You Can’t Say

WE DIDN’T KNOW:

Some Perspectives on Israel, Palestine and the Conflict

Episcopal Bishop’s Committee for Israel/Palestine
Diocese of Olympia
The Episcopal Church in Western Washington
October 2016
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DISCLAIMER

Each author takes full responsibility for what has been written. The material has been thoughtfully researched, and is offered in the spirit of seeking peace through understanding.
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Mary Segall

Eleonor Roosevelt once said, “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” We, the members of the Episcopal Bishop’s Committee for Israel/Palestine, Diocese of Olympia (the “Bishop’s Committee”), are very familiar with the choice to light that candle. The Bishop’s Committee was formed in 2000 at the request of Bishop Vincent Warner to support the presence and witness of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. The first chair of the Bishop’s Committee was The Rev. Stan Fowler succeeded by Brian Sellers-Peterson, Mary Pneuman, Warren Guykema, and Tim Hill. Randolph Urmston has served since 2011 as chair.

This Bishop’s Committee works through education, advocacy and prayer to support our Christian brothers and sisters in their witness for justice and peace. Our mission is to educate and to promote understanding of the complexities of the issues underlying the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and to promote understanding among the different congregations of the Episcopal Church in Western Washington. To this end, we decided to start an interactive process: we have put forward a series of well-constructed ideas and positions on different issues and invite your feedback. Feedback can be in person, via letter, email, or at our website, bishopscommittee.org. We see this dialogue continuing and expect there will be additional papers produced in the future with new ideas and actions identified to be taken by both the committee and you, the reader. The Bishop's Committee meets every second Thursday of the month. If you would like to learn more about the Bishop’s Committee, please consult our website, bishopscommittee.org, or email us at bishopscommittee@gmail.com.

We envision a future in which everyone in Israel and Palestine can live together in a free and democratic state, with security, justice, and equal opportunity for all. We work toward this future by raising awareness, advocating for change, and praying for guidance.

— Mission & Vision Statement

Our History

In 2000, Bishop Vincent Warner established the Bishop’s Committee for Justice and Peace in Israel/Palestine, recently renamed Episcopal Bishop’s Committee for Israel/Palestine, to support the presence and witness of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.
The Diocese of Jerusalem presently oversees the operation of 21 schools, 6 healthcare facilities and 20 parishes in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, providing K-12 education for about 6,000 students, and offering employment to about 1,500 Palestinians. It serves tens of thousands in two hospitals — Ahli Hospital in Gaza and St. Luke’s Hospital, Nablus — and has a large outpatient clinic in Zababdeh, West Bank. It offers a variety of special education and rehab programs for the blind, deaf, retarded, and other disabilities through the Princess Basma Center for Children with Disabilities.

A formal partnership between the Diocese of Olympia and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem was first proposed in 1994 when Bishop Warner and Bishop Kafity of the Diocese of Jerusalem met in Jerusalem. Prior to this, many connections between the two dioceses had developed. Bishop Steven Bayne was instrumental in the founding of St. George’s College in Jerusalem. St. George’s alumni at St. Mark’s Cathedral were leaders in establishing the St. Mark’s Palestinian Concerns Group in the 1980’s, and Bishop Robert Cochrane was the first bishop to host the bishop of Jerusalem in our diocese.

Our Mission

Today, increasingly adverse living conditions threaten the very survival of the Christian churches in Israel and Palestine, and the estimated Christian population in the Holy Land has declined from 25–30% to 1–2%. Never has there been a more urgent time for public awareness and support.

By means of education, advocacy, and prayer, we are committed to supporting our Christian brothers and sisters in their struggle to survive the social, cultural, and economic effects of 49 years of military occupation in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and to assisting their efforts to bring about a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A centerpiece of our work has been the formation of sister church relationships. These relationships have led to visitations and exchanges of youth and clergy, volunteer opportunities, and financial support for health and education ministries, especially through the Good Friday Offering. Currently there are active partnerships between St. Paul's, Port Townsend, and St. Matthew's, Zababdeh; Epiphany Parish, Seattle, and St. John the Baptist, Irbid, Jordan; St. Andrew’s, Seattle, and Holy Family, Raineh, Israel; and St. Thomas, Medina, and St. Andrew’s, Ramallah. Other efforts include the development of educational programs for the congregations of the Diocese of Olympia, an information and
advocacy network, and collaboration with local ecumenical and interfaith organizations in support of joint projects and major conferences.

