



The Impact of Interfaith Peace-Builders Delegations on the Policy Debate

A Case Study

**IFPB Delegation 25
October 27 – November 10, 2007**

Introduction

This *Case Study* examines the education and advocacy activities of Interfaith Peace-Builders' 25th delegation to Israel/Palestine. The 23 members of the delegation were on-the-ground in the region from October 27 – November 10, 2007, returning a matter of days before the most significant Middle East policy conference in several years. The Annapolis Peace Conference, convened by US President George Bush, brought together international leaders to discuss a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. IFPB delegates were well-placed to contribute to a deepening policy debate and raised important questions about the conference and its aims.

Most commentators agree that US policy towards Israel/Palestine will not change overnight. Whatever explanations are offered, the fact remains that important US interests and constituencies pursue arrangements that sustain the status quo of war and occupation. Thus, it is incumbent on civil society groups and activists to take a broad approach to policy change by shifting public discourse, organizing on the grassroots level, and bringing more informed and active citizen's voices to congress. IFPB pursues change on all these levels. The efforts highlighted in this *Case Study* represent only a fraction of the many contributions that returning IFPB delegates have made to public discourse and the policy debate in the United States.

Since 2001, Interfaith Peace-Builders has organized 31 delegations and brought nearly 500 people face-to-face with the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Delegations emphasize the grassroots voices of Israelis and Palestinians immersed in the reality of the conflict and present alternative images and analyses which reach deeper to uncover the roots of conflict and avenues pointing the way to change and reconciliation.

IFPB's Education and Advocacy Program focuses on movement building and civic engagement by empowering delegation participants to become forces for change in their own communities. Participants on IFPB delegations know that their on-the-ground experience is only the beginning. The Education and Advocacy Program emphasizes continued engagement, activist skills training, and empowerment to ensure that the delegation experience becomes a transformational event and a building block in the larger movement for Israeli-Palestinian peace and a just application of US policy in the region.

Interfaith Peace-Builders is much more than a delegation program. Our comprehensive vision aims for a new reality and a new framework for US policy in Israel and Palestine. Since 2001, IFPB has helped delegates publish thousands of articles, op/eds and letters to the editor on the pages of local newspapers, journals and news sites. IFPB has also recorded thousands of speaking events featuring delegation participants. These activities have reached tens of millions in North America, from major cities to rural communities. Perhaps most significantly, many delegates have taken leadership roles in local organizing initiatives and national organizations, making lasting contributions to the wider movement for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The 25th delegation is not unique in its results. Many other delegations have recorded similar accomplishments. This delegation was chosen for this study because the proximity to the Annapolis Conference allows us to display more concretely IFPB's impact on discourse and policy.

- *Interfaith Peace-Builders staff and volunteers*
August 2009



Contents

Background: The Annapolis Conference	page 4
Impact of the Delegation	page 5
Timeline of Delegate Activism	page 6
Transition to Long-Term Organizing and Congressional Engagement	page 7
Our Commitment to Movement Building	page 8
Conclusion	page 9
On the Issues: Delegate Views	page 10
List of Delegate Events	page 12
<i>Media Appearances</i>	<i>page 12</i>
<i>Presentations</i>	<i>page 14</i>
<i>Congressional Advocacy</i>	<i>page 16</i>
<i>Organizing Initiatives</i>	<i>page 17</i>
News Clippings: Media Examples	page 20

Background: The Annapolis Conference

The Annapolis Peace Conference hosted by the United States State Department on November 27, 2007 was publicized as the most important meeting between Israelis and Palestinians in seven years. The conference brought the State of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization together, with the United States as a mediator, to agree to move forward with future bi-lateral negotiations on core issues.



US President George W. Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas released a joint statement of understanding that resolved to fulfill their previously agreed obligations under the 2003 Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution but came to no definitive conclusion on any final status issues. Although Olmert, Bush, and Abbas together called for an end to violence and pledged to make the Roadmap a reality by the end of 2008, the conference concluded without any tangible progress on vital issues including Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlement building, and the separation wall that would make their statements concrete.

The 2008 deadline set by the Annapolis Conference for a final resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was either overly optimistic or helplessly cynical. However, Annapolis was significant in putting the Israeli/Palestinian conflict back on the international - and the domestic - agenda.

It was in this context that participants on Interfaith Peace-Builders' 25th delegation returned to their communities across the United States. Delegates brought their eyewitness experience to the debate and carried the voices of Palestinians and Israelis committed to nonviolence, human rights and peace with justice. These voices, and the hundreds of grassroots organizations in Israel/Palestine and North America working for peace, were cut-out of the Annapolis process.

Two years later, conditions on the ground in Israel and Palestine continue to decline, while international efforts for a just resolution to the conflict flounder on unfulfilled promises and dashed hopes. The need for a meaningful peace process has grown more desperate yet the Israelis and Palestinians working for peace on a daily basis are still denied access to the US-led process.

In this context, the efforts of US citizens at the grassroots level have become ever more important. Interfaith Peace-Builders' delegates are leading the way in their organizing work and efforts to engage congressional representatives and impact the policy debate on this crucial issue.

Impact of the Delegation

In many ways, IFPB's 25th delegation is illustrative of our broader work. In one way, however, it was unique: the delegation's proximity to the Annapolis Conference gave the efforts of the delegates a strategic importance and immediate relevancy to a current political debate. IFPB staff worked with participants to take advantage of the situation.

The chart below illustrates the impact of delegates work. In all, education and advocacy activities originating from the group have reached nearly 3.5 million people to date. This includes: 37 articles, letters to the editor and/or opinion pieces reaching a circulation of nearly 1.5 million people; 10 radio broadcasts reaching nearly 1.4 million; 2 television interviews reaching 600,000 viewers; and at least 71 presentations with an estimated audience of 3,000 people.

Notable media appearances include interviews on: *WKSU Radio News*, an NPR affiliate in Ohio with 200,000 listeners; *WOI Iowa Public Radio* with 101,300 listeners; *WLBY Talk Radio* in Michigan with 270,000 listeners; *Vermont Public Radio*, an NPR affiliate, with 566,090 listeners; *KFAI Community Radio News* in Minneapolis/St. Paul with 112,800 listeners; and *WNCO Talk Radio* in Ohio with 84,000 listeners.

Print articles appeared in: the *Cleveland Plains Dealer* (rdshp. 783,000), the *Lansing State Journal* (circ. 58,948), the *Grand Rapids Press* (circ. 133,107), the *Everett Herald* (circ. 50,657), the *Southside Pride* (circ. 70,000), and the *Des Moines Register* (circ. 146,050), among others.

A list of delegate media appearances, events, congressional advocacy and organizing projects begins on pg 11.

Delegation 25 Activities	2007	2008	2009 (January – July)	DELEGATION TOTALS	Circulation, Listeners, Attendance,
All Media:	30	14	5	49	3,485,401
<i>Newspaper</i>	23	11	3	37	1,499,211
<i>Radio</i>	5	3	2	10	1,386,190
<i>Television</i>	2	-	-	2	600,000
Presentations:	28	34	9	71	,000 (estimated)
Congress:	-	3	8	11	-
Organizing:	1	13	9	23	-
YEAR TOTALS:	59	64	30	153	3,488,401

