”
has a common thread.” She ended with a plea for boycott, relating the present situation in Israel/Palestine to South Africa in the early 1990s.

Notebook responses indicated participants had absorbed a great number of Fullerton’s illustrations, especially about appropriation of Palestinian land and abuse of pregnant women and children. One participant offered a challenge and a solution: “Is the United Church doing enough? Get the word out. Who is controlling the media?” Another was even more impassioned: “We must boycott the businesses that are ‘funding’ the Israeli ‘army.’ Boycotting is the answer. Get them where it counts—money.” Then she added, “TO RAISE AWARENESS WE HAVE TO SPEAK UP WHEN WE SEE WRONG.”

One notebook entry recalled the theme of hope. “If Apartheid could be ended in South Africa, perhaps we can help Palestinian people to regain their lands – or at least a fair share of them. We have to gain a better understanding of Islam—to lessen the fear that so many North American people hold. And somehow we must get over the guilt that we still carry, knowing how badly the Jewish people were treated during the Holocaust. Certainly, anything we can do to help the economic situation in Palestine seems reasonable. Can we hope and pray that God can help?”

6.3.3 Come-and See Follow-up

As a researcher, I worried about this meeting’s extension from the allotted time and the intended focus, come-and-see tourism. I pondered whether I should have stopped Fullerton
and asked her to return to the script, and the schedule. With the presentation over-extended, I was pressed for time to introduce materials supporting other recommendations. I could only distribute materials from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and the Canadian Israel Jewish Association (CIJA), asking participants to read at home. I was forced to abandon discussion on the Unsettling Goods materials distributed at the previous session. Now, I needed to ask participants to attend an extra hour during our next session to cover other planned materials. Above all, I was sensitive to a remark from my thesis proposal committee: a great deal was being asked of participants in this study (all of whom, I acknowledged, were seniors—some with trouble sitting and focusing for longer periods of time.)

Thesis advisor Dr. Couture advised that participants’ reactions to the presentation offered an unexpectedly rich source of data. She supported my choice of not stopping the presentation, but advised that I spend all the time required at the next meeting to help participants examine their reactions to the emotional presentation, even if I sacrificed other planned material.\(^{164}\)

When the group reconvened, I asked participants to write in their notebook three words that expressed their reaction to the last presentation. Many expressed sentiments such as \textit{sad}, \textit{amazed}, or \textit{interested}. Lydia offered that the presentation was \textit{upsetting}, and she’d been forced to \textit{judge}. As she read her notes, she explained, “When you’re bombarded with that

kind of information it’s very hard not to [she raised her arms, as if reacting in alarm] judge. 
But you have to maintain perspective that there’s always two sides to every story. And 
change, hopefully change will bring peace and hope and people working together will bring 
change.” Nancy’s three words were terse: dominance of the Israelis, who pushed the 
Palestinians, and unfair. David shared the worrisome question, “What do I believe, with the 
media so one-sided?” Aura stated that she had felt shocked, disturbed, and helpless. But she 
added that after reading CIJA’s materials, she no longer felt helpless but uplifted.

6.3.3.1 Interpolation: Themes of Love, Justice, Communication and Care

Next, I asked participants to write what they felt the gospels suggested about dealing with 
complex issues such as the conflict under study. While the group’s responses will be 
examined more thoroughly in the next chapter, it is helpful to reflect here that five of the 
seven mentioned love in their responses; for example, “Love one another as I have loved 
you,” and “Love your enemies.”

Other themes arose, and for the first time, the word justice surfaced. “Seek justice, love 
kindness, and walk humbly with your God,” Lydia offered. At first, David spoke of 
forgiveness and acceptance, but expressed misgivings about extending those virtues “from a 
distance.” Later he reminded the group of the word evil, explaining, “It’s fine to say ‘I forgive 
you,’ but the killing of children [in the Israel/Palestinian conflict] speaks of evil.” He ended 
without further conclusion. Nancy seemed decisive, “We must learn to care for both sides.”
Aura concurred, adding that she found CIJA’s booklet “Seek Peace and Pursue It” interesting for its cooperative projects, showing that different groups really could live together.

Before moving on, I encouraged the group to write any lingering feelings they had about the presentation. Entries noted the presentation was overwhelming and upsetting, and probably “one-sided.” Interestingly, however, at a later meeting for member-checking all agreed that the presentation had been effective and memorable.

6.3.4 Economic Action, Grassroots Organizations

When reviewing materials from the Unsettling Goods campaign, participants argued that the UCC’s entire economic action project was too demanding and unfocused; it must be admitted, however, that the conversation was largely carried by three participants while others signaled by their body language a general sense of disengagement. I observed, however, that several suggestions gained the group’s attention. All agreed they disliked the word boycott, some intensely. Participants stated that they had no need for products from Ahava, Soda Stream, and Keter Plastics and found difficulty distinguishing products from the occupied territories from those of Israel. Finally, they agreed the UCC had done a poor job of making consumer action easy by giving information that was too “vague” or “general.” “The easier you make it for someone, the more chance they’ll follow through,” one observed. Another declared, to general agreement, “I would rather be going to a positive thing.”
The group found two documents that fitted their desire for positivity: CIJA’s letter inviting representatives to GC40 to cooperate with Jewish neighbours by voting against boycott, and CIJA’s “Seek Peace and Pursue It” booklet (2012). Aura explained her rejection of the Unsettling Goods campaign in favour of CIJA’s proposals:

Originally I was for it [economic action], but now I’m not so sure. I do not want to burn bridges we have worked so hard to develop. I don’t want to alienate ourselves from the Jewish community. I feel we’re just doing the same thing, we’re just using discrimination.

Lydia commented that projects seen to help “both groups” [Israelis and Palestinians] were preferable to boycott, which she said implied a judgment against one group. Aura agreed, saying she did not wish to be a fence-sitter, that in her younger years she had protested injustices but now she was more “cautious.” David proposed participants should behave as “typical Canadians,” not sitting on the fence but occupying neutral ground and holding a mirror to the conflicted parties in Israel/Palestine, “to show what they’re doing.”

6.3.4.1 Interpolation: Canadian Angst

Suddenly, and in sharp contrast to what I observed as a half-hearted participation in conversation about the Unsettled Goods campaign, participant voices were now insistent and impassioned. Lydia emphasized supporting both Israelis and Palestinians, adding that most citizens are innocent and made vulnerable by the wrongful actions of others. “Average people don’t have the power to control what’s going on,” she said. “They’re told this is how it’s going to be. We don’t like it when our government does this to us either!” (“Yes! But they’ve been doing it!” another participant added.)

165 See Appendix One, Sub-appendix J.
In the general disorder of the conversation, Frances drew from her trips to the Holy Land exclaiming, “People are territorial! Every one of us is!” Then she concluded, to general agreement, “I keep getting this muddled with our situation in Henson Mills—that’s my problem!” After a number of suggestions about the role of territoriality and religion in entrenched conflicts, Nancy added reflectively that she understood from personal experience the importance of land. She and her husband remained on “the tail end” of the farm they once held and while moving into town might be convenient, that tiny little scrap of the land left to them was vital to their sense of wellbeing. Speaking of Israel/Palestine she wondered, “Will some of these things right themselves in time? It seems to us a long time since 1947, but it takes a long time for things to come to some sort of balance, and there are so many areas of worry.” She paused momentarily before adding, “And I think I’ve got to stop this. I’m going to drive myself insane.”

Then conversation shifted to the global scene, and I observed participants becoming increasingly agitated as they named countries where territorial conflicts remained entrenched until warring factions found their own solutions. “And we’re still dealing with stuff here!” said one. “You can’t change power unless you have huge numbers of people to protest,” said another. “Exactly what’s happening in Henson Mills!” exclaimed yet another. “Our government! Do something!”

Suddenly, the conversation was brought back to the previous concern, “So, Israel and Palestine?” The response was terse: “The Israelis just built a wall and that’s that!”
Conversation—now a disorganized jumble of comments—shifted for a few minutes to topics such as the role of greed, money, and oil in the dynamics of conflict, until I observed no new material and suggested a break to set up a video.

The group turned its attention to a video showing a particular concern of the UCC, one brought to the floor of GC41 shortly before the vote on the IPP Report. The video featured Cindy Blackstock, a First Nations activist, speaking on behalf of aboriginal children about their need for safe and fully functional schools funded to the same level as off-reserve schools. After the video, two participants stated their concern over the issues raised and wondered why more was not offered through the UCC’s “Gifts With Vision” program. Others raised doubts about how money is spent on Canada’s reserves and how tax money is invested, although words of admiration and encouragement for successful First Nations communities were also offered. But the sense of negativity that had been building during the morning’s conversation to me now seemed pervasive. One participant recorded in her notebook this judgment of Blackstock’s presentation: “Biased. I’m skeptical.”

A brief but telling event occurred after this meeting ended. Two women lingered to help me pack up my materials. In contrast to the emotionally charged discussions of the morning, they chatted pleasantly about the value of the Grandmothers’ Tea, which they saw as helpful in enabling First Nations and Henson Mills citizens to share reflections. Then, expressing

gratitude for the informative meetings, they offered a cheerful “Merry Christmas!” and disappeared out into a sudden snow-shower, leaving me to lock up the empty church.

6.4 Decisions for Peace

At the group’s fourth meeting, participants arrived ready to vote on their preferred strategies for peacebuilding, as recommended by the IPP Report and accepted by GC41. I began with a brief clarification about how voting should proceed. Participants would vote first on behalf of the congregation and, second, according to their own personal preferences; a score of “1” meant the voter gave the recommendation a very high preference—at the top of his or her list—and “5” meant a very low preference, at the bottom of the list. Participants briefly reviewed the meaning of each recommendation and the materials used to illustrate how that recommendation might be implemented.

Before discussions began, I reminded participants to consider only recommendations for the HMUC congregation during the first round, to recall earlier descriptions of the congregation, and to offer a faith-based rationale for each choice. While scores for the congregation and those for the individual him- or herself were to be kept separate, it became obvious when participants offered their rationale that this separation was challenging for them. Thus the following graph presents the action plans, first for the congregation and then for the individuals, with all options ranked according to preference. For each plan, a score of 7 (i.e. 7 participants each scoring 1) indicates the highest preference for a recommendation, and 35
(i.e. 7 participants scoring 5), the weakest preference. After scores were recorded and tallied, participants were invited to explain their contribution while holding to the understanding that one might decide to change a score as conversation clarified certain issues; nonetheless, multiple and contradictory perspectives were acceptable and even desirable, as the “Ten Propositions for Communication” illustrated (page 80, above).
Graph 6.1: Selections in order of preference from the seven-member focus group

Option #1: Support grassroots organizations promoting improved relations between Israel and Palestine
Option #2: Support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Israel-Palestine
Option #3: Invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy
Option #4: Engage in Come-and-See tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy
Option #5: Take economic action (“boycott”) against one or more products from Israeli-occupied territories

When discussion faltered and it was clear that no new data would be disclosed, I presented for the group’s consideration Recommendation #8 from the IPP Report (subsection 7). This recommendation, approximated above as option #1 for participants, is not clearly listed for individuals at the congregational level to consider but may have been intended chiefly for policy makers. The recommendation was distributed and read as follows:

This recommendation appeared in the IPP Report, separate from other recommendations, and it encouraged members to assist peace by “[identifying] the importance of trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis by (a) encouraging stronger

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167 For clarity and ease of voting, options presented to participants are a précis of recommendations offered in the IPP Report (see Appendix Two).
connections between United Church programs and organizations that build understanding between Palestinians and Israelis [and by] (b) exploring and supporting initiatives for increasing connections in Canada between Palestinian Canadians and Jewish Canadians.”

Without further comment, I invited participants to consider the recommendation and vote according to preferences, first, as part of the congregation’s peacebuilding strategy and, second, as part of their own strategy. Two participants needed to leave before this discussion, but planned to consider the recommendation and vote during their one-on-one interview. From the five remaining participants, the votes indicated a fairly positive 11 for the congregation, and a surprising 5 for themselves—a unanimous high preference, although two expressed some hesitation about follow-through because of the absence of Jews or Muslims in their community. David, however, expressed great pleasure with the possibility that “Yes, we can make a difference” by implementing such an option. Explaining his own reticence about the “fairness” of intervening elsewhere when we have “our own problems with the natives,” he decided “I think to me it [the new recommendation] is right where I’m at.”

Throughout the morning, I observed the group’s keen interest in results as they were formulated. Throughout the discussion, each participant offered thoughtful commentary on his or her choices, although many struggled to express a faith-based rationale. A schedule for interviews was drawn up, with the understanding that participants could then clarify and

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168 The two absentees for this discussion answered variously. Frances was troubled and confused about numbers generally, and during the interview suggested that she could no longer process the information due to her age. She suggested, however, that it would be helpful to invite members of the other faiths to talk about their families, etc. See discussion below. Nancy found the recommendation for building stronger relationships between Canadian Jews and Palestinians or Muslims “interesting,” but was unsure about how suitable activities could be arranged for a small town with little to no representation of these populations. She herself was too busy to pursue such an activity, but she suggested a “Peace Picnic” would be a good way to start building bridges.
expand on the data so far presented. Thus, as the fourth meeting ended, there was a sense of both closure and anticipation of a new level of investigation. All participants expressed satisfaction and gratitude for the discovery process.

6.5 Younger Demographic

The seven-member group regretted the absence of younger people, so the eventual nomination of two 30-year-olds was warmly welcomed. Rosalyn and Jason had been present when the initial invitation to join the study was made at HMUC, but did not volunteer because of work and family commitments. Nonetheless, when I personally invited their participation, the couple eagerly arranged two meetings in their home. Both showed extraordinary interest in conversation on the IPP Report and recommendations, so the two meetings scheduled exclusively for their input did not seem inadequate when compared to the five meetings and personal interviews dedicated to data-gathering with the seven-member group. As previously, the couple read and signed letters of permission during the first meeting, completed the fact-finding questionnaire, and agreed to audio-recording, which I determined would be sufficient for a three-way conversation.

Jason and Rosalyn spoke of HMUC as an extension of their family. They expressed pride in their involvement in church activities and regretted that other young adults are not as keen, reasoning that where church-satisfaction is concerned, “It all depends on what you put into it.” This couple put a good deal of commitment and interest into congregational life.
Reading summaries of the *IPP Report* and its five recommendations for peacebuilding, both expressed surprise that the UCC’s efforts extended to several recommendations and did not involve a complete boycott of Israel, as they previously supposed. “I knew about boycott,” Rosalyn explained. “And I had a feeling there should be other action, because a church organization would want to do more than that. So these other recommendations make sense as well.” She approved of the other recommendations as strong possibilities for action: “These are about education, about other ways of supporting, not just ‘Let’s throw money at the problem.’” But she had strong reservations about the effectiveness of economic action, recalling other “unsuccessful” boycotts such as the historic protest against French missile-testing in the South Pacific by targeting French wines.

I showed the couple the three introductory videos,\(^{169}\) and Bruce Gregersen’s explanation of GC41’s decision to accept the *IPP Report* and its recommendations drew most attention. They immediately grasped the intent of economic action. “There’s a difference between the boycott movement, which might not be as effective, and economic action, which is something a little more targeted,” Jason explained. He valued Gregersen’s explanation that the UCC did not tell its members to boycott, but rather encouraged discussion and education—a distinction, they agreed, that had eluded their congregation. Rosalyn also experienced what she called “an a-ha moment”:

> As a Christian I do not intentionally break the law. There’s a question of the morality we should have as Christians. So going to New York City, would I ever intentionally and knowingly buy a Louis Vuitton bag from the back of a van? No. Why? Because it’s probably fake or stolen. Gregersen said that we do not support buying illegal products from an illegal land and I had not seen it that way before. You’re talking about the creation of something and the intent to make money off a situation that is fundamentally

\(^{169}\)“Visit Israel, You’ll Never Be the Same,” “Israel’s Apartheid Wall,” and “No to Boycott, Yes to Economic Action,” presented in the same order as to the seven-member group.
illegal. And even if you make something in a completely legal way, if it’s done on illegal land or in an illegal place it’s still illegal.

To get a better grasp of the other recommendations, they asked me to share my materials and work through the list, including the separate recommendation for encouraging trust-building relationships between Israelis and Palestinians and Canadian Jews and Canadian Palestinians as posed during the last meeting of the focus group. After offering the Ten Propositions for Communication, I shared information, while the couple remained quiet, as if to absorb all the details.

When the materials supporting each recommendation were shared, I mentioned Blackstock’s presentation and asked about the challenges Canadians encounter regarding occupied land. “I’d say everyone is living on occupied land, of some sort, depending on how far back you go,” Jason suggested and Rosalyn agreed. Having emigrated from war-torn eastern-Europe, she was familiar with historical patterns of migration and occupation and the complexities of integration and assimilation.

Rosalyn acknowledged her lack of knowledge regarding relationships between First Nations and their neighbours, estimating that many Canadians were similarly ill-informed. She regretted a perceived lack of information and conversation on the conflict and thought she would appreciate the Grandmothers’ Tea and efforts to build relationship. Having been raised in a white middle-class setting, she recognized that many details about the conflict remained beyond her grasp; nonetheless, she spoke vehemently about economic progress in the area being brought to a standstill when “natives were causing a ruckus” protesting about land-
claims. For the next meeting, the couple promised to view the Blackstock video and study other materials provided, as the focus group had done.

While the first meeting focused on sharing information and research materials, Jason and Rosalyn used this second meeting for broadly expressing their discoveries about the UCC’s efforts at peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. They described Blackstock’s information about conditions in aboriginal schools as “surprising, for Canada.” They made connections with recent television programs viewed, noting particularly a feature on Palestine and the lack of neighborliness between Jewish Israelis and Arab Palestinians. “Voting” then followed the same regime as previously, accompanied by their reasonings for each decision, which will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter. For now it is helpful to identify their preferences (ranked in order below – “1” for high preference, “5” for low); to plot and compare the scores of the seven-member and nine-(7 + 2)-member groups (see graphs 6.2, 6.3 below); to plot the preferences of the entire nine-member group (6.4); then to trace the themes that arose during the conversation with the two younger participants.
• To support grassroots organization(s) promoting improved relations between Israel and Palestine.
  recommendation for the congregation – 3 and 1
  strategy for the individual – 1 and 1

• To invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy:
  recommendation for the congregation – 3 and 3
  strategy for the individual – 2 and 2

• To engage in “Come-and-See” tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy.
  recommendation for the congregation – 1 and 2
  strategy for the individual – 4 and 3

• To take economic action (“boycott”) directed against one or more products from the Israeli-occupied territories.
  recommendation for the congregation – 4 and 5
  strategy for the individual – 1 and 2

• To support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel.
  recommendation for the congregation – 3 and 4
  strategy for the individual – 3 and 3
Graph 6.2: Comparison of focus group selections for the congregation (in order of preference, averaged to control for sample size)

Option #1: Support grassroots organizations promoting improved relations between Israel and Palestine
Option #2: Support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Israel-Palestine
Option #3: Invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy
Option #4: Engage in Come-and-See tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy
Option #5: Take economic action (“boycott”) against one or more products from Israeli-occupied territories
Graph 6.3: Comparison of focus group’s selections as individuals (in order of preference, averaged to control for sample size)

Option #1: Support grassroots organizations promoting improved relations between Israel and Palestine
Option #2: Support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Israel-Palestine
Option #3: Invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy
Option #4: Engage in Come-and-See tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy
Option #5: Take economic action (“boycott”) against one or more products from Israeli-occupied territories
Graph 6.4: Selections in order of preference from the 9-member focus group

Option #1: Support grassroots organizations promoting improved relations between Israel and Palestine
Option #2: Support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Israel-Palestine
Option #3: Invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy
Option #4: Engage in Come-and-See tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy
Option #5: Take economic action (“boycott”) against one or more products from Israeli-occupied territories
6.5.1 Emerging Themes: Effectiveness, Conversation, Love

Rosalyn and Jason spoke about their preference for effective peacebuilding strategies, as opposed to what they saw as the typical “Christian way of doing things, throwing money at a situation for a bandaid solution.” When money was required, it should be considered seed money, Jason suggested, and given with trust that people “on the ground” know their own needs. Christian hope and love must respect that needy people want “a hand up rather than a hand-out.” Applying a cost/benefit assessment, the couple gave come-and-see tourism a low priority, preferring the “higher impact” of assistance through grassroots organizations.

They saw conversation between conflicted parties as key to creating peace, and Rosalyn suggested that such conversation, as between Israelis and Palestinians, could only be supported, not imposed, by Canadians—although she saw possibilities for outsiders offering different perspectives to that conversation. While both participants were generally positive about building better relationships with multi-faith others in Canada, they were tentative about how to accomplish anything; nonetheless, both affirmed that conversation leads to better education. “You’re more likely to not like what you don’t understand, or to misconstrue things if you don’t understand,” Rosalyn concluded.

As with the previous group, love of neighbour was an important theme arising from this conversation. Jason explained that when he was “looking out for the other,” he supported grassroots organizations that were known to cooperate with the other’s needs. But a
peacebuilding strategy promising reward for the would-be peacebuilder seemed to him less likely to cohere with the work of “Jesus the peacemaker,” and thus less likely to exemplify his commandment of love.

Concerning the separate recommendation regarding “identifying the importance of trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis” (page 94, above), Jason voted, “One for the congregation—I think that’s something they would like to get involved with—and 2 for me. I think it’s a good idea, but I don’t know I have the connections or the wherewithal to go out and accomplish that.” Rosalyn voted next: “I put a 3 for me and a 2 for the congregation. I could see the congregation being open to that; for me I’d be open to it too. It’s good to try and get conversation happening here, I just don’t know how that actually would help things there [Israel/Palestine] as much.”

6.6. Conclusion

Comparing the differences between the younger participants’ scores and those of the seven-member group, voting patterns appear reasonably consistent: the most preferred peacebuilding strategy involved support for grassroots organizations promoting improved relations between Israel and Palestine and the least preferred for taking economic action. The notable exception was Rosalyn’s and Jason’s decision to engage as individuals in boycotting (they would not recommend this strategy to their congregation.) All nine individuals contributed significant insights into their dispositions toward the UCC’s recommendations and appeared elated by the discoveries they made and shared. Speaking for Jason, who had departed for work at the
conclusion of their voting session, Rosalyn seemed to echo what others said: “I feel I’ve learned a lot and I know Jason has too. This was great. I’m happy we did this.”
Chapter 7: Reasonings on Mission

7.1 Introduction

With a predisposition toward a theology of conversation and no use for Soda Stream, Ahava or Keter products, I did not consider myself a boycotter or economic activist against industries in the Israeli-occupied territories. Yet I stood for a long moment in the cosmetics aisle, holding a box of olive-oil soap for my chronically dry skin. Shouldn’t I look at the product’s origins? Was this a moment of crisis, or just curiosity? Would I become a consumer activist if I saw an “Ahava” label and decided I didn’t need the soap after all? Or would I accuse myself of surrendering to “the spectre of fear” and “tippy-toeing around the truth” about Israel’s oppression of Palestinians if I made the purchase anyway?\(^{170}\) Decisions about buying soap had never been this complicated. I turned the box over, read the label, then sighed with relief. “Made in the South of France.” I bought three.\(^{171}\)

Before I began my ministry-in-action study, boycott sometimes took a disproportionate amount of my thinking about the *IPP Report*. And boycott (not the report’s other recommendations) dominated the press and conversation at the grassroots level whenever talk turned to the UCC’s activities in the Middle East, as often demonstrated in the *Observer*. But I did not expect the HMUC focus group’s sense of surprise and welcome upon discovering the full range of *IPP Report* recommendations. Until this study, they assumed GC41 decided to boycott all Israeli products and then tried to foist this political act on congregations. With recommendations to support grassroots organizations, buy products from peace-minded Palestinian manufacturers, or work to encourage stronger ties between Canadian Jews and Palestinians, participants found strategies to cohere with their sense of mission, as their selections demonstrate. But the boycott issue is useful, *via negativa*, for distinguishing what their sense of mission is from what it is not.


\(^{171}\) Researcher’s notebook observations.
7.2 Mission: Do No Harm

“We may never arrogate it to ourselves to delineate mission too sharply and too self-confidently,” Bosch writes; otherwise, mission may become “incarcerated” by our own projections or preferences. Better to settle for some approximations of what mission is, he advises. It is not inappropriate, therefore, that participants in this study were non-specific about how they defined a mission-minded congregation, especially regarding missional activities in Israel/Palestine. Seeing these activities in the company of boycott, which they initially rejected, participants seemed to choose as their primary missional concern to do no harm or, I would conclude, to do unto others as they would have done unto themselves. As in conversations about boycott against South Africa or more recently against Bangladesh (Lorraine’s concern), the group’s sentiment rested with innocent people struggling to make a livelihood in trying circumstances. Lydia echoed others’ concern: “It’s very unjust and unfair when all they’re trying to do is raise their families and raise a garden, and provide food for people. I’m sure these people who make these products aren’t terrible horrible people. There’s good in everybody and it’s harsh to tar them all with the same brush.”

