

Cornerstone



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**Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center Announces
An Alternative Assembly
Speaking Truth, Seeking Justice**
In place of its Fourth International Conference

21-24 February 2001 Jerusalem

The Assembly Seeks To: Focus on the current crisis. Educate and raise awareness about real time "facts on the ground". Address issues of justice and human dignity both theologically and politically. Expose structures of domination. Strengthen global ties of solidarity with the Palestinian People. Call for justice, liberty, human rights and equality. Explain how to share first-hand information with others and to advocate for justice upon your return home.

The Alternative Assembly experience will include:

Exposure: opportunities to see the effects of the occupation on Palestinian life. Visits throughout the West Bank to towns and villages, settlements and refugee camps, churches and secular institutions,*

Education and Interpretation: Palestinian and Israeli speakers will facilitate our discussions and provide us with insight and analysis of unfolding political, economic and social realities,

Solidarity: an opportunity to support the Palestinians and stand with them as they strive to achieve a just peace,

Advocacy and Activism: to raise a voice for truth and justice and coordinate international campaigns. A Justice March is being planned,

Post Conference Tours (optional): Feb. 25-26: 2 day trip to Gaza (assuming access is possible) or the Galilee – with overnight stay; Feb. 25: Half day tour of Jerusalem's Old City,

Reflection: time for worship, prayer, meditation and response.

Assembly Fees:	Individual	Student	Group Rate	FOS Member	FOS Group Rate
(to be paid to Sabeel)	\$275	\$220	\$250	\$250	\$230
Assembly Package*: <small>(Does not include assembly registration fees)</small>			Hotels		
<i>from:</i> New York	3 Star	\$900	4 Star	\$950	5 Star \$1150
London		\$580		\$660	\$800
Stockholm		\$650		\$700	\$900

(Assembly package and Post Assembly tours to be paid directly to Shepherds Tours)

*Includes: Roundtrip air fare, 5 nights accommodation. half board basis, (5 star includes bed & breakfast), airport taxes, and airport shuttle service. Contact Shepherds Tours and Travel Co., Ltd., PO Box 19560, Jerusalem, Tel: ++972.2.628.4121, Fax: ++972.2.628.0251, email: shepherd@baraka.org (Pre and post assembly extensions available).

If you have already registered for the Fourth International Conference, please reconfirm your participation in the Alternative Assembly. If you wish to withdraw your registration, please contact us.

For more information on the Alternative Assembly, or to register contact

Email: conf2001@sabeel.org, tel: (+972-2) 532-7136, fax: (+972-2) 532-7137
or mail: Sabeel, PO Box 49084, Jerusalem 91491
Go to www.sabeel.org/conf2001 for the latest.

For more information on travel and accomodation contact [Shepherd Tours](#)

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Our faith tells us that ultimately it is not the "Herods" of this world that contribute to the well being of society. The "Herods" will come and go.

History will exonerate those who strive, like Jesus Christ, for peace and goodwill among people.

[TOP](#)**The Massacre of the Innocents - A Christmas Reflection***by Naim Ateek*

According to the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi came to Jerusalem from the East in search of a royal baby whose birth they had seen foretold by the stars. They stopped to enquire from Herod, the local king, the whereabouts of this child. Herod's religious advisors gave the opinion that a royal birth would take place in the nearby village of Bethlehem. The Magi set out on the last stage of their journey, with a request from Herod to report back to him where the birthplace was, so that he too could go and pay homage to the child. They did not realize, however, that Herod was a tyrant who felt threatened by the prospect of any rival, however tiny, to his unchallenged rule.

The Magi went to Bethlehem, found Jesus, paid him their honor, gave him their precious gifts and returned home without going back to Herod, having been warned of his ill intentions. Wishing to leave nothing to chance, Herod ordered his security forces to sweep the Bethlehem area and kill all children under the age of two.

In the Christian tradition, Herod's cold-blooded action is known as the Massacre of the Innocents, and its victims are regarded by the church as martyrs. It is a sobering reminder that the coming of the One whose life represents goodness and truth, peace and justice to the world, provoked an evil response from the ruling power. The innocents were helplessly caught between the domination of a violent man and the reign of the Prince of Peace.

The Christmas message for this year takes cognizance of the story of King Herod, the baby Jesus, and the massacre of the innocents. The events of the past three months of protest in Palestine have seen the killing of many children, youths, and even elderly people by the Israeli army. We have witnessed the destruction of many homes and businesses and a siege imposed on three million Palestinians. The state of Israel has been brutally gunning down hundreds of people and injuring thousands whose only crime is their desire for a life of freedom and the independence of their own country from the oppressive occupation.

