

Invested interests: Divestment strategy

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [December 28, 2004](#) issue

The prophet Isaiah, whose words we read in Advent, gives us wonderful images of peace and of the restoration of Zion—images of the wolf living with the lamb, of waters breaking forth out of the wilderness, of a land where there shall be “no lion, nor any ravenous beast.”

I can’t read these passages, however, without remembering Woody Allen’s comment that when lion and calf lie down together, only the lion will get back up. I also recall something Dietrich Bonhoeffer said about peace being the opposite of security—peace is a great venture, something to be dared.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently made what it thought was a daring decision on behalf of peace. It decided to begin a process of selected, phased divestment from corporations whose business is deemed harmful to Palestinians and Israelis. The response to this decision inside and outside Presbyterian congregations has been vigorous and heated—and not exactly peaceful.

Our Jewish neighbors have been deeply hurt by what they regard as an attack on the state of Israel and its economy, and on Jews personally. I have tried to interpret my church’s action to Jewish friends by explaining that its focus is Israeli policy, not Israel’s economy or existence and certainly not Jewish people.

I have also tried to help congregation members, who aren’t always paying attention to what their denomination is doing, or who wonder why it is doing what it does, to provide some answers when their Jewish neighbors or co-workers ask them why the Presbyterian Church is picking on Israel.

Is there a way to show that the church’s concern is truly for peace? The congregation I serve took up this question, and after much discussion it came up with a strategy. The session produced a statement that, among other things:

- Asks the PCUSA to slow the divestment process in order to give the Jewish and Palestinian communities an opportunity to be heard.
- Asks the denomination, should divestment ultimately happen, to reinvest whatever proceeds are realized from the sale of divested holdings in corporations whose business in Israel is deemed positive, helpful and peaceful.
- Instructs its own investment committee to invest some funds in those kinds of businesses in order to underscore that the target is not Israel's existence.

The statement also expresses the belief, so central to those Isaiah passages and the faith tradition of Jews, Muslims and Christians, that finding a way to work together is the best hope for peace in a land that is precious to us all.