

**September 24, 2005**  
**Religion Beat -- Churches facing rifts over heavy equipment**  
**By Michael Miller of the Journal Star**

Some pastors in Peoria are finding themselves performing pastoral care for congregation members troubled by actions taken by their own denomination.

The 2004 Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly voted to ask one of the denomination's committees to investigate whether the PCUSA should sell its approximately \$3 million worth of Caterpillar Inc. stock. The objection is that some heavy equipment bought by the state of Israel from Caterpillar has been used for actions which some in the PCUSA consider to be a violation of its peace and justice guidelines. The Caterpillar equipment has been used by the Israeli Defense Forces for such actions in the disputed territories as bulldozing homes and olive groves believed to be used for Palestinian terrorist cover.

Other corporations doing certain types of business with Israel that were included in the resolution include ITT Industries, Motorola and United Technologies. Citigroup was included for allegedly handling funds that ended up with terrorist organizations, which it has denied. Meanwhile, Caterpillar has said it is operating within "all local, U.S. and national laws and policies governing sales of our products around the world. ... We clearly have neither the legal right nor the tangible ability to regulate how customers use their machines."

Representatives of the PCUSA's Mission Responsibility Through Investment, the panel looking at whether to divest in these companies, said during a visit to Peoria last week that the divestment issue is a matter of only investing in companies that operate in accord with those peace and justice guidelines, of being good stewards of the denomination's money.

But members of some area PCUSA churches who work for Caterpillar see the approach as an attack on their livelihood or, at best, an attack on their company and thus on them.

Others also see it as an attack on Israel and as a wedge driven in local churches' relationships with Jewish communities.

"It's not fair, it's biased and it's anti-Semitic," said the Rev. Doug Hucke, pastor of Northminster Presbyterian Church said of the resolution.

He expressed those sentiments at a sort of town meeting at that church at which the two PCUSA representatives - MRTI chairwoman Carol Hylkema and committee staffer Bill Somplatsky-Jarman - who were in the area talked about how the committee is going about its job.

"I think our people had a chance to express their dissatisfaction," Hucke said. "For some people, that helped. Some people walked away more frustrated and angrier."

Hylkema and Somplatsky-Jarman said they weren't surprised by the reaction they found while talking to pastors and other members of the Presbytery of Great Rivers, the PCUSA district which includes the Peoria area.

"We expected for people to be concerned with the relationship," Hylkema said. "We've been very intentional about sharing the process. I have sensed people have appreciated knowing how it's going to work (and) that previous stuff in newspapers had a lot of incorrect information.

"Divestment is not our goal," she added. "The goal is to be in dialogue with the corporation as to issues put forth by the General Assembly and see if that corporation believes" policy can be changed.

Local congregations aren't waiting to see what happens.

United Presbyterian Church and Northminster already have engaged in joint educational events with the Jewish Federation of Peoria in order to counteract damage inflicted on relationships between PCUSA churches and the Jewish community.

The Northminster session, or church board, also has decided to prepare an "overture," or proposed resolution, that would address the Caterpillar part of the issue. If it moves forward, the overture could be considered at the 2006 General Assembly.

Washington Presbyterian Church, which also has several Caterpillar employees who are members, has held a roundtable discussion to try to clarify different aspects of the issue.

"There was some concern that was expressed both for the plight of all people who are experiencing any kind of violent expression of power," said the Rev. Jennifer Kemp, pastor at the church. "There was also a voiced concern for the effectiveness of this action combined with what the actual facts are.

"I want to be sure as their pastor that we keep the main thing the main thing. This is by no means a divided or angry congregation. Pastorally, I'm very concerned about Caterpillar employees who are in our congregation and also concerned about how we as a church respond and that it be in a way that honors the body of Christ and not tears it down."

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