King Herod allowed himself to stoop down to the basest of all feelings. He stripped himself of all semblance of humanity when he ordered the killing of innocent children. This scenario is being repeated in a different guise. Almost 40% of those killed have been less than 18 years old. Some younger teenagers died by bullets fired from further away than their stones of protest could possibly reach. These young Palestinians posed minimal threat, no real danger to their killers. Why do Israeli soldiers target protesters in the upper parts of their body, given the use of such powerful weapons? This expresses the intent to destroy, not deter. These deaths are a crime against the value of human life. They dehumanize not only the killers, but also those who command them.

At this Christmas time, when we remember the message of peace and love that came down from God to earth in the birth of Jesus Christ, our celebrations are marred by the destructive powers of the modern day "Herods" who are represented in the Israeli government. The message of this Christmas is already overshadowed by the sound of war, violence, and state terror. Indeed, violence breeds violence, and innocent people have been killed on both sides. But the original sin is the violence of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. When the Israeli leadership calls daily for the termination of the

violence, for us this means, the occupation must end. It is the occupation that is evil and violent. It is apartheid in its ugliest form. Once the occupation ends, the violence will end. There is no other proper sequence. The sooner the Israeli leadership understands this, the quicker we will achieve an enduring peace.

Our faith tells us that ultimately, it is not the "Herods" of this world that contribute to the well being of society. The "Herods" will come and go. Indeed, while they are with us, they use all kinds of destructive force to kill, maim, and create havoc. Power blinds them. They are deluded in believing that they can steer history as they wish and charter its course. They are fools. The God of history who is the God of justice and peace will not allow it. The movement of history is toward the liberation of people and against their subjugation and oppression. It is for freedom and democracy and against tyranny and apartheid. History will condemn those obstructionists who knew not the things that make for peace. They heap untold destruction and misery upon themselves and many innocent people.

History will exonerate those who strive, like Jesus Christ, for peace and goodwill among people. Our world needs leaders who work to establish justice and peace and have a true knowledge of God, the one who desires justice and who calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. The message for this Christmas is a call to struggle against all forms of dehumanization: domination, apartheid, racism, occupation, oppression and ethnic cleansing. We must strive for all that leads to genuine peace: justice, reconciliation, sharing, non-violence, forgiveness, neighborliness, and respect for the rights and dignity of others.

The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is president of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem.

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A Meditation on the Feast of the Holy Innocents

(celebrated on December 28)

Anyone who has loved a child reacts with great emotion to the idea of any child suffering. The innocence and beauty of a little child is the best argument I know for the goodness of creation.

That is why this story of the wicked king who slaughtered the little children touches us so. I know of a woman, now well into her retirement years, who never misses church on this day. She lost her six-year-old son over fifty years ago to diphtheria. I know of another man who lost his son, struck down in the prime of his young manhood by a drunken driver; he never misses, either. Both of these people have accepted their terrible losses, but both know that they will never be the same again. Something irreplaceable has been lost to the world in the death of a child. Something unnatural has occurred.

The slaughter of the innocents-the children of any era, not just first-century Palestine-calls us to embrace all living children and feel responsibility for their care. Their innocence, and the right they have to that innocence, forbids us to think of any child as someone else's problem. Not just precious to their parents, they are precious to the human family.

The loss of even one is a slaughter.

*Bishop Edmond Browning
Former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A.
President of Friends of Peace & Justice in the Holy Land*



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Ramallah Priest's Ordeal

Ramallah is a Palestinian city situated ten miles north of Jerusalem. It has a population of approximately 35 thousand. Father Ibrahim Hijazin, the Roman Catholic parish priest of Ramallah, is a respected figure in the city. He initiated a "Peace Education Program" in the Latin Patriarchate School which he runs there. He spoke proudly, but also sadly (in the light of recent events) about his project.

"We are the first school in Palestine to have meetings with Israeli students and teachers," he said of a program, which began five years ago. "We have had many meetings with Israeli schools about the peace process, the environment and water resources, as well as games like basketball. But when our students see the killing on TV, how can we teach and convince them of a real peace with Israelis, whom they see killing their people and taking their land?" The frustration which Father Ibrahim feels is reflected in the faces and speeches of his teachers and students, as well as their parents. In this atmosphere, it is easy to despair-- even more so for Father Ibrahim, who has suffered aggression himself.

He was driving back to Ramallah from nearby Nablus, where he had been conducting services. As always, he used the main road between the two towns. At about 6:20 he was stopped by a group of between 45 and 50 Israelis from the nearby settlement of Shilo, who were blocking the road. They were middle-aged, dressed in civilian clothes. The men carried machine-guns; the women were blocking the road with boulders to halt traffic. As the priest brought his vehicle to a halt, a well-dressed man addressed him: "What is your business here?" "I am a Catholic priest," he replied, "returning to my parish from religious services in Nablus." (He was dressed in cassock and clerical collar.) When asked for his papers, he produced his Vatican passport, at which one of the men scoffed before throwing it back into the car. The leader shrugged and stated, "You can't use this road; it is for Israelis only. Go back." "But I used it only hours ago. I always use it; it's a main road," Father Ibrahim replied.

