

# YWCA Newsletter



Global Partnerships:  
The Cornerstone  
for Development

Volume 03, Summer 2017



# Partnerships are Essential

## Partnerships are Essential

**Rev. Loren McGrail**

*Communication, Advocacy and Church Relations*

This summer newsletter is a giant thank you note to all the partners who have worked with us over the many past years. We literally could not do what we do without their support; either financially or spiritually. Together we have built a Palestinian organization that empowers youth and women through vocational training, leadership development, and civic engagement. As we approach over 100 years of settler colonialism and 50 years of a military occupation, we appreciate not only the support but the accompaniment on this journey of trying to keep hope alive. By sharing a common mission for peace and justice, or economic or social empowerment, we know we are making a difference in the lives of young people and women in our communities.

Our newsletter is divided into two main sections: Working with Our International Partners and Working with Our Faith Based Partnerships. In each section the reader will find articles written by our partners including an article about two of our young women who had the opportunity to work with the Peace and Justice Internship and Mission of the Church of the Disciples. In addition, we have included articles from a group of women from the United Church of Christ Central Pacific Conference who came here in the Spring of 2016 to work with us as part of their commitment to be Global Mission partners with us.

2017 is a year of commemorations here in Palestine, let it also be a year marked by significant progress toward liberation and freedom.



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# Celebrating Our Global Partnerships

**Mira Rizeq**

*National General Secretary*



The YWCA of Palestine has been working in Palestine for decades and decades. One of the most successful elements of its work is the long established global Partnerships. Being part of such a large, well established and reputable global movement has offered us a chance to create several global partnerships within the YWCA family. The support and networking facilitated by World Office in Geneva is duly recognized here. Being an ecumenical organization has also offered us a chance to build strong partnerships with several churches globally, especially churches in the United States and Europe. Without the support and solidarity of our global partners, the YWCA would not have been able to make the positive changes in people's lives in the communities where we work. Our partners have worked hard in educating their constituencies on our context and our everyday struggle under occupation.

The YWCA decided to dedicate this special newsletter to our partners, to offer some of our partners (we realize we could not ask all of them) a chance to reflect on our partnership and assess its value for their own organizations and constituencies.

Obviously, this newsletter is an opportunity for us to express our gratitude for the long term support and solidarity of our partners. To all of our partners, and as the General Secretary, I say thank you today and forever and always!!

Our partners are quite diversified in terms of geographic location, affiliation, mission and vision, expertise, ways of work, and funding levels. Irrespective of the scope of the work we did together, they all individually and collectively have assisted us in realizing our strategic goals and objectives over the years, and in becoming a more responsive and relevant youth and women organization. To name a few areas of support: Bread for the World, the United Church of Christ/Global Ministries and Y-Global (Norway) have for years supported our vocational training programs and skills training in refugee camps, and enabled us to become more market driven and responsive to young people's needs. Horyzon, Christian Aid, ICCO, the United Methodist Women, and Oxfam Quebec have all supported us in advancing our economic empowerment strategies, expanding our target areas and population, and creating new approaches and services for enhancing young people's livelihoods as well as creating jobs, Y-Global and YWCA-YMCA Sweden have been instrumental in building our capacity as a rights-based organization, and engaging

nationally and internationally in the implementation of women's rights agendas including UNSCR1325. Without the financing and leverage funds given to us from Y-Care International and YWCA-YMCA Sweden, we could not have accessed big grants from donors like the EU. All of these partners have helped us conduct participatory needs assessments in all localities we are working in, which had helped create long-term sustainable local and national partnerships for the YWCA.

In most cases, these partnerships have offered us financial resources, human resources, networks, technical support, exchange opportunities, common understanding on issues, opportunities for growth, a platform for dialogue, and most importantly opportunities for advocacy and for making our voices heard in the international community. We have shared a lot in many of our partners' meetings, in which we exchanged knowledge, skills, information as well as built support. These partnerships have been successful because we have developed a shared vision, shared values, personal relationships and human network, and engagement.

Equally important to us as YWCA is our advocacy for women's rights, youth rights and a just peace where all people of the region can live equally and in peace. Over the years, the YWCA has developed a number of advocacy tools that many of our partners are using especially when advocating for a just peace in Palestine and the region, and many of them have actually helped us both financially and technically to develop these tools. With support from Global Ministries of the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ, we have been fortunate to have Rev. McGrail working with us to help us develop our advocacy strategy and tools for our partners to use when back home.