The Bishop’s Committee is your way to keep current and learn how you can help. We depend on our partners in the Diocese of Jerusalem for accurate, up-to-date information about the human cost of Israel’s continuing policy of settlement expansion and construction of separation barriers. We are connected with a national and international Christian network that includes The Episcopal Church USA’s Peace and Justice Ministry, American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (AFEDJ), Churches for Middle East Peace, Sabeel, and the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

Can we make a difference? There are no easy answers, but our Baptismal Covenant calls us to strive unceasingly for justice and peace. The Resurrection is our hope.
INTRODUCTION

The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel, VIII Bishop of Olympia

For many years the Diocese of Olympia has had a special relationship with the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Parishes in this Diocese have become sister parishes with parishes in Israel and the West Bank. In Israel, as well as in the West Bank and Gaza, there are Episcopal educational and medical institutions that people and parishes in our diocese not only financially support but also often visit. I have personally visited many of these institutions both in the West Bank and Gaza.

Given this history, it should not surprise anyone that we have, in this Diocese, an Episcopal Bishop’s Committee for Israel/Palestine.

The members of this committee meet monthly to reflect upon how we, the Diocese of Olympia, might better support not only our fellow Episcopalians, but the whole Christian community of the Holy Land as they go about their delicate and difficult mission of peacemaking. This booklet is one expression of the educational work the Committee does in our diocese. I very much welcome the publication of the papers that make up this booklet and I commend them to you. I have read them all. I commend them not as statements with which we all will agree. In fact, I am still puzzled and unsure about some of the issues. It is a complex situation. But, that is why it is immensely important for us to read and learn more about these issues and to be open to a genuine dialogue and deeper engagement with all of them. It is my hope that this booklet will stimulate reflection and conversation that will enable us to better understand and more effectively witness to and support the efforts of all the people of Israel-Palestine: Christians, Muslims, and Jews alike, all of whom are struggling to live together in shalom, salaam, justice and peace.

I offer my thanks to the members of the Bishop’s Committee for Israel/Palestine for the offering of these papers and for their continued commitment to our sisters and brothers in the Holy Land.
One hundred years ago, there were no countries in the Middle East. Palestine, like the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, was part of the Ottoman Empire, as it had been for 400 years. The law came from Constantinople and was administered locally by appointed governors and influential families. At that time, Palestine was inhabited by about 850,000 people, roughly 75% Muslim, 15% Christian, and 10% Jewish. Of the 85,000 Jews, about 50,000 were Palestinian, with the remaining 35,000 being recent immigrants from Europe, the vanguard of the Zionist movement. The majority of the population lived in the coastal valleys where water was relatively plentiful, far fewer lived in the rugged hills around Jerusalem. There was a generally stable coexistence among the various peoples and faiths, as there had been for centuries.

World War I changed everything. At the close of the war, Britain and France divided the spoils of the Ottoman Empire, creating multiple territories under “mandate” rule with the promise of future independence, most of which have become the states we now recognize in the Mideast. In fact, Palestine is the only mandate territory that has not yet achieved its full independence. While promising independence to Palestine and the other mandate territories, Britain also aligned itself politically with the Zionist movement in Britain, supporting the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, yet admonishing that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the . . . rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

Britain’s administration of Mandate Palestine was problematic from the start, and ultimately unsuccessful in creating a viable state under its auspices. Fundamentally, Britain was unable to find a way to manage the influx of European Jewish refugees in a region already populated by Palestinians. A number of plans were put forward attempting to divide the region into two states — for example, the 1937 Peel Partition Plan allocated 25% of Palestine to a nascent Jewish state — but all such plans failed to gain acceptance, neither with the European Jewish immigrants nor with the indigenous Palestinians. The reasons for those failures are many, but chief among them are that all proposed plans required significant dispossession and

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1 We follow the UN terminology for the region. “Palestine” refers to the former British Mandate Palestine, the geographic region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, bounded to the north by Lebanon and Syria, and to the south by Sinai. “Israel” refers to the modern State of Israel, whose internationally-accepted borders, the “Green Line,” were established by armistice after the 1947–49 War. “Occupied Territories” refers to those areas of Palestine under Israeli military occupation, currently Gaza and the West Bank.
relocation of the indigenous Palestinian population. Furthermore, Britain failed to establish even a rudimentary Palestinian government that might have represented the interests of the people.

