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“Let Their Faces Move You...

...Let Their Cries Reach Your Heart”

by Andrew Ashdown

“We will cut off your electricity and your water supplies. You will be like a dead olive tree.” With these words a few months ago, the soldiers left the house of an elderly Palestinian woman in a small village east of Bethlehem. They had asked her and her family to leave the home and the land that the family has nurtured for nearly 200 years. In the valley below the village, the ancient olive groves, comprising of trees that were originally planted by the Romans, have been completely uprooted to make way for the 8 metre high concrete wall and series of fences that now snake for hundreds of kilometres around the Palestinian territories destroying thousands of acres of land and hundreds of homes - everything in its wake, cutting people off from families, work, schools, clinics, shops. Across the valley, yet another new settlement is being built on land that the farmers have cultivated for centuries, and where settlers have ‘expropriated’ the villagers’ remaining olive groves. When the wall is complete, the villagers

will not have access to the nearest school or clinic, and checkpoints, the other side of the village, will in effect imprison them in their own homes. Without electricity or water the villagers will almost certainly be forced out. Thousands of people, including hundreds of Christian families who trace their origins to the early Palestinian Christian community, have already left the Bethlehem area. This is the reality for dozens of ancient Palestinian communities today. It is a subtle (and not so subtle), insidious and strategic process of ethnic cleansing that is taking place. Yet it is not just the world that politically, militarily and financially supports the injustices of the aggressor, whilst remaining silent on the human rights abuses being committed daily on a vast scale against a whole civilian population entirely against international law. Millions of Christians who uphold a ‘Zionist’ agenda, support these acts and are complicit by their very theology in the violence of oppression and injustice being perpetrated against the Palestinian people.

It was to address this issue that the 5th International Sabeel Conference, "Challenging Christian Zionism" was held in Jerusalem in April 2004. It was a huge privilege to join over 500 delegates from over 30 countries, including renowned theologians and senior Church leaders, seeking to address, and answer, the devastating and dangerous implications of Christian Zionism. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theologians explored the history and theology of Christian Zionism and its social and political implications. Both Israeli and Palestinian speakers lent a powerful experiential dimension to the presentations. We are all familiar with the pressures and risks that pertain to 'speaking out' on this issue. Given the need for courageous and prophetic witness from the Church as a whole on this matter, it was a huge disappointment to all the delegates that the Archbishop of Canterbury, did not attend in person. We were grateful however that he sent his Ecumenical Secretary to give his address.

Given the practical difficulties faced by Palestinians in attending the Conference (there is little freedom of movement for ordinary Palestinians), the Conference as a whole 'went out' to the people. One day was spent in Ramallah at the Friends Boys School. That afternoon, President Yasser Arafat received us in what little remains of his headquarters in the city. Another day was to have been spent at Bethlehem University in Bethlehem, but because of Israel's targeted assassination of Dr. Abd-El-Aziz Rantisi in Gaza the day before we were due to transfer to Bethlehem, and the declaration of a three-day period of mourning it was advisable not to go ahead with our planned visit. A hastily arranged telephone link-up between the Notre Dame Conference Centre in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, enabled one of the scheduled speakers who does not have a permit to get to Jerusalem to address the conference by telephone hook-up.

Yet, for the quality of all the speakers and their presentations, the greatest strengths of the conference were perhaps the opportunity to experience something of the situation 'on the ground', and to engage with local and international people who are committed to working for a just peace in Palestine and Israel. On one of the days, we were warmly welcomed by the director of the Al-Aqsa Mosque to visit the Dome of the Rock compound. This was a huge act of generosity, given that the Dome of the Rock has been closed to all non-muslims for three years; and to welcome 500 of us to visit the site was no small invitation. It was a witness to how highly Sabeel is respected by people of different faiths in Jerusalem, and of the success of Sabeel's work of bridge-building, which is one of its cornerstones.

We also visited the Wall at Abu Dis and Bethany. No pictures or descriptions can fully prepare one for the impact of the wall; for its sheer size; the way it is cutting communities in two; and the sheer destruction and theft of land wrought by its construction. The Wall is now almost complete around the Bethlehem area. Its social, economic and environmental impact upon all who are imprisoned behind it is huge. It is a monstrous indictment of an ever-deepening policy of apartheid, and it is nothing short of a criminal action of huge proportions, built with the implicit and explicit complicity and support of western governments.

So what now? Sabeel is committed to peace with justice for all the people of Palestine and Israel, and non-violent advocacy for justice. It continues to be a vital resource for Palestinian Christians, not just in Palestine and Israel, but increasingly in neighbouring countries as well. Its work is ever-growing internationally through the Friends of Sabeel groups in the United States, Canada, UK, Ireland, Scandinavia, Australia, and The Netherlands. In an afternoon dedicated to strategy, all the delegates reaffirmed their commitment to working to challenge the powerful influence of Christian Zionism in the Churches, particularly in the United States, where Christian Zionists have a direct



influence on the policies of government. The following are just a few ways by which it is suggested this could be achieved:

* by the continuation of conferences internationally that explore a much more inclusive understanding of the scriptures, and the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim imperative of working for peace, justice and righteousness.

* through publications and other media formats addressing the history and theology of Christian Zionism (the work of Stephen Sizer, Marc Ellis and several other theologians who attended the Conference comes to mind).

* The continued lobbying of governments. All Christians including Church leaders have a particular responsibility in this respect.

* Through the widespread informing and education of Christians everywhere of both the reality of the situation in Palestine, and of the theological issues that underlie the history of injustice that has been perpetrated on the Palestinian people by the Zionist agenda.

* Through visits to Palestine. There can be no greater insight to the realities of the situation than to make a personal visit. Sabeel will be planning a series of solidarity visits over the next few years.

* We also urge greater contact with and support for the Christian community in Palestine and Israel.

We in the churches need to challenge theological principles that help to create and to sustain oppression, but most of all, we need to take up the prophetic mandate to speak out against all that is unjust and that only sustains a cycle of hatred and violence. Reconciliation can only begin where there is recognition and acknowledgement of truth, and repentance for all that has created violence and suffering. South Africa presents us with a useful model in this respect. For whilst injustice, violence and human rights abuses are being perpe-

trated on a daily basis by the state of Israel against the civilian Palestinian population, and whilst western nations, and churches worldwide, acquiesce with their policies, it is unlikely that appalling acts of revenge committed out of despair will cease or that peace will be attained.

