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#### **The Jubilee of God: God's Favorite Year**

*by Naim Ateek*

This issue of *Cornerstone* is dedicated to the theme of jubilee - in preparation for our upcoming *Sabeel* conference - February 10-15, 1998. At the same time, this is our Christmas issue and we are about to celebrate the feast of the incarnation. If we look at jubilee in the light of Christ's coming, we find that the two themes are linked.

### ***The Biblical Jubilee***

The biblical jubilee was a specific time in the life of the people in which God expected that justice be restored to all those who had experienced injustice. It was the time in which God would set right what has gone wrong throughout the previous years. In the jubilee year, among other things, the slaves were to be set free, the debts of the poor were to be forgiven, and the land was to be returned to its original owners (Leviticus 25). There were at least two important messages of the jubilee. It was to remind people of who God is, a God of justice. God has created and established the world on the basis of justice and wishes that it continues to exist as such. Yet due to evil and sin, injustice seems to always creep in and change God's just order of things. Many people fall prey to others. The rich and the powerful in society tend to exploit the poor and the weak. In the jubilee year, God steps in to demand that things should be set right again in the community.

The second clear message of the jubilee was that God does not forget the poor and the oppressed in society. If humans are not willing to give them justice, God will. God is their protector.

Although we are not sure that the concept of jubilee was ever implemented historically, it has remained a measure for God's standard of justice. It reflects God's sincere desire for the way human beings should relate to one another. Thus the jubilee year was to be announced with a loud blast from the ram's horn with this one basic theme, namely, to "proclaim liberation in the land for all its inhabitants" (Leviticus 25:10 [*New English Bible*]). Once every fifty years the jubilee principles were to be re-enacted and justice was to be restored to the poor and oppressed.

At the beginning of his ministry, in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus proclaimed his vision of God's jubilee (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus read a few prophetic words from the book of Isaiah (61) which seemed to express what God expects to happen during the year of jubilee. Jesus combines it with a few words on what the messiah will accomplish when he comes. In his commentary on these words, Jesus connected it all as referring to himself and as being fulfilled in himself. He joined the two concepts together, namely, that of the jubilee and the coming of the messiah. In other words, by proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favor", Jesus was proclaiming the jubilee - that is, the year which most pleases God because it is the year of liberation for all people. Significantly Jesus stripped it of its exclusivist and racist implications (Leviticus 25:25, 35, 39; 44-46, 47), and integrated it with the mission and ministry of the messiah. The jubilee year was supposed to bring good news to the poor in the forgiveness of their debts, and freedom to the slaves and oppressed. Similarly, the coming of the messiah was supposed to bring good news to the poor represented in restoring sight to the blind (Isaiah 35:5-6, Matthew 11:5). Jesus understood that both have been fulfilled in his own coming. God's jubilee, at long last, has come to be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the messiah. It is now to be proclaimed not once every 50 years as was envisioned in the old jubilee concept in the Torah but as a perpetual

jubilee that must become the pattern of daily life and practice of those who believe. People of faith should proclaim perpetual jubilee and should try to work constantly and persistently for its implementation. In other words, God is calling us to work for justice and liberty for all the oppressed people of the world.

In the song of Mary, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), the same basic theme is poetically expressed. In the coming of Christ, God's revolution has taken place. It affects the religious, social, political, and economic spheres of people's lives. It ushers in God's upside down kingdom. Those at the top of the ladder will find themselves at the bottom. God is looking after the marginalized and outcast in society. It is jubilee plus.

The church acknowledges that in the coming of Jesus Christ, God has ushered in not only the days of the messiah but also the year of jubilee. Therefore, at the birth of Jesus, the first message of Christmas was to the shepherds who would have welcomed the jubilee year as well as the coming of the messiah. Ultimately, it is Christ the messiah who would bring them salvation and liberation. Christmas is, therefore, a very appropriate time in which to proclaim God's jubilee in Christ. It is a good way to prepare ourselves for what God demands of us. In Jesus the jubilee is not only a 'kairos' that happens once every fifty years as the Old Testament concept of jubilee was meant to convey, but a perpetual jubilee to be lived and practiced every day. In other words, the 'kairos' and the 'chronos' come together in Christ.<sup>1</sup> God meets us in Christ at every juncture of our life and challenges us with the demands of jubilee - urging us to work for the liberation of all those who are oppressed.

### ***The Jubilee and the State of Israel***

We are, therefore, challenging the state of Israel to consider and heed the demands of the jubilee and its implications for peace today. We are using the jubilee in a very symbolic way. It has been fifty years since the establishment of the state of Israel. Fifty years of instability and insecurity is more than enough for all the people of our land. In spite of all of its power, Israel has not been able to achieve the security it seeks nor crush the spirit and aspiration of the Palestinians. It is time to pause and take stock of the past and look at the future with greater openness. The answer lies in fulfilling the demands of the jubilee so that Israelis and Palestinians can reap a life of security in the land. This must begin with the recognition that the Palestinians have been wronged and deprived of justice during the last 50 years. An acceptable measure of justice today would require that Israel return the whole of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the Palestinians; and support the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel must content itself with the 77% area of Palestine on which it established itself in 1948, and allow the Palestinians to have their own sovereign state on the 23% which comprises the occupied territories. I believe that it would then be possible to achieve a peace that will give the Israelis the security they need and the Palestinians the justice they need.

From our perspective of faith, this jubilee year offers a challenging choice to the state of Israel. To implement the demands of jubilee by returning the land to the Palestinians is to choose justice. To choose justice is to choose peace and a life of security for both Israel and Palestine. The jubilee must be understood inclusively. Any exclusive understanding is an affront to God who is the creator and sovereign of this land as well as the whole world. The demands of God's jubilee must be interpreted today and understood in the light of God's comprehensive concern for justice for all people.

1. *The Greek word 'kairos' referred to the time at which a significant event took place. It is also the 'right time' for something to happen. Whereas 'chronos' to the Greeks meant time in its ordinary, everyday sense.*

*The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is director of Sabeel Liberation Theology Center.*

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### **Clergy Retreat at Ein Karem**

*by Roger Hazou*

An ecumenical retreat was organized by *Sabeel*, at Notre Dame De Sion in Ein Karem on November 13-14.

The first session started at 5:30 p.m. with the distribution of the Lord's Prayer. This prayer was the unified version as adopted by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). The opening welcome was given by Rev. Naim Ateek who asked for God's Grace and Blessing on all, especially the two bishops, twelve priests and one deacon who were present. A Scripture reading - the Virgin Mary's visitation to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-80) followed. Monsignor André Bedoghlian of the Armenian Catholic Church prayed for church unity, calling on the Holy Spirit to lead everyone during the retreat.

