

Reconciling Leaders

More than 20 Israeli and Palestinian community and congregational leaders, together with their families spent one-week in Germany for Musalaha's Family Leadership Conference. This conference fulfilled Musalaha's vision to equip and empower leaders from Israeli and Palestinian communities to form leadership skills and become reconcilers in their societies. Musalaha trains these leaders together with their families because Israeli and Palestinian societies are structured around the family unit. As the family grows together as reconcilers they can together impact their societies for change.



The Family Leadership Conference serves as a starting point for networking opportunities as people begin to establish relationships with those from the "other side." The language of "us versus them" is deconstructed to provide an open space for a new definition of "we."

The conference lasted from August 14 to the 21 and convened at the Langensteinbacher Hoehe Bibelkonferenzzentrum. This secluded Bible Conference Center provided an ideal location and ample opportunities for outdoor activities which allowed the participants time and space to process and cultivate thoughts and emotions. It was through Eckhard Maier's servant-leadership, our families not only formed close relationships, but also learned servanthood through his humble example.

Every second day the theory and praxis of Musalaha was presented through teachings, workshops, and family interactions. Musalaha Director Salim J. Munayer and Israeli Pastor Oded Shoshani served as the teachers and leaders of the conference. The week's events were divided into different segments emerging from the theory and praxis. One section was devoted to building relationships between families from a different background, centering on the theme in Ephesians 2 of breaking down walls in order to create new identities. Another lecture presented a theology of reconciliation rooted in the nature of God found in 1 John 4, which is love. Participants explored and discussed how the socioeconomic and political climates affect the process of reconciliation.



In conjunction with this discussion, a period was spent sharing obstacles to reconciliation as a way to engage the concept of forgiveness. Small groups convened as they studied Jesus' teaching on forgiveness as written in Matthew. The activity proved difficult because most people are accustomed to forgiveness only after certain expectations of repentance are met. But Jesus' words are

about an impossible forgiveness, a forgiveness that does not require repentance but rather gives birth to it. Many had attempted to bury their pain and struggled with digging up bitter emotions. Some were surprised by the iceberg-like structure of their anger, including one Palestinian leader who discovered his deep-seeded hurt stemming from damage done to his village and his people. Israelis and Palestinians experienced the transforming catharsis as they were forced to sit face to face and allow dehumanization and injustice, oppression and victimization, to encounter one another and be overcome.

"It was good to listen to my brothers on the other side," said Nadav from Rehovot. "On a personal level we didn't have much to forgive because we had not met before. But we practiced forgiveness together by sharing." He saw the challenging experience as a call to move

deeper: "We need to get down to business. We need to build relationships, because we don't need to stay just with reconciliation, but to take that forward. We must now go forward."

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Everyone gathered together for Communion on the last night of the conference. The youth served the bread and the wine to the parents and the sacramental meal broken and shared by Israelis and Palestinians. Communion not only represented the symbolic ingesting of the life and way of Jesus, but also embodied the "open commensality" of Jesus who invited everyone to his table.



"For the parents it was very touching," said George a Palestinian pastor. "I was deeply touched because we want to pass on a legacy, not only for our kids but

for the next generation. And I watched my children living in that new reality and believing in it."

Reconciliation is the fertile ground in which forgiveness is made possible, and tolerance is tempered with the reality of our neighbor's suffering. In order to overcome old prejudices we must be converted to a new one: the prejudice of love for the other whose face we are now coming to see, whose name we are now coming to understand, and whose story we are now coming to hear.

By Jonathan McRay

Building Bridges Among Israelis, Palestinians and Norwegians

Bridgebuilders, a group of 10 Norwegian, 10 Israeli and 10 Palestinian young adults, traveled to Norway at the end of the summer, to begin their process of Reconciliation. Bridgebuilders began their trip by camping at Steilene, an island in the Oslo Fjords for the first three days. There they were introduced to each other, and began to establish relationships through setting up the camp and later packing it up in the rain. Right away we began our team building activities, cross-cultural communication and listening, teaching on reconciliation, games, discussions, prayer and worship.



From there we traveled to Valdres, in the mountains of Norway, where we continued intensive teaching on fear, forgiveness and power. We enjoyed learning about each other's heritage in our cultural nights. The Israelis showed what it was like immigrating the Land, while the Palestinians put on a mock wedding and the Norwegians dressed in traditional clothing, played traditional games and music. During this time in Valdres, we also did some theatre sessions called The Theatre of the Oppressed.

During such role playing, the spectators discuss what is happening. This activity was one of the highlights for me, as well as for many other participants, because it enabled us to witness the formation of certain realities by our fellow friends, and to carefully consider the outcome of our actions in real life, to put ourselves in the shoes of the oppressors and the oppressed, to understand what these roles entail, and what sort of feelings they raise along with them. I gained so much from this kind of activity as I learned how to look at different situations more subjectively, and was able to sympathize with roles I hadn't considered before.