Whilst recognising that we have a huge and seemingly impossible task ahead of us, the conference in Jerusalem in April offered hope in reminding us that awareness of the reality in Palestine and Israel is growing significantly worldwide, and that there are many who are committed to this work. But there is little time. For every day that we hesitate to proclaim the truth, and speak out in love; for every day that justice is denied, innocent Palestinians and Israelis are dying and the situation is becoming more and more desperate.

In the course of the conference we were treated to some wonderful performances of dance, singing and music by young Palestinians. In a very moving song written by Sari Ateek Naim's son, he writes of the oppressed in Palestine: **"Let their faces move you, let their cries reach your heart. The compassion of Jesus is what sets you apart. If you've been searching for a way to please him, then you'll listen - he has shown the way. Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God. How long will the earth keep silent? Who'll say, 'enough's enough'?"**

This is the underlying principle behind the work of Sabeel. "Speak the truth. Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God." When we do so, then there will be peace for Israeli and Palestinian, for Jew, Christian and Muslim. It is the only way forward. We have begun the work. Now is the time to continue it apace - to strive unceasingly for the goal for which we all long, and which is so long overdue - peace with justice for everyone in the land.

The Revd. Andrew Ashdown, Chair of Friends of Sabeel, UK.



BIBLICAL REFLECTION

HOW CAN WE CONQUER?

“But they have conquered ... by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death” (Revelation 12:11)

By Naim Ateek

The following reflection is inspired by Dr. Barbara Rossing's book *The Rapture Exposed, Westview, 2004*. Barbara gave one of the Bible studies at the Fifth International Sabeel Conference. Unfortunately, I did not hear her, as I did not hear most of the other speakers because I was busy going in and out to attend to organizational matters.

After the conference, I read Barbara's book. It inspired me to write a sermon which I had the privilege of preaching last May at Chichester Cathedral in England. In this issue of Cornerstone, I am writing this reflection on Revelation 12:11 using material that has primarily been drawn from Barbara's book. I believe that its message is a fitting follow up to our conference on Christian Zionism.

Revelation is probably the most misunderstood book of the Bible and it has been opened to much abuse. Its wonderful message has been clouded and even buried by a misguided eschatology of the End times. Rather than marginalizing and neglecting Revelation, it is important to retrieve and to reclaim it as a New Testament book that contains a very important message of hope and victory for Christians and especially for all who live under persecution and oppression. Instead of leaving the book as the sole property of crazed fundamentalists, it is important for Christians to study it and to discover its spiritual and theological value. Revelation is not a guide pointing the way to a violent end of the

world through the battle of Armageddon, it is a book that guides Christians to live a life of victory and faithfulness to God even when they are persecuted and oppressed by empire.

Those of us who live in Palestine/Israel feel the presence of empire with Israel's domination and oppression of the Palestinians. The question that confronts us continuously is this, “how can we conquer?” Believe it or not, this is a very important part of the message of the book of Revelation. It was significant to the Christians at the end of the first century; and it is significant for us today.

Revelation is not a guide pointing the way to a violent end of the world through the battle of Armageddon, it is a book that guides Christians to live a life of victory and faithfulness to God even when they are persecuted and oppressed by empire.

Every letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation uses the word “conquer”. One needs to understand this obsession for “conquering” or for victory, against the background of the Roman Empire itself. “Victory” was the Latin name of the military goddess of Rome. Victory, *nike* in Greek, was a goddess that was worshiped by the Romans. Soldiers carried its symbol of the winged goddess when they went to battle. Its statues

were erected everywhere with one of its feet on the globe symbolizing Rome's domination of the whole world. Rome was victorious in its wars, conquests, and control. Nothing could stand in its way. Graffiti inscription on a rock in

Arabia that goes back to the first century says, "Romans always win". Rome's propaganda machine explained that victory, or *nike*, in wars brought peace and prosperity - Pax Romana. John the writer of Revelation had the guts to say, "no" to Rome's victory. He described its empire as a demonic whore riding on a beast greedily seducing and destroying the world (Rossing, 105).

John wanted to give a different theology of victory than that presented by empire. He was sending a word of hope and encouragement to the Christians who were under persecution. He presents them with a revolutionary theology. He says that Christians have power and they can conquer. According to Revelation 12:11, Christians can conquer by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.

1. Christians can conquer by the blood of the Lamb. The word "lamb" has a number of references in the New Testament. John the Baptist refers to Jesus as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Paul writing to the church in Corinth says, "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed..." (1Cor. 5:7). For Paul, Christ is the slain lamb whose blood has been shed for the salvation and liberation of the world. We believe that Jesus has defeated evil through his death and resurrection. The cross of Christ reminds us of his violent death at the hands of the religious leaders of his day in collusion with the powers of the state. It also reminds us of Christ's victory over the powers of evil. Any violence should make us cry out against it: enough to violence, enough to the suffering of the innocent people of the world.

We conquer by the blood of the lamb that was slain for the redemption of the world. The shedding of Jesus' blood has become a symbol of the blood of all innocent people who are killed every day. We must resist violence and stand against it. We must not inflict violence, we must defeat it by the blood of the lamb. The lamb slain helps us to take a stand against all those who shed the blood of others. The blood of Christ is a constant reminder that people's blood must not be spilt. It is a source of power for us through which we can conquer. "The book of Revelation deals with the opposition between two kinds of power in our lives and in our world: the power of oppressive systems of domination versus the power of God's Lamb to bring life and healing... In place of the vision of military victory and power offered by Rome - a vision still offered by imperial powers today - Revelation offers the amazing vision of the victory of God's slain Lamb, Jesus" (Rossing, 108).

Today in the conflict over Palestine, we speak out against the illegal military occupation of Israel of the West Bank and Gaza. We can live in peace with Israel, but justice must be done to the Palestinians. . . . Without justice for the Palestinians no peace is possible for Israel. This is the word of our testimony. This is our witness.