In 1947, the UN Partition Plan approved the establishment of the State of Israel, giving Israel control of 56% of the territory in Mandate Palestine, including most of its arable land. At that time, Jews constituted 33% of the population of Palestine but owned less than 10% of the land. Immediately after the UN vote, civil war broke out in the newfound State of Israel. In 1948, the war expanded to a regional conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. When the war ended and armistice agreements were signed in 1949, Israel had expanded its control to 78% of Mandate Palestine territory, and 750,000 Palestinians had been expelled or fled from their homes in Israel — an event the Palestinians call “al-Nakba,” (“the Catastrophe”). As a symbolic gesture, many Palestinians still carry the keys to the homes they left behind, to which they have never been able to return.

The 1949 Armistice established the internationally recognized border of Israel, referred to as the “Green Line.” The remaining 22% of Mandate Palestine territory comprised the West Bank and Gaza. Between 1949 and 1967, the West Bank was annexed by Jordan and Gaza was administered by Egypt. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel conquered the remaining territory of Palestine, expelling Egypt from Gaza, extending its control to Sinai, and expelling Jordan from the West Bank. Since 1967, Israel has held Gaza and the West Bank under military occupation.

Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but continues to maintain absolute control over it, strictly limiting the movement of goods, services, and people into and out of Gaza, essentially keeping it under siege. Israel maintains a full military presence in the West Bank, although there are regions under the nominal control of the Palestinian Authority. Israeli policy encourages Jewish Israelis to settle in the West Bank, providing settlers with tax incentives, stipends, and additional funding from overseas donors. Settlements are built on land appropriated by the Israeli government, often dispossessing local Palestinians. At present, there are over 500,000 Israeli settlers living in the West Bank in areas under strict military control,
covering 36% of the West Bank. This leaves only 14% of the former Mandate Palestine under nominal Palestinian control.²

Presently about 9.3 million Palestinians live in Palestine or neighboring Jordan, with another 1.7 million scattered throughout the world. Of the 6.1 million who live in Palestine, 2.7 million live in the West Bank, 1.7 million in Gaza, and 1.7 million in Israel, where they represent 21% of the population. Within the borders of the old Mandate Palestine, there are roughly equal numbers of Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Going forward, Israel has three options, all politically difficult. (1) Israel could maintain a Jewish-majority democracy within the Green Line borders and allow the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, the “two-state solution.” This would involve substantial security issues, and would require removing the Israeli settlers from appropriated land in the West Bank. (2) Israel could extend its borders to roughly those of the old Mandate Palestine, “Eretz Israel” (“Greater Israel”) in a one-state solution. If Israel were to maintain itself as a nominal democracy, Israeli Jews would become a minority, with the dream of a Jewish-majority state succumbing to the tide of demographic change. (3) Israel could pursue a one-state solution, but abandon its stated commitment to democracy, which would perpetuate the current conflict by replacing the military occupation of Palestine with its political subjugation.³

ZIONISM

Randolph Urmston

“Zionism is variously looked at as a salvation or as a catastrophic power. Yet all agree that Zionism was and is at the center of the conflict that has now raged for over 100 years in the Land of Canaan. No lasting solution can be approached without an honest examination of the origin and consequences of this phenomenon that still shapes events, not only locally in Palestine/Israel, but in the region and the world.”

If the powers-that-be discriminated against you, persecuted you, forced you to live in ghettos and murdered you, because of your religion or ethnicity, would not you want to start a new country where you were in charge? Zionism, the political mechanism to create a nation of and controlled by Jews in Palestine, is what Theodor Herzl advocated in the late 19th Century. Argentina and Uganda were considered for the new country, but despite the fact that early Zionists were secular Jews, Palestine was thought to be an ideal area for settlement. The remaining tribes of Israel had resided in Palestine before their defeat by the Romans in 70 CE.

In Europe and in Russia, in the age of Christendom, Jews were persecuted for not converting. Jews were used by the rulers of emerging nations as a common enemy, a scapegoat, to unify their populations. In the early 20th Century, even Great Britain encouraged its Jewish population to immigrate to Palestine for this and other reasons. Thus, the emergence of nationalism in Europe fanned the flames of discrimination against Jewish people and fostered the birth of a nationalist movement within the Jewish community that only became a colonial movement when it excluded the rights and aspirations of the indigenous Arab peoples.

Not all Jews, however, favored Zionism. The only Jewish official in the British Cabinet — who voted against the 1917 Balfour Declaration, a commitment by the British Government to recognize a Jewish homeland in Palestine — thought the creation of a Jewish state would magnify anti-Semitism. On the other hand, some anti-Semites thought Zionism was the answer. The National Socialist movement (the Nazis), for example, took advantage of Zionism to move Jews out of Germany during the 1930’s.