Archbishop Paul Sayyah of the Maronite Church led the retreat with a lecture entitled: "Why Ecumenism?" He began by pointing out that Christians in the Middle East are

only 5% of the general population. Any divisions and misunderstandings therefore cause us to be a 'stumbling stone' to non-Christians. They ask why Christians lack love for one another. The world cannot accept Christ under such conditions. To correct this situation, we need to align ourselves with what Christ himself called for, that we all be one (John 17:21). He concluded that we deeply need ecumenical activity - Gospel based and with the aim of glorifying the Lord. To move toward unity each of us needs to commit to:

1. Praying regularly for church unity.
2. Deep study of my own church's tradition and faith.
3. Accepting with open-mindedness the other church's traditions.
4. Working on my own and my church's revival.
5. Being ready to educate, to learn and to change my own thinking.
6. Working on my historical understanding and preparing for the future with humility.
7. Being open to all that is new and alive.
8. Being willing to cooperate with others.
9. Being honest with myself and with others through love.
10. Possessing the spirit of hard work, perseverance, hope and meekness.

The day ended with a meal and then prayers. At 8 a.m. on Friday the 14th there was Holy Mass, breakfast, then the second session. The opening prayer was offered by Archimandrite Atallah Hanna. Paul Sayyah then described the work of the MECC. The council's aim is to bring churches together on a theological and pastoral basis. It tries to foster a respect for others' beliefs and a willingness to view these afresh. "What brings Christians together is 90% and what separates is only 10%."

In the afternoon, Naim Ateek talked about: "The Challenge of Jubilee: What Does God Require?" He spoke of the importance of speaking the truth - which had once cost John the Baptist his head. He also explained the meaning of the word 'Jubilee'. This clearly defines the year of Jubilee as the time when the justice which the Lord wants for the world is restored. In the Person of Christ this justice is realized.

In the final session, it was agreed that the following were key items for building a stronger church: theology and pastoral care that go hand in hand, interrelationships between priests, and working together to bring back to God those who are distant.

Suggestions were made with the aim of showing that we care to be one: clergy retreats on a quarterly basis, monthly meetings to discuss current issues, and a monthly ecumenical magazine.

At 5 p.m. the retreat ended, and everyone with God's Grace went home.

*Roger Hazou is a deacon of the Syrian Catholic Church in Jerusalem.*

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### **News in Brief**

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#### ***Seven Year Old Gets Death Penalty***

Ali was a bright, 7 year old first-grader, whose home was the 'Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem. On November 11, he had received his report card from school - it contained straight A's.

After school a group of children were throwing stones at the Israeli soldiers standing guard at Rachel's Tomb; Ali Jawariesh joined the group. Five Israeli soldiers reacted by running toward the group, and one of them fired at Ali, hitting him in the head.

Brain-dead for 4 days, Ali was officially declared dead on the 15th (the anniversary of the Palestinian declaration of independence).

Ali's father, Mohammed, responded to the tragedy by donating his son's organs to needy recipients, whether Arab or Jew.

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#### ***Child Labor on the Increase***

From the growing database of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), we can now see the scale of the problem of working children in the West Bank and in Gaza. At least 18,500 children aged 12-16 are put to work - over half of them full-time. These youngsters are 6.6% of the labor force (an International Labor Office report claims), and even this figure is reckoned to be an underestimate. For three reasons:

1. Many children under 12 also work.
2. It is believed that the number of girls reported as working does not show the whole picture. The figure for boys shows 11.5% of 12-16 year olds working; the equivalent figure for girls is only 1.3%. But girls working in embroidery, sewing, or in agricultural jobs may not all get into the child labor statistics.

3. Palestinian children also cross over into Israel to work - in order to replace wages lost by grown-ups due to the closure. There are no figures available for them - they are employed illegally.

Despite a lack of prior statistics, it is clear that there is increasing use of working children - a trend driven by poverty, a declining economy, and the closure.

Negative effects of child labor here are not limited to missing-out on education. Health and safety standards are not applied to children, generally. In one survey, some 14% of children (up to age 15) in jobs reported they had been injured at work. And in the same survey, about 20% of the children stated that they had been subjected to physical or emotional abuse.

How is this problem to be overcome? In addition to tackling the root cause - poverty - there is said to be a need for raising public awareness. Only when society here becomes intolerant of child labor will any new legislation aimed at removing this abuse be able to succeed.

(Source - for this article, and the foregoing - Palestine Report)

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### ***A Boost to the Education System***

A project aimed at increasing local self-reliance and the quality of education is underway in schools run by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The project, managed by the British Council, is a bilateral one in which Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) is working with the Ministry of Education of the PNA.

The project has yielded 600 days of consultancy so far; all supervisors and 1,500 teachers have participated in workshops, and 51 PNA education staffers have been on 2-3 week study visits in the UK. There has been a special focus on the needs of children in grades 1 through 4, and on the areas of maths, drama, and English.

Dr Said Assaf, Director General of Educational Training, Qualifications and Supervision for the PNA, said: "The DFID project is playing a leading role in developing skills in the Palestinian education system ..."

(Source - November's British Council Newsletter)

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### ***Jordan Valley Farmers and Bedouin Being Forced Out***

In villages and in Bedouin camps there is fear today, as people wonder how long they will be allowed to live in their homes. In the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank both farmers and Bedouin are getting evacuation orders. From the North, at Tamoun (near Nablus), and farther South - at Burqin and Beit Jen, since April of this year the message from the Israeli Civil Administration has been: "Go!"

At Tamoun the impetus for the enforced move was said to be to turn the farmers' land into a 'closed military zone'. But in a parallel move affecting Bedouin living near al-Thahriya (southern West Bank), the 'closed military zone' soon became 'state land' and the beginnings of a new Jewish settlement were quickly put in place.

A starker purpose is seen behind these moves by the State of Israel. Namely to add further 'facts on the ground' in the occupier's favor, ahead of any final agreement with the Palestinians. The aim being to displace as many people as possible from (Israel-controlled) Area 'C' land before negotiations can take place.

(Source - Palestine Report)

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### ***Palestinian Economy - Birth Pangs?***

An October 30 report by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) jointly with the World Bank spells out the difficulties facing the PNA at this stage: "The decline in household incomes, a sharp increase in unemployment, and the general broadening of poverty pose serious challenges ...."

