

## Leaders in Unity ... What?

Imagine spending time with the people you feel most comfortable with and love the most. A time where you can be yourself, relax, learn, disagree and still be loved. Even though most of the participants on this trip did not know one another, the feeling of unity, comfort and love were something so prominent amongst this blessed group.

This past June 25-29, 21 Palestinian and Israel youth leaders from a variety of congregations throughout the land flew to Ephesus, Turkey for the first of a three-part youth leadership training seminar. The purpose of this trip was to bring Israel and Palestinian youth leaders together to first, train them in youth leadership work and second, expose them to the work of reconciliation.

Musalaha believes in promoting reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians as demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus. We endeavor to be an encouragement and advocate of reconciliation within the believing community. When youth leaders come together their main interest is youth. Our youth leadership training is two-fold: one, train them to be effective youth leaders; two, train them in reconciliation by addressing the difficult issues that create barriers between these two cultures. Through the youth leaders setting an example and building relationships with each other, their youth are then able to build bridges with youth from the other side.

We were exhausted from the get-go with a late departure and early arrival times. Despite this challenge, the group meshed really well together. We didn't need to ask them to mix and mingle - they just did!



On one of our hikes, one of the leaders yelled, "Water break, everybody check your bags, if you have a chain clipped to your bag, then your "it," and you must do whatever I tell you to do." And so the challenges began, the first person with the chain had to do jumping jacks, others had to do push-ups while reading scripture in three different languages, and through this ice breaker the youth leaders not only felt more comfortable with each other, but also really enjoyed one another's company.

We also spent some time, hiking the hills of Turkey, exploring the ruins of Ephesus and browsing through the bazaars. Through these activities the participants kept growing closer together.

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"Yes... together!" was our response, with the biggest grin, happy to be with my brothers and sisters from the other side because we were showing the world around us that in Christ there is unity!

One thing that was very prevalent during the trip is the unity everyone felt with each other. Taking a small break after lunch on our first full day (people were still jetlagged) many were still sleepy and tired, taking naps on the wonderful couches

provided for us on the porch (which we used on most of our meetings). Laughter and loud conversation was echoed throughout the room; a group of the Palestinians and Israelis were sitting together, getting to know each other and having a wonderful time waking the rest of us up with their raucous unity!



At every meal you could see people mingling, talking, laughing, sharing stories, sharing lives and history, becoming vulnerable in a setting so familiar-over food! As one of the participants mentioned while we were about to partake of the Lord's Supper on the last night, "It is great that we are doing the Lord's Supper now and I am not belittling the importance of it. However, our participants had many

Lord's Suppers throughout the previous four days communing as one in unity!"

The work of God exceeded all expectations. God always surprises us with the unexpected and God makes the impossible possible! I believe God has placed each and every one of our

youth leaders in their respective youth groups to be a light and make a change. God pieced all of the minute details together, which resulted in a masterpiece. God remains faithful and he is good even when things like reconciliation are hard.

By Tamara Kuttab  
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## Musalaha

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## Family Update

We as a family have had a busy summer. Jack returned safely from the Ireland, Rwanda and Burundi. Though he has adjusted to being back in the land, he envies your prayers as he seeks the Lord's guidance of where and what to study in the coming year.

Daniel will be getting ready to start his final year of high school and has already completed a number of matriculation exams. We are grateful as we have seen tremendous spiritual growth in him this past year. He has continued to stay active in the youth group and serve at summer camps.

John and Sam just completed the nationals for Israeli swimming. They both performed very well (more details in the upcoming newsletter).

As the kids are getting older and Kay stays busy with her charity work, she is deciding on what to do in the next stage of her charity adventures.

We hope to have a full and detailed family update for you in our Christmas newsletter when the summer is over and we are back in the full swing of things.



## Summer Blessings

This has been one of our busiest summers ever, especially for our youth department. Musalaha ran a record-high three summer camps this year, and was able to touch the lives of around 350 Israeli and Palestinian children, in Israel and in the West Bank. Another 60 local counselors also participated, as well as about 40 volunteers from the U.S. The first camp was in Beit Sahour, from July 6 to the 11, and was run with the help of a group from the Calvary Community Church in California. The second camp was our annual Musalaha Children's Summer Camp at the Baptist Village, from July 20 to 24 and was blessed by a group from Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton. The final camp was held in Zababdeh, from July 27 to August 1 and was made possible with the help of a group from the Kensington Community Church in Michigan.



Musalaha's camp, which ran from July 20-24 was organized and run by our staff, but the other two camps were projects initiated by Musalaha's wom-

en's groups, and were run entirely by them. At all three camps most of the counselors, aside from the volunteers from abroad, were youth and young adult veteran participants of Musalaha activities, and this was exciting to see. This means that these projects have made a difference in people's lives. Seeing people from all ages return year after year to Musalaha projects and camps is an encouraging sign, they have made friends from the other side, and have begun to reverse the demonization and dehumanization of their "enemies" that is so prevalent in the mainstream of both Israeli and Palestinian cultures.

