



## Report on Trip to the Holy Land Spring 2015

## Trip Report



Group study at Capernaum, the base of Jesus's Galilean ministry

What would happen if clergy from many faiths across America came together to speak out in support of a peaceful two-state solution? What if we sought ways to speak, teach, and advocate for peace that lifted up the hopes of Israelis and Palestinians, engaging in true dialogue that informs but does not incite? At a time when public movement towards a peace settlement between Israelis and Palestinians seems dormant, positions on the conflict are hardening and conversation across political divides is less common and less civil. The majority of American Jews and Christians hold more moderate views, but there are few outlets for their voices.

Interfaith Partners for Peace (IPFP) was created to develop grassroots energy to build a movement for peace and reconciliation by pairing up local teams of ministers and rabbis committed to true dialogue and two thriving states for two peoples. The partner teams already have been learning together about the complexity of the situation in Israel and the necessity for incorporating multiple narratives into our public discourse. IPFP began by having clergy sign a carefully crafted statement (see Appendix

A) supporting the principle of two states for two peoples, rejecting violence, and pledging to counter efforts to tear down or delegitimize either narrative. From among those early signatories, we gathered 28 rabbis, ministers, and communal leaders for our first mission to Israel and the Palestinian Authority that took place from April 26-May 5, 2015.

The trip was an outstanding success, demonstrating that it remains possible to identify and learn from prominent leaders who are willing to stand apart from the hostile ideological voices that sometimes dominate the debate. The participants ranged in denomination, age, and geography, representing 14 cities.

We had multiple Christians from each of the five major mainline denominations—Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and UCC—and the four major Jewish movements—Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, and Reform. We also had with us a Jewish and a Christian scholar-in-residence, both with broad academic and interfaith experience.

Cover: Interfaith Partners for Peace trip participants visiting a Palestinian farm in the Gush Etzion area with founders of *Shorashim* (Roots), a program building bridges among Palestinians and Jewish settlers

The trip had a different “story arc” than most interfaith missions. It combined three main elements: text study/community building; the sharing of diverse narratives and political perspectives between Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, and many faith traditions; and an encounter with those working on building understanding and partnerships in a variety of settings—from schools in Israel to open fields in the West Bank. The first day, in Tel Aviv, participants were exposed to all three threads, beginning with a morning interactive text study session with Talmudic scholar and former MK Ruth Calderon. Then the group met with former Ambassador and current MK Michael Oren, followed by a session at the Peres Center for Peace focusing on health care and other peace-building initiatives. From there, the group went up north to tour and engage in study at Christian holy sites.

In Jerusalem we explored Israeli and Palestinian narratives in greater depth. We met with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, including a half-day at the Shalom Hartman Institute, took trips to Ramallah and Bethlehem, and visited Yad Vashem and engaged in follow up conversation about the role of Holocaust memory in Israeli society. In addition to sharing study and experiences, we also shared rituals, and on Friday we prepared to celebrate together

the Jewish and Christian Sabbaths. On the final two days of the trip, we met with a range of groups and activists who are working for positive change that respects the narratives of both parties and builds bridges of understanding. A particularly dramatic encounter was meeting with a former Palestinian security prisoner who engages in regular dialogue with a settler Rabbi in a field near both of their homes. Seeing what is being done on the ground those last days gave us hope and showed that there are many positive opportunities to invest in peace building. These groups told us that peace will be possible only when the people on the ground are ready.

As the quotes below indicate, the feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Ministers and rabbis spoke of leaving with their hopes affirmed and their understanding deepened. Our partners returned home ready to continue studying and teaching together and our leadership left convinced that future trips can help us build a network that will make a concrete difference in religious discourse in the United States. IPFP has been incubated within the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. It is guided by a steering committee of academics, ministers, and rabbis.



Trip participants in prayer and thanksgiving before the final dinner on our journey

## Feedback from Participants



From top to bottom: Trip participants visiting a Palestinian farm in the Gush Etzion area with founders of *Shorashim* (Roots), a program building bridges among Palestinians and Jewish settlers; Dinner at the cozy *T'mol Shilshom* bookstore/cafe; a rabbi and a minister studying together at the Shalom Hartman Institute; trip participants Bishop Cate Waynick (Indianapolis) and Deacon Stephen Crippen (Seattle) with Rev. Canon Hosam Naoum at St. George's Cathedral in East Jerusalem; group discussion at the Shalom Hartman Institute

*"I was very taken by their stories, their passion, and the ideological conception that they were articulating; that each community, Palestinians and Israelis, have deep roots in this land, and peace can only come with this recognition that can evolve through interaction and humanization. Very enlightening...[it] was a most informative, inspirational trip. And I thank you for organizing it with thoughtfulness and care."*  
—Rabbi Mel Gottlieb, Orthodox/Conservative; Los Angeles, CA

*"...the trip was very well thought out and has provided a stronger foundation for my advocacy in my community. Thanks for all your efforts and leadership."*  
—Rev. Todd Stavrakos, Presbyterian; Gladwyne, PA

*"I am still walking in the glow of the trip. Thank you so very much for the experience. I do feel fundamentally changed by it in ways I cannot yet name but deeply feel."*  
—Rev. Stacy Swain, UCC; Boston, MA

*"Ten days in Israel with my local colleague Reverend Stacy Swain, among other 'Partners for Peace,' impressed upon me the unique value of a shared experience of Israel to nuance our Christian neighbors' appreciation of Israel and Palestine. We connected through moving visits to holy places, text study, and listening to a wide range of expert voices across the political and religious spectra. This trip deepened our friendship and professional relationship in ways that will reverberate in our communities. Because there is no shortcut to protecting Israel from extreme and weakly informed rhetoric, this project is urgently needed."*  
—Rabbi Leonard Gordon, Conservative; Boston, MA