There were Zionists who favored a binational state and warned of the dangers of Jewish exceptionalism and militarism. And then there was the impact of the Holocaust that stimulated a belief in the need for Jewish military power and a Jewish state for Jews to survive.

Today, liberal Zionists are torn by the inconsistency of their belief in human rights on the one hand and support of a “democracy” that discriminates against its non-Jewish citizens and has a policy of apartheid and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and Gaza. Some argue that criticizing these policies of the state of Israel is anti-Semitic. Central to this charge by the current right-wing government of Israel, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is the assertion that Israel represents all Jews.

Today, the historical persecution of Jews that fueled Zionism is being used by Zionists to justify Israel’s possession of the whole of Palestine. A feeling of permanent victimization justifies the need for “security” at any cost. On the other hand, many Jews, particularly younger Jews, feel that Zionism (the national political movement) has corrupted Judaism (the religion) and neither should be confused with Israel (the state). It is our hope and the hope of many of our fellow Christians that Palestine will continue to be a place where Jewish people and culture flourish. However, we are convinced that the current policies of discrimination and ethnic cleansing of the Israeli government are undermining this possibility.

THE WANE OF CHRISTIANS IN THE HOLY LAND

Claude Soudah

Across the Holy Land, where Christianity was born and once made up around 20 percent of the population prior to the war of 1948, Christians now represent a tiny minority. In the West Bank, Christians now represent between 1–2% of the population and continue to decrease at an alarming rate as a reflection of ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The Institute for Middle East Understanding estimates that approximately 51,000 Christians live in Palestine: 38,000 in the West Bank, 10,000 in East Jerusalem and 3,000 in Gaza.\(^1\) Approximately 161,000 Christians live in Israel, representing 1.1% of Israel’s population as of October 2015.\(^2\)

The continued Israeli occupation has made it impossible for Christians, indeed for the whole Palestinian people of whom they are an integral part, to live with dignity, freedom and security. Palestinian Christians, like all Palestinians, want to live in peace and with justice. They yearn for freedom and life abundant. Christian churches have frequently been desecrated in an effort to intimidate Christians to leave the Holy Land. The pressure from some Muslim Palestinians also contributes to the dwindling number of Christian Palestinians.

Palestinian Christians have been denied their right of worship at traditional holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and many generations of Christians have never been able to reach either city to worship. Jerusalem, the holy city for all children of Abraham, is also a city of daily life for all her Jewish, Muslim and Christian inhabitants connected to this place through family ties as well as the location of their places of worship, their schools, hospitals and work places. Daily they are confronted by the Separation Wall, checkpoints, and roadblocks guarded by Israeli soldiers who deny them movement and access to Jerusalem. Basic services such as water and electricity are withheld multiple times a week. All these conditions make living in the Holy Land extremely difficult, and many Christians consequently choose to seek new lives in other countries.

Holy Land Christians have a rich history, a language and a common culture with Palestinian Muslims with whom they have lived in peace for centuries. Christians have played a positive role in Arab society and facilitated relations between the different social groups.

The expansion of Israel and its search for security has become an obsession, a mythical ideology in the name of which gross injustice, intimidation and the use of violence are justified. In closing, I would like to quote Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, “One day, political leaders,


\(^2\) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Israel)
the Israelis and Palestinians and the International community will come to understand that, beyond the game of interests and political ambitions, the nation and vocation of this Holy Land is to be chosen by God to unite all men to himself and to each other.”
WHAT PROSPECT PEACE?

Claude Soudah

The immediate outlook for a peaceful settlement of the Israel/Palestine conflict is not very encouraging. Peace talks have collapsed many times and in the shadow of the peace process stalemate, mutual trust and peaceful intentions are no longer there.

Among Palestinians, the sense of frustration with the military occupation by Israel is matched by infuriation with their own leadership. Palestinian Authority President Mahmood Abbas has stayed in office despite the fact that his term expired in 2009. He has ousted rivals, cracked down on dissidents and has not planned for a transition. According to a recent survey, 65% of Palestinians believe he should resign. The rupture between the moderate West Bank-based Fatah and Gaza-based Hamas continues unabated, and stands in the way of a democratic electoral process. In addition, the younger generation is fed-up with a high level of unemployment; they do not see prospects for the future nor do they believe that anything is going to change in the next generation. Recent violent actions attest to their frustration; the context in which these Palestinian violent responses are taken are not presented as a response to the extreme level of Israel state violence.

