1 Who are the Christian Palestinians and how are they related to the UCC?

- Palestinian Christians in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories are the descendants of some of the oldest Christian communities in the world, they include Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and several other denominations. The United Church of Christ, therefore, traces its Christian heritage to the place of Jesus’ life, the Pentecost, and the first churches. The UCC also has a 200-year mission history in the Middle East, with the first Congregational missionaries being sent to Smyrna, Beirut, and Jerusalem in 1819-20 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Wider Church Ministries today). Today, through ecumenical partnerships with a number of churches, church-related agencies, and other organizations (list is available here: http://www.globalministries.org/mee_partners), our church supports critical work in education, health, refugee relief, human rights documentation and interfaith relations. The denomination is greatly enriched by these connections.

- Finally, the UCC, with its focus on peace and justice, is especially attuned to the voices of our partners from Palestine and Israel who inspire us with their steadfast faith in the face of ongoing direct and structural violence. For decades, UCC mission personnel have offered critical presence at points of greatest need and increasing numbers of UCC visitors to the region have become informed and inspired through growing ties of solidarity with Palestinian Christians, their Muslim neighbors and Israeli Jewish peacemakers.

2 What is the Kairos Palestine Document?

- In December 2009, a group of leading Christian Palestinian clergy and community leaders issued the Kairos Palestine document, urging their fellow Christians around the world and all people of conscience to support efforts to boycott and divest from companies involved in Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people, in order “to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for all.” Numerous Christian Palestinians who signed the Kairos Palestine document are our partners in mission through Global Ministries.

3 What exactly does Resolution #4 (A Call For The United Church Of Christ To Take Actions Toward a Just Peace In The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict) call for?

- Resolution #4 calls for four things: (1) Educational empowerment through the study of the Kairos Palestine document, which invites the global Christian community to witness firsthand what is happening in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza; (2) The use of economic leverage, including divestment from companies that profit from Israel’s Occupation of Palestinian territories and boycott of products produced illegally in those territories by Israeli companies; (3) Political pressure through petitioning Congress to ensure that aid to Israel violates neither the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act nor the U.S. Arms Export Control Act; and (4) Interreligious dialogue among members of the three Abrahamic faiths aimed at reaching religious reconciliation and a resolution to political differences.
4 Why focus on Israel/Palestine?

- Palestinian civil society, including the Christian Palestinian community, is asking for us to take these measures to support their nonviolent struggle for freedom. Our regional partners in the Church have asked us to endorse the measures called for in Resolution #4 in order to end our complicity in the Occupation, which the UCC has long opposed, and to stop profiting from the perpetuation of violence.

- As Americans, our government and tax dollars enable Israel’s violations of Palestinian human rights due to the massive amount of military aid and diplomatic protection that the U.S. government provides to Israel. As a result, as Americans, we have a direct moral responsibility to work to bring an end to what Israel is doing to the Palestinians in ways that we do not for many situations elsewhere.

5 Why boycotts and divestment?

- In 2005, the General Synod passed a resolution calling for corporate engagement and the use of economic leverage to support efforts to make peace, including: “divestment from those companies that refuse to change their practice of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the Occupation.” Endorsing boycotts and divestment is the next step in a decade-old internal Church process to ensure we are not invested in companies that profit from and sustain Israel’s Occupation. It is not a change in UCC policy, but rather an attempt to align our investments with existing Church policy, which clearly opposes the Occupation and explicitly discourages investments in companies that profit from it.

- Boycotts, divestment, and sanctions are time-honored, nonviolent tools to remedy injustice, and have been used effectively in the service of social justice causes ranging from the U.S. Civil Rights Movement to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and many others.

- The UCC has previously supported boycott and divestment campaigns involving the United Farm Workers, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, and the Immokalee Workers, and against companies such as Gallo, Taco Bell, and Nestle. In 1985, the UCC voted to divest from corporations operating in apartheid South Africa.

6 Why these companies? For divestment: Caterpillar Inc., Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard Development Company LP & successors, G4S, and Veolia Environnement and its subsidiaries; for boycott: Ahava cosmetics, SodaStream, and Hadilklaim dates.

- The companies in question all supply products or services used by the Israeli military to violate Palestinian human rights and/or operate on occupied Palestinian land in violation of international law.

- Despite a decade of corporate engagement and outreach on the part of the UCC and other denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and United Methodists, the companies that Resolution #4 proposes divesting from have failed to change their practices and continue to profit from the Occupation and the perpetuation of violence.

7 Is it not sufficient to support the Palestinian economy as we are doing now through the Pension Boards investment in the Siraj Palestine Fund?

- No. Investing in the Palestinian economy is fine, but it cannot be a substitute for boycotts and divestment. Investment cannot work without boycotts and divestment. As documented by the World Bank and others, the Palestinian economy is dominated by Israel and cannot grow sustainably as long as the Occupation remains in place.

- Investing in the Palestinian economy while continuing to profit from Israel’s Occupation and ongoing violations of Palestinian human rights is morally deficient and counteracts any good our investments might do. St. Augustine said, “Charity is no substitute for justice withheld.” Palestinians are not asking us for charity. They are asking for us to stop profiting from their suffering.
8 Why not engage in “positive investment” in the Palestinian economy instead of divestment?