The report team goes on to point out that 19% of the people in the West Bank-Gaza Strip (WBGS) were below the poverty level in 1995 and that, because of the harsher labor situation the numbers have certainly risen since. Likewise with the quoted unemployment rate for Spring 1996 of 28%. Spending in real terms has declined 15% over a 4 year period (1992-1996). And over the same 4 year period the number of (WBGS) Palestinians employed in Israel has dropped by 76%.

The team highlight a root cause of the problem when they chart the increasing number of days lost by Palestinians due to closures - see the chart below:

What signs of hope are there? The report acknowledges the vital role played by donor countries, and by Diaspora Palestinians, who give great support to the emerging economy. The resourcefulness of Palestinian business people, and the resilience of the people generally, are cited as key strengths. And in this paragraph from their overall summary, the report team points the way forward:

"The donor community can help greatly in implementing ... a development framework with support for investment projects, especially those that facilitate free and diversified access to outside markets; support the move toward a lean and efficient governance system; and encourage all the parties to overcome the obstacles to development."

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## **This Christmas in Jerusalem**

*by Carmen Pauls*

### *The Christmas Story, Luke 2*

A community of people wait for God's Good News to be delivered to them. How and when will God come to them? The people wait expectantly.

An occupying government issues a decree that all people should be registered.

The lives of a young family are disrupted when they travel to fulfill their obligation to be registered as citizens in their hometown. The young family find shelter in a cave - there is no room for them in the inn.

A baby is born to them. When the baby is taken to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, some there recognize this Child and praise God for sending redemption to the city of Jerusalem.

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### *Another Story, Jerusalem 1997*

An occupying government revokes the residency rights of the people. In order to achieve a majority of occupiers and a minority of indigenous citizens in the city, the occupiers annexed the city in years past, and made the indigenous people 'residents'. The residency rights of the people can now be manipulated through policies imposed on the people.

The lives of a young family are disrupted when the occupiers demolish their home, and threaten to take away their residency rights, forcing them to dwell in a tent in order to retain their right to continue living in Jerusalem, the city of their birth.

A baby is born to them. She has no birth certificate - her mother's residency right and identity card have been taken away by the occupying authorities, and there is no legal way to record this child's birth.

The 'tent city' where the family lives grows. Now sixty families who face similar injustices at the hands of the occupiers also live in tents, struggling for the right to continue living in their own city. In the face of home demolition and discriminatory policies, the community waits for the Good News of peace with justice to come to their city: Jerusalem.

### *Why the 'Tent City' is there*

Those of us living and working in Jerusalem this year cannot help but read the Christmas story with new sensitivities to the text. This Christmas we look around us and we find families whose lives are disrupted by increased Israeli efforts to demolish Palestinian homes in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. Forced into tents, or to live 'doubled-up' with relatives, these Palestinian families face the future with uncertainty, their life-savings turned to rubble by an Israeli bulldozer. Some 850 homes across the

West Bank have been served demolition orders by the Israeli military. The reason for the demolition orders, in most cases, is that the homes have been built without permits. The reality on the ground is that it has been near-impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits for the past thirty years - since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967.

House Building	Palestinian	Jewish
<u>East Jerusalem</u> Permits granted per year 1991-95	150	1,500+
<u>East and West Jerusalem</u> City housing units built 1967-97	0	40,000

Demolitions	Palestinian	Palestinian	Jewish
	In total	Per month	
<u>East Jerusalem</u> 1967-97	2,500	7	0 (see below)
<u>West Bank</u> <u>including</u> <u>East Jerusalem</u> August '97	52	52	This figure of zero is for complete demolition of homes. There have been "partial demolitions (of extensions, sheds, etc.)"

This Christmas, Palestinians in Jerusalem live with growing fear of losing their right to live in the city of their birth. Since the illegal annexation of Jerusalem by Israel in 1967, Palestinians living in the city were given the status of 'residents' instead of citizens. (See the article - ["The Threat to Palestinian Residency Rights in Jerusalem"](#), by Jonathan Kuttab - *Cornerstone*, Easter 1997.)

As 'residents' and not citizens, Palestinians living in Jerusalem are vulnerable to Israeli policy which deprives them of their right to continue living in the city. Israeli

authorities have made public their intention to shift the demographics of the city to a Jewish majority plus a controllable, Palestinian minority. In the past year, Israel has increased its efforts to rid the city of Palestinian residents. The Israel Ministry of Interior, for instance, employs a variety of tactics, including confiscating the identity cards of Palestinians during routine yearly renewal of travel documents, and written notices sent to Palestinians by mail informing them that their residency in the city has 'expired'!

*Imm Mustafa lives here with her seven children. The births of the four youngest could not be registered.*

The tent city has come about to enable Palestinians to retain their residency in Jerusalem in the face of such measures - the sixty Palestinian families who inhabit the tent city have not committed a crime; they are simply resisting the unjust policies of the Israeli government. For some of the families, the tents provide the only affordable housing option available to them. Due to the acute housing shortage in Jerusalem, the price of renting an apartment has skyrocketed. Sometimes fifteen or more persons live in one or two rented rooms. When the financial resources are exhausted, the family must choose between staying in Jerusalem come what may, or risk losing their Jerusalem identity cards if they move outside of the municipal boundaries of the city, as defined by Israel.

#### ***'Tent City' - a Visit***

One day in October, we visited the tent city of Jerusalem. The camp has been given a name in Arabic - *Sumood* - which means steadfastness. Three of the sixty families living in the tent community have lost their homes to demolition. The rest have either lost their identity cards and right to reside in Jerusalem, or are threatened with impending confiscation of their identity cards.

At the tent city, we meet a 12 year old boy named Hamdi. Hamdi's name in Arabic means 'Praise'. His mother, an ambitious woman, works hard to improve their living conditions; she cares for her six children (ages 6 months up to 12 years), which is a challenging task without her own water or electricity, and with only two toilets for use by the whole community. Now the valley is like a desert, but the winter rains are coming, and loose rocks on neighboring hillsides threaten to slide into the tent shelters with the first big rain. When we first meet him, Hamdi rushes into his tent home, practically in tears. The driver of his school bus has just failed to pick him up for school, and Hamdi is devastated. He wants to go to school, but it's too far to walk. It's clear that Hamdi really enjoys going to school. He goes to a charitable school for orphans in Jerusalem, his mom explains; because of the identity card problem, it is difficult for the children who live in the tents to be accepted at government schools in the neighborhood. We agree to drop Hamdi off at school - it's on our way.