2. The second way by which we can conquer is through the word of our testimony. This is the "martyria," the way we can witness. Rossing has suggested that this word, "martyria" comes from the courtroom. "...We conquer by putting the unjust empire on trial and telling the truth about it... Revelation aims to convince us that Jesus' model of Lamb power is a model of victory more powerful than Rome's model of *nike* as military conquering" (Rossing, 120). "In place of overwhelming military strength, we are given the image of the Lamb's nonviolent power. In place of Rome's image of inflicting slaughter on the world, Revelation tells the story of the Lamb who has been slaughtered - and who still bears the scars of that slaughter. This reversal of images must have come as a big surprise to first-century Christians accustomed as they were to Rome's images of power and victory. Revelation undertakes to reveal what true power and true victory is: At the heart of the power of the universe stands Jesus, God's slain Lamb" (Rossing, 110). In our life today in the midst of empire, we feel we are victims of violence and terrorism as the early Christians living in the Roman Empire were. We see many "beasts" of violence, terrorism, occupation, poverty, injustice, humiliation, and dehumanization. We must speak out. We must stand against the injustice and expose it. We conquer by the word of our testimony.

Today in the conflict over Palestine, we speak out against Israel's illegal military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. We can live in peace with Israel, but justice must be done to the Palestinians. The occupation, illegal under International Law, must end. Without justice for the Palestinians no peace is possible for Israel. This is the word of our testimony. This is our witness.

The blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony are connected together. It is faith and action. Our eyes are fixed on the cross. Yes, the cross that was a symbol of violence and terror has become to us a symbol through which we can conquer. Therefore, we stand in witness. We conquer by the word of our testimony. In Revelation, John redefines victory and conquering. God's people can conquer not by the power of the sword but by remaining faithful to Christ and by testifying to God's victory in self-giving love. We do not conquer by waging wars and by killing people. We conquer by standing for what is right, no matter how long it takes. We conquer by commitment to truth, by witnessing to God's self-sacrificial love in Jesus Christ. As Rossing says, "Nowhere in Revelation do God's people 'wage war.' What they do is 'conquer'...and they do that by the

Lamb's own blood and by their courageous testimony, not through Armageddon or war. In contrast to Rome's theology that defined Victory as military conquest, Revelation develops a counter-theology of the nonviolent victory (nike) of Jesus, God's slain Lamb, in which 'evil is overcome by suffering love,' not by superior power." We conquer through the power of God's vulnerable, nonviolent love.

Theologian Ward Ewing writes, "Lamb power is the power of vulnerable, but strong, love to change the world...Living by Lamb power means we accept the cross as the ultimate expression of love...If we are to follow the Lamb, we cannot remain safe and secure...Vulnerability - the primary characteristic of Lamb power - includes by definition the possibility of suffering." Lamb power "is the power of nonviolent resistance and courage in opposition to injustice; it is the power of solidarity and forgiveness" (Rossing, 112-113).

This reflection is a call to nonviolent resistance in the face of injustice. It is a call against violence and terrorism. It is our call to fellow Palestinians to stop the violence. It is our call to Israel to stop the violence. It is a call for all of us to abandon the way of empire, the way of domination and oppression. It is a call to do whatever we can to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories. It is a call to follow the way of Jesus, the slain lamb.

One of the famous quotations against violence from Martin Luther King reads, "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

This is the power of the slain lamb and the power of our witness. This is the message of Revelation. Yes, we can conquer by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony.

For further reading:

- Wes Howard - Brook & Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire* (Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 1999)
- R.J. Mc Kelvey, *The Millennium and the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1999)

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Challenging

From April 14-18 I was in Jerusalem for the fifth international Sabeel conference on "Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Palestine-Israel Conflict." Sabeel is a Christian liberation theology movement founded by the Palestinian Anglican priest theologian, Naim Ateek, author of the book, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Orbis, 1989).

Sabeel as a movement has three interconnected goals. One is to knit together the dwindling and fragmented Palestinian Christian community to speak and work together as the Palestinian local church, with all of its many traditions. The second is to develop a vision of justice for the Holy Land that brings together two peoples (Israeli and Palestinian) and three religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). The third is to communicate this liberating vision, as well as its critique of the theological justifications for Palestinian oppression, to the rest of the world, especially the Christians of the West. To promote this work of international communication and dialogue, Sabeel has developed a number of support groups in Western countries, called "International Friends of Sabeel" (IFOS). The largest of these are Friends of Sabeel North America, which includes U.S. and Canadian branches, and Friends of Sabeel-UK. There are also small but committed Friends of Sabeel-Scandinavia and Australia. Recently IFOS groups have sprung up in Ireland and the Netherlands. These groups promote conferences and study materials on the Israeli-Palestinian issue and challenge Christians to become aware of the use and abuse of theology in relation to this issue.

A movement to develop a Palestinian liberation theology began in 1990 and held several conferences and consultations before it was formally organized as Sabeel. The talks of its first conference were published in the book, *Faith and the Intifada* (Orbis, 1992), edited by Rosemary Ruether, Naim Ateek and Marc Ellis. In addition to international conferences Sabeel promotes many local support activities for Palestinian Christian groups, clergy, women, youth, etc. The IFOS groups hold regional conferences in their countries each year. Its quarterly journal, *Cornerstone*, reports on these events and reflects on current issues.

The most recent conference this April addressed Christian

Christian Zionism

by Rosemary Radford Ruether

Zionism, the most egregious type of abusive Christian theology that justifies the displacement of the Palestinians by the state of Israel. What is Christian Zionism? This is a theology developed in the nineteenth century by Evangelical Protestants in England and the United States. It affirms the following thesis: the election of Israel by God continues in the Jewish people today. This people must return to the Promised Land and refound Israel as a nation. This return signifies the redemption of the world in the last days. It must be expressed by the rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem (only possible by destroying the present Muslim edifices - the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque). Christ will then return, and elect a number of Jews who will be converted to Christianity. Together with true believing Christians (a category which excludes most Christians, Catholic, Orthodox and liberal Protestants), these believers will be raptured to heaven, while God purges the earth of unbelievers in the battle of Armageddon. Then the believers will return to live in a redeemed earth.