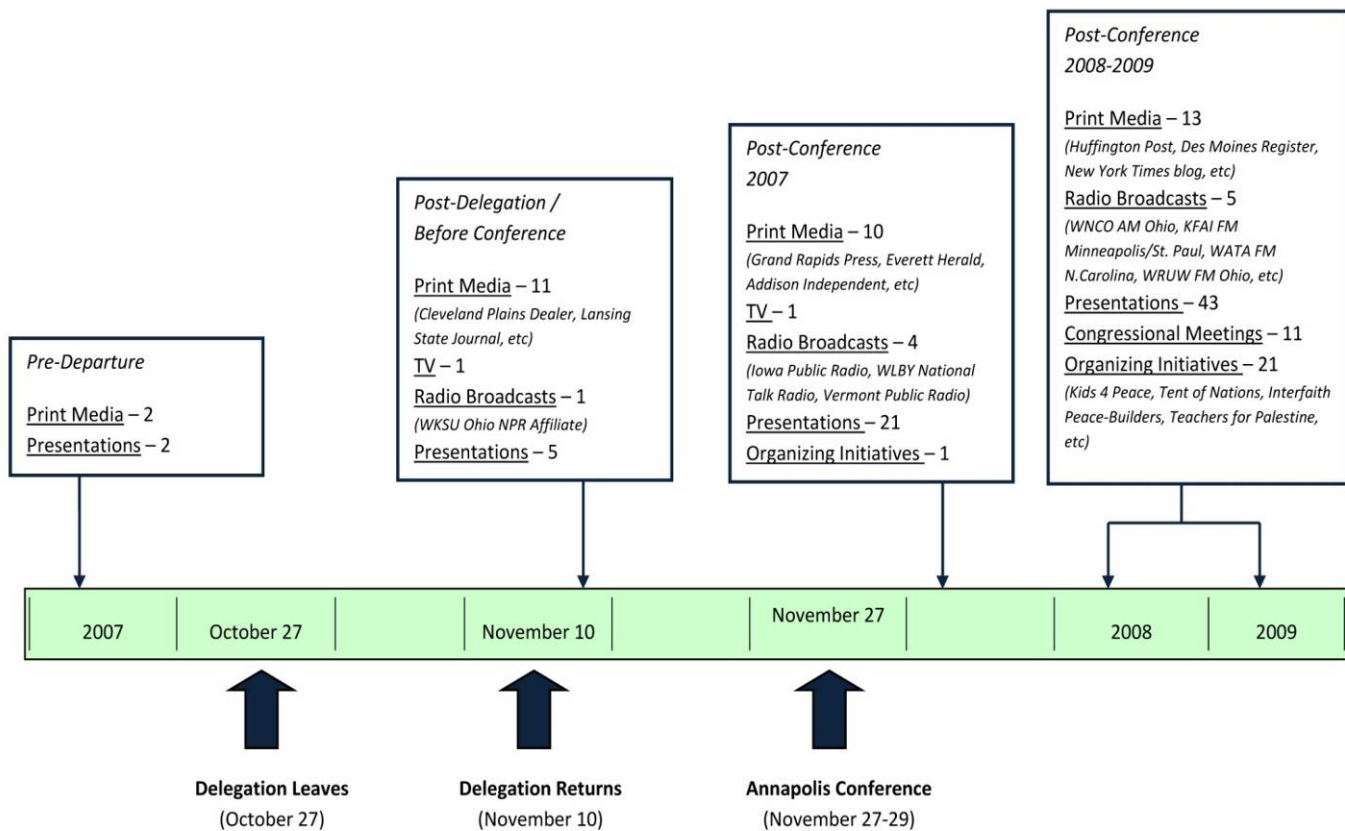
Timeline of Delegate Activism

An analysis of the timeline of delegate media events and activism suggests that the audiences exposed to their stories were presented with an alternative and more nuanced vision of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of coverage given to the Annapolis Peace Conference. While not every story was framed by the conference, a significant percentage was put in that context by editors, reporters and interviewers. As a result, delegate activism had a significant relationship to the production of public discourse surrounding the conference and its results.



The delegation returned on November 10, just over two weeks before the conference. The timeline on the following page illustrates that the majority of media appearances occurred in the two weeks before and in the month immediately succeeding the conference. Additionally, these media events included the largest and most significant of the delegates' combined efforts.

Delegation 25 Timeline



Transition to Long-Term Organizing and Congressional Engagement

The timeline also illustrates the natural evolution of delegate advocacy efforts as their time of return has lengthened. Delegates engaged in most of their presentations in 2008 and by the beginning of 2009 had begun to involve themselves more fully in long-term organizing projects and in engaging their congressional representatives in the policy debate.

As individual delegates moved further from the delegation experience, their activism has become deeper and more meaningful. Delegates have organized multi-day conferences (Ursula Gallagher), sold Palestinian fair trade olive oil (multiple), organized local speaking tours for presenters such as Daoud and Jehan Nassar of *Tent of Nations* (Mike and Judy White, Doug and Mary Ann Kerr), joined the boards of national organizations such as *Kids 4 Peace* (Tom Baskett) and *Interfaith Peace-Builders* (Doug and Mary Ann Kerr), organized local divestment campaigns with their unions (Judy Gilbert), and much more.

A closer look at two areas illustrates the importance of delegate activism on the local and congressional levels:

Des Moines, Iowa: Two delegates from Des Moines (Kathleen McQuillen and John Tuzcu) returned to work in a conservative area. The Congressional Representative from Des Moines, Leonard Boswell (D), rates a -3 on the *US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation's* Congressional Report Card. Kathleen McQuillen scheduled meetings with Boswell's offices on Israeli accountability for US funding and she and John Tuzcu were interviewed on *WOI Iowa Public Radio* (reaching 101,300 listeners), and published two articles in the *Des Moines Register* (reaching 146,050).

Boone, North Carolina: Nancy Benson has brought her delegation experience home with features in local publications including the *Mountain Times* (circ. 20,500), *Watauga Democrat* (circ. 20,832), and the *High Country Press* (circ. 11,500) and she was also interviewed on the conservative *WATA Talk Radio* (26,000 listeners). In addition, she has given talks at the Boone Unitarian Universalist Church and two presentations to Democratic Women's groups. Nancy's advocacy has already made a positive mark in her town by getting people talking about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Nancy's congressional representative, Virginia Fox (R), scores a -3 in her voting on Israel and Palestine.

Though these represent a small contribution to the whole movement for Israeli-Palestinian peace their advocacy efforts in their hometowns contribute to increased media exposure of the conflict and bring first-hand experiences to their communities. It is in these small, rural, and conservative areas that the most work needs to be done to broaden exposure of the issue.

The vast majority of the 23 people who attended Interfaith Peace-Builders' 25th delegation have continued to stay engaged and active in the pursuit of peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. IFPB remains committed to their activism and has engaged with individual members by providing support for their work and inviting their participation in activist skills trainings and other programming.

Our Commitment to Movement Building

Interfaith Peace-Builders describes our work as *“delegation based education and advocacy.”* This phrase embodies our commitment to be more than just a delegation program. In fact, participants on IFPB delegations know that their on-the-ground experience is only the beginning.

While a delegation can be a deeply moving and transformational event, IFPB’s primary work is here in communities across the United States and North America. Through delegation follow-up work, Grassroots Advocacy Trainings and other related programming, our Education and Advocacy Program promotes the civic engagement of our delegation participants and the growth of a comprehensive and diverse US-based movement for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

IFPB’s Education and Advocacy Program prioritizes civic engagement, movement building and coalition organizing. All of Interfaith Peace-Builders’ efforts have the ultimate goal of building a strong, comprehensive and diverse US-based movement for Israeli-Palestinian peace. To achieve this goal, IFPB works to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills and capacity of individuals and small groups through on-the-ground experience, ongoing education, activist skills training and support for grassroots organizing. A range of different strategies operating simultaneously is the key to successful movement building and IFPB materials and trainings are geared to promoting and supporting peace-building efforts on a variety of levels. Through Grassroots Advocacy Trainings, delegation follow-up work, and other programming, IFPB empowers our partners and constituents with the skills and experience needed to build a powerful and sustainable movement.



Conclusion

Interfaith Peace-Builders' 25th delegation is not unique. Every IFPB delegation returns from their on-the-ground experience with a variety of skills and greatly enhanced understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Every delegation records successes in media advocacy, presentations and congressional engagement, among other accomplishments. The 23 people who traveled on the 25th delegation, however, were uniquely situated to impact public discourse and policy regarding the Annapolis Peace Conference of November 2007.

The immediate success of delegate-led media advocacy (reaching nearly 3.5 million people in the weeks surrounding the Annapolis Conference) demonstrates that Interfaith Peace-Builders delegations can, and do, have an impact on the production of public discourse. Insofar as the policy debate in Washington DC is informed by public discourse, the media advocacy of IFPB delegates also resonates in the policy arena.

Perhaps more importantly, however, is the reality that media advocacy is only the beginning of the delegation's civic engagement and activism. Starting in 2008, individual delegates began to engage more deeply in organizing projects which have the capacity to make long and meaningful change. Delegates have also turned more energy towards congress and held direct meetings with representatives in Washington DC and their staff at the district level.

