

Newsbrief Special Edition September 1999

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We welcome your questions and comments: sabeel@sabeel.org

Building a Secure Future Together *by Naim Ateek*

We have a nice Arabic saying: "The meal which you are promised is better than the meal which you have already eaten." In other words, I hope that our friends will be looking forward to a fuller issue of *Cornerstone* in a few months' time. We give thanks to God that Cedar is feeling better and recuperating well.

Sabeel has always believed that it is not through being "anti" one side and "pro" the other that we succeed. Our position has always been that we are *anti* injustice and falsehood, wherever that exists. As people of faith, we are called by God to be *pro* justice and truth. This does not mean that we set ourselves as morally superior to others. It reflects our willingness to be faithful to God. Moreover, we do not set ourselves as judges, nor are we going to keep our mouths shut in the face of wrong. Similarly, we do not pretend to be prophets or sons and daughters of prophets. We are, however, inspired by the spirit of the great prophets of the Bible and especially that of Jesus Christ. We must speak prophetically as we address the specific situation in life where we are. As we do this, we try to be conscious of our own weaknesses and

limitations, and that it is only through the Grace of God that we can maintain this ministry.

To speak prophetically is not easy. To begin with, it implies a commitment to honesty and truthfulness. It contains a message of repentance and the need for the amendment of wrong and the restoration of right. To speak prophetically is to recognize that life is inter-connected. Morality must not be divorced from politics, economics, or religion, or any other aspect of life. All of life and relationships must be brought under the subjection of God and exposed to the light of Christ. As people of faith, we must nourish integrity and honesty among people.

We believe that it is only through the doing of justice that Israelis and Palestinians can enjoy a life of security and peace.

People in power who have done wrong, whether in government, church or society feel uneasy when confronted by the truth. It is in the nature of truth to both affirm and judge simultaneously. It affirms us when we are in the right, and it exposes and judges us when we are in the wrong. Therefore, we must reiterate repeatedly that Sabeel is not committed to a blind and unequivocal support of one side against the other. The government of Israel has to face its unjust past, stop its present unjust policies, and commit itself to the doing of justice for the Palestinians, whom it has wronged. By the same token, the Palestinian Authority has to clean its ranks from corruption, and with its present limited powers and responsibilities, it must do its best to build a healthy democratic society where law and order are respected, and all people are equal under the law.

Sabeel's prophetically inspired ministry stems from our strong faith in God. We believe that it is only through the doing of justice that Israelis and Palestinians can enjoy a life of security and peace. We hope that the cry of people everywhere will become so loud that Israel will have to pay attention and commit itself to the doing of justice in order to live in peace. It is only then that Israelis and Palestinians can hope to build a viable future together, instead of trying to destroy each other's future. The secure future can only be built together on the firm foundation of truth and justice. †

The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is President of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center..

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk
humbly with your God?
Micah 6:8

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Friends of Sabeel UK

by Janet Davis

The work of FOS-UK grows by the day and we have had an exciting and positive early Summer with the visit of the distinguished Jewish Theologian Professor Marc Ellis and the Revd. Dr. Donald Wagner, from the United States. Speaking at an evening service in Manvers Street Baptist Church in Bath, Marc recognised how difficult it is for Christians to speak out against Israeli action for fear of being taken to be anti-Jew. But for him the suffering of his people over three millennia did not mean all their actions were beyond question. He put it bluntly: "If our redemption is at the suffering of others, it is no redemption." "Can we as Jews be liberated if we oppress another people?" Marc reflected these thoughts with Dr. Don Wagner during a public lecture at the Christian Resources Exhibition, where many people were given a challenging view of the real situation in Palestine/Israel. FOS-UK is delighted about Marc Ellis' joint book launch with Michael Prior at Sabeel Jerusalem (see [Snapshots](#)).

"Can we as Jews be liberated if we oppress another people?"

We now move into a busy Autumn programme with the visit of the Revd. Dr. Naim Ateek to London to speak with the FOS-UK Theological Reflection Group, and an Open Gathering on the 16th September. Dr. Ateek then undertakes a major lecture tour with the Church In Wales.