In the context of an intractable conflict, the segregation has a very detrimental effect on everyone, and especially children. As a result of segregation, "children have little opportunity to come into contact with those of another culture other than through myths, symbols and rituals, which perpetuate endemic fear and distrust, hostility and ultimately violent conflict."<sup>1</sup>

This year there were so many local volunteers that we had to turn some people down. Having this many people willing to sacrifice their time and energy to come to these camps, an opportunity to engage with the other side in a positive environment, is evidence that they have been blessed by their participation in the past, and of their commitment to reconciliation.

Summer camps are a lot of work, take months of preparation and planning, and are physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting because of the children's endless energy. However, the camps have such a huge influence on the lives of the children that attend them, through the development of friendship and spiritual growth, that they are a very sound investment towards the future. The message of reconciliation must be heard at a young age! I hope you find these reports on our camps, as well as the Youth Leaders Training that took place in Turkey as uplifting and inspirational as I have, and continue to keep Musalaha's ministry of reconciliation in your prayers.

By Salim J. Munayer Ph.D.  
Musalaha Director

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Judy Kuriansky, *Beyond Bullets and Bombs, Grassroots Peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians*, (2007, Praeger Press) pg. 51

# Friendship through

Whenever I tell people about my job, or explain to them that I work for Musalaha, and that we seek to facilitate reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, I am usually met with a cynical or sarcastic response. Even people sympathetic to this goal recognize the immensity of the project, and rarely miss the opportunity to ask, "So, when can we expect peace in the Middle East?" This can be very disheartening, because the work of reconciliation is already difficult, and slow, with few tangible signs of progress. When the current political situation is considered, (and we are constantly reminded of it through the media and in our everyday lives) it is often hard to believe that reconciliation will ever be possible in this place. In spite of all the evidence against it, however, there is reason for hope. I was recently infused with inspiration, and would like to share the story with you as a word of encouragement.

From July 20 to 24, I served as a counselor at Musalaha's seventh annual Children's Summer Camp. This camp brought together nearly 70 Israeli and Palestinian children, as well as an additional 40 counselors. It was a wonderful time of fun, fellowship, challenge and growth. This year we were privileged to be joined by a group from the First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton in California (EV Free) who brought a lot of passion and enthusiasm, and were a great help to the local staff and counselors running the camp. The theme of this year's camp was The Life of Daniel, and covered the dramatic events of Daniel's life in Babylon, and how God worked miraculously through him and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

This camp is a project that God has greatly blessed, and has seen many children returning year after year because of the friendships they have made. The same goes for the counselors, many of whom are former campers, and veteran Musalaha participants. This camp is

special because it provides an opportunity for Palestinian and Israeli children to meet with each other, and develop friendships across ethnic, national, and even religious lines. The reason this is unique is because there are many in both Israeli and Palestinian society that seek to actively discourage this type of meeting. It is socially, and religiously unacceptable, and these children face strong pressure from their society, and peers, to hate the other side and to refuse to engage with them at all. Making friends with someone from the other side is a statement against this pervasive negativity, and the first step in the process of reconciliation.



At camp this year there was a Jewish Israeli boy named Yakov, from Nazareth Illit. Nazareth is one of the biggest Palestinian cities inside Israel, and Nazareth Illit is a mostly Jewish suburb of Nazareth. Although they live right next to it, and are technically a part of the same city, most of the Jewish residents of Nazareth Illit avoid going into Nazareth itself. Because there were a number of campers arriving from Nazareth, Musalaha arranged for a bus to leave from the city, and Yakov's family was informed that he was welcome to join them. Although they were initially happy that transportation was being provided, when they found out that they would have to bring their son to Nazareth to catch the bus, they decided against it. They were uncomfortable dropping their son off in Nazareth, and even preferred to pay for his way on another bus as an alternative. In the end they did consent to Yakov riding on the Nazareth bus, but expressed

# the Flames

apprehension and were not completely happy with the arrangement.

Once Yakov arrived at camp, he was assigned to my cabin. There he met a Palestinian Israeli boy, Farid, who was from Nazareth and was also assigned to my cabin. They hit it off immediately, and spent the whole week together. I was able to observe them and it was amazing to see how their friendship developed. Farid translated for Yakov when the other children spoke Arabic, and Yakov began teaching Farid some Russian (he speaks Russian and Hebrew). I think he learned to count to ten by the end of camp. They played football together, did crafts together, and spent a lot of time just hanging out. While they both made other friends at camp as well, it was evident that a special bond had been created between them. At one point we were running late for our Bible study, and everyone in our cabin had already left except for me, Yakov and Farid. Yakov was ready, but Farid was still looking through his bag for his Bible. I told Yakov to go on, and that Farid and I would be along shortly, but he would not go without his new friend.

