

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Pentecost trip to the Holy Land began May 10, when 16 Presbyterians from across the US gathered at JFK in New York for our flight to Amman, Jordan. Our trip was a pilgrimage to see the Holy Places of our spiritual heritage *and* to come to a better understanding of the Palestinian – Israeli Conflict, after 60 years of Independence for Israel and 60 years of Nakba (catastrophe) for Palestinians. We were met at the airport by Christie Reiners, our guide from Middle East Fellowship, who arranged most of our meetings for us.

While still in Amman, the first presentation we heard was from **Baker al-Hiyari**, Assistant and Deputy Director, **Royal Institute for Inter-faith Studies**. This organization provides the Arab and Islamic worlds with a forum for the interdisciplinary study of religions and religious, cultural and civilizational interaction, locally, regionally, and internationally including the historical and contemporary stereotypes which have resulted from these processes. Particular emphasis is given to the Christian contribution to Arab/Islamic civilization throughout the ages, as well as the contributions of other non-Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, and the importance of preserving religious and cultural diversity. Mr.Hiyari emphasized the eco-justice of our culture is based on faith values.

Following this presentation we heard from H. E. Ekonomos Fr. **Nabil D. Haddad**, Executive Director, **Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC)** (Website [www.coexistencejordan.org](http://www.coexistencejordan.org)); Judge, Court of Appeals, Melkite Catholic Church in Amman; Chair, Justice, Peace and Human Rights Committee, Middle East Council of Churches, Jordan,; Member Royal Commission for Human Rights. From the JICRC mission statement: The Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center was established with the aim of using research, dialogue and practical initiatives to promote values of peaceful interfaith coexistence. The JICRC mission is concerned with the sensitive and vital issues of mutual respect and coexistence among followers of diverse religious faiths in the Middle East and throughout the world. Father Nabil Hadad stated, “JICRC is built upon the belief that an approach of togetherness is needed to build upon the faith that all religions guide us to God, and there should be no difference in values and morals. JICRC calls for mutual respect and dignity for all people as human beings by emphasizing that we are all children of Adam. The mission is to publicize Jordan’s long history of Muslim-Christian coexistence and to develop programs to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.”

Tuesday, May 13

Our trip into Israel through the Jordan River Valley to the Allenby Bridge was not noteworthy, except to see the hilly rocky countryside with a hard-scrabble look to most of the area. We noted the sea level sign as we descended in to the Jordan River Valley. Immigration was not difficult but we were heavily guarded both by Jordanian military on that side, and then by Israelis on the other. Baggage was checked somewhat, but our US Passports made a tremendous difference in ease of entering. After we were inside Israel we met Rami Yatim, our tour guide for Holy Land Trust for the rest of our stay in Israel/Palestine.

From the border we drove to Jerico, the oldest inhabited city in the world, part of the current state of Palestine. We saw part of the tell under which old Jerico was buried. We had lunch, a buffet, in a “truck stop” with an interesting gift shop specializing in Dead Sea skin care products. Jerico also looks old and poor, with narrow streets, not much green and plastic garbage bags scattered everywhere. In hind sight this garbage is due to the lack of frequent garbage pickup in all parts of Palestine, another ploy by the Israelis to make life difficult for Palestinians. Jerico, being Palestinian, has one road into and out of the city, with a heavily guarded check point.

After lunch we moved west into Jerusalem and arrived at the Lion’s Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem to walk along the Via Dolorosa, stopping at the Stations of the Cross to hear the traditional story of each location of Christ’s final walk to Golgatha, and ending at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Rami explained that there are usually two sites considered to be traditional for almost every event in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. After the walk along the Via Dolorosa, we checked into the Gloria Hotel, very near the Jaffa Gate, for the next two nights.

Wednesday, May 14

The next morning we walked back along the Via towards the Western Wall, where we could put a prayer into the crack in the wall and say a prayer. The women’s side was very crowded so we could barely touch the wall over the heads of several rows of women sitting on porch chairs, with cell phones, and reciting Hebrew prayers. The men’s side is quite large and much less crowded. Then after going through another Israeli check point we went up the stairs to the Muslim owned Temple Mount where Jews cannot go, because of the Holy of Holies. The Dome of the Rock (where Abraham almost killed Isaac) and Al Aqsa Mosque are there (where the legend has it Muhammed landed on his night flight from Mecca, ascended into heaven, and returned to Mecca). The Mount is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most holy site for Muslims. Christians can walk around outside, but cannot enter either mosque.

Then the bus picked us up for the drive down into the Kidron Valley and up to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus went after his last supper to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. A chapel covers the rock where he asked God to “take this cup from me”. A Roman Catholic service was being held as we watched. Outside the chapel in the garden are very old large-trunked olive trees which look to be old enough to be actual trees in Jesus time.

After lunch we visited the **Cathedral Church of St. George the Martyr**, Jerusalem (website [www.j-diocese.org](http://www.j-diocese.org)). The Rev. Canon **Hosam Naoum** spoke to us in place of Bishop Dawani. The Canon gave a brief overview of the Anglican diocesan structure in this region. It includes Syria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories. It contains 27 parishes centered in the Cathedral in Jerusalem. He stressed how important it is to have the cathedral in Jerusalem, as it is central to faith and politics. The presence of the three faiths makes Jerusalem so special.