At this the leader levelled his gun at the priest's head and repeated that the road was for Jews only. The people behind him were beginning to get angry, shouting and gesticulating at the car. Father Ibrahim put the vehicle in reverse and attempted to turn around. Behind him, however, had gathered another group of some 30 younger settlers in their mid-20s. One of these approached the driver's side and said, "Shalom." Father Ibrahim replied, "Shalom," and was astonished to hear the breaking of glass from his rear window. He looked back to see that the younger group had surrounded the car, were gathering stones and hurling them from as close as two or three yards away. The attack continued until they had run out of stones, by which time every window of his vehicle had been smashed, every plate dented; he too had been struck on the arm. He quickly put his car into gear and set off the way he had come, in a state of severe shock.

At a nearby service station, the owners took one look at the condition of the car and its driver, and called the police. They refused to come. Then they called the army, which did not come. Father Ibrahim was wondering what to do, driving back to Nablus would be dangerous after dark (since he would face the threat of another attack from other settlements; yet he could not risk returning to the blockade). Then an Arab taxi drove past in a hurry. A quarter of an hour later, however, the cab returned. Its elderly driver and his vehicle had received the same treatment as

Father Ibrahim and the his car. The driver told him that he knew a back road to Ramallah, so the priest followed him slowly home.

The next day, Father Ibrahim visited the police station in Jerusalem. The officers there redirected him to offices in Beit El, where he filled out numerous forms and reminded the officer in charge that, by law, he should be compensated by the government for this attack. "I'm sorry," shrugged the policeman. Israeli laws stipulate that the government should pay compensation for damages done by Palestinians, but not by Israeli citizens. "If you want to take this matter any further," said the police officer, "you will have to go to Shilo and sue these people yourself." The priest threw the papers on the desk in disgust, and left. The 10,000 shekel (\$2,500) bill for repairs to his vehicle was paid by the Latin Patriarchate, from funds raised abroad for schools, housing projects, and other needs of the local church.

This is not the only time Father Ibrahim has felt the threat of violence. He has had guns pointed at his head, and his Vatican passport does little to curry favour with Israeli officialdom. Once, he was travelling in a car with a group comprised of both Christians and Muslims. Soldiers stopped the car and ordered the Christians to dismount while the Muslims stayed inside the vehicle. "This was to divide the Muslims and Christians," the priest observed. He was the first in line to dismount, but refused, saying, "Either we all get down or we all stay inside." Consequently, he was made to wait in the street for four hours.

In the light of such experiences, it is understandable that Father Ibrahim could say: "Israel has no respect for anybody, only for its own benefits." Still he also stresses that "the Jews are human beings like us." Father Ibrahim is now working to bring about peace without violence. Churches in Ramallah have organized demonstrations in which the parishes pray and march alongside each other with candles, singing songs of peace. They have been joined by many Muslims, who feel solidarity with their compatriots. But Father Ibrahim is under no illusions. He does not expect peace overnight. "Worse is to come for all the Palestinian people," he fears. "Maybe soon we will have no food, no water, no electricity." In a country whose economy is losing \$200 million a day, this is a frightening prospect. But Father Ibrahim retains his conviction of peace: he hopes there will be "real peace, the baby of justice."

He adds a final note: "Without justice, we'll never find peace."

Ex: Catholic World News



"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome
it." John 1:5

INTIFADA SPECIAL EDITION

Christmas Message

During this Christmas season, as the political and economic situation of our country is deteriorating rapidly, we are not able to enjoy the spirit of Christmas as we have known it. Our hearts are heavy with sorrow and grief for all those who have been killed and wounded. As Christmas was marred when King Herod slaughtered the innocent children, so our Christmas this year has been marred by the killing, injuring, and suffering of thousands of our people around us. How can we celebrate?

We believe that Jesus Christ is God's gift to a humanity that longed and continues to long for a world emancipated from fear, violence, and evil. The first words to announce Jesus' birth were, "Do not be afraid ... I bring you good news..." The good news is that salvation and liberation are possible in the midst of the destructive powers of evil. Christmas becomes not only a historic reality but also a promise that peace, joy, and love are the enduring gifts of God to humanity. These gifts take precedence over the forces of death and inspire in us hope that life with God is worth living and striving for.

During this Christmas, as always, we hope and trust in a loving God who, in the coming of Jesus Christ, has shown us the way for "peace on earth". It is nothing less than a life lived in love of God and neighbor. We will continue to strive for this end. We ask you to stand with us. May the peace, love, and joy of Christmas fill your hearts and ours and bring us closer to what we aspire for, a peace based on justice for all the people of our land so that joy and love may abound.