Congressional engagement has occurred in congressional districts across the country, both conservative and liberal, Democrat and Republican. Representatives who have shown little progress in their voting record on Israel/Palestine, have had to address the reality of a more informed and active constituency.

As Interfaith Peace-Builders continues to engage and facilitate delegate activism, individual delegates will have access to more materials and resources which will further strengthen direct policy work. The goal of building a strong and diverse movement for Israeli-Palestinian peace here in the US will only be accomplished by building connections horizontally (among civil society actors and NGOs) and vertically (connecting civil society to the grassroots). It is this task that we must now turn our attention towards.

The 23 members of Interfaith Peace-Builders' 25th delegation join nearly 500 delegation participants, each as important as the next, in achieving these goals and laying the foundations for a more just and equitable US foreign policy in Israel/Palestine.



On the Issues: Delegate Views



"... the road that we are on now is not leading to peace. [Israeli activists] expressed no confidence in their government or in the Palestinian government and they said the international community has failed everybody. The problem again is ... we have this duality of peace-building, we think there is only this or that. We need to bring more people to the table, we need to be bringing these voices who are desperately in need of peace, and let's see what we can shape when we have all those people coming together"

– Kathleen McQuillen, *WOI Radio Talk of Iowa* (November 27, 2007)

"What we saw is it makes it difficult in terms of negotiations because the Israelis have the power ... They have a strong military. They control the borders. They control the water. They control the electricity. They control the economy. They control access in and out of the country."

– Mike White, *Hillsboro Times-Gazette* (December 1, 2007)



"There is little hope that another peace conference will lead to peace. That Palestinians are in this struggle for the long haul and they (at least some we spoke to) have faith that eventually there will be a true peace. [They are hopeful] that some of the seemingly most important grassroots efforts have begun only in recent years—more than 30 years into the occupation."

– Carlie Numi, *IFPB Delegation Evaluation*

"Most of the nonviolent groups are saying the problem isn't the Israelis and the Palestinians - it's the occupation."

– Judy Gilbert, *Orillia Packet and Times* (November 23, 2007)

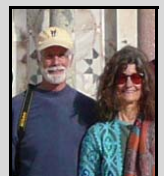


"There has to be more understanding of human rights issues, the economic issues, and shared resources in order to make this work. The alternatives are frightening because there could be an ongoing state of war indefinitely, affecting generations"

– Doug Kerr, *WKSU National Public Radio News* (November 26, 2007)

"It is important for us Americans, who provide Israel \$3.5 billion a year in non-accountable aid, to be informed of the full picture."

– Diane Nancekivell and Tom Baskett, *Addison Independent* (December 27, 2007)





"Palestinians are not the only ones in this conflict that suffer from misrepresentations and over-generalizations. The Israeli people, though differently, are also fastened to a narrow, homogenous narrative and are a victim of media distortion. There are many in Israel that want to escape the cycle of violence, object to the state of Israel's racist and oppressive policies and speak out against such moral and legal offenses."

– John Tuczu, *Via Pacis Newsletter* (December 2007)

"The absence of bombings and military reprisals while we were there does not signify an absence of conflict or violence. Oppression is a form of violence even in the name of security. What we did find were many Palestinians and Israelis dedicated to working for peace and often taking considerable risks to do so."



– Diane Nancekivell and Tom Baskett, *Addison Independent* (December 27, 2007)



"I was struck by the fact that so many groups were working toward a nonviolent solution. . . I came away with a great deal of hope."

– Nancy Benson, *Watauga Democrat* (November 21, 2007)



List of Delegate Events:

The following list details delegate media and events. It is organized into four categories: Media, Presentations, Congressional Advocacy, and Organizing. Each category is listed chronologically. This events list is incomplete, not every delegate has reported full events to IFPB staff and we have little doubt that more work has occurred in the months since the delegation returned.

Media Interviews and Articles

2007:

- **BOOK:** *Peace, Justice, and Jews* Scott Kennedy Bunim & Bannigan Ltd III edition wrote two chapters included in book by Murray Polner and Stefan Merken: "Christians, Jews, and Muslims: A Personal Journey" and "Joseph Abileah: A Nonviolent Israeli" (July 1)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *The Orillia Packet and Times* (local daily, circ. over 10,000) interviewed delegate Judy Gilbert for an article (October 25)
- **SANTA CRUZ, CA:** *SoWat TV show* (local biweekly show) interview with delegation co-leader Scott Kennedy (November 18)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (regional daily, circ. 306,673; readership 783,000) featured delegates Doug and Mary Ann Kerr and John Tuzcu in an article (November 19)
- **BOONE, NC:** *The Watauga Democrat* (triweekly, circ. 20,832) interviewed delegate Nancy Benson for an article titled "A Study in Conflict" (November 21)
- **WEST CHESTER, PA:** *The Daily Local News* (regional daily, 28,600) interviewed delegate Carlie Numi for a feature article published on Thanksgiving Day (November 22)
- **BLOWING ROCK, NC:** *High Country Press* (regional weekly, circ. 11,500) featured delegate Nancy Benson in a front-page article titled "Hope in a Hopeless Region" (November 22)
- **WATAUGA COUNTY, NC:** *The Watauga Mountain Times* (regional weekly, circ. 20,500) interviewed delegate Nancy Benson in an article titled "Area Resident Visits Middle East" (November 22)
- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Philadelphia Inquirer* (national daily, circ. 300,674) Delegate Carlie Numi wrote a letter to the editor on the topic of the Annapolis Meetings (November 22)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *Orillia Today* (local twice-weekly, circ. 21,108) published an article on delegate Judy Gilbert (November 23)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *The Orillia Packet and Times* (local daily, circ. over 10,000) published an article featuring delegate Judy Gilbert (November 23)
- **ATTLEBORO, MA:** *The Attleboro Sun Chronicle* (local daily, circ. 17,777) featured delegate Martha Yager in an article (November 23)
- **LANSING, MI:** *Lansing State-Journal* (local daily, circ. 58,948) featured announcement about delegate Cathy Deyo Young in religion notes section (November 24)
- **KENT, OH:** *WKSU FM Radio* (NPR affiliate, listeners 200,000) featured Doug and Mary Ann Kerr with John Tuzcu. (November 26)
- **RUTLAND, VT:** *Rutland Herald* (local daily, circ. 17,000) Tom Baskett published a letter to the editor (November 27)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *WOI, Talk of Iowa* (listeners 101,300) Kathleen McQuillen and John Tuzcu were featured in an hour long interview. (November 28)
- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Central Philadelphia Friends Meeting Newsletter* (circ. 340) published article by Carlie Numi (December 1)
- **ANN ARBOR, MI:** *WLBY Radio* (270,000 weekly listeners) one hour interview with Ron Stockton on the Lou Perry Show (December 1)
- **ASHLAND, OH:** *Ashland Times-Gazette* (local daily, 4,937) profiled Judy and Mike White in a front-page article (December 1)

- **GRAND RAPIDS, MI:** *Grand Rapids Press* (local daily circ. 133,107) published article by Cathy Deyo Young "Delegate witnesses Middle East Challenges" (December 1)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *"Via Pacis" Catholic Worker Newsletter* (local quarterly, circ. 4,000) published article by John Tuzcu (December 1)
- **BOONE, NC:** *WATA 1450 AM - Talk Radio* (local, 26,000 listeners) interview with Nancy Benson (December 1)
- **VERMONT:** *Vermont Public Radio* (state wide, 566,090 listeners) Tom Baskett was featured in a short interview which aired during broadcast of *NPR's Morning Edition* (December 4)
- **MANSFIELD, OH:** *WMFD TV* (local news, 600,000 households) delegates Judy and Mike White were interviewed on evening news (December 4)
- **ADDISON, VT:** *Addison Independent* (regional biweekly, circ. 39,903) Diane Nancekivell & Tom Baskett published an article "A Couple's Take on Middle East Peace" (December 10)
- **EVERETT, WA:** *Everett Herald* article (regional daily, circ. 50,657) Ursula Gallagher featured in article "Snohomish woman travels to Mideast, works for peace" (December 15)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Sun Press* (local weekly, circ. 10,352) Doug & Mary Ann Kerr front page article (December 20)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *City View* (local weekly, circ. 27,053) Kathleen McQuillen & John Tuzcu featured in article with photo (December 20)
- **ADDISON, VT:** *Addison Independent* Diane (regional biweekly, circ. 39,903) Nancekivell & Tom Baskett published letter to the editor in response/clarification of article (December 27)