On the Israeli side, the occupation of the West Bank has become more entrenched. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, now in his fourth term, has sworn in a hardline coalition of settlement supporters and ultra-Orthodox parties. To date, his government continues to build settlements, demolish Palestinian homes, and confiscate more land. This includes thousands of acres in the Jordan River area, almost encircling the Palestinian town of Jericho. There are now over 800,000 settlers residing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, constituting approximately 13% of Israel’s Jewish population, and the trend continues.1

Netanyahu and his corps of professional propagandists are now desperately trying to link the Palestinians with Islamic terrorists (Daesh or ISIS), with association with Iran, and in some way claim that Palestinians are responsible for the Holocaust, preferring to substitute the words “Muslim-Arab” for “Palestinian.” In many communities, but not all, these approaches to discrediting Palestinians have failed so far.

Netanyahu has sworn that there will be no bi-national state and continues to blame the Palestinians for the stalemate in negotiations. Right-wing politicians are calling for the annexation of Judea and Samaria (using Biblical names for the West Bank) and thereby, to quote one of their

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1 http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/18210#.VpK885scTIU
leaders, “We have to connect Judea and Samaria to the State of Israel. We have returned to our land, so that we will never again have to leave it.”

In view of these recent developments and the intransigence in both camps, the outlook for peace and reconciliation appears to be very far away. Considering the seriousness of recent moves on the part of Israel, a number of political analysts strongly suggest that their ultimate goal is the creation of a Greater Israel in fulfillment of Zionism’s grand agenda of establishing a Jewish State throughout the historical region of Palestine.
Since the 1950’s, the United States has provided substantial military support to the State of Israel. Israel claims its survival is threatened by several of its surrounding neighbors. The pro-Israel lobby in America has pressured Congress to provide armaments. Both Republicans and Democrats have responded favorably. This paper provides an overview of America’s military aid to Israel.

After the founding of Israel in 1948, its leaders sought military aid from Europe and the United States to combat adjacent Arab countries. American weapons began arriving in the late 1950’s. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union shipped weapons to the Arabs, and in response the United States sent armaments to Israel. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy authorized a major sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel. In 1964, the United States sent 200 M48A battle tanks. More sophisticated weaponry was shipped as the years went by. American aid significantly increased after the 1967 War and again during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Israel purchased these weapons with loans from the United States. Later the United States cancelled this debt. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter convened talks that led to a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt at Camp David. Israel was subsequently guaranteed $3 billion a year in weapons. Egypt was granted $1.3 billion in development assistance. It is interesting to note that Israel's clandestine nuclear program, which began in the 1950’s, was financed, not with US aid, but from wealthy diaspora Jews, including several from America.

The United States and Israel cooperate closely in a number of areas of military activity. The United States underwrites some of Israel’s research and development of weapons such as the Merkava main battle tank and the IAI Lavi ground-attack aircraft. Israel has been a participant in the development of the F-35 Lightning II fighter. It was offered access to the F-22 Raptor program, although it was abandoned because of high costs. The United States also contributes funds for a joint U.S.-Israel Missile Defense Program designed to thwart short-range ballistic missiles.

The two countries also cooperate jointly on a number of technology development programs, notably the Arrow missile system and the Tactical High Energy Laser, also known as “Nautilus.” They conduct joint military exercises, including biennial operations code-named “Juniper Cobra” to test integrated operations. In addition, the Israeli port of Haifa is the main port of call in the eastern Mediterranean for the United States Sixth Fleet. Israel also provides other
logistical and maintenance support for U.S. forces in the region. Finally, the two countries share intelligence and maintain a joint anti-terrorist working group.

Over the last 20 years, the United States has shifted economic aid into military aid. In 2007, the Bush Administration and the Israeli government agreed to a 10-year, $30-billion military aid package for fiscal years 2009 through 2018. In 2015, President Obama promised to continue multi-year commitments of military aid to Israel, at a rate exceeding $4.5 billion per year. This means that 53% of total US foreign military financing worldwide will go to Israel whose defense expenditure amounts to 5.6% of Gross Domestic Product, the highest in the world.