There are other major day conferences, including Guildford Cathedral, Strawberry Hill University College. Also, Afif Safieh, Palestinian General Delegate in London and Special Envoy to the Vatican will be speaking in Chester Cathedral. (Afif Safieh addressed the annual United Reformed Church Assembly speaking to their major resolution on the situation in Israel/Palestine. He was wonderfully received and supported.)

The Revd. Garth Hewitt's new book *A Candle of Hope* based on Bethlehem, will be available in September and we shall have an exciting major book launch; we are greatly involved in advising pilgrim groups going to Palestine/Israel during the coming year on how they can meet with the Palestinian people. And hooray for the marvelous Sabeel Ahlan wa Sahlan Brochure!

We are looking forward to receiving the Sabeel [15 month Calendar](#). During the coming year, we shall be making many direct challenges to our own members of government, who still stand by UN Resolutions that Israel occupies the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights in international law illegally. We hope some of us will also be visiting Sabeel Jerusalem in the coming months.

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Snapshots of Our Activities

•Joint Book Launch

July 8th was a special day at Sabeel. After an absence of three months in Scotland and Sweden, 'Assis' (the Reverend) Naim returned. On the same day he welcomed two theologians Michael Prior and Marc Ellis at Sabeel Center where they celebrated a joint book launch.

Michael Prior's new book *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry* examines the consequences of using the Bible as a legitimisation for implementing the political program of Zionism.

The novel perspective of this study is the moral question of the impact which the Zionist conquest and settlement have had on the indigenous population of Palestine. It pays particular attention to biblical, theological, and moral considerations and addresses the conflict from the perspective of the victims, rather than from that of the victors.

Rosemary Radford-Ruether, professor of theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, commented on Marc Ellis' *O, Jerusalem! The Future of the Jewish Covenant* with these words: "In his latest book Marc Ellis asks the defining question for Jewish life today: 'Can injustice, represented by Jewish domination of Jerusalem, be at the heart of the covenant?' Ellis' answer is that the covenant of Israel with God

has been shattered by the creation of a state at the expense of Palestinian life in the land. It can only be renewed by a new ethic and practice of justice that reconcile these two people, who have become irrevocably linked together in the land, either for good or for ill."

The crowd gathered for Q & A and refreshments, and all the books were sold out like hot cakes!

Revival!

The local department has been busy re-activating its programs for clergy, women and youth.

On July 14th, as the French celebrated "equality, fraternity and liberty", a group of clergy (many with their spouses) set forth to the Galilee for the annual trip within the clergy programs. Highpoints Akka (Acre), Kufr Yasif and Shfa' Amr.

After a short stop in Caesarea, for a traditional breakfast of ka'ek, za'atar and white cheese, the group hurried on to Akka where they were joined by their brethren from Nazareth, Shfa' Amr, Turaan and Abu Snan to start the exploration of the Crusader town, the Turkish baths and the old souks.

Father Afif Makhoul, the Maronite priest introduced the local guide Abdo Touma, who cleverly swirled us into the beginning of the century.

The 'break' at the Maronite Church Center was refreshing. After listening to the history of the Maronite Church, the guests were invited to taste Father Afif's special "almond drink", and many of the women eagerly asked for the recipe!

The unforgettable visit to Kufr Yasif began with a greeting from Father Atallah Makhouli and the whole Greek Orthodox community. Members of the village council as well as the Muslim Imam had also been invited.

Kufr Yasif had just experienced a very sad incident. Two neighbors had fought over the position of a trash can, and in a moment of anger the Christian neighbor, who is known to be emotionally troubled, shot down his Muslim brother. Instead of fanning the fire, the wise religious leaders and the bereaved family of the young man calmed down the spirited parties. Being inside the Orthodox Church and hearing the Muslim Imam speak from behind the pulpit was heart-rending, in fact exhilarating.

Words cannot describe the hospitality and generosity of the women there. A sumptuous delicious meal was served to all after which many of the priests went to offer condolences to the bereaved family.

Including late joiners, there were 25 priests (largely Greek Orthodox - this is a positive sign of hope for ecumenism). There was again the beautiful variety of Latin, Catholic, Syrian, Orthodox, Anglican and Baptist and Muslim participants.