*"Thanks to everyone for such an incredible trip. I hope to live out my thanksgiving in the coming months by sharing reflections with all of you as well as my congregation and diocese. And I pray that my personal relationships with other faith leaders benefit the most from my learning and experience on the trip."*  
—Deacon Stephen Crippen, Episcopal; Seattle, WA

*"There is so much to process and pray about; how to share what we experienced with others very high on the list... We encountered a spirit of courage, revealed in grass roots efforts, which provides hope that these people will learn not only to tolerate each other, but also to respect and care enough for each other to live in the peace they all desperately want for themselves and their children."*  
—Bishop Catherine Waynick, Episcopal; Indianapolis, IN

*"Thanks for an incredibly informative and inspiring experience... Thanks for your leadership and vision."*  
—Rabbi Dennis Sasso, Reconstructionist/Conservative; Indianapolis, IN

## Evaluation Responses

*"Already I have had [a] couple of significant conversations with staunchly pro-Palestinian advocates who harbor deep discontent (mildly stated) with Israel's policies and actions. Now that I have been on this "listening tour," these folks want to engage me more deeply in dialogue, and they are willing to listen to what I've seen."*

*"Seeing/hearing the different sides and aspects of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; ending with the grassroot movements for peace which gave hope and opened the doors to possibilities beyond what we could see; the diversity of rabbis and the diversity of clergy among themselves as well as all together; the pairing of rabbi and clergy from one's home area."*

*"I now have a greater need for combing the depth of an issue or problem for clarity. A greater sense of being connected to the issues and working for solutions..."*

*"The group came together in wonderful ways. Nice balance of touring, spirituality and reflective time."*

## Social Media



From top to bottom: Touring the *Yad B'Yad* (Hand in Hand) bilingual school; Noam Zion contextualizes the visit to Yad Vashem for the trip participants; Learning from our local Palestinian guide at the Church of the Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus; author and prominent thinker Yossi Klein Halevi with trip leader Ethan Felson; night scene at the Kotel (Western Wall)

## Some Takeaways



### Text Study

From engaging in Talmudic text study with Ruth Calderon in the modern city of Tel Aviv, to biblical study amid the songs of birds and pilgrims from around the world at the magnificent gardens on the Mount of Beatitudes, the focus on shared study provided an important framework for our journey together. The use of texts helped to surface positive intent and provided a fascinating springboard for conversations about divergent narratives—ancient and modern. The participants were enlivened by the study and shared learning helped bring us together. At the Hartman Institute we broke up into pairs and scattered around the building for *hevruta* (traditional yeshiva-style learning), something many in the group had never experienced before.



### Narrative

The participants heard various narratives, including those of Palestinian-Muslims, Palestinian Christians, Jewish settlers, and many others. We heard official and unofficial voices, personal stories of discovering our shared humanity. Participants found these sessions enriching, particularly those that pointed toward reconciliation rather than finger-pointing.



### Shared Society

Hearing from grassroots groups that are building bridges between Palestinian and Jewish communities—including the Peres Center for Peace, Shorashim (Roots), Kids 4 Peace, Yad b'Yad (Hand in Hand) School, and Shades Negotiation Program—was the most profound part of the journey. We learned that efforts on the ground are laying the groundwork for peace, or even for a more realized shared society in the absence of official peace. Creating institutions of peace will be the foundation for the lived peace of the future.



### General

Composing the trip of rabbis partnered with ministers from their hometowns, as opposed to non-clergy Jewish communal leaders, makes a significant difference for the depth of the experience. Many of the participants told us that the fact that we paired them before the trip, and that they are committed to working together in their home communities after the trip, was critical. The partnership concept enriched their experience during the trip and enhanced their ability to make an ongoing commitment going forward.

From top to bottom: Trip participants engaging in *hevruta*-style study at the Shalom Hartman Institute; trip participants visiting a Palestinian farm in the Gush Etzion area hearing from Ali Abu Awwad, founder of *Shorashim* (Roots), a program building bridges among Palestinians and Jewish settlers; Mohammad Joulany and Meredith Rothbart, Palestinian youth in dialogue with the Kids 4 Peace program; the group at St. George's Cathedral

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Interfaith Partners for Peace Statement*



We, the undersigned clergy, come together as partners for peace in our communities and on behalf of Israelis and Palestinians.

We speak out in our pastoral voices from the shared values of peace and reconciliation that animate our religious traditions. Our partnership is a natural outgrowth of decades of dialogue. Our communities are better served because of our relationships. Our partnership is also born of our desire, as neighbors and faith leaders, to model positive and productive ways to approach the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict by fostering hope and reconciliation, two things the parties surely need and deserve.

We recognize with profound pain the suffering that continues on both sides in the land. We have precious bonds with Israelis and Palestinians and we hear their voices. Each and every human being is created in the divine image. When one person suffers, we all suffer.

We recognize that there are multiple narratives in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We commit to hear narratives that are not our own, and to engage in and encourage deep listening so that we may challenge our assumptions.

We commit to using our pastoral roles to help our congregations and communities learn about the land, its history, and its peoples.

We commit to genuine dialogue in which we seek to listen and to learn.

We commit to speaking civilly, with respect for all people, and teaching in ways that inform rather than incite – that invoke empathy and not outrage. We commit not to reduce the conflict to a caricature of right and wrong, of good and evil.

We commit to pursue traveling together to the region so that we may experience the land for ourselves and see the land and know the people of the Holy Land as they know themselves.

We commit to learning and teaching in a way that deepens understanding and trust, and that helps build confidence in our commitment to stand by the parties as they make the painful concessions that will ultimately be needed for peace to prevail.

