



January 19, 2022

For Immediate Release:

On Saturday, January 15, the American Jewish community was assaulted once again as a terrorist entered a synagogue during a time of worship, took the rabbi and several congregants hostage, believing that he could then convince authorities to release prisoners held in jail. This extremist, with partners in the UK, believed the anti-Semitic trope that Jews run the world and if Jews were taken hostage, he could pursue his agenda. This attack is yet just another example of the violent rise of anti-Semitism in our country and in the world.

Our prayers go out to the Jewish community in Colleyville and the nation, who once again have been reminded that there is a segment of humanity who wishes harm to befall Jews, no matter where the Jews live. We have seen the violent actions of white supremacists and of progressive activists who have attacked Jews for just being Jewish. How much more abuse will the Jewish community suffer before we all say “never again”?

As Presbyterians we are deeply saddened that the Jewish community has once again been targeted, and we are deeply embarrassed that even after four days, our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has made no statement about this atrocity. However, on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, the Stated Clerk of our denomination, took time to extol the need to be vigilant against injustice in the world as well as pursue the unity that Dr. King sought. Unfortunately, with all the injustices in the world (China, Myanmar, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, to name a few.), he wrote only of the continuing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Yet while extolling Dr. King’s call to unity on one hand, he described the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians as “21st-century slavery.” Incredibly, his language seems to blame all Jews as the culprit, ignoring the many reasons why Americans support Israel. He dared to claim that Jews have forgotten their own history. This is working for unity?

The Rev. Dr. Nelson’s actions in lashing out at the U.S. and global Jewish community is beyond the pale. Gratefully, his actions and words do not match the work of local PCUSA and Jewish congregations in communities across the nation. At the grassroots, Presbyterians work for justice alongside Jews, rather than engaging in polarizing polemics. If Rev. Dr. Nelson spent time with the American Jewish community, as locally based Presbyterians do, he would know that American Jews are diverse and extremely concerned about what is happening in Israel and Palestine. He would also know that many live in fear of violence – and that words matter. We hope the Stated Clerk will spend more time talking and working with American Jewish community leaders and less time writing blasts filled with reprehensible misrepresentations of our Jewish neighbors.

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