*Hamdi - a resident of the 'tent city'. Non-resident of the Jerusalem of Hebrew University (seen on skyline.)*

Hamdi's mom tells us that Hamdi is bright, but his grades are suffering because of the instability in his life right now. Hamdi is the oldest son in the family, and he feels responsible somehow. He attends the afternoon shift of school (there are two shifts in most Jerusalem schools to accommodate the growing number of students), and doesn't get home until about 5 p.m. It gets dark these days at 5:30, which leaves very little daylight for Hamdi to complete his homework. He works diligently by the light of a gas lamp in the evening, his mother tells us. In the morning, Hamdi, the oldest son in the family, helps his mother with tasks at home. It seems Hamdi, only twelve, is fighting not only for his right to live in the city of his birth, but also for the right to be educated and to have his basic needs met. It's a daunting struggle for a boy of his age.

Before we leave for the school, Hamdi and his mother show us around the tent community, and introduce us to their neighbors. One neighbor, a mother of seven children, was seven months pregnant when her identity card was taken away from her. Her daughter, born two months later, is not legally registered and has no birth certificate. We learn that all Palestinian children born after the confiscation of their parents' identity cards are not legally registered, and lose the rights which other

citizens and residents of Jerusalem enjoy. We consider this baby - sitting in her mother's lap, alive and happy, but by legal standards a non-person. What does her future hold?

As we walk through the valley, among the tents, we notice the white, stone buildings of Hebrew University standing on Mount Scopus. In many ways, the image of the tents and the Jerusalemites struggling for their right to stay in the city of their birth, is set in stark contrast to the stability and opportunity represented by the university structures on the top of the hill. Hamdi graciously leads us around the community, toting his backpack and schoolbooks, showing us the common toilets and the place where the children fly their plastic-bag kites. Meanwhile, the injustice and disparity is present before our eyes. It will take more than Hamdi's apparent love of learning to rise above the obstacles in his path; what will it take to overcome, we wonder? Affirmation of their connection to Jerusalem, their steadfastness - what the tent city stands for - is certainly a start. But what is our role, we wonder. Exposure? Advocacy? Or a commitment to challenge the structural violence committed against Hamdi and others like him who are systematically denied the stability and comfort human beings deserve?

*Suzanne at home in the tent city - facing the future with courage.*

We drop Hamdi off at his school - it's located in the area of the Islamic Waqf, near the Dome of the Rock in the Old City of Jerusalem. On the opposite side of the Dome stands the western wall of the temple, and as we walk away we recall the story of Jesus who also loved learning as a Child and who also came to this place as a 12 year old, centuries ago. We think of Hamdi and of Christ as a Boy. We wonder: What would Christ do if he met Hamdi in the streets of Jerusalem?

We remember the part of the Christmas story when Mary is told that she will suffer on account of the suffering of her Son, Jesus. We think of the mothers living in the tent city, who are struggling to meet the needs of their children. The Christmas story this

year reminds us of the pain of mothers around the world who feel helpless to relieve the suffering of their children.

We remember Anna, the prophetess who Mary and Joseph meet when they take the Baby Jesus to the temple to be presented to the Lord. In Luke's account of the story, Anna rejoices, and begins to tell others who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem about the coming of the Christ Child (Luke 2:36-38). We think of the people today who are still longing and still waiting for Jerusalem to be redeemed from the unjust and discriminatory policies which deprive its citizens of the fullness of life.

*Carmen Pauls is a Peace Development Worker with the Mennonite Central Committee West Bank.*

*Cedar Duaybis, of Sabeel's Executive Committee, acted as advisor for this article. The editor compiled the statistics.*

*Our thanks go to the Mennonite Central Committee for the photographs.*

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### **Third International Sabeel Conference - 1998**

*by Janet Lahr Lewis*

In the coming year of 1998 Israel will be celebrating its Jubilee, the 50th anniversary of the declaration of the State of Israel. For our third international conference to be held February 10-15 we at *Sabeel* have chosen to reflect on what this means for the people of Palestine who will be remembering fifty years of dispossession, occupation, and oppression.

The fiftieth year is, according to both the Old and New Testaments, a time set aside for restoration: sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, restoration of the land to its rightful owners, "*proclaim liberty throughout all the land to **all** its inhabitants.*" (Leviticus 25:10 [New King James Version] and please see Luke 4:18-19.) These texts in and of themselves create controversy. Throw in the term 'jubilee' and you invite a multitude of questions such as: "A jubilee is a celebration. We have lived under occupation for fifty years. What do we have to celebrate?" or "Why are you celebrating the jubilee in 1998? I thought it was supposed to be in the year 2000?" With this in mind we have chosen for the 1998 conference the theme *The Challenge of Jubilee: What Does God Require?* We hope to answer some of these questions, ask new ones, present new ideas and opinions on the topic of jubilee, explore the biblical

references in an attempt to reveal what God requires of us, and try to determine how to apply these requirements under the present circumstances.

The conference will concentrate on three areas using a text from Micah 6:8. The first full day of the conference will reflect on the past ('Love mercy') where we will look back at the past fifty years; the events that occurred that have led to the present conditions, the dispossession of thousands of Palestinians, the destruction of hundreds of villages, and the occupation of the land. We will also look at how those who have suffered have dealt with these problems and try to uncover the path toward personal and cumulative reconciliation.

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***The fiftieth year is ... a time set aside for restoration: sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, restoration of the land to its rightful owners...***

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The second day will deal with the present ('Do justice'). The topics for discussion vary widely as do the issues of today. In the afternoon we will board buses that will head out in different directions to visit sites in the area that could easily be considered modern stations of the cross - a contemporary Via Dolorosa. We will concentrate on three main areas: judgment and truth, lamentation along the Way, and new life after death; as we reflect on Jesus' trial, his personal suffering on the way to Calvary, and his death and resurrection as a Sign of Hope for restoration and justice. Checkpoints, demolished homes, settlements, a tent city for displaced persons - these are only a few of the sites that we hope to include in this very tangible demonstration. This is the ongoing Via Dolorosa that those who live in an oppressive society are made to endure. Following the contemporary Via Dolorosa a visual presentation at Bethlehem University will illustrate the present physical conditions and outline future plans for the area.

On the final day of the conference we will look toward the future ('Walk humbly') in an attempt to determine what God requires us to do to ensure peace and justice over 'all the land'. We will hear the examples of people from other countries who have suffered from similar circumstances; what they have done that was successful, what mistakes were made, how we may be able to apply their experiences to the situation here. We will attempt to 'think the unthinkable' in an effort to explore new ways to achieve peace with justice. And finally we will look at the spiritual guidance that God provides, and how we can use that to help achieve our goals.

