



Canadians urged to respond to UC actions

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With its sweeping moral judgments and harsh condemnation of Israel, a recent United Church of Canada report on Israel/Palestine policy has shocked some people into action.

And with only weeks to go before a church-wide vote, they'd like the rest of us to reach out, too.

When psychologist Ellen Greenberg read in The CJN about a church minister, Rev. Andrew Love, speaking out against the report ("United Church minister wants more balance on Mideast," May 17), she immediately got on the phone – to invite him to dinner.

"She called me out of the blue," said Rev. Love, who lives in Arnprior, Ont. After dinner, they attended an Aish HaTorah Evening to Celebrate Israel, which highlighted an Israeli field hospital in Haiti and other global contributions. "It was a wonderful experience... to have dinner in someone's home – total strangers – united by a bigger purpose, and a recognition that... this is going to be hard work: home-to-home, church-to-synagogue... relationship building."

Avi Benlolo of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies said that while the United Church of Canada has "backed down" from apartheid language, the report still attempts "to decomplicate a very complicated issue. They're obviously moving in the wrong direction by invoking the Shoah... [and] fail to understand that the Palestinian community is just not interested in a twostate solution."

The report calls for a boycott of "products produced in the settlements and through the occupation," accusing Israel of "stealing" land granted through international law as far

back as 1920, according to Richard Bass of the JEd Institute, who also met with Rev. Love while he was in Toronto.

Greenberg, who said she has a “passion for community,” said anyone can take action. “Call the United Church in [your] community... Let the minister know that we are concerned both about this suggestion to boycott and also the fact that no Jewish organizations have been invited.”

She also suggests writing to the Moderator, the church’s elected head.

Benlolo agrees. “People should take the matter into their own hands by reaching out... to all churches in their neighbourhood, making an appointment... and creating a relationship of discussion.”

Talking points must highlight “that Israel is a democracy, it’s not an apartheid state,” and also that “most Jews want to find a reasonable two-state solution.” Several Wiesenthal representatives met with United Church officials, including Rev. Bruce Gregersen, part of the working group that produced the report, who said there’s no question of Israel’s legitimacy. “To claim otherwise is unacceptable.”

In August, the United Church of Canada’s general council will debate and vote on the report. “They make decisions on the basis of where they believe God’s spirit is leading them,” Rev. Gregersen said.

To claims that the report belies the “view from the pew,” he said leadership must take a moral stance. “In the 1980s, the church was among the first... to consider the ordination of gay and lesbian people. There was huge opposition... but council decided it was the right thing to do.”

But Rev. Love resents the parallel. “Those are two fundamentally different moral imperatives.” Where ordination is an internal leadership issue, on Israel “we need to approach with much greater humility. We need to be much more sophisticated in our understanding of the complexity... more balanced with our moral judgment.”

Rev. Ross Lockhart, a United Church minister in British Columbia, recently wrote, “I fear that for the United Church of Canada, long ago we somehow adopted a meta-narrative that said ‘Israel is bad, Palestinians are good.’” With 650,000 members, the United Church is Canada’s largest Protestant denomination.

One surprise for Rev. Love has been the “diversity of opinion within the Jewish community. When I was in Israel, I was blown away by just how vibrant the democracy is – in its truest sense... The most important thing we can do as Christians is [to] educate ourselves.”

“What happens way up there,” in upper echelons, “is not as important as... the local level.” He’s heard Jews say they’re “wrestling and hugging” with Israel, and said, “I love

that expression! That's healthy, that's positive... that's how we come to a better understanding of one another."