There are many dissenting voices regarding United States military aid to Israel, including many European governments and peace organizations around the world. Israel has used its weaponry against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and in Gaza. Thousands of civilians, including women and children, have been killed or wounded by the Israeli Defense Forces. The Jewish Voice for Peace, along with other groups, has accused Israel of using American-made Apache helicopters, F-16 fighter jets, and cluster bombs on the civilian population in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead in December 2008 and January 2009. Israel denies this charge. As long as American aid to Israel goes to the purchase of weapons used to maintain Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and the siege of Gaza, both violations of the Geneva Accords and American law, we members of the Bishop’s Committee encourage our fellow Episcopalians and other citizens of our country to oppose all such aid.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) References:
OUR SUPPORT OF BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, & SANCTIONS IN REGARD TO ISRAEL

The Rev. John-Otto Liljenstolpe

The Episcopal Bishop’s Committee for Israel/Palestine, Diocese of Olympia, has agreed that the use of boycott, divestment and sanctions — commonly known as “BDS” — in regard to Israel is a moral imperative. We are supporting this method of protest and political pressure because of what we have learned in Israel and in the West Bank from our fellow Episcopalians living there as well as from others, both Palestinians and Israelis. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and their documented discriminatory policies towards their own Arab citizens is harming the lives and well-being of many people in the Holy Land both Arabs and Jews.

For this reason, we are encouraging the members of the Diocese of Olympia as well as others to participate in the current BDS campaign by boycotting the products of Israel, especially those produced in or using the material resources of the West Bank.1 Furthermore, we are encouraging Church-related organizations to divest from companies that are profiting from products sold to Israel and used there to further and maintain the occupation.2 Finally, we are working together with other BDS groups for a governmental sanctioning of Israel pending the agreement of the Israeli government to fully obey international law.3

While we have no illusion that BDS can cause serious harm to the economy of Israel, we do believe that these tactics, used for various causes in these United States since the time of its establishment,4 are an effective way of alerting our fellow Church members and fellow citizens to the injustices we Americans are supporting in Israel-Palestine with our tax dollars and free-will.

1 A list of Israeli products whose boycott we encourage can be found at bdslist.org/full-list/.
2 A number of American Churches and Church-related organizations have initiated a divestment process, among them: the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Conference of the Major Superiors of Men, the Alliance of Baptists, and the Unitarian Universalist Association.
3 The current occupation and settlement of the West Bank by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), as well as the growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, has been held to be a violation of Article 49 of the Geneva Convention. These and other aspects of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank have been the subject of numerous UN resolutions.
4 There are numerous historical instances of the use of boycott, divestment and sanctions by American colonialists, American citizens and the United States Government. Among them are the boycotting of British tea by colonialists, and the boycotting and sanctioning of the products and states of what would become the Confederacy before and during the U.S. Civil War. More recent examples are the sanctioning of South Africa by the United States during the 1980’s. In our days, a number of states and U.S. corporations threatened boycotts and sanctions against the State of North Carolina because of its passing legislation against transgendered individuals.
contributions. It has become increasingly clear to us, as well as to Israeli governmental authorities and their U.S. counterparts, that currently BDS is the most effective set of strategies available to us as U.S. citizens to put pressure on the government and people of Israel as well as the U.S. government to change their attitudes and policies towards the Palestinian people.

As was the case, when Christians in the United States employed these economic pressure tactics against the government of South Africa, our intent in encouraging their use now against the economy of Israel is not motivated by any wish to harm the well-being of the Israeli people. Indeed, we do so in part because we believe that the occupation of the West Bank and their discriminatory practices against their own Arab citizens do not serve the best interests of the Jewish people of Israel. We are, if fact, convinced that the best way for Israel to secure her future as a country would be for her to use her resources to make of the West Bank not only an independent country for the Palestinian people but a center of economic prosperity that would be the envy of peoples through the Middle East. However, our hoped-for goal in waging this nonviolent campaign against the current Israeli policies of occupation and colonization is simply to pressure the government of Israel to do all within their power to see that the Arab peoples living in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, as well as in Israel proper, enjoy all the basic human rights that the Jewish citizens of Israel and her West Bank settlers now enjoy.

Regrettably, rather than engaging with us to discuss how we might work together to encourage the government of the United States to support those groups in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza who even now are working for a peaceful and just solution, supporters of the current Israeli policy, both Jews and Christians, are attempting to defame the supporters of BDS by labelling us as “anti-Semites.” While there certainly are people in the United States who suffer the affliction of anti-Semitism while speaking positively of BDS, anyone who has taken the time to study or even to get to know the recognized leadership of the BDS movement in both its religious and secular varieties, and the documents related to the campaign, knows that anti-Semitism is not tolerated among us. That not a few of those who lead the BDS movement are themselves Jews, is but one of many testimonies to this fact.

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5 It is estimated that over $130 billion has been given in weapon credits and donations in support of the current Israeli policies of occupation and settlement over the past 49 years. A good deal of this aid was given to Israel on the condition that it be used to buy weapons from the various components of the American defense industry.