We commit to making a positive investment of our time and resources in solutions that strengthen the possibility for achieving the two-state solution we seek.

We commit to being advocates for peace, including advocating for a two-state solution that will allow Israelis and Palestinians to live out their national aspirations in peace and security, with democracy and religious freedom for all.

We support a vibrant U.S. role in helping bring the parties together. With humility about our role as peace-makers, we recognize that, ultimately, peace can only come from the parties themselves in a negotiated settlement that will address complex issues of security, borders, settlements, refugees, water rights, and the status of Jerusalem.

We are encouraged by Israelis and Palestinians who are engaged in genuine dialogue, who are working for reconciliation, building the foundation on which a lasting peace will depend.

We prayerfully seek to build bridges in our communities and to support broad, public interreligious cooperation and action for peace.

## Appendix B

### *Interfaith Partners for Peace Trip Itinerary April 27 – May 4, 2015*

#### **Day One: Monday, April 27, 2015**

Arrivals at Ben Gurion International Airport throughout the day

- A group transfer will be provided for those arriving on El Al flight #002
- Transfer to Tel Aviv and check into the hotel
- 6:00 p.m. Welcome by Interfaith Partners for Peace leadership and orientation with your tour educator, **Mike Rogoff**
- 7:00 p.m. Opening dinner at Goshen, a grille restaurant located on the historic Nachalat Binyamin Street

Overnight: Dan Hotel, Tel Aviv

#### **Day Two: Tuesday, April 28, 2015**

- Breakfast at hotel
- 8:30 a.m. Opening study session at the hotel with **Dr. Ruth Calderon**
- 9:45 a.m. Check out of the hotel
- 10:00 a.m. Meet with **MK Michael Oren**, former Israeli Ambassador and recently elected Member of Knesset for the Kulanu party at the hotel (pending final confirmation)
- 11:30 a.m. Peacemaking on the Ground: Visit the **Peres Peace Center** on the Jaffa shore and meet with **Lara Portnoy** and **Soha Atrash**, Project Manager, Medicine, Healthcare & Bio-Medical Technology
- 1:00 p.m. Depart Jaffa and drive to North via the Trans-Israel Highway with boxed lunch en route
- 4:00 p.m. Visit and text study at the Mount of Beatitudes, the site where Jesus is believed to have delivered the Sermon on the Mount
- 5:30 p.m. Drive to Kibbutz Ginosar and check into the hotel
- 7:00 p.m. Dinner at the hotel
- 8:30 p.m. Evening program with **Dr. Marcie Lenk** and **Rev. Peter Pettit**, Co-Directors of Christian Leadership Programs at the Shalom Hartman Institute

Overnight: Nof Ginosar Hotel, Sea of Galilee

#### **Day Three: Wednesday, April 29, 2015**

- Early breakfast at hotel
- 7:30 a.m. Check out of hotel
- 8:00 a.m. Visit and text study at:
- **Tabgha**, traditional site of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes; the modern church preserves fine 5th-century mosaics
- **Capernaum** on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the base of Jesus' Galilean ministry, with its remains of an ancient synagogue

- 10:00 a.m. Drive to Nazareth
- 11:00 a.m. Visit Nazareth and the Church of the Annunciation
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch in Nazareth
- 2:00 p.m. Depart Nazareth and drive to Jerusalem
- 4:30 p.m. Meet with **Dr. Yohanna Katanacho**
- 6:00 p.m. Jerusalem overview at **Haas Promenade**
- 6:45 p.m. Check into the hotel
- 7:30 p.m. Dinner at hotel
- 8:30 p.m. Exploring the Geopolitical Realities of the Middle East Region Today with **Paul Hirschson**

Overnight: Dan Panorama, Jerusalem

#### Day Four: Thursday, April 30, 2015

- Breakfast at hotel
- 7:30 a.m. Briefing at the hotel with **Rami Hatan** and **Akiva Tor** from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 8:00 a.m. Depart hotel
- 8:30 a.m. Study and dialogue at the Shalom Harman Institute with scholars including **Chaya Gilboa** and **Dr. Tal Becker**
- 12:45 p.m. Depart for Ramallah
- 1:30 p.m. Lunch in Ramallah with **Nabil Saath**, senior Palestinian official and former acting Prime Minister
- Program in Ramallah including a meeting with **Dr. Khalil Shikaki**, a Professor of Political Science and director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and **Elias Zananiri**, a Palestinian journalist and former policy advisor to the Palestinian Minister of Justice (guided by journalist **Gal Berger**).
- 5:30 p.m. Return to Jerusalem
- Dinner on own
- 8:00 p.m. Group reflection at hotel

Overnight: Dan Panorama, Jerusalem

#### Day Five: Friday, May 1, 2015

- Breakfast at hotel
- 8:30 a.m. Depart hotel
- 9:00 a.m. Visit **Yad Vashem**, the World Center for Holocaust Research, Documentation, Education, and Commemoration with guide **Liz Elsbey**
- 1:00 p.m. Take a multi-cultural tasting journey through Jerusalem's **Machaneh Yehudah** open-air market
- 2:30 p.m. Return to hotel with time to prepare for Shabbat
- 4:00 p.m. Holocaust in Israeli Consciousness: Yad Vashem debrief session with **Noam Zion**
- 5:00 p.m. Shabbat text study at the hotel
- 5:30 p.m. Depart for Congregation Kol HaNeshama
- 6:15 p.m. Shabbat services at Congregation **Kol HaNeshama**
- 8:00 p.m. **Private Shabbat dinner** at the hotel