Thanks to the World YWCA, Global Ministries and the Church of Scotland, as well as the Presbyterian Church and Pal Craft Aid in the USA who are now supporting and using them.

Our partners have given us value, and made us feel special, and in a political situation like ours where we live under oppression, they created a model for equality and mutual respect. We are honored and privileged to have a chance to build, sustain and grow such partnerships. We look forward to continuing the partnerships, and to keep hope alive for our women, youth and communities who continue to struggle to exist and live in dignity.



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# Mutually Beneficial

**Bruno Essig, Project Coordinator Palestine**

*Horyzon - YWCA-YMCA Switzerland*

“For Horyzon “the partnership with the YWCA of Palestine is special because we can learn a lot from the YWCA too. YWCA of Palestine has gained profound experience in advocacy and we can benefit from this knowledge.”



The YWCA of Palestine and the local YWCA associations in Palestine are some of the longest standing partners of Horyzon - the cooperation started already 30 years ago.

During these three decades, we have been amazed time and again by the determination of the YWCA of Palestine to work for the most marginalized women and young people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The YWCA has spared neither trouble nor expense to reach its target beneficiaries in remote rural areas or in refugee camps. In doing so, the YWCA has always closely collaborated with

the local communities and grassroots organizations. The YWCA has not only listened attentively to their recommendations and needs, but also shared its knowledge and experience with these organizations.

The willingness and eagerness of the YWCA to innovate and to include new approaches in the programs have impressed us as well. We were happy to see the transformation of the food production unit in Jericho into a viable, financially self-sustaining social enterprise. Even though many hurdles had to be overcome and setbacks had to be suffered in the process, the YWCA did not lose sight of the objective and succeeded.

We also appreciate the eagerness of the YWCA to collaborate with and learn from academic partners as well as governmental institutions. Projects such as “Young Business Coaches”, which was implemented together with the University of Bethlehem, demonstrate the mutual benefits and the potential of such collaborations.

One of the many highlights, which we still have vividly in our memory, was the conference on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women’s Freedom, Peace and Dignity in Palestine” at the end of 2014. The YWCA of Palestine demonstrated its capability to organize and host a major international conference in which more than 250 participants from Palestine as well as from many other countries gathered. The conference proved how well the YWCA is connected with and valued by other local, national and international non-governmental as well as governmental organizations.

For Horyzon the partnership with the YWCA of Palestine is special because we can learn a lot from the YWCA too. YWCA of Palestine has gained profound experience in advocacy and we can benefit from this knowledge.

At Horyzon we look forward to continuing the mutually benefitting partnership and collaboration with YWCA of Palestine. It is crucial for us to have partner organizations like the YWCA that are so dedicated to their vision – a vision that Horyzon is sharing and supporting as well.

# Celebrating 25 Years of Working Together

By Hans Heijs

Middle East Representative

ICCO

“ *It's working together, enriching each other's imagination and scope, and not forgetting to humour that so often is part of our meetings that ICCO most cherishes.* ”



In the Middle East, the YWCA of Palestine is one of ICCO's longest standing cooperating partner. In ICCO's registration system we can trace back our cooperation till 1992. Having cooperated over such a long period of time implies that many ICCO colleagues worked with YWCA. The comments that they give focus on a few constant factors: rootedness in the Palestinian society, women empowerment through social as well as economic rights and cooperation with other civil society organisations.

YWCA being one of the oldest civil society organisations in Palestine draws a lot of experience and orientation from its wide local and grassroots contacts. From there it builds its response not only in a programmatic manner but also in its organisational set up. That programmatic response has changed over time. Where YWCA started off with human rights capacity building with a focus on the position of women it also introduced women economic empowerment. Nowadays both go hand in hand and one cannot function without the other. YWCA realises that economic empowerment means that women are to take the opportunity to become entrepreneurs who take decisions about investments and run risks. To build in such an approach in its programming requires innovation.

The organisation never shies away from reorganisation and reform if realities on the ground deem this necessary. Such processes take a lot of work, self-criticism and rethinking, but most of all it takes courage and belief to make the organisation's mission come to life.