2008:

- **VERMONT:** *The Mountain Echo* (local monthly, circ. 5,500) Diane Nancekivell wrote article in the Newsletter of Episcopal Diocese (January 1)
- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** *KFAI Pacifica radio* (local, 112,800 listeners) Esther Ouray interviewed on 6:00 evening news (January 2)
- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** *Southside Pride* (local monthly, circ. 70,000) Esther Ouray featured in front-page photo and self-written article (January 2)
- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** *American Jewish World* (regional weekly, circ. 5,000) Esther Ouray featured in front page article (January 4)
- **MANSFIELD, OH:** *Mansfield News Journal* (regional daily, circ. 31,665) Judy & Mike White published article (January 6)
- **MANCHESTER, OH:** *WNCO Radio AM* (local, 84,000 listeners) Judy & Mike White interviewed on radio talk show: "Anything Goes" (January 15)
- **WILMINGTON, DE:** *Pacem en Terris* (circ. 2,100) Carlie Numi featured in peace work print article (January 15)
- **ASHLAND, OH:** *The Collegian - Ashland University* (local weekly, circ. 6,200) Mike & Judy White featured in article detailing presentation (January 24)
- **NEW ENGLAND:** *Peacework Magazine* (local monthly, circ. 3,000) Martha Yager print article in Quaker Journal (February 1)
- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Pacem en Terris* (circ. 2,100) Carlie Numi submitted an article addressing the Quaker Peace Testimony and her delegation (July 1)
- **BOONE, BLOWING ROCK, AND BANNER ELK, NC:** *High Country Press* (regional weekly, circ. 11,500) Nancy Benson article with photos and interview with Nancy (November 19-23)
- **BOONE, NC:** *Mountain Times* (regional weekly, circ. 15,500) Nancy Benson article with photos and interview with Nancy (November 19-23)
- **BOONE, NC:** *Watauga Democrat* (triweekly, circ. 20,832) Nancy Benson internet article with photos and interview with Nancy: "A Study in Conflict" (November 19-23)
- **BOONE, NC:** *WATA FM Radio Station* (local, 26,000 listeners) 30 minute radio interview with Nancy Benson (November 30)

2009:

- **DEARBORN, MI:** *Local radio station* Ron Stockton interviewed on local radio show about the Gaza attack (January 1, 2009)

- **NATIONAL:** *Huffington Post* (internet newspaper, visitors 1,373, 566) Adam Horowitz published internet article "Even in Sderot, Israelis say no to endless war" (January 2)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *Des Moines Register* Kathleen McQuillen met with the editorial staff (January 9)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *Des Moines Register* (regional daily, circ. 146,050) Kathleen McQuillen print article: "Leaders Should Heed Voices" calls for peace and notes people she met while on the delegation (January 10)
- **OHIO:** *WRUW FM, Case Western Reserve University Radio* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr were interviewed (2009)
- **NATIONAL:** *New York Times "Lede" Blog* Adam Horowitz's *Mondoweiss* blog post referenced in New York Times blog post (July 14, 2009)

Presentations

2007:

- **ASHLAND, OH:** *Ashland Center for Nonviolence* Judy & Mike White presentation at local university, attendance 75 (January 17)
- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Methodist Church* Adam Horowitz presentation just outside Philadelphia (January 21)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Coleridge Rd Association* Doug & Mary Ann Kerr presentation to neighborhood association (November 11)
- **PROVIDENCE, RI:** *AFSC Program Committee* Martha Yager presentation at AFSC annual dinner, attendance 12 (November 13)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Coleridge Concerned Citizens* Doug & Mary Ann Kerr presentation neighborhood group, attendance 10 (November 16)
- **PROVIDENCE, RI:** *AFSC-SENE (Quaker event)* Martha Yager 45 minute presentation, attendance 60 (November 18)
- **SANTA CRUZ, CA:** *Harbor High School* Scott Kennedy lecture and Q & A, attendance 40 (November 18)
- **MICHIGAN:** Catherine Deyo Young gave presentation (December 1)
- **CHICAGO, IL:** Joy Reis gave presentation (December 1)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *Simcoe Muskoka Monthly Meeting* Judy Gilbert public presentation with power point on trip and used flyer template from IFPB, attendance 20 (December 2)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *Quaker Friends Meeting House* Judy Gilbert gave powerpoint presentation about her delegation, answered questions, and sold Zatoun olive oil, attendance 30 (December 2)
- **SNOHOMISH, WA:** *Local Church* Ursula Gallagher short talk on her trip (December 2)
- **CHICAGO, IL:** *AFSC Meeting* Adam Horowitz gave presentation (December 3)
- **CAMBRIDGE, MA:** *AFSC – NERO* Martha Yager gave presentation, attendance 15 (December 4)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *House Party* Doug & Mary Ann Kerr gave presentation, attendance 30 (December 8)
- **BRUNSWICK, OH:** *Interfaith Council for Peace in the Middle East* Judy & Mike White house-party with Kerr's, attendance 35 (December 8)
- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Kendal Retirement Community* Carlie Numi gave power point presentation about delegation to her community and sold olive oil, attendance 100 (December 9)
- **KENNET SQAURE, PA:** *Central Philadelphia Friends Meeting* Carlie Numi presentation, attendance 100 (December 9)
- **SANTA CRUZ, CA:** *Resource Center for Nonviolence* presentation by Scott Kennedy, Julie Doyle, and Sallye Bowyer, attendance 45 (December 9)
- **VERMONT:** *Retired Episcopal Clergy* Diane Nancekivell & Tom Baskett presentation, attendance 15 (December 13)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *AFSC* Mary Ann Kerr, Doug Kerr "Is peace possible" report back from olive harvest delegation (December 13)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *Des Moines Valley Friends Meeting* Kathleen McQuillen and John Tuzcu presented on the delegation, attendance 60 (December 13)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *AFSC* Doug & Mary Ann Kerr sponsored talk, attendance 30 (December 13)
- **BOW, NH:** *local peace group* Martha Yager presentation, attendance 8 (December 13)
- **ST. PAUL, MN:** *Rimon Jewish Arts Council* Esther Ouray presentation and dance at Kahoot's Coffee Shop - fulfilled terms of Grant (December 17)
- **PROVIDENCE, RI:** *Rhode Island spring mobilization* Martha Yager gave presentation, attendance 15 (December 19)

- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** *House Party* Esther Ouray presentation for Jewish friends and congregation members (December 27)
- **PROVIDENCE, RI:** *Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island* Martha Yager panel discussion and presentation of resources that discussed the boycott, divestment, sanctions, attendance 10 (December 29)

2008:

