

2006 TRAVEL/STUDY CONFERENCE TO ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

A FOLLOW-UP REPORT

PRESBYTERIAN PEACEMAKING PROGRAM

From April 25 to May 5, 2006, ninety-nine Presbyterian peacemakers traveled together to Israel and Palestine. The peacemakers participated as members of presbytery teams. Twenty-one presbyteries sent teams comprised of two to seven individuals. Two “hybrid” teams of five persons each were created with individuals from ten different presbyteries. The group also included seven staff persons. In December 2006, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program sent a brief survey asking what the individuals and teams were doing since their participation in the travel/study conference. As of February, responses from individuals in sixteen of the thirty-one presbyteries had been received.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

- Presentations have been made:
 - in seventy-eight churches
 - at fifteen presbytery and synod events and fourteen Presbyterian Women’s events, including two Synod Gatherings and one Presbytery Gathering
 - to retirement communities, churches in other denominations, Rotary clubs, P.E.O. (philanthropic educational organization) and other service groups, and secular peace groups
- Four teams report an increase in interfaith work in their presbytery as a direct result of the trip.
- Four teams have engaged in conversation with presbyteries that did not have teams go on the trip.
- Five teams reported intentionally working on peace and justice advocacy for the people of Israel and Palestine since the trip. This work ranged from letters to the editor to visits to their senators and representatives.

“I have been wearing my ‘political hat’ and have been working with a number of other Iowans in questioning the many presidential candidates that are visiting Iowa as the January 2008 caucuses approach. Sharing my personal experience in Israel/Palestine with the candidates in a public forum has been effective, especially my recent meeting with Sen. Obama . . . I met with my new U.S. House Representative regarding Israel and Palestine.” —Participant from East Iowa Presbytery

“We met with representatives of both Sen. Biden and Sen. Carper and in person with Congressman Mike Castle in June and July [2006].” —New Castle Presbytery Team

- Several participants attended, at their own expense, the 217th General Assembly (2006) in Birmingham, Alabama, where they engaged in educational activities with commissioners and visitors. Among the travel/study conference participants who testified before the Peacemaking Committee was a youth from the Minnesota Valleys Presbytery team.

TYPES OF PRESENTATIONS

- PowerPoint presentations created by team members
- Panel presentations
- Sermons
- Written reflections
- Devotional pieces
- The Newark Presbytery team created a DVD.
- Teams created quizzes, worship resources, and resource bibliographies for use in presentations.

“We have developed a 45-minute presentation, but we adapt it depending on how many members of the team can be present and the venue. We do an introduction and background piece, and then we each share about the trip and offer a personal reflection. We distribute The Iron Wall video when we talk.” —Donegal Presbytery Team

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

- Matt Middleton, conference pianist and PC(USA) mission co-worker at the International Center, has founded and directs five music ensembles under the umbrella of Bethlehem Star Music. The Dar Al-Kalima College has hired four music faculty members and is applying for accreditation for the Department of Music.
- A participant from Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery led a presbytery-wide overnight retreat for youth in January, focusing on the diary-writing project of the Terra Sancta School for Girls—Sisters of St. Joseph. Young women from the school performed a play, *Our Diaries Through The Wall*, for the conference participants.
- A member of the Minnesota Valleys Presbytery Team has begun importing olive oil from a West Bank olive oil merchant.
- As a tool to obtain invitations to speak in various venues, the Donegal Presbytery Team developed a 3-minute PowerPoint presentation with a few slides such as a map, the wall, settlements, and a refugee camp.
- The North Puget Sound Presbytery Team started the North Puget Sound Coalition for Peace and Justice in Israel and Palestine.
- The New Castle Presbytery team helped establish a presbytery Task Force for Justice, Security and Peace in Israel/Palestine, which will focus on education and advocacy.
- Four participants helped create the resources for the Week of Prayer and Witness with Christians in the Middle East used by congregations and presbyteries across the denomination.

RESOURCES IDENTIFIED AS HELPFUL

- The Israel/Palestine network
- Emails from Doug Dicks, PC(USA) Regional Liaison for Israel, Jordan and Palestine
- *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* by former President Jimmy Carter
- *The Iron Wall*, a video by Mohammed Alatar that explores issues related to settlements and Israel's security fence (the wall) and their impact on the Palestinian people and the possibilities for peace



FUTURE PLANS

- Teams plan to help others from their presbytery travel to Israel/Palestine.
- The New Castle Presbytery team is working to package their presentation so that it can be distributed efficiently to the congregations in the presbytery.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE EVENTS

- “. . . *Keep a journal. This is one way of outreach that has worked best for us.*” — Central Florida Presbytery team member
- “*If another trip is ever planned, I think a better follow-up and ‘keep in touch with the troops’ approach needs to be in place. We have not had adequate communication or encouragement from Louisville.*” —Minnesota Valleys Presbytery team member
- “. . . *When other groups go [to Israel and Palestine], participants from the original group should go with them. I feel that I would be more effective in my interacting there and back home after a second trip. Can you tell that I really want to go back?*” —Western North Carolina Presbytery team member