The Anglican Church maintains 33 institutions including hospitals (one in Gaza and one in Nablus), clinics, kindergartens and schools, vocational training programs, as well as institutions for the deaf, disabled, and elderly. St. George's School has about 960 students, 10 percent being Christian. The Anglican Church sees itself as the healing hands in the community, in society. The church is showing Christianity to the community; however, evangelism is not permitted.

The Canon continued that the geography and history of the region makes the Israeli/Palestinian issue complex. The church, of course, stands for non-violence and denounces the bloodshed. He continues to believe in a two-state solution, and he indicated he does not like to associate with extremists of any kind.

In answer to the ongoing question of what we as Presbyterians can do, the Canon first said he is happy with the Presbyterian partnership including Scotland. He stressed that it is important to help people see exactly what is going on here. Visits such as ours are good as they need groups to support the Christian community which has about 150,000 Christians remaining. He said we are ambassadors to bring their voices, the voices of the living stones, home with us. He asked us to pray for their young people to remain. In response to Stuart's request for comments about the Isaac-~~Ismael~~ *Ishmael* question, the Canon said their issue is not to discuss theology, not to have a theological debate or a dogma/doctrinal debate, but rather to have participants put in their perspectives of faith and look for the common ground. He affirmed there are differences but we must seek the common ground.

On the way we walked past the US consulate but could not take any pictures. This was the day President Bush was in Jerusalem, celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Israeli Independence. He was staying at King David Hotel, very near the US Consulate.

Back on the bus to go to the other traditional tomb site, outside the gate, known as the **Garden Tomb**, we saw the skull in the cliff side overlooking a bus depot. Inside the garden is a cave carved out of the rocks for two bodies to be placed. The one on the left is the traditional site. This site is more in tune with the Bible stories ~~we~~ we've heard. The opening is large enough to have had a large stone blocking the entry, but the stone has never been found. The Welsh church owns this Holy site and narrates the story.

**Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial** was the last activity planned for this day and we had one brief hour to see it all. It is very sad but well done.

Thursday, May 15

**B"tselem** (web site [www.btselem.org/english/index.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/index.asp)) is the Israeli Information Center of Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, established in 1989, by a group of prominent academics, journalists and Knesset members. It endeavors to document and educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violation in the Occupied Territories, to combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and

to help create a human rights culture in Israel. We met with **Risa Zoll**, the International Relations Director.

Two clear themes characterize Israel's policy in many of the issues surveyed in a report published in 2007 by B'Tselem. The first is the almost automatic tendency to justify everything done in the Occupied Territories in the name of security, without scrutinizing these justifications and ensuring that they meet legal standards. There is no doubt that Israel faces serious security threats and is entitled, and even obligated, to do its utmost to protect its population. However, far too often, Israel fails to appropriately balance its security needs with other important values, including protecting the rights of Palestinians under its control. In addition, Israeli authorities often exploit security threats to advance prohibited political interests under the guise of security. This tendency is apparent regarding many of the hardships imposed on Palestinians, which severely infringe their human rights while actually serving the purpose of perpetuating settlements in the West Bank and effectively claiming them as Israeli territory.

The second theme that emerges from the report is the lack of accountability of Israeli security forces in all matters relating to human rights in the Occupied Territories. This is evident in the reluctance of the state to thoroughly investigate violations and to prosecute those responsible for them. The lack of accountability can also be seen in the denial of most Palestinians' right to compensation when they are injured through no fault of their own by Israeli forces. The result of this lack of accountability is that many rights have effectively been rendered meaningless.

From B'Tselem we went to **Musalaha** (web site is [www.musalaha.org](http://www.musalaha.org)) to hear Dr. **Salim J. Munayer** speak to us about their mission. In order to facilitate the reconciliation process, Dr. Munayer called together Israeli and Palestinian congregational leaders to found Musalaha Reconciliation Ministry in 1990. (Musalaha is an Arabic work that means reconciliation, but implies forgiveness and mediation by a third, neutral party.) The driving conviction behind their ministry is that, through faith in Jesus the Messiah, there is hope for lasting reconciliation of Palestinian and Israeli believers. They operate according to the belief that, if we let His Spirit unify us, we can and will overcome all the various religious doctrines, racial barriers, and cultural differences that divide us. By sowing love, we are slowly but surely reaping peace.

One of their relationship building activities is to take groups of Palestinians and Israelis camping in the desert together. They travel two to a camel which begins the trust-cooperation building - a key to reconciliation. They work with both children and adults.

After lunch we met with an ex-Israeli soldier (a refusnik) who served jail time for refusing to complete his military obligation. He works with the **Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions** (ICAHD) (web site [www.icahd.org/eng](http://www.icahd.org/eng)). ICAHD is an Israeli direct-action organization established to resist non-violently Israel's demolition of Palestinian houses in the Occupied Territories – over 12,000 homes destroyed since 1967. The motivation for destroying these homes is purely political: to confine the 3.5 million residents of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza to small, crowded, impoverished

and disconnected enclaves, thus effectively foreclosing any viable Palestinian entity and ensuring Israeli control.