Overnight: Dan Panorama, Jerusalem

#### Day Six: Saturday, May 2, 2015

- Breakfast at hotel and morning at leisure
- 11:00 a.m. Morning text study session in hotel
- Lunch on own
- 2:00 p.m. Depart the hotel for a walking tour of Christian sites in the **Old City of Jerusalem**
- 7:58 p.m. Ben Kodesh Lechol: Havdallah overlooking the Old City
- 8:15 p.m. Depart the hotel for dinner
- 8:30 p.m. Dinner and conversation at the cozy T'mol Shilshom restaurant and bookstore, with scholar and author **Yossi Klein Halevi**

Overnight: Dan Panorama, Jerusalem

#### Day Seven: Sunday, May 3, 2015

- Breakfast at hotel
- 7:30 a.m. Depart the hotel
- 8:00 a.m. Meet with Rabbi **David Rosen** and **Rev. Canon Hosam Naoum** at St. George's Cathedral
- 9:30 a.m. Church Services at **St. George's Cathedral** in Jerusalem
- 10:30 a.m. **Kids4Peace** - Educating for Peace & Coexistence: Dialogue with educators **Meredith Rothbart** and **Mohammad Joulany** and the **Very Rev. Diane Nancekivell**
- 12:00 p.m. Visit the **Jerusalem Open House**, an organization working with Jewish & Palestinian LGBT persons; Conversation with **Rabbi Noa Sattath**, CEO of Israel Religious Action Center and former CEO of the Open House, and Jerusalem Open House Executive Director **Elinor Sidi**
- 1:15 p.m. Quick lunch en route
- 1:45 p.m. Drive to Yad b'Yad (Hand in Hand) School
- 2:30 p.m. Visit the **Yad b'Yad Bilingual School** with host **Noa Y.**, dedicated to bringing together Jewish and Arab children in a positive and natural learning environment
- 4:30 p.m. Group reflection time
- Free time in Jerusalem, with dinner on own
- Night visit to **Kotel** (Western Wall)

Overnight: Dan Panorama, Jerusalem

#### Day Eight: Monday, May 4, 2015

- Breakfast at hotel
- 7:15 a.m. Depart hotel and drive to Bethlehem
- 8:00 a.m. Visit the **Church of the Nativity**, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, with local guide **George Saadeh**
- 10:45 a.m. Depart Bethlehem
- 11:30 a.m. Meet with **Ali Abu Awwad**, **Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger**, and **Rabbi Shaul Judelman** from **Shorashim**, a program bringing West Bank Palestinian and Israeli neighbors together despite walls of fear that separate them
- 1:00 p.m. Return to Jerusalem for lunch on your own

- 2:30 p.m. Return to the hotel for time to pack and prepare for flight
- 5:30 p.m. Check out of the hotel and depart for farewell dinner
- 6:00 p.m. Farewell dinner at Piccolino, with guest speakers **Lior Frankenshtayn** and **Ihab Khatib** from the **Shades Negotiation Project**, an innovative program bringing key Israeli and Palestinian young leaders together for a year-long leadership and negotiation skills program with the Harvard Law School Program on Negotiation
- 8:15 p.m. Transfer to airport and check in for various departure flights
- Departure flights to the U.S.A., with next day arrival

Overnight: flight



View of Jerusalem from the Haas Promenade

## Appendix C

### Interfaith Partners for Peace Mission List of Participants April 26-May 5, 2015

- Rabbi Michael Balinsky, *Chicago, IL*
- Rev. Liddy Barlow, *Pittsburgh, PA*
- Rev. Dr. Jerry Campbell, *Los Angeles, CA*
- Deacon Stephen Crippen, *Seattle, WA*
- Rabbi Eric Cytryn, *Harrisburg, PA*
- Hanna Dershowitz, *New York, NY - Staff*
- Ethan Felson, *New York, NY - Staff*
- Rev. Bryan Franzen, *San Jose, CA*
- Rabbi Jamie Gibson, *Pittsburgh, PA*
- Rabbi Seth Goldstein, *Olympia, WA*
- Rabbi Dan Gordon, *Houston, TX*
- Rabbi Leonard Gordon, *Boston, MA*
- Rabbi Melvyn Gottlieb, *Los Angeles, CA*
- David Heim, *Chicago, IL*
- Rev. Katie Ladd, *Seattle, WA*
- Rev. Myron McCoy, *Chicago, IL*
- Rev. Laurey Murphy, *Houston, TX*
- Lynn Pettit, *Allentown, PA*
- Rev. Peter Pettit, *Allentown, PA - Scholar in residence*
- Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, *Chicago, IL - Scholar in residence*
- Rabbi Dennis Sasso, *Indianapolis, IN*
- Rev. Todd Stavrakos, *Gladwyne, PA*
- Rabbi Batya Steinlauf, *Washington, DC*
- Rev. Dr. Tim Stevens, *Chicago, IL*
- Rev. Russell Sullivan, *Harrisburg, PA*
- Rev. Stacy Swain, *Boston, MA*
- Rev. Kathryn Tiede, *Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN*
- Bishop Catherine Waynick, *Indianapolis, IN*

## Appendix D

### *Sermon by Reverend Stacy Swain “Called as Friends” 05/10/2015*

Acts 10:44-48 and John 15:9-17

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Last Sunday morning, while all of you were hearing a good word from Amy, I was sitting in the pews of St. George's church, an Anglican cathedral in East Jerusalem. The place was packed but I found a seat between two of my traveling companions, Rabbi Jamie Gibson from Pittsburg and Rabbi Lenny Gordon from Congregation Mishkan Tefila here in Chestnut Hill.

As we settled in I felt grateful to be in such a beautiful and peaceful space. And I was looking forward to the sermon on Jesus' final teaching to his disciples from the Gospel of John that our reading for today continues.