*Naim Ateek
President of Sabeel*

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Anatomy of Economic Violence

by Suzanne Goldberg

Cries falling on deaf ears

1.5 million people in the West Bank and Gaza could go hungry due to Israel's military and economic blockade. The military blockade of Gaza and the West Bank is at one moment being relaxed for public relations purposes and then tightened again, "for security reasons", thus drastically limiting the supply of fuel and all commodities. On occasions medical supplies are held up at checkpoints for no account, though the need for these is urgent, given the numbers of injured being cared for.

Urgent appeals for help have been issued by the UN's Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme. "My impression is that donors are not responding," said one official. "In the past, they linked assistance to the peace process. Now there is no peace process, so they tend not to respond."

Israel's prime minister, Ehud Barak says that these shortages are deliberate. Economic sanctions plus army firepower, is intended to punish all Palestinians for the actions of the handful who fire on troops and Jewish settlements in Gaza and the West Bank.

Statistics of oppression

Since the onset of the present Intifada, Israel's economic blockade on the West Bank and Gaza has been the little recognised face of a conflict which has claimed over 280 lives, and injured nearly ten thousand people so far. It has devastated the Palestinian economy, reversing all the progress made over the last five years, and bringing three million people - the overall population of the two territories - to the point of ruin.

In Gaza the population is especially vulnerable. A third of the labour force has been turned out of jobs across the border in Israel, and tens of thousands of others have lost local work in the building industry because of a blockade on the export of concrete. By the end of the year, about 892,000 people in Gaza, including 635,000 refugees, will have exhausted their savings and need food aid, UNRWA and the WFP predict.

Some 554,000 Palestinians in the West Bank, of whom some 450,000 are refugees, are in similar trouble. By conservative estimates, that means 1.45m of the 3m people in Gaza and the West Bank will need food aid. To feed them, and to rebuild homes and infrastructure, UNRWA is asking for \$39 million for the next three months alone. The WFP wants \$4 million to cover next month's food aid. "They do not have any stocks. It is really hard to mouth. Every day finds the situation more tense in the camps," said Karen Koning AbuZayd, Gaza's deputy commissioner for UNRWA.

Outside the blue gates of the UNRWA field office in Jabaliya refugee camp, desperate women queue from early morning. The officials inside have exhausted

their quotas, and have nothing to give them. "People cannot pay for electricity, water, tuition for their children, school supplies. Some cannot buy meat," said one field officer.

In the abyss of debt

Until Israel closed the borders, sealing Gaza behind an electrified fence, members of the el-Eilah family could count themselves among the more prosperous of Jabaliya's inhabitants. Rajab Mohammed Eilah would rise with his two sons every morning at 4am, wait for hours at the Erez crossing for soldiers to check his coveted pink permit to enter Israel, and then go to work as a painter just up the coast in Ashqelon. On a good day, he could count on earning 150 shekels (about \$40). Now he is owed a fortnight's wages by his Israeli boss, and is asking round local shops for credit. "I went to five grocers and asked for credit. I just hope that when the closure ends I can go to work and repay them," he said. "But God only knows." His debts for the last month add up to nearly \$660.

Destitution and grief

A few blocks away, Latifa Abdullah Muqayied's home is bare, except for a photo of her son, Lou'ai, 20, which hangs above a rough sketch of Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque. His head was blown off by machine-gun fire from an Israeli helicopter on October 6, robbing the 10-strong family of its one potential bread-winner. Mrs Muqayied has firewood stacked on her asbestos roof for when her cooking gas runs out. In the last few days, gas has disappeared from the shops as the blockade bites. Mrs Muqayied says shops have run out of basics such as sugar, oil and flour.

Economic with the truth

"We have no intention of strangling [the Palestinians]," said Nahman Shai, an Israeli government spokesman. "Just creating pressure in a careful and delicate dosage." For the Palestinians, the approach is sheer folly. In Gaza it is practically impossible to find anyone who will openly say the time has come to resume peace talks with Israel. "This is the harvest of the peace process - de facto apartheid - social and economic suffocation of our people."

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How to Start an Uprising

by Jeff Halper

First, you create great expectations. Handshakes on the White House lawn. A rhetoric of peace ("No more war. No more bloodshed"). Elections, giving them a flag of their own. Then secret meetings, summit meetings, dinners, retreats, peace treaties, interim agreements, promises, tantalizing benefits held before hungry eyes. More handshakes, more "gestures."

Then you create a framework of peace that guarantees you negotiating superiority. Take out international law, human rights covenants, UN resolutions, and for good measure enlist your strategic ally, the strongest power in the world, the one who supplies you with all your arms, as the "mediator."