- Investing in the Palestinian economy is fine, but it will not end the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian people and their land. Investing in the Palestinian economy cannot be done as a substitute for boycotting and divesting from the Occupation. Investment cannot work without boycotts and divestment. As documented by the World Bank, United Nations, and others, the Palestinian economy is stifled by Israel’s Occupation and cannot grow sustainably as long as it remains in place.

- Investing in the Palestinian economy while continuing to profit financially from Israel’s Occupation and ongoing violations of Palestinian human rights is morally deficient and counteracts any good investing might do.

9 Are boycotts and divestment targeting Israel’s Occupation anti-Semitic?

- No. The UCC rejects and deplores all forms of racism and bigotry, including anti-Semitism, without qualification, and has made numerous declarations to this effect.

- Divestment and boycott initiatives such as Resolution #4 are intended to address the complicity of the Church in human rights abuses associated with Israel’s Occupation. They do not target Jewish individuals or organizations in any way.

- The Jewish community itself is divided on this issue, with many Jews and Israelis supporting boycott and divestment.

10 Will endorsing boycotts and divestment damage relationships with the Jewish community and interfaith dialogue?

- The Jewish community is not monolithic. Many Jews support boycott and divestment initiatives. Good interfaith relationships are founded on mutual commitment to shared values and doing God’s work together. Interfaith work on other issues should not be held hostage to our support for human rights and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Methodists, Quakers, and other denominations have endorsed boycotts and/or divestment directed at Israel’s Occupation and their relations with the Jewish community did not end. In fact, many new relationships were built with Jewish groups and individuals that support boycott and divestment as a peaceful means to effect positive change.

11 Is Israel being unfairly singled out?

- No. The United Church of Christ has long opposed Israel’s Occupation of Palestinian lands. By passing Resolution #4, we are simply taking the next step in a decade-old Church process to ensure that we are not invested in companies that profit from the Occupation. In doing so, we will also be responding to a call from Palestinian civil society, including Christian Palestinians who endorsed boycott and divestment in the Kairos Palestine document in 2009, to use these tools to support their nonviolent struggle for freedom.

- The United Church of Christ has a long history of using boycotts and divestment as a means to address injustice and to prevent the Church from profiting from activities that we oppose on moral grounds. The UCC has supported boycott and divestment campaigns involving the United Farm Workers, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, and the Immokalee Workers, and against companies such as Gallo, Taco Bell, and Nestle. In 1985, the UCC General Synod voted to divest from corporations operating in apartheid South Africa.

- As Americans, our government and tax dollars enable Israel’s violations of Palestinian human rights due to the massive amount of military aid and diplomatic protection that the U.S. government provides to Israel. As a result, as Americans, we have a specific moral duty to take action so that we are not complicit and profiting from Palestinian suffering.
12 Do boycotts and divestment harm Palestinians?

- Palestinian civil society, including businesspeople, has asked the international community to support boycott and divestment initiatives such as Resolution #4. In 2005, a broad coalition of more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations called on the world to use these measures to support their struggle for freedom. In 2009, Christian Palestinians issued a further call in the Kairos Palestine document. If we want to help Palestinians, their voices should be heard.

- While boycotts and divestment might have some negative effects on the Palestinian economy in the short term, Palestinians themselves are telling us that they are willing to endure them in order to achieve their rights and freedom.

- During the struggle against apartheid in South Africa many opponents of boycotts and divestment also claimed that they would harm Black South Africans, but it was the right thing to do then, just as it is the right thing to do now with Israel’s Occupation.

13 Does boycotting and divesting from Israel’s Occupation make it harder for Israelis and Palestinians to achieve peace?

- No. Israeli political leaders have made it absolutely clear that they will not grant Palestinians their freedom without outside pressure. The two-decade-old US-sponsored peace process has failed, due largely to Israel’s continued construction of illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land, and during the recent Israeli election campaign Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised never to allow the creation of a Palestinian state if reelected, subsequently forming an even more hardline and anti-peace government than his previous three.

- Supporting boycotts and divestment initiatives encourages Palestinians to continue using peaceful means to achieve their freedom, which brings Israelis and Palestinians closer to a peaceful future where they live together not as occupier and occupied, oppressor and oppressed, but as equals deserving of the same rights and freedoms.

14 Why now?

- After a decade of extensive corporate engagement with the UCC, other Christian denominations, and human rights activists, the companies in question have failed to change their practices, and continue to profit from and enable Israel’s Occupation.

- The two-decade old peace process has collapsed, due largely to Israel’s continued construction of illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land, and this spring the most hardline and anti-peace government in Israel’s history was formed. In the absence of a viable negotiations process leading to the end of the Occupation, and with our government’s continued support of Israel and its policies towards the Palestinians, we have a moral responsibility to do what we can to end our complicity in Palestinian suffering, and to support peaceful Palestinian efforts to achieve their rights and freedom.

- Palestinians have endured nearly half a century of repressive military occupation, which becomes more entrenched each day. Enough is enough. The time to boycott and divest from the Occupation is now.

15 Who else supports boycotts, divestment, and sanctions directed at Israel’s occupation?

- The movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel’s Occupation is supported by a wide and diverse array of individuals and organizations, including Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, one of the heroes of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Archbishop Tutu has written a letter of strong support for our Resolution #4. Other Christian denominations that have endorsed boycotts and/or divestment from Israel’s Occupation include the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodists, the World Council of Churches, the United Church of Canada, The Church of England, and the Australian Council of Churches.