6 While Israeli peace movements have diminished over the past decade, there are still a good number of young Israelis who actively support Palestinian resistance to their own country’s occupation of the West Bank. And there are Israeli officials such as the former Israeli security (Shin Bet) officers who have publicly opposed Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. The opposition of American Jews, on the other hand is growing, and there appears to be a discernable shift of opinion in regard to Israeli policy vis-à-vis Palestinians in general and the on-going military occupation of the West Bank in particular. At the center of the Jewish opposition in the United States is the Jewish Voice for Peace organization.
Those who have questions about BDS, its justness, and its compatibility with the mission of the Church, are invited to contact us at the website of the Bishop’s Committee on Israel and Palestine, bishopscommittee.org.
MUSALAH: A REASON TO HOPE

Carolyn Sherrard

Recently it occurred to me that in the midst of the distressing news we constantly read about Palestine-Israel, it would be heartening to discover something that offers encouragement regarding peace and justice in that land. As I researched current reconciliation efforts, I was struck by a surprisingly large number that feature Palestinians and Israelis working together to end the illegal occupation there. Of those, I was particularly drawn to an organization called Musalaha, whose very name means “reconciliation” in Arabic.

There were two reasons why Musalaha interested me. Firstly, and this is unique, the foundation for its message and activities are Jesus Christ’s teachings about forgiveness and reconciliation in Scripture (e.g., Galatians 3:8 and Ephesians 2:14–16). Thus, its leaders are men and women committed to living out those principles. Secondly, Shadia Qubti, a young Palestinian woman representing Musalaha, spoke in our church last year. I was impressed both by her candor and forbearance regarding the effects of the Israeli occupation of her homeland, as well as her own story, which she recounted calmly, without hostility.

Musalaha’s mission statement is:

_Musalaha is a non-profit organization that seeks to promote reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians as demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus. We seek to be an encouragement and facilitator of reconciliation, first among Palestinian Christians and Messianic Israelis, and then beyond to our respective communities._

This organization was founded in 1990 by Dr. Salim Munayer, Academic Dean at Bethlehem Bible College, at a time when both sides recognized that even among Palestinian and Christian believers, unity was rare, due in part to the First Intifada¹. Even Christians who share the same faith and goal of honoring God’s word as they pursue reconciliation are prone to division due to cultural misunderstandings, negative images, opinions and attitudes about one another, language barriers, general resentfulness, dehumanization and demonization of each group by the other. Finally, they have a common concern about whether it is actually possible for Palestinians and Israelis who desire to retain their own identity, history, and nationality to live together amicably as neighbors without hostility, bitterness and fear.

¹ The first intifada (“uprising”) occurred in 1988, the uprising of Palestinians against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.
Two things were clear to Dr. Munayer. Building relationships would have to be the crucial first step, daunting because it would require people to reach out to those on the other side, persons who each group had little reason to trust. Once started, the sustainability of these vulnerable new relationships would be vital.

Towards that end, Musalaha has an Executive Board composed of an equal number of Christian Palestinian and Israeli community and church leaders committed to this ministry of reconciliation, whose foundation is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They believe that forgiveness and healing are only possible through following his example and obeying his words. They seek to emulate and teach Christ’s model of forgiveness, mercy, and love, and in this way to bring down strongholds of enmity that embitter and hold generations hostage on both sides.

Dr. Munayer’s innovation was to take people from both groups out to the neutral environment of the desert to seek common ground. He began this experience by teaming fifteen Palestinians with fifteen Israelis in the group to ride as pairs on camels. In the desert, all were equal as they coped with the camels, the heat and discomfort. These challenges became a venue for opening communication and initiating relationships. Once working relationships were established, participants were more able to deal with the issues arising from apartheid because the personal narratives they heard affected how they perceived historical events that had grieved and alienated them. Seeing the faces of those who had been one’s enemies made it difficult to dehumanize and demonize each other despite the fact that both sides repeatedly reported they had been initially filled with apprehension, prejudice and fear.

Over the years, Musalaha has expanded its reconciliation projects to include summer camps for children — the younger the better, since learning to understand the other side comes more quickly with early exposure — publishing, cultural teaching and leadership training. Programs include those specifically geared to children (ages 8–12), youth (ages 13–19), young adults, and women, whose role is critical as they impact their families with attitudes of tolerance and understanding rather than prejudice and bigotry. Social services are also provided for both Palestinian and Israeli communities. For those who stay with Musalaha, training is offered in reconciliation leadership including how to bear personal witness to the transformative power of what they have experienced and how to recruit new participants into the process.