These two elements clearly are driving forces that are so alive in the YWCA and so much appreciated by ICCO. Working with YWCA is not about projects, it is about knowing that change is needed and the conviction that we can do it together; and that we do this in partnership so we can inspire each other. The roles are not strictly defined but moderate given the expertise and means that we both bring to the table.

It's working together, enriching each other's imagination and scope, and not forgetting to humour that so often is part of our meetings that ICCO most cherishes. Working with YWCA is inspiring, rewarding and a joy at the same time and for ICCO a privilege that will reach its 25th year in 2017!!

# Friendship and Partnership

**Karin Olsson**, *National Secretary General*

**Jana Frolen**, *International Secretary for Eastern Europe and the Middle East*

**YWCA-YMCA Sweden**

“ *The YWCA-YMCA of Sweden is hoping that our cooperation can contribute to the construction of a democratic and free Palestine. No doubt, civil society organisations are important actors for democratisation, state-building and economic growth.* ”



Being a part of the global YWCA-movement is a privilege for YWCA YMCA Sweden. A unique feature in a global movement like the YWCA-movement, is that we share the same values all over the world and we are working together towards the same goals in a global context, despite local differences in our countries, notwithstanding if a formal partnership agreement is in place or not. The spirit of solidarity, mutual respect and striving to make the world a better place for girls and women is there. It gives us a coherent ground for our partnership.

The friendship and partnership between YWCA Palestine and YWCA-YMCA Sweden is a special relationship with long tradition. And it is a partnership that the YWCA-YMCA of Sweden values and cherishes. Our movements have had contact and supported each other since the late 60s, and since the 90s we have a formalized cooperation. As a representative for the YWCA-YMCA of Sweden, I would like to thank the YWCA Palestine for the opportunity to share our thoughts and appreciation in the newsletter of YWCA Palestine.

Our current leaders tell me of contacts between our movements from the 1960s and I have taken part of anecdotes from World YWCA Council in Athens in 1979 and from the World Council in Stavanger in 1991 when YWCA Palestine was formally re-affiliated with the World YWCA. My colleagues shared memories of how we in so many situations and issues supported each other at international meetings. I hear stories of how leaders in Sweden found inspiration in your leaders such as Jean Zaru, Doris Salah, and Samia Khoury – just to name a few, in the same way that Mira Rizeq inspires us with her courage and commitment. And in the Swedish YWCA-YMCA-movement the interest and commitment for Palestine is and always have been strong. A few Swedish YWCA-YMCA local associations have longstanding local to local partnerships with Palestinian locals that are very important.

The concept of a formalized partnership, like the one between YWCA Palestine and YMCA-YWCA Sweden, always contains a set of definite conditions. Firstly, we need a common idea of what we would like to achieve together. Secondly, we need resources: financial to finance the cooperation, personnel to perform the tasks, knowledge on the topic in order to be sure that we are doing the right thing and we need a great deal of trust in each other's intentions and capacity. Lastly, we need to define who does what. If we can create these three core stones, the outcomes and opportunities that come with our partnership are endless.

Due to internships of YWCA Swedish volunteers, like the latest volunteer young leader Ellen, we could bring hands on experience and deeper understanding of the YWCA work and how occupation affects every day life of people. All this creates global engagement on the local level in our organisation. Even contacts and relationships with other Y-actors as Y Care International in the UK and Y Global in Norway have developed a lot since we have started the joint Shumous project.



Now we are in the process of evaluating our latest program that aimed to create opportunities of economic empowerment and civic engagement for youth and especially young women. In 2017 we continue our partnership and will focus on UN resolution 1325 and work for youth empowerment to create tools for youth to be able to advocate for their rights on all levels.

Our new program is now about strengthening the role of women in promoting peace with justice and finding ways of implementing Resolution 1325 in the Palestinian context. This is an important project not only for achieving results in Palestine, but also engaging with local communities, women coalitions on the national level and high level meetings on the international level, like the CSW or Human Rights Council in New York and Geneva. For us it is also a chance to learn more about the Resolution itself and how it works in practice.

The YWCA-YMCA of Sweden is hoping that our cooperation can contribute to the construction of a democratic and free Palestine. No doubt, civil society organisations are important actors for democratisation, state-building and economic growth. You can contribute to create peaceful coexistence, influence attitudes and hold public officials to account. We are proud of our partnership and will continue to support your struggle for freedom, justice, equality, dignity, and security. We would like to take this opportunity to thank YWCA Palestine, the board, the national office, local organisations and all volunteers and members for the immense work you do. We do believe that it will bring peace and justice to your families, communities and country.