Then, as you talk peace in Oslo, Washington, Paris, Cairo, the Wye Plantation, Stockholm, Amman, Camp David, Sharm, you "create facts" on the ground that ensure your continued control and prejudice the negotiations altogether. You exploit the last seven years since the signing of the Oslo Accords to:

- * Dismember the West Bank into "Areas A, B and C," giving the Palestinian Authority full control of only 18% of the land while retaining control over 61%; divide tiny Gaza into "yellow, white, blue and green areas," giving 6,000 settlers control of 40% of the territory and confining 1,000,000 Palestinians to the rest; and completely sever East Jerusalem from the wider Palestinian society;
- * Expropriate 200 square kilometers of farm and pasture land from its Palestinian owners for your own exclusive settlements, highways and infrastructure;
- * Uproot some 80,000 olive and fruit trees that are in the way of your construction projects, thereby impoverishing their owners and making them casual day workers in your labor market — provided they can get access to your labor market;
- * Add some 30 new settlements, including whole cities like Kiryat Sefer and Tel Zion, to the dozens of settlements that already exist in the Occupied Territories over which negotiations are taking place, and construct 90,000 new housing units in East Jerusalem and the settlements exclusively for your own population;
- * Demolish more than 1200 homes of the people with whom you are negotiating peace;
- * Double your settler population across the 1967 border to 400,000, 90% of which you have already decided will remain under your sovereignty even though you haven't negotiated that with the other side yet;
- * Begin construction of 480 kms of massive highways and "by-pass" roads serving your settlements while dissecting the future territory of your peace partner into tiny disconnected islands, thereby preventing the emergence of another viable and competing economy next door;
- * Impose a permanent "closure" to prevent those whose lands you took from finding employment in your own economy, because you have discovered that workers from Rumania and Thailand are cheaper and more docile. While you're at it, you also exclude them from entering Jerusalem, the site of their holiest places;

* Exploit their natural resources, unilaterally and illegally drawing, for example, 25% of your country's water from your neighbors' aquifers while leaving them thirsty for months on end;

* Vandalize their countryside and environment, burying its fragile historic landscape under your massive settlements and highways and turning it into a disposal site for your industrial and urban wastes.

Next, you wait until your occupation has become irreversible and all-encompassing, until you've integrated your two economies under your control, the electrical grids, the highway and urban infrastructure, until you've completely absorbed your partner's economy and society into your own. Then you announce that your concept of peace is "separation," and you lock your neighbors into a few small islands, taking away any hope they have for a better future, for a real country and identity of their own. You keep tightening your control, restricting their life space, humiliating and harassing them — until the uprising finally explodes.

Then you tell your story to the world: how you tried to negotiate, how "generous" you had been, how you wanted peace, and how disappointed you feel that "they" let you down. How "they" met your good intentions with stones, how "they" are not partners for peace, how "they" are not yet ready for peace. And so, until they agree to end their violence against you and return to the same negotiating table that allowed you to construct your matrix of control in the first place, you resort to force — defensive force, of course, since "they" are the aggressors. The most up-to-date American weapon systems, snipers, closures until starvation, clearing thousands of acres of agricultural land, destruction of hundreds of houses.... Until they get the message.

Jeff Halper teaches anthropology at Ben Gurion University in Israel. He is co-ordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) and is editor of the critical Israeli-Palestinian magazine NEWS FROM WITHIN, published by the Alternative Information Center.

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"O Little Town of Bethlehem, 2000"

Who dares sing this version in public?

Oh Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and restless sleep, a missile glideth by.
And over dark streets soundeth the mortar's deadly roar
While children weep in shallow sleep for friends who are no more.

How silently, how silently their hope has gone away.
No laughter rings; no choir sings in shepherds' fields this day.
The angels in the heavens are hushed in sad lament.
Messiah's home has been burned down by those to whom He was sent.

Oh sing for wholly innocents who hurled a hopeless stone.
Who ran from tank, who, wounded, sank in gutters all alone.
Their eyes by bullet blinded, their lungs by gasses burned
In sad exile, the Holy Child knows Herod has returned.

O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray.
Your love bring down on David's town; Drive fear and hate away.
Awake the ire of nations, let justice be restored.
Rebuild the peace in silent streets where once your love was born.

Don Hinchey, Littleton, Colorado, November 9, 2000



"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome
it." John 1:5

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Christmas Message

During this Christmas season, as the political and economic situation of our country is deteriorating rapidly, we are not able to enjoy the spirit of Christmas as we have known it. Our hearts are heavy with sorrow and grief for all those who have been killed and wounded. As Christmas was marred when King Herod slaughtered the innocent children, so our Christmas this year has been marred by the killing, injuring, and suffering of thousands of our people around us. How can we celebrate?