This theology, held by a minority of evangelical Christians in the West, has created an alliance with the Jewish Zionist Right of the Likud party, despite its tacit anti-semitism. It also has come into great political power in the US through its funding by wealthy supporters and its influence on the leaders of the US Congress and the Bush administration. The conference addressed the historical roots and development of this theology among English and North American fundamentalists, its use and abuse of the Bible and its political power in current global conflicts in the Middle East. Jewish and Muslim, as well as Christian scholars and social activists, addressed the ramifications of this marriage of theology and politics. Among the Jewish speakers were Jeff Halper, founder of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions, and Marc Ellis, a Jewish liberation theologian. Stephen Sizer and Don Wagner addressed the historical development of Christian Zionism in the UK and the USA, both published authors in this area. Catholic Biblical scholar Michael Prior, author of *The Bible and Colonialism* (1997) addressed the use of the Bible by Jewish and Christian Zionism. Mainline churches also entertain a more diffuse sort of Christian Zionism that has much the same effect of as-

suming that Jews have an exclusive right to the land in a way that eliminates the rights and even the existence of Palestinians. This was the subject of my talk at the conference. A book will be forthcoming from the papers of this gathering.

Since Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are largely unable to come to Jerusalem due to Israeli policies of permanent curfew, the organizers sought to bring the conference to them by holding one day of the meeting in Ramallah and another day in Bethlehem. The day in Ramallah went smoothly. Unfortunately on Saturday evening (April 17) it was announced that the Israelis had carried out a targeted assassination of Hamas leader, Dr. Abdel Aziz Rantisi. Immediately all access to the occupied territories in the West Bank, as well as Gaza, was cut off. There was no way nine buses carrying 450 people could get to Bethlehem. So the final day was held in Jerusalem, with some of the Bethlehem speakers walking across a hill area to come to the conference illegally. In a shocking way the realities of our context impinged on our deliberations, not as abstractions, but as matters of life and death. For further information on Sabeel, see www.sabeel.org and www.fosna.org.

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THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL SABEL CONFERENCE STATEMENT “CHALLENGING CHRISTIAN ZIONISM”

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist programme provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today. We also repudiate the more insidious form of Christian Zionism pervasive in the mainline churches that remains silent in the face of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Therefore, we categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that undermines the biblical message of love, mercy, and justice.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with extremist elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently seeking to impose their unilateral preemptive strategies and militaristic rule over others, including Palestine and Iraq. As a result of the 14 April, 2004 Bush-Sharon memorandum of understanding, the crisis in Israel and Palestine has moved into a new phase of oppression of the Palestinian people. This will inevitably lead to unending cycles of violence and counter violence that are already spreading throughout the Middle East and other parts of the world. We reject the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these extremist policies as they advance a form of racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ.

Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation and instead to pursue the healing of the world. We call upon Christians in churches on every continent to prayerfully remember the suffering of the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are victims of policies of occupation and militarism. These policies are reviving a system of apartheid that is turning Palestinian cities, towns and villages into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusively Jewish colonies. The recent construction of the Israeli wall on Palestinian land precludes a viable Palestinian state.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to the following principles as an alternative way (Sabeel):

- * We affirm that all people are created in the image of God and called to honor the dignity and respect the equal rights of every human being.
- * We call upon people of good will everywhere to reject the theology of Christian Zionism and all parallel religious and ideological fundamentalisms that privilege particular people at the expense of others.
- * We are committed to the power of non-violent resistance to defeat the occupation and attain a just and lasting peace.
- * With renewed urgency we warn that the theology of Christian Zionism is leading to the moral justification of empire, colonization, apartheid, and oppression.

Moreover, we affirm that a just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel must be based on the Jerusalem Sabeel Document: Principles for a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel (2004).¹

Sabeel's vision embraces two sovereign states, Palestine and Israel, which will enter into confederation or even a federation, possibly with other neighboring countries, where Jerusalem becomes the federal capital. Indeed, the ideal and best solution has always been to envisage ultimately a binational state in Palestine-Israel where people are free and equal, living under a constitutional democracy that protects and guarantees all their rights, responsibilities, and duties without racism or discrimination - one state for two nations and three religions.

This is where Sabeel takes its stand. We will stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation and a life of security and prosperity for all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace — and working for peace makes us children of God.

God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security, or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently.

“What does the Lord require of you, to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

¹ See www.sabeel.org

Seek Peace and Pursue It

A translation of the Sabeel statement read at the ecumenical prayer service for peace in Palestine and Iraq which was held at St. Stephen's Dominican Church, Jerusalem on June 6, 2004

"Anyone who wants to have a happy life and to enjoy prosperity...must never yield to evil but must practice good; he must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:10, 11)

Every year, the months of May and June bring back to the Palestinian people the memory of an-Nakba (The Catastrophe) with its twofold dates- May 15th (1948 war) and June 5th (1967 war). These two dates remind us of the destruction of Palestine and the dispossession of its people.

The tragedy of the Palestinians did not end with these wars, but was repeated on a daily basis, adding new tragedies and suffering by the Israeli government - the continuous state of siege, the destruction of homes, the closures of towns and villages, the robbing of land, the apartheid wall, the targeted assassinations, the excruciating suffering, and the denial of people's basic human rights.

The occupation of Iraq and the suffering of its people is similar to what we experience here in Palestine in terms of evil, injustice and oppression. It is quite obvious that we live under the domination of an American "empire" whose right hand in the Middle East is Israel. Everything that stands in the way of "empire" is called "terrorism."

In light of these facts, we at Sabeel would like to re-iterate the following:

- 1) The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments urges us to seek peace and pursue it. Therefore, we pray continuously and strive persistently for peace.
- 2) We raise the voice of conscience against all evil, oppression, and domination; we call upon the international community to make a concerted effort to put an end to the injustice perpetrated by the Israeli government.
- 3) We call for peace for all people, near and far. We wish to live in peace with all our neighbors, including the Israeli people, but our desire is for a life of freedom, dignity, and equality.
- 4) As long as Israel continues its practices of humiliation

and oppression, it will reap only fear, anxiety, and the lack of security. The power of weapons will not bring lasting peace to Israel.

5) We strongly condemn the distortion of the image of the Palestinian people, portraying them as enemies of peace. We are a people who have been deprived of our rights. Therefore, we strive to establish a lasting peace based on justice and righteousness.

6) Peace can be achieved through the implementation of International Law by ending the occupation of the whole of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. It is possible to achieve peace through Israel's withdrawal from Palestine, through the removal of the apartheid wall and the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian state.