Over the years ICAHD's resistance "on the ground" was extended to other manifestations of the Occupation as well: land expropriation, settlement expansion, the construction of "Israeli-only" highways that connect the West Bank settlements with Israel proper, the closure, the building of the Separation Barrier/Wall, and the wholesale uprooting of fruit and olive trees.

ICAHD endeavors to end the Occupation and ultimately, to bring a just and sustainable peace to Israelis and Palestinians. ICAHD cooperates closely with Palestinian organizations seeking peace and co-existence. After a home has been demolished, ICAHD helps to reconstruct the home, using volunteer labor. We heard of one home that has been demolished 4 times and rebuilt 5. Our ICAHD guide, Rotem, took us to see four sites in East Jerusalem: a fake archeological dig in East Jerusalem, where the Israeli's claim to the land is bogus; the beginning of a private development for Israelis with a billboard half in English giving a US phone number; a recently demolished home claiming the builder had no Israeli permit to build; the divided community of Abu Dis cut off by the Wall and closing the direct Palestinian road to Jerico. These are ways the Israeli government confiscates or appropriates land in East Jerusalem which is by the 1967 agreement supposed to be Palestinian.

From ICAHD we went to the **Israeli Palestinian Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)** (web site [www.IPCRI.org](http://www.IPCRI.org)) to hear Dr. **Gershon Baskin**, an Israeli who emigrated from the US, speak about the issues to be resolved in order for reconciliation and peace to occur. IPCRI is a joint institution of Israelis and Palestinians dedicated to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of "two states for two peoples" solution. IPCRI recognizes the "two states for two peoples" solution as the ultimate fulfillment of the national strategic and security interests of the two peoples. IPCRI, therefore recognizes the rights of the Jewish people and the Palestinian people to fulfill their national interests within the framework of achieving national self-determination within their own states and by establishing peaceful relations between two democratic states living side-by-side.

IPCRI seeks to serve as an intellectual platform for Israelis and Palestinians (and others) to create and develop new concepts and ideas that enrich the political and public discourse in order to influence decision makers and to challenge the current political reality with the aim of advancing the political solution of two-states for two-peoples.

Dr. Baskin identified 7 conditions that need to be in place for the two-state two-peoples solution to be achieved. They are

- Control of Jerusalem,
- Secure borders along the 1967 boundary
- Water rights
- Contiguous area for Palestine, including Gaza
- Recognition of the rightful existence of Israel

Right of return to a homeland for Palestinians  
Israel acknowledges two states and two capitols.  
Economic relations between the states.

He asserts that all the problems preventing reconciliation and peace are recognized. What is needed is the agreement on how to achieve the solutions. The political will is lacking. Gershon is very pro-Israeli and yet insists that “There is no choice but to live in peace.” He was very positive and hopeful. Gershon Baskin’s web site is [gershon@ipcri.org](mailto:gershon@ipcri.org).

IPCRI is on the Israeli side next to the checkpoint for entering Bethlehem in the Palestinian Occupied Territory. Since Rami as a Palestinian is forbidden to ride through the check point and must walk, we all got off the bus and walked with him.

We ended this very informative but emotionally taxing day at the Sahara Hotel in Beit Sahour, a town outside of Bethlehem. The debriefing and devotional time were very meaningful.

Friday May 16

Visited Shepherd’s Field where the angels appeared to the shepherds, announcing Christ’s birth and where Ruth and Boaz of the Old Testament had cultivated fields. We sang O Little Town of Bethlehem for Rami. Later Melinda made up verses speaking to the situation of Bethlehem today. The fields now look over the Israeli fence and wall to the sight of a new Israeli settlement and cleared Palestinian farm land and olive groves ready for settlement expansion.

Holy Land Trust is an NGO that protests non-violently against the Israeli occupation. It was the coordinating group for most of our meetings. It works to promote understanding between peoples through travel for visiting groups, and summer camps for kids from all faiths. After our orientation at Holy Land Trust we went to a non-violent Every Friday demonstration *in* Uum Salamona opposing the barriers between a settlement and Palestinian land. The Israeli soldiers were all decked out in full military protections (hand guns and machine guns) and the Palestinians had on tee shirts, some of which were the Nakba ones. Many Palestinian men were facing the young soldiers across a barbed wire blockade which the younger boys pulled away. Then an Israeli soldier fired a sound bomb which scared us. Observers were there from the World Council of Churches and other peace activists. Finally we started singing “We Shall Overcome” which the Palestinians tried to join in.

After we left the demonstration we drove to King Solomon’s pools, which were used as aquifers for Palestinian settlements up until 15 years ago when Israel drained them by diverting water from them to their settlements. The Pools are enormous, still in good condition, and could hold lots of water.

The Church of the Nativity is enormous, sitting at one end of Manger Square in Bethlehem. The outside walls are stark and linear. This is where a siege occurred in 2002 killing many Palestinians and lasting 40 days where people were trapped inside the Church. Inside the church original Byzantine stone columns still show some of their original painted decorations. The “stable,” or more like a cave is beneath the current church floor and is quite humble.