- **CHICAGO, IL:** Joy Reis gave presentation (January 1)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Church of the Redeemer* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave an illustrated presentation to the church (2008)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Church of the Savior* Doug Kerr gave a presentation to a class at the Church (2008)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Church of the Savior* Doug Kerr gave a second presentation to a class at the Church (2008)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *CPA Middle East Committee* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave a presentation put on by CPA and showed the film "Searching for Peace in the Middle East" (2008)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *CPA Middle East Committee* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave a presentation with Youngstown group who brought their local news staff (2008)
- **ELYRIA, OH:** *Elyria Methodist Church* Mary Ann Kerr gave a sermon at the church (2008)
- **ELYRIA, OH:** *Elyria Methodist Church* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave an illustrated presentation at the church (2008)
- **PROVIDENCE, RI:** *Providence Friends Meeting* Martha Yager gave presentation (January 20)
- **WESTPORT, MA:** *Sanwich Quarterly Meeting* Martha Yager gave presentation to a group of friends (January 26)
- **BOONE, NC:** *Boone Democrats* Nancy Benson 45 minute talk to democratic women of Watauga county and sold 6 bottles of olive oil, attendance 23 (January 30)
- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** *Jewish congregation* Esther Ouray gave presentation (February 1)
- **URBANDALE, IA:** *UCC church* Kathleen McQuillen gave presentation at adult-education forum (February 3)
- **WEST CHESTER, PA:** *Chester County Democracy Caucus and Chester County Peace Movement* Carlie Numi gave presentation at a small Methodist Church (February 5)
- **MOUNTAIN CITY, TN:** *United Methodist Church* Nancy Benson gave an hour-long presentation to the Methodist women of mountain city and sold 5 bottles of olive oil, attendance 23 (February 7)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** *Trinity UMC* Kathleen McQuillen gave presentation at church adult-education forum (February 10)
- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Central Philadelphia Monthly meeting* Carlie Numi gave presentation and shared platform with another member, Sadie Forsythe, who returned January 1 from a CPT sponsored trip (February 24)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Ohio Methodist Peace and Justice Committee* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave presentation (March 1)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *Amnesty International* Judy Gilbert presented on the topic of settlements, demolitions, checkpoints, and detentions with posters and maps displayed, attendance 25 (March 1)
- **BOONE, NC:** *Boone Unitarian Universalist Church* Nancy Benson gave 40 minute presentation to church and sold 4 bottles of olive oil, attendance 53 (March 9)
- **BOONE, NC:** *Democratic Women's luncheon group* Nancy Benson gave presentation and got 20 signatures on letters to Senators Biden, Dole, Burr, and Rice and Bush which called for an end to the occupation and expansion of settlements, etc (April 1)
- **ORILLIA, ON:** *St. Paul's Women's Group* Judy Gilbert presented on her impressions from her delegation experience, attendance 15 (April 1)
- **ASHLAND, OH:** *Ashland Center for Nonviolence* Judy & Mike White follow-up presentation at Ashland University about action steps to take. Showed two videos, "Occupation 101" and "the Iron Wall" followed by discussion, attendance 20 (April 17)
- **MEDFORD, NJ:** *Medford Leas Retirement Community* Carlie Numi was invited to give a presentation by the Diversity Committee based on her article in CPMM newsletter (May 8)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Cleveland Peace Action* Mary Ann and Doug Kerr moderated a panel discussion (May 15)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Cleveland Heights Library* Doug Kerr presentation on Israel/Palestine with Cleveland Peace Action (May 25)
- **WASHINGTON, D.C.:** *Churches for Middle East Peace Meeting* Mary Ann & Doug Kerr attended churches for Middle East peace leadership council meeting (May 25)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Congregation of Sister's of Saint Joseph* Judy and Mike White gave presentation (June 14)

- **MASSILLION, OH:** *St. Paul's Lutheran Church* Judy and Mike White gave presentation (June 15)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Cleveland Heights Public Library* Judy and Mike White gave presentation (June 15)
- **WOOSTER, OH:** *Trinity United Church of Christ, Wooster Area Interfaith Partnership, and Ashland Center for Nonviolence* Judy and Mike White gave presentation (June 16)
- **BROADVIEW HEIGHTS, OH:** *Assumption Parish* Judy and Mike White gave presentation (June 17)
- **TORONTO, ON:** *Human Rights Committee of District 12 of Secondary Teachers Union* Judy Gilbert gave a powerpoint presentation with 3 other people and shared quotes of people that they met on their delegation, attendance 50 (November 1)
- **PARADISE, CA:** Wendy Hartley gave presentation "stories from Palestine" (November 16)

2009:

- **ORILLIA, ON:** Judy Gilbert met with local individuals to discuss and share their concerns, attendance 7 (January 1)
- **LAKEWOOD, OH:** *Lakewood Public Library* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave a presentation "Israel/Palestine: Grassroots for Peace in a Land of Conflict" which discussed the history, settlements, occupation, and efforts for reconciliation (2009)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Church of the Redeemer* Mary Ann Kerr gave a sermon at the church (2009)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Church of the Redeemer* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr gave an illustrated presentation "taking your family to the middle east" (2009)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Cleveland Heights Library* Mary Ann Kerr and Ruth Tracy presented with Cleveland Peace Action Panel on Israeli/Palestinian women's perspectives, attendance 40 (February 7)
- **MONTEREY, CA:** *Friends of the Middle East* Scott Kennedy speaking panel on Gaza question: Ethical and Political Implications (March 18)
- **WASHINGTON, D.C:** *Canaan Fair Trade Fundraising* Mary Ann Kerr & Ruth Tracy sold bottles of Palestinian olive oil from Canaan Fair Trade at local farmers markets and at talks (May 5)
- **LITCHFIELD, OH:** *Catholic Church* Judy and Mike White participated in dialogue at a church (May 5)
- *Lutheran Church* Judy and Mike White gave a presentation on the Lutheran church mount of olives project (July 24)

Congressional Advocacy

2008:

- **VERMONT:** *Senator Leahy* Tom Baskett & Diane Nancekival phone call with member of Leahy's Foreign Policy staff. (January 14)
- **NATIONAL:** *National Security Council Meeting* Mary Ann & Doug Kerr Met with Michael Pascual of the NSC and observed diplomats discuss negotiations and issues (May 25)
- **OHIO:** *Congressman Bob Latta* Judy and Mike White held meeting with Bob Latta (May 25)

2009:

- **PHILADELPHIA, PA:** *Congress Lois Swartz* called her senators and reps regarding the Gaza invasion (January 2)
- **SANTA CRUZ, CA:** *Congressman Sam Farr* Scott Kennedy got 250 signatures for a petition opposing any coming Congressional action that endorsed Israel's war on Gaza which positively affected Rep. Sam Farr's position (January 6)
- **WASHINGTON, D.C:** *President Bush, Condoleezza Rice, Senator Biden, and her 2 Senators* Nancy Benson wrote letters to all of them and got 25 people to sign her letters at talks (January 30, February 7, March 9)
- **TORONTO, ON:** *Israeli Consul General Amir Gissin* Judy Gilbert and 3 other Quakers visited the consulate in Toronto to discuss their concerns about Israeli action in the West Bank and Gaza, attendance 5 (June 1)
- **OHIO:** *Senator Sherrod Brown* Mary Ann Kerr held meeting with Senator Brown's aides (June 10)
- **OHIO:** *Cleveland Peace Action* Mary Ann Kerr met with Rep. Marcia Fudge's Middle East Aide (June 23)
- **DES MOINES, IA:** Kathleen McQuillen scheduled meetings with congressional offices on Israeli accountability for US funding (July 9)

Organizing

2007:

- **PENINSULA, OH:** Scott Kennedy organized dinner with former delegates (December 1)

2008:

- **DES MOINES, IA:** AFSC Kathleen McQuillen and 10 cosponsors organized theatre production of "My Name is Rachel Corrie" (January 26)
- **TORONTO, ON:** *Teachers for Palestine* Judy Gilbert helped with planning and leafleting for the organization (January 2008-present)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Cleveland Peace Action* Doug Kerr was organizer and facilitator of Cleveland peace action group (2008)
- **CAPE COD, MA:** Martha Yager organized film showing of My Name is Rachel Corrie (February 15)
- **WASHINGTON:** *Conference on Christians in Palestine* Ursula Gallagher organized two day conference (April 18)
- **ASHLAND, OH:** *Ashland Center for Nonviolence* Judy White organized Parent's Circle Program (attendance 70) and got 3 people to sign up for IFPB (May 4)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Daoud and Jehan Nasser* Judy & Mike White, Mary Ann & Doug Kerr hosted and scheduled visits for them in the US (May 25)
- **CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OH:** *Interfaith Peace Builders* Judy and Mike White, Mary Ann and Doug Kerr organized private event in the Kerr's home for IFPB delegates (June 15)
- **CLEVELAND, OH:** *Daoud and Jehan Nasser* Judy and Mike White organized speaking event for them (June 14)
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- **WOOSTER, OH:** *Daoud and Jehan Nasser* Judy and Mike White organized speaking event for them (June 16)
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- **ASHLAND, OH:** *Michael Zougbi* Judy and Mike White had Michael Zougbi and his wife come to their church and sell olive wood carvings (2008)

2009:

- **VERMONT:** *Kids 4 Peace* Tom Baskett accepted an appointment as chair of the Board of Directors for kids 4 Peace organization in Vermont and organized Israeli and Palestinian summer camps in Vermont (2009)
- **LAKEWOOD, OH:** *Lakewood Public Library* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr with Cleveland Peace Action helped organize a film showing of "Searching for Peace in the Middle East" followed by a guided discussion (2009)
- **LAKEWOOD, OH:** *Lakewood Public Library* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr with Cleveland Peace Action helped organize a panel discussion with a representative from americans for peace now, an israeli graduate student, a palestinian newspaper editor, and palestinian-american leader from Arab Community Center (2009)
- **Washington DC:** *Foundation for Middle East Peace* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr met with Ambassador Phil Wilcox, the Director of the Foundation for Middle East Peace (2009)
- **Washington DC:** *Churches for Middle East Peace* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr met with Warren Clarke, director of Churches for Middle East Peace and they joined the leadership council (2009)
- **Cleveland, OH:** *Brit Tzeddek* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr participated in the dialogues at the Peace Café (2009)
- **Cleveland, OH:** *Ohio for Gaza Coalition and Middle East Forum* Doug and Mary Ann Kerr interacted and communicated with the organization (2009)
- **Cleveland, OH:** Doug and Mary Ann Kerr organized a family trip to the Middle East and traveled to Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem and visited with Daoud and Jihan Nasser (2009)
- **TORONTO, ON:** *Teachers for Palestine* Judy Gilbert is organizing a campaign for the Ontario public teachers union to divest from holdings in Israel.

A study in conflict

BY SCOTT NICHOLSON
nicholson@wataugademocrat.com

A Blowing Rock woman took a closer look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, having recently returned from a delegate tour of the Mideast.

Nancy Benson went on a tour of the region in late October as part of an effort to promote awareness of the issues dividing the two nationalities. The tour was co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee.

Benson was a former coordinator for American Friends Service Committee efforts in Africa, and a Mideast visit earlier in her life kept it prominent in her thoughts.

Benson said the purpose of this delegation was to educate North American citizens about the region and deepen their understanding of its conflicts. "I'm very concerned about human rights and peace in that part of the world," she said, adding that she was more interested in the social impacts on the people than the political implications.

Benson was on a European tour in 1960 when she visited Egypt, Jordan and Israel for the first time. She sought out prominent Christian landmarks like Bethlehem and Jericho. "I was stunned by seeing the religious sites, the beauty of the land and the friendliness of the people," she said.

While in Jericho, she encountered a woman covered in black with a can of water on her head. The woman beckoned Benson to follow her, eventually leading her to a Palestinian refugee camp, where Benson was fed and learned more about their plight.

The recent trip came just as Israeli and Palestinian negotiators prepare for a November peace conference in Annapolis hosted by the United States. The prospect of renewed peace negotiations has contributed to rising tensions in the region, according to American Friends Service Committee, which it says makes the work of peace and education organizations even more critical.

Benson said the beneficial aspect of the tour was mingling with the people whose lives are affected by the strife. "I'm not sure what the solution to the problem is," Benson said.

"I thought there might be a two-state solution, but after seeing the problem on the ground, I'm not sure that's possible."

She said while Palestinians were being pushed out of Israel, the Israelis were themselves divided about how to address the issue.

Benson worked for the AFSC's Africa Desk for many



Photo submitted

Nancy Benson of Blowing Rock picks olives with a Palestinian family outside of the West Bank city of Jenin during a recent educational tour.

years supporting programs for women and villagers in Africa. She has worked and lived in Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Somalia with the AFSC and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in The Ivory Coast. She has also traveled extensively in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, Japan and Central America.

Benson's trip also included a hands-on component. The delegation focused on the Palestinian olive harvest that takes place each autumn, climbing ladders and picking produce. The olive harvest is an occasion of particular cultural and economic importance for Palestinian communities and a time when tensions between Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents of the West Bank run high.

The group visited the Palestinian Fair Trade Association's Olive Harvest Festival and supported Palestinian farmers harvesting olives near the cities of Jenin and Bethlehem.

The olive harvest is an important social, economic and cultural tradition for Palestinians and a time when right-wing Israeli settlers often launch attacks against Palestinian farmers in their fields.

"This trip wasn't political, but educational," Benson said.

Locally, Benson has been active joining other women in vigils in downtown Boone, where the participants dress in black and read out the names of the American soldiers killed in Iraq.

Benson is optimistic that a peaceful resolution is possible in the Mideast. "I was struck by the fact that so many groups were working toward a nonviolent solution," she said. "I came away with a great deal of hope."

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Life Times

Featuring Hometown Folks, Friends & Neighbors

Area resident visits Middle East

Nancy Benson witnesses Israeli-Palestinian strife, leaves with 'great deal of hope'

By Scott Nicholson

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Nancy Benson of Blowing Rock picks olives with a Palestinian family outside of the West Bank city of Jenin during a recent educational tour. Photos submitted



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High Country Press

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FREE

Hope in a Hopeless Region

Blowing Rock Resident Returns from Middle East Trip

STORY BY KATHLEEN MCFADDEN

Try to imagine the personal transformation involved in going from a guerilla fighter to a committed peace advocate. Then add to that scenario a 7-year prison sentence and the death of your 10-year-old daughter, both at the hands of the enemy you battled as a guerilla and now work with to bring peace to your region.

As remarkable—and unbelievable—as the story sounds, it was just one among many that Nancy Benson heard during her recent trip to Israel and Palestine.

The 75-year-old Benson is no stranger to adventure. In her younger days, she spent several months traveling through Europe and the Middle East. When Benson, who currently lives in Blowing Rock, learned about the peace delegation trips co-sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee and the Interfaith Peace-Builders, she was determined to go, despite the potential for violence and danger.

Benson was one of 24 people from all over the United States and Canada who made the two-week trip with the goal of becoming more informed about the region's divisive issues through interacting directly with Israelis and Palestinians.

Continued on page 25



Nancy Benson picks olives with a Palestinian family outside of the West Bank city of Jenin above. Members of the delegation stayed overnight in Palestinian homes and supported the families in the olive harvest, an important social, economic and cultural tradition for Palestinians and a time when right-wing Israeli settlers often launch attacks against Palestinian farmers in their fields. Photo courtesy of Ursula Gallagher



Nancy Benson visits with a Palestinian woman in a refugee camp near Jericho (left). Benson visited these camps in 1960 and returned again this month. Photo courtesy of Scott Kennedy

My journey to Palestine

BY ESTHER OURAY

Editor's note: As part of a two-week, interfaith Olive Harvest Delegation to Israel and Palestine late last year, longtime Powderhorn resident Esther Ouray was able to see firsthand the land and people involved in what is perhaps a defining conflict of our times. Ouray, a Heart of the Beast associate artist for the past 25 years, presents the hows and whys of her journey in her own words.

I googled "Israel nonviolence" and was eventually led to the Olive Harvest Delegation cosponsored by Interfaith Peacebuilders and the American Friends Service Committee. I believe it is important for me, as an American Jew—as a Jewish woman who is committed and connected to the Jewish community—to share this experience, especially within the Jewish community. We do not hear these voices enough, if at all. The people I met and the organizations I was exposed to, both Israeli and Palestinian, were deeply committed to the well-being of each other's people and to a viable and peaceful solution to the crisis.

Although the delegation was called an interfaith delegation, the majority of the delegates were Christian. I was very aware of being one of the few Jewish mem-



Esther Ouray sits on Mount Sinai.

[former Israeli Prime Minister and current Minister of Defense Ehud Barak] announced that Arafat really never had intended to negotiate, that he wanted to throw all the Jews into the sea. He stated that there was no partner with which to negotiate peace. The peace movement became disillusioned because they had hope in Arafat. It basically collapsed at that point. The nonviolent movement in Palestine needs the support of a strong Israeli peace movement.

I observed a lot of fear. Some of this fear is well-founded, like in Sderot, an Israeli town close to the

leave and were then beaten when they objected. The house demolition destroyed some of the neighbor's fruit and olive trees. House demolition of this nature is clearly a collective punishment and prohibited by international law.