Finally, on the last day of camp, I overheard a conversation they were having as I sat with them at lunch. Yakov was explaining to someone else how he and Farid were going to ride home together on the same bus. He was excited about it, and repeated a number of times that he was going to be dropped off in Nazareth, and picked up by his parents. Although this was not a big deal, and may seem small when set off against the large scope of the conflict, to me it was amazing. This child whose parents were not comfortable letting him go to Nazareth before, was now excited about going because he has a friend there. Once you know someone, and make a personal connection, the place you fear is no lon-

ger a faceless, scary place, it is a human place. It was also amazing for Farid, who now has a Jewish friend who is willing to come visit him, even though they both know it is something completely out of the ordinary.



Their example is inspirational, for they embody "The reconciliation of Jesus Christ," which "is a new basis of union that is inclusive and liberating. It presupposes the removal of barriers and the competing claims that have divided. To be reconciled means that we are no longer defined by the old divisions, but by a new reality."<sup>1</sup> These children are the future and represent our hope. They will bring about this new reality of peace, tolerance, and love and we must follow their example.

This was not a miracle in the vein of interpreting visions and dreams, being saved from the lion's den, of emerging from the fiery furnace unscathed, but in the context of the conflict, it was certainly remarkable. If we are faithful to God's commands, he will show Himself to us, and the scriptures are clear, we are commanded by Him to reconcile with our brothers and sisters. Just as God was there to support and protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who chose to faithfully worship Him, in Daniel 3:24-28, He is there with us too, when conflict and hate rage all around us, standing by our side through the flames.

By Joshua Korn  
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<sup>1</sup> Schmichen, Peter, *Christ the Reconciler, A Theology of Opposites, Differences, and Enemies*, (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996) pg. 111



# A prayer for the children

We have had a fruitful summer, especially with the service of Calvary Community Church and Kensington Community Church who dedicated their time to assist at our summer camps in Bethlehem and Zebabdeh. Over 200 Muslim and Christian children attended these camps to learn Biblical principles and for a time of building up and fun.

Here are excerpts from the Kensington group's blog of their adventures working at the Zebabdeh Camp.

Today we got to meet the kids! Yay! There were 111 kids and 20 more are expected tomorrow. We had everyone working at different stations that consisted of crafts, drama, story telling, and outdoor games. Two of our guys were assigned to a whole age group of children consisting of around 20 kids and everyone as a team did a GREAT job! We shared responsibility with some of the Palestinian staff and they said that our interaction with the kids today was really awesome.

Although Dianne says that a smile is the universal language... There is somewhat of a challenge communicating with them since they mostly speak Arabic. The kids here are all very well behaved and we have been trying to learn a few Arabic phrases but they just smile and laugh! The outdoor games were so fun for the children and the team! We are very blessed to have enough running water to keep the hose on outside for the games. The weather forecast was 95 degrees, but it felt like 104.

During the children's Bible lesson today, told by the drama coordinator, "Mr. Okay" they learned how it is important to be thankful to God for our blessings and what we have. Speaking for all of us, I think that message really related to our team as well. The poverty was so evident on the drive here because of the run down shacks along the road. It has been a very humbling experience already and we still have 5 more days left of camp, so we are looking forward to what God has in store for us.

We would also like to take this time to thank our supporters again for giving us the funding and prayers that it took to make this entire trip possible. Every person on this team has added something

so special and the mission would not be the same without any one of us. We are so grateful to be here giving love to the children and also receiving it from one another.



*From the last day:*

I've never liked the word, "goodbye." It always seems so final to utter those words after visiting someone, as if you might never see them again. Instead, I like to use, "See you later." Those three words bring hope of a future reunion and a joy in knowing that paths will one day cross again.

Today many "See you later's" were said as we spent our last day at the children's camp in Zebabdeh. It is hard to believe that our time here is over. It was only a few days ago that we came here, not speaking any Arabic or knowing what was to be expected of us. Now as we leave camp to fit in a few days of sightseeing, we are all able to utter some phrases in Arabic and what we can't say gets understood with a smile and hand gestures. The children here can call all of us by name and many picked up our expressions of, "Awesome!" "Way to go!" and "How are you?"

As we dropped off all the children, we exchanged hugs, email addresses and shouts of, "See you next year!" We don't know how many of us will be able to return next summer but all of us would like to try.

The children here have touched our hearts in a profound way. Our conversations with our new-found Palestinian friends have opened our hearts and minds to the plight of these brave people.

For myself, as I bid see you later to this village and all the beautiful people I have befriended during my stay, I say a prayer for the children of Palestine.

*I pray that you experience God's guidance and direction in your life each and every day.*

*I pray that you continue to love innocently and whole-heartedly.*

*I pray that you know how much you are loved -- not just by God but by every single member of our team as well.*

*I pray that as you grow older, you remember your time at camp with fondness and warm memories.*

*I pray that one day you may realize that you impacted my life even more than I could hope to impact yours.*