**Bethlehem Bible College** (web site [www.bethlehemcollege.edu](http://www.bethlehemcollege.edu)) was founded by Dr. **Bishara Awad**, who spoke with us about the school and its mission. BBC seeks to train and prepare Christian servant-leaders for the churches and society within an Arab context who model Christ centeredness, Godly humility, biblical wholeness, creative mercy and justice in their jobs and ministries as life-long learners. Their outreach is through opening their library to the public, the BBC choir, a mass media center that produces a Palestinian-Israeli weekly news show, extension programs, an international student program, a guest house, and language classes. Their Shepherd Society has supported 13,000 local residents for humanitarian aid and job creation services since the first Intifada in 1987.

Saturday, May 17

**Sami Awad**, Director of **Holy Land Trust** spoke to us about his own personal story in the context of the history of Palestine and Israel.

Born in 1971 to Palestinian father and mother in Kansas City, MO, so carries a US Passport. Travels between both countries. Got a degree in political science from Kansas University.

Grandparents were forced to flee Palestine and grandfather was killed. Grandmother raised 7 children mostly by placing them in orphanages in Palestine.

Grandmother taught forgiveness by insisting that her husband's killers would not have done so, had they known him personally.

Father was assisted by American family in Kansas City.

Sami grew up under the Israeli occupation, attended the Bethlehem Orphans School run by the Mennonites.

Has always known the violence, insults and humiliation of the Palestinian people due to the restriction of movement, with the wall, the checkpoints, constant need for documentation, the “put your head down and don't argue” demeanor required to get along.

Emphasized the need to overcome fear of the oppressor to attitude of reconciliation.

His uncle, Mubarak Awad, established the Nonviolence International Center in Washington, DC, in the 1980's prior to the First Intifada. Sami learned many nonviolent resistance tactics from this Uncle and its techniques, such as planting olive trees on proposed settlement sites, asking people not to pay taxes, boycott Israeli products and produce, etc. Due to his effective non-violent activism, he has been banned from Israel for life.

Sami Awad published his own 12 page blueprint for passive resistance, published in the Journal of Palestine Studies.

**Holy Land Trust** introduced non-violent training to Hamas groups from the northern part of the West Bank who requested it. Holy Land Trust tries to have gender balance in their training courses, but in this case, he says, they accepted the men only and twenty men really started understanding while participating in a 4-day basic course. He believes that change can only be created through engagement with Fatah and Hamas. He believes that he has been denied a permit to visit Jerusalem for 5 years now is because of his non-violence activities and not any association he has with Hamas.

He said he is friendly with the Druze Captain Remy (sp.?) who was in charge of the Israeli soldiers at the demonstration yesterday, telling him that he is waiting for the day that the captain will take off his uniform and join the Palestinians. He said they want to reach the soldiers and settlers in the non-violent demonstrations. He mentioned the man who had been so vocal with the soldiers at the Uum Salamona demonstration and said they had not seen this particular man there for about a year, and I believe Sami said that Captain Remy remarked, "I think you brought him here to ruin the demonstration." Increasingly, Sami said, Hamas has been restructuring itself to move to a more moderate position, particularly in elections. But he said he thinks that the US government and Israel do not want to see Hamas move into a more middle of the road position. He talked about a recent cease fire during which there were no rocket attacks or suicide bombings and that an ultimatum was given to Hamas giving them ten days for some sort of denouncement, and to issue an apology, and to accede to 5 conditions which he said they could not do in that short of a time frame. In reaction to a question about Jimmy Carter, he said Carter's efforts were wrong only in timing -- that he should have tried something two years ago.

He says he believes that the U.S. government continues to make things worse through the support of Israel's military activities. He said that Fatah and the Palestinian National Authority were examining which non-violent tactics had the most promise and what were the best steps for leadership tactics. Dealing with the military occupation, home demolitions, checkpoints and travel restrictions on places and roads, etc. is a daily challenge and he says it is difficult on so many levels. He believes that non-violent resistance needs to expose what is happening. In India, he said the non-violent activities made it easier to expose the oppression. He says that Palestinians have to travel to confront soldiers now as the wall means the people for the most part are really locked up in "prisons." He said the media gets bored with the same old story.

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**Marwan Fararjeh** led us through **Aida**, a 60-year old Palestinian refugee camp. It really looks like a tenement, with very crowded housing, terrible streets, set against the Wall where some in our group painted pictures and expressions of protest. Some children and some men were hauling water to their homes in plastic bottles they had

filled from a slow running hose because the community had had no water for 7 days. Israel controls all the water in the West Bank, keeping a disproportionate amount for themselves. Water is a scarce resource.

Dialogue with Sheik **Maher Assaf**, Muslim Imam from Bethlehem occurred at Holy Land Trust. His main issue is that although there are differences in our religions, we all worship the same God and there are no real problems between Muslims and Christians. Rather it is a political problem. One-half of Palestine has been lost to Israel and the people want freedom. Israel builds settlements but continues to say they want peace. He emphasized that the conflict is not about religion, but is purely political.