But when the preacher began to speak, I could not understand a word he was saying. It turned out that the sermon is first preached in Arabic and then preached again in English.

As I listened to what I could not understand, a little boy caught my eye. He was a little guy, probably not more than seven, seated a few rows in front of me with his mother wearing a bright blue bike helmet. I smiled, remembering that quote from Annie Dillard who says we should all be wearing crash helmets when we go to church. For so powerful is God and so powerful the good news that we should really be ready to be shaken up a bit and have our life changed.

But then I remembered where we were and that here in this conflicted land, far too many people have worn helmets for far too long. Here in this conflicted land far too many people have had their lives shattered by violence and far too many live with unhealed wounds.

The purpose of my trip to Israel was to step into the conflict of the land in order to more fully understand it. Traveling with Interfaith Partners for Peace, we were Christian clergy and Jewish Rabbis who came to study the narratives of our faiths and to listen to the narratives of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, both of whom understand themselves as having a deep and defining claim to the land. These are peoples who have been intertwined for a long time in a narrative of conflict.

Now you know how it is when two people have been together for a very long time; when they know each other so well that the other can answer the question before the one has even finished asking it. Or when one can finish the other's story because it is their story too.

What came home to me on this trip is that there is another way that we finish each other's sentences and complete each other's stories. And this other way is born not out of intimacy with another but out of ignorance about the other.

What I heard from the numerous people we met, was how each people, the Israelis and the Palestinians carried, a story about the other. Each had written the other into their own narrative. We heard how each

side was certain of the other's hatred and murderous intention. For the Israelis, the Arabs were dangerous and out to get them and for the Arabs, the Israelis were dangerous and out to get them.

As we know too well, the tendency to write the narrative of the other resides not just in the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. While we were there we heard of the protest in Baltimore where there continues to be a pernicious tendency in our country's law enforcement to write a hate-filled and murderous narrative about African American men.

Reflecting on the news of Baltimore, I was reminded as well about the conflict two years ago, right here in Newton, over a proposal to turn the Engine 6 firehouse into affordable housing for people who were homeless. Many in Newton, many in Waban, were quite convinced that those people were a threat and a danger.

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It was threatening and dangerous times for those first followers of Jesus, but what strikes me about the passage from Jesus farewell discourse that Jim read for us this morning is how Jesus is commanding the disciples to create right in the midst of the fear and threat a space where love abides, where those that dwell in that space are called friend and where joy is made complete.

Jesus is commanding them to make a literal space among them and a metaphorical space within them right in the midst of the conflicts they faced. A space where love abides, where one is called friend and where new narratives based not on fear and threat but on peace and care can be written.

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I experienced such a space, just a few days ago on the last day of our trip. We were in the West Bank, just outside of Bethlehem. We had turned off the main highway and made our way down a narrow dirt road until we stopped before what looked like a rough temporary structure on the edge of a field. There was a large canvass tarp strung up to provide some shade. Chairs were arranged in a large circle. We made our way into the space and sat down.

This was the meeting place of Shorashim, a program that brings West Bank Palestinians and Israeli neighbors together. We were met by Ali Abu Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger. Rabbi Hanan introduced himself as a Settler, a Jew, a Zionist and a Rabbi. The narrative he told us, the narrative that defines him is that he is part of Israel, a young nation of an ancient people, reconstituting itself in the land after a long time of exile. He told us that he and others like him are the dry bones of which the Prophet Ezekiel spoke, dry bones that once again live! He told us that that's the meaning of his life! And that even though he has said it thousand times, it still makes him cry.

And then sitting there under the tent in the field he continued saying that his truth had blinded him to the truth of the Palestinians, until 15 months ago when he was invited by a Christian Pastor to a gathering that was going to take place not far from where he lived. For some reason he said he accepted and walked 20 minutes from his house in the settlements to the field in which we were sitting. There he met an Arab for the first time. He said that that encounter changed his life. Talking late into the night he heard his Arab neighbors tell their story and speak of their fears of Israelis. He said he was speechless. For him it was the Arabs who were to be feared and who were a threat to him. Now he was hearing that he was feared, that he was a threat.

Then Ali spoke. He began by telling us that the political management of Judaism in this land is his problem. It has made his life miserable. Born as a refugee he witnessed much violence and participated in some. In October of 2000, while coming home his brother got into an argument with an Israeli soldier and was shot to death. Ali said he remembered feeling so angry that all he wanted to do was to seek revenge, but his heart he said was arguing with his head. His mind was asking the question "how many must I kill

to make up for the murder of my brother?” “How many mothers will have to cry as payment for the tears my mother sheds.” He said he was broken until one day, his mother received a visit from a group of parents who also had lost a child.

Many of those in the group were Jewish. He was 31 at the time but remembers feeling shocked to see these Jewish parents crying. He said he did not know Jews could cry. Suddenly, he had to face for the first time, he told us, that the Jew was a human being with a heart and with tears.

And so Ali and Rabbi Hanan come together under the tent, in that field, in the West Bank, on the edge of Bethlehem, to write a new narrative. There under the tent where they call each other friend and they invite Palestinians and Jews to come together to tell their truth and to work together to create a new shared reality and to envision peace. It was an astonishing visit. It was an astonishing place.

I came away thinking I could use a bit more astonishment in my life. And in turning to the scripture from Acts this morning, astonishment is exactly what Peter and the circumscised believes get. They were astonished to find the Holy Spirit upon those who they had considered to be the other, the Gentiles — who those early disciples had thought were outside of their narrative and beyond the reach of God’s grace. But God’s tent, it turns out, is large.