We believe that Jesus Christ is God's gift to a humanity that longed and continues to long for a world emancipated from fear, violence, and evil. The first words to announce Jesus' birth were, "Do not be afraid ... I bring you good news..." The good news is that salvation and liberation are possible in the midst of the destructive powers of evil. Christmas becomes not only a historic reality but also a promise that peace, joy, and love are the enduring gifts of God to humanity. These gifts take precedence over the forces of death and inspire in us hope that life with God is worth living and striving for.

During this Christmas, as always, we hope and trust in a loving God who, in the coming of Jesus Christ, has shown us the way for "peace on earth". It is nothing less than a life lived in love of God and neighbor. We will continue to strive for this end. We ask you to stand with us. May the peace, love, and joy of Christmas fill your hearts and ours and bring us closer to what we aspire for, a peace based on justice for all the people of our land so that joy and love may abound.

*Naim Ateek
President of Sabeel*

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Prayer for use by those excluded from pilgrimage to Bethlehem 2000

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, born as one of us,
we come to you, confiding our shame and grief, anger and sorrow
for once again, the land made holy by the shedding of your blood
is stained by the blood of innocents slain.

Although the doors of your birthplace remain ever open to welcome
the joy and trust of your faithful people,
few can enter, who long to dwell in your house;
for this land is dominated by those
who live by violence and the fear of violence.

Have mercy upon us and forgive us
for whatever we have done or left undone
to betray your reign of justice truth and love -
our failure to calm or conquer fear.

Strengthen us now, we pray,
to persevere in hope against hope
that your kingdom will come and your will be done.
May we take to heart all that you teach us.
May we grow more like you, Prince of Peace.

Give us courage to celebrate your coming to birth
and your coming to us from the grave, through closed doors
and past cordons raised by fear, suspicion and doubt.
Come and reveal yourself to us, Lord Jesus
at this time of suffering and injustice
wherever we feel trapped by
oppression or unbelief, exhaustion or despair.
Turn this exile of sorrow and weakness
into a new homeland of joy and strength;
by the grace of your lifegiving Spirit among us, Amen.

*We cannot deny the grief
and indignation we feel.
We are wounded
for love of You, and for this land.
Save us, O Lord
from hardening of heart
from contempt for your Word,
and for our neighbours.*

(Fr. Keith Kimber)

Welsh Anglican priest working in Europe who spent his sabbatical volunteering at Sabeel in Jerusalem.

Almighty God,
you created us in your own image:

give us grace
fearlessly to contend against evil
and to make no peace with oppression.

And that we may
reverently use our freedom,
help us to employ it
in the maintenance of justice
in our communities, and
among the nations,
for Christ's sake
Amen

(US Episcopal Prayer Book)



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Sabeel Underlines its Position

1. We are deeply grieved at the deteriorating situation in our country, over 300 of our people killed and ten thousand injured by the Israeli army and settlers. We experience daily the apartheid policy of closures of our Palestinian areas, the arbitrary roadblocks that humiliate and dehumanize our people, the drastic economic siege and rising rate of unemployment, the deep pain and suffering of the injured and their families, the violations of our human rights, the oppressive measures carried out with impunity against us, the bombardment of Palestinian residential areas, not to mention the painful feelings of hopelessness and despair.
2. We are shocked and outraged at the inhuman and brutal policy of the Israeli Government, the onslaught of its military machine, and the apparent apathy and callousness of many Israeli Jews for the value of Palestinian human life.
3. We believe that the foundational injustice and the primary cause of our present predicament is the continuing illegal Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Israel's refusal to comply with international law.
4. Palestine is our home and our country of origin. As Palestinian Christians, we are ethnically Arab and with our Muslim brothers and sisters we make up the Palestinian people. The fifty-two years of dispossession and the thirty three years of occupation have affected us as Palestinians regardless of our religious affiliation. We stand together as one people integrally united against the Israeli occupation of our country and the continued oppression of our people.
5. Any attempt by Israel or any other group to drive a wedge between us and our Muslim brothers and sisters will fail. We are one nation, we struggle for the same objectives, and have the same aspirations for liberty, independence, and sovereignty.
6. We reject the call to a return to the status quo ante because that means the continuation of the oppressive Israeli occupation, the subjugation of our people, the Israeli free hand to confiscate more land, and the expansion of the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.
7. We are appalled and frustrated by the blatant bias of the United States Government toward Israel. We feel that Israel's intransigence is due, in large part, to unconditional US military, financial and political support of Israel in spite of its defiance of international law and UN resolutions.
8. We demand that the UN assume its responsibility in sponsoring the peace negotiations. A new framework is needed based on UN resolutions 242, 338, and 194 and the Fourth Geneva Convention for the protection of the Palestinian people as well as relevant human rights conventions. Justice and peace will be achieved when Israel fulfills its obligations under international law.
9. We call on all people of good will to work with us to put an end to the evil occupation of our country and support us in our struggle for liberation and self - determination.