Beyond this well-recognized concern about collateral damage to the innocent, Aura emphasized, “I do not want to alienate ourselves from the Jewish community. I do not want to burn bridges we’ve worked so hard to develop.” Nancy spoke about her fear that boycott was easily misinterpreted: “I just feel that if you start boycotting things because they come from a place, especially if we’re talking about Jewish people and their productivity, that’s just likely

to edge into the notion that we’re opposed to them.” During her interview, she responded to the question of whether she feared the perception of racism: “All someone would see is that we’re boycotting a product from these people. It wouldn’t necessarily be understood, and it might cause more difficulties than it ever could solve. So about racism, yes, because I wouldn’t want Jewish people to say or to feel that we were boycotting something because it was from Israel and therefore it was from Jewish people and therefore we’d be saying ‘You’re bad people.’”

Here Aura and Nancy seem to concur with Lochhead that mission (however defined) must not concern itself only with structures whereby the wealthy and powerful align themselves against the poor and the excluded, but must also consider the world of religious and cultural diversity where mission occurs. Lydia was uncomfortable with the notion of being “judgmental” of people “caught up in circumstances beyond their control”—often through governmental action, not citizens’ volition. Both seemed to fear that, if religious and cultural others in Israel or Canada found their work or livelihood threatened by boycott, the perception of anti-Semitism would ignite. What would become of hopes for discovering common-ground for peacebuilding?

174 To these women, action against products because they come from a place rather than, for example, because they do hard to consumers, requires what peer reviewer T.B. calls “a high level of abstraction” and thus becomes a risky proposition, especially where racism might be suspected as a motive.
7.2.1 Complications in Choosing Less Harm

Discerning missional activities without causing harm, however, presents considerable difficulty when two types of harm must be weighed, as Rosalyn demonstrated. She declared skepticism about boycott based on her perceptions of ineffectiveness, but then chose boycott as an “easy” choice based on a moral decision against wrongdoing: buying goods made on illegally occupied land equals buying stolen or fake goods and harming the one whose rights are infringed. This reprehensible act should be avoided, whether one can effect a change of heart in the manufacturer or not. But during an examination of the reasonings offered by the previous group, Rosalyn recognized how their decision against boycott might be equally coherent when they considered Jesus’ commandment to love one’s neighbour as one’s self and the social costs and lost opportunities associated with damaged relationships between UCC and Canadian Jews. She found the different perspectives “fascinating” and shared her appreciation of the complexity of harm-avoidance, and perhaps the error of what Bonhoeffer calls cheap (or “easy”) grace:

> Here I am saying that boycotting would make me a better person, but that’s not the point of this. Yes that would be nice, and yes I would understand things and yes I could be an advocate, but how much is that going to help people? And that’s why I’m doing this, considering what’s going to have the most benefit…. When someone says “That [decision to boycott] is just an easy decision to make,” that makes sense. But then you look at what the impact would be in terms of the relationship with the Jewish faith leaders, then it makes me question that—it kind of makes me reconsider whether boycott is going to affect families.

Interestingly, Rosalyn did not change her vote about participating in economic action. Here she illustrates an important aspect of any congregation’s reflections about missional activities:

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175 This conversation took place between Rosalyn and the researcher, after she and Jason had “voted” for their choices of peacebuilding strategies.
conversation is perceived as successful when better understanding, rather than complete consensus, is achieved.\textsuperscript{176}

An interview with Lydia afforded a glimpse at further complexity in the harm-avoidance strategy, because her rejection of boycott did not indicate willingness to buy the targeted products. She demonstrated this anomaly with reasonings that portray her struggle to discover a peacebuilding action appropriate to her sense of mission:

Boycotting something is pretty drastic and dramatic. It’s very definitely taking one side of the issue and I don’t do that anymore. . . . I just wouldn’t buy the product. I just wouldn’t engage in something that’s destructive, but if I felt strongly enough about it [she paused], I just wouldn’t do it. It’s hard to explain. [Researcher: “It sounds like you’re on the edge of boycott.”] No, no! I just wouldn’t buy the product!

Such nuances in consumer behaviour may elude boycott proponents, who favour clear choices for moral action and justice against oppression. But for Lydia, I suspect, “just not buying the product” meant anonymously choosing and avoiding public feuds that alienate Jewish neighbours. Instead, she spoke of these neighbours as possible partners in finding “common ground” for peacebuilding. Interestingly, her strategy compares closely with Canadian Anglicans’ choice (2013) to educate the faithful about products from the occupied territories rather than to launch a United-Church-style boycott.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{176} During their final debriefing meeting, participants of the seven-member group expressed their improved understanding of Rosalyn and Jason’s input, though different from their own, noting that they were both strong and intelligent conversation partners.

\textsuperscript{177} See page 47, above.
7.3 Mission: Do Not Promote Self-satisfaction or Isolation

Among participants’ reasonings for supporting grassroots peacebuilding organizations, investing in ethically responsible business in Israel/Palestine, and strengthening relationships between Canadian Jews and Palestinians, I find further instances of via negativa in the argument that mission does not spring from self-importance. Rejecting “the ego” he felt Canadians exhibit in prompting change “over there,” David reflected, “I’d love to solve our own problems and say ‘This is how we did it,’ rather than say ‘You do this,’ or ‘You do that.’” Jason spoke against a different kind of egotism, noting that mission should not involve personal aggrandizement, which too often occurs when “the charitable” conflicts with “the personal.” He explained: “If I’m in the accompaniment program, I’m the one going. And I get the tour out of it.” He also suggested that mission should not involve power over the other. “It’s not me coming in telling others what to do. It’s me giving the support and saying, ‘Do your thing on the ground and since you are there, you know what is needed most.’”

Both positions react against any tendency in mission-minded Christians to proclaim their knowledge of what’s best for the world or to become the church over others, not the church with others. Jason particularly opposed personal payoffs for come-and-see tourists or guardians “policing and judging” those presumed to be oppressors, as he suspected the EAPPI program implies.

But a proper critique of self-satisfaction as both impetus and goal of mission can disclose an isolationist stance, as David suggested in his interview when he refined his position: “I don’t think any of us—individual, Church, Canadian—has the right to give answers to a situation
we’re not personally involved in.” Here, he seems to shade toward a position such as GordW’s, that the affairs of Israel/Palestine may be none of the church’s business and that “meddling” in another country’s affairs is inappropriate. Such sentiments as David’s and Jason’s could be attributed to charity that reflects the premise “do no harm.” But if that charity leads to benevolent detachment, it will be critiqued by peace activists such as Barry K. Morris, who notes that church members often mistake as “justice” their charitable contributions to combat inequality or poverty. In a response to Moderator Gary Patterson’s blog, Morris quotes St Augustine, “Charity is no substitute of justice denied.”

Harold Wells argues that detachment and isolation are incompatible with Christian mission, which must be rooted in the desire and the attempt to follow the life and teachings of Jesus, not just in the laudable goals of promoting justice, love and equality. *Lex sequendi, lex credenda*—the law of following is the law of believing—he insists, and Christian life, ethics and mission must reflect the life of Jesus in order to understand him, as all disciples must strive to understand. Throughout his life and to the extremes of the cross, Jesus labored in the cause of God’s reign, denouncing and resisting efforts of the powerful to subject the lowly. “The reign of God, so central for Jesus, must also be central for his followers, first in terms of practical action, but also primary for any theology of liberation and particularly for any

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178 Emily expressed this issue in terms of respect for other’s challenges, and thus explained her choice of supporting local initiatives in Israel/Palestine. “Sometimes when you’re struggling so hard in your country, and somebody comes and tells you what to do, it depends on how you’re told, how the advice is given. I think they [Israelis and Palestinians] would throw that advice out and say, ‘You people live in a country where things aren’t like what they are here. How can you possibly know how hard it is for us?’”

179 See Moderator’s blog, July 22, 2015, available at www.garypaterson.ca.
Christology,” Wells affirms. How else might UCC members rightly proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, and their mission to “seek justice and resist evil?”

7.4 Theological Base for Mission: Love and Justice

My claim here is that the group’s choices and reasonings indicate their determination to follow the life of Jesus, expressed in their understanding of his life’s work in terms of love first and then justice, although they would probably speak of their understanding of their own role in terms of working toward a tolerable world rather than building up the reign of God. I would wager that their reticence about being more forceful in the cause of peace springs from a humble appreciation of their own limitations in mending complex and persistent conflicts rather than from slothful indifference or tragheit, as Barth would call it. Having listened to the reasonings that participants gave for choosing as suitable to their sense of mission the particular set of peacebuilding strategies named above, I find that love, justice and humility—not detachment—are key.

Unaccustomed to such discourse in their day-to-day lives, the focus group at first had difficulty employing theological language in their conversations. The seniors struggled to articulate their theological basis for peacebuilding, notably after Fullerton’s presentation,

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during the voting procedure, and—though to a lesser degree—during interviews.\footnote{Jason and Rosalyn incorporated their theological reflections into the voting process, separate from the main group.} They seemed puzzled about the source of their discomfort. Aura spoke of her reluctance to reference scripture, not wanting to be seen as a “Bible Thumper.” David saw this reluctance as widespread: “We in the United Church don’t wear our faith on our forehead. I think our faith is shown through actions.” And he critiqued the diminished role of bible-study for adults in contemporary church-life, saying members lack confidence in summoning their knowledge of scripture to make sense of their own decisions. Such hesitancy notwithstanding, the nine participants in this study did explore the theological foundations of their decisions for peacebuilding.

Their sense of mission was perhaps most clearly seen in their reasonings for preferring to support grassroots organizations working to improve relationships between Israelis and Palestinians. It must be said that many in the seniors’ group were influenced by CIJA’s persuasive letter and catalogue, “Seek Peace and Pursue It,”\footnote{See Chapter 9 for a discussion of the impact of rhetorical style.} and were attracted to the grassroots peacebuilding opportunities promoted there, in spite of the fact that those opportunities focused primarily on improving relationships among Israeli Jews, Arabs and Palestinians within Israel rather than relationships between Israelis and Palestinians cut off by the separation barrier or mired in disputes throughout the occupied territories. It is important however to hear the focus group’s reasons for choosing grassroots strategies—reasons which frequently involved love.
Emily emphasized grassroots support as her first choice because “it all comes down to what we do for each other, and that should involve love. Jesus said love your neighbours and forgive them—a lot of forgiving has to be done here, too.” Lorraine echoed this resolve: “Jesus talks about loving your neighbour. That’s the problem, they [Israelis and Palestinians] don’t always love each other and I don’t know how we can change that except, I guess, by supporting the organizations that are trying to improve relations between the two ‘countries.’”

David spoke of grassroots organizations as offering equal support to all sides with the hope of allowing the conflicted parties to work through their difficulties, a strategy he felt cohered closely with his congregation’s ethos: “We’re very open and accepting and have a lot of outreach. This church is mission based and there’s a lot of love in this congregation.”

Rosalyn took a broader perspective to include her notion of other faiths and spoke to a concern other participants voiced in other ways:

I think God is probably up there thinking “I don’t understand why you people can’t just get along.” If you look at these three faiths, they are all about being a good person, treating other people well, doing unto others as you would have done unto you, loving people. And I know that sometimes as Christians, we don’t really do a good job at that.

When Jason considered his preference for grassroots peacebuilding, he mentioned the need for hope, love and respect for the individual’s independence: “I suppose, in the aspect of love, there’s the knowing when not to be too much hands-on. People in the gospel needed to demonstrate faith. Isn’t there a story where someone touched Jesus’ robe and he said, ‘Your faith has made you well’? People took their own initiative, thinking they could do something. Turned out they could.”
As was mentioned previously, the seven-member group’s reflections on theological foundations for mission also followed the presentation on come-and-see tourism. What were the gospels teaching them and what Christian values did they bring to peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine? While love figured prominently in five of seven responses, that love had depth and complexity in its practical application.

“Love one another, as I have loved you,” Lydia sang to the group. “This is first commandment. With all your hearts, by this I will know you are mine.” Then she added, “To seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” Finally, she challenged, “Can we do it? Yes, with great hope and faith.”

Lorrain spoke to a similarly complicated love: “Jesus wanted justice for all, for the poor to be equal to the rich, and for us to love one another, love our enemies. He came to bring peace. Don’t ask me how we’ll achieve that.” Emily echoed the commandment to love our enemies, and Nancy mentioned equality and even-handedness: “In his life, Jesus loved everyone and treated them equally, so we must try to understand and care for both sides [i.e. Israelis and Palestinians].” Aura cited her favourite bible passage, to love one’s neighbour as oneself, and added, “When we see injustice we need to right it.”

At first glance justice did not appear as prominently in conversation as love, and justice language was sparse throughout the discussions of mission. Fairness, a word the older participants used for a predisposition to act openly and even-handedly, was a word more
frequently used: Palestinians should have a “fair” share of the land and Israelis were **unfair** in governing the distribution of that land (Nancy); boycotting goods was “unfair” to families who struggled to make a living (Lydia); are we being “fair” in deliberately choosing sides in the dispute (Aura). Interestingly, when issues about Canadian settler/non-settler conflict arose, neither the word *fair* nor *just* surfaced, with one exception. “There’s a big problem here in terms of *fairness*,” David suggested, “in that we have our own problems in dealing with the natives, and there are other problems. It’s not for us to make a point or stand up for problems in other places in the world before we clean up our own act.”

Whether labelled a sense of *fairness* or *justice*, some motivator prompted participants to act so peace might gain a foothold in Israel/Palestine. In the meetings after the come-and-see presentation, David indicated a particularly strong sense of dis-ease on the subject of violence in the disputed lands of Palestine. While expressing support for grassroots peace organizations, he indicated in his interview that he continued to struggle with his reservations. “The only time I think that we, as individuals or as a church, should step in is when you have some part of some country murdering people. Then we have an obligation as Christians, as people who care for anybody, to step in,” perhaps referencing Fullerton’s report of settlers killing Bedouin children on their way to school. But David was unclear about how mission should respond to injustice. He laboured over how to define Christian mission, constantly returning to his theological foundation: “All we can do is live our lives as Christians, which is about love and acceptance and forgiveness.”
7.4.1. Theological Support for Love and Justice

Bosch would no doubt approve of the priority the group assigned to Jesus’ teaching regarding love for enemies. Referring to the Q teachings of the New Testament, he finds love of the enemy the most characteristic of Jesus’ sayings, and probably an innovation in Jewish teachings of the time.\(^\text{184}\) Disciples who model the Master, Bosch continues, do so in the spirit of invitation—never coercion. “Is it possible to imagine a more ardent and compelling missionary spirit?” he asks.\(^\text{185}\)

Drawing from the work of Niebuhr, however, he also insists that two rationalities—religious and ethical, mystical and prophetic—must exist side by side. The mystical dimension, when not accompanied by the prophetic, tends toward an other-worldly orientation and a detached view of the neighbour. The prophetic aims to attend to the neighbour in real, bodily and social ways, but without the active presence of love the prophetic tends to become purely political, at the expense even of ethics. The Protestant ecumenical movement, Bosch finds, seems to preference the prophetic motif, but love must always demand more than justice.\(^\text{186}\) The focus group seems, in its expressions of love—then justice—to be sensitive and committed to following Jesus’ ethic of love while remaining grounded in the pursuit of justice, equality and peace.

\(^{184}\) Bosch, 28-29.
\(^{185}\) Bosch, 30.
\(^{186}\) Bosch, 412ff.
Lorraine concluded her comment about Jesus’ will for world peace with an after-thought—perhaps a verbal-shrug or a frank admission of bewilderment: *Don’t ask me how we’ll achieve that* [peace]. Lydia spoke more positively, that “with great hope and faith” participants could pursue their mission to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. But the absence in this part of the conversation of even a hint of an evangelism inviting others to come closer to God’s love suggests to me that further study and preaching might help participants find more confidence in theologically grounding their sense of mission. Bosch would no doubt sympathize with their omission, noting that throughout church history Christians have been “fairly good at faith” but poor in respect to love. He cites Van der Aalst, who argues there have been numerous councils on right believing and none to explicate how to enact the greatest commandment—to love one another.¹⁸⁷

There is help for ministers who seek ways to fortify their congregation’s sense of mission based primarily on love. Douglas John Hall, with others who strive to bring a theology of the cross to our understanding of Christian mission, proposes an invigorated theology of faith (not sight), hope (not finality) and love (not power) to counter a theology of glory which in the past prompted a triumphalist attitude toward mission—something participants also rejected. Hall speaks of *faith* as contradictory to notions of Christian omniscience or infallibility, instead encouraging the faithful to be modest when engaging in dialogue with other faiths. Thus may the mission-minded be receptive in listening, trusting that the other also has gifts or “corrective insight” to bring to encounters. A mission of *hope* in a deeply

conflicted world must spring from hope in God, not in one’s own works, and especially not to the extent of losing confidence in God’s power to surprise. But most essential here, Hall cites the theology of the cross as one of love, not power. “This, were it truly understood and enacted, would render every other commentary on Christian missions unnecessary.”

Power, Hall argues, has been the impetus behind uncountable mission-failures throughout history. Too often, subjugation of other cultures and peoples has resulted from evangelism that used power rather than love, which should have modeled the self-giving love of the One crucified. It seems to me that, having rejected any notion of effecting peace by exerting power over others—as, for example, by imposing categorical solutions upon others’ complex problems—the focus group would benefit from further reflection on a theology of the cross. The love they profess as core to their missional approach seems appropriate to those who heed Jesus’ invitation, “Take up your cross and follow me.”

But the notion that “each of us has a cross to bear” has too often resulted in hard-edged stoicisim that rarely produces compassionate action. Where else might participants find theological grounding for their desire to take appropriate, loving action against injustice, without sliding into the easy passivity that replaced their original interest in peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, after they rejected boycott? Here McCarroll’s work on hope as a dynamic of the theology of the cross might be particularly helpful for follow-up group discussion. She insists that Christians be attentive to God’s presence and possibility, while loving the

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189 Ibid, 190-194.
other and refusing to combat injustice by acting rashly, relinquishing hope, or avoiding commitment. Such a theology would help HMUC’s troubled peacebuilders tolerate the frustration of seeing profound need that they cannot immediately mitigate.\textsuperscript{190} McCarroll’s notion of active hope should also help them counter the worldly demand for power-over others.\textsuperscript{191}

No one practices in isolation the compassion, love, and solidarity that characterize hope-filled waiting. Though community is the locus of all strategies of power and mastery, community is also where we beg forgiveness, glimpse God’s active presence, and nurture relationships with those who share our hopeful and watchful work. What did participants say about relationality in the service of mission?

7.5 Mission: Role of Communication and Conversation

The group’s support for grassroots peace organizations disclosed a further aspect of their missional ethos: that communication and conversation are indispensable elements of mission. Here I define spoken \textit{communication} as inter-personal exchanges that are largely vocal but supplemented by glance, posture or movement that also transmit information. \textit{Conversation} is a specific type of communication that is readily suited to the needs of a missional church, as

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{190} Pamela McCarroll, \textit{Waiting at the Foot of the Cross: Toward a Theology of Hope for Today} (Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 191-195. \\
\end{flushleft}
can be deduced from a comparison with another of our common forms of communication-in-community, the *meeting*. According to Marian McClure Taylor’s work on a conversational approach to theology, preparation for meetings should include healthy conversation when participants pursue a topic or question, learn, delve deeply, and perhaps achieve new insights that shift their goals.\footnote{Marian McClure Taylor, “Mission and Ecumenism as Conversation,” in *Under the Oak Tree. The Church as a Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World*, Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, O. Wesley Allen, Jr., eds., (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 185.} Meetings can break into conversation, she adds, but the aims and organization of these two types of discourse are very different. Recalling Tracy’s comment that conversation partners must be willing to pursue a question wherever it leads, we see in conversation a much freer construct than goal- and decision-oriented meetings can generally afford.

Lydia seemed aware of conversation’s capacity to encourage giving and taking, speaking and listening, when during her interview she spoke appreciatively of grassroots organizations that keep communication lines open and address *issues* (she dislikes the word *conflict*) before problems get out of control. She spoke of the Heart to Heart project that brings Arab-, Palestinian- and Jewish-Israeli teenagers to Canadian summer camps to discuss issues they all face. “What a great place to start, she said, “sharing their experiences, good and bad.” She saw the goal of bringing representatives of the Abrahamic faiths together as one of respectfully exploring common-ground: “Talking about their own faith journey is probably a real leveler of the playing field, because everybody is starting from the same starting block. So nobody feels better or worse than anybody else. And if you start there, everybody can just
relax and listen, learn to listen to the other’s story and say ‘Wow, that’s very encouraging.’ It’s important to help people to understand not just as individuals, not just as representatives of a religion … but as human beings living on the same earth.”

Rosalyn noted that grassroots networking could encourage conflicted parties to engage in peacebuilding conversations, without imposing solutions or forcing people to agree or consider others’ opinions. She appreciated the support mission-minded people can extend as non-involved parties offering different perspectives for conflicted parties to consider. “One of the ways we can help out is to support them to help themselves. I think if you just leave them to sort it out on their own, well that’s what’s been going on, and it hasn’t been working very well.” Thus Rosalyn perceived mission as more “involved” than strategies she believed Christians generally favour: sending money to a problematic situation or country and avoiding its messy politics.

But senior participants did not share Rosalyn’s apparent willingness to engage in conversation with conflicted parties. Frances appreciated grassroots activities, especially those that include inter-cultural dialogue and teaching, as did Neve Shalom, a cooperative village founded by Jewish and Palestinian-Arab Israelis, which Fullerton had described. “It’s probably not going to change much,” Frances reflected. “But you catch the kids and get them thinking, ‘Yes, this [person from another ethnic background] is my friend too.’” But she herself hesitated about engaging in face-to-face conversations. “If we talk about families and things like that, we’d
find we’re on the same page. But the extremists? I guess maybe one of the things that worry me is the fact that they feel everyone must be Islamic!”

Inter-faith dialogue demands courageous commitment to meeting others and growing friendship, beginning (as Frances suggests) with sharing the details of our everyday lives—“families and things like that.” But Nancy was candid about how easily we deceive ourselves: “We all like to think of ourselves as not being narrow in our outlook and wanting to know people of other backgrounds. But I suspect that a lot of people are like myself. We choose to have conversations with people who agree with us.” I would suggest that such socially convivial conversations may feel significant and helpful in the short term, but reliance on easy insights does not advance our understanding of the other, build trust, overcome harmful stereotypes, or mitigate harmful competitiveness.

Mackenzie’s work on inter-faith conversation suggests that a steady diet of feel-good conversations is unlikely to build peace and inter-faith understanding in our communities. Understanding dawns when we commit ourselves to the hard, patient work of inter-faith and inter-cultural conversations that explore the everyday issues of our family- and career-lives. But fuller understanding does not shy away, when time is ripe, from exploring problematic fears and distrust of the other and failures in our own faith-lives. Only then can we hope to engage in any personal way in activities that are consistent with a missional theology of love.

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and justice-seeking. Unfortunately, Mackenzie observes, it is not apparent to most congregations—even mission-minded ones—that their agendas should include such sustained and generous work.

David revealed the paradoxical position of congregations that earnestly seek to assist peace in Israel/Palestine but also experience dread in the face of conflict and confusion in sorting contradictory testimonies. During his interview, he supported grassroots interaction that, he felt, should consist of a cycle that begins with caring, moves to questioning and listening, and not only repeats the process but draws in others. But he sensed that conversation, even at home-base—much less among conflicted Jewish or Muslim neighbours—was simply “too big a problem” for congregations:

What scared me about this focus group discussion is how easily we could have a speaker come in and talk to us and literally convince us that she was right. And in the next session we would look at something totally different and think, “Wow. This is right.” There are so many tributaries to this problem, so many rights and so many wrongs, that it’s—I don’t know.

Resistant to Canadians offering solutions to Israelis and Palestinians yet frustrated with discoveries without resolution and always watchful for what he called “neutral information” to underlie his opinions, David perhaps exemplified the church member who does not share Kegan and Laskow Lahey’s appreciation of internal and interpersonal contradictions (conflict) as a source of learning. I also suspect he would find little comfort from Ronald Allen’s book on a conversational approach to theology, Under the Oak. Allen sees postmodernism and its associated perceptions of the contextual and relative nature of all

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194 Ibid, 222 ff.
196 See 80, above.
human interpretations about God, the state of the world, and human existence as evidence of God’s diversity and invitation to converse with others, glean their God-given insights, and follow the path to greater understanding and tolerance.\textsuperscript{197} The invitation to explore at least a sample of perspectives on Israel/Palestine was to David an invitation into chaos.\textsuperscript{198}

There could not have been a sharper contrast between David’s anxiety about multiple viewpoints and Rosalyn’s and Jason’s appreciation—even delight—in perspectives contrary to theirs. We saw that the younger couple offered their views \textit{against} boycott based on perceived ineffectiveness and within half an hour chose \textit{for} it after Gregersen explained the recommendation and church-goers’ freedom to choose. Having changed position and voted accordingly, Rosalyn declared herself “fascinated” by the seniors’ contrasting reasons for rejecting boycott and welcomed that information. It’s worth noting that pastors wishing to reach out to the sons and daughters of the modernist age—the majority in today’s aging congregations—and the well-educated, intellectually nimble children of postmodernism need to nurture \textit{all} voices, discordant though they seem, when discussing missional activity.