I look forward to arranging more projects like Bridgebuilders in the future, and hope for similar achievements.

This trip was sponsored and organized by the partnership between Musalaha, The Palestinian Bible Society, The Caspari Center, The Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway.

By Nussi Khalil
Young Adults Coordinator

Musalaha

Winter 2009 Newsletter



Musalaha Celebrates 20 Years of Fruitfulness

In the latter part of 1988, while studying together in a program designed to sharpen ministry skills among indigenous leaders, Salim Munayer approached me with the details of a 'vision' he sensed God had given him. As he shared in 'broad strokes' the biblical call of reconciliation between our two conflicted peoples, something resonated with me deeply. When asked to join with him in developing the concepts into practical initiatives involving our respective faith communities, my answer was almost immediate - yes! Shortly following, "Musalaha" was brought into being, with basic infrastructure established with Salim as Director and an equal number of experienced leaders from both the Palestinian Christian and Messianic Jewish communities forming a Board of Oversight. This same balanced model of leadership was to quickly become the 'hallmark' of all Musalaha initiatives until today.



Twenty-five years ago, the term reconciliation was not a central issue for the local Body of Christ. The Arabic and Hebrew-speaking communities enjoyed some minimal fellowship interaction; however the challenges of the first Intifada (Palestinian uprising) changed everything - young Messianic servicemen were embroiled in the civil unrest and young Palestinian Christians who suffered the frustrations and indignities of checkpoints and military occupation became involved in the resistance. The polarization between the two groups deepened and Jesus' call to his Body for unity became more and more apparent.

Musalaha responded with its first desert encounters - firstly among the young adults from both sides, then with older experienced ministry leadership, both men and women. Stepping out of the comfort and safety of our homes, the harsh environment of the desert became our 'classroom' where we faced one another (often for the first time) 'on level ground'. These earlier days presented a very steep 'learning curve' for us all as we learned to worship, study and pray together and form the relationships that would become a vital basis for the manifold ministries that Musalaha now represents.

The three and five-day desert encounters and various seminars held during those first years would hone our skills at providing a safe environment for these new relationships to withstand the inevitable challenges as we attempted to deal with the hard issues such as theology of the land, conflict and the obstacles to peace. Those that chose to 'hang in' would, in time, form a broadening circle of leaders, committed to the vision and being willing to stand in the face of intercommunity opposition to unity and peace. People from both sides were now willing to take the courageous step from being involved in the conflict to being active in reconciliation and peacemaking. This new dynamic provided impetus to Musalaha staff to produce literature and develop a leadership training curriculum in reconciliation that is specifically suited to our 'conflict zone'. This in itself is bearing immediate fruit in all branches of the ministry.

Musalaha

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Please note: If sending checks to the addresses above, please write the check to that organization (e.g. Reconciliation Ministries or The Andrew Christian Trust) and in a letter designate the contribution to Musalaha or the Munayer family. Reconciliation Ministries can also receive donations by credit card. Contributions are tax deductible. Thank you very much!

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During the breaks, the participants were introduced to Theater of the Oppressed. Rawan Zahran from the Bible Society led and explained the activities. Theater of the Oppressed, which originated in Brazil, is an interactive form of drama that attempts to illuminate different aspects of oppression and the complex relations between varying perceptions of oppressed and oppressor. The theater becomes a mirror reflecting oppression in different areas of society. The audience becomes the most important actor because they have the freedom to redefine the given scenario in order to explore different solutions to the problem. However, the goal is not to find one solution to all problems, but to show different interpretations and responses to oppressed situations. Below, the Palestinian-Israelis, Israeli Jews and Palestinians are depicting an image that represents them in society.



Palestinian Peoples

challenged the prevalent belief in Palestinian society that the Jewish people have no religious or historical attachment to the land and denounced the lack of recognition of Jewish suffering, especially during the Holocaust.

Many hold a zero-sum mentality of the conflict, believing that if they recognize the suffering of another then somehow their personal pain is delegitimized. The exposition and critique of the lectures gave way to a lively discussion about problematic themes and the need to further deconstruct each narrative.

The final session was entirely committed to reflection and open dialogue led and moderated by Musalaha's Chairman of the Board Evan Thomas. The lectures were very difficult for many involved, and hurt feelings and challenging frustrations were very honestly shared. The conference showed the need to acknowledge the difference between interpersonal reconciliation and reconciliation between groups: we may come together, but then we leave and go back to our own camps and an asymmetric balance of power between two people groups. Only through a changed understanding of our own narratives in the light of another story can true reconciliation, and therefore transforma-

tion, occur, both on a personal and societal level.

One Palestinian participant was particularly affected by the close juxtaposition of two opposing views: "At times when the Israeli narrative was being talked about I was sitting there with my teeth clenched and, you know, getting angry thinking 'This is not true!'"

And then when the Palestinian narrative was being presented I saw some of the Israelis doing the same thing. I think if you brought a group of Palestinians and Israelis off the street to have this talk, there would be chairs flying."