# The Essence of Partnership Between YWCA Palestine and YGlobal

**Linda Martinsen**

Program Advisor  
YGlobal

“ *The youth exchanges have been crucial in our advocacy work in Norway, and it is through these exchanges and friendships that our partnership has grown over the years.* ”



YGlobal in Norway is proud to be partnering with Palestine YWCA on advocacy for a Free Palestine. Our partnership has a long history and it has become stronger over the past years with a bold response to the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and to the call for women's freedom, dignity and peace. The Norwegian YWCA-YMCA has supported the call by launching the Free Palestine campaign in Norway.

In 2010, the work and partnership on UNSCR 1325 in Palestine started and it has been highly successful. YWCA of Palestine has played an important role in pushing the Palestinian Authorities to bring to life the

National Action Plan (NAP) on the UNSCR 1325. It was absolutely worth the effort because the Palestinian Authority headed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs launched the NAP for the protection and non-discrimination of Palestinian women in 2016. Two years earlier, YWCA of Palestine held the conference on Women's Freedom, Peace and Dignity in Palestine, where many young women, government officials and international organisations were engaged. Today, the YWCA is both a member of the NGO National Coalition for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the Governmental National Committee on UNSCR 1325. Thus, it is responsible for implementing specific activities within the NAP and plays a significant role in 1325 in Palestine in general. YGlobal is proud of being part of this journey and the wonderful achievements made through this partnership.

When it comes to advocacy, YGlobal has taken a clear stand over the years to advocate for ending the occupation and the right for Palestinians to have a sovereign state. By launching the Free Palestine campaign, we call for broad economic boycott of the state of Israel. As a christian organization, we responded by endorsing KAIROS and its call for supporting liberation. As the first Christian organisation to call for boycotting Israel in Norway, we have been met by both criticism and support. Yet it is very important to take this action as a reaction to the continuous violations of Palestinian rights and failure of the peace process. Through the campaign we also want to pave the way for other organisations in Norway to be bolder in their advocacy for Palestine. Without our partnership with the YWCA, the JAI and the YMCA in Palestine, this would not have been possible.



Through several youth exchanges, the YWCA has hosted and helped Norwegian youth see how the occupation affects young people and women in Palestine. They have through their actions and programs

that strengthen resilience of communities, women and youth, and steadfastness for their people and their land, taught us what it takes to struggle for freedom and showed us their everlasting support and kindness to their communities and to each other. These exchanges have been crucial in our advocacy work in Norway, and it is through these exchanges and friendships that our partnership has grown over the years.

Further, we are looking very much forward to our partnership on UNSCR 2250 on youth, peace and security. Seeing young people as assets instead of a burden or troublemakers is crucial for building a just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel. It is essential to involve youth in our work on non-violent resistance against the Israeli occupation. Therefore, we are excited to be a part of the youth conference that will be held in 2018, and looking forward to many years of long and lasting partnership.



# Working with Our Faith Based Partnerships towards Peace with Justice

**Dr. Peter Makari,**

*Executive Middle East and Europe,  
Global Ministries of the Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ (UCC)*

“ More recently, through the development of the “Fabric of Our Lives” project, the Disciples and UCC have had access to refugee women’s stories and skills in a tangible and personal way, and through the art of Palestinian embroidery and the form of dolls. ”



For many years, Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ (UCC) and the YWCA of Palestine have nurtured a deep and mutually edifying relationship of trust, support, and shared pursuit of justice. Global Ministries is the common mission board of the Disciples and the UCC, two Protestant church denominations based in the US. (The Disciples also include Canadian members.) Global Ministries’ vision is “that all of God’s people and creation share in God’s abundant life,” a vision that is accomplished through the core values of presence, mutuality, community, justice, and peace. With more than 200 partnerships worldwide, Global Ministries strives to live out those values through solidarity, confronting powers, embodying reconciliation, and walking in hope.