So as not to heap too heavy a load on the minds of the conference participants we are also including a selection of 'lighter' events during the evenings where folks can enjoy their choice of music, dance, theater, videos, or informal gatherings. We will also provide space and time for ad hoc meetings for those who wish to participate in denominational gatherings, theologians' discussions, or 'relevant brainstorming'.

In holding this conference it is our sincere desire not only to enlighten those who are unfamiliar with the local events and circumstances, and spark new ideas in those who have become all too familiar, but also to enrich the lives of all who share in this experience. Our hope is that we may all take home a clearer understanding of what jubilee means for us, and apply it in our own lives.

*Janet Lahr Lewis is Sabeel's Conference Coordinator.*

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### ***Intifada 10 Years On***

Under the heading "*Intifada* Anniversary" Cliff Kindy of CPT Hebron has put an article on the Internet (full text available by e-mail: [cptheb@palnet.com](mailto:cptheb@palnet.com)). This marks the start on December 9, 1987 of the *Intifada*. Cliff stresses the largely nonviolent nature of the campaign:

"The story of the Palestinian people is not ended but only about to continue as the nonviolent *Intifada* spirit becomes an implanted gene in the chromosomal chain of the Palestinian people. The anniversary of the resistance is but a celebration of the ongoing *Intifada*. At this time it is incumbent on the concerned people of the world to assume their role in this resistance to injustice. The outcry of those of us seemingly unaffected by the struggle is an essential piece of the nonviolent campaign ..."

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) will host the Hebron visit on February 15, for those attending the *Sabeel* conference who elect to visit this key city. CPT people have served in Hebron since 1995.

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### **Photo Exhibit**

*by Hilary Rantisi*

An additional feature of the 1998 conference is the opening of a photo exhibit - to mark the passing of fifty years since *al-Nakba* (the events of 1948). The idea of the exhibit is to provide a window into Palestinian lives during those fifty years. We aim to show not only the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli rule, but also their remarkable steadfastness in the face of oppression and injustice. Their continued will to strive for justice, peace and freedom is clearly seen in this photographic documentary.

The exhibit will have two sections - pre 1948 and post 1948. We think the comparison between people's lives before and after 1948 will be found both moving and instructive.

### ***The Traveling Photo Exhibit***

After the conference, exhibits will be touring in the USA, Canada and Europe. If you, your church or organization are interested in hosting such an exhibit, please contact one of the *Friends of Sabeel* offices to get further details of how to be involved.

*Hilary Rantisi is Sabeel's Photo Exhibit and Calendar Project Coordinator.*

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### ***Sabeel Pre Conference Workshops***

Ahead of our third international conference - *The Challenge of Jubilee* - pre conference workshops have been held. The following is a summary of the workshops held in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Nazareth. (Further workshops will be held between now and the conference opening.)

First, what Scripture teaches us about Jubilee was unfolded - beginning with Leviticus 25:8-54 and ending with Luke 4. (Christ's message is a *Constant Jubilee*.) Three points emerge:

1. The whole world is God's, and God's inclusive Love is for the whole world.
2. God always stands by the oppressed and harassed. The Lord looks upon the weak and the poor with tenderness, compassion and solidarity.

3. God sets things straight. Jubilee shows God's way for a return to Freedom and Justice.

How should the above truths translate into political aspirations? Bearing in mind two things:

Firstly, Christ abolished all forms of racism through his lifestyle and teachings - no group of people have any basis for standing on a higher level than anyone else.

Second, Christ's refusal to be legalistic; this teaches us the importance of accepting the spirit rather than the letter.

It follows that many issues should be raised during the conference. Among those discussed were:

1. Release of ALL Palestinian political prisoners in the year of jubilee.
2. The right of return for the exiled, the deported, and all refugees and displaced people to their country: Palestine.
3. The start of a new era, a new century should be the end, the abolition of military courts and oppressive measures.
4. Redistribution of riches, resources and materials throughout the world.

*We are grateful for the reports carefully compiled by Jeanne Kattan (Bethlehem workshop - October 31), Jack Khazmo (Jerusalem - October 17), and Ibtissam Muallem (Nazareth - November 15). These made this summary possible. It is also encouraging to see from the enthusiasm shown by those who took part in the workshops, and from their good turnout, that the sessions have been valuable. This is a healthy sign as we look forward to the conference itself!*

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## **The Biblical Jubilee:**

### **Making Connections Between Justice, Generosity, and Joy** *by Patricia Shelly*

Our first association with Jubilee may well be celebration - the marking of any 50th anniversary that calls for great joy! But biblical Jubilee is no simple jubilation. It begins with an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and finds its joy in God's justice and generosity.

The Jubilee tradition, as outlined in Leviticus 25, starts with God's sovereignty over a day (the Sabbath) which is extended to the seventh year, and finally, after 7 cycles of

7 years, to the fiftieth year. In this Jubilee year, Leviticus 25 commands, one is to "*proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants*" (vs. 10). Land returns to the family who owned it fifty years before. Those who have sold themselves into debt slavery are freed and forgiven their debts. The land lies fallow - crops are neither sown nor gathered.

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***... Jubilee ... begins with an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and finds its joy in God's justice and generosity.***

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The tradition of Jubilee is grounded in the rulership of God and the fact that the divine will is justice and mercy. Leviticus 25 affirms that God is the One who owns the land and its human resources (vss. 23, 42). It is God's justice that shapes human accountability and ownership: God's gracious mercy that frees, that releases, that liberates. Jubilee is a call for human beings to proclaim and institute social justice and restoration in response to God's mercy and righteousness. The call to Jubilee is a recognition that human institutions tend to favor the powerful, that the normal workings of human history will result in grave inequality; and this must be redressed. Jubilee calls for a radical social reorientation which restores equality and opportunity to those who were dispossessed. It affirms that God's sovereignty extends to the social order, to the distribution of land and its privileges.

Although the word Jubilee is only used in the Bible 22 times, its themes and principles are rooted deeply in the prophetic tradition and given new interpretation in the life and teachings of Jesus. The prophets of the Old Testament proclaim God's concern for social justice as part of religious faithfulness. In Isaiah 61, perhaps the clearest echo of the Jubilee tradition, the prophet declares that he is anointed by God "*to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor ....*" (vss. 1-2).