7) We have no choice except to remain steadfast no matter how long it takes. We extend our hands to welcome those who are willing to put aside arrogance, to repent from evildoing and injustice, and to give back to the Palestinians their lawful rights.

8) As we continue to live in steadfastness, we will hold on to our genuine principles. We will continue to bring up our new generations on the values of love, faith and compassion, encouraging them to realize the importance of striving for justice and righteousness.

9) Our dependence is always on God, the source of our strength, and in whom we place our trust. We turn our face to God with whom we labor to achieve justice and peace in our land.

10) We will continue to act and pray, and to appeal to all our friends everywhere to support us, and to influence their governments to lift this yoke of injustice that we bear. We ask our friends to continue to act tirelessly, until peace prevails and security is realized in this Holy Land.

From the Conference Participants' Evaluation

“Generously dynamic and impactful giving us insights to the struggles of the Palestinians and how we have been too sheltered from the harsh realities they face, and the importance of getting this message out to our communities.”

“ (During the pre-conference) I had the privilege of spending Holy Week visiting Holy sites, worshiping in the Churches in Jerusalem, especially the Church of the Resurrection, participating in a traditional and contemporary Way of the Cross, and walking in

the footsteps of Jesus during the days before his crucifixion. Sadly, during Holy Week, Christians living in the occupied territories were, by and large, denied access to Jerusalem even with the proper permits. When they arrived at checkpoints, they were turned back. Some had their permits confiscated or torn up.

The strategy session I attended stands out in my mind as a symbol of how

Christians can work together while honoring our differences. Dr. Gary Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and Professor Barbara Rossing, teacher of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago jointly facilitated a discussion on the Biblical verses used to support the Christian Zionist position and the scriptures countering the Christian Zionist position. Professor Burge, a well grounded conservative evangelical and Professor Barbara Rossing a liberation theology feminist worked extremely well together although their Biblical understandings were quite different. It was great to have them affirm each other while disagreeing on their understanding of the Biblical text.”

Stephen Denny

“It was excellent. I have been like a sponge, absorbing so much information.”

“I want you to know that you provided one of the most impressive programs that I have ever attended. Sabeel, in combination with St. Georges College, did a marvelous job and one I will never forget.”

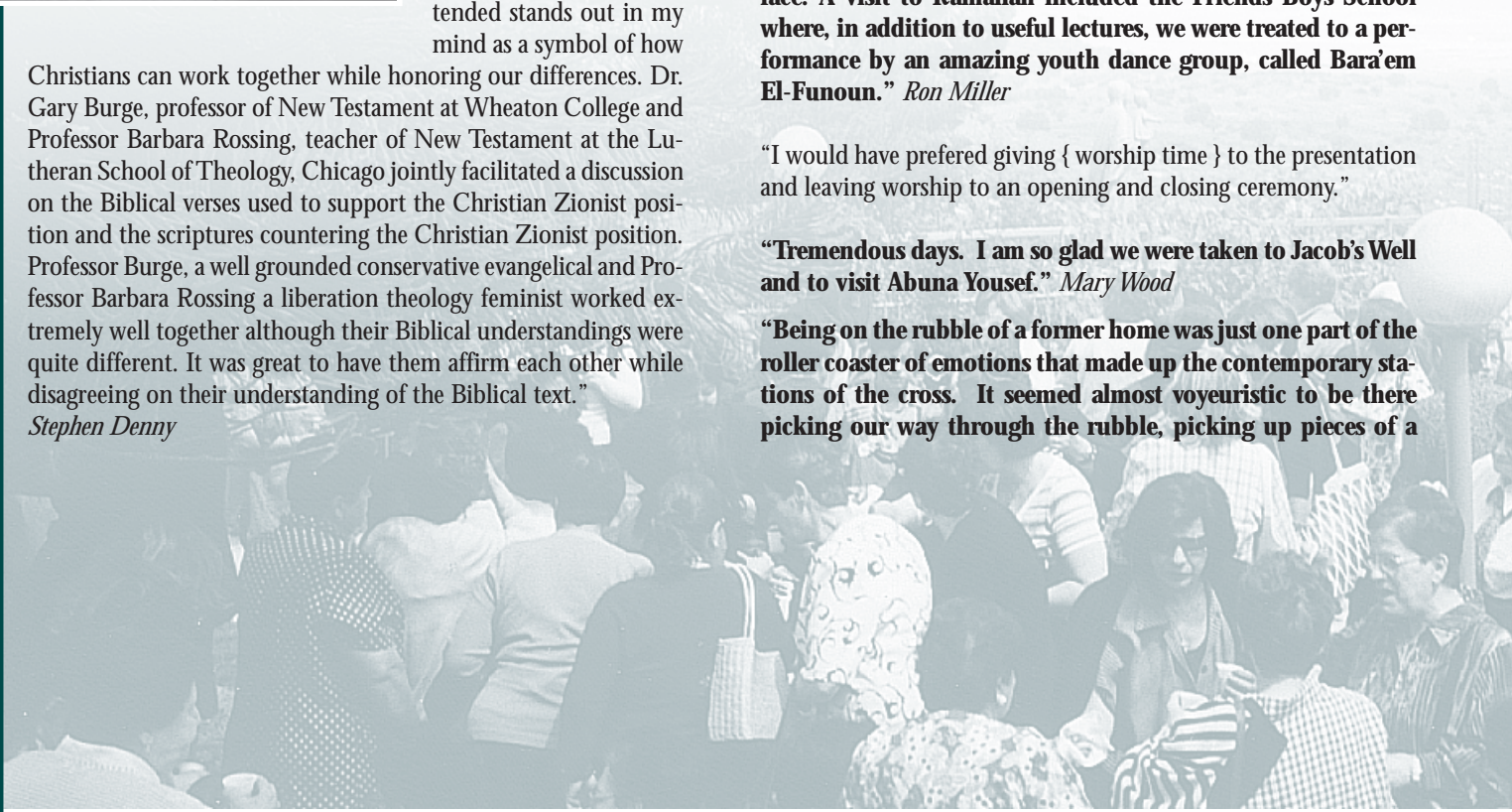
“The conference worship was uplifting. It is such a blessing to see the strong faith of the Palestinian people reinforced in worship and lived out in their lives. God’s presence has been part of every worship opportunity.”