\textsuperscript{198} Such frustration need not be interpreted as a sign of failure in the focus group process. In the classroom, Parker Palmer sees it as evidence that the student is grappling with “the dissatisfying truth.” He explains: “Good education may leave students deeply dissatisfied, at least for a while…. angry that their prejudices have been challenged and their sense of self shaken. That sort of dissatisfaction may be a sign that real education has happened.” \textit{The Courage to Teach}. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 94.
For now, I return to a moment when David acted as spokesperson for other seniors and lamented the welter of perspectives and conflicts he saw around him:

When we were younger, there were maybe one or two major issues [conflicts], and we were certainly willing to discuss them and do our part. But there are now literally hundreds coming at you and you just don’t know where to go. That’s when we want to put blinders on and stick to our vision. It tends to make us fold in on ourselves. It’s just too much. Part of that is the media but part of it is that world conditions are in such bad shape.

Frequently enough throughout the data-gathering process, he recalled for the group that at least one of those distressing conflicts had occurred and probably would occur again, very close to home.

7.6 Mission Interrupted: Canadian Angst and Settler/Non-settler Disputes

“When I see the little that we’re accomplishing here in Henson Mills, I say [to Israelis and Palestinians], ‘Go to it! You’re going to have to solve your own problems over there!’”

With that, Frances seemed to summarize the frustration and insecurity her colleagues felt about participating in church-directed peacebuilding initiatives in Israel/Palestine while acknowledging a peace-deficit in their own community. During this study, Henson Mills and its First Nations neighbours were experiencing relative calm and providing occasions to mend relationships. But no one denied that resentments still smoldered and passions could reignite at any time. Many citizens would agree with Frances that little had been accomplished in
building peace between settlers and non-settlers. But was it true, as she implied, that—short of solutions to offer—they had nothing to contribute in conversation with Israelis and Palestinians?

As community and church members, many participants witnessed protests during the land-dispute between Henson Mills and First Nations neighbours. HMUC deeply felt the tensions, which were partly attributed to wrongdoing by outside agitators. The group described the frustration, hostility and estrangement between settlers and non-settlers, even the shunning of each other’s businesses (something remarkably similar to boycott.) Emily observed the eventual normalization of relationships:

> Once all the people protesting left, then everybody gradually just seemed to come back together because they’ve lived here for years and years. It seemed natural to see the other folks come back to stores in town, say “Good morning,” and whatever. So it flows back together somehow. There are still differences, and differences of course with the government. And I can understand that.

> I can’t change the treaties. But I can say good morning in the grocery store. And get my milk. I think [non-native] people have returned to getting their gas on the reserve. It’s hard to explain. It’s just a feeling. I hope they don’t feel threatened.

Was this return to economic exchange and neighbourly greeting enough to signify a new turn toward peace? After completing the data-gathering process at HMUC, I met with Elder L.C., who acted as a First Nations peer-reviewer for my project. He saw one of his gifts as being “a liminal resource,” intermediary between First Nations and settlers, and he thought these

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199 At the time of data gathering Canadians were awaiting the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s report investigating Canada’s history of residential-school abuse, which promised to deliver even more disconsolate news about the relationship between the native and non-native neighbours, accessed November 2015, [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)
small-steps Emily observed were more positive than participants recognized.\textsuperscript{200} About the normalization of relationships, he was optimistic.

It’s all about respectful relationship. If you respect me, I’ll be much more honest with you. If I respect you, you’ll be more honest with me. And that’s important, it’s how you build relationships. Since 155 years ago, people lived on the river, and gradually lost their land, for a variety of reasons. There’s a lot of hurt that happened, plus the people who went off the reserve, they got hurt.

But he found something positive was developing. As an intermediary, he saw a new openness, new risk-taking. I asked about Grandmothers’ Tea, upon which many female participants based their understanding of the power of conversation. I recalled that early in our talks, Lorraine had named it “a small way in.”

7.7 Healing Mission: Grandmothers’ Tea

Grandmothers’ Tea was initiated in 2010 by a few First Nations women living off-reserve in a city near Henson’s Mills. The inspiration is simple: to bring native and non-native women together once a month for a potluck luncheon, conversation, time for sharing, and occasionally hearing a guest speaker. To begin the sharing, the hostess holds a “talking-piece” and stands to propose a topic. For instance, she might reflect on her experiences of one who taught her aspects of \textit{wisdom}, one of the Grandfather Teachings of First Nations culture. The talking-piece is passed around the table, and each woman speaks without interruption, as she

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\textsuperscript{200} Gopin also remarks on the lack of awareness among ordinary people that they can create huge differences in the cultural and political scene by forging new relationships that make for peace. “We constantly underestimate the power of human-to-human encounters to form the basis of new relationships and alliances,” he writes. But in the next breath he acknowledges the harm that results from getting things wrong: “We also underestimate the damage done by ugly public encounters and destructive symbolic gestures, which undo the rational willingness to compromise among many people.” \textit{Holy War, Holy Peace}, 27.
chooses. After each takes a turn, the Tea is finished, although participants often continue with unstructured conversation.

During her interview, Lorraine described the event as time to focus on everyday issues such as how families celebrated Thanksgiving or Christmas, to learn others’ customs or ways of worshipping. After two or three years’ attendance, she remembered only one exchange when “things got dicey”: a discussion about whether native children received more money for education than non-natives. She concluded, “We don’t argue. We just get to know each other.” When asked if Grandmothers’ Tea could be seen as an effort at peacebuilding, she was at first surprised but agreed wholeheartedly.

Having experienced the pain of inter-racial conflict during the land dispute, Emily also spoke with a sense of relief about the gradual easing of tensions and return of peace:

It’s hard to explain how it starts. We have a lot of the women in our church go to the Grandmothers’ Tea. They just go and have lunch! And they talk, like grandmothers talk, getting their pictures out… We all have different opinions, we all come from different lines of life. Everyone listens to what everyone says. They may go home and say “I didn’t agree with that, but I didn’t say so.” Or they may actually say, “Well I didn’t see it that way,” and that’s acceptable. You accept what other people say. It’s an interesting group of women. Maybe that’s what the Israelis and Palestinians have to learn to do, too. I don’t know.

Nancy suggested that, as helpful as it was, Grandmothers’ Tea was not perfect, that fewer native women attend than she would prefer, and topics were often too “cozy.” But another regular conversation, the Sharing Circle, promised a different kind of engagement:
[Sharing Circle] has tried to have a meeting once a month. It’s a combination of natives and “settlers” (as they call us) and the difference between that and the Grandmothers’ Tea is that there are men involved and it’s pretty interesting. It also gets down to facts more.... The Sharing Circle is more likely to bring out the question of “What the heck do you do with the money the government gives you?” [she laughed] Interesting! It’s been tremendous.

Nancy spoke of the goals she envisioned for the Tea and Circle, that they would foster hope and help newcomers revise any stereotypical, Hollywood-style notion of First Nations people. People who attend, she explained, do so hoping that the custom leads to better understanding and a more peaceful resolution to the difficulties the two peoples confront. Expectations of any easy answers to complex issues however are promptly discounted. “It’s not that I have any [solutions]!” Nancy exclaimed. “It’s not ‘Oh, we should do this and it will solve everything!’”

In my interview with Elder L.C., I mentioned my surprise that Grandmothers’ Tea had been raised so early in conversation about Israel/Palestine, and he reported his own learning on the subject.

I would not have thought Grandmothers’ Tea was as good or exciting as it seems to be for people. I was probably looking at it as a male chauvinist person and thought, “Whatever turns your crank go ahead and do it.” I was more excited by the Sharing Circles that people would be involved in, because I thought that was certainly a good way to move forward.

[But one woman, a past chief, offered him another perspective, he explained.] She talked about native culture as being a matriarchal society. Women are the ones that have the power. So why isn’t GMT a good thing!? I thought, OK, I’m good with that. I learned. Yeah, GMT could be mundane, and it could be a good thing. Could be some sparks that come out of it. Sometimes. And a lot more mundane stuff. The person who called me into ministry said, “It’s taken us 500 years to get things screwed up. So it’s going to take at least another 500 years to get them unscrewed.” To make it change….something will happen. Maybe some young grandmother fourteen years from now will say, “Yes, this is it!” And carry it on to the next stage.
The lack of discernible purpose in such inter-cultural conversations, almost certainly an irritant to peacebuilders focused on measurable results, presents to others a dose of preventive and healing medicine. Group members who frequently expressed skepticism about the possibility of grand or immediate solutions to complex inter-cultural problems took comfort that projects such as Grandmothers’ Tea provided small, I would say humble, steps toward bringing people together. As someone in the group observed, “It’s much easier to hate someone you don’t know and it’s much easier to understand someone you’ve met and talked with.”

7.8 Speaking into the Circle in the United Church Context

Grandmothers’ Tea has much in common with the teaching initiatives of past UCC Moderator Mardi Tindal (2009-2012), who takes inspiration from the work of Parker Palmer and Thomas Merton. Tindal brings a ministry of the circle to clergy and lay people, encouraging each to give and receive the gift of “hearing his/her own soul out loud.” The first premise of such discussions, as with the Tea and Quaker “clearance circles,” is that individuals need a safe place to speak without fear of contradiction or correction. Thus Courage to Lead retreats emphasize that no one needs another’s assistance in fixing, saving, advising, or liberating. Respectful listening is liberating in itself but must involve community, with speakers discovering and bringing their authentic voice—not the voice others want to hear, not the voice of a spectator too timid to truly participate. Tindal cherishes the creativity possible when conversation is valued over consensus but speaks of the need to hold in tension various

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201 Interview with Mardi Tindal, June 3, 2014, and the researcher. Tindal’s retreats follow Palmer’s Courage to Lead resources.
perspectives and discordant voices, a difficult skill to practice and, I would judge, dauntingly so for members of the HMUC focus-group.

Tindal expresses hope the UCC will find ways to convert the conversational model she teaches to suit its own plurality of authentic voices. She feels Moderator Gary Paterson (2012-2015), took that suggestion and championed the church as “host” to conversations across the land. Thus visitors to Paterson’s blog might note that a word he uses most frequently is conversation.

Paterson offered a model of the church as the “third space,” supplemental to family-space and work-space but a public place where people feel welcomed, respected and safe to tell stories and share perspectives. Here conversation happens freely and community gathers to discuss important faith and ethics issues, such as doctor-assisted death. When a congregation provides such third space, it commits to loving its neighbours, becoming a local hub, and being part of conversations that encourage participants to “wrestle, explore, and be challenged.” Elsewhere, Paterson suggested this expression of neighbourly concern springs from “a newly emerging missional church” that pays attention to injustices nearby, seeks out God’s will for action, and learns to identify God’s ongoing activity in the community. But far from encouraging congregations to limit mission to the immediate neighbourhood, he urged expansive conversations about justice and right living. Especially when the denomination’s

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dwindling resources and influence were curtailing its work in the world, Paterson saw opportunities to network with ecumenical partners and non-church social justice activists.\textsuperscript{204}

Paterson didn’t make the link, it seems to me, that inter-faith partners might eagerly join social justice networks, but he was certainly aware of the need and opportunities for UCC members to extend their conversation. In 2014, he posted an excerpt from his article in \textit{Cruxifusion}:

Many of us United Church folk are not fully comfortable with sharing our faith… not wanting to give offense, perhaps; wanting to be authentic and respectful of others, especially in pluralistic, multicultural, interfaith Canada. And yet, there is a growing desire for conversations of faith, in safe spaces, where we can talk openly about what truly enlivens us and what drains life out of us; times of sharing honestly, dialogue that is rich in personal testimony, with questions, fears, hopes; speaking of those moments when we have felt filled with… well… with God…Can you imagine what it would be like to be part of such conversations, both within and beyond the church? Where would they take us and our communities of faith?\textsuperscript{205}

7.9 Ecumenical and Multifaith Cooperation

Members of the HMUC group dared to imagine such conversations. In fact, the first surprising insight offered into the value they attached to cooperation beyond their own denomination occurred during the discussion of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program, which received the third highest ranking of all recommendations. Members agreed the word \textit{ecumenical} was “pleasing,” because they associated it with joint worship services in their community. The group affirmed their belief that everyone has a right to religious choice, but

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when various denominations worked cooperatively to build peace between Israelis and Palestinians, that was cause for celebration.

The group made no distinction between ecumenical (Christian inter-denominational, or even Christian/atheist) and multifaith interchange, which for this study included Muslim and Jewish input. Lydia suggested that anyone engaging in multifaith conversation should prepare to see another’s perspective and learn to consider all possibilities for why that person might speak or act in a certain way, rather than give way to anger. Better to deal with a contentious issue, she said, because “once you’re the victim, you won’t let it go. You can’t get it out of your system.”

Although largely in favour of multifaith interaction, which generally meant conversation to this group, some offered that it was no panacea for complicated problems. Recall Nancy’s warning about selecting only partners who agree with us. Emily mentioned an event when selectivity was not an option, and the consequences were distressing. HMUC invited an imam from a nearby city to speak about Muslim beliefs. Some in the congregation were indignant when he called Jesus “the prophet” rather than “the son of God.” Emily remembered thinking, “You asked him to come and explain his religion. So you can’t say he’s wrong, because it’s the Muslim way.” Then she shook her head as if to dismiss the incident from memory. “But I think religions getting together is very good.”

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206 See page 127.
The second surprising insight into HMUC’s desire for multifaith communication and cooperation came from the unanimous vote of the seven-member group, as individuals, to support the IPP Report’s recommendation to build trust between Canadian Jews and Palestinians. This support came in spite of concerns, first, that few members of those faith-communities live in or near Henson Mills and, second, that it is difficult to identify Palestinians in community. “Shouldn’t we simply include the entire population of a mosque?” they asked.207

The younger participants too favoured the recommendation, with Rosalyn expressing a common view that whether people worship at a church, synagogue or mosque, all pray and try to live good lives, and Christians were well placed to assist in bridge-building. Jason agreed that some relationship-building project would be excellent. But, he asked, how would such an effort in Canada contribute to peace in Israel/Palestine? And how might an event be planned in a small-town congregation? None of the participants present during the discussion had any notion of where to begin, but they remained undeterred in their enthusiasm for the possibilities. During her interview later, Frances appeared to consider Grandmothers’ Tea as a paradigm for building closer relationships with Canadian Jews and Muslims when she queried “Why not ask them in for tea, a group of women maybe?”

207 GC42 (2015) addressed this gap in information by passing “Tor 2 Relationship-Building Towards Peace Between Palestinians And Israelis,” directing the General Council to prepare resource materials for UCC members and congregations wishing to engage in trust-building initiatives with Canadian Jews and Palestinians. See page 40, above.
Intentionality did not dismiss lingering fears of the unknown other, however, and Lorraine mentioned her difficulty in being open to others via Internet:

When we hear people tearing down another religion, that would [mean] we have to speak up. I’ve had emails, terrible emails that come in… a slur against the Muslims…. so often it doesn’t have to do with religion.

Although she didn’t report having been influenced by such messages when the issue was first raised, during the debriefing session she voiced concern. Participants were speaking positively about interfaith conversation and its potential for good, when she asked, “Does anyone else fear this sort of thing? I’m all for this getting to know the other religions, because we’re all worshiping the same God, in my opinion. But I guess because of all the radicals in the Muslim faith I wonder, do I really want to get involved? It’s almost a fear of what’s going to happen and I don’t know what it is.” The response from another group member was swift, “It’s because the words Muslim and terrorist are all in the news! But you could live right next door to a serial killer!” Nonetheless, with the rise of ISIS in the Middle East and the near-constant coverage of atrocities on global media, there was no easy answer to Lorraine’s fear.

Further discussion with participants might address Allen’s suggestion that “listening” to others through the media may actually consist of only tuning in to sound-bites or manipulative projections that foster a sense of superiority among receivers rather than understanding among inquirers. Allen would no doubt encourage HMUC participants to enter into discussion about making the church a “community of conversation”—much like Paterson’s notion of church as host of conversations—and to maintain a provisional attitude that refuses to take

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208 Allen et al, xvi.
itself and its decisions so seriously as to become idolatrous of its own absoluteness.\textsuperscript{209} The focus group seemed resolved, by the end of our discussions, to critique any grand or imposed schemes for solving inter-religious or inter-cultural conflicts. To illustrate, Frances recalled Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman and concluded that such conversations are possible when hearts change—but that was likely to take a long time.

### 7.10 Conclusion: Going Forward

Subtle changes, however, were already taking shape for group members. Lydia considered mobilizing their sense of mission and drawing the congregation and community into conversations about grassroots peacebuilding. Taking herself as an example, she reported new hope and interest. Previous to our meetings, she reported having greeted any news of the Israeli/Palestinian situation with dismay, “Oh, they’re at it again!” But this attitude no longer distracted her from caring. “Now if I see the word Israel or Palestine, I stop and read. So my awareness has risen. I think that it’s not only about Israelis or Palestinians; it’s how it’s changed us too, made us more aware, and made us stop and think more about how we can get into this in a different way.” Aura seemed to agree when she suggested that the group should share its insights and start advocating for Israel/Palestine at the grassroots level, starting at HMUC. She immediately organized the next congregational newsletter around an item about peacebuilding and the materials used in our study.

Lydia and Aura then attended open house at the mosque in a nearby city. No doubt their intention was to encourage Muslim neighbours in their attempt to pave the way for more

\textsuperscript{209} Ronald Allen, “The Church as Community of Conversation,” \textit{Under the Oak Tree}, 19.
truth-sharing and relationship-building conversations. With lots of food and lively discussion, the initiative seemed to provide “a small way in.”
8.1 Introduction

After a two-week hiatus, the seven-member group reconvened to discuss the presentation on come-and-see tourism. The information, some said, was shocking and disturbing. Why didn’t they know about this situation in Israel/Palestine? The media must control information. But people’s stories are often one-sided. If participants could only speak to an average Palestinian or Israeli—folks just trying to live their lives. Wouldn’t that make a difference?

They also wanted to clarify for the researcher: HMUC really did do something about the IPP Report. A notice was in the church bulletin, and a meeting was scheduled. It’s not that they did nothing.

In a notebook, a participant reflected: “I don’t really need to be present in Israel or Palestine to feel the level of emotions involved on both sides. In justices abound. Extreme behaviour rarely results in a happy ending—except in the case of love.”

Thus in just a few minutes, the group’s most pressing concerns surfaced. Participants were shocked but dubious about a tourist-observer’s reports, and they distrusted the media.

Average Israelis or Palestinians might be able to shed light on the situation, but participants would no doubt soon judge their accounts unbalanced and one-sided as well. The group was uncomfortable about HMUC’s response to the crisis—which wasn’t totally negligible. But how can the faithful with clear conscience negotiate the path between do-something justice-making and somewhere-a-happy-ending love?

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210 Observations from the notebooks of research and participant.
The seven-member group listened intently and learned from the come-and-see presentation. But in the two weeks between meetings, they decided to reject any call to boycott, largely because they refused to act in any way that seemed judgmental or punitive against the wrongdoers. Such acts would be transgressions against their theological base: Jesus’ commandment to love.

8.2 Locating the Focus Group on the Taxonomy

Recall the IPP Report writing group’s anthropological attitude leading to service through praxis: first, by heeding the cry of oppressed Palestinians from the World Council of Churches and the multifaith leaders who endorsed Kairos Palestine; then, by immersing into the context of Israel/Palestine and interviewing many witnesses to identify necessary change; finally, by taking steps to entrain a cycle of action and reflection as the church debated and launched its campaign to help liberate the oppressed and move the conflicted parties toward peace. For the report’s co-writers, praxis and understanding must go hand in hand. As Wells explains, “The reign of God, so central for Jesus, must also be central for his followers, first in terms of practical action, but also primary for any theology of liberation and particularly for any Christology....The reign of God can really only be understood rightly, and for that matter can really only be believed in, properly speaking, from within our own activity of practical service.”

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211 See Figure 1:1, “Conceptualizations,” 9, above.
212 Wells, 145-6.
I estimate that participants would agree but start from a different notion of practical service and a different aspect of Christology. Whereas the report’s praxis theologians would take as their beginning Jesus’ words of liberation in Luke, “The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to let the oppressed go free (4:18),” the HMUC theologians would preference his command to love one’s neighbour, even enemy, as oneself (cf Lk 6:27-36; Luke 10:29-37; Mat 5:43-48). I do not need to argue here for separate Christologies, since both preferences spring from Jesus’ good news to the poor and suffering of the earth. Both call disciples to radical and costly action. But I strive for an understanding of how preferencing the commandment to love one’s neighbour, and enemy, bound group members to a synthetic attitude and predisposition toward transcendental method.

8.3 Rejection of the Anthropological Attitude

Given their rejection of the IPP Report’s recommendation to take a come-and-see tour, it is difficult to see how participants could commit to an anthropological attitude. For the older participants age was a limiting factor regarding such travel, but they also challenged the notion of tourism as an opportunity for fact-gathering. David judged tours as “fluff”—pleasant trips but entirely inadequate when choosing action for peacebuilding. Jason and Rosalyn considered tours as perques, not serious tools for investigating the plight of the poor and oppressed; moreover, with Internet and social media, they had numerous fact-finding opportunities without leaving home. And Frances, who twice toured Israel and heard about ambitious and productive Jewish citizens, nevertheless judged that such impressions were transmitted by local guides who “pumped” their own viewpoint to tourists. I conclude that participants considered touring Israel/Palestine with an anthropological attitude—to immerse
in the complex and unfamiliar cultures, listen and learn from reliable and “unbiased” sources about the roots of oppression—was simply naïve.

The seniors’ group rejected the notion that they could obtain, close to home, ready and reliable evidence to form their opinions about the sources of conflict or to support their decisions for specific peacebuilding action. For them, *bias* and *one-sidedness* obstructed fair-dealing and open communication. Most video presentations for the study were treated dismissively by one or more participants, who expected coverage of at least two perspectives. One was emotionally stirred by the plight of average citizens depicted in “Israel’s Apartheid Wall” but labelled it “one-sided” in her notebook and concluded, “The reason the wall was erected was to prevent the militants in Palestine from bombing and attacking Israel!” The plight of non-militant citizens, whom the video featured so poignantly, to her seemed almost non-consequential. And we have already seen how the news media were judged as one-sided in favour of Israel after Fullerton’s come-and-see presentation. But then the presentation itself was critiqued, though at the time welcomed and judged very persuasive. As one woman wrote in her notebook, the presentation was “educational and upsetting, but probably one-sided,” a sentiment repeated in other notebooks as well. In short, the group was doubtful about the very premises underlying the anthropological attitude, that one could learn and

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213 Interestingly, the seniors’ preoccupation with fairness, one-sidedness, and neutrality as essential to their sense of mission was completely absent from the younger members’ discussions. Meeting separately from the main group, Rosalyn and Jason were far more absorbed in the question of effective peacebuilding strategies and simply never mentioned the words *justice, bias, or neutrality*. Only once was the issue of one-sidedness mentioned, when Rosalyn judged her own failure to become more informed about First Nations issues. “A lot of time it’s very one-sided of me,” she admitted, “and I recognize that I am middle class, white and have a lot of blessings in my life, and that affects a lot of things. Sometimes, it’s just too easy to have that little bubble and not have to try to figure everything else out.”
respond to injustice by listening to those affected or their spokespersons, and then follow a praxis methodology to bring real change in the lives of the oppressed. It’s difficult to imagine how the focus group could have been more seriously at odds with the attitude that motivated the IPP Report’s writers.

But I would judge that the seven-member group did not reject Fullerton’s testimony, so much as set it aside. They didn’t want to act upon her information alone, but to seek more diverse input and take more time to learn. Moreover, given the discussion immediately after the debriefing session on the come-and-see presentation, when the seniors shared their notion of mission through their preferred scriptures, I would further judge they found her passionate, justice-making praxis—and her advocacy for boycott—incongruent with their theological baseline. In contemplating any peacebuilding action, they needed first to consider how it cohered with their desire to follow Jesus’ directive to love.

8.4 Synthesis Attitude

Vähäkangas suggests that a synthetic attitude predicts a predisposition to ongoing dialogue initiated by and, it is hoped, conducted among those striving to be authentic beings who bring their faith into conversation with issues arising from culture and so on.214 On that basis, the HMUC theologians’ attitude is aptly designated synthetic. Both seniors and younger members proved open to conversation, listening and learning about different perspectives and with encouragement explained their perspectives and theological baseline for mission and outreach. The younger members were delighted with new and challenging perspectives. But recall how the seniors insisted on balancing various viewpoints and discarding anything “one-

214 Vähäkangas, 284-285.
sided.” Could those attitudes be considered merely consistent with the basic quality of postmodern thought that we all imbibe, namely that all claims to authority under the truth of one’s own knowledge are to be viewed with suspicion and vigorously challenged? Further, might the tendency to skepticism regarding other peoples’ arguments or pleas for redress stem from postmodernism’s most cynical attitude: since no one has the full truth, anyone may be rejected as delusional or dishonest?