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***Land returns to the family who owned it fifty years before. Those who have sold themselves into debt slavery are freed and forgiven their debts.***

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In many ways, Jesus' life and teachings are precisely an incarnation of the Jubilee proclamation. When he reads from Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-30), Jesus identifies his ministry with "*the year of the Lord's favor*". Furthermore, Jesus reminds those in his home country of the universal claims of Jubilee, by citing Elijah's concern for a Sidonian widow and Elisha's healing of a Syrian man. God's demand for justice knows no ethnic or national limits. It is this insistence that Jubilee standards are of wider application which arouses the Nazareth congregation to such anger that they would hurl Jesus off their town cliff!

In 1998, as we mark the 50th year of the dispossession of the Palestinian people and the establishment of the state of Israel, the biblical tradition of Jubilee presents provocative material for our reflection. The situation today is still concerned with issues of land ownership and use, economic indebtedness, and national privilege. Where might our reflection begin?

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***The call to Jubilee is a recognition that human institutions tend to favor the powerful, that the normal workings of human history will result in grave inequality; and this must be redressed.***

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First of all, Jubilee is a sobering word to the powerful and privileged. Such power and privilege tend to corrupt and to create an imbalance. Jubilee is a reminder that God's sovereignty - and not human power or claims - has the final word. So this biblical teaching calls upon those of us with privilege and power to relinquish our benefits and act in ways that express God's restorative justice.

Secondly, Jubilee is a word of hope and joy to the powerless and dispossessed. Jubilee begins by acknowledging a loss that must be redressed. It remembers the loss of property and freedom and declares that it is not the will of God for this to continue. Jubilee declares liberty and restoration - in concrete, social terms - as an expression of God's righteousness. If God's people live in the spirit of Jubilee, the dispossessed and poor will be given equal standing and renewed opportunity in the community. This is "*good news to the oppressed*" indeed.

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***If God's people live in the spirit of Jubilee, the dispossessed and poor will be given equal standing and renewed opportunity in the community.***

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Finally, Jubilee is a challenge to all humanity. It embodies a perpetual critique of power and its limits. God's justice and generosity are extended - in every generation - to the dispossessed and powerless. One people's experience of tragedy is not a justification for establishing a new pattern of domination. Likewise, the biblical tradition of Jubilee is a reminder to all who would see justice as a simple "turning of the tables", that God demands a justice which restores and forgives.

If Jubilee is to be linked to joy, it must first be grounded in God's justice and generosity. Psalm 146 clearly illustrates this. The Psalmist's vow to "*sing praises to my God all my life long*" (vs. 2) grows out of an awareness that God is the One who "*executes justice for the oppressed ... sets the prisoners free ... who lifts up those who are bowed down ...*" (vss. 7-8).

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***This is the challenge of Jubilee: to live out God's justice and generosity. May our celebration and joy be marked by faithfulness to the Jubilee proclamation!***

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Even the Christmas story contains this affirmation of Jubilee. Mary's "Magnificat" - her song of joy - is a response to a God who has "*brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly ...*" (Luke 1:52). Mary's Son becomes the One who will announce this "*year of the Lord's favor*" and so his Birth is indeed "*good news of great joy*" to the Bethlehem shepherds (Luke 2:10).

This is the challenge of Jubilee: to live out God's justice and generosity. May our celebration and joy be marked by faithfulness to the Jubilee proclamation!

*Dr. Patricia Shelly is the Country Representative for the Mennonite Central Committee West Bank.*

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**On the Eve of Christmas (*Laylat al-Milad*)**

*(Lebanese Carol by Father Labaki)*

*Note: We wanted to present this carol to you in the original Arabic. Unfortunately, we found that not all our software is "Arabic-literate"! So we have to limit ourselves for now to a transliterated version of the Arabic, together with the words in English. Watch this space for the Arabic text.*

**Transliteration** (Not according to any formal transliteration scheme, scholars please note! but rather for ease of following):

Refrain:

Laylat al-Milad ... yummahah-l-bughdou

Laylat al-Milad ... tuzhiru-l-ardou

Laylat al-Milad ... tudfanou-l-harbou

Laylat al-Milad ... yanbutou-l-hubbou.

-1-

'Indama nusqee 'atshan ka'sa ma' ... nakoonu fi-l-milad

'Indama naksoo 'uryan thaowba hub ... nakoonu fi-l-milad

'Indama nukafkifu-d-dumoo' fi-l-'uyoon ... nakoonu fi-l-milad

'Indama nafrishu-l-qulooba bi-r-raja' ... nakoonu fi-l-milad.

-2-

'Indama uqabbilou rafeeqi douna ghush ... akoonu fi-l-milad

'Indama tamootu fiyya roohu-l-intiqam ... akoonu fi -l-milad

'Indama yarqudu fi qalbi-ya-l-jafa ... akoonu fi-l-milad

'Indama tamootu nafsi fi kiyani il-lah ... akoonu fi-l-milad.

### **The Same Song in English:**

Refrain:

On the Eve of Christmas ... Hatred will vanish

On the Eve of Christmas ... The Earth will flourish

On the Eve of Christmas ... War will be gone

On the Eve of Christmas ... Love will be born.

-1-

When we offer a glass of water to a thirsty person ... it is Christmas

When we clothe a naked person with a gown of love ... it is Christmas

When we wipe the tears from weeping eyes ... it is Christmas

When we line a hopeless heart with love ... it is Christmas.

When I kiss a friend without hypocrisy ... it is Christmas  
When the spirit of revenge dies in me ... it is Christmas  
When in my heart I no longer want to stay apart ... it is Christmas  
When I am buried in the being of God ... it is Christmas.

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### **Letter from the Bantustan of Bethlehem: Facts and Hopes**

*by Zoughbi Zoughbi*

"I will tell you something about stories," he said. "They are not just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have stories."

"Their evil is mighty but it can't stand up to our stories. So they try to destroy the stories. Let the stories be confused or forgotten. They would like that. They would be happy. Because we would be defenseless then." (From *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko.)

Yes!! Our story starts with the prophecy which says, "*But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.*" (Micah 5:2, here quoted in Matthew 2:16.)

King Herod was disturbed, called upon the people's chief priests and teachers of the Law to have an urgent meeting, and then it seems declared a state of emergency: "*Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me ...*" Thus the Magi were ordered (Matthew 2:8).

The story continues, "*When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under ...*" (Matthew 2:16).

Fight or flight - was this the challenge? The angel intervened and told Joseph, "*Get up ... take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.*" (Matthew 2:13).

It seems the 2,000 year state of emergency has not been lifted since then.