When we look out over the world and across our communities, and see such conflict and entrenched violence it is easy to become discouraged. It is easy to think that peace will never come; that far too many people will continue to put on helmets; that far too many people’s lives will be shattered by violence; and far too many people’s body’s and souls will be marked by wounds not healed by time.

And yet, what I experienced last week has made me deeply hopeful. I have come to believe that peace is possible, because I have seen it emerging in lives that are being transformed in spaces and places created as sanctuaries where something new can happen, where love can abide and where once people who were called enemies now are called friend. I saw it there under the tent there in the West Bank. I saw it there in a bilingual Arab Israeli elementary school and I felt it there in worship last Sunday at St. George’s where shoulder to shoulder with my Rabbi friends we listened to a sermon preached in Arabic about Jesus’ call to abide in love.

Our job as peace makers, is to do as Jesus commands. It is to create such spaces among us and within in us where love abides. It is to create a place of hospitality and encounter.

So here is what I’d like to ask. What if we commit in the days or weeks to come commit to sitting down with someone we do not know or someone we think we do not have much in common with? Perhaps even, someone you don’t particularly like? Perhaps someone who may have a very different story than our own? What if we sit down with that person and ask to hear their story and tell our own. Could we create with that person even if it is just for an hour or so, a tent, a space, a place where love abides? And could we allow ourselves the possibility of being astonished?

It may sound like a little thing but I am quite convinced that in this small way we are contributing to a greater peace.

And as a final note, at the end of the service last Sunday communion was celebrated. As we stood in the line approaching the altar to receive the bread and cup, I saw the mother of the little boy reach over, un-buckle his helmet and leave it behind on the floor.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

## Appendix E

### Letter from Rabbi Dennis Sasso



## Congregation Beth-El Zedeck

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May 14, 2015  
25 Iyar 5775

SENIOR RABBINIC CHAIR  
*endowed by*  
MELVIN AND BREN SIMON

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HAL B. SCHEVITZ  
*Assistant Rabbi*

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*Executive Director*

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ELLEN GABOVITCH  
*President*

Mr. Ethan Felson  
Senior Vice President and General Counsel  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
116 East 27<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10016

Dear Ethan,

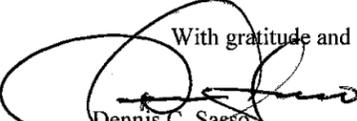
Over the past week I have been recovering from jet lag while reaping the rewards of our wonderful Interfaith Partners for Peace Mission to Israel. I want to thank you, Hanna Dershowitz and Rabbi Leonard Gordon for coordinating and leading such an incredible trip, as well as Rabbi Yehiel Poupko and Rev. Peter Pettit for serving as our most erudite and inspiring Scholars in Residence.

I have visited Israel and the West Bank several times in the past, often leading congregational trips or participating in rabbinic conferences. As a college student, I was privileged to spend my junior year at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I have always loved and identified with Israel, the land and its peoples. But this experience was unique because of the depth of sharing among the interfaith participants, the building of friendships which will last a lifetime and the open and genuine engagement with Israelis and Palestinians across the political and religious spectrum, both in positions of authority and at the grass roots level. I’ve returned encouraged that even in the midst of a difficult and complex geo-political reality, we are witnessing signs of hope for reconciliation and peace.

It was an honor to share this experience with my dear colleague and friend, Rev. Catherine Waynick, the Episcopal Bishop of Indianapolis. We had met several time in anticipation of the trip to study, share a meal and pray together. We now look forward to sharing the fruits of our journey with our respective constituencies and the broader interfaith and civic communities of Indianapolis.

Please express our deep gratitude to my friend and colleague, Rabbi Steve Gutow and to the generous donor(s) whose vision and generosity made this experience possible. I am eager to know in what ways I might continue to be of help to the JCPA in furthering this initiative or assisting in any other endeavors.

With gratitude and fondest regards,



Dennis C. Sasso  
Senior Rabbi

## Appendix F

### *Homily by Deacon Stephen Crippen*

The Haas Promenade looks down on Jerusalem from a serene southern height. It's a fair way south, so you can see pretty much everything: not just the Old City and the Dome of the Rock, but the "new" city as well—'new' in Jerusalem terms meaning all the developments over the last couple of thousand years.

If the Messiah returned as promised, we could stand on the Haas Promenade and watch him descend the Mount of Olives, to the north and east. We'd watch him resurrect all the bodies from the field of graves on the western slope of the Mount, and lead them in a joyful horde through the Golden Gate, the one we Christians say Jesus used on Palm Sunday.

I stood on the Haas Promenade a couple of weeks ago, in a cool, golden late afternoon, and snapped pictures with two and a half dozen other Christian ministers and Jewish rabbis, on a trip hosted by Interfaith Partners for Peace, a trip designed to deepen understanding and dialogue between our traditions. My buddy on the trip, my designated partner, was Rabbi Seth Goldstein from Olympia—and yes, Seth and I took a selfie on the Haas Promenade.

But this was a serious trip, and even a quick stop on a scenic overlook at the end of a long day became an opportunity for study and learning. Our group was led by two scholars, one Christian and one Jewish, and it was a rabbi by the name of Yehiel Poupko who led the group that afternoon. Rabbi Poupko is a scholar at the Jewish Federation in Chicago. On the promenade, he talked about the city of Jerusalem, and how for some (including many Christians) Jerusalem is a spiritual home—the actual city in the near East is less important than the concept or dream of Jerusalem, the celestial City of God. But for Jews, the rugged, ancient, roiling city of Jerusalem—the physical one we were gazing at—was and is centrally important.

There are times when the object of affection can't be a dreamy metaphor. For the Jewish people, 'Jerusalem' is an actual place on the map.