It seems to me that a synthetic attitude must be other than such cynicism. Bevans maintains that a synthetic attitude is characterized by openness among individuals to “a creative dialectic,” willingness to learn, change and grow in processes that are necessarily ongoing and unpredictable. Here Rosalyn and Jason seemed particularly flexible, receiving new information that challenged, then persuaded them, regarding economic action. Rosalyn welcomed and respected the seniors’ perspectives, without feeling compelled to alter her own. The seniors’ openness to change and growth during the study was difficult to assess, but we heard of Lydia’s new appreciation for Israelis’ and Palestinians’ issues, and Aura’s rejection of boycott when other voices spoke for interfaith cooperation. Furthermore, on concluding the study each participant supported grassroots organizations—a change of attitudes and behaviour maintained at least since GC41. Such openness suggests HMUC participants were disposed to engaging in creative dialect, showing more compassion toward victims of

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215 Cf Wells, 83-85.
217 Bevans, 88-93.
injustice and more hospitality to challenging information than one might expect from the
cynicism or evasiveness that sometimes calls itself postmodernism.

Among all participants, I warrant that the single greatest factor preparatory to learning and
growth was also the clearest marker of their authenticity. They were humbly aware, as first-
hand witnesses to Canada’s periodic conflicts between settlers and non-settlers, that they had
no solutions to offer or impose upon Israel/Palestine’s complex issues. Discussions showed
they sought a multiplicity of voices exploring wide-ranging perspectives on an ongoing basis
as uniquely necessary for learning and truth-telling.

8.5 Toward Transcendental Method

While a synthetic attitude lends itself to adopting a transcendental method, the link is not
necessarily made and never perfectly accomplished. One striving to be an authentic being
open to conversation and even to change, on one level, might yet fall short of the
transcendental method’s active engagement in deep listening, relationship-building and
transformative interaction and learning. If I live close to a First Nations reserve and a recent
conflict has now dissipated, I may go back to my old habit of buying gas there. I may be open
to casual conversation with the folks I find there, as well. But if I never bestir my curiosity
about how the service-station owner is faring, how people are getting on with their lives, how
perhaps a Sharing Circle might welcome me for further relationship-building, then I can
scarcely claim to be open to the transformation or conversion that Lonergan poses as
constitutive of transcendental method. It takes a kind of “vertical freedom,” he tells me, to
leap upward past my previous horizon of attainment and attempt to experience, understand, and judge the new information that I might discover beyond my previous borders.\footnote{Lonergan, 239-240.}

Of course, even my curiosity and willingness to participate in conversation may for a time be insufficient. The service-station owner and the Sharing Circle that he or she attends may not be ready to have such conversations. I may be able only to offer my inclination to openness, and wait. But if I am consistent with my mission based on a theology of costly love, I will be willing to wait, and extend new offers from time to time, and perhaps wait again. During the time of this study, the HMUC focus group seemed to locate itself in this intermission, this inclination toward the transcendental method described in the taxonomy. If they were not yet fully engaged, members showed at least a predisposition toward transcendental method by offering, soon after the study was completed, to host a Grandmothers’ Tea.\footnote{It must be admitted that this was a women’s initiative. Time will tell if David, Jason, and other men of the congregation have their own inclinations to develop toward transcendental method.}

While we help each other to attain the vertical freedom necessary to transcend boundaries, Lonergan acknowledges that each must move through the process of self-transcendence alone, learning how “to break often long-ingrained habits of thought and speech.”\footnote{Lonergan, 239.} Through self-transcendence I am able to make a new start, leaving behind the false certitude I once claimed. But first I need to recognize that my certitude was insufficient or even completely wrong-headed, so that my self-transcendence may be a kind of repentance—an understanding that my former horizon was fixed at least partly according to my own choosing. This
repentance (and forgiveness, too) may sometimes happen with a flash of insight. But I suspect that both repentance and forgiveness are more likely to be a gradual process of experiencing, reflecting, understanding and moving forward, until I find myself in new and very different territory, ready to form new relationships and engage in new conversations.

How did participants in the focus group indicate their readiness to repent and forgive? When they reflected on the harm done to the Jewish people and the harm now being done to Palestinian people, they seemed to be inclining toward self-transcendence, especially when they challenged themselves about what the world had done to Jewish people and the fear many presently hold regarding Arabs or Islam. However, the issue of harm done to their First Nations neighbours and the possible need for repentance and forgiveness there was a topic that remained relatively undeveloped during this study.

Nancy, however, shared this reflection during her personal interview:

My husband has no problem with people on the reserve because he knows a lot of them. He went to school with some of them, he worked with them. But a lot of people have no idea. Personally, what I’d like to know more about is the agreements [i.e. treaties] that were originally made. I must confess that a lot of my sympathy is with the native people. I feel as though we “done them wrong,” as it were. But I don’t know how you undo that.

Rosalyn also reflected on the possibility that she could be doing more to redress harm to First Nations:
I don’t know a lot about what’s going on with the natives. That’s not a very good Christian thing, if there’s something happening nearby and I don’t even want to take the time out of my own little bubble to try to understand it. It doesn’t mean you have to go to Ottawa and advocate, but just to understand it.

I would estimate, by the positive emotions some expressed and the initiative of Grandmothers’ Tea undertaken, that there are currents of desire among the focus group members for more experience and greater understanding with the First Nations people. The number and occasional vehemence of their complaints about intercultural disputes close to their own community also suggest to me that most in the group have not yet crossed beyond the leading edge of repentance and forgiveness. Here are some areas to develop as they move further toward self-transcendence.

8.6 Praxis Dilemma: What Are the Most Loving Options?
A young civil servant I know once complained about “analysis to paralysis”—the tendency we all have to converse and consult—and procrastinate—while a problem continues to simmer in the background. McCarroll addresses a concern about such paralysis, that Christians waiting in hope and doing the preparatory spiritual work for action in the world might assume a kind of passivity in the face of injustice. She advocates praxis, to be sure, and she would support participants in their insistence that praxis must arise from and stay in reflective contact with God’s love, God’s possibility; otherwise, she insists, those fighting injustice resort to the behaviours they seek to correct, namely coercion and oppressive
power.221 Instead, she counsels what appears as praxis for the transcendental method via a theology of the cross.

“The hope of the cross,” McCarroll writes, “anticipates fullness of being for all through open dialogue, communication, communion, and a willingness to be changed by encounters with otherness.”222 It is a God-filled hope rather than the self-referencing hope we once held when we trusted the promises of empire and human progress, thus doing incalculable harm to lands we conquered and peoples we oppressed. It is also a hope that waits upon the mysterious presence and possibility of the divine, overturns the most dismal situations, and acts cooperatively to fight injustice while witnessing to the light.

8.7 Conclusion

Any praxis that wins the focus group’s support must be consistent with members’ theological baseline, which is indelibly etched in the road from Jerusalem to Golgotha: Love is always the way. The title of this thesis suggests, however, members need the language to articulate their theology of love. They need an understanding of the theology of the cross to steady them when feeling doubtful or helpless or besieged by conflicting demands upon their love. Conversely, they also need to hear and appreciate the compelling stories of others, who start with a different perspective of Jesus’ work and commandments and with an anthropological attitude, which sees them immersed in the messiness of sinful human lives, like our own.

221 McCarroll, “Hope Matters,” 74.
Finally, UCC members must recover and share *all* the *IPP Report*’s recommendations, since the church provided (but ineffectively conveyed) appropriate methodologies to suit both anthropological and synthetic attitudes.
Chapter 9 - What Ministry Can Learn

9.1 Introduction: What Language Shall We Borrow?

What language shall I borrow to thank thee dearest friend,
For this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord let me never, never, outlive my love for thee.

(“O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” J.S. Bach, words attributed to Bernard de Clairvaux)

In the marketplace of ideas language is a currency, constantly enriched by transactors who borrow, trade, and grow the idiom as an investment. In the UCC, for instance, *empire* has become a code-word with a wealth of meanings and associations.\(^{223}\) In conversation over peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, however, language-poverty struck HMUC participants. They struggled to find language for their theological predispositions, signaled unfamiliarity with the language of peacebuilding and surprise at being called “peacebuilders.” They protested the inaccessibility of language in the *IPP Report*, which should have helped express their notions of mission for justice/peace. But through our conversations regarding the resources and the issues they raised, participants could borrow language and expand their confidence. My fervent hope is they will continue these conversations with their congregation and engage in more peacebuilding initiatives.

To facilitate such engagement, this chapter proposes two recommendations for peace-minded UCC ministers. First, address the need for employing persuasive language in our documents.

\(^{223}\) Words such as *oppression*, *injustice*, *inescapability*, even *guilt* come to mind.
and listening to grassroots language; second, address how congregations might employ “small ways in” to invite broader conversation and build peace, starting with their own communities.

9.2 Recommendation #1

That UCC communicators write persuasive materials for peacebuilding initiatives in Israel/Palestine. To persuade the greatest number of church members, materials must include the full range of the IPP Report’s recommendations and speak to members’ differing theological predispositions and methodologies.

9.2.1 Communications Gone Awry

The interview with the researcher was drawing to a close. Then the participant shifted in her chair, paused, and launched into a new direction. “You know, over all I feel that with everything that’s happened with these recommendations, and I don’t know if I blame the United Church, but communication to the congregations just didn’t work.

“I look at what we understood about these recommendations and up until we met you we thought it was just, ‘Ok we’re going to do boycott, and the church is going to just boycott everything in Israel. They want all of us to get involved in the politics of it.’ So however the real plan was communicated, it was not done properly.

“How much of that is the fault of the church? I remember we got the Observer, and I remember an article about boycott was in there—and I didn’t read it. So how much of that was my fault? I didn’t read that article perhaps because it didn’t impress me, or I thought ‘I’ll come back and read it later,’ and never did. I wasn’t at that meeting [with the report’s co-writer] at the church, either. It wasn’t something I felt was important enough to warrant the time in terms of having the evening or afternoon it would take to go, away from my family and other priorities. It just wasn’t an issue that affected me.”

No need to subscribe wholeheartedly to the notion of the national church as extended family to sense that this “small-town cousin” temporarily felt alienated from an important aspect of church-work. To her, the agenda was controlled by others and the conversation did not invite
her. As is generally the case in such breakdowns, communication no longer seemed a two-way street with input from all parties and a synthesis of perspectives gradually evolving. Such a pattern is healthy in families—and among the priesthood of all believers we are trying to be. But this participant felt excluded from the traffic of communications and echoed the sentiments of the entire group: that the working group on IPP, General Council, and other communicators initially failed to send a clear and effective message. The results were parabolic. Peacebuilding might have started, although seed was scattered on HMUC’s rocky soil of resistance. But with too little nourishment, the desire to act was quickly overcome by weeds of apathy.

9.2.2 CIJA’s Persuasive Technique

In contrast to their negative impressions regarding communications about the IPP Report’s recommendations, participants found CIJA’s materials particularly successful. Aura said a letter from Canadian Jewish rabbis and cantors persuaded her against boycott, which she favoured after Fullerton’s presentation. A brief study of the letter’s organization and tone suggests reasons for Aura’s receptivity: it’s an impressive demonstration of the time-honoured AIDA formula (attention, interest, decision, action) for persuasive writing.

First, the letter-writers focus the reader’s attention by establishing common-ground, introducing themselves as Jewish neighbours sharing the reader’s sense of responsibility for Tikkun Olam, “healing the world,” and speaking encouragingly about justice/peace for Israelis

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224 Aside from the comments from the participant, above, recall David’s inability to make headway in the report, 82, above.

225 June 2012. See Appendix One: Thesis Proposal, sub-Appendix J. This letter was mailed to ministers across Canada shortly before the 41st General Council.
and Palestinians. Readers will instantly respond to what business communications names “the you-viewpoint;” that is, through direct address and acknowledgement of readers’ concerns, the writers encourage trust and understanding. Next, interest is roused by appealing to irresistible values—“fairness,” “balance,” and “friendship” between Jewish and UCC communities. But interest is lost if credibility is sacrificed, so the writers address the tension between friends, while still recognizing the reader’s “heartfelt desire to support the Palestinian people.” The writers then heighten interest by proposing a solution, which involves supporting “the legitimate aspirations” of both Israelis and Palestinians through initiatives that prompt “dialogue, reconciliation and confidence building.” Next the letter prompts decision-making by inviting UCC members to be “caring observers” and “fair-minded intermediaries.” But they withhold nothing when arguing against the alternative—boycott—which they say reminds Jews of the dark times when they were vulnerable targets in a hostile world. Finally, action is prompted through an emotional plea that readers remember their shared scriptures and accept the outstretched hand of rabbinic friends and colleagues “to beat swords into plough-shares” (Isaiah 2:4). The letter invites readers into partnership, then carefully layers conciliation and challenge while maintaining a studiously emotional pitch—all masterfully persuasive.

Group members also found CIJA’s booklet “Seek Peace and Pursue It” (2013) a helpful resource offering specific projects to enhance the previous letter’s prompt to action. “Seek Peace” invited missional support for a selection of grassroots organizations in Israel and Canada. When discussing support for grassroots organizations promoting trust between

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226 The group was familiar with similar catalogues published yearly by the UCC’s Mission and Service organization. “Seek Peace and Pursue It” is distinctive however in that it features organizations that promote
Israelis and Palestinians, participants frequently mentioned this resource, which was published in a timely manner just six months after GC41. The booklet however was limited by concerning itself exclusively with Jewish-Arab relationships within Israel rather than in Canada or in the occupied territories. But some participants used it as a guide when choosing overwhelmingly for grassroots action, persuaded that conversation and modest cooperative efforts could have surprising effects—though participants agreed such activities were unlikely to move mountains of mistrust and hostility soon.

A personal letter or helpful catalogue of outreach activities serve expectations very different from those of a full report written to GC regarding needful policy change. But professional report-writers strive to make reports readable, persuasive, and actionable; otherwise, even well-researched documents may fail to prompt crucial change. So there is much to learn from CIJA staff who demonstrated the power of persuasive writing with timely and focused communications delivered specifically to ministers and members in UCC pews who loathed the adverse publicity IPP was garnering. Here I wish to emphasize the preparation for such delivery. I warrant CIJA listened carefully to various UCC voices in order to appeal directly to average congregants, such as HMUC participants. I further judge participants found CIJA speaking to their two primary goals for mission: to enact Jesus’ commandment to love one another as he loved, and to cooperate with multifaith partners in peacebuilding.227

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227 Focus group participants frequently referred to this cooperation as “ecumenism,” although context suggested they included not just Christian partners but Jews and Muslims as well.
9.2.3 IPP Report’s Rhetorical Style

This report missed the mark in appealing to participants because, in contrast to CIJA’s communications, it was utterly unpersuasive. First, it was a broad policy statement for the entire UCC, but despite good intentions did not assist rank-and-file church-goers to clarify their peacebuilding choices. Without concise delineation of who should do what and how, its recommendations lacked the accessible language needed to be actionable. Moreover, they were buried on page 26 of a 30-page document and explicated on just three other pages, with economic action information taking two. Second, the report would have disappointed participants seeking theological guidance for their peacebuilding choices. Just three paragraphs provided biblical and theological reflection, but focused on the dignity of Israelis and Palestinians and the “particular calling of the land itself”—abstractions, I warrant, of little use to average potential peacebuilders.

Nor could HMUC peacebuilders find help elsewhere in the report, which was apportioned as follows: the authors’ findings on the conflict’s historical context, two pages; assumptions regarding the conflict, occupation, existential threats and Israelis’ and Palestinians’ fears, three pages; analysis and policy directions for the UCC regarding creation of a Palestinian state, seven pages; security of Israel, six pages; and a one-page conclusion on

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228 For example, the recommendation aimed at building stronger relationships between Palestinians and Israelis employs language such as “identify the importance” of relationships and “encouraging stronger connections”—without notifying any particular denominational court (e.g. congregations or members) to take any specific actions (e.g. “to invite dialogue with multi-faith partners” or “support grassroots organizations for peace.”) Cf the recommendation for economic action, which specifies that the UCC encourage its members “to avoid any and all products produced in the settlements.” Less clear in subsection 7 are the agents implied in actions such as “identifying the goal of the campaign [for economic action],” “requesting the government of Canada” to clarify labelling for Israeli products, or “inviting the participation of other Canadian churches in the [economic action] campaign.”
recommendations for a limited first step, but one responsive to Palestinian Christians’ pleas and consistent with Christ’s call to live in hope, forgiveness, and love. Previously, David complained that he attempted to read the document but couldn’t comprehend it; in contrast, no other participant claimed to have read the report before this study.\footnote{All members of the study received a summary of the report, however, which was available through the United Church website.} I warrant there were many non-readers at HMUC, and without appreciating its content most believed the report was chiefly political and unduly forceful about boycott—something congregants found distasteful. If they considered the matter, they concluded the report offered no satisfactory strategy for mission.

UCC report-writers could benefit from learning the skills of human relations and business communications experts. Persuasive reports must inform and motivate the faithful to choose and act for peace. Far from being tools for manipulation, which senior HMUC participants sometimes disparaged, persuasive writing shows sensitivity to its prospective readership. Writers prepare by analyzing members’ prior learning, opinions, and constraints to understanding an issue.\footnote{Jane Thomas, \textit{Guide to Managerial Persuasion and Influence} (Toronto: Pearson Education, 2004), 34-37.} The \textit{IPP Report}, with its recommendations varied to appeal to many church-members, could have been written more persuasively if the writers and council staff had analyzed and responded to the readership’s needs.

Appealing to a broad swath of UCC members is challenging. But by assuming an academic tone, emphasizing the occupation’s history and possible creation of a Palestinian state,
downplaying recommendations that members with a synthetic/transcendental inclination might choose and act upon, the report neglected questions that many church-family members were asking: What good might boycott do? What harm might it cause? What are alternative peacebuilding activities and how might they be pursued? What theological bases support our action? And—especially for those wanting a particular kind of theological clarity—how, in Israel/Palestine and multicultural Canada, can peacebuilding UCC members enact Jesus’ command to love both neighbour and enemy?

9.2.4 The Moderator’s Persuasive Tone

An excellent example of persuasive writing style was available on the UCC website by November, 2013. There, Moderator Paterson offered encouragement and information regarding the IPP Report’s full range of proposals, and urged the faithful to consider their options:

You and your congregation are now invited to “Pray, Choose, Speak for Peace in Palestine and Israel.” Join in worship, prayer, and study; economic action focused on settlement goods; and support for trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis. Become involved in conversations with Canadian Jews and Canadian Palestinians. Take positive actions for peace with justice. All of these actions are part of The United Church of Canada’s Unsettling Goods: Choose Peace in Palestine and Israel initiative. I encourage you to review the enclosed materials for details about how you and your congregation can become involved.

…With these efforts, we join with many others striving to bring peace with justice to the Holy Land. This outstretched branch and these courageous actions for peace are signs of our belief that God calls us to embody and pass the peace of Christ so that all might live with fullness of life.231

Here Paterson demonstrates persuasive method, getting attention through invitation; maintaining interest in positive action and, tellingly, situating the controversial economic

action initiative between those with widespread appeal; stimulating *desire* for additional resources; encouraging individuals’ and congregations’ collectivist impulses to “become involved;” and prompting “courageous” *action* with theological references to the Old and the New Testaments.

I warrant this persuasive invitation could have succeeded with mission-minded congregants at HMUC, but probably escaped notice, first, for lack of timeliness. It was not until late 2013 that the resources Paterson mentioned were available to congregations, online or in mail-out packages. By that time, one participant said, boycott “had taken on a life of its own” at HMUC and weeds of hostility or apathy had stifled conversation for a time. Second, channels of communication were problematic. Although UCC’s web-site and moderator’s blog provided a helpful network for those who navigate easily, the HMUC seniors indicated they are generally disinclined to visit online sites. Part of the UCC’s aging demographic, they usually bypass this cheap outlet for information; unfortunately, surface-mail requires church administration to copy or post resources on bulletin boards. HMUC participants were unaware of Unsettling Goods resources, and no posters appeared on their bulletin-boards.

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232 Resources were updated in 2015, and at the time of this writing church members could learn about and consider working for such organizations as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), the Parents’ Circle - Families Forum (PCFF) for Israelis and Palestinians who have lost a family member in the conflict but show how cooperation between peoples is possible, and the cooperative village of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salaam (Oasis of Peace) where Jewish and Palestinian Israelis live and together. See “Trust-Building Initiatives,” November 4, 2013, updated January 5, 2015, accessed May 2015, http://www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/unsettling-goods/choose/trust
9.2.5 Other Resources

The UCC cannot be critiqued for coverage in the popular press or the Observer, which maintains independence in content-selection and editorial position. It’s important to recognize, however, that even if participants were aware of the full range of IPP recommendations and sought information from sources other than those on line, they would have been stymied by narrow coverage. News publications were almost exclusively drawn to the most controversial part—again, boycott—before, during and shortly after the decision of 2012. The Observer published a special report on GC41 but neglected to mention other peacebuilding recommendations, instead promising to separate fact from fiction on settlement boycott while emphasizing the strong majority of commissioners who voted for an end to the Israeli occupation and a boycott of settlement products. In fact, commissioners gave rather scant time to debate boycott itself, contained as it was in the entire report, which was the motion before council. By focusing on boycott, which they called “the most controversial plank in the United Church’s Mideast policy,” Observer’s editors neglected the rest of the platform—and readers remained ill-informed about their options.

Finally, by early 2016 little had been done to name and claim the broader perspectives of the report’s peacebuilding proposals. The “Let’s Keep Talking” campaign (2015) sought to bolster the church’s Unsettling Goods initiative, but brochures and posters once again

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233 Mike Milne, “For Better or For Worse, A Boycott,” Observer, October 2012, 22-23.
235 We have seen that Bedford Park United’s proposal to GC42 (2015) protested that the UCC had focused primarily on boycott of settlement goods, with limited work on trust-building initiatives, since the previous General Council. See 40, above.
neglected the full range of recommendations. Instead, space was devoted to encouraging boycott and countering concerns about its “controversial” nature. HMUC participants could be forgiven for feeling the word controversy is inadequate, perhaps disrespectful, of the dilemma they faced. During this study, they disclosed that forming their conscience regarding this complex act was a real exertion, with social and theological implications to consider.

With future reports employing more consistently persuasive techniques as proposed above, interest groups such as HMUC’s will more readily rise to action. For UCC communicators to craft their peacebuilding messages for wider appeal, a crucial first step must involve focused conversations at the grassroots level and intentional listening by General Council members and report-writers. While congregations form the denomination’s lower court and are poised to give input, grassroots alienation from upper courts has struggled to find expression for several years.236 This ministry-in-action project demonstrates that qualitative research offers a paradigm of deep listening and sharing, one which prompts church-family-members to help one another climb higher than personal goals and see further than personal horizons.237

237 UCO reporter Trisha Elliott also observed the Comprehensive Review process as a triumph of structured communication. She defines the beauty of the review: “The idea of networks and clusters and the original vision of a ‘connective space’ belied a desire for deeper relationships, trust and transparency—virtues that a polarized church desperately needs.” “Navigating the Fault Lines,” UCO, October 2015, 30.
9.2.6 Tapping Grassroots before Report-writing

Though it involves ministers in an intensive, time-consuming process, I recommend qualitative research when the church proclaims crucial need—such as peace in the family of Abrahamic faiths. More pastoral case-studies followed by timely reporting will result in more persuasive communications from the church to its members. Case-studies help rank-and-file members remain in conversation with other church courts to promote engagement in peace projects. After this study, HMUC participants could have informed higher courts about the perceived ineffectiveness of received communications, their resistance to language of economic action/boycott and their desire for more theological reflection on all peacebuilding proposals. With encouragement, they could have clarified their theological baseline of Jesus’ commandment concerning love for neighbour and enemy. Such input would have been invaluable before the report was drafted, helping writers organize their document to respond to data gathered. I predict that qualitative research among congregations would result, first, in more accessible and persuasive communications between General Council and grassroots members and, second, greater grassroots participation in and appreciation for the UCC’s peacebuilding activities.

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238 Certainly, a church-wide project in conversation and feedback is unrealistic for the majority of issues brought forward for ecclesial decision-making. When the new structures for the church courts are determined, a mechanism will be needed for ascertaining what would be a suitable number of congregations to submit results from their own case studies.
9.2.7 Younger and Senior Members

One should not underestimate the difficulty of data-gathering in a group that represents a congregation’s demographics and disposition on a complex subject such as peacebuilding. Understanding that members 65 years of age and over form the largest sector, researchers need to use communications channels that suit seniors’ needs. Faulty sound systems hinder their appreciation of videos, email attachments are often unwelcomed. Younger members are adept at receiving on multiple channels but are sometimes uncomfortable expressing their views as a minority sub-group.