In Aramaic, Talitha Kumi means "Little girl, arise!" and comes from the story in Mark where Jesus revives the dead daughter of Jairus. The children of God, those who love their enemies, are to hear and be resurrected by the whispering call of justice and peace that breathes life. In the midst of heated debates about identities we must remember that in order for us to find our identity we must first lose it. Everyone met together at the conference because they share a commitment to a redemptive narrative about a kingdom, a way, a banquet table where there is neither male nor female, rich nor poor, Palestinian nor Israeli.

By Jonathan McRay



Historical Narratives of the Israeli and

order to justify conflict and to breed exclusivity because history is not a concrete, static entity with only one undisputed version; it is rather an interweaving and oftentimes contradicting pattern of connected narratives.

All stories have at least two sides, and history is no different. Everything is unavoidably told through a specific voice coming from a specific person with a specific worldview. The way in which to achieve some balance is to tell two different narratives together and allow them to be informed and to inform the other, to add and subtract and to make whole.

The lectures concerning the Israeli and Palestinian narratives were very challenging. The purpose was to tell the collective version of history particular to each society and then to provide space for deconstruction through a critique of certain aspects of each narrative.

Two Israelis skillfully presented the Israeli narrative, offering a commonly-held view of history within Israeli and Jewish society. They began by telling the biblical story of the Jewish people, their exile and life in the Diaspora (in other lands) with their longing for a national Jewish homeland, and the horrors of the Holocaust which led to the establishment of the State of Israel. They closed their lecture by honestly and openly challenging basic assumptions, such as the belief that the land was scarcely-inhabited and

Every Passover, the Jewish people remember God's deliverance from the oppression they suffered under Egypt. Jews recount how in every generation someone had sought to kill them as a people, but it was God who delivered them, leading them back into the Promised Land after two thousand years just like the past. For 2,000 years they have longed for the land of their ancestors and they have returned to a land with a people without a land.

Every May, the Palestinian people remember a different type of exodus, not one of deliverance, but one of displacement as they were forced from their homes in a land where they had a rich historical and religious connection. They strongly proclaim their continuous presence, enduring occupations from the Crusaders and Ottomans to the Israelis. "We are oppressed and we bear no responsibility for any of our circumstances."

Both Israelis and Palestinians have their own interpretation of oppression and history as each has a nationally defined historical narrative. And, so, 28 Israelis and Palestinians at the Young Adult Follow-Up Conference learned, analyzed and challenged their own historical narratives this past October 4-5. The experimental, and very relevant, conference proved to be one of the deepest and most intense of Musalaha's conferences.

In order to frame the discussions of the two days, Musalaha Director Salim Munayer presented a concept of 'narrative,' a word which has been used to mean both history and propaganda. Historical narrative expresses a people's past and also points to a vision of the future, providing identity through relation to a shared story. Narratives, or stories, create meaning and healing when they are open to change and new perspectives. However, narratives can be, and are, distorted in



As a result, we are able to invite foreign study groups from time to time to come to learn from us and to raise awareness of our conflict by encouraging people to partner with us in reconciliation activities.

For all this, God alone deserves the glory as he demonstrates the power of his grace in our lives and the truth of his Word to change our lives and that of our communities. The Middle East is volatile and the New Covenant community here in Israel/ Palestine is not immune to its painful struggles. Has Musalaha risen to the challenge of providing an alternative paradigm? I sincerely believe so and the fruit of these labors together will lay down solid foundations for the generations to come.

Evan Thomas
Musalaha Chairman of the Board
Israeli Messianic Pastor

women's program that hopefully will include Jewish women by next year, 2010. These same initiatives continue to grow significantly and now have a measurable impact on the communities they benefit by offering relationship, fellowship and bridging of communities.

It has been a tremendous privilege to see Musalaha's credibility steadily develop in the eyes of the international Christian world.

The testimonies of our successes (and heartbreaks) and the methodologies that have been tried and tested in the 'fire' of one of the world's most complex conflict zones are now providing mod-

Youth leaders from both communities receive high quality professional training together. Musalaha summer camps and youth initiatives (including missions abroad), are among the best the local Body has to offer. Children that have participated in the camps often return to serve as counselors, creating a healthy continuity. The women's department has grown quickly into the largest and most active department. Many women are reaching out into their own communities and organizing a variety of outreach activities, impacting young children and youth and now a successful Muslim-Christian



Munayer Family throughout the years



Musalaha was established 20 years ago, when Jack was born.



Over the years the family began to grow and Daniel, John and Sam had completed the Munayer family



Jack has been accepted to universities in the UK, but first, will be studying Arabic in Jordan. Daniel has one more year of high school and John and Sam compete as some of the top swimmers in the country for their age group. Salim is still teaching at Bethlehem Bible College as well as directing Musalaha and Kay is busier than ever with the boys and charity work.