Rabbi Poupko wanted to broaden our understanding of this idea. It's important that we understand. In 1994, he came to Jerusalem as part of a delegation that met His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who had come to Israel for a visit. As he stood over the city with his new friends, the Dalai Lama turned to Rabbi Poupko and asked this question: "What is the most important passage in your scripture?"

This is an expectable and proper question, as decent a way as any to strike up an interfaith dialogue. At first Rabbi Poupko thought of the obvious answers. The most important passage in the Hebrew Bible? Well, probably the one where we are commanded to love God and neighbor as we love ourselves. Or maybe it's the shema, the short prayer at the heart of morning and evening services: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is one." But then Rabbi Poupko got it. He knew the answer that the Dalai Lama needed to know.

He said the most important passage in all of Hebrew scripture is Deuteronomy 23, verses 12-13. Here's what they say: "You shall have a designated area outside the camp to which you shall go. With your utensils you shall have a trowel; when you relieve yourself outside, you shall dig a hole with it and then cover up your excrement."

We should probably unpack that a bit.

Rabbi Poupko's point was that in contrast to, say, the Dalai Lama's Tibetan Buddhism, Judaism is practical and down to earth, not caught up in a detached, abstract world of ideas but here on the ground, addressing the concerns of the real city we see lying below us. Tribes and empires and armies come and go, and the Jewish people clean up after them. They care for the land, for one another, and for the stranger. They worry about securing and administering the city. They take care of business.

The Jewish perspective is also seen in their modest architecture, for which they are not known or celebrated. Jewish architecture is unimpressive because the main Jewish concern is not the gleam of a tower or the ornamentation of a pillar, but the inner life of the human person, living in community. Jews work hard to develop the health and sanctity of the human person, all the while cleaning up God's city, taking care of everything as good stewards.

It is prudent to have a hole outside the camp for your smelly waste. But it's more than prudent: it is a vital spiritual principle. Can we Christians understand this insight?

It might be hard to imagine that we can, given that tonight we celebrate yet another celestial wonder: the ascension of Jesus into heaven. We followed the Star of the East that led the sages to the cradle at the beginning of the Incarnation, and now we stand at the top of the Mount of Olives, east of the Golden Gate, as Jesus is taken up, taken out of our sight. Can we understand the Jewish worldview that finds God not in the clouds, but in the gritty city, and even closer in than that—within the human heart?

We can, and as incarnational, Anglo-Catholic Christians, we must—we must understand this, if we want to understand our own spiritual life, and understand how our way of being faithful can make a difference in this troubled world.

The Ascension is not simply a story of glory, the final triumph of Jesus. It is the completion of the Cycle of Incarnation, the climax of the story about God's participation in human life, and our participation in the life of God: God in Jesus became human, became a frail child and a vulnerable, hungry peasant; became a sibling and teacher and friend; became a political prisoner on the gallows; became a lasting presence at the center of his community of human beings here in real cities. And in the Ascension, the human Jesus returns to heaven, completes the cycle, and because he is human, he takes humanity along, takes us up, helps us to share in God's divinity just as God became humble to share in our humanity.

But his friends were left on the Mount of Olives. Let's watch what they do, so that we can get some idea of how the abstract concept of 'ascension' might be helpful or useful for us. After Jesus departed from them, "two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away."

First, notice how they were addressed: "Men of Galilee." This is like saying, "Men of Moses Lake," or "Good citizens of Blaine, Washington." They weren't nobility; they weren't the one percent. And then they returned to the city by walking down the mountain. As Jesus went up, they went down. They stopped looking into a faraway cloud for their friend and teacher, and turned their attention downward, down toward the city with its teeming pilgrims and political unrest and faulty sewage systems.

Second, notice the earthly, concrete precision, almost as if Luke is giving us the Google Maps coordinates: he tells us which mountain they were on, and how long it took them (in the Jewish unit of a sabbath day) to get to the city.

Finally, let's unpack the confusing line, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." He will come (again) the same way as we saw him go. And how did he go? He went by first becoming a frail, vulnerable, intimate, and revolutionary human being. He will come again, then, in the same way. His ascension teaches us that Christ is found among frail, vulnerable, intimate, and revolutionary human beings.

God ascends into all things, all cities, all relationships. God ascends downward and outward, not just up, down and out and around and into this room, into the friendship you have with the person next to you right now, into the living room you vacuum before your guest arrives, into your cubicle at work, into the human heart that beats inside you, and into the deepest fear you hold in your heart. God ascends into this bread and this cup, into the tree resin and beeswax we burn for our ceremonies, into the wooden and metal organ pipes that lead us in song, into our labor to restore the health of this blue-green earth and all her creatures, into our sharing of food with our neighbors who (just like us) are hungry every day, into our earthly, smelly, communal life together here and now, into our whole lives broken and poured out so that all might be nourished.

We need not gaze into heaven. If we follow these men of Galilee into the city, we will find our friend and Savior.

We should be prepared to get our hands dirty.

## Appendix G

### *Selections from the Blog Posts of Pastor Todd Stavrakos of Gladwyne Presbyterian Church*

"...our next meeting with Dr. Johanna Katanacho, who is a professor at the Bethlehem University and an author of the Kairos Document...as I listened to Dr. Katanacho, while I was moved by his personal story, his theology was very dangerous to not just delegitimizing the State of Israel, but delegitimizing Jews themselves..."

"For those of you who are Presbyterians, the BDS Movement (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) has little if any support in Palestine. Palestinians need investment desperately and any boycotts or divestments are not supported by the people of Palestine. Also, the BDS movement as a goal wants a one state solution, which again goes against the desire of the people of Palestine. So if this is the case, I myself wonder what the agenda is for BDS proponents in PCUSA. Do they care about the Palestinians and their desires or do they just have an agenda against Israel?"