“In addition to learned and informative lectures the other part of the course was to open our eyes and minds to the reality of the Palestinian people. Through a number of speakers and artistic presentations the conference became aware of the spirit with which the Palestinian people address the problems they face. A visit to Ramallah included the Friends Boys School where, in addition to useful lectures, we were treated to a performance by an amazing youth dance group, called Bara'em El-Funoun.” *Ron Miller*

“I would have preferred giving { worship time } to the presentation and leaving worship to an opening and closing ceremony.”

“Tremendous days. I am so glad we were taken to Jacob's Well and to visit Abuna Yousef.” *Mary Wood*

“Being on the rubble of a former home was just one part of the roller coaster of emotions that made up the contemporary stations of the cross. It seemed almost voyeuristic to be there picking our way through the rubble, picking up pieces of a





home, but offering up the experience in prayer together helped make sense of the non-sense. It was an intense experience and all observed carefully from a distance by Israeli soldiers.” *Bridget Rees*

“One of the most informative and well-organized conferences I have ever attended.”

“Excellent, fantastic program! Life changing.”

“The speakers were top notch - I felt privileged to experience them all.”

“Count me in as a supporter of Sabeel.”

“An outstanding, well-planned and executed conference. Most stimulating and inspiring! Keep up the fine, helpful work for peace with justice nonviolently.”

“Cultural interludes were unexpected, of very high quality, varied and so enjoyable.”

2004 Sabeel International Witness for Peace and Justice

5-12 November 2004

For more information
visit our website: www.sabeel.org
Call: (972) 2 532 7136;
Fax: (972) 2 532 7137
Email: visit@sabeel.org

Pentecost hymn

by Wendy Ross-Barker

Wind of God, blow strongly,
Break the walls of hate;
Sweep away divisions;
Open wide love's gate.
Heal and cleanse and strengthen
Hearts that still are cold
And, in every language,
Let your truth be told.

Harmonising Spirit,
Spread your flame of peace -
Burning brighter, stronger,
Light of love increase.
Fill with warmth and brightness
Every darkened place.
Let your joy and radiance
Shine on every face.

Gentle, dove-like Spirit,
Soothing frightened hearts,
Strengthen and encourage
Till all fear departs.
Then strong cries for justice
Will at last be heard;
Ears, long closed, will listen,
By these voices stirred.

Come then, lively Spirit,
Fill this world of pain.
End the reign of violence,
Set us free again
Free from all oppression,
Let the fighting cease;
Enmity behind us,
Build your world of peace.

©Wendy Ross-Barker, May 2004
Wendy Ross-Barker works with Friends of Sabeel UK

5th International Sabeel Conference

Summary

by Janet Lahr Lewis

The 5th International Sabeel Conference, “Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics, and the Israel-Palestine Conflict”, was held April 14-18, 2004 at the Notre Dame Conference Center in Jerusalem across the street from the Old City. In attendance were 640 participants from 32 countries many of whom had to overcome personal trepidation or family pressure to be with us during these times of conflict and uncertainty. We appreciate their persistence and fortitude. We were very disappointed that four people from countries in Africa and one from India were denied visas by the Israeli government despite a flurry of letters to government officials. We hope we will have the opportunity to host them sometime in the near future.

The conference opened with two days focusing on the history and theology of Christian Zionism as a way of giving participants an insight into the roots of this ever-growing movement. Experts in this field gave visual presentations illustrating the cause and effect of an ideology that began in England in the 1800's. The focus then shifted to the effects that the Christian Zionist movement is having on mainline churches, in Islam and Judaism, and international politics. The final day was spent in workshops concentrating on strategic planning. Morning Bible studies were also included where local and international theologians presented their views on the issue of land, the promise of the Fathers, and the Book of Revelation.

Local participation was encouraged. However, the political situation does not allow many of the Palestinians to travel to Jerusalem. Consequently Sabeel attempted to take the conference to them by planning one day of events in Ramallah and one day in Bethlehem. We were successful



in getting 8 buses of participants through the Qalandia checkpoint and into Ramallah where we were hosted by the Friends Boys' School. The lectures were concluded by a wonderful and lively cultural event where young Palestinians, ages 8-15, performed traditional (and not so traditional) dances encouraged by the clapping and cheering of the participants.

The day concluded with a visit to President Yasser Arafat at the Muqata'a - the compound of the Palestinian Authority- where many photos were taken of the massive destruction and huge piles of rubble, all that remains of the majority of the buildings where the administration of the government was housed. Government officials are now confined to two smaller buildings, both severely damaged.

Sunday, April 18 was planned as our day in Bethlehem where we were to be hosted by Bethlehem University for a full day of workshops and discussions followed by a closing dinner and entertainment at the Bethlehem Hotel. Unfortunately, on Saturday evening we received word that Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the newly declared head of Hamas, had become the latest victim of Israel's targeted assassinations. Many phone calls were made to colleagues and friends in Bethlehem. Although they all agreed that for many it would be a sign of solidarity to bring busloads of people into Bethlehem, there was concern that the visit might be misinterpreted by the community who would be on strike for the three days of mourning. Tensions were already running high before the assassination, so after much consideration the coordinating committee decided to respect the advice of our Bethlehemite associates not to be insensitive to the community in mourning. As a result, all activities had to be quickly rearranged back at the Notre Dame Center. One of our speakers for the day was himself a Bethlehemite who does not hold a permit to come to Jerusalem. Consequently his lecture had to be given via telephone hook-up.

One full day was spent on field trips around the Jerusalem area; visits to the Mt of Olives, Al Azaria (Bethany) where the Separation Wall has closed the historic (and biblical) route from Jericho to Jerusalem, and visits to villages in the surrounding area where the wall is dividing families from their schools, places of employment, hospitals, and each



other.

Perhaps the highlight of the field trip day was the visit to the Al Aqsa Mosaic where the group was graciously welcomed by the director - Sheikh Hussain, who greeted our large group and allowed us to visit the holy sites. We were not only the first non-Muslims allowed inside the compound since the beginning of the Intifada in Sept. 2000, but we were also allowed to take photos inside the Dome of the Rock, something that is normally forbidden.