After lunch we traveled to Beit Fajjar. **Beit Fajjar** is a Palestinian Muslim village famous for its limestone quarries and stone cutting operations. The men are all accomplished stone masons, many of whom pass the trade on to their sons. Today only 3 of the 27 stone cutting yards are in operation and most of the quarries are shut down due to the Israeli refusal to let their stones be shipped to Israel where building is booming - again the Wall. As a result, many of the group of students in this little town whom we met need help to get to their classes due to being held up at the Wall as well as needing financial assistance. The students were eager and pleasant. It was good to be among youthful energy again. Following their presentation we were shown around the town and ended up at a Women's cooperative which helps support the students. They served us tea and coffee around a big table and we asked them to sing a song for us. Some of the women led in singing. After much discussion they sang several and then invited us to sing a song for them. Stu started singing "Summertime" from Porgy and Bess and we all joined in. It was great fun. All the little children of the village tagged along with us, asking us in perfect English, "What is your name?" They were practicing.

Sunday, May 18

At Christie's suggestion, we drove into the Judean wilderness along the Jordan River Valley to an area known as **Wadi Qelt** for our own worship service where the silent portion was lead by Jim Donnelly. What an unbelievable sight and experience this was as we could easily visualize Christ spending time here, preparing for his ministry, following his baptism in the Jordan River. We continued south within sight of the Dead Sea to **Masada**, a high rocky massif where Herod built a palace and the last Israelites established a stronghold in 70 AD following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. In 73AD, rather than be taken into Roman captivity, they all committed suicide. Since then the site has become a shrine for the nation of Israel. Groups of Israeli school children were visiting the site escorted by heavily armed security forces. From Masada, we stopped to look at the **Caves of Qumrun**, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. No wonder they remained hidden for so many years. The caves are still remote and almost impossible to get to.

Then a dip in the Dead Sea. The water is deep gray with mud and so dense it is difficult to get your feet to stay down on the slippery bottom. The mud is reportedly good for your complexion.

This evening we met our host families and went off to their homes.

Monday, May 19

We traveled to Ramallah where we met with **Sam Bahour** (web site <http://www.epalestine.com>). He is an American-Palestinian business man with a US Passport and no legal residency status in Palestine so he must leave Palestine every 3 months to get a new tourist visa, although he lives outside of Ramallah with his wife and children and has successfully established a high tech business including ownership of the telephone company in the West Bank. He recommended we read "The Jewish State" by Theodore Herzl, published in 1896-97, to understand the history of the Zionist movement. He maintains until Jews from Europe started immigrating to Palestine in the early 1900's, Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived in harmony there indicating the conflict is only about 100 years old, and not thousands as reported in some US media. He repeated what many other speakers had told us, "the conflict is not about religion, it is about politics." He mentioned the British Mandate, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and Plan Dalet ("D") as all part of the plan to provide a homeland for Jews in Palestine. In 1948 750,000 Palestinians were forced to leave their homes. Many of those families to the third generation are still in refugee camps.

In 1967, the land acquired by Israel during the 6-day war is inadmissible under international law. However, Israel promises to stop building more settlements on this land and yet continues to build them and encourages Jewish settlers to move into them. In 1988 Israel said it would accept the 1967 armistice borders. The PLO led by Yassir Arafat accepted Israel's right to exist on 78% of the land. However, the Separation Wall takes an additional 10% of the Palestinian land plus the Jordan Valley area and 50% of the West Bank off limits. Therefore Palestine is reduced to 10% of the total land originally agree to.

At this time Bahour believes a two-state solution is not possible. The reality on the ground is that Israel refuses to acknowledge that Gaza and the West Bank are occupied. Even though Prime Minister Ariel Sharon agreed to pull out the settlers in Gaza, 8,000 left Gaza, while 16,000 settlers entered the West Bank. Today a two state solution is under question. International law has been scuttled; only the law of the jungle exists, with the Israeli military answerable to no one.

Some ideas for a peaceful resolution to the conflict:

1. Living in the simmering conflict is unacceptable to both sides.
2. Let Egypt control Gaza and Jordan control West Bank
3. Two smarter generations of Israelis and Palestinians are coming of age. Possibly they will figure out a way to create a confederation of states, each with sovereignty and partially each with autonomy. Called "living together."
4. A one-state solution supported by a few Israelis who may be thinking that it may not be in their best interest to stay as a Jewish state. Maybe a secular state, with Jewish values would be a better plan.

Palestinian refugees are a key issue (see UN Resolution 253). Some issues to be resolved in this area are:

1. Will Israel allow them to return?
2. Can they feasibly come back? Israel is basically a group of city states – most importantly Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, etc. – but that mostly Israel is full of empty places. Most Palestinian villages abandoned in 1948 were leveled and the area has not been reoccupied.
3. Illegal settlements are still being built, especially around Bethlehem and packages are still being offered to entice settlers. *(added a space)*
4. Borders need to be defined, so far, resisted by Israel
5. Water rights must be firmly established, equitable to both sides.