Our Arab Palestinian Christian continuous presence is in danger! Herod is still sending folks to get information to report and act on. And so Bethlehem's Christian population is down to 30-35% of the total. A large number of the locals left the country, whether through the intervention of the angels, or by the current repressive measures. We certainly have a deteriorating socio-economic and political situation. There are three types of flight: physical, capital and that of youth.

Yes! Christians here are becoming an endangered species! The number has dwindled enormously since 1967, in the aftermath of the Israeli occupation. Now there are more people leaving as a result of the siege, the structural violence of Israel and the lack of progress in the peace process. There is enough room in the inn for all except for us, the Palestinians.

The little town of Bethlehem has become tinier. Since 1967, at least 60% of Bethlehem's land has been confiscated by Israel. Jewish settlements surround Bethlehem, choking it from every side. Har Homa and Givat Arba are just two examples of new settlements to be built in the Bethlehem area - with a total of 8,500 housing units (according to a 1995 report issued by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem).

Bethlehem is now aptly referred to as the "Bantustan of Bethlehem", isolated from Jerusalem and often joining the cut-up ghettos club of other West Bank towns, whenever Israel imposes a closure in the name of "security".

*"Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!"* (II Samuel 23:15). Sorry David, we can't provide you with the water you want to drink. We haven't had a water supply for three weeks. The tap has been shut off by the children of your people. We have learned how to recycle water in Bethlehem and many other West Bank communities. 84% of our water has been plundered and David's well is completely dry!

"Who taught you all this, Doctor?" The reply came back promptly: 'Suffering.'" (From *The Plague* by Albert Camus.) I feel I don't want to open the page of suffering since it is immense and overflowing. Horace Walpole said, "Life is a comedy for those who think and a tragedy for those who feel."

I feel we are living the Via Dolorosa's stations of the Cross on a daily basis. We are not sure what station we are at just now! Is it the fourth or the fourteenth? Closure, siege, deportation, arrest, demolition, denial of basic rights. It is not so important

which station we are at. The Via Dolorosa will lead us to the tomb! To the Holy Sepulcher which poses the question:

*"Who will roll the stone away ...?"* (Mark 16:3). Are we going to overcome all the political, economic, social and religious challenges?

Eventually, the tomb is empty! Christ is resurrected! All are invited to the feast of resurrection - Christians, Muslims and Jews - Arabs and Israelis! Sooner or later the resurrection *will be*. After all, this is the hope, the promise, and the catalyst behind our continuous presence in the land of our Lord.

(All Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.)

*Zoughbi Zoughbi is the director of Wi'am Conflict Resolution Center, Bethlehem; he is also on the board of Sabeel.*

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### **The Maronite Church of Antioch**

*by Paul Sayyah*

*The Maronites form a significant strand among the Christians in the region of the Holy Land. Their development is traced here from the beginning. The way that God has underpinned their faith is clearly seen. This faith ensures that Maronites enrich the fabric of the present day Church.*

The Maronite Church is called after its founder, Saint Maron. He was a priest who decided to lead a monastic life on one of the mountains of Syria near Antioch. This links the Maronite Community to the very early Christian presence in that part of the world where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:25-26). The personality of Saint Maron, from the limited amount of information we have on him, seems to distinguish itself by a deep sense of serenity, ascetic living and prayer. This gave him a special charisma which attracted around him numerous people who adopted the kind of lifestyle he had shown to be of such value. Many hermitages and monasteries were built around his original monastery. Saint Maron died in the year 410 or so, but little did he know that this spirit - his way of living the Gospel - was to survive, develop and flourish for many centuries to come.

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***Saint Maron ... his way of living the Gospel - was to survive, develop and flourish for many centuries to come.***

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About 50 years after his death the community appears to have attained to some sense of religious identity. It was able to assert itself and take a clear stand in the theological controversy that followed the Council of Chalcedon, and centered around the understanding of the Person of Christ. (The council agreed that Christ's Divinity and Humanity were distinct. The question was: Did this mean the God-Man - One Person - had two "natures" or one?) The controversy was found by contemporary theological dialogue (15 centuries later), to be a false one because the difference is basically one of terminology rather than substance. But in 517 the Maronite monastery was ransacked and 350 monks were massacred because of their fidelity to their faith. Many communities then moved to the site, and together brought a regrowth of faith to that area; from there they were able to defend their traditions until the 7th century.

Gathered around their elected Patriarch, they had developed a certain sense of autonomy, both spiritual and temporal, an autonomy that the Maronites continue to treasure dearly up to the present time, and for which they have paid a very heavy price all through history.

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***... in 517 the Maronite monastery was ransacked and 350 monks were massacred because of their fidelity to their faith. Many communities then moved to the site, and together brought a regrowth of faith to that area ...***

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Under pressure from the Byzantine Empire and from Islamic invasions - powers who did not appreciate their autonomy, the Maronites started their exodus which led them to Mount Lebanon - to the land of cedars, where they lived for centuries, along with their Patriarch, safeguarding their monastic tradition as well as their independence.

When the Franks (the so-called "crusaders") arrived, some Maronites joined them and guided them toward Jerusalem. Since that time their relations with the Christians of Europe, especially France and the Holy See, became close and were to remain so until modern times.

After the defeat of the Franks in 1291 the Mamlouks of Egypt, the new masters, became suspicious of the Maronites. This led to another wave of persecution in 1367, in which their Patriarch and many of his monks were massacred. Later Patriarchs were forced to take refuge in the Qadisha valley where they lived in security with some of their clergy and laypeople around them. There they cultivated the land and lived their monastic life in relative peace and safety.

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***The Maronites continue to pay a dear price for their autonomy ... However, the spirit which animated their history is still alive and strong.***

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In 1510 the Turks succeeded the Mamlouks and ruled until 1918. During that time there were periods of relative calm and the Maronites spread all through the Mount Lebanon area. Other Maronites emigrated to various parts of the world. But again the relative autonomy of the Maronites was not looked upon favorably by the Ottomans, who succeeded in creating divisions within the community and between Maronites and Druzes. Ultimately this led to the massacres of 1860 where 360 villages, 560 churches and 50 monasteries were destroyed and 20,000 people were killed. This led to a new exodus which scattered the Maronites once again all over the world.

It is said that during the first world war about one third of the Maronites perished or were exiled. After the end of the war their identity and their autonomy were threatened yet again. At that time Patriarch Elias Howayek was delegated by the various Lebanese communities to attend a peace conference, which led to the formation of a somewhat autonomous Lebanese state having natural frontiers, and existing under a French Mandate.