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Intifada Snapshots

Sabeel came into being during the first Intifada, its ministry being molded by the needs of the local Christians, eager to find answers to the unending plight of the Palestinians. For the past decade, it has sought non-violent ways of working for a just peace and has attempted to internationally bring awareness about the urgency of putting an end to occupation.

The second intifada that erupted three months ago did not come as a surprise at all... for the occupation has not ended. However, like all local institutions and individuals, the tremors of this new phase have affected Sabeel and its staff. Thankful that many of the summer programs were smoothly carried out, the disappointment for postponing or canceling some of the planned activities was quickly replaced by the challenge to operate in an emergency situation.

There were days when Hilary, Estephan and Dan could not come in from Ramallah, Jifna and Beit Jala. Consequently, office work was disrupted and decisions delayed. We were especially concerned for Dan's safety as Beit Jala, where he lives, was under frequent shelling and bombardment.

All our efforts were immediately geared towards mobilizing the community and Sabeel turned to the clergy, women and youth, committed members of this one large family. As early as the Camp David talks, Sabeel had started consulting with local and international Church-related organizations (CROs) about strategies for a unified stand in the face of continuing injustice.

On October 5, Sabeel sent out its own [appeal](#) to the International Community urging friends to show solidarity by:

- a) **holding special ecumenical prayers for the end of the present tragedy and for a just peace to be established**
- b) **urging their government to pressure Israel to end the massacre and to insist that UN resolutions 242 and 338 which call for the end of the Israeli occupation are implemented.**
- c) **ensuring that the media portrays the truth of the current situation in Palestine and Israel with honesty and objectivity, and without bias.**

This last point was at the core of discussions of both local and international CROs meetings with Sabeelers. Sabeel's contribution so far has been to include personal stories and news on the website on a regular basis.

Together, we assessed the immediate problems and needs of a community under political and economic siege mainly, the increasing unemployment and the trauma of children living in fear. In addition, we explored the possibilities of cooperation in the following areas: media, congregational education, non-violent struggle, relief and support and advocacy.

The presence of expatriates within areas of conflict was discussed. One such effort is that of the CPT, who have started a new "station" in Beit Jala with Sr. Anne Montgomery and Pierre Shantz braving the Israeli shelling on the front lines with their peaceful presence.

During this critical time, the importance of a unified stand of Muslims and Christians, clergy and lay people in the face of "yet to come" calamities was emphasized.

One of the first initiatives of Sabeel was to call for an ecumenical worship service. The idea was adopted by all the Church leaders who, on October 12, met at St. Stephen's Church, (the Dominican Fathers) to pray for peace. It was a very moving service with Patriarchs, Bishops, clergy, and laypeople of all the various churches joining together and lifting their prayers to God for a just and peaceful end to this long and agonizing conflict.

Solidarity visits

Sabeel also organized three solidarity visits to hospitals and towns in the Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas. Clergy, women and youth joined in offering comfort, expressing solidarity and learning the truth firsthand.

The first visit, on October 5 was in the Jerusalem area to the four hospitals to which the casualties of the Aqsa massacre on September 29 were rushed. We were witnessing the living proof of the illegal use of bullets fired at close range. But severed limbs and torn internal tissues did not dampen the spirits of these young men from Jerusalem, Gaza, Hebron or Nablus, ready to offer even their lives for a free Palestine. At their bedsides, mothers, wives and sisters stood quietly, stoically accepting the ill-fate of their loved ones, too shocked to question or analyze the implications of such sacrifice.

The visit ended in Sawahreh village, close to Abu Dis where, a day earlier, 23 year old Muhammad al Imwassi had been laid to rest. He was killed by Israeli soldiers at the outskirts of Ramallah. Under a large tent where Qur'anic verses were being recited, Muhammad's father and uncles accepted the condolences of the male visitors, while the women in the group headed toward the family home to express their sympathy. Muhammad's mother mourned her first born whose wedding was to take place the next Friday. There would be no chanting, no dancing and no ululation. The mother of the martyr, the hero, cried silently; her grief too deep to be comforted.

The second visit on November 6, Sabeel's solidarity trip took two van loads and a car towards Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. Strangely enough, the crossing at the checkpoint was not too difficult; for once the presence of clergy with collars and cassocks in the group had its effect. In Beit Jala, the Orthodox priest, George Shahwan guided the group into what was once a quietly beautiful residential area. Apache helicopter missiles and tank shells had erased both beauty and quiet. We visited only six homes (there were many more) and could hardly absorb what we were seeing. Kitchens and furniture as well as children's toys and bedrooms were all under rubble.

The patriarch of the Kayssiah family sat at the entrance of his home, his eyes reddened from tears. He spoke very little, and it was the younger sons and daughters who filled in the details. Over 25 people lived there, but they had all fled, like their neighbors, for safety. Was history repeating itself? Would the Palestinians be driven out again as in 1948?