The Israeli wall being built on the premise of keeping Israel secure is four times longer, and in places, two times as high as the Berlin wall. It not only puts Palestinians in enclaves in some areas, but also serves to separate Israelis and Palestinians even further. Less than 20 percent of the wall is constructed along the inter-

20 and 40 percent of their income to purchase water.

Many of the settlers who are living in illegal settlements are Americans who have immigrated to Israel. We repeatedly encountered the point of view that the United States was using Israel to fulfill its own interests. Often this is a barrier to the peace process.

The issues are so complex. The history is complex. The emotions feeding both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives are complex. The peace community here in the Twin Cities tends to oversimplify issues and look at the conflict in a simplistic manner.

The Temple Mount is the symbolic epitome of the importance of the same land for two peoples. It is not surprising that both Jews and Muslims find the same place to be sacred. The Temple Mount is believed by Jews to be the place where the holy of holies was, a place so sacred that only the high priest could enter once a year. This is the same place where the Dome of the Rock and al Aqsa mosque stands to honor the spot from which Mohammad ascended.

There are two separate road systems being created in the occupied territories—one for Israelis and one for Palestinians. Many of the Palestinian roads are planned to be

I reject the terms pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli. The security and well being of both nations are so intertwined. Either you are pro-peace or for the occupation.

Under international law the Palestinians are recognized as a people with a right to self-determination; they have the right of return and compensation; the occupation is illegal based on the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, and Palestinians living in Israel have the right to equality as citizens of Israel.

The Geneva conventions were created in response to the Holocaust. Israel has relied on international law when prosecuting and bringing to justice Nazi war criminals. It is incumbent that both the USA and Israel respect international law.

Esther Ouray will discuss her trip at various locations in the Twin Cities, as part of her commitment to trip sponsors.

MOUNTAIN ECHO

News of the Episcopal
Diocese of Vermont

an edition of
Episcopal Life

"Glorify the Lord, O mountains and hills..."

January 2008

www.dioceseofvermont.org

Making sense of "facts on the ground" in Israel and Palestine

by Diane Nancekivell

My husband, Tom Baskett, and I recently returned from a two week trip to Israel/Palestine. We were part of a peace delegation traveling with Interfaith Peace-Builders (www.interfaithpeacebuilders.org) and American Friends Service Committee. Our trip was arranged to coincide with the Palestinian olive harvest so that we could join with farmers in the harvest and in the celebration of their Olive Harvest Festival.

Our schedule was intense; each day we met with at least two, often three, different organizations that had some angle or focus for forging peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We were centered in East Jerusalem within walking distance of the old walled city and stayed at St. George's Cathedral Pilgrim House.

As preparation for this trip we were encouraged to read *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew and the Heart of the Middle East*, by Sandy Tolan. Thus, we set out with Palestinian sympathies together with compassion for the Israeli Zionist cause. Our point of view has remained consistent but now includes an awareness that "the facts on the ground" do not match the rhetoric of the Israeli government and leave little hope for a vision of how a just peace could be accomplished. Below are just two of the many stories that now live in my heart and play over in my mind.

It was late in the afternoon, and we were already tired and filled to overflowing with the information we'd been given during our visits to beautiful old Jaffa, and much younger Tel Aviv. But our group had made arrangements for us to meet the Israeli men



Diane Nancekivell (second from left) and members of the Interfaith Peace-Builders trip join a protest against the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

and women from New Profile, a feminist group dedicated to questioning the level of militarization of Israeli society. So we hauled ourselves out of the bus and into the meeting hall of a kibbutz located some miles from downtown Tel Aviv.

After dinner and the more formal presentation given us by a vibrant young Israeli woman named Asiza, we broke into informal conversations. I made a beeline towards a handsome woman about my own age. Dorothy had offered some notably insightful comments earlier, and I wanted to hear her story. She was born and brought up in Connecticut and emigrated to Israel after graduating from Smith College and marrying her husband Max, who had survived

Nazi Austria. They had lived a good life, bringing their three sons up in Israel and keeping close associations with her family back in the states.

Seven years ago, Dorothy began to question the governmental policies and actions of the Israeli Defense Force. She was chagrined it had taken her so long, but for her husband it is still sometimes hard, she explained to me. "I love Israel enough to demand that we honor international laws and respect others as we want them to respect us," she told me with tear-filled eyes. "I can no longer stand by silently, and New Profile is taking on military policies in ways that count, and they are helping young people make conscious choices about whether or not they will serve in the IDF—that's important!" she told me with pride. Dorothy and I talked until our group was herded back to the bus. I was surprised to see it was 10:00 p.m. Now that I'm home, we continue to be in contact by email.

Some days later, early one morning, we loaded onto our bus and traveled north toward Jenin. The ride is much longer now since there are so many check-points to go through (all within the West Bank). Just north of Ramallah, we were obliged to change into mini vans, because our bus with its Jerusalem license plates could go no further. By midday we arrived at the office of the Palestinian Fair Trade Association, where a young, dynamic American-educated Palestinian, Nasser Abu Farha, has created a certified organic and fair trade co-operative. It is now the largest exporter of Palestinian olive oil and brings together 647 small farmers.

The program is impressive; true to their certification of fair trade, they include social programs like encouraging women's co-operatives through small loans and donating new trees to help farmers develop and use their land more productively, to reintroduce pomegranate trees and to expand the almond orchards. After a delicious lunch of falafel, tomatoes, and yogurt smushed into the best pita you've ever tasted, we visited an olive press. The perfume of the sweet oil permeated the air. Typical of old-world thinking, nothing is wasted; even the ground-up pits are used as fuel in stoves for winter warmth.

That evening we joined the farmers and



Palestinian children enjoy a playful moment during the olive harvest in Jenin.

their families (about 600 men, women and children) for their annual festival. The food, improvised song and poetry, and dance were fabulous. It was joyous, energetic, creative, and hope-filled. Through this initiative the people of this fertile valley see possibility for their futures and a pride in their old ways made new. At first, we Americans were strangers in their midst, but slowly, as a young boy offered us water and timidly asked us our names, we were drawn into conversation. We were asked, "What do the Americans think of us?" It was telling to watch their faces lose hope as we answered truthfully: "Not much is written about the Palestinians in our papers, except about the Hamas terrorists." How could we help but promise to come back to the states and tell what we'd seen, talk about the legendary hospitality and many ways the Palestinian people are choosing to resist the oppression of occupation?

The morning after the festival we walked with a group of farmers to their olive orchards. It was wondrous for us to see ancient trees laden with hard black olives, families gathered, each member with a specific task. Again we were a curiosity, and again we were given juice to drink and chocolate to eat as we joined with the pickers. It seemed all so normal until a ripple went through the group. At the end of the dirt farm road was the Israeli security wall, this time in the form of barbed and razor wire, and lingering on the other side of it were two Israeli Defense Force armored cars. After they slowly moved on, we were taken to the edge of the orchard where the "fence" cut the orchard apart, leaving some of their land on the other side, unavailable for harvesting, or tending, lost to become incorporated by the new Israeli outpost that is visibly growing. Someone shrugged and said as he pointed to a town in the distance, "It used to take us 20 minutes to go to that town where we did our shopping and visited our doctors; now it can take up to 6 hours, depending on the check points and line ups and traffic, so we don't go anymore, and the town is dying."

Wherever we went, whenever we met, we heard a similar story. The older Palestinians have no sense that they will see peace in their lifetimes, but they are determined to prevail; they are dedicated to find ways to

Bi-vocational clergy "weave connections"

by Jean MacDonald

Thanks to the Pastoral Enrichment Project/Lilly Grant, a group of bi-vocational clergy of the Diocese of Vermont, some with their spouses or partners, gathered at the Grand Summit Resort and Conference Center at Mount Snow for a time of learning, rest and relaxation with the theme "Weaving the Connections."

We were fortunate to have Fran McKendree with us as conference musician. Fran used his musical gifts to gather us together and set the tone for each session. The participants engaged in a web-making exercise that showed us the connections we all have in the various parts of our lives—church work, home life, work in the world, our

volunteer efforts—and how the Spirit is woven through all of them.

Block building was also a part of our time together! In that exercise we talked about how we could build welcoming entryways, places of rest and solitude within and around the structures of our complex lives.