Presenters gave different and sometimes controversial viewpoints; participants' thoughts were stimulated enough to raise some difficult issues in their questions; organizers and volunteers did their best to make sure all ran reasonably smoothly despite the complications and constant changes. We could, at this point, call it a "successful" conference. However, the challenge is still there. The question must continue to be asked: "Are you willing to stand up to the challenge, and if so, what are you going to do about it?"



*Janet Lahr Lewis, Conference Coordinator.
United Methodist Mission Personnel working at Sabeel.*

Snapshots of our Activities

The anticipation that Spring and the Resurrection season would bring some hopeful signs of peace in this region ended in more frustration... Summer struggled in with added facts on the ground: the dreaded Wall has reached Jerusalem... Will neither the voice of reason nor international law be effective in conquering evil?

Sabeel, like other peace-building organizations, continues to bring awareness and rouse the conscience of justice lovers. One such effort was the Fifth International Conference covered on almost all pages of this issue. However, conferences- as important as they are- are only one aspect of the work of Sabeel; other programs are implemented with as much eagerness, zeal and ...hope.

PROGRAMS

Community -Building

The third pre-conference lecture on Christian Zionism was delivered in Arabic by Father Maroun Lahham, rector of the Beit Jala Latin Seminary, to a Jerusalem audience on April 1, 2004 at the YWCA. An audience of about 100 people was curious to understand more about this growing movement that is negatively affecting the religious and political lives of the Palestinians. For many of the local residents who could not attend the whole conference, these pre-conference sessions whetted their appetite in a bitter way.



... and when all efforts fail, we take comfort in prayer...
A special Ecumenical Worship Service for peace was held on Sunday, June 6, 2004 at St. Stephen's Dominican Church. The scripture verse from 1 Peter: 10, 11: "For those who desire life and desire to see good days...let them turn away



from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it”, reflected clearly the aspirations and concerns of those who lifted up prayers for the end of the suffering of the people in Palestine/Israel and Iraq, as well as everywhere else in the world. Over 150 clergy and lay people participated in the service called for by the group of clergy that regularly meet at Sabeel. Choirs from the Armenian and Coptic traditions chanted their peace hymns while the budding “Raja” (Hope) band led the communal singing. In its ten-point statement read by Archmandrite Atallah Hanna during the service, Sabeel re-iterated its commitment to persevere in its work for peace and to urge the international ‘conscience’ to pressure the Israeli government to put an end to its oppressive measures.....(See full statement on page 9).



Clergy

Several of the clergy participated in Sabeel’s Fifth International Conference in Jerusalem; Father Youssef Saadeh from Nablus coordinated the post-conference trip in that area, but their “own” meeting was held on May 11, at Sabeel followed by a light lunch. Father Marwan Di’des - Franciscan Order - reflected on the parable of the prodigal son. The six priests present, among whom one from Bethlehem, another from Jericho, reviewed the yearly plan and renewed their commitment to strengthen relations with their brethren in the West Bank through increased social visits of solidarity. Hence on June 22, the priests will be in Birzeit, Jifna and Abboud.

Women

Several of the “Local Friends of Sabeel” were involved in Sabeel’s 5th International Conference in April, offering various forms of assistance to the staff both in Jerusalem and Ramallah. Sabeel expressed its appreciation at a dinner held on May 14.

The May 28 gathering of Jerusalem and Nazareth women in the series of spiritual, recreational trips further strengthened the social ties among the 85 women who participated. The sites chosen were Safourieh (Sephoris), the traditional



home of Mary's parents-Joachim and Hanna, Ibillin and the Mt. of Beatitudes. For many, even old-timers in both groups, the two first places were new, and the Mt. of Beatitudes was experienced from a new perspective and a deeper understanding of blessings. The Jerusalem group had started the day lightheartedly with hymns and prayers, but driving along the Wall of Separation, cutting through Arab villages and towns, jolted people into the ugly and painful reality of the ongoing Israeli occupation. Rula Shbeita, the tourist guide, patiently pointed out places of interest but the sight of the ominous wall wiped out the pleasant atmosphere.

After a short stop at Megiddo Park for breakfast, the bus headed towards the St. Anne convent in Safourieh, where the Nazareth group welcomed their Jerusalem sisters with coffee and cinnamon rolls. Though very little remains of the old Palestinian village, the convent - managed by the Italian Nuns of the Order of St. Anne - has become a refuge for hundreds of homeless and underprivileged young men and women from the surrounding hamlets. It is a beacon of hope for all faiths.

The group also visited the attractive ruins of a church built on the traditional home site of Joachim and Hanna -Mary's parents- a symbolic pilgrimage, since the month of May is dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the Roman Catholic Church.

One of the highlights of the day was the encounter with Father Elias Chacour awaiting the group in front of the new auditorium of Mar Elias Educational Establishments at the top of a mountain, rising high over the narrow-winding streets of Ibillin. Only one day earlier, the Institute had celebrated its 20th anniversary and the yellow flowers that adorned the graduation hall were warmly welcoming. The inspiring story of this man from the Galilee who dared brave the challenges in order to bring together Christian, Muslim, Jew and Druze students had finally yielded its fruits. Today the village of Ibillin has the first Arab university in Israel and it promotes coexistence and reconciliation. A powerful mural painted by Diane Roe, CPT, expresses "Together, we are stronger than the storm"

Filled with awe and admiration, the women's voices rose in praise and glory to God in the unfinished 'Basilica of the Beatitudes', an artistic achievement made possible by donations from various faiths all over the world. Ibillin is a model of faith and perseverance, a blessing. An excellent lunch was served at the modern banquet hall of al-Rashid restaurant in the village. Joyous laughter filled the air as the two groups mingled together savoring those rare moments of fellowship. The peaceful quiet afternoon by the Sea of Galilee passed too quickly, and it was soon time for farewells.

On the way to Jerusalem, it was time for reflection and evaluation. Several people requested archeological trips too, since on this occasion we had deliberately avoided digs. For the new-comers, Sabeel's work was introduced through the witness of volunteers who had participated in the 5th International Conference. The conference statement was circulated too.

Youth

On March 27, a dozen teen-age leaders assisted in entertaining 88 children at the Maison d'Abraham in Jerusalem in an egg-hunting activity. Mothers and friends had volunteered and offered over 900 colored eggs for the event. Rob Thorburn, our volunteer from the UK added bliss to the occasion by dressing up as a clown and singing at the guitar. The volunteers, after securing the children back home, gathered at Sabeel for a light meal.