Then the group gathered in the hall where Assis Naim spoke about Sabeel and the role of clergy in the direction of celebrations for the millennium. And Father Makhouli introduced Sister Soutoria, the newly ordained, young, local Orthodox nun serving the community.

It was with renewed hope that the visitors left Kufr Yasif, a rejuvenated Church and an ecumenical community eager to serve God and humanity. Next on the itinerary was Shfa 'Amr, and the Greek Catholic Church (7000 parishioners). Father Nadeem Chacour invited the guests to pray and to listen to the choirs of this active little town.

Once again the visitors were met with extreme cordiality, sharing sweets, the famous Shfa 'Amr ice-cream, anecdotes and information. Seeds of warm friendship were planted on that day and the West Bank members look forward to receiving their newly found brothers and sisters for the upcoming millennium programs.

•Women's Activities

Together ... we can make a difference

At the initial meeting held at Sabeel on May 14, 38 women, active in their own churches and from all walks of life discussed urgent societal needs and tried to find ways of working together in order to make a positive difference in the community. There was a general concern for youth and their lack of spirituality and responsible commitment. The women expressed their thirst for deeper biblical knowledge, and for exploring their Christianity through recreational, educational field trips and lectures.

Sabeel immediately responded to their requests, and on May 28 a group of 43 women led by Maronite deacon Subhi Makhoul headed towards Ein Kerem. They were joined by four Sabeel Nazareth committee members who, like Mary, came to the hills of Jerusalem to be with their cousins. Sabeel felt it was important to start our quest for truth in Ein Kerem, where Mary's faith, obedience and acceptance of God's will brought about the greatest gift that changed the history of humanity.

On that sunny, cool morning we walked through the picturesque hamlet rediscovering the familiar doorways and arcades of Palestinian families who were evicted and became refugees.

After inspiring reflection and hymns at the church of St. John the Baptist, we trekked up the hill to the site of the Visitation. Prayers and songs echoed among the green hills. After some painful climbing, the rest of the day was spent at the Notre Dame de Sion Center. The women expressed their awe and admiration at the beauty of this simple refuge where Père Marie Ratisbonne, the founder of the order, had spent his last days.

Next, we rediscovered Jerusalem through the eyes of historian Albert Aghazarian. Standing on the roof top of the Christian Swedish Study Center in Jaffa Gate, familiar land marks were pointed. The local ‘tourists’ then made a stop at the museum of the Greek Catholic Church to compare the different church traditions through their garments and crosses. The rest of the walk included the Coptic quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Muslim Quarter and the self-imposed Jewish settlement ‘ghetto’ in the center of the old city. Then we headed up to the Syrian Quarter to Maronite Street and lunched at the exquisite ‘Nafoura’ restaurant bordering the Old City wall at Jaffa Gate.

Two women theologians visited the country during this period and Sabeel grabbed the opportunity to introduce them and their views to the newly re-organized ecumenical nucleus of women. Dr. Rosemary Ruether, renowned Feminist Theologian from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, a very close Sabeel friend, and member of the steering committee of Friends of Sabeel North America, spoke about *Feminist Theology and Intercultural Contextualization*. Jean Zaru, vice president of Sabeel, introduced Rosemary to an audience largely familiar with her views about the oppressive structures of domination. The encounter was an interesting, empowering and challenging one as Palestinian women tried to draw similarities and learn from other ecumenical experiences.

A smaller group of 20 women listened to [Sylvia Marcos](#)' informal talk about the struggle of Mexican woman for justice.

The third educational trip (August 13) saw the Rev. Naim Ateek and Sami Khoury accompanying 41 women to the West Bank towns of Taybeh and Jifna.

The two largely Christian towns have maintained a primitive charm and are rich in traditions. Taybeh (meaning “good” is today famous for its beer!) is presumably the ‘Efraim’ of the Bible. The three Parish Priests, Father Joseph Rizek, Jack Nobel and Daoud Khoury welcomed the visitors in their respective Roman, Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches, showing them the ruins of Byzantine cathedrals, and recounting miracles and folk tales.