In her interview, Rosalyn made a strong case for handling the two demographic groups separately:

I like this study because we were separate, especially when it comes to the boycott question. If I had been the third or fourth person to comment, my opinion could have been affected when the conversation got to me….There were equally valid points of view, but I think for the purposes the study it was really nice for us to see that difference.

What happened here through serendipity might be helpful for local ministers. When the congregation is engaged in qualitative research on controversial issues, judicious separation of younger and older members—at least for some discussions—may facilitate everyone’s exploration of the issues.

9.3 Recommendation #2

That peace-minded ministers and their congregations actively seek out opportunities to practice the theology of “the small way in.”
9.3.1 Hospitality to Different Truths\textsuperscript{239}

The first time I prepared to attend Grandmother’s Tea, I considered the sacramentality of our potluck offerings. I imagined each woman preparing a dish—as I did—not knowing what others were bringing, because there was no coordination in preparations. Each considered what would be pleasing to others, what she had in her pantry, and what she could transport. When grandmothers set their table, they rarely identify who brought what, so nobody stresses about making a culinary statement. Food is important, chiefly as a way into conversation. I suspect the delicious tastes and colours point to something larger and more nutritious than chit-chat, but sacramental qualities are challenging to define.

My own church hosted its first GMT as Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation report was released. We selected Truth from the Seven Sacred Teachings, inviting each woman to consider how she gained greater understanding of some truth important to her.\textsuperscript{240} Many spoke of wisdom their mothers or aunts had imparted. One woman, presumed non-native, surprised us by speaking of her quest to discover the resting place of her First Nations great-grandmother. Two indigenous women said truth was a difficult topic, having been prevented from knowing their true racial identity by loving parents who thought it better for children to grow up in the dominant culture. Acceptance, opportunities, even better healthcare were theirs, parents later said, if they didn’t know their true identity.

I pondered this degree of cultural ambiguity among just twenty-two women. Briefly, the two cultures seemed less separate yet remained distinct—no longer “pure” in isolation but invigorated by shared vulnerability. Each woman spoke her personal experience of truth or non-truth into the circle, but together the narratives suggested that neither individuals nor cultures were truly isolated. All were critically dependent on others in order to understand our identity and place in the world. When “Lillian” spoke, we had a better understanding of what it meant to be “Lillian” and glimpsed into Lillian’s world. Thus we participated in “the small way in,” as Lorraine named such conversation on the first day of the study. “In,” for the grandmothers, meant admittance into the foyer of the other’s doubts and fears and triumphs, all of which might arise within our searches as well.

\textsuperscript{239} From the researcher’s notebook.
9.3.2 Risking Adjustment

Some will say twenty or thirty women meeting and occasionally discovering more about their lived experience in different cultures hardly signifies a new era, but I maintain these women are taking on an essential task in peacebuilding. I also claim that peace-minded ministers need to be alert to opportunities for practicing “the small way in” as an important part of life in a multicultural, multifaith milieu.

Volf contends that we can work to create “just, truthful and peaceful societies,” but too often our postmodern society enables us to evade our moral responsibility to do so. In multicultural Canada, we seldom accuse ourselves of evasion; we celebrate our differences with homage to each other’s arts, cuisine, even skill-sets in the academy or workplace. We even acknowledge mixed heritage with hyphenated identifiers: “I have a French-Irish background.” All of this is helpful in building bridges, but the small way in takes us deeper. The grandmothers show that something fundamental changes when individuals meet and share profoundly of themselves, as, for example, when they disclosed decades of falsehood and celebrated truth-telling. When they stand on such common ground, I warrant they do not even think about building bridges.

Volf would no doubt approve of the grandmothers’ hospitality to different truths. He affirms the dynamic changes implied in making that hospitality real, because yielding

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space for such encounters involves a prior and necessary adjustment of our own identities, to see perhaps for the first time our common humanity with the other.

Through their tea-party—their recognition of the need for nourishment and companionship and their donation of time, attention, skills and food—the women act creatively and generously to situate themselves and each other for discovering and experiencing together. Volf describes this as preparation for peacebuilding: “The will to embrace precedes any ‘truth’ about others and any construction of their ‘justice.’”

Adjusting one’s identity to make space for the other is fraught with risk. For members of two separate communities to transcend decades of friction and actually desire each other’s company, there is risk of appearing odd, foolish or treasonous to those who remain at home-base. Further risk must be reckoned when the first tentative efforts to adjust one’s self-identity to engage in peacebuilding lead to actually meeting the other.

Recall how the translation stage of contextualization presents danger and opportunity: a misinterpreted word or gesture can sabotage outreach, although sometimes misinterpretation can provide motive for more intensive—even good-humoured—discovery. Gopin acknowledges the potential for damage when a public encounter turns ugly, but he offers encouragement: “We constantly underestimate the power of human-to-human encounters to form the basis of new relationships and alliances.”

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242 Volf, 28.
243 Gopin, 27.
9.3.3 Turning Points for Multifaith Cooperation

The land-dispute between the Six Nations community and its non-indigenous neighbours seems to have occasioned a turning point, an opportunity for new choices when the risk of dysfunctional relationship or violence outweighed the risk of a few women gathering for tea. Lederach suggests those who exercise moral imagination meet real-life challenges with an eye to such turning points, risky though they be, because they carry potential for new life. Such pregnant moments cannot be programmed into our complicated lives. But active peacebuilders are vigilant for breakthroughs, like artists on the lookout for new materials and insights. Turning points are opportunities “imbued …with creativity, skill, serendipity, and craftsmanship.”

During this study, I came to hold Attawapiskat and Gaza close in my imagination and to appreciate both the need and opportunity for transcendence of the present order. I gratefully acknowledge members of indigenous and settler communities in my own nation who seek small ways into each other’s hearts (often by sharing what’s in their own), and am hopefully watchful for turning points in all conflicts. Just such a turning point, with great risk and opportunity, is arriving with the current flood of refugees from Syria and other troubled countries who are moving toward Europe and probably North America.

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244 John Paul Lederach, The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29. Lederach defines moral imagination as the quality that transcends violence through the exercise of four disciplines and capacities: “the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence” (5).
Canadian Christians, Jews and Muslims are beginning to meet with a new sense of purpose, pooling money and other resources, inviting each other to share peacebuilding networks for assisting refugees.\textsuperscript{245} Commitment to “the little way in” would allow the Abrahamic family to work for something now only dimly visible. As they work cooperatively, they needn’t deny the complexity of the task ahead or their historically troubled relationships. Just as grandmothers at their tea-parties do not proclaim solutions to complex intercultural problems, activists offering compassion to refugees should not bear the burden of healing all wrongs. But neither should they be undone by such wrongs. Lederach recommends a disposition of paradoxical curiosity: willingness to suspend judgment and deal with social realities without indulging in either/or dualities. Holding painful contradictions in tension without compulsively striving to resolve them does require a special kind of creativity. But multifaith partners who confront paradox without dismay and allow their curiosity to explore potentialities may find surprising energy to channel into peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{246}

\textsuperscript{245} I’ve been brought into two such conversations at this early point in the movement to compassion. Rev Dr Barbara Fullerton, who spoke on come-and-see tourism to the HUMC focus group, has been a leading voice for refugee relief in her presbytery.

\textsuperscript{246} Lederach, 36. Cf Gopin: “If the millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims who are committed in principle to coexistence and compromise actually took the time and developed the skills of reconciliation, the sheer power of their activism, the sheer strength of all their new relationships would have overwhelmed the political and cultural milieu by now. But they have not because most lack the skills and the courage necessary to engage the stranger, the other who has been an enemy” (27).
9.4 Conclusion: Two Voices in Contextual Theologies

The ability to tolerate paradox and ambiguity also coheres with a theology of the cross, which teaches a humble recognition that eschatological peace is God’s peace, glimpsed even now in the lovingkindness of peacebuilders. What does our hope mean to others facing horrific suffering and years of privation? What hope do we offer families caught in the midst of a war that defies most reckonings of human logic? Christian peacebuilders who consult McCarroll and other theologians of the cross receive the gift of hope-filled waiting. Here is relief from the awful stress humans experience when trying to impose solutions on complex systemic problems. But here also is a reminder: followers of the Crucified One declare themselves through self-sacrificing compassion both for friend and enemy, righteous and sinful. Volf insists that followers of Christ must align two qualities: self-donation and solidarity with the needy. Doing otherwise is advocating “cheap grace” and “deceitful ideology.”

With the turn to compassion for refugees, synthesis/transcendence contextualizers will excel in creating vital ad hoc communities to discuss the best ways to provide shelter and relief. But sometimes the desire for multilateralism ignores contentious voices in the immediate family. Here I insist on drawing both anthropological/praxis and synthesis/transcendence contextualizers into the discussion. It is true that some championed the UCC’s policy for economic action against Israeli goods from occupied Palestine, and others grieve that policy as an irritant in relations with Canadian Jews.

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247 Volf, 24-25.
But the refugee crisis demands that committed activists—ecumenical, multi-faith and no-faith—find ways to mobilize the most creative and visionary resource-people. *The small way in* today seeks conversation, timely compassion and cooperation with God’s mysterious and transforming action among us.

Those who, like the participants in this study, have taken steps toward peacebuilding among their Abrahamic kin have a head-start in cooperative action for refugee relief. What follows here is the story of one congregation’s efforts to share the language of peace at a turning point—when the rise of ISIS in the Middle East provoked fear and suspicion in Southern Ontario.
Chapter 10 - Epilogue: Peace Sunday 2014

Numbers 6:24–26. May God bless you and protect you! May God deal kindly and graciously with you! May God bestow His favour upon you and grant you peace.

Matthew 18:1-5. At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’

Sûrah 6, Al-An’âm Part 7 107. Had Allâh willed, they would not have taken others besides Him in worship. And We have not made you a watcher over them nor are you a Wakîl (disposer of affairs, guardian or trustee) over them.248

10.1 Groundwork for Peace

After graciously handing me a cup of coffee, Rabbi Benjamin took his own cup, settled into the chair opposite me, and sighed as he resumed our conversation.249 “You know why others have such an easy time attacking Israel? It’s because we Jews are so open about our disagreements. All you have to do is read a paper like Haaretz to see how true that is!” He argued that Israel appears weak to its enemies because it is a democracy where freedom of speech is cherished—even though such freedom lays all the country’s internal divisions open to the world. The UCC, with its recent decision to boycott products from the occupied territories, was in his opinion yet another voice in the chorus of international critics enabled and encouraged by Israel’s own well-protected malcontents.

249 Participants’ names are pseudonyms.
Perhaps. But as a UCC member I could offer another perspective. I recalled for Benjamin a
description of Jews as “our elder brothers in faith,” which has been used since the pontificate
of John XXIII.\textsuperscript{250} When we disagree with our brothers, whom we love and respect, couldn’t
we—shouldn’t we—voice disagreement in the strongest terms? Wasn’t that expected when
we belong to the family of Abrahamic faiths? Benjamin seemed taken aback but nodded. Yes,
that’s part of the story. We moved on to discuss the peace project I proposed.

With Benjamin’s support for the project, I arranged to attend Friday services at a mosque
nearby to meet the imam and invite his co-operation. I had previously attended functions there
but without much comfort. I was the only non-Muslim woman and felt insecure about whether
my \textit{hijab} was acceptable to the older women. A second source of dis-ease arose from needing
a male colleague to accompany me, so that through him I might gain access to the imam, who
generally circulated among the men—women gathered separately for refreshment, as for
prayer. But the discomfort was not only mine. Imam Abduhl was nervous about speaking
English, although I assured him that I understood him very well and appreciated his efforts.

The Muslim community’s goodwill and the imam’s gracious hospitality eventually overcame
the awkwardness, and I explained my project and received his agreement to participate. He
smiled gently as he pledged to ask his sons, who attend a local university, to help write in
English and manipulate the e-mail channels.

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\textsuperscript{250} Pope Benedict however preferred to speak of the Jews as “our fathers in faith,” noting that the elder
brother was often rejected or found wanting in Jewish tradition. Carolyn Moynihan, “Our Fathers in Faith—
http://www.mercatornet.com/justb16/view/8362
10.2 Peace-reading Project

Thus the three of us started on a peace project with hopes to foster a reading relationship between members of three Abrahamic faith-communities: my own small-town congregation, and a synagogue and mosque in neighbouring cities.251 Each faith-leader agreed to select twenty-one scriptural passages that were dear to the hearts of members and that spoke, in any way, about peace. A different selection from the Torah, Christian Testament, and Qur’an would be presented for each day of three weeks, and when readers reached the end they were encouraged to begin again and discover new depth of meaning through repetition and familiarity. The readings would circulate among our congregations as an e-book, to make the project widely accessible and environmentally friendly. McDaniel calls such a project a “friendly reading,” which helps God become more incarnate in the world by working to create a culture of peace while affirming the truth in each religion.252 But the project also drew inspiration from the notion that God’s faithful people find strength and unity in the discipline of sharing daily prayer, as exemplified in the Christian practice of reciting The Office, for Anglicans, or the Liturgy of the Hours, for Roman Catholics—not to mention the Jewish and Muslim traditions of daily prayer.253

251 The three congregations are stretched over 50 kms. A tighter neighbourhood focus, which in my opinion would have been desirable, was not possible, since there is neither mosque nor synagogue in closer proximity to my church.

252 “What can humans do, to help God become more incarnate in the world?” McDaniel asks. "One way is to undertake friendly readings of the many world religions [he doesn’t specify ‘of scripture’], helping to create a culture of peace. A friendly reading is not a naïve reading... [We need] full awareness that religions can become evil: that is, that they can be conduits for violence and prejudice, arrogance and ignorance.... A friendly reading simply realizes that the dark side of religion is not the whole story, and religions like human beings contain wisdom as well as foolishness. A friendly reading is interested in affirming the truth in each religion." See Jay McDaniel, Gandhi’s Hope: Learning from Other Religions as a Path to Peace (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 97-98.

253 I draw support for the notion of unifying grace stemming from shared prayer from Martin Thornton, who upholds the discipline of following The Rule of reciting the Office, celebrating Eucharist, and praying privately—all practices that fortify members of what he calls the faithful remnant in an increasingly secular world. The Heart of the Parish: A Theology of the Remnant (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1989), 205-217. But
10.3 Pastoral Dimension for the Project

For me, the friendly reading-project had its roots in two layers of pastoral soil. First my congregation imbibed some of the fears and suspicions of Islam that have swept across the western world in the last decade. When a group of Muslims from Toronto bought an empty building in our village to establish a boys’ boarding school, local citizens were alarmed. Emotions reached a climax when vandals savaged the property and the new owners retreated, never to enroll a single child. Sometime later, when Quebec’s proposed Charter of Values called for a ban on all religious symbols or clothing worn by public employees, one of my elderly parishioners used our pastoral visit to rail against immigrants who insist upon wearing turbans or headscarves. They should ban such symbols, Ellen declared, since everyone is “equal” when they come “over here.” As our visit came to a close, I reflected that more, patient conversation was needed. Rather than live in fear and suspicion, Ellen and others like her needed a pastoral invitation to see further and imagine more creatively. I was convinced that a tolerable level of peace could be achieved in our midst. But as long as religious chauvinism was left unchallenged, there remained a serious risk to the congregation’s spiritual and social wellbeing.254

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254David N. Hempton, writing for the Harvard Divinity Bulletin would agree: “There is nothing inevitable about conflict, and there is nothing guaranteed about peace and stability. There is often a fragile veneer of civility in societies, which can be stripped with distressing speed and consequences. This can happen in any community, anywhere.” See “Eleven Reflections from a Conflict Zone,” HDB, Winter/Spring 2013, 56.
The reading project had a second root, which extended deeper into the soil and involved the polity of the UCC. With GC41’s approval of the IPP Report, congregations were invited to act on its peacebuilding recommendations. My congregation’s Official Board rejected boycott but agreed to consider other possibilities, at least in the abstract. The friendly reading-project was welcomed as a resource for building understanding among the Abrahamic family members.

10.4 Invitation, and Risk

Benjamin was first to propose an event when our participating communities might meet, share refreshment, and discuss what we learned from each other’s scriptures. Together, we hoped interested members of our congregations would enjoy that sense of communion that demands “face time.” But such sharing among congregations would need to evolve over time, for both sociological and practical reasons. We recognized that long held suspicions, or just shyness, would be difficult to overcome. Also, when we looked at the calendar and counted the various festivals we celebrated, finding fallow time for meeting and sharing was difficult.

Our booklet, “Scriptures to Share,” was distributed both electronically and by hard-copy in the spring of 2014. At the time, tensions were still evident among Canadian Jews from publicity around the UCC boycott.255 That summer, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

255 Such tensions about the boycott were not unique to this situation, nor did they dissipate. Nicholas Keung, immigration reporter for the Toronto Star, reported a project among the Abrahamic faith communities in the Oakville-Mississauga-Halton region for refugee relief, in the fall of 2015. Keung writes, “The project wasn’t without skeptics, says Shaarei Beth-El’s Rabbi Stephen Wise. Some members of his congregation were hesitant about helping people from Syria, a longtime enemy of Israel. Then there was the United Church of Canada’s decision to boycott products made in or linked to Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.” The project, however, was eventually saved. “There was initially some discomfort working with other groups,” Wise said, “but we have built strong bonds and trust with the United Church and Muslim community over the years through honest dialogues. There is less fear of the others.” See “A Word from the Sponsors,” TS November 1, 2015.
(ISIS) rose to prominence as a force for conquest and brutality in the Middle East, and the contagion of fear and distrust was evident in Canada, our village included. Here was greater reason than ever, I thought, to help my congregation understand they had nothing to fear from their not-so-distant Muslim neighbours. And again, practical considerations prompted decision: Benjamin was leaving the country on sabbatical and a new imam, Ismail, was enthusiastic about meeting multifaith peacebuilders. We agreed to meet at my church for Peace Sunday on the second Sunday of Advent, with three messages for peace based on three passages from our “Scriptures to Share.”

The initiative was endorsed by my congregation’s Worship Committee, then discussed and accepted by the Official Board. Due process however did not allay some congregants’ fears. Acrimony began to build and vows of boycotting Peace Sunday were heard in some quarters. I visited homes, telephoned and explained exactly what parishioners could expect for the event, with mixed results.

On the First Sunday of Advent, I preached about Jesus’ parables of the kingdom of heaven, where good seed is sowed and “weeds” also appear; where the mustard seed flourishes; and where a woman takes yeast and mixes it with flour to feed the hungry. Which vision of the kingdom would suit our church best? Which would help us build peace as we prepared to welcome the prince of peace at Christmas? I invited the congregation to attend Peace Sunday to meet two champions of peacebuilding and interfaith relations, who would share their gifts of wisdom. But I also explained that it was understandable if some could not support the initiative, and that there were real dangers in insisting we all occupy the same spiritual
I asked for understanding from would-be boycotters. “The rest of us are trying very hard to honour Jesus’ teachings in the gospel. We’re planting tiny seeds of hope. And into this mustard-tree-church we’re welcoming, not just folks like ourselves, but others too. We’re trying to create small, helpful changes in the world. And we’re inviting others to do the same.”

10.5 Peace Sunday: What Language Shall I Borrow?

Peace Sunday arrived, and a reasonable-sized congregation gathered—including some supportive clergy, some onlookers curious about whether the event would succeed, and even some (but decidedly not all) who had threatened boycott. The rabbi and imam, acquaintances who had served together on a social-housing committee, greeted each other warmly and sat together until it was time to preach.

Speaking from the Qur’an, Ismail explained that Allāh made humankind into different tribes with freedom to choose different religions yet work together for a better world. “Giving opportunities for sharing our diversities and our similarities, and loving each other, will bring peace,” he assured the congregation. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that recent reports of Islam did not feature love, and he explained why this was a false impression. When good Muslims greet each other with “Salam (peace),” they share a heartfelt understanding that
peace will indeed be achieved through submission to the Divine. Then he told a parable about a woman who caused a cat pain and thus could not be considered a good Muslim. So how could a terrorist remain a good Muslim? Ismail invited the congregation to read and learn more about the Qur’an, rather than learn from the media, from imams, even (he laughed) from himself!

Benjamin greeted the congregation with “Shalom,” and noted the similarities with “Salam.” Reading from the Torah, he pronounced the priestly benediction: “God bless you and keep you.” God’s love, he explained, is unconditional—there is really no “may” in the reading, because blessing is and will always be. God blesses. And God’s people are deeply grateful. This intense personal relationship between loving God and grateful human is the source of inner peace that, when shared, spreads around the globe. He taught the congregation to raise both hands and speak from behind them, asking everyone to imagine God as so interested in their occupations that God peeked out at them, as if from behind a lattice.

Thanking both my colleagues, I too spoke of peace—the peace that comes when adults set their competitive natures aside and become like the child Jesus indicated in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus told us that unless we change, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. When a rabbi, an imam, and a minister stand together and proclaim the words of peace all humans long to hear, change was indeed at hand—necessary change, if we were to meet the earth’s formidable challenges.
The service over, we posed for photographs and wished Benjamin well as he departed for his sabbatical. Then folks continued their conversations, as is our custom, with coffee cups in hand and youngsters eager to join the group. Many surrounded Ismail to continue their discussion. Before long, he came to find me—his face bright with joy.

“They want to know when they can come to the mosque!” he exclaimed. “Tell me when. I will arrange whatever you ask.” A few months later, the mosque held its first—well-attended—Open House.

What language shall I borrow to describe the now-and-yet-to-come kingdom of God? I shall borrow the language of Salam, Shalom, Peace. And Skennen.256

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256 From the Mohawk. Translation provided by a Six Nations elder.


Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. Letter, June 2012.

———. “Seek Peace and Pursue It” (pamphlet, 2013).


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Peacemaking Efforts Between Israelis and Palestinians.” *Record of Proceedings.*


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Appendix One: Thesis Proposal

“What Language Shall I Borrow?”
How a United Church Congregation Articulates its Choices from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

A D.Min Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the D. Min Program Committee
Toronto School of Theology
August 2014

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I  Background and Context of the Applied Research Project

After days of tense debate, the 41st General Council of the United Church was readying itself to vote on the *Report of the Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy*. Acting in large part in response to the plea of Palestinian Christians,\(^1\) the group proposed several recommendations, including the controversial “economic action” against the Israeli-occupied territories.\(^2\) The Court had heard the Jewish and Arab Palestinian sides of the conflict, and the national media had weighed in with critical analysis. Speakers would soon be lining up at the microphones; an on-line chat room was bristling with anxious commentary. But first, the Court would hear a presentation by Cindy Blackstock.

Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, informed the court that aboriginal children on reservations across the nation receive primary and secondary education that is underfunded compared to non-native, off-reserve schools. She told of students forced to attend class in sub-standard buildings or to leave their family for schooling off the reserve. She explained her case for the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, to force the federal government to fund First Nations children’s culturally-based welfare services at the same level that other Canadian children receive.\(^3\) Commissioners listened attentively and offered support. Some commissioners remarked on the irony of debating the situation in

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Israel/Palestine when vestiges of colonialism in Canada are still so apparent. Did any of them wonder if our settler society might share insights in conversation with other settler societies, to learn and grow and together seek justice for the marginalized?

Soon after Blackstock finished, the debate shifted to the IPP Report, with its recommended actions to support Israelis and Palestinians in their search for a just peace and to take economic action against Israeli goods produced on land seized from the Palestinians. At this point, GC 41 witnessed a dramatic tableau. At one microphone a former UCC moderator spoke with passion against the proposed boycott, while behind her, another former moderator prepared to speak against the motion as well, adding a plea for consideration of alternatives. Looking down from the stage were no fewer than three other moderators—one, the incumbent, who had recused herself from the debate, one who had taken over as chair, and a third at the podium who was ready to defend the IPP Report he had co-authored and the recommendations it offered. Thus five moderators representing fifteen years of experience in church leadership were simultaneously engaged in this issue that has seen church members at odds among themselves and with their Jewish neighbours for at least a decade. Surely this is an important debate that speaks to how United Church members see themselves, how they work for justice, and how they cope with tensions within the church and pressures from outside. Surely as well, it is a debate with implications for how we do ministry across the church.

