

## Anti-Apartheid Work in Lansing, Michigan September - January 2025

We regret that we could not participate in the “What’s Next for Palestine” event on the evening of December 6 & 7 at Friends Center in Philadelphia, because we hosted an event in the Lansing area that will likewise address the Israeli war on the Palestinians and the overarching apartheid structure of Israel. This schedule conflict seemed an appropriate time to report on our anti-apartheid work in one locale in the country—work that has been inspired by AFSC’s leadership.

This past March, Red Cedar Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Lansing, MI, signed AFSC’s anti-apartheid pledge, after passing a Minute on the war and occupation of Gaza. We wrote letters to our elected representatives urging the cessation of violence and the provision of humanitarian aid but otherwise lacked a clear leading on what “joint action” may be possible and productive.

But in the summer of this year, Red Cedar Meeting was blessed by contact from members of Edgewood United Church of Christ in nearby East Lansing inquiring about the process that led the Meeting to join the AFSC campaign. Edgewood and Red Cedar had previously partnered on numerous other anti-war efforts, particularly during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Four of us met during the summer to share the recent history of concerns about Israel and Palestine held by our two faith communities. From those discussions grew a decision to host two Fall gatherings for members of our two congregations and a third faith community, the University Lutheran Church in East Lansing. We took Israel’s apartheid policies as a starting point, based on the AFSC campaign.

In the first meeting, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, we viewed and discussed the short video produced by Amnesty International outlining why Israel is an apartheid regime in all the territory that it controls. Many attendees had followed the Israel-Palestinian conflict and its long history but were also surprised and moved by evidence presented about the fundamentally unjust structure of Israeli state. Forty people attended.

In the second meeting, on October 17<sup>th</sup>, we viewed segments of the speech given by Reverend Munther Isaac at Riverside Church in New York on August 14 that called on faith communities, especially Christian churches, to acknowledge the human rights violations and war crimes that had taken place since 10-7-23 and to speak and act honestly and directly on those awful truths. We also discussed actions that called us personally to respond, individually or collectively, to what we were learning. Twenty-four people attended.

Given this evidence of substantial interest and a sense of responsibility as U.S. citizens and people of faith, we discussed how best to move forward and maintain momentum—with the U.S. elections and the holiday season looming. We decided to host a free meal for our three communities and many other faith communities, local groups, and campus groups at Michigan State University that we knew or suspected shared these concerns. Our goal was to increase

the breadth of our “tent” for one evening and spend some time getting to know each other for what we knew to be a long struggle ahead in the New Year.

In the balance of October and November, we focused on reaching out to those communities and groups, inviting them to attend. The only “requirement” was to bring a concern for the issue and an interest in or history of acting for justice in Israel and Palestine. (During the month of November, we also urged members of our original three faith communities to write to Senators Peters and Stabenow in support of the Joint Resolutions of Disagreement on the proposed new arms sales to Israel.)

From this work, we were pleased to welcome 80 participants at our December 6<sup>th</sup> meal coming from thirteen faith communities, including our local mosque (the Islamic Center of Lansing), and members of six more secular local groups working for justice in Palestine. Among these attendees are members of the three original congregations as well as members of Unitarian-Universalist, Presbyterian, Brethren, Episcopal, and Greek Orthodox congregations, as well as two interdenominational congregations. A local middle eastern restaurant operated by a family of recent immigrants from Syria that will cater our meal. The Peace & Justice team at Edgewood and one Red Cedar household jointly paid for the meal. At Edgewood Church we gathered attendees around circular tables (8 per table), encouraging all to sit and listen to those they do not yet know. The time devoted to speakers and program was minimal. Six hundred dollars was collected and donated to Medical Aid for Palestine.

As we looked beyond this event to 2025, we decided to devote meeting time with this new interfaith network to learn more about boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) work—focusing on large institutions, such as universities and state-level retirement funds; possibly campaigns targeting particular companies like Maersk and Chevron; as well as actions that can be taken by individual households. Some of us have had extensive prior experience with BDS work on South Africa. Our first meeting focusing on divestment, with specific focus on the State of Michigan Retirement System, will take place on December 13<sup>th</sup>, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing. Given the orientation of the incoming U.S. administration, we also expect to devote more attention to “lateral” work—directed at shifting public views in our local community and thereby to our local and state elected representatives.

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