A delegation from KAIROS, Canada, a youth group from the Iona Community in Scotland, led by Dr. Runa Mackay and a youth group from Sweden, all eager to hear about the struggles of the Palestinian Youth under occupation, met with a few of the young teenagers and adults involved with Sabeel.





Visitors

The determination and courage of visitors is a boost for Sabeel. Among these, in addition to the ones already mentioned above, were groups including: DanChurch Aid led by Uffe Gjerding from Denmark; two from Christian Aid led by Nigel Vardell and Ramani Leathard; from the United Reform Church, UK; bishops from the Boston Area led by Bishop Tom Shaw and Maurine Tobin; Swiss Protestants led by Albert Rieger, from the Swedish Theological Institute, a large delegation from Amos Trust led by Garth Hewitt, students from San Francisco Theological Seminary led by Charles Marks, an archeological group led by Max Miller and the International Course participants at Tantur Ecumenical Institute,.

Other

Taking advantage of the author Duncan Macpherson being in town, Sabeel invited a small group of “bookworms” to the launching of his book “Pilgrim Preacher: Palestine, Pilgrimage and Preaching”. At the same time, Michael Prior introduced “Speaking Truth about Zionism and Israel” the book he recently edited. Copies of both interesting books are available at the Sabeel Center.

On May 3, The Sabeel crew spent a well-earned day of rest away from the conference wrap-up and office work. After a

brief stop on Mt. Carmel, they drove through the Druze villages and stopped in Old Akka (Acre) for lunch. In the afternoon, they reached the border of Lebanon at Ras al Naqura and made a special trip to Ikrith, where the church staunchly stands to remind the world of the once existing Palestinian village, pre-1948. On the way back, they passed through Kufr Yassif for a taste of the well-known Shafa Amer ice-cream.





Volunteers

Sabeel bade farewell to Rob Thorburn from the UK, who, for six months, patiently tackled all the endless exasperating problems of computers. Rob's good humor and gentlemanly manners will long be missed. Rob handed the reins to Mohammad Desai from South Africa, who is spending three months in the country before pursuing his studies.

Sabeel wishes to thank Fadi Houry for his support during the conference and wishes him well in his new job at the Latin Patriarchate.

News from Nazareth

Visitors to Sabeel Nazareth included a Scottish Group led by Dr. Runa Mackay (who had resided and served there), a Swedish Youth group led by Karl Malmquist, over 100 conference participants in the post-conference program and Rola Karam, residing in the USA and a member of FOSNA. Several members of the Nazareth Committee also attended the 5th International Conference and actively participated through prayers and moderating.

On April 24, Jamal Juma', of the Stop the Wall Campaign gave a power point presentation at the Nazareth Cultural Center. The hall was filled with attendees from all faiths and walks of life, who were shocked by the painful discrimination imposed by the "democratic" state of Israel.

On May 27, the Young Couples monthly meeting was with Dr. Elias Daw to discuss their growing social problems.

The Nazareth Sabeel children met for an informal pleasant afternoon at Violet Houry's home. By planting seeds of ecumenism at such an early age, Sabeel ensures continuity of the movement and the building of a liberated society.



International Friends of Sabeel supports the work of Sabeel through education, advocacy, conferences, solidarity visits, and financial contributions. Regional chapters have been established creating a network of friends throughout the world who work in partnership with Sabeel to help bring about a just and durable peace for Palestine and Israel.

International Friends of Sabeel (IFOS) have been very active these past few months with hosting conferences and extending their outreach and effectiveness through increasing memberships, establishing new regional chapters, and encouraging group visits. We are happy to announce the establishment of our latest IFOS chapter in the Netherlands. For those interested we will soon have their contact information on our website.

Sabeel is very happy and grateful that all of our IFOS chapters were represented at our 5th international Sabeel Conference in Jerusalem. We also had participation in our IFOS finance meeting which took place immediately after the conference. We wish to extend our sincere thanks to all of you who have been giving up your free time to assist us in the ministry of Sabeel through your concerted efforts in your own countries. May God continue to bless your efforts!

IFOS

Snapshots

Friends of Sabeel-North America (FOS-NA)



will continue with its program of regional conferences in the fall of 2004 and spring of 2005. The next event is scheduled in St. Paul, Minnesota, October 22 and 23, at the University of St. Thomas. Pax Christi USA will co-sponsor

this event with FOSNA. We are in the process of lining up speakers and workshops. Committee leaders are Mary and Nick Eoloff of St. Paul who attended the 5th International Conference in Jerusalem and who are the adoptive parents of Mordecai Vanunu. Jesuit Father David Smith, who also attended the conference, is our host at the University. Dick Toll will travel to St. Paul at the end of June to meet with the conference coordinating committee. Other conferences are under consideration for Austin/Dallas, Atlanta, and Birmingham. Elaine's summer will be spent on the phone, doing a national membership drive campaign with proceeds going to our program of conferences. A number of FOSNA's leadership team participated in the annual meeting of the US Campaign to End Israeli Occupation in Washington DC in May. We have changed our

email address to a more professional service: friends@fosna.org (please change your records) and our website, www.fosna.org is now being managed by Ken Willett who is also a consultant for Bethlehem University (and he lives here in Portland). Finally, a great congratulations and gratitude to all of our friends in Jerusalem for the excellent conference in April. It gives us the strength and encouragement to continue our work.

Friends of Sabeel-Australia Inc. (FOS-OZ)



reports that the Rev'd Dr. Greg Jenks presented a report of the 5th International Sabeel Conference at a public meeting in Brisbane on Sunday, 2 May, 2004. As well Greg spoke about the situation of the Palestinians at a Student Christian Movement gathering on Friday, 4 June. Copies of Greg's account of the International Sabeel Conference as well as his report on the subsequent Witnesses for Justice and Peace program were circulated to all the members and patrons of FOS-OZ. At the Brisbane Anglican Diocesan Synod, to be held over the weekend of 19-20 June, Greg is moving a motion (with Ray Barraclough seconding it) in support of the Palestinians, of Sabeel and of Friends of Sabeel-Australia Incorporated.

If you are interested in becoming a member of International Friends of Sabeel, please contact:
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Purpose Statement *of* Sabeel

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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