II The Research Problem

While a parliamentarian would say that the IPP Report and its recommendations passed the vote at GC 41 with a comfortable two-thirds majority, the well-publicized tensions over the particular recommendation to boycott products from the occupied
territories have presented challenges for pastoral leaders hoping to rouse a grass-roots effort in peacebuilding. A sense of fragmentation was lamented by church members such as Andrew Love, co-chair of a Jewish/ UCC organization formed to oppose the proposal. Speaking to reporters shortly after GC 41 approved the IPP Report, Love emphasized that while boycott had been adopted each congregation was free to implement or reject it. His organization would work locally to mitigate the damage they felt would result from passage of the motion but, he concluded, “As for the national level, that’s broken now.” And at a deeper, more personal level, some UCC members seemed to wonder if we have done enough to pursue justice here, before taking up the cause elsewhere, as one posting on Wondercafé suggests:

I would suggest that few presbyteries, unless there is a group within the presbytery pushing the issue, would take the time to discuss something that is none of their business [i.e. the proposed boycott, 2012]. . . . I also suggest that the majority of people in the UCCan are far less interested in this discussion (or most discussions that will happen at GC41) than one would like to believe. Now I also believe an argument can be made (not sure if it convinces me but it can be—and is being—made) that this is none of General Council’s business either. As one posting I saw somewhere put it ‘Why do we think we are important enough to meddle in the affairs of another country?’ I might add particularly when we do such a bad job of meddling in/advocating for issues in our own country.

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5 Wondercafé is an online site where contributors discuss various matters of interest to the church. See GordW, www.wondercafé.ca/discussion/global-issues/united-church-release-report (July 23, 2012). Questions about negligence in “advocating for issues in our own country” arose elsewhere as well. Even one who is personally committed to carrying out the recommendations of the IPP Report suggested that the UCC, and perhaps any North American church, is vulnerable to criticism when it elects to actively pursue peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. “Allan,” a UCC commissioner at GC41, reported on the 2012 IPP Report debate at a gathering of United Church Women in the spring of 2013. He told of his recent tour of the Holy Land and of encountering an Israeli border guard who challenged him—a Canadian—for his notions of healing the conflict in Israel/Palestine. “You North Americans stole land from the Indians, right?” the guard queried; then he dismissed the church’s efforts as hypocritical. Allan’s comment to the UCW regarding the guard’s challenge was brief: “It’s a fair question.”
Congregations and individuals are not required to take the actions recommended by the *IPP Report,* thus it may be not be appropriate for the church itself to gather and publish information about how its members respond to General Council’s invitation to “support those who seek a peaceful and just resolution to the conflict in Israel/Palestine.” But I am eager to study members of a congregation, similar to but other than my own, in conversation to consider GC 41’s recommendations on peace-building in Israel/Palestine. This study does not seek a proposal for settling the problems of Israelis and Palestinians; neither does it take aim at the church’s efforts at boycotting—easily the most controversial aspect of its efforts to assist peace in the Middle East. What this study seeks to discover is the theology that underlies the decisions of selected individuals in a UCC congregation as they choose one or more or none of the *IPP Report’s* recommendations:

- to invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, help build the Palestinian economy, promote security and viability for a Palestinian state and for Israel, and/or
- to support grassroots organizations promoting improved relations between Israelis and Palestinians, and/or
- to engage in “Come and See” tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories, and/or
- to support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel, and/or
- to take economic action ("boycott") against products from the Israeli-occupied territories.

III Theoretical Framework and Assumptions

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6 Bruce Gregerson, a senior staff-person for General Council programming in 2012, was firm in his assessment: “We don’t tell people what to do. What we can do is invite consideration; we can encourage.” Gregerson reflected the will of the Council, which voted to “recommend the report and its policies to its members for study, prayerful discernment and personal action.” Qtd by Mike Milne in “For Better or For Worse: A Boycott,” *UCO,* Oct 2012, 22.

7 *IPP Report,* 1.

a) Contextual Theologies at Work in the Study

Might differing theologies be an important root of the conflict among UCC members as they discern their role in peacebuilding in the Middle East? Contextual theology suggests that many Christians would initiate encounters in another’s context with communication pitched at a translation level; a Christian from a western country who encountered the segregated neighbourhoods of East and West Jerusalem might relate the situation to Jesus’ words about an unhappy house divided against itself, and seek to learn more about that city’s problems. Such translation would result in effective learning where mutual respect and careful listening prevailed. But because Israel/Palestine is so much more complicated than a household with embattled parents, both the visitor and the hosts from Jerusalem would quickly come to a point where rough equivalencies seem banal and insufficient. How then could a contextualized understanding proceed?

I observe here a system of theological predispositions, sometimes distinct and sometimes overlapping, as I shall outline below. In my Comprehensive Paper I examined how two such predispositions have guided justice- and peace-building in recent decades, with the anthropological approach leading to praxis methodology (championed most notably by liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez) and a synthetic approach leading to a transcendental method (with Bernard Lonergan as one of its first guiding lights.)⁹ One who practices theology along the anthropological/praxis pathway is likely to immerse in the context under study, refrain from offering and, especially, from imposing western Christian insights, and come to a crisis when action is demanded on behalf of the oppressed. For many in the UCC, praxis in the

church’s engagement with the conflicted parties in Israel/Palestine has come to mean boycott, as demonstrated in the IPP Report and the 2013 campaign, “Unsettling Goods.” When speaking theologically, such church-goers would use expressions that reflect a concern for “preferential option for the poor,” and “action in solidarity with the marginalized.”

Some UCC members (such as some contributors to Wondercafè) who seek alternatives to the praxis methodology might find helpful Lonergan’s synthetic/transcendental model, which highlights the role of the authentic self in encountering the other while maintaining an openness to mutual transformation. Theologians following this pathway listen to other-context representatives while searching their own subjective hearts carefully. Less reticent about offering their insights than those on the anthropological/praxis route, transcendental theologians express their own culture’s gifts and graces, its sins and short-comings, in frank and open discussion, reasoning that in due time similar disclosures from the other culture may also be offered.

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10 See, for example, the following postings to Wondercafè: “I find it odd the Church is thinking of vengeful ways rather than healing ways to bring peace. This kind of action has never worked to bring lasting good, or peace... Surely, depth of spirituality at General Council can bring us to more creative ways in this matter. Anger is deadly...a break in relationship with the Creator’s Love. It takes more strength to stand up for peace than it does to take on the broken ways of judgment and punitive action.” [His/her emphasis. From spirit wind 7, 07/16/2012]. And also: “Boycott may seem to be a peaceful reaction to what seems to be an unfair situation, but boycott is a gentler term for embargo....It matters not who is in power and who exerts power. It matters that power is involved. And frankly, history speaks and we need to hear the stories, from all sides, and if we listen carefully, there would be more consideration around this proposed embargo.” [From redhead, 07/16/2012].

11 Encounter, for Lonergan, is deeper than brief or casual acquaintance. It is fundamental to the individual’s growth and society’s development. “Encounter is...meeting persons, appreciating the values they represent, criticizing their defects and allowing one’s living to be challenged at its very roots by their words and by their deeds. Moreover, such an encounter is not just an optional addition to interpretation and to history. Interpretation depends on one’s self-understanding: the history one writes depends on one’s horizon; and encounter is the one way in which self-understanding and horizon can be put to the test.” Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 247.

12 A helpful text outlining various aspects of a theology of conversation has been assembled after the Third Louvain Encounters in Systematic Theology Conference, November 2001. See Jacques Haers, “Defensor Vinculi et Conversationis: Connectedness and Conversation as a Challenge to Theology.” Theology and Conversation:
If, for example, Cindy Blackstock’s assessment of the treatment of First Nations students led commissioners to GC 41 to reflection about Canada’s record as a settler society, they might have left General Council seeking extended conversation with Jews and Palestinians about the complexities of culture-to-culture, religion-to-religion interface. If they developed conversation along the synthetic/ transcendental path, they would tend not to see action as end in itself—they might not have a single, definable goal in mind. They would however acknowledge that sometimes conversation partners must disagree, but travel together and learn to argue out their differences.

Currently Lonergan is best known among Roman Catholic theologians, but the Reformed tradition has developed similar theological perspectives. David H. Jensen argues that Christians engaged in interreligious conversation must model the kenotic Christ, emptying themselves of all desire to convert the other but aiming to develop more deeply each religious tradition.13 Ronald Allen, et al, offer a vision of the church as community of conversation, where listening is crucial, mutual conversion is possible, and mission through relationship inches all humankind closer to a “relatively adequate” understanding of God’s will.14 More familiar to UCC members may be Parker Palmer’s work, practiced and now taught by Mardi Tindal, UCC Moderator during GC 41 and present during its debate on the IPP Report. She teaches that the individual does not need the services of another to be fixed or saved or set free; rather, each needs a community of safety for the soul to explore its own share of the

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divine spark and discover its own calling. In a speaking circle that borrows from both Quaker and First Nations traditions and adheres to faith in the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance, Tindal teaches participants to speak with their authentic voices, “hanging in and staying connected” without yielding to cynicism when conversation is difficult.

Regardless of the theological models they follow, I predict that synthetic/transcendental thinkers would also seek a praxiological dimension to their transcendental method; perhaps for UCC members this means choosing one of the IPP Report’s recommendations for accompaniment, positive investment and come-and-see tours. If these transcendental thinkers argue against boycott for its potential to damage UCC/Jewish relationships, they would encounter sharp disagreement from churchgoers following the action-oriented praxis method, who find arguments for boycott compelling, especially since it was requested by suffering Palestinians. Thus I am hoping that my ministry-in-action project will show how congregation-participants may articulate these two different theological groundings, and thereby explore one aspect of the UCC’s peacebuilding efforts in Israel/Palestine, which remain so polarizing after more than a decade of debate.

A third predisposition arises in the debate over GC’s recommendations toward peacemaking. Here neither anthropological/praxis nor synthetic/transcendental models of theology may be at play but a resistance to any kind of engagement, based on the notion that “we should mind our own business” or that “church and

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15 Allen makes a similar point. “…Conversation is seldom an end in itself but typically takes place to help the church clarify not only God’s purposes but also how to respond…through the internal life of the community and also through relationships and mission beyond the congregation,” Under the Oak Tree, xiii.
16 (And perhaps most noteworthy, fellow Christians in Palestinian.) Kairos Palestine, 30, 36.
17 Preliminary research has suggested to me that church members have focused almost exclusively on the political aspects of the debate, rarely venturing into theological conversation from the perspective of an intentional Christian of the Reformed tradition practicing in the Canadian context of the UCC.
politics don’t mix.” Such a disposition could stem from risk-aversion, protectiveness for a church with declining membership and influence, embarrassment over Canada’s record of tensions between indigenous and settler societies, or weariness with ongoing conflicts or natural disasters around the world. During my ministry-in-action study, I may need to “hear into speech” those participants who are reluctant to engage at any level in the Israel/Palestine conflict and hesitant to express their opinions.

Theory at Work in the Study:

(a) Historic Experience of UCC and other Faith Groups

“A conversation is a rare phenomenon,” writes David Tracy. “It is not a confrontation. It is not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go.” An important aspect of my study will be the opportunity it affords for extended questioning and conversation at the grassroots level concerning an initiative passed by General Council. Such conversation accords with the obligation of the church’s courts to propose policy for the triennial council to debate and then to prayerfully consider implementing such policies as the council’s commissioners recommend. Thus I am eager to study how such conversation, such pursuit of a question wherever it might go, could serve congregations searching for a way to build peace. My study of past debates on assisting conflicted Israelis and Palestinians, however, suggests that the process is
problematic—perhaps especially at the grassroots level—for the United Church and other denominations as well.\(^{20}\)

UCC experience extends back at least to the 1970s, when A.C. (Al) Forrest, editor of the Observer, argued on behalf of Arab Palestinians so vigorously that he led both the Observer and the church to a 1972-73 libel suit and counter-suit with Toronto’s B’nai Brith, as Jewish-Israeli scholar Haim Genizi has painstakingly detailed.\(^{21}\) Perhaps this bitter experience has had a lingering effect on subsequent debate. Especially in the first decade of the 21\(^{\text{st}}\) century, when the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has drawn the attention of the UCC and its governing bodies, contributions and letters to the UCO have often shown members to be wary of accusations of being anti-Israel or one-sided in the face of a complex problem. Debate has been so problematic for some that they have suggested membership would drop or the church would be perceived as irrelevant if it continued its struggle to assist peace in the Middle East.\(^{22}\) Some decry the church’s involvement in politics at all.

But others counter that Jesus was political and that the church has responsibility to act when politicians and diplomats have failed in the cause of peace.\(^{23}\) Those who support recommendations to boycott—by far the most contentious of the peace-building initiatives proposed thus far—see themselves as participating in a religious


\(^{22}\) See for instance Janice Alaimo Brophy, letter to the editor, UCO, October 2009, 6: “The United Church is not exactly busting at the seams. Why is it taking such volatile stances?” Or James Maffre, letter to the editor, UCO, September 2012, 8, on the IPP Report: “United Church statements on the subject make our church more and more irrelevant.”

\(^{23}\) See Ralph Wushke, qtd by Mike Milne, “For Better or For Worse, A Boycott,” UCO, October 2012, 23.
protest movement similar to the one that brought down South African apartheid, though it took six years to do so.\textsuperscript{24}

The UCC is by no means the only denomination that struggles to assist the conflicted parties in Israel/Palestine. To take one example, the Presbyterian Church in the United States has been involved in discussions of boycott as well as divestment and sanctions for the many years, drawing expressions of praise on one hand and on the other concerns that are very familiar to the Canadian church.\textsuperscript{25} The Society of Friends also seems to have garnered varying responses toward peacebuilding strategies that involve such forceful measures as boycott. Canadian peace activist and member of the Society, Ursula Franklin, maintains that peace is the absence of fear from political, economic or even environmental injustice. Cooperating with what she calls “the threat system” only works in the cause of fear, and unjust means cannot produce justice or peace. Since Jews around the world fear that boycotting targets and isolates them, it would seem that Franklin would not support a boycott initiative.\textsuperscript{26}

In contrast to what she suggests, however, Quakers (Friends) in the United Kingdom have taken a very different approach by voting on April 2, 2011, to


\textsuperscript{25} For example, General Assembly Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons received both kudos and condemnation from his flock following his letter to the US government in support of Palestinians and the rebuilding of Gaza. From David Oliver-Holder: “Thank you, Rev. Parsons, for this clarification. I am proud of the stance taken by our General Assemblies” (October 25, 2012). And from Stephen Gons: “The policies of the national church leadership will continue to drive the relentless exodus of members to other churches that are not so brazenly anti-Israel and actually promote traditional Christian values” (October 25, 2012). Presbyterian Church USA, Office of the General Assembly, “A Message from the Stated Clerk Concerning Recent General Assembly Statements on Israel,” October 23, 2012, ed. Emily Enders Odom, Communications Coordinator. http://www.pcusa.org/news/2012/10/23/message-stated-clerk-concerning-israel-statement/responses to posting (accessed Oct 27, 2012).

\textsuperscript{26} This point is demonstrated in my paper for Dr. Pamela Couture (EMP 6619), “Shalom, Peace, Salaam (Skennen): Yehezkel Landau, the Abrahamic Partnership, and Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine,” January 2013. See also Ursula Franklin, “Reflections on Theology and Peace,” \textit{The Ursula Franklin Reader} (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 70-73.
boycott products from Israeli settlements. UK Quakers explain they acted in response to a call from Palestinian Quakers for boycott as a non-violent act of resistance, which they believe has the support of Jewish Israeli peace groups.27

It is small wonder then that members of the UCC find themselves at odds as they struggle to discern their responses to a conflict that has baffled faith groups in various countries for decades. To this point, only submissions to the Observer have provided a glimpse of grassroots’ support or opposition for the church’s peacebuilding efforts in Israel/Palestine. Thus my ministry in action should benefit congregations and church leaders by sharing the thoughts of a faith community engaged in conversations about pursuing peace through the IPP Report’s recommendations.

b) Biblical Reflections: Justice, Kindness, Listening, Sharing

Those who speak with prophetic voices in the cause of justice and peace frequently refer to the prophet Micah, who reminds the would-be worshipper that God has specific requirements: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Even as I acknowledge these are words to live by, I concede that the way to do justice is far from clear in the muddy complexities of life. As a parent, I found that when justice was called for, lovingkindness was not top of mind, nor was I walking humbly with my God; instead I was standing tall as the wrath of God. All of us want justice and peace. But our strategies for building peace and preserving justice differ a good deal, depending on our culture, past experience, and God-given gifts of insight and communication.

I have argued elsewhere that lovingkindness for a neighbour, especially in the context of inter-religious and inter-cultural communication, must involve intentionally and skillfully listening to that neighbour, and must involve upholding what I call the principle of mutual responsibility for the success of any communication event. When I have my own agenda at the beginning of dialogue, I need to examine not just my assumptions but my willingness to listen and explore possibilities. When I discover I’m inept at such examinations, I find much in common with Jesus’ disciples. Their dreams of establishing and leading a new world order ran counter to Jesus’ emphasis on faith the size of a mustard seed and on the little ones, the anawim, leading into the kingdom. More than once, he summoned his friends to better listening and learning skills: “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” (Matt 11:15, Mk 4:9, 23, Lk 8:8, 14:35). And Jesus himself, though not intentionally portrayed in the gospels as one who listens, showed mastery of the art of adapting his message with illustrations, parables, and even confrontation, so we may safely assume that he did listen closely to others. Moreover, as a twelve-year-old, Jesus offers a helpful paradigm of active conversation in his three days of listening and questioning in the temple (Lk 2:46-47), and it is this paradigm that I hope to offer to the congregation that participates in my action-in-ministry project. My invitation is this: Take the time to listen, question, engage in conversation, humbly learn from others and offer authentic personal opinions—be, in short, what I call the unanimous catechumenate, all of us learners hoping to give and receive. Our goal is justice, our disposition loving-kindness, our first and most important action walking humbly with God.

c) Assumptions Operative in the Study

As Gerald Nosich points out, critical thinking does not proceed on the basis that all assumptions can and should be set aside; on the contrary, assumptions are necessary if I am to develop a thesis that can be tested for reasonability and compared to other reasonable works. Those assumptions, however, must be intentional on my part and transparent to research partners and readers.\(^{29}\) I begin, therefore, by acknowledging the following as my pre-understandings about the UCC, its relationships, and its mission:

1) That the protracted intra-denominational debate on strategies for assisting to build peace in Israel/Palestine demonstrates the importance of the issue to church members, that they develop their opinions with a prayerfully informed conscience, and that their disagreement is not in itself a sign of abnormality or ill-health.

2) That inter-faith partnerships are a “good,” and that disagreement between conversation partners is not necessarily or in itself a sign of abnormality or ill health in those relationships.

3) That the church must continue, through its prayerfulness and peacebuilding strategies, to partner with others working for transformation in the world, and that peace, though always fragile, is nonetheless attainable.

4) And finally, though not an assumption but more correctly a predisposition, I am personally inclined toward a relational theology practiced in conversation over an inclusive network and patient in commitment of time. I prefer a peacebuilding modality that admits courageous praxis while encouraging the broadest possible cooperation among conversation partners. In short, where boycott halts conversation, I am prompted to mend the network and begin again.

IV Ministry—in–Action

a) Case Study with a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Component

My ministry-in-action will take place in a congregation, “N,” preferably situated in a town or small city, to reflect a factor in UCC demographics: more than 50 per cent of congregations and church members living in communities of fewer than 30,000.30 I note two social considerations, plus a practical one. First, being mindful of the special per-spective that First Nations and Métis people may bring to issues involving settler so-cieties, justice and peacemaking, I would like to choose a congregation that includes a First Nations/Métis person or has knowledge of aboriginal concerns. Second, I recognize that small-urban centres may have neither a mosque nor a synagogue, and few Jewish or Muslim neighbours living nearby—possibilities that could be discussed as factors in participants’ choices regarding the pursuit of justice and peace in Israel/Palestine.31 Finally, when the recommendation of boycott is considered, I note that few products from the Israeli-occupied territories are likely to appear on small-town retailers’ shelves. Therefore, I will try to choose a location that has access to a larger city where participants may shop and find a wider variety of goods than is locally available.

The selection of a bounded system focussed on the single activity of choosing among five recommendations offered by the IPP Report suggests case study as an

31 A factor to explore if the congregation decides, for example, that the entire issue of peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine is “out of our hands” or “not our problem.”
appropriate approach for qualitative research,\textsuperscript{32} case study being defined as the study of a bounded system with focus on an issue that is illustrated by the case to provide an in-depth study of the system, based on diverse data collection materials so that the research may situate that system in its larger context.\textsuperscript{33} For my ministry-in-action project, I would see the bounded system as the UCC’s strategies for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, the case as Congregation N in the process of discerning its members’ strategies within that system, and the UCC and its work in the service of justice and peace as the larger context. This is not to suggest that the study of a single congregation predicts behaviours or attitudes across the United Church. Stake (2008) points out that the aim of case study is “to optimize understanding of the case rather than to generalize beyond it.”\textsuperscript{34}

b) Preparation for the Case Study Component

Taking Creswell’s model,\textsuperscript{35} I would outline the purpose of my proposed case study with the following statement: \textit{The purpose of this case study is to discover how a congregation would choose among a variety of peacebuilding strategies offered by the UCC’s 41\textsuperscript{st} General Council in its Israel-Palestine Policy Report.} At this stage in the research, I would deem a choice to be made when the participants under study, as a group and/or as individuals, decide (a) to adopt one or more of the strategies offered or (b) to reject all of the strategies offered or (c) to declare themselves deadlocked and unable to render a decision. Although I will prompt the group and individuals, in a follow-up interview, to explore their plans for action, a choice will be

\textsuperscript{32} John W. Creswell, \textit{Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design}, Second Edition (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 73, 74. Creswell defines a collective case study as one where a single issue is selected but multiple case studies are chosen to illustrate the issue.

\textsuperscript{33} Creswell, 244.


\textsuperscript{35} Creswell, 103-4
deemed to have been made whether or not the participants actually implement their choices.

In keeping with the suggestions of Creswell (2007) and Yin (2003), I will gather information from Congregation N in several ways: from my own observations noted during group discussions, interviews with participants, documents and participant-observations.\(^{36}\) Acknowledging that case study is often used to understand a complex situation,\(^ {37}\) I will prepare for the complexity of choosing from IPP’s recommendations by providing participants with background in several forms:

a) audio-visuals to immerse participants in the context of Israel and Palestine, to highlight the debate on the *IPP Report* at UCC’s General Council 41 (2012), as well as to reprise Cindy Blackstock’s address before the court’s final vote on the *Report* in order to help the participants, as far as is possible, to appreciate that input from a First Nations’ perspective

b) extracts from the *IPP Report* and UCC Records of Proceedings from the 41\(^{st}\), as well as from past General Councils if participants think they will be helpful.

c) a scripted presentation from one who has completed a Come-and-See tour (see the third recommendation, p. 5, above). The script for this presentation will be vetted by at least one other participant on the same tour, to insure that the information given is as accurate a reflection of the tour-group’s experience as possible.

d) research materials (on-line and otherwise) on at least one peace-minded corporation and grassroots organization—Israeli, Palestinian, Christian or non-Christian—and on ecumenical accompaniment programs, as examples of

\(^{36}\) Creswell, 75. My own observations will be monitored and supplemented by peer reviewers.

\(^{37}\) Creswell, 75.
opportunities for investment and support (see the first, second and fifth recommendations, above. I will also encourage participants to search online for other organizations that might attract their interest and investment.) e) material from the Unsettling Goods campaign to encourage investigation of the fourth recommendation: economic action (boycott).

Throughout the discussions I will strive to enable participants optimal freedom in forming their own opinions and expressing their own theology. See “My Role,” below.

Lincoln and Guba (1985)\textsuperscript{38} propose a problem/context/issues/lessons-learned sequence for developing a qualitative research study. Since the problem of selecting from peacebuilding strategies will be explored in the context of a congregation, I will select a site after spending considerable time there gathering information about the locale, its demographics, and its exposure to and interest in the IPP debate (including a First Nations/Métis perspective, if possible), all to be included in my in-depth description of the site. While I can’t predict at this point exactly what such a description will disclose, I can note that it should indicate that Congregation N is open to investigating and deciding on the recommendations, and is not anchored to a previous decision on the issue. To that end, I will invite group members to share, as a way of clearing each heart, their preliminary hopes for the outcome of the decision-making process, then to shed attachment to controlling the process and thereby allowing the Spirit to move among them as new and different information is shared.\textsuperscript{39} Although it’s premature to say what lessons will be learned, I will be alert to the emergence of topics such as the UCC’s role in politics and peacebuilding,

\textsuperscript{38} Creswell, 75.
\textsuperscript{39} A technique suggested by former UCC Moderator Mardi Tindal in an interview with the writer, June 3, 2014.
impressions about maintaining inter-faith relationships, and indications of theological thinking along the anthropological/ praxis or synthetic/ transcendental axis.

c) Process of the Case Study

I reason that the urban or rural identity of the case/congregation, and perhaps its interest in a First Nations/Métis perspective, will be more significant to the study than its geographical location—that is, whether it is located in the Maritimes or on the prairies. Thus I will select a congregation relatively close to my home and in my primary ministry base, a presbytery in Southern Ontario.\(^40\)

After approval of my thesis proposal and with the clearance of ethical review, I will select a possible congregation for study and meet with the pastor to confirm his/her co-operation. I will then write a letter to the Official Board (or “Session,” etc.) explaining the project, the role congregants might play, and the benefits they could derive (see Appendix A). With the approval of the board, I will meet with appropriate members to decide the make-up of the panel, then make recruiting calls (Appendix C), until I have positive response from 10 to 12 participants, the approximate number on the board of a mid-sized congregation. I will then meet candidates at their church to answer questions and distribute letters of information (Appendix D) and consent forms (Appendix E), allowing sufficient time for candidates to assess the intent and scope of the study before they respond. Together we will work out a schedule of meetings to cover eight components over a period of four to six weeks (for details see Appendix H).