As Palestinians prepare to mark a half-century since the naksa of 1967, the Disciples and UCC continue to seek an end to occupation through public witness and committed engagement. Our support for the rights of refugees, many of whom are now children and grandchildren of the nakba, remains firm. How we understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the policy positions we have adopted, and the ways we engage in advocacy are deeply informed by our partners, and the YWCA is prominent among them. It is a partnership that enables deeper understanding of the issues related to refugees and occupation, and of women’s empowerment. It requires and compels studying beyond headlines and commercial media; as well as engagement to overcome systems of injustice; and invites prayers for strength and support, especially when circumstances require it.

For decades, a primary foundation of the Global Ministries-YWCA partnership has been the focus on refugees. Through its vocational training program, the YWCA has enabled women to learn the skills required to contribute to the support of themselves and their families. Global Ministries’ support for the program has provided a perspective on the Palestinian refugee community that transcends stereotypes and has allowed our church members to see a different reality. More recently, through the development of the “Fabric of Our Lives” project, the Disciples and UCC have had access to refugee women’s stories and skills in a tangible and personal way, and through the art of Palestinian embroidery and the form of dolls.



The story of the dolls, the newer interpretive items ("The Wise Women," "Breaking Down the Wall," and the "Flight into Egypt" miniatures) and the broader stories and work of the YWCA find their way to our churches through Global Ministries promotion, and by the presence of the Rev. Loren McGrail, appointed to serve with the YWCA to work in the areas of communications and advocacy. We are proud to be able to respond to the YWCA's invitation to support this work through Loren's presence.

In October 2014, the YWCA hosted an international conference on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, "Women in Situations of Armed Conflict." Global Ministries was proud to participate with a delegation from our churches and Board, and the delegation was exceedingly impressed with the level of critical engagement by panelists and YWCA members, as well as their pride of identity, and culture of hospitality.



# YWCA Young Women's Internships with Disciples of Christ

## Peace and Justice Internship and Mission

**Minerva Halteh**, Youth member from Jericho YWCA

**Rachel Shomali**, Youth member from Bethlehem YWCA

“They were shocked and touched by what we endured and endure every day.”

*Minerva Halteh.*

“I hardly ever had a bad encounter with anyone at the camps or at the churches, but I did face a lot of ignorance”

*Rachel Shomali.*



Rachel Shomali and Minerva Halteh were chosen by the YWCA of Palestine and Global Ministries to be young women interns with the Disciples Peace Fellowship for two months this past summer. Our two young women, members of the Peace and Justice Youth Task Force, representing Bethlehem and Jericho associations, spent the summer attending summer camps and giving workshops on the reality of life in Palestine under a military occupation. They talked about the Annexation Wall and checkpoints and about the many ways Palestinians are resisting nonviolently including BDS. Minerva talked about her grandparents who were refugees from Al Nakba.

Both wrote in their reports that they were shocked to find that many people didn't even know Arab Christians existed. Others said they didn't know the YWCA is an international women and development organization and is a lot more than a place to swim or go to a youth club. "They had no idea that the YWCA works with peace and justice, social justice, human rights and women's empowerment" said Minerva.

Rachel appreciated meeting other peace interns who are engaged in issues in their community like immigrant or LGBT rights, or racism and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Both young women commented on what they also learned about how the Disciples of Christ Church lives out its mission to be an inclusive church.



## Making a Difference

**Kenny Rogers**

Middle East Secretary  
Church of Scotland



“Mira and her team are passionate, creative, great communicators, and firm in their beliefs that nothing can be done without the involvement of key women, as they seek to play their part in ending the decades-long Occupation.”

The Church of Scotland delights in its partnership with the YWCA of Palestine, and has been partnering with them for many years. Recently, we have worked in collaboration with the YWCA and with the United Church of Christ to support the Rev Loren McGrail in her work, as part of our Ecumenical Team in Jerusalem.

The aims of the YWCA are very much in line with the aims of the Church of Scotland, which is why working with them is always a pleasure. Personally, I am always amazed by their energy and creativity, working as they are in such a difficult country and for a cause which regularly sees barriers put in their way. Their focus on supporting the most marginalized women and communities through the promotion of economic justice and women's leadership in civic and public life, is one which the Church is immensely supportive of, and is a focus which fits beautifully with the aims of the Church.

The YWCA has been represented at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland a number of times in recent years, and has a solid support base within the Church in Scotland. They are always so welcoming to our delegations, and each person that interacts with their people and their work leaves with a new sense of the realities on the ground, and a new sense of the urgency of the situation. Mira and her team are passionate, creative, great communicators, and firm in their beliefs that nothing can be done without the involvement of key women, as they seek to play their part in ending the decades-long Occupation.