Then the father rose and calling upon the priests in the group, he held up a framed

picture of Jesus Christ. This, he explained had been blown out of the house along with the window frames and bricks five meters below, but somehow it had been preserved without one single scratch or fissure in the glass. Nothing, he said could shake his faith. What a lesson to learn amidst all this devastation!

Among the visitors who had accompanied the Sabeelers from Jerusalem were representatives of women's organizations, a Palestinian filmmaker and members of Young Christian Workers. In Beit Jala, they were joined by some young people who had participated in the First Ecumenical Youth Leaders Conference organized by Sabeel in Emmaus on September 13 and 14. For lack of space, only 120 participants had been able to attend, including 20 Galileans, but it was a fruitful encounter resulting in the election of a steering committee, who, with Estephan Salameh, the Youth Coordinator, would oversee the coordination and cooperation of all church-related youth groups in the country. Now these young leaders were undertaking the task of documenting all that they witnessed.

In Beit Sahour, the smell of burnt objects prepared us for what we were to see. As Father Yacoub Khoury and his wife led the way, it soon became apparent that this small town, where the shepherds had received the peaceful message of the angels 2000 years ago, was in havoc. One Israeli military camp situated at one end of the town had, without provocation, shelled the neighborhood. They had shot at houses (one was completely burnt out) and water reservoirs and had uprooted olive trees (this was the olive-picking season!)

Our last stop was in Aida refugee camp. (We had to take a detour to avoid the daily stone vs. bullet confrontation at the entrance of Bethlehem which often resulted in the death of innocent by passers.) Muayyad Jawarish was only 14, the oldest child in the family and was walking back from school when Israeli bullets pierced his heart, his school satchel still hanging on his back. On the walls leading to the Jawarish family, two pictures were pasted, one was that of Muayyad, the other of his cousin who had been killed during the first Intifada. Where can one find words to express sympathy to a mother who still cannot grasp the loss of her son's life?

The third visit, on December 3, took 36 young people to Beit Jala where they first prayed with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox parishioners, then they toured the town meeting with the owners of the demolished homes. Those same homes that we had seen a month earlier were now in a deplorable state or no more existed! The cry of the Palestinians had still not been heard. The shelling continued and there was no international protection.

The young people then visited the Fischer family offering condolences to the widow and children of the German chiropractor who had given his life trying to save his neighbors. No sooner had he stepped out of his house than he was killed by a missile. His body was badly mutilated. The experience in Beit Sahour was equally painful.

The positive aspects of these solidarity trips are the bonds of unity forged, the knowledge obtained, and the growth of community commitment and responsibility. The young people returned with more ideas of how to work together. They sat down to write a Christmas message that will soon appear on our website.

Truth and Justice Bible Studies

Feeling the need to replenish our faith and to find answers in the Bible, Sabeel

rallied the ecumenical community around a series of reflections on “Truth and Justice” The Bible Study went on for six weeks, every Tuesday evening. Representatives of the Maronite, Coptic, Roman Catholic and Syrian churches, the Rosary Sisters and Sabeel led the study, exploring passages from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Matthew, Luke, and John, digging deep to find comfort and strength at a time when truth is distorted and injustice prevails.

Clergy wives’ gathering

A group of women, all of them wives of clergy, gathered on December 2 at the Moniales de L’Emmanuel convent on the outskirts of Bethlehem. The charming quiet setting (only two streets away from the Bethlehem checkpoint) and the wonderful hospitality of the nuns made the encounter, though short, a very pleasant one. Invitations had been sent to these women of the Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas, and the response was very positive.

Eleven women from the Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches opened up in a warm atmosphere, sharing concerns and experiences before the coffee break at which we celebrated Leila Abu Saada’s birthday. (Leila is the wife of the Greek Catholic parish priest in Bethlehem who is a committed clergy participant at Sabeel.) Abla Nasser, a counsellor, facilitated a discussion about the challenges and hopes that face them.

As they bid farewell, the women decided to meet every two months. We hope that this first step will lead to wider opportunities to share with other clergy wives all over the country.

Muslim and Christian Clergy meet

Monday, December 11, Muslim and Christian Clerics as well as lay people met over a Ramadan Iftar (break the fast meal) to share and discuss common concerns. This is the first event of its kind at Sabeel.

Sabeel Nazareth Branch

The intifada that spread to Galilee also affected the Nazareth branch of Sabeel. Their activities during the last three months included a lecture by Dr. May Seikaly on the importance of Oral History and Documentation, an ecumenical worship service for justice and peace, a pilgrimage tour to the Nazareth Village Project (Sabeel Jerusalem had also visited it last August) and an ecumenical carol service.