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***Since the Middle Ages the Maronites have distinguished themselves in the world of education to the extent where a person could be said to be "educated like a Maronite".***

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The Maronites continue to pay a dear price for their autonomy and for the independence of the country they, along with all the other Lebanese communities, consider to be their home. The divisions created once again recently within their

community have been very costly. However, the spirit which animated their history is still alive and strong.

Since the Middle Ages the Maronites have distinguished themselves in the world of education to the extent where a person could be said to be "educated like a Maronite". Toward the end of the 16th century they founded the Maronite College in Rome. The college had a very deep influence on the education of the clergy, who were instrumental in the provision of schooling to Lebanon - before the western missionaries arrived in the 18th century and joined them in that mission. The Christians of Lebanon and the Maronites in particular, later were to be in the forefront of the Arab renaissance in the region.

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***With its links back to Apostolic times, the Maronite Antiochian Syriac Church remains one of the expressions of God's Presence in the world.***

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The Maronites form the only eastern Christian community which - has remained in communion with Rome all through and which - does not have an Orthodox faction. But throughout its history, because of its close ties with Rome, it has tended to adopt some of the Latin liturgical ways. This tendency has been largely rectified in recent years thanks to a strong current of liturgical renewal. Being an Antiochian Syriac Church the Maronites have kept Syriac as the official liturgical language, but the vernacular is the language of common use in the liturgy.

The Maronite community is currently witnessing a strong movement of renewal, at the level of all its institutions. This movement gathered pace especially after the Synod for Lebanon - which began in June 1991, its final exhortation being issued in May 1997.

At the present time the Maronite Church counts between six and seven million members world-wide. About one million still live in Lebanon where they remain the largest Maronite community. There are 37 bishops who shepherd the Church all over the world, under the leadership of their Patriarch who carries the title of "Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and the Whole East". The Patriarchal residence is in Lebanon, at Bkerke about 25 miles to the north of Beirut. During the summer months the Patriarch goes back to the region of the valley of Qadisha in the north, to Diman where some of his predecessors took refuge for about four hundred years in order to safeguard their religious as well as their political autonomy.

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***May she remain a sign of hope and may she continue to distinguish herself by an authentic witness ...***

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In the Holy Land the Maronite presence goes back about a thousand years. They count about 7,500 faithful - located in nine parishes mostly in the region of the Galilee. They come under the leadership of the Maronite Archbishop of Haifa and the Holy Land, who is at the same time Patriarchal Exarch for Jerusalem, the Palestinian Territory and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. So the See of the Archdiocese is in Haifa, while the Maronite Exarchate is located in the Old City of Jerusalem.

With its links back to Apostolic times, the Maronite Antiochian Syriac Church remains one of the expressions of God's Presence in the world. May she remain a sign of hope and may she continue to distinguish herself by an authentic witness to the same spirit of love and fellowship which was the mark of the early Christians of Antioch.

*Paul Sayyah is the Maronite Archbishop of Haifa and the Holy Land, and Patriarchal Exarch for Jerusalem, the Palestinian Territory and Jordan.*

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### **Snapshots of Our Activities**

This issue of *Cornerstone* is evidence that much of *Sabeel's* work lately has been geared toward the coming conference - February 10-15, 1998. The groundwork of bringing awareness and ensuring the active participation of the local Palestinian Christian population is being done through pre conference workshops (please see [Sabeel Pre Conference Workshops](#)). There is a definite growing interest among the local population and we may need to schedule more workshops before February.

Other aspects of the ministry have flourished as well:

Advocacy through the speaker's bureau is one of them. More pilgrims are planning to meet with the living stones on their tours to the Holy Land. Despite the political disturbances in the country, *Sabeel* has received about 425 people in 21 groups, and around 50 individual visitors since September 1. Most of our visitors are British or

American, but many other nationalities (Australian, Chinese, Dutch, German, Norwegian, Swedish) are also represented. Some of them old friends who are returning, bringing groups with them.

People come to the center to discuss issues of concern about the status of Palestinian Christians and because they want to get a total view (and not a one-sided view) of the political situation. Our hope is that through these encounters, some minds are enlightened and some hearts touched. One thing we find these meetings always do is to raise questions about facts that were unknown. We trust folks end up with a clearer image of the situation here than before they came to *Sabeel*. Also, people tend to go away from here encouraged to find out the truth behind biased reports/rumors in the local and international media.

In one letter written by David Pickering (leader of a United Reform Church party who visited *Sabeel* on September 17), he tells us that:

"On the way back people were grateful for the way that you helped us to ask the question: Why? and to think about the answers in relation to the values found in God's Word.

We were moved by your work to bring freedom to the Palestinian people who need liberating from the paralyzing effects of injustice, and liberation to those who enact such policies - and so deny the human within themselves."

We acknowledge with grateful thanks the commitment of time and effort that *Sabeel* staff and volunteer speakers are making to meet this growing level of outreach. There are already several groups booked for 1998. *Sabeel* gladly welcomes visitors on Monday and Thursday evenings. We only ask that you let us know well in advance that you would like to come visit with us.

***Voices in the Wilderness:***

On September 29, *Sabeel* hosted Joe and Jean Gump - members of *Voices in the Wilderness*. This is the movement that campaigns to end US/UN economic sanctions against the people of Iraq. Joe and Jean presented a first hand testimony of the deplorable situation in Iraq as they passed around photos of innocent suffering children. Those attending the talk were heartstricken at the price these innocents are paying for so-called "just" war. If we really believe in justice, let us resolve to do what we can for these little ones!

The Gumps, staunch activists for many years, work toward ending all violations of human rights. They were visiting Israel on a mission to try and free Mordechai Vanunu. (Mordechai has been in solitary confinement in jail for the last 11 years after disclosing to the world Israel's nuclear capability.)

***Bible Study:***

The International Bible Reading Association, UK invited *Sabeel* to write reflections on assigned Scripture passages - to appear in their publication *Words for Today in 1999*. A group of 15 men and women - some locals and some from abroad - met on Wednesday evenings over a 7 week period. We pondered over challenging passages - sometimes capable of various interpretations. Our aim was to try to find God's Message for Palestinians today.

***Sabeel Day:***

On October 20 the executive committee and staff of *Sabeel* marked the anniversary of the opening of the new center with a brief retreat. This took place at Mater Misericordiae - the secluded beautiful refuge of the nuns - on the outskirts of Jerusalem. We gave time to worship, prayer, reflection and evaluation of the work of *Sabeel* in the past year.

*Note: Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations in this issue are from the New Revised Standard Version (NSRV).*