The US and other third parties need to hold Israel accountable to international law and the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention. Some in Israel have suggested an incentive package to settlers to encourage them to leave the settlements. This was stopped by Israel.

When asked what we can do individually to help resolve this conflict he mentioned several:

1. Become pro-active in investments especially micro-community projects.
2. Look into pension investments, seeing if any Israeli bonds are in the plan. Get annual reports to check pension fund investments.
3. Do not buy Israeli produce or products. Check labels for country of origin.
4. Write letters to local editors, meet with editorial boards, call in to radio talk shows.
5. Support the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS).
6. Gather like-minded people and plan educational activities.
7. Contact congress members about the \$6 billion annually that the US gives in outright aid to Israel, plus tax-deducted donations through charitable giving and other monetary benefits amounting to over \$10,000,000,000.00 per year from the US. (From The Washington Report on Middle East)
8. Develop a moral solidarity with a resolution to propose a sister city relationship with Bethlehem, then develop educational cooperation.
9. American churches can take a moral position and educate their congregants about the situation in the occupied territories.

**Non-Violence Trainers from Holy Land Trust** – Strengthening Communities for the Future. **Mohammed Jaradat** spoke to us about their work to train Palestinians in non-violence tactics. This group organized the plan to release 21,215 black balloons over sites in Palestine in commemoration of Nakba, the 21215 days of occupation of Palestine since 1948 when Israel declared its independence. This event was concurrent with the Israeli celebration of its independence. He considers Christians like us to be messengers of love and peace. “Send a message”: is a web site (SAM) [www.sendmessage.nl](http://www.sendmessage.nl) where one can paint on the Wall and then send a picture of it to this Palestinian/Dutch web site. Creativity and patience in being non-violent are difficult but worthwhile. One example of non-violent resistance he cited: Seven Palestinians were in a taxi and decided to

practice nonviolence at a checkpoint. They usually have their id's ready immediately; this time they decided to make the soldiers ask to see them all the while they were reading their flyers about nonviolence. They did not smile, did not present the id immediately and just continued to read the flyers. The only reason for the checkpoint is to delay – it is not for security. A power balance was established by the seven in the taxi in this way.

Nonviolent methods to stop the construction of the Wall and keeping a children's park open to Palestinian children are some of the locations for the nonviolent action. Requests for the training outrun the availability of trainers, so HLT is now concentrating its efforts on "training trainers." He thinks non-violent resistance will be effective, but it takes a long time. The Israeli military sees it as a threat to its intentions – to drive the Palestinians out of Palestine.

**Mustafa Bargouthi**, at the **Medical Relief Society Office** in Ramallah (web site is [www.pMrs.ps](http://www.pMrs.ps)) spoke about the **Palestinian National Initiative** (web site is [www.almubadara.org](http://www.almubadara.org)) for the implementation of Palestinian national rights and the creation of a durable just peace. Dr. Bargouthi is also a member of the Palestinian Parliament. The DVD we got is informative, interesting and educational.

After the Annapolis Summit, events have gone the wrong way for Palestine. There has been a 350% increase in attacks and a 20-fold increase in settlements, an increase from 521 to 565 checkpoints. In his speech to the Knesset on May 13, President Bush reemphasized our 100% bias in favor of Israel, giving full support to the whole Zionist concept. Such strong support for the Israeli narrative is unprecedented even for the USA. This speech has killed many hopes of a two-state settlement. Bargouthi thinks the peace process will collapse.

Dr. Bargouthi reviewed briefly the history of Palestine since 1947.

1. 1947 – UN Resolution establishing the state of Israel  
Israel gets 54% of land; Palestine gets 45%  
Jerusalem to be an international city  
Actuality – Israel claimed 78% of land
2. 1967 – Israel occupied West Bank and Gaza. Israel thinks Palestinians will leave.  
Actuality – Palestinians have compromised and agreed to accept half of what they were originally to have. This was accepted.
3. Barok's offer at Camp David – not acceptable
4. 2005 – Sharon insists Israel get all of the Jordan Valley, all the settlements and all of Jerusalem. This reduces Palestine to 11% of the land and it would be non-contiguous. The West Bank is like Swiss cheese and Palestine gets the holes. Not acceptable to Palestine.
5. Checkpoints destroy daily life.
6. Wall is inside Palestinian territory it is twice as high as the Berlin wall. Wall separates towns, families from their fields, families from each other.

7. Some Palestinians cannot go on their own rooftops as they are controlled by Israeli military.
8. Current situation is worse than Apartheid was in South Africa.
9. President Bush has killed Palestinian democracy.
10. Israel is conducting ethnic cleansing, denying Palestinians access to electricity, water, medical care, land, jobs, garbage collection, access to good roads.