"In Gush Etzion there is a movement called Roots, that is creating dialogue between Palestinians and Jews. Ali Abu Awwad is a Palestinian seeking to make non-violence the way of his people. He has been imprisoned in the past for being involved in more violent pursuits, but has now sought a different path., Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger is an Orthodox rabbi settler...Roots is the effort of these two brave men, and their colleagues, to bring about reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians.

To listen to them was like an "aha" moment, it can happen, it is happening, how can we in the church foster this? But it is not a polyanna kind of aha moment, there is much to do, much pain to overcome, but it can happen, it will happen. Those are the my thoughts as I listened. I felt Christ in this place, this canopied area outside a hut, which I assume was Awwad's home, a home he opens up to Jews and Palestinians. I felt Christ here, in the home of a Muslim sitting with Jews."

"... we went to the restaurant for our farewell meal and our final speakers. I am not going to name names because of the work they are doing, but it is partnered with Harvard University. Two men, one Jewish and one Palestinian, have joined together to bring mid-level government officials of Israel and Palestine together to learn about each other. Talk about exciting! They shared stories of bringing groups of officials together in the embassy or the residence of a diplomat to keep the meetings secret, and build bridges. These are men and women, risking on peace, this is the future! It will happen."

## Appendix H

### *Article from The Jewish Chronicle by Toby Tabachnick “Clergy’s Trip to Israel Brings Renewed Focus on Hope”*

The Rev. Liddy Barlow had never before visited Israel, but what she witnessed and learned while traveling the land with Rabbi Jamie Gibson — and a cohort of 13 other interfaith pairs from across the country — has changed her perspective of the Middle East.

“I think my own views have been made more complicated,” said Barlow, executive director of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, a coalition of more than two dozen Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant denominations that issues policy statements and promotes church unity. “I am now able to engage the issues with more depth and nuance than I had before.”

Barlow and Gibson, spiritual leader of Temple Sinai, and the other pairs of clergy were in Israel from April 28 to May 5 on a trip sponsored by Interfaith Partners for Peace, a community of Jewish and non-Jewish faith leaders committed to a two-state solution and to helping their respective congregations learn about Israel, its history and its people.

The trip had three components, according to Peter Petit, associate professor of Religion Studies at Muhlenberg College and a co-convenor of the trip: text-based study to explore what Israel and its people mean to both Jews and Christians; encountering diverse voices across Israeli and Palestinian communities; and witnessing several grassroots projects of Israelis and Palestinians working together toward coexistence and peace.

“The way that American Christians and American Jews think about and engage with Israel is almost necessarily divergent,” explained Petit. “For Christians, Israel is a question of holy sites, history and peace in a troubled part of the world. But for American Jews, ‘This is part of my story.’ This is the Exodus in the Haggadah. This is not about them back then, ‘It’s about me today.’ Christians just don’t have that sense.”

One aim of the trip was to open up the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Petit said, and to demonstrate there are more than two perspectives to that conflict.

That the conflict is not black and white became evident to Barlow during the trip.

“There are shades,” she said. “There are true narratives on every side.”

This was the inaugural trip for IPFP, which was launched about six months ago. It is currently being organizationally incubated by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, but organizers are aiming for it to become an independent nonprofit, according to Rabbi Leonard Gordon, a co-convenor of the group and the spiritual leader of Congregation Mishkan Tefila near Boston.

The pairs of clergy came from 14 different cities from throughout the country, including San Francisco, Boston, Indianapolis and Harrisburg. The pairs spent eight days together in study, worship and listening to the voices of those living the conflict on the ground. They spent one day studying at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

The group visited several sacred sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Western Wall, both in Jerusalem.

“For me, to walk through the Galilee with Christian ministers was very powerful, very moving,” said Gibson.

The rabbi, who has been to Israel 24 times, said this most recent trip was “one of the most fulfilling and enriching trips I’ve ever taken. I had a sense of seeing Israel through eyes that were different than my own.”

A critical element of the trip, Gibson noted, was being exposed to a diversity of voices and the consequent realization of some of his colleagues that “Palestinians are not of one voice on all issues.”

For example, he said, it became obvious that the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement is not universally endorsed by Palestinians.

“Over and over from the Palestinians, we heard, ‘Invest [in programs promoting peace], don’t divest,’” Gibson said. That message “strengthened the hand” of those clergy members who are opposed to BDS in their efforts to edify their congregations back home.

The rabbis on the trip came from diverse backgrounds, including Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist, while most of the Christian partners were from mainstream Protestant and Episcopalian denominations.

“There was a really strong Presbyterian presence on the trip,” Barlow observed. “And some of them had very mixed feelings about the action of their General Assembly last summer.”

It was at the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) that a resolution to divest church funds from three companies doing business in Israel won approval by a slim margin, 310-303.

Trip participant Todd Stavrakos, pastor of the Gladwyne Presbyterian Church near Philadelphia, acknowledged that some of his Presbyterian colleagues are persuaded by the “particular narrative” promoted by BDS supporters.

But he saw for himself during the trip that “the BDS agenda is not representative of the Palestinian people as a whole.”

“There is a sense of fairness that BDS appeals to,” Stavrakos said. “But if someone looks at the facts on the ground, it’s not accurate.”

A central aim of IPFP is to “create teams of rabbis and Christian clergy throughout the country committed to study together, and to travel together,” said Gordon, who hopes to expand the program to include additional partner pairs and convene four interfaith trips to Israel a year.

Despite the turmoil in the region, Barlow came home optimistic, she said.

“They were exposing us to a complexity and richness of the problem, and the richness of possibilities for hope,” Barlow said. “I am not without hope.”



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