Component #1  Introductions, consent (Appendix E), questionnaire (Appendix F), sharing/shedding (see above, p. 20).
Component #2  Presentation: Come and See tour; material from the IPP Report.
Component #3  Presentation of a First Nations’ perspective; IPP Report, continued.

\(^{40}\) See “Limitations” below.
Component #4  Positive investment, Unsettling Goods campaign, a Palestinian perspective
Component #5  A Canadian Jewish perspective, Seek Peace campaign; Ecumenical Accompaniment
Component #6  Questionnaire re choices and recommendations (Appendix G); panel discussion
Component #7  Follow-up and debriefing; member-checking; opportunity for participants to comment on the process.
Component #8  Post-decision discussion and/or interviews for follow-up, debriefing and member-checking.41

Interviews will provide me with an opportunity to speak to individuals, especially those who do not appear to have participated fully in the panel discussion (as recorded in my field notes), or whose input raises further questions during data processing. I will consider data collection to be complete when meetings have been conducted and recorded, and when interviews do not disclose any new information.

d) The Hermeneutic Phenomenology Component

I envision the discussion and interview portions of the study as a semi-structured opportunity for participants to comment on the choices of peacebuilding strategies. When interviewing individuals, I will focus the conversation with two questions: “What do you see God doing in Israel/Palestine?” and “How do you see the church aligning itself with what God is doing there?”42 It is too early to predict responses, but since I have chosen Case Study to analyze an event, problem, program or activity in an unusual situation involving more than one individual,43 my investigation should naturally elicit data on the who, where, what happened and when of the congregation’s decision-making. The question why, however, and especially why a participant would choose a particular set of strategies, falls into the purview of Hermeneutic Phenomenology, which seeks to extract the essence of participants’

41 See Appendix G for details regarding objectives, goals, and outcomes for each research event.
43 Creswell, 75-78.
experience from their significant statements and textural and structural description. 44

While my ministry-in-action is in the first instance structured as a Case Study, I predict that participants will contribute deeper reflections of their lived experience of being church in a complex and often conflicted world, giving the study, especially during discussions and interviews after decision-making, a Hermeneutic Phenomenology slant as well.


f) My Role in the Ministry-in-Action Project

Case Study methodology generally suggests that I bracket my prejudgments, while proponents of Hermeneutic Phenomenology insist that bracketing is neither possible nor desirable46—an interesting dilemma for a Case Study with an HP slant. I reason that the research question—how a congregation chooses—suggests that bracketing and optimal listening skills will help me immerse in the case, but that reasonable disclosure of my own preference for transcendental methodology early in the process will empha-size my authenticity with participants and also remind me that all interpretation includes a degree of prejudice. Thus to avoid unduly influencing the data-gathering process, I will review my own input as recorded on video, as well as keep a journal and notes to track my own lived experience, preferences, and

44Ibid, 78-9. Laverty (2003) shows the focus of HP is the study of details and experiences in our lives with the intent of understanding lived experience, either through the understanding of beings or the phenomena they are part of (Husserl) or the “mode of being human” situated in the world (Heidegger). Susann Laverty, “Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations,” International Journal of Qualitative Methods 2 (3), Sept 2003, 7. Retrieved June 2013 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_3final/pdf/laverty.pdf. See also Stake, 120.
45It is considered likely that GC 41’s decision regarding The IPP Report will be revisited during GC 42 in August 2015. Further information may then be available for incorporation into the dissertation.
46See Cresswell, 142; Laverty, 11.
predispositions toward a theology of conversation. Taking seriously Creswell’s advice that self-reflection contributes to the validation of my work,\textsuperscript{47} I will attempt to document the progress of my interpretations in a way that readers of my study would find convincing and inspiring.

V Confidentiality, Security, Storing

Prior to their consent-giving, I will assure candidates that confidentiality will be a priority, their names and that of the church pseudonymous. During the first meeting, I will emphasize that each participant is responsible for keeping the confidence of the others. Any other individuals or congregations named during conversation among the participants will be noted under a pseudonym. If a transcriptionist is employed, he or she will be required to sign a pledge of confidentiality and observe the protocol of using pseudonym. While the assistance of two peer reviewers will be necessary to maintain referential adequacy, each will be asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality and will receive only transcribed materials with pseudonyms in place. I will ask permission to video record for this research project and to destroy the recording upon completion.

In accordance with University of Toronto ethics standards, I will ensure that all data will be collected onto a password-protected external hard-drive\textsuperscript{48} and encrypted for protection against theft or other misuse. The external hard-drive and all hard copy of materials will be stored in a secure, fire-proof container. When the thesis has been written and accepted by discerning bodies, I will apply to have transcripts of the interviews stored in the UCC archives for future scholars.

VI Analyzing, Interpreting and Evaluating Case Study Data

\textsuperscript{47} Creswell, 206.
\textsuperscript{48} WC Passport Ultra
With approvals, ethical clearance, and consent from the participants of the case-congregation, I will begin collecting data from the case via questionnaires, transcribing discussions and interviews, making fieldnotes and taking participants’ comments and observations during debriefing. I will read materials several times to immerse myself in the details and to distinguish patterns that emerge (Agar 1980).\footnote{Creswell, 150.} Following Creswell’s data analysis spiral,\footnote{Ibid, 151.} I will code these patterns, looking for evidence of multiple perspectives within the pattern. I will also develop detailed descriptions of each pattern and relate it to perspectives on peacebuilding and historic patterns of thought as recorded in the literature, especially in UCC sources. As I build a thick description suitable for case study, I will clearly identify my own observations of participants in the process of choosing.

Case Study methodology allows representation of varying points of view in a rich construct that enhances the reader’s appreciation of objectively documented events, here the bounded case of a church choosing among peacebuilding strategies. I expect that themes such as 	extit{justice} and the church’s involvement in politics will emerge readily, and Yin (2003) suggests that a word table may be helpful in keeping track of similarities and differences in the use of such expressions.\footnote{Creswell, 162.} With my interest in embedded contextual theologies, I will also look for expressions of solidarity with the poor and non-violent intervention as an implied anthropological/praxis orientation, and statements about authenticity, conversation and commitment to mutual transformation as evidence of a synthetic/ transcendentual inclination. I will also be careful to sift for clues of less obvious themes to discover a complete picture of the
case. Stake (1995) warns against over- or under-interpreting, thus encouraging me to allow for surprises and contradictions that may or may not be accounted for by the different roles participants assume in the dynamics of the group. My goal is to present a narrative of the choosing process with a sufficient number of edited quotations from respondents for depth, and my own identified interpretation for trustworthy analysis. While case study requires that my role and point of view as researcher be “nicely apparent,” I will also be mindful of Polkinghorne’s advice (1989): avoid influencing participants’ descriptions to the point that they no longer reflect the authentic experience of the phenomenon.

Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001), in their work on validation criteria, suggest benchmarks by which I will evaluate my work: (a) my interpretations are congruent with participants’ meaning, (b) I have represented different voices, (c) critics have appraised all aspects of my research, and (d) I have been self-critical. While my goal is similar to Wolcott’s (1990a) in that I seek to understand rather than to convince, I also want to be sure that my understanding is well grounded in my familiarity with the context of the congregation and the experiences of its members, which can only be achieved through extensive time spent in the situation.

How can I validate my interpretations? First I will employ “member checking” (Ely et al., 1991, among others), that is, I will provide participants with summaries of my findings with a preliminary sounding of the theology they’ve expressed to obtain their input on the accuracy, to refine the language chosen, or to propose alternate interpretations. Second, I will employ two peer referees to review and critique my

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52 Ibid, 218.
53 Ibid, 219
54 Cited in Creswell, p. 215.
55 Creswell, 206
56 Ibid, 208.
interpretation of the data (Ely et al., 1991, among others) and to provide referential adequacy by challenging me to go deeper for a multi-layered understanding of the case at hand. My peers and I will keep written accounts of our meetings. Finally, since my own theology leans toward the synthetic/transformational orientation, conversational but with a praxis dimension that supports ongoing relationship and peacebuilding, I must clarify both for myself and for readers how my biases may inform my interpretations and how I am endeavoring to prevent distortion in the study. My journaling will record my efforts to maintain an empathic approach to all participants as I build my familiarity and understanding of the case.

VII Risks and Limitations of the Study

I have identified two possible risks of the study and two limitations:

Risk #1: The IPP Report was debated and adopted in August 2012, fully two years before my ministry-in-action project is likely to take place. Some UCC congregations will have embarked upon action plans based on the recommendations of the IPP Report, and thus will be ineligible for my study.

Risk #2: I may impose my views on respondents or on my analysis, or I may be unclear about my role and perspectives.

The limitations involved in my study include the following:

Limitation #1: An otherwise eligible church may not have First Nations or Métis members, or may not have young adults, 20-40 years of age, who can commit to participation, so those demographics may also be under-represented. (Depending on availability I may request the inclusion of a FNM adult from outside the congregation to participate.)

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57 Creswell, 208.
Limitation #2: The study does not assess whether the congregation or individuals enact the choices they make, perhaps suggesting less commitment to the process under study.

**VIII Contributions of the Study**

I believe the study will enhance UCC members’ understanding of the two theological approaches and methods—anthropological/praxis and synthetic/transcendental—by assessing the language participants choose to articulate their choices of the IPP Report’s recommendations. In particular, I am hoping that the conversation will strengthen Congregation N participants’ commitment to the broader church as they study the UCC’s peacebuilding initiatives. The process of choosing strategies may inspire and give them great satisfaction from helping to build peace by joining their efforts with secular and/or faith-based organizations.

I also believe that constructing a thick description of the context of a congregation immersed in this single problem will assist me and other ministers and leaders within the church in at least two ways. First, the case study will provide a template for guiding an initiative from General Council through decision-making and, potentially, into action at the grassroots level. Second, the case study participants may give readers insight into the variety of theological perspectives underlying peacebuilding, perspectives frequently unstated during debates. It is possible that with greater theological clarity, church leaders will be able to engage the faithful in more heartfelt and effective peacebuilding efforts concerning Israel/Palestine.
Appendix A: Letter on TST stationery to a Congregation
(Minister, Head of Official Board, Clerk of Session)

53 Devon Street
Brantford, Ontario
N3R 1M3

Month, day, 20--

Mr/Ms ……, Chair Official Board
……. United Church
City, Province, PC

Dear Mr/Ms…

The United Church has a particular concern for justice and peace in our troubled world. One area of interest, Israel/Palestine, was the topic of a report and decision at General Council 41, 2012. May I outline for you a project I am developing to investigate how a congregation might explore the recommendations that arose from the report and that received approval from the council?

The study I propose will form a part of the qualitative research to be conducted for my Doctor of Ministry thesis, through the Toronto School of Theology. With your consent and cooperation I would select approximately 10-12 volunteers from your church to represent as closely as possible the over-all make-up of the congregation—preferably with at least one young adult (20-40 years) and one First Nations or Métis person included. After obtaining each individual’s in-formed consent, I would ask each to complete a general information questionnaire about age, gender and church membership.

The study itself would take place during approximately five meetings over the course of four to six weeks and involve participants in a period of inquiry, discussion, and reflection on GC41’s recommendations:

1. To inform discussions, the participants will review what they’ve already thought and heard on the subject, then view audio-visuals of portions of GC41, read information from UCC records of debates and decisions, and study various materials that may be useful to their discernment. They will also hear a scripted presentation about a tour of Israel/Palestine conducted by a group of UCC members.
2. Each participant will have time to reflect, both as part of the group and as an individual, on the materials given before choosing from the recommendations.
3. Each participant will respond privately to a questionnaire regarding his/her choices from the recommended peacebuilding strategies, with a view toward (a) those the congregation might implement and (b) those he/she might as an individual implement.
4. Participants will discuss the strategies recommended for the congregation, to determine if a plan of action for peacebuilding could be achieved. This project does not involve implementing such a plan.
5. Participants may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview.

The participants’ questionnaires and notes will be collected for analysis. As well, the discussions and interviews will be videotaped (with participants’ permission) and transcribed,
also for analysis. A participant may withdraw at any time, and his or her data will be returned or destroyed immediately upon request.

Data from the study will be transcribed, codified and used as qualitative evidence for my research. Neither the identity of participants nor of the congregation will be disclosed during research or subsequent writing. Coded anonymous transcripts will be kept securely for the duration of the study and at its completion archived with the United Church of Canada (with participants’ permission) or destroyed. All video recordings will also be destroyed. No remuneration will be paid for participants.

Participants will be given a copy of findings on their part of the study, for their comment, observations, and assistance in fact-checking. Copies of the completed study will also be available for their correction and comment. There are no known risks involved in this study.

This study has the potential for informing participants about the UCC’s efforts to build peace in a troubled part of the world.

I would be pleased to meet with you and/or with your board to answer any further questions you might have about this study and the opportunities it presents for your congregation. Would you be so kind as to contact me by phone (519-………) or by email (…) to set up a time that is convenient to you.

Blessings and Peace,

D. Kerrigan
Appendix B: Consent Form (on TST stationery) for a Congregation: Minister, Head of Official Board, Clerk of Session

**Project Title:** Case study (HP)— “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

**Investigator:** Rev. Donna Kerrigan, UCC minister, Doctor of Ministry student (Toronto School of Theology)

1. I, ___________________ am willing to cooperate in a study conducted by Rev. Donna Kerrigan, Doctor of Ministry student at Toronto School of Theology, at the church where I am currently ( ) the pastor, ( ) head of the Official Board, ( ) Clerk of Session. I consent to cooperate in recruiting volunteers from the congregation who will participate in a discussion group that chooses among strategies for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, as recommended by United Church of Canada.

2. I understand that volunteers will be asked to give information regarding general data about gender, age, residence, church membership, and possible affiliation with First Nations. Volunteers will listen to presentations, read materials and participate in discussions and an interview.

3. I understand that this project involves approximately five meetings over a four-to-six week period, with meetings held at my church. I further understand that all participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time, without giving reason or incurring penalty. Where withdrawal is requested, the data the requester has contributed will be returned or destroyed immediately at his/her request.

4. I understand that in the written report all input will be kept confidential. I understand that all coded notes and submissions will be kept secure and (with participants’ permission) archived with the United Church of Canada at the end of the study, or destroyed. All audio-visual recordings will be destroyed as well. I understand that participants will be asked to keep confidentiality.

5. I understand that all data collected during the research will be coded and analyzed by Donna Kerrigan and her assistants to compile a case study, which will form part of her Doctor of Ministry thesis. The data will be presented without revealing the identity of volunteers or the congregation.

6. I understand that no remuneration will be offered for participation in this study. I understand that I may be interviewed for information about my church’s history and experience with peacebuilding, will receive a written summary of my input, and will be able to comment on or correct its content.
7. I understand there are no known risks associated with this study. Participants will have the opportunity to learn more about the UCC’s recommendations on peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine.

8. I understand that the final thesis for the Doctor of Ministry programme at the Toronto School of Theology will be available to the public through the University of Toronto library system.

9. I confirm that this research project has been explained to me and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

10. I understand that I may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, or Dr. Pamela Couture at pamela.couture@utoronto.ca or 416-585-4539 if I have questions about my rights as a participant.

11. I have read this statement and with my signature consent to participate in the study. I will receive a signed copy of this statement for my records.

Participant’s signature __________________________   Date ______________

Researcher’s signature __________________________   Date ______________

Contact Information

Name of Researcher: Donna Kerrigan                 Telephone: 519-756-5750
e-mail: donna.kerrigan@sympatico.ca
Appendix C: Telephone/E-Mail Script for Recruitment of Case Study Participant

**Project Title:** Steps toward Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine: How a Congregation Chooses

**Investigator:** Donna Kerrigan

Hello, my name is Donna Kerrigan and I am a minister at Burford United Church as well as a student at the Toronto School of Theology, in the Doctor of Ministry Programme. May I take a few moments of your time to outline the ministry-in-action project I am undertaking as part of the requirements for my thesis?

The project will involve 10-12 volunteers from your congregation, who will select from the United Church’s recommendations for peace-building in Israel/Palestine. The participants will fill out a brief questionnaire, review what they’ve already thought and heard on the subject, then listen to presentations and read materials to become familiar with the issues and context. The study will involve participants in individual reflection as well as group discussion, and will take place during approximately five meetings over the course of four to six weeks. The information gathered during the study will be analyzed and presented as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis, but will not disclose your name or that of your congregation. You will also be given the opportunity to respond to a written summary of your input into the study.

Would you like to attend an information meeting (explain time, place)?

Many thanks for giving this project your consideration.
Appendix D: Information for Participant (on TST stationery)

**Project Title:** Case study (HP)—— “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

**Investigator:** Rev. Donna Kerrigan, UCC minister, Doctor of Ministry student (Toronto School of Theology)

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research project concerning the United Church’s recommendations for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. You have been nominated by your church’s minister and/or Official Board as one who can help represent your congregation in choosing a plan of action.

With your agreement, you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire about age, gender and church membership. Next, you and other participants will review what you’ve already thought and heard on the issue. You will hear a presentation from a member of the UCC who has toured Israel/Palestine on a church-sponsored visit. You will also be presented with audio-visual and printed material as background to the topic. After reflection and discussion, you will be asked to choose your preference—both as an individual and as a member of the congregation—from several recommended strategies for peacebuilding.

After you and other participants have chosen, a discussion of the choices will take place, to see if a plan of action could be achieved for your congregation. This project does not involve the actual implementation of such a plan of action. The study will involve approximately five meetings over the course of four to six weeks.

Your permission means that your written responses, plus a video of the discussion will be recorded, transcribed, and processed as background information for the qualitative research portion of my thesis in the Doctor of Ministry programme at Toronto School of Theology. You may also be requested to meet for an interview of no more than one hour after the panel discussion takes place. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, you will be given a written summary of your input and you will be able to comment on the content. A copy of the final project will also be available for your comment.

Neither your name nor your church’s name will be associated with the reporting. When the study is complete, coded data may be archived with the United Church of Canada if participants give their permission to do so. Absent such permission, all data will be destroyed. All audio-video recordings will also be destroyed on completion of the project. All participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality throughout the study.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about your participation, either before or during the study. If at any time, and for any reason, you wish to withdraw from the study you may do so without any explanation and without penalty; any data you have contributed will be returned or destroyed at your request.
There are no known risks associated with this study. Participation is voluntary and no remuneration is involved. Participants may, however, gain insight into a question that has occupied the United Church for some time and may gain satisfaction from assisting in the peacebuilding process.

Please sign the attached form signifying that you give your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of the consent form with your signature will be given to you to keep.

With thanks,

Donna Kerrigan
Appendix E: Consent Form for a Participant (on TST stationery)

**Project Title:**  Case study (HP)— “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

**Investigator:**  Rev. Donna Kerrigan, UCC minister, Doctor of Ministry student (Toronto School of Theology)

1. I, _____________ am willing to take part in a study conducted by Rev. Donna Kerrigan, Doctor of Ministry student at Toronto School of Theology. I understand that I will be part of a discussion group that chooses among strategies for peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, as recommended by United Church of Canada.

2. I agree to complete an information form regarding general data about gender, age, and church membership. I also agree be part of a panel that will listen to presentations, read materials and participate in discussions and an interview.

3. I understand that this project involves approximately five meetings over a four-to-six week period, with meetings held at my church. I further understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving reason or incurring penalty. If I withdraw, the data I have contributed will be immediately returned or destroyed at my request.

4. I understand that in the written report all my input will be kept confidential. I understand that all coded notes and transcriptions will be kept secure and, with participants’ permission, archived with the United Church of Canada. Absent such permission, all data including all audio-visual recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. I accept my role in keeping confidentiality.

5. I understand that, to compile her case study, all data I provide will be coded and analyzed by Donna Kerrigan and her assistants, who are bound to the same standards of confidentiality that she maintains. The data will be presented without revealing my identity or that of my congregation.

6. I understand that no remuneration will be offered for participation in this study. I understand that I will receive a written summary of my part in the study and will be able to comment on or correct its content. I understand that a copy of the final study will also be made available to me for comment.

7. I understand there are no known risks associated with this study. I will receive information about the UCC’s recommendations on peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine.

8. I understand that the final report, as a thesis for the Doctor of Ministry programme at the Toronto School of Theology, will be available to the public through the University of Toronto library system.
9. I confirm that this research project has been explained to me and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

10. I understand that I may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, or Dr. Pamela Couture at pamela.couture@utoronto.ca or 416-585-4539 if I have questions about my rights as a participant.

11. I have read this statement and with my signature consent to participate in the study. I will receive a signed copy of this statement for my records.

Participant’s signature __________________________   Date ______________

Archiving

I agree that, for future scholarship, all coded notes and transcriptions may be archived with the United Church of Canada at the end of this study. I understand that coding will protect the identity of all participants and of our congregation.

Participant’s signature __________________________   Date ______________

Videography

I agree that the discussions and interviews I will participate in will be recorded unobtrusively using audio-video equipment. I understand these recordings will be used for the purposes of gathering data, which will subsequently be transcribed. I understand that these recordings will be kept secure and confidential until the study is complete, then destroyed.

Participant’s signature __________________________   Date ______________

Contact Information

Name of Researcher: Donna Kerrigan
Telephone: 519-756-5750

e-mail: donna.kerrigan@sympatico.ca
Appendix F: Questionnaire for General Information (on TST stationery)

Project Title: — “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

Investigator: Donna Kerrigan

1. Please indicate your status with the UCC:
   _____ a member or adherent for 1-10 years
   _____ for 11-20 years
   _____ for 21-30 years
   _____ for over 30 years

2. Please indicate age:
   _____ under 30
   _____ between 31-45
   _____ between 46-60
   _____ between 61-75
   _____ over 75

3. Please indicate gender: _____ female _____ male

4. Please indicate whether a member of a First Nations or Métis community
   _____ yes       _____ no

5. Please indicate the location of the pastoral charge where you are a member:
   _____ rural
   _____ village with population under 2000
   _____ town with population of 2000-30,000
   _____ city of over 30,000
   _____ a metropolitan area
Appendix G: Questionnaire for Selecting Peacebuilding Strategies (on TST stationery)

Note: The Case Study may reveal that one or more participants eschew the possibility of congregational action in favour of personal initiative, a choice honoured by the church and by GC 41st in its decisions and recommendations. Thus two identical choice-sheets are provided here, one for a decision and recommendation for congregational action, the other for individual action. One or both may be used, depending on the desires of the participants.

Title: — “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council's Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

Investigator: Donna Kerrigan

The following are actions that a congregation might take with regard to Israel/Palestine. Please rank these actions as 1,2,3,4,5 according to your choice: from 1—“highly recommended action for my congregation,” to 5—“not recommended for my congregation.”

_____ to invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy

_____ to support grassroots organization(s) promoting improved relations between Israelis and Palestinians

_____ to engage in “Come and See” tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy

_____ to take economic action (“boycott”) directed against one or more products from the Israeli-occupied territories

_____ to support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel.*

Please record your comments, if desired, on the other side of this page.

*From the IPP Report, 19-21.
Title: — “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

Investigator: Donna Kerrigan

The following are actions that you, as an individual, might take with regard to Israel/Palestine. Please rank these actions as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 according to your choice: from 1—“highly suitable action for me,” to 5—“not suitable for me.”

_____ to invest in companies that conduct ethically responsible business, contribute to peace, and help build the Palestinian economy

_____ to support grassroots organization(s) promoting improved relations between Israelis and Palestinians

_____ to engage in “Come and See” tours of the Holy Land, including a visit to Palestinian territories to learn more about their life and economy

_____ to take economic action (“boycott”) directed against one or more products from the Israeli-occupied territories, and/or

_____ to support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel.

Please record your comments, if desired, on the other side of this page.

*From the IPP Report, 19-21.*
Appendix H: Schedule Components for Meetings with Participants

Component #1

**Purpose:** Informing candidates about the scope, process, duration, confidentiality, and significance of the Action-in-Ministry Study in an atmosphere that allows freedom of expression, reciprocal respect and confidentiality, as well as trust in the competence, discretion and neutrality of the researcher.