**Addameer Organization** (web site is [www.addameer.org](http://www.addameer.org)) is a prisoners' support and human rights organization. It is a non-governmental, civil institution focusing on human rights issues. Established in 1992 by a group of activists interested in human rights, the center's activities focus on offering support for Palestinian prisoners, advocating the right of political prisoners, and working to end torture through monitoring, legal procedures, and solidarity campaigns. Ala Jaradat, Program Manager, who now wears a neck brace described some of the torture methods used by the Israelis on him such as stringing him up by his hands tied behind his back, until his toes just barely touched the floor. Another method is to put a prisoner in a very small box with a heavy filthy dirty hood over his head and then kick the box loudly and incessantly for days at a time. This way no marks are left on the body as evidence of torture. At 15 Mr. Jaradat was arrested for resisting the demolition of a neighbor's house. He was imprisoned and tortured for 59 days. He has been imprisoned several times since. Today he works with Addameer to train lawyers in international law.

Psychological means are used more frequently such as threatening the prisoner's family, demolishing homes, etc. The trials for political prisoners' are military tribunals with little justice evident in the proceedings. Defense attorneys are rarely permitted, family visits severely restricted, the Red Cross visits but makes no reports of abuse, prisons are overcrowded and located far from the prisoner's home. Since 1967, 700,000 Palestinians (out of 3.8 million) have been arrested and detained. This means almost every family has had a detainee or prisoner. Currently 88 women are political prisoners and their treatment is worse than what the men get.

Rehabilitation is the responsibility of the family and community. Some ex-prisoners are so badly damaged that they cannot be rehabilitated or integrated back into society at all.

While driving in Palestinian towns, one notices quite readily how trashy the roadsides are and the terrible condition of the roads, narrow, full of pot holes, no sidewalks. This area is a great demonstration of the staying power of blue plastic shopping bags. They are littered everywhere, making the beautiful landscapes very cluttered. On the Israeli side, the settlement communities are beautifully landscaped and well watered, the houses are clean and well tended, with no water storage tanks on the rooftops, but with swimming pools and nice clean playgrounds, shopping malls, and modern schools. In the Palestinian towns every home has water storage tanks on the roof tops for the days when

the municipal water supply is shut off by the Israeli government. Garbage collection is infrequent if at all and there is no water available for landscaping. We saw many olive groves cut down along the roadside as they were thought to be security threats to Israel, another way to harass the Palestinians.

Tuesday May, 20

**Ephrat**, a Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, is home to 10,000 Jews. It nearly cuts the West Bank into two parts. The settlements are subsidized by the Israeli government and water is plentiful. Green lawns and lush landscaping, swimming pools and clean playgrounds are evident. Workers commute to Jerusalem for their jobs, traveling on Israeli-only good roads. The talk by **Ardi Geldmann** from the settlement gave us an insight into the settler mentality which was quite different from what we were hearing from the reconciliation groups. He is an ardent Israeli settlement supporter who distrusts all non-Jews. He emigrated from the US in '82 and moved to the settlement in '85. Ephrat was settled on a rocky hilltop by 67 kibbutz members, in the 1970's to bring a young Jewish population to this historic area. Now it is home to 10,000 Jews who work mostly in Jerusalem and commute on roads reserved only to Jews. Mr Geldmann works for a philanthropic organization. He quoted an article by the American conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer in the Washington Post from the previous week. He believes the two-state solution is a scare tactic and Israelis and Palestinians must live side by side. Currently Israel is only administering the West Bank, and does not claim to own it. He denies statistics of the number of Israelis and Palestinians killed by terrorists. He claims the Palestinians locate their rockets in civilian centers, so when Israel retaliates, many Palestinians are killed.

From the Israeli settlement we drove to Hebron, a very highly guarded Palestinian city, and visited with the members of the Christian Peacemaking Teams. This is an organization that uses peacemaking volunteers from all over the world to stay in locations of tension and extreme conflict such as Hebron for a period of time. They act as protectors and mediators for Palestinians. They explained to us from the rooftop of their offices that Israeli settlers have moved into Hebron and now claim a whole section (H1) of the city so the Israeli government has established rooftop military guard posts, thus preventing the Palestinian residents access to their own roofs. As we listened to this explanation, an Israeli army soldier in full combat uniform and machine gun walked over to the edge of the roofs that separated us and urinated in front of us, toilet paper in hand. The military has also closed the main thoroughfare in town to Palestinians. The CPT also escort Palestinian children past the illegal Israeli settlement and the check points so that the settlers do not throw stones and threaten them in other ways. These same settlers throw their garbage from their rooftops down on the Palestinian market streets, so the Palestinians have had to put up chicken wire over the walkway to catch the debris. Hebron is the most hostile place we have visited so far. Rami is very wary and uncomfortable in Hebron.

After lunch in downtown Hebron we visited the Abrahami Mosque and Tomb of the Patriarchs where Isaac and Ismael reconciled. This is the mosque where an Israeli citizen entered and gunned down many Palestinians while at their Friday prayers. We women had to put on brown hooded cover-ups in order to be allowed entrance. The other half of the large building is a Jewish synagogue, which we were not allowed to enter. To get there we had to walk through 2 Israeli military checkpoints.

We visited an orphanage in Hebron, run by the **Charitable Islamic Society**. We saw where the Israeli military had raided the girls school, ripped out all the sewing machines and sewing equipment and thrown it in the town dump about one week earlier. The military has ordered that the orphanage close for good on June 3, an extension from the original March date.