I have been privileged to take a group of our young people to Ramallah to see the work that the YWCA are doing on the ground there. We were all struck by the amazing testimonies that we heard of how the YWCA was genuinely changing lives. One girl in particular struck us as an excellent example of this – a girl who had witnessed a stranger shot dead on her doorstep during the second intifada, and who struggled with everyday life until she ‘found’ the YWCA who had helped transform her into a confident, articulate woman, with a clear vision for her people and her country.

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In the last couple of years, the YWCA has also worked hard at their 'Fabric of our Lives' project, which has helped women create and sell dolls made from olive wood, and which has empowered these women and given them an opportunity to use their talents for economic reward.

These examples really sum up so much of the work that the YWCA does. It works so closely with women who are often marginalized in this society, both those in refugee camps and those not. The work of the YWCA makes a difference. It helps these women develop by giving them a safe refuge, education, and a place where they can express themselves and start to see how they can make a difference to society. Using the skills of the team, they enable women to find their way in life, and give them the confidence to speak for themselves in what is still a male-dominated civil society.

The Church of Scotland wholeheartedly supports the work of the YWCA, and continues to support it on a regular basis. It uses the information given by the YWCA to inform its decisions and strategies for our work in the region. It uses the dolls to emphasise the plight of the refugees. But most of all, it uses the relationships, formed over many years, to bring awareness of the situations faced in Israel and Palestine to people in Scotland, to offer prayers to those affected and working in the struggle, to learn new strategies for dealing with difficult situations, and to bring hope to those who need to be encouraged the most.



## Partnering with the YWCA of Palestine

By Carol Hylkema

*President of the Board,  
Pal CraftAid - the Presbyterian Church*

Pal Craftaid is very pleased to have a partnership with the YWCA of Palestine for several reasons.

- Like the YWCA, Pal Craftaid focuses the proceeds of our sales and donations to support women's and children's program. We strongly believe that Palestine's women and children are the key to a future of justice and peace and non-violence.
- Empowering women and training children to have productive occupations whether it be through traditional crafts or other occupations will enable families to stay together and to remain in their native lands.
- Bringing Christian and Muslim women together for understanding and cooperative work enhances a culture of living together in difficult times. No organization does this better than the YWCA.
- Giving women and youth opportunities for leadership leads to critical thinking, critical learning, identity strengthening as well as recreation.



As Americans, we understand the value of the YWCA in today's society for leading the world to moral and positive decision making.

## Wise Women

When I first saw the Wise Women dolls, I was thrilled to see that finally, there was a presence of women in the holy story embodied in the dolls which I could hold in my hands. We all know that women were everywhere in the biblical stories but most were unnamed. We also know that women were influential in the decision making of biblical times. Combining the wise women in their royal clothing with the Jan Richardson poem, we are reminded of the many ways that women were a presence then and are a presence in our current society.



This set of dolls would be great for children's sermons throughout the year. They can also be used in Sunday school programming. Yeah for the YWCA of Palestine creating this set of dolls to enlighten the stories we tell and to brighten our shelves between classes. Thank you YWCA for offering us all these tools to tell the story from women's perspectives, we very much appreciate the work that the YWCA is doing.

# The Personal Side of Partnerships

## Come Back and Find Out

**Rev. Kate Reynolds**, Associate Minister

*Saint Andrews in the Galilee (Church of Scotland)*

“*When we returned to the community centre, I stood in the playground, the pouring rain masking my tears. ‘What does my priesthood have to do with this?’*  
*I asked myself. ‘How do the sacraments I am ordained to celebrate speak to the division and hatred and fear in this land?’*”



In November 2014, I came to Israel-Palestine as a newly ordained priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church. I had been invited by the Church of Scotland to join one of their delegations touring the land and meeting the organizations whose work they support throughout Israel and the West Bank. It was neither my first time here, nor was I new to the situation; nevertheless, it was a truly life-altering, heart-changing visit.

Many of the conversations we had, the situations we witnessed, the stories we heard still haunt my dreams. But one day in particular still stands out. It was rainy and

cold and miserable when we arrived at the YWCA community centre at Jalazone refugee camp. Because of the weather, there were no children there, and under the angry grey sky, the empty playground looked forlorn. After meeting some of the women at the centre and admiring their embroidery and sewing skills (and adding to our growing collections of gifts for friends and family back in Scotland!), we went to visit a family in the camp.

They shyly but warmly welcomed us into their home, and we sat in the lounge, almost dark but for a lit oil lamp, despite the fact it was early afternoon. We could smell the Arabic coffee being prepared. They had lived in that house for four years, but the extended family had been in the camp for over 60 years, after the husband's family was forced out from their home in 1948. His father's picture and story are in a book he proudly showed us. They told us quietly of the imprisonment of their eldest son and the death of their second-eldest, who had been shot in the back by Israeli soldiers, while playing near the settlement which sits opposite the school.

I felt humbled. Helpless. The words of Psalm 30 came to my mind: 'Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes with the morning.' Morning felt a long way off.

When we returned to the community centre, I stood in the playground, the pouring rain masking my tears. 'What does my priesthood have to do with this?' I asked myself. 'How do the sacraments I am ordained to celebrate speak to the division and hatred and fear in this land? What — in these days as we look to the start of Advent, as we prepare for the birth of a child to refugee parents — what message of hope, what Good News, what act of love does the Church have to offer people like those I met today?'

Words quietly formed in my heart: 'Come back and find out.'

In November 2015, a year later, almost to the day, I began my work as Mission Partner and Minister at the Church of Scotland in Tiberias.

Tiberias often feels worlds away from Jalazone refugee camp. Because of its location and environment, it would be very easy to 'hide' from the reality of what is happening in the West Bank and Gaza. It could be tempting to ignore the systemic inequality between communities in the Galilee region and simply immerse myself in the beauty of the land and the richness of its history.

But to do so would be to betray my calling. Each time I celebrate Communion by the shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus himself walked, I am reminded through the sacrament how much God loves this world and desires the wholeness and healing of all people. As I say the words, 'This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you,' I see the faces not only of those gathered in the church, but the faces of those throughout this land who suffer. We are Christ's body in the world now. His ministry of healing is now ours. May God grant us the strength and courage and wisdom to share in it, that one day the long night of weeping will end, and with the breaking of the dawn, joy will spread across this land.



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# Thanks to the YWCA of Palestine

**Marcia Gilliland,**

*Palestine Israel Network of the United Church of Christ  
Central Pacific Conference - Oregon / Portland*

“ *Later this year at the Annual Meeting of the Central Pacific Conference, the Wider Church Ministries Team will invite the CPC to become a Global Ministries mission partner with the YWCA of Palestine. In preparation for this possibility, Diane Dulin and Marcia Gilliland worked closely with the National General Secretary Mira Rizeq to determine how the partnership could work most effectively.* ”



Recently Rev. Diane Dulin, Marcia Sims, and I returned from a very busy and fruitful visit representing the Palestine Israel Network of the United Church of Christ Central Pacific Conference. My goal was to work with women in refugee camps to teach sewing project that will be marketable in the US.

The women were so enthusiastic to learn new sewing techniques and use their sewing skills to earn some money for their families. I made four items with patterns and prototypes: place mats, fabric bowls, table runners, and Christmas stockings. We decided that the ladies would make their beautiful cross stitch pieces and they would be incorporated into the designs. We also decided to make small quilts, so right now I am developing a pattern that will incorporate the cross stitch with the quilts. When I return to Palestine to work with the ladies I will buy some sewing machines for them to use in their projects.

To better know the mission of the YWCA, we were escorted to some of the YWCA Associations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It was amazing to see how much they are doing.

We visited classes for both men and women in food production, professional childcare, information technology, accounting, tourist and hotel management. We peeked into pre-school classes for children in the refugee camps near Ramallah and Jericho, and saw wonderfully trained teachers who also happened to be from the camps themselves. I was particularly impressed by how much the kids love being in the classes and how much they are learning. They'll definitely be ready to go to school. The food production program in Jericho served us lunch and it was one of the best meals I have ever eaten. Not only do these students receive great training but companies are standing in line to hire them. The YWCA's reputation for excellence in training makes any graduate a desirable employee.

The staff of the YWCA is really making things happen. We are excited to join them in providing valuable training for productive futures for children, youth, and families.

Thank you so much Mira and the National staff for making our visit so rich and productive. Thank you staff and students of all the associations. We look forward to seeing you again.







فلسطين PALESTINE



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