The Old Palestinian Home is a prize (not to be missed by any pilgrim or visitor). Well-preserved in the courtyard of the Latin Church, it is a strong witness of traditional homes in villages, similar to the ones existing at the time of our Lord. Provision, agricultural tools and animals all ‘lived’ together. (Watch for our Christmas Issue for clear explanations about mangers within dwellings).

Jifna (coined Geneva by the local inhabitants), a quiet village in a valley that is connected to the hilly Birzeit, has lately become attractive because of its increasing number of restaurants. A summer resort with two churches, Catholic and Orthodox, it has established contacts with Sabeel through youth participants in Sabeel’s camps and the parish priests, Father Rafiq Khoury and Father Andraous Rafidi. Lunch was at "Al-Burj" (the tower) an old compound transformed into a youth center and restaurant. An old olive-press, crude agricultural tools and artifacts decorate the area, a reminder of our heritage and roots in this country.

After a short visit to Father Andraous and the Greek Church, a meeting with a dozen women from Jifna was held at the Roman Catholic Church and Hall. Father Rafiq welcomed his guests and Assis Naim gave a Bible study on Lydia in Acts 16, opening up a heated discussion about the role of women in and for the church. The encounter was mutually rewarding for visitors and hostesses who together can make a difference.

•Youth Activities

In June, Sabeel extended invitations to all existing church-related youth groups in Jerusalem in order to coordinate activities and establish a stronger network of committed responsibilities in society. Several groups responded, some accompanied by their priests.

The need for real knowledge about different churches is prominent. The identity crisis and the thirst for a deeper understanding of one’s faith have led to three meetings on these topics. Led by Subhi Makhoul and Naim Ateek, the group is exploring the basis

of their faith and the principles of Christianity and is looking forward to collective activities in addition to their denominational functions.

YAP (Youth Action Plan), is an attempt to establish friendships and understanding based on human rights. The project, initiated by Rev. Anna Karin Hammar from Lund, Sweden, includes Sabeel (through Sami and Hilary), Al-Liqa`, Wi`am, the International Center and the Rapprochement Center in a joint effort to educate Palestinian Youth about Human Rights (through workshops) and to prepare for exchange meetings with their Swedish counterpart.

The group hopes to implement phase one of the plan soon, with a future goal of sharing their acquired knowledge with Israeli Youth.

•News from Nazareth

On August 1, Sabeel Nazareth started operating from a rented office at the YMCA. Nibal Mizzawi became the first staff member (as a part-time secretary) to help facilitate the expanding ministry in the Galilee.

In a brainstorming session on July 22nd, the Nazareth Committee, the director and local programs coordinator discussed plans and guidelines for the local conference celebrations for the year 2000.

•Meet the Palestinians

Over 550 pilgrims, scholars, theology and archaeology students, peace workers, volunteers and delegations included Sabeel in their itinerary to hear the objective view of Palestinian Christians on the actual political, religious and cultural situation.

Delegations from the National Council of Churches in Norway, the American Committee on Jerusalem, Hope International, the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden and Christian Peacemaker Team spent time with the Sabeel Board and staff discussing cooperation, support and exchange programs and alternative pilgrimages.

Dozens of unannounced visitors including journalists from far and wide also found their way to Sabeel requesting assistance, interviews or contact addresses.

A six-person group from Middle East Fellowship of Southern California celebrated their thirtieth anniversary of support and work for justice for Palestinians with a two-week visit to the area. Sabeel extends its appreciation for the courage and perseverance of this group led by the Rev. Darrel Meyers. We pray that their efforts will soon yield fruitful results.

Bringing awareness and bridging gaps are still important aspects of our international ministry.

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Holding Down the Fort!

Since the beginning of 1999, Sabeel has been evaluating itself, re-organizing its structure by acquiring new staff and clearly dividing labor between the two main departments: local and international. In addition to the president, **Naim Ateek**, there are now six local staff members and several foreign volunteers. A team of three people, **Nora Carmi**, **Sami Khoury** and **Sawsan Bittar** coordinate, plan and execute the local programs and conferences.

In the international department, **Hilary Rantisi** runs special projects (calendars, exhibits, alternative programs and books) with the help of volunteers.