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Wednesday May 21

After thanking our host families for their gracious kindnesses, we departed for Nablus, the biblical Shechem, another restive Palestinian city. Here we saw Jacob's Well inside a Franciscan church. The well still has water in it 90 feet down. This is the area of the Samaritan's of "good Samaritan" biblical fame. A walking tour of old Nablus with Fayeze Taneb lead us to the ancient Turkish bath, that still is in use today. The heated floors and hot steam baths were evidence of current usage, unlike the ruined baths in Masada and Jerath in Jordan.

While in Nablus, we met with Sheik **Abu Islam**, Imam of the mosque in Nablus and organizer of the Palestinian Forum. The center organizes forums between business leaders and educators who support nonviolence in their pursuit of freedom, justice, forgiveness and the need to improve communities. The core of their belief is mercy, and they strive to improve the quality of life through communication and improved education. The problem is not with Israelis but with the occupation. Some people are benefiting from this occupation, so they want it to continue. They encourage women to be part of the forum, but more are needed.

Our bus ride towards Nazareth took us through Tulkarem where Israel has relocated its very toxic polluting chemical factories, thus reducing the effect on the Jewish population. Next we stopped in East Baqa, where the Israelis bulldozed the entire market of this village and erected the wall through the village, cutting them off from family and neighbors in West Baqa. One house next to the wall now has nights all night long shining in their bedroom, the next house had the side of the house bulldozed for being too close, and a third house now part of the wall has been vacated and is used as a guard house for the military with the roof enclosed entirely in wire and camouflage netting.

We, as internationals, were denied entry into Israel at the Tulkarem checkpoint, which is named Ertah meaning relax, so we had a 40 minute drive to another point of entry into

Israel. We had to change buses inside Israel, as Palestinian buses are not allowed to drive tourists inside Israel. Nazareth is a Palestinian city inside Israel.

Thursday, May 22.

In the morning we were off to Akko we went, a Palestinian city and the ancient Accre, where several crusader groups rendezvoused in the Middle Ages. Their ruins are still apparent. Across the bay Haifa is a modern busy Israeli city on the Mediterranean Sea. The **Baha'i Gardens** at the **Stella Maris Church** in Akka were gorgeous. **Ein Hod**, an unrecognized Palestinian village inside Israel, was our lunch destination. The road leading there is good evidence of the lack of recognition by Israel. No recognition means the village gets no support from the government: no water, no electricity, no health services, no public education, no road maintenance, etc. Today there are still 100 unrecognized Palestinian villages in Israel with 122,000 people who are all Israeli citizens. Lunch was excellent with many courses all delicious, and was followed by a video, "Not on the Map" which describes the struggles of these villages to survive, with no recognition, no help and lots of opposition to their existence. In 1994 Ein Hod, and four other unrecognized villages out of 100 received recognition.

After lunch we were off to **Kibbutz Metzger**, to meet with General Secretary **Dov Avital**. The kibbutz started in 1953 with 120 young adults, mainly left-wing radical émigrés from Argentina who had lived under Juan Peron. Originally structured along communist socialist lines, with common eating areas and child rearing practices, the kibbutz today is more like the Scandinavian social system. The kibbutz provides schooling, culture, social needs, and health care, with no religious structures or affiliations of its members. The main economic activity is the manufacture of low volume irrigation piping, avocado groves, and banana plantations. They also raise dairy cows and poultry.

This kibbutz has always believed in and practiced day-to-day coexistence with the surrounding Arab villages. Elders of the Arab village at the start offered cooperation as the émigrés were not farmers and needed their help. Cooperatively the Arabs needed knowledge of modern ways. Both communities continue in close harmony despite many problems.

In the evening we met with two representatives of **The Parents Circle (website [www.theparentscircle.com](http://www.theparentscircle.com) )**, **Ibrahim Khalil** and **Rami Elchanan**. This is a group of Palestinian and Israeli parents who have lost a child to the senseless conflict. They both described the agony of their loss and their invitation to join other grieving parents in support and to be part of a grass roots effort to end fighting. 1200 children have died since October 2002. Mr. Elchanan's story is available at [http://www.theparentscircle.com/stories/rami\\_elchanan.doc](http://www.theparentscircle.com/stories/rami_elchanan.doc).

This was the last day of our scheduled meetings.

Friday May 23

We continued to see the Holy sites, including Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Mt. of Beatitudes and the Sea of Galilee with a nice boat ride, Tabgha Heptapagon, (the Church of Loaves and Fishes), St. Peter's Primacy where we had a very moving communion service, Capernaum, and a lunch of St. Peter's fish on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The last Holy site we visited was the village of Cana where Christ turned the water into wine at the wedding.

Saturday, May 24

After stopping in Nazareth at the Israeli post office to mail home our papers and notes that might implicate Palestinians, we crossed back into Jordan via the Sheik Hussein Bridge where the Jordan River is slightly larger than a small stream, saying goodbye to our two wonderful new friends, Rami Yatim of Holy Land Trust and Christy Reiners of Middle East Fellowship.