**Goals:**

1. To establish an atmosphere of trust in the researcher by reviewing previously distributed Introduction to the Study (Appendix C); by providing information in an open and confident way; by answering questions with demonstrated concern for the candidates’ sense of ease, cooperation and confidentiality.
2. To have candidates complete and return the Consent Form (Appendix D).
3. To have participants complete the General Information Questionnaire (Appendix E).
4. To distribute notebooks as an encouragement to notetaking, with the request that participants return the notebooks at the end of each session, as part of the data collection process and to insure confidentiality.
5. To distribute and explain the five recommended actions of GC 41 (Appendix F).
6. To explain the end-goal of deciding (a) for a congregational action plan, and/or (b) for an individual action plan. (Resource: “No to boycott, yes to economic action,” www.gcr1.ca/news/no-boycott-yes-economic-action)
8. To observe as participants discuss their previously held thoughts and opinions about the UCC’s peacebuilding efforts in Israel/Palestine, as well as their hopes for how this decision process will conclude.
9. To encourage participants to relinquish any desire for control* and prepare for a new start.

**Objectives** Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. A minimum of 10 candidates confirm their participation by completing their consent forms and GIQs.
2. Participants indicate by show of hands their understanding of the recommended actions and the end-goal of a congregational and/or individual action plan (understanding that participation in the study does not require implementation of the plan).
3. Participants are observed to have shared their previous opinions and hopes for the study’s outcome and state their readiness to make a new start.
4. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the researcher’s communication style and the ease of communication within the group.
Component #2

Purpose: (a) Introducing participants to two perspectives of Israel/Palestine (b) Informing participants of a witness’s account of a United Church group’s Come and See tour of Israel/Palestine; (c) Observing participants review and discuss the IPP Report.

Goals:

1. To provide visual learners among participants with AV material depicting contrasting views of life in Israel/Palestine*
2. To provide a pre-scripted presentation by a member of a Come and See tour, with a question-and-answer period with the presenter, followed by a time for recording impressions in notebooks.
3. To observe participants’ interaction with the presenter during a question-and-answer period and gather their impressions from their notebooks.
4. To observe as participants share their highlights of the IPP Report and/or summary: (a) by round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.
5. To maintain and build an atmosphere of trust, ease and cooperation among participants and with the researcher, while maintaining a stance of researcher neutrality and shared confidentiality.

Objectives:

Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. Each participant is observed to have asked questions and/or responded affirmatively to the question at the end of the presentation: “Has everyone understood this presentation and offered questions or comments as desired?” as well as to the question, “Has everyone had enough time to write notes as desired?”
2. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the researcher’s communication style and the ease of communication within the group.

Component #3

Purpose: Informing participants of a First Nations person’s perspective, similar to a presentation at GC41, on the Canadian settler/non-settler experience; observing and assessing participants’ reactions to the presentation; continuing discussion on the IPP Report if necessary.

Goals:

1. To show participants AV presentation of Cindy Blackstock on aboriginal children’s rights in Canada.* Blackstock speaks of “Shannen’s Dream,” as she did at GC41.

2. To observe as participants share their insights into Blackstock’s perspective on the First Nations experience: (a) by round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.

3. To observe as participants share their highlights of the IPP Report and/or summary: (a) round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.

4. To maintain and build an atmosphere of trust, ease and cooperation among participants and with the researcher, while maintaining a stance of researcher neutrality and shared confidentiality.

Objectives:

Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. Each participant is observed to have shared insights on the Blackstock presentation and/or responded affirmatively to the question: “Has everyone had enough time to speak or to write notes on this issue, as desired?”

2. Each participant is observed to have contributed to the discussion on the IPP Report and has responded affirmatively to the question “Has everyone had enough time to write notes on this issue, as desired?”

3. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the researcher’s communication style and the ease of communication within the group.

Component #4

Purpose: Informing participants about one company that promotes peace in Israel/Palestine; informing of the “Unsettling Goods” campaign available through the General Council Office (Appendix H); informing of a Palestinian perspective on the GC41 decision on the IPP Report; observing and assessing reactions through discussion and notetaking.

Goals:

1. To show participants AV of Robert Massoud of Zatoun*, a company featured by the Unsettling Goods and allow time for comments, questions, and/or notetaking.

2. To provide participants with print material concerning Zatoun, available through the UCC Unsettling Goods campaign website. (Where possible, to encourage participants to research similar positive investment possibilities online.)

3. To provide participants with print material concerning economic action against products from the occupied territories, available through the Unsettling Goods campaign (Appendix H), and allow time for (a) round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.

4. To show participants a video interview, “A Palestinian Perspective,” from GC41 archives.**

5. To maintain and build an atmosphere of trust, ease and cooperation among participants and with the researcher, while maintaining a stance of researcher neutrality and shared confidentiality.

Objectives:

Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. Each participant is observed, where discussion has taken place, to have shared insights and/or responded affirmatively to the question: “Has everyone had enough time to speak or to write notes as desired?”

2. Each participant is observed to have accepted hand-out materials for reading at home.

3. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the researcher’s communication style and the ease of communication within the group.


Component #5

Purpose: Informing participants of a Canadian Jewish perspective on improving relations between Israelis and Palestinians; informing participants about the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel; observing and assessing reactions through discussion and notetaking.

Goals:

1. To provide participants with copies of a letter from Canadian Jewish Rabbis and Cantors, distributed in advance of GC 41 and available through The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (Appendix J), as well as a copy of CIJA’s campaign “Seek Peace and Pursue It.”*

2. To provide participants with information regarding “Voices of Accompaniment,” available through the UCC Unsettling Goods campaign website, and from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (Appendix I).

3. To observe as participants discuss the question, “What do you see as possibilities for grassroots organization, locally or internationally, to improve relations between Israelis and Palestinians?” -- (a) round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.

Objectives:

Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. Each participant is observed, where discussion has taken place, to have shared insights and/or responded affirmatively to the question: “Has everyone had enough time to speak or to write notes as desired?”

2. Each participant is observed to have accepted hand-out materials for reading at home.

3. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the researcher’s communication style and the ease of communication within the group.

* Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. “Seek Peace and Pursue It” (pamphlet, 2014).
Component #6

Purpose: Having participants complete Appendix F ranking their preferences for peacebuilding strategies; to observe and record participants’ discussion of possible peacebuilding actions for Congregation N.

Goals:

1. To have each participant complete questionnaire on choices of peacebuilding actions (a) to recommend to the congregation, and (b) to meet the individual’s own preferences.

2. To observe as participants share their recommendations to the congregation: (a) by round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.

3. To maintain and build an atmosphere of trust, ease and cooperation among participants and with the researcher, while maintaining a stance of researcher neutrality and shared confidentiality.

Objectives:

Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. Each participant is observed, where discussion has taken place, to have shared insights and/or responded affirmatively to the question: “Has everyone had enough time to speak or to write notes as desired?”

2. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the researcher’s communication style and the ease of communication within the group.
**Component #7**

**Purpose:** Following-up and debriefing; member-checking; allowing time for participants to comment on the process, arranging for interviews

**Goals:**

1. To summarize discussions from Meeting #6 and allow for participants’ input, correction, further considerations.

2. To distribute summaries of each individual’s contributions and a preliminary sounding of their theology, allowing time for member-checking (correcting, clarifying, additions).

3. To observe as participants share their comments about the process of the study: (a) by round-table 1-minute comments, (b) by open discussion, (c) by individual reflection in notebooks, if desired.

4. To arrange for follow-up interviews, as needed (Component #8).

**Objectives:**

Objectives will be measured and considered achieved when

1. Each participant is observed, where discussion has taken place, to have shared insights and/or responded affirmatively to the question: “Has everyone had enough time to speak or to write notes as desired?”

2. Each participant returns his/her summary after member-checking for accuracy and completeness.

3. Participants state that they are either “Comfortable” or “Very comfortable” with the process of the study and communication style maintained within the group.
Appendix H (handout): The “Unsettling Goods” Campaign

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: General Council Office <generalcounciloffice@united-church.ca>
Date: Wed, Feb 19, 2014 at 11:18 AM
Subject: Unsettling Goods Communication to all Pastoral Charges
To: General Council Office <generalcounciloffice@united-church.ca>

To: Ministry Personnel and Lay leaders
Re: Unsettling Goods Campaign UPDATE and new resources.

Greetings from the Unsettling Goods Planning team!

As Lent approaches, we have some new and exciting resources for raising awareness and encouraging broader action on this campaign. Available at www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/unsettling-goods.

* Lenten worship resources in English http://www.united-church.ca/planning/theme#israel.

* Daily Lenten prayers for peace via Facebook https://www.facebook.com/UnitedAction and Twitter @UnsettlingGoods and @JusticeUCC.

* "Unsettling Goods Peace Box" - order your box of Palestinian products (olive, oil, soap, herbs) from Zatoun for your congregation or community. Encourage others to buy. Do an olive oil tasting with pita after worship, at a meeting, or at Presbytery. http://www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/unsettling-goods/choose/peace-box.

* A downloadable campaign card that can be used as a bulletin insert http://www.united-church.ca/files/getinvolved/unsettling-goods/card.pdf.

* Hard copy campaign card - a fridge reminder of the campaign goals. Order in bulk at no cost from 1-800-268-3781 or 416-231-7680, ext. 4073 or unsettling-goods@united-church.ca.


* Web badge available for download. Use it to connect directly to the Unsettling Goods Campaign webpages from your website http://www.united-church.ca/files/getinvolved/unsettling-goods/badge.png.

New French Resources!
The Unsettling Goods information package has been mailed to French-speaking pastoral charges and online resources are now available in French at www.united-church.ca/fr/getinvolved/unsettling-goods.

More resources at www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/unsettling-goods:

* FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions about the Unsettling Goods Campaign
* Action resources regarding settlement products
* Speakers Bureau - invite a speaker to your congregation
* Information about settlements, travelling to the Holy Land, and political engagement
* Opportunities to support trust-building programs, such as joint Palestinian-Israeli initiatives
* Global partner profiles of United Church partners
* Links to networks: United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI)
* Links to blogs: Voices of Accompaniment, United Church Ecumenical Accompaniers writing about Palestine and Israel

Unsettling Goods Mailing:

Last fall, an Unsettling Goods package of information and resources (in English) was mailed to every pastoral charge. This package offered resources to help United Church members PRAY, CHOOSE, and SPEAK to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands by being part of the Unsettling Goods: Choose Peace in Palestine and Israel campaign. As you know, this initiative is a response to the pleas of long-time United Church partners in Palestine and Israel, and follows from the resolution passed at General Council 41 in August 2012. If you want extra copies of the action card or poster, please e-mail us at unsettling-goods@united-church.ca.

Updates:

We know that many of you have already been engaged in consumer action around products manufactured in the Israeli settlements by three companies - Ahava, Keter Plastics, and Soda Stream - and have also spoken to retail store managers. Many of you have also raised awareness in your congregation and community about our quest for a just peace in Palestine and Israel. Thank you!

General Council staff and elected members have had cordial meetings with corporate staff from Walmart and Home Depot, two of the four retail companies that are named in our Unsettling Goods campaign. We have, as yet, had no response to our meeting requests from The Bay and Canadian Tire.

We still need your help!

When you speak to local store managers about not carrying products produced in or related to the Israeli settlements, you effectively put leverage on the retail corporation as a whole. Questions and comments from store managers to their corporate staff help us, at a national level, to convincingly
say that consumers don’t want to buy these products. This, then, helps us to make the case with corporate staff for not using these suppliers or for re-labeling the products. Please carry on and encourage others in your congregation and community to get involved.

Goals of the Unsettling Goods Campaign:

Unsettling Goods: Choose Peace in Palestine and Israel focuses on action:

a. to engage in worship, prayer, and study in response to partner calls for peace in Palestine and Israel
b. to avoid buying products made in or related to the Israeli settlements
c. to engage with Canadian retailers to encourage them to stop selling these goods
d. to promote congregational conversations with Palestinian and Jewish Canadians
e. to support programs focused on trust-building between Palestinians and Israelis

With others seeking peace with justice in the Holy Land, we work for an end to the suffering and instability experienced by thousands of Palestinians and Israelis caught up in a prolonged and exhausting struggle.

Together in peace,

The Unsettling Goods Planning Team
unsettling-goods@united-church.ca
Appendix I (handout): From http://www.eappi.org/
The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) brings internationals to the West Bank to experience life under occupation. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) provide protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace.

EAPPI seeks to provide up-to-date, reliable information on the occupation. When EAs return home, they campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through an end to the occupation, respect for international law and implementation of UN resolutions.

EAPPI supports local and international efforts to end the occupation, bringing a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

To see photos and videos from some of EAPPI's partner communities, click here.

**Mission**

The mission of the EAPPI is to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and to carry out concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation. Participants in the programme monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, support acts of non-violent resistance alongside local Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, offer protection through non-violent presence, engage in public policy advocacy and, in general, stand in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation.

**Principles**

The EAPPI is based on principles of international humanitarian and human-rights law, including resolutions of the UN Security Council, General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights. One of the EAPPI guiding principles is 'principled impartiality', the EAPPI Code of Conduct states: 'We do not take sides in this conflict and we do not discriminate against anyone but we are not neutral in terms of principles of human rights and international humanitarian law. We stand faithfully with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. We want to serve all parties in this conflict in a fair and unbiased manner in word and action.'

Our approach is based on our belief that the occupation is harmful not only to Palestinians but also to Israelis and from our concern about the suffering experienced
by both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis. We acknowledge the humanity of everyone involved in this conflict, be they victims or perpetrators of violence and human rights abuses, but the programme demonstrates our solidarity with people on both sides of this conflict who strive non-violently to end the occupation and achieve a just peace.

We have a deep concern for the safety and dignity for all those we work with, and provide protective presence wherever possible. However, the protection we provide is by presence alone and as such is limited – we recognise that we cannot protect civilians from suicide bombings, rockets or military operations because of the nature of such acts.

We also wish to support local people, whenever they find it possible, to become agents in their own protection and to help protect one another. At the same time, we acknowledge that local people's confidence and freedom for manoeuvre may be severely reduced, although it is not zero. Wherever possible we will look to support the increase of local peoples' potential for action in pursuit of their own protection and safety in ways that demonstrates and accentuates people's interdependence.

**Objectives**

While the programme's mission is to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation, some of its detailed objectives are to:

- Participate in the daily life and work of Palestinian and Israeli civil society, Churches and Christian communities. For example, we take part in the annual olive harvest, meet and learn from the experiences of Israeli activists in Jerusalem, Haifa and Sderot, and regularly attend church services in Jerusalem, Nablus and Bethlehem.
- Be visibly present in vulnerable communities, locations or events, e.g. near Israeli settlements and the wall/fence, schools and homes, fields & orchards.
- Actively *listen* to local people's experiences and give voice to peoples' daily suffering under occupation and write or speak about these experiences in their reports and public speaking engagements.
- Monitor the conduct of Israeli soldiers and settlers (e.g. at checkpoints and other barriers and during demonstrations and other military actions) and contact relevant organizations and authorities to request intervention.
- Engage in non-violent ways with perpetrators of human rights abuses.
- Produce high quality, first-hand written materials, testimonies and analysis.
• Report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that EAs witness and document and use these reports to inform governments and intergovernmental bodies and press them to take action.
• Engage with the media locally, nationally and internationally.
• Be part of international advocacy and networking activities that highlight the human rights situation in the Occupied Territories.

Background

Further to the call by the local churches of Jerusalem, as expressed to the ecumenical delegation to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) in June 2001, and at the International Ecumenical Consultation in Geneva in August 2001, the WCC Executive Committee meeting of September 2001 recommended to "develop an accompaniment programme that would include an international ecumenical presence" and which would build upon and develop the experiences which had been gained from the Christian Peacemaker Teams, and which would also be closely linked to the local churches.

After extensive consultation with the churches and ecumenical partners and following the initial phase of assessment and feasibility (October 2001 - January 2002), the WCC International Relations team convened a meeting of the Accompaniment Working Group on February 1-2, 2002, in Geneva in order to develop the framework of the accompaniment programme for the approval of the WCC Executive Committee in February 2002. With the approval of the WCC Executive Committee, the EAPPI was launched, originally as part of the WCC Ecumenical Campaign to End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine: Support a Just Peace in the Middle East, which was itself the first annual initiative of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (2001-2010).

Thus responding to the call from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem to stand in solidarity with the churches and people in Palestine, accompaniers were sought by the participating churches to volunteer for three month periods. The programme has functioned fully since then, with Ecumenical Accompaniers constantly in placements working with many different local people in numerous locations.

Read some of the WCC policy documents for more background information on to the EAPPI programme.
Dear Friends:

We, the undersigned rabbis, represent your Jewish neighbours in communities across Canada. With you we share a sense of responsibility for the world in which we live and a commitment to *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world) through prayer and action. Like you, our deepest prayers are that Israelis and Palestinians will know the blessing of peace, speedily in our days.

We understand your desire to speak out, to share your vision of how a just peace may be reached between Israelis and Palestinians, and to take steps to advance that goal. However, we strongly believe that these two peoples can only be brought together through fairness, balance, and mutual obligations – not one-sided judgments.

For this reason, and in the spirit of friendship between our communities for which we strive, we ask that you reject proposals which call upon the United Church to boycott products manufactured by Jews originating over the “green line”. **We see this as a boycott of the State of Israel – and, as such, we call on United Church Commissioners to reject it during this August’s General Council.** At the same time, we extend our support for a number of positive elements in the Working Group’s Report, including initiatives to strengthen the Palestinian economy.

As friends, we are profoundly disappointed that the proposed boycott will only serve to undermine the goal of a peaceful, two-state solution. For we ask: how is peace advanced by targeting Israel – the only liberal democracy in the Middle East – for economic punishment, while largely absolving the Palestinian Authority and regional terror groups of any responsibility to end the conflict? We recognize your heartfelt desire to support the Palestinian people. Still, there is a world of difference between being pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel. In fact, **the Church need not oppose either side in this painful conflict but rather support the legitimate aspirations of both sides.**
The dreams of Israelis for peace and Palestinians for independence are not mutually exclusive. But those dreams will only be realized through direct negotiations and painful concessions by both parties. The role of caring observers should be to seek ways to motivate both sides to pursue peace. To this end, the Church has a unique opportunity to serve as a fair-minded intermediary – advancing dialogue, reconciliation, and confidence-building initiatives. **Were it to pass a boycott of Israel in any form, the Church would sadly disqualify itself from this trusted role as an interlocutor and credible voice for peace.**

Closer to home, we see the proposals developed by the Working Group and others put forward by various United Church Conferences as a retreat from the values enunciated by the Church in the 2003 document, *Bearing Faithful Witness*, for we now see the highest court in the Church considering how best to punish the Jewish State. Although the writers of the policy document went to some lengths to distinguish their proposed boycott of settlements from a general boycott of the Jewish state, we respectfully believe that this is a distinction without much difference. During the some of the darkest times in our history, Jews were the target of boycotts that were designed to punish us, isolate us, and render us helpless in a hostile world. **It is impossible for members of the Jewish community to consider the proposed actions as anything but a boycott by a church against Jews.**

Indeed, some proposals debated by regional conferences have made no distinction at all, and call quite simply for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against the State of Israel. Moreover, we believe that the distinctions within your current proposals will not be understood and that media and the general population will see them as a call for a boycott of Israel. Acceptance by the General Council of proposed boycott proposals will undoubtedly harm relations between the United Church and the Jewish community.

There is a better way. We ask that the United Church of Canada turn away from these injurious proposals and instead accept our outstretched hand. **Let us together seek ways to end the pain that Israelis and Palestinians have endured for too long.** We invite you to work with your rabbinic friends and colleagues to replace discord with concord and, in so doing, fulfill the prophecy of Micah: “They will beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

Shalom
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<td>Beth Torah Congregation</td>
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<td>Toronto, ON</td>
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Appendix K: Consent Form (on TST letterhead) for Transcriptionists and Peer Reviewers

**Title:** — “What Language Shall I Borrow?” A UCC Congregation Articulates its Choices of from the 41st General Council’s Recommendations Regarding Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine

**Investigator:** Donna Kerrigan

1. I, __________________________ agree to act as a ( ) peer-reviewer, or as a ( ) transcriptionist for researcher Donna Kerrigan during the data collection and analysis stage of the research project specified above. I understand that this is a voluntary role and no compensation is involved.

2. I agree that I will not copy, store without the researcher’s authorization, or share data involved in this study.

3. I understand that I will be provided with a password-protected external hard-drive (WD My Passport Ultra) and a secure fire-proof container in which to store both the external hard-drive and all hard copy associated with this study. I agree to return to the researcher the hard-drive, storage container, and all hard copies from the study upon its completion.

4. I will comply with all the researcher’s instructions regarding the safety, storage, and confidentiality of all data I receive during this study. *Confidentiality* means that I will protect the identity of participants and their congregation.

5. With my signature I consent to participate in the study under the terms outlined. I will receive a signed copy of this statement for my records.

Volunteer’s signature __________________________ Date ______________

Researcher’s signature __________________________ Date ______________

**Contact Information**

Name of Researcher: Donna Kerrigan

e-mail: donna.kerrigan@sympatico.ca

Telephone: 519-756-5750
Appendix Two: “Recommendations,”


7. Recommendations
The General Secretary, General Council proposes:

That the 41st General Council (2012) receive the Report of the Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy, and direct that United Church policies and actions in relation to Israel and Palestine reflect the content of the report.

The General Secretary, General Council proposes that the 41st General Council (2012) direct that United Church of Canada policy:

**In respect to the conditions necessary for peace:**

1. Continue to identify the end of the occupation as necessary for peace in the region by:
   a. continuing to name the occupation as the primary contributor to the injustice that underlies the violence of the region
   b. identifying the end of all settlement construction by Israel as a necessary first step in entering into good faith negotiations toward ending the occupation
   c. calling on Israel to dismantle settlements within the occupied territories
   d. calling on Israel to dismantle the separation barrier in all sections where it crosses over the Green Line
   e. identifying equitable access to water as a critical factor in a just settlement of the conflict
   f. urging the Canadian government to provide leadership among nations advocating for the end of the occupation

2. Continue to call for a rejection of all forms of violence by all parties in the conflict.

3. Affirm that non-violent resistance to the occupation is justified and should be supported by all who seek an end to the occupation.

4. Acknowledge with deep regret the past policy of calling on Palestinians to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state.

5. Affirm the importance of a just resolution of the rights of refugees throughout the world and the Palestinian Right of Return by continuing to uphold the legal rights of all refugees to return to their home, affirm that in the situation of Israel/Palestine this right extends to both Jewish and Palestinian peoples, and support a negotiated settlement to the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees that maintains the demographic integrity of Israel.

6. Address the critical role that some forms of Christian theology have played in legitimizing the occupation by: (a) challenging Christian beliefs that theologically justify the occupation and Israel’s possession of a greater Israel that includes the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza;
(b) requesting that the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee explore the implications of theologies and beliefs that support the occupation

In respect to actions to be taken by The United Church of Canada:

7. Call on United Church members to take concrete actions to support the end of the occupation by:
   a. encouraging members of the United Church to avoid any and all products produced in the settlements
   b. directing the Executive of the General Council to give high priority to establishing a church-wide campaign of economic action directed against one or more settlement products that can be identified as produced in or related to the settlements or the occupied territories
   c. identifying the goal of the campaign as building awareness of United Church members of the illegal settlements’ unjust continuation of the occupation and its impact on the lives of Palestinians and Israelis
   d. supporting the campaign through accompanying resources such as this working group report, the Kairos Palestine document, and others that are clearly directed toward an end to the occupation
   e. directing the Executive of the General Council to explore the wisdom of divesting in companies that are profiting from or supporting the occupation
   f. requesting that the Canadian government ensure that all products produced in the settlements be labelled clearly and differently from products of Israel
   g. requesting that the Canadian government ensure that products produced in the settlements not be given preferential treatment under the Canada–Israel Free Trade Agreement
   h. inviting the participation of other Canadian churches in the campaign

8. Identify the importance of trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis by:
   a. encouraging stronger connections between United Church programs and organizations that build understanding between Palestinians and Israelis
   b. exploring and supporting initiatives for increasing connections in Canada between Palestinian Canadians and Jewish Canadians

9. Emphasize the importance for all Christians, and in particular members of the United Church, of visiting and engaging directly with Palestinian Christians by:
   a. encouraging United Church people to respond to the call from Palestinian Christians to come and see the Holy Land through their eyes, encouraging support of Palestinian-based tourism, and providing materials to United Church members for supporting ethical travel in the Middle East
   b. encouraging positive economic action in support of the Palestinian economy and making available to United Church members information on programs and services like the Alternative Tourism Group and the Olive Tree Campaign
   c. continuing to support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel and encouraging United Church members to participate
Appendix Three: Letter of Approval From Ethics Review Board

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 30686
October 20, 2014

Dr. Pamela Couture and Dr. Thomas Reynolds
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

Rev. Donna Patricia Kerrigan
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

Dear Dr. Pamela Couture, Dr. Thomas Reynolds and Rev. Donna Patricia Kerrigan,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, ""What language shall I borrow?" How a United Church of Canada congregation articulates its choices from the 41st General Council's recommendations regarding peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine"

ETHICS APPROVAL

| Original Approval Date: October 20, 2014 |
| Expiry Date: October 19, 2015 |
| Continuing Review Level: 1 |

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB's delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Wakefield, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager