In conflict, violence expresses itself in thought, word or deed. When it comes to violence, it is just a matter of time before violent individuals move from actions against property to acting violently against people. On the Israeli Jewish side, we have witnessed the burning of the church in Tabgha, the stabbing and killing at Jerusalem’s gay pride parade, and the burning of a Palestinian family in their home. On the Palestinian side, we have seen Molotov cocktails thrown at cars, attempts to run over and kill civilians with cars, and the stabbing of soldiers or civilians.

Many of these actions are carried out by members of radical Jewish or Muslim groups. They want to enforce their absolute moral values, while challenging law and order. They claim that their interpretation of religious law is the best political order for society; the means to their end is violence. This violence often leads to chaos, and we can feel that our stability and security are threatened, leading to fear.

How can believers respond in this tense atmosphere?

1) We need to reject the mentality of us versus them, Israelis versus Palestinians. What we currently see is not even about the ultimate “other” – the enemy camp – but about the “others” in our own ethnic communities, the very pious or radical versus those who disagree with them.

2) Violence starts in thoughts and words, and then moves to action – toward those who disagree with us. We need to be careful what we think and how we speak, asking ourselves if our words bring hurt or healing. As believers, our discussion needs to reflect godly attitudes, and we are responsible for the words we use against those who do not agree with us.

3) We must bear witness to the transforming love of God through our fellowship and unity across ethnic, political, and theological lines. God loves all people and seeks to bless all people. One of the best ways to bring this message of blessing and love is to act as living witnesses of God’s transforming power in our lives, which we then show to others.

In Musalaha, we bring participants together across the ethnic, political and theological spectrum. We encourage one another to use language carefully and thoughtfully, and we view one another as children of God, one body in the Messiah, with a common vision of reconciliation.

By Salim J. Munayer
This past July 26–31 we took six Israeli and six Palestinian families to Germany. Many of our participants are involved in local ministries from outreach to Muslims, to Jews, and to the local body of Messiah in Israel and Palestine.

We were welcomed into the warm Christian community of a small hamlet nestled in the Black Forest. Our group dramatically altered the demographics of this village in the one week we visited. The hamlet saw their child population nearly double, from 30 prior to when we arrived, to 54 with all of our children running about, going on walks through the community and venturing into the surrounding forest.

Throughout the week, we had six training sessions and discussions on a variety of topics, ranging from Biblical Principles of Reconciliation, Conflict, Forgiveness, Parenting and more. One Palestinian woman commented, “The small groups [during the sessions] helped me to hear the other side and learn from them, also giving me the opportunity to speak up.” An Israeli man shared, “I was personally stretched as I began to look at the Gospel’s implications for my relationships with others as a reflection of my relationship with God. I recognized the imperative to participate as an active force for good because to be silent in the face of injustice is to be part of the problem.”

Meanwhile, our children had a beautiful program organized for them by the guesthouse staff and their teenagers, and our children returned daily singing songs, bringing artwork, happy and invigorated by the time they had with one another. An Israeli–Palestinian mother remarked, “I loved that the children enjoyed their time together even without knowing the other’s language!”

In between times for worship, fellowship, devotionals and testimonies from participants, we visited some surrounding sites. On one outing we hiked through the forest on a 12 degree (Celsius) day to see some beautiful views of the mountains from lookout points, walking over some of the old fallen trees. Afterwards, one Israeli participant shared, “The lessons learned at this conference were not restricted in their application to the Middle East conflict. They are applicable to a branch, a family, a church community and more.” An Israeli–Palestinian participant commented, “We learned how to hold love in our hearts for people that are different than us, as Jesus taught us. We are waiting for the second conference!”

Reflecting on our long travel days at the beginning and end of our trip, a participant reflected, “Traveling to and then from the conference felt completely different. On the way to Germany, there was a bit of apprehension about what will be,” particularly considering some of us traveled together but did not know one another yet. “On the way back,” though, there was a sense “full of love, well–being, and with deep friendships formed. There was so much to say!”

By Musalaha Publications Department

We would like to thank the Philippus-Dienst, AMZI and the Wörnersberger Anker Guesthouse for helping to make this trip possible.
T
his July we held our annual children’s camp. 100 children participated in the camp along with 40 staff and volunteer counselors.

Some of our counselors came from abroad, but the vast majority consisted of Israeli and Palestinian youth who came to our camp as children themselves. About 70% of the children and 90% of the counselors are returning participants, and when we reunited on the first day of camp, it was like picking up where we left things a year ago.

Other than the obvious changes that some of the children and youth have experienced within a year (like getting taller, growing facial hair or removing their braces) we also see the change in our conflict’s dynamic in Israeli and Palestinian societies. It has been a year since the war in Gaza where most of these children and leaders shared the experience of seeking shelter when the sirens went off. Our fears have subsided, and the psychological wounds have begun to heal, although we know we are the privileged ones who made it through safely. These thoughts briefly flickered in the back of our minds as we returned, eager to see old friends and make new memories.

Of the many stories I could share from camp, here are two incidents that reflect the conflict and the message of reconciliation.

Rami, one of the Palestinian children, came to me and said that Yosef, his Palestinian friend, called him a traitor because he was playing with Josh, an Israeli counselor. As he shared the incident with me, he was on the verge of tears. He was so hurt by Yosef that he felt the need to come to me - the Camp Director - and complain. It didn’t take long to deal with the incident, and soon enough, Yosef and Rami went to play with Josh.

For Palestinians, being a traitor is a serious offense. I think the reason Yosef accused Rami of this is due to the rise of the BDS movement (the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel) and its prominence in Palestinian society. To an average Palestinian, any encounter with Israelis is perceived as normalization, i.e., maintaining the status quo of occupation. This was the first time I personally encountered the accusation that meeting with Israelis is treason.

This encounter demonstrates the clear message in Palestinian society that discourages its people from interacting with Israelis. At the same time, I find it interesting that both Rami and Yosef decided to attend, regardless of their society’s pressure, knowing that Israelis attend the camp. Neither of them considered this normalization until the point when Rami started playing with Josh and developed a relationship with him. Yosef felt jealous, so he accused Rami of treason. This is the message that Yosef, like a sponge, absorbed from his society.

The second incident occurred in one of the cabins. When arranging rooms for participants, we keep a few friends or relatives together so they will feel comfortable during camp. We then mix these groups together with children from the other national/ethnic group, and they are supervised by Israeli and Palestinian counselors. Since some of the children already know each other, they have cliques coming to camp.

One day Matty lost his swimming goggles. He and his friends turned to their counselor saying, “They took it.” The counselor knew that Matty and his friends were referring to the Palestinians in the room. He challenged them asking, “Who are they? There is no they here.” Matty and his friends understood, realizing that they labeled all the Palestinians as the outside group.

Matty corrected his question, “Not they, but maybe one of my roommates took it?” Matty learned his lesson; we cannot simply generalize as that leads to stereotypes. Furthermore, in the camp we are not ‘us’ and ‘them’ - we are one group, believers, seeking fellowship together.

Children are like sponges, absorbing what they see and hear in society. Sponges have no idea whether they are absorbing clean or dirty water just as children do not always differentiate between the positive or negative messages they hear. Meeting the other at camp helps them see the implications of such messages. In Musalaha, we counter messages of suspicion, separation, bigotry and racism through friendships, love and unity.

By the end of the camp, Rami, Yosef and Josh established a fast friendship, and often played with water balloons or football together. Matty and his Israeli Jewish friends made new Palestinian Christian friends. (And if you are wondering, Matty found his goggles).

The friendships that the children and staff develop will not be quickly forgotten. In the distant future, we hope and pray that these relationships become the point of reference to hope and peace. And in the near future, we know that these friendships will continue to develop: at camp next summer.

By Shadia Qubti
Musalaha Youth Director
“When I arrive at the camp, I forget the things that divide us and make us different and we become one big family.” – Israeli counselor

“This was my seventh year in a row being part of Musalaha’s summer camp. I’ve been to other Musalaha events, but the summer camp is my favorite. I go to camp because I make friends, feel safe, loved, confident, and happy.” – Palestinian counselor

“The Musalaha camp is important to me because I want to be the change I wish to see in my country and the world. Musalaha gives me an opportunity to be that change. As Christians we need to be involved in reconciliation between the Israelis and Palestinians because this is what Jesus taught us.” – Palestinian counselor

“This last camp I brought my camera to take pictures and show my friends that Israelis and Palestinians can live together and that it is a reasonable solution to our problems! Musalaha for me is like a house with brothers and sisters from the same Father but a different mother. We are different and don’t have the same background but we still love each other.” – Israeli counselor

LEGEND
100 KIDS
40 LEADERS
20 DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES
10 TRACK TIMES
9 CABINS
5 WORSHIP SESSIONS
5 BOUNCY CASTLES
1 BIG PAINT WAR
(see cover photo)
Munayer
Family
Update

In a surprise turn of events all the family is together for two weeks. Unexpected but welcome. This surprise has led to a shuffling of bedrooms, cupboards, vacuuming and the re-organising of the shoe storage [pile] by the front door. I have had to re-institute a few house rules and resign myself to two big shops a week with two trollies. Water melons are in season and are very refreshing to eat on hot days … they are also very heavy to carry up 40 stairs, hence the rule, ‘You want to eat it? Then you carry it!’

Now it is the fun [and challenges] of having the six of us together in a small space. I am focusing on the fun, yes the fun, fun, fun.

I continue to volunteer one day a week at the Bethlehem Bible College gift shop and advance in my own private social justice work.

Jack

Has applied to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to start his MA [Human Rights and Transitional Law] in October 2015. He is waiting to hear back. Taking a group of young Israeli/Palestinian adults to Ireland at the end of August. His beard has stopped itching and is quite ginger [no idea where that came from].

Daniel

Returning home after three years in USA. Seeking guidance for the next step. Proud graduate of American University in Washington DC. Has gathered many new experiences in life over the last three years.

John

Completed and passed his first year at King’s College University in London. Home for a rest after working for children’s camps in UK. Tough decisions for next year as in which sports’ teams to be on, i.e., Football, Swimming, Water Polo [he cannot be on them all!!!]. Moved out of dorms and renting a flat. Seems to be thoroughly enjoying himself and his studies.

Sam

Completed 11th grade well [known as the hardest year in the Israeli school system]. Currently taking a swim teacher’s course and practicing for the swim Nationals in a few weeks. Enjoying having his brothers at home although he had to go back to his old bedroom, now full of olive wood and other items. Now over 6’ [1m 81 cm] and threatening Jack’s position of the tallest in the family. Generally eats too many snacks and ice creams.

Salim and I

Pressing on and offering advice for those who ask. Salim is all consumed in his work which has him travelling frequently. I am consumed in mine. We are happy. We are grateful.

Wishing everybody a good summer,

Yours, Kay Munayer
[for all the family]