For the past two years, the Presbyterian Church USA has enriched Sabeel with **Laurel Nelson** and **Catherine Gordon**. Unfortunately the year flies by, and the parting becomes hard to accept, but ... new friendships are established and both Laurel and Catherine have become Sabeel Ambassadors raising awareness back home. The new volunteer **Sam Jones** will be replacing Catherine in September to help in building international contacts.

Dan Richards, a staff member in 1995-1997 will be returning from the States to rejoin the International Department.

Frida Emerezian has recently joined Sabeel as our new secretary. Our happily growing Sabeel family will soon be out of room!

Sam and Lois Seykali from Nebraska, both involved in youth ministry back home, became indispensable friends as they stayed at the Sabeel apartment for two weeks, helping plan youth activities and conducting bible studies.

Elaine Meyers helped Assis Naim as research assistant during the month of July.

Roxane Assaf came to Sabeel, a breath of fresh air, bringing in her gifts of writing, editing and photography at a very crucial time to meet deadlines for the calendar and book: she is a life-saver for this edition of Cornerstone!

Elise Aghzarian, with her quiet, discreet ability to translate efficiently and to research and collate calendar and book was a real asset in the International Department.

Liz Peel, an American graduate student at the Divinity School in the University of Edinburgh, decided to write her thesis on media and theology in Jerusalem. During the three weeks she lived at Sabeel, researching and interviewing people, she became a ‘Jill of all trades’ offering her artistic, writing and photographic skills with great style. Liz has felt the call to return to the Middle East, and we hope she will return this fall as a staff member to Sabeel.

A word of tremendous appreciation to our staff and volunteers. We praise God for your coming into our ‘way’. †

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us each exercise them accordingly.

Romans 12:6

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Dr. Sylvia Marcos on Women and Men in Mexico

by Sandra Olewine

A group of twenty gathered to share in an energetic discussion with a renowned feminist theologian from Mexico on the evening of Friday, 30 July 1999. Dr. Sylvia Marcos is a professor of theology most recently at Union Theological Seminary in New York and has focused her professional life on the articulation of women’s theology, primarily working with the indigenous Mayan women of Mexico. Significantly, Dr. Marcos is a second-generation Mexican with Palestinian roots.

She expressed that liberation theology is by its very nature contextual. The Incarnation takes root in specific contexts within particular cultures. These realities always influence the shape of religion and the nature of the liberation needed. She stressed that it is in living our faith, practicing it, that concepts of theology are created. The practice of faith by men and women is not the same, and too often when women articulate a position, it falls into a well of silence. When both men and women reflect more deeply about their practice of faith, it enriches the links between them, as well as between humanity and God.

She then spoke more specifically about women's participation in Mexican society, explaining that the various factions of the women's movement focus on social, spiritual and political realities, some to the exclusion of the indigenous women of Mexico.

Dr. Marcos reminded those gathered of the sophistication of the ancient people of Mexico. She explained that currently the Indian people have rights within the Mexican constitution, but in their daily reality, those rights do not exist. One of the important contributions of liberation theologies is to make sure the voices of the oppressed and marginalized around the world are not silenced through imposed first world cultural hegemony. †

The Rev. Sandra Olewine is a Methodist pastor currently working with Catholic Relief Services.

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Celebration 2000:

Local Conferences

The millennium is a unique opportunity for Palestinian Christians of all denominations to celebrate the birth of Christ in the land where they have been witnessing continuously for 2,000 years. In a demonstration of ecumenical unity, they will be able to rejuvenate their faith and renew their commitment through two conference/celebrations to be held in Bethlehem March 11-12 and in Nazareth April 8-9.

The program consists of workshops revolving around Jesus, joyful musical presentations, and ecumenical worship services. What's more, there will be a mobile program transporting the celebration to believers in remote corners of Palesine and Israel.

Sabeel urges everyone to participate, if not physically, then through prayerful support and contributions. The programs will entail the commission of writers, singers, poets and dancers, among other expenditures, so we appreciate all your help in making this an unforgettable and enriching experience.

Our Story

The Palestinian experience from 1948 to 1998 has been on tour via a photo exhibit in the U.S., U.K., Sweden, Australia, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Israel and Lebanon. If you missed it, you can view this exhibit in your own home! The photographic history book is well on its way to completion.