At this point, there are two related tracks, one being the faith-based process described so far. The other is a bridge-building effort to branch out from believing communities to reach people regardless of their religious beliefs. This effort is guided by Biblical principles of peace, goodwill, and love, heeding the admonition of Romans 12:18, “If possible, as far as it depends on you, live
at peace with everyone.” A strong foundation for discussion is the fact that the three monotheistic religions of this land share common moral values.

Nevertheless, Musalaha walks a thin line. It is funded largely by Christian evangelicals who sympathize with Israel. If the organization insists too loudly on justice, Israelis may end their involvement and funding could be affected. On the other hand, if Musalaha takes a more neutral position on political issues, Palestinians may consider it to be normalizing the occupation and also stop participating.

I mentioned earlier that Musalaha — actually one of the many organizations composed of Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace and justice in Palestine-Israel — particularly interested me because its leadership is Christian and its efforts are based on Christian principles. As I studied it, I became curious about just how effective Musalaha has been in achieving its goals. It makes sense to me that Musalaha says it measures the success of fulfilling its mission statement when it observes tangible changes in people’s lives.

There is a recognizable progression in these changes. In the first stage, participants move from their pre-conceived ideas, to curiosity about the “other,” to enthusiasm about cultivating relationships. However, there may be a second stage where they find it impossible to continue with Musalaha’s program — as they put it, if they are barely able to look at each other, how can they sit down and talk? But for those who do press on, a third stage is entered, where both sides mature in the ability to understand that although all have genuine grievances, each is a human being longing for peace and security.

In this recognition there is elation and triumph. It means participants are ready and eager to begin communicating and relating to each other, to remain committed to continuing fellowship and to building new bridges between diverse communities. These folks are passionately determined to work within Musalaha to bring down the longstanding barriers between Palestinians and Israelis. Where this dedication exists and when it prevails, one indeed has reason to hope that the illegal occupation with all its ramifications will end and be replaced at last with reconciliation, justice, and peace.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mary Segall is a registered nurse with a doctorate in public health. She has worked the past twenty five years in international development working with others to improve the quality of health care provided. Her travels have taken her many times to the West Bank where she came to understand first-hand the challenges that Palestinians face living under occupation. She has been a member of the Bishop’s Committee since she moved to Seattle in 2009.

The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel is the eighth Bishop elected to the Diocese of Olympia. Bishop Rickel embraces radical hospitality that welcomes all, no matter where they find themselves on their journey of faith. He envisions a church that is a safe and authentic community in which to explore God’s infinite goodness and grace as revealed in the life and continuing revelation of Jesus Christ.

Rennie Coit is a pediatrician with an enduring interest in peace and reconciliation.

Randolph Urmston is Chair of the Bishop’s Committee. He a Seattle attorney who has also been active in the Mideast Focus Ministry at St. Mark’s Cathedral. He attended a Sabeel Conference and travelled in Palestine in 2011 and has been engaged in education on and actions to end Israel’s Occupation.

Claude Soudah was born in Bethlehem and raised in Jerusalem. He emigrated to the United States in 1963. He graduated from the University of Washington and UW Pacific Coast Graduate Banking School. He had a successful International Banking career for 40 years, serving in senior positions in Seattle, London, and Zurich. He lives in Seattle, is married and has children and grandchildren. He is a long standing member of the Bishop’s Committee and currently serving as its treasurer.

Tim Hill is a past chair of the Bishop’s Committee, a member of Epiphany Episcopal Parish in Seattle, and has served as a former King County Executive. He and his wife, Margot, have three children, their spouses, and six grandchildren.

The Rev. John-Otto Liljenstolpe is a priest of the Church of Sweden who now works as a religious educator in the Greater Seattle area for the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He also serves as a regular member of the Bishop’s Committee.

Carolyn Sherrard was born on Long Island, New York, and lived in Pasadena, CA, Seattle, WA, and for one wonderful year in Honolulu, HI. Her Interest in and concern about Palestine and its indigent people began with years of talks with her neighbor Huda Giddens and her husband Jerry, who would share with her information and insights. After they, along with Charlton Price,
initiated the Conversations group, her awareness was piqued by hearing or reading about the experiences of people who have experienced the Palestinian plight for themselves and the frustrating struggle for peace and justice in their land. Carolyn considers herself very much a beginner in my awareness and concern, which to this point finds expression in communicating with politicians by phone or email and signing online petitions in support or defense of Palestinian issues.