The opportunity for rest was a big part of the conference, and participants swam in the outdoor heated pool, walked on the hiking/biking trails and enjoyed the hot tub. A truly "grand" time was had by all, and we look forward to the possibility of a different type of gathering in 2008.

The Rev. Jean MacDonald is a teacher and priest who lives in Lyndonville.



Lucy Pellegrini photo

Jean MacDonald, Paul Gratz, Victor Horvath, Susan Gratz, Jean Fuller, Steve Fuller and Jim Ballard participate in an exercise about building welcoming entryways.

Mountain Echo/Episcopal Life

Formation

Liberation

Communication

Connection

Celebration

Continued on Page G

Page E • January 2008

Extending the olive branch

Minneapolis theater artist Esther Ouray's recent travels in Israel and the West Bank kindled her hope that peace is possible

By MORDECAI SPECKTOR

Nonviolence is not the first idea that springs to one's mind when thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, as Minneapolis resident Esther Ouray learned, there are activists on both sides of the divide who are coming together and trying to find creative, nonviolent solutions to the famously intractable and bloody struggle.

Ouray returned in November from a two-week tour of Israel and the West Bank, where she intended "to learn the Jewish language of nonviolence, how to speak in Jewish terms about nonviolence, and what were the details of Jewish thought on non-violence versus violence."

An associate artist with In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre in Minneapolis, as well as a Hebrew teacher and arts specialist at Temple Israel, Ouray was part of a delegation co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee.

She was one of three Jews in the mainly Christian group — "probably the most Jewish-identified person on the trip," she commented, during a recent interview at the bustling May Day Café in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood of Minneapolis.

Her investigation of Jewish thought on nonviolence yielded some answers, but Ouray admitted that she found the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "complex" — and somewhat beyond the framework of the questions she had sought

to answer.

In what was her first visit to Israel since she was a teenage tourist in 1974, Ouray, and the other members of the Interfaith Olive Harvest delegation, met with Israeli peace activists,



Mordecai Spektor

Esther Ouray: A peace settlement will require "people coming together... getting to know each other."

lawyers and ordinary citizens inside Israel and in West Bank settlements, including Hebron, the only Jewish settlement situated inside of a large Palestinian city. They also met with Palestinian community activists, and members of the Bereaved Parents' Circle and Combatants for Peace, two groups promoting reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Regarding the olive harvest part of the trip, Ouray said that it took place outside of Jenin, on the West Bank. The delegation stayed in Palestinian homes and went out into the fields in

the morning. The work was not arduous, Ouray admitted.

"We'd pick one tree and then have coffee for a while," she recalled. "Then we'd pick another tree and have some more coffee. So, it was not a labor-intensive experience."

She added, "I feel an affinity to olive trees that I never felt before."

The olive picking took place under the auspices of a group called Canaan Fair Trade (www.canaanfairtrade.com), a Jenin-based distributor of olive oil, almonds, honey and other indigenous products.

Ouray's participation in the Interfaith Olive Harvest delegation was funded in part by the Amy Adina Schulman Memorial Fund; and by a Norman Ackerman Artist Travel-Study grant from Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation.

She acknowledges that she is not an expert in Middle East politics, but is willing to talk with groups about her "personal experiences as a Jew" in Israel and the Palestinian Authority territory. From day to day, Ouray's views modulated as she heard different assessments on prospects for a negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

She was left with the overall impression that "political solutions that are on the table now are just not viable... there needs to be creative thinking," which is coming from grassroots activ-

• OURAY / see page 2

From Savannah to the Middle East, in search of understanding ...

BY ANGEL N. ROSS
News Journal

SAVANNAH — If you live outside of Mansfield, imagine going through a contentious military checkpoint just to reach the city. Whether you have to work, go to the hospital or are in desperate need of groceries — your admission to the city depends on the military allowing it.

Ashland County residents Judy and Mike White witnessed this and other eye-opening experiences when they spent two weeks in Israel and the Palestinian territories with the Interfaith Olive Harvest Delegation. The delegation was co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace Builders and the American Friends Service Committee.

The Whites said the purpose was to learn about the region and deepen their understanding of its conflicts.

At the end of World War II, Palestinian Arabs made up 90 percent of the population of the area. In 1947, a United Nations resolution created Israel as a homeland for Jews.

The Jews began moving into the land and have gradually occupied a majority of it, leaving Palestinians with only a little bit of land.

There is tension on both sides, as some Palestinians feel oppressed by the Israelis and some Israelis want an all-Jewish state and feel it is their God-given land.

Terrorist attacks prompted Israel to begin building walls around its territory and around Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory. It became difficult for Palestinians to move back and forth between the two lands. Hostility, violence and anger has grown between the two sides.

"We just wanted to give a presence and support to people who are feeling oppressed," Judy said. "We

don't want to be pro one way or the other. We just want the truth to be told."

During the delegation, the couple met with Palestinians and Israelis who want peace in the region.

The couple supported Palestinian farmers harvesting olives near the cities of Jenin and Bethlehem.

"Olives are their main source of income," Mike said. "They are a symbol of endurance. Olives are on the table for breakfast, lunch and dinner."

They also met with several Israeli support groups.

"We toured the town of Sderot, which has been targeted with rockets by Palestinian militants from within the impoverished Gaza Strip," Judy said.

"It's a tough place to live. They worry about their children. They have a 15-second warning system that the rockets are coming. The people we met said they have never lost empathy for the people behind the wall in spite of the tension they live with each day."

Judy also took part in a weekly silent vigil, held in West Jerusalem, by the Israeli organization "Women in Black."

"For 19 years, women have held signs in different languages saying 'end the occupation,'" she said. "It was a silent protest that shows people want peace in that region."

Mike, a former history teacher, said he "absolutely gained more un-



Rockets shot at Sderot, a city three miles from the Gaza Strip, pile up on shelves.



Daoud Nasser, a Palestinian farmer, talks about his efforts to keep his land.



derstanding of the situation," by witnessing it firsthand.

"When we first got there, we were really discouraged," he said. "We saw all this and it was very overwhelming, but as we met more people,

we became more encouraged because there are people fighting for peace. We want to get the word out about the reality of the situation. It's not that one side is right or one side is wrong."

The Whites said the

United States will be a key towards peace in the region.

"We all need to meet high standards for human rights," they said.

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Part of the wall built to protect Bethlehem.

January 24, 2008

NEWS

Speakers discuss Palestinian-Israeli conflict

By Ahmed Ebraheem
COLLEGIAN REPORTER

Mike and Judy White decided that media isn't the best way to know about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that has been going on for more than half a century.

They spent two weeks touring Israel and the Palestinian territories, talking to victims from both sides. Last Thursday, they came to Ashland University to share their experience.

"We must keep in mind that the Israeli and the Palestinian versions of the history are different in ... almost in every detail," said Mike White before giving a brief historical preview of the conflict to the excited audience. "The Palestinians called the 1967 war between the Jewish militias and the Arabs a 'nakba,' which means a catastrophe, and the Israelis called it the War of In-

dependence."

Mike White highlighted the difficult living conditions of the Palestinian West Bank.

"The Israeli settlements are illegal by international law," he said. "However, one Israeli settler consumes five times the water of one Palestinian, and Israelis control about 75 percent of water resources."

He said Israeli intentionally hinder Palestinians from going to schools and workplaces.

"Israel uses 100 military check point[s] to restrict movement of Palestinians between Israel and the West Bank," he said. "It is as if you have to go through a check point to go from here to Mansfield."

He added that Palestinians are often humiliated during the daily security screenings. During one of the Whites' interviews with Palestinians living in the West Bank, a college student claimed that an Israeli

soldier had once decided in whim that he would only allow "pretty girls" to pass through his check point.

Judy White discussed the situation of the Arab Christians of Bethlehem, the city in which Jesus was born.

"Palestinians in Bethlehem are not permitted to go to hospitals, not permitted to visit their families in Jerusalem," she said. "Christians are moving out of Bethlehem. In not too many years, the birth place of Christianity will be a city without Christians."

The Whites have met several peace activists from both sides who still believe in the possibility of a Palestinian-Israeli coexistence. One Israeli settler told the Whites he wishes Israel would use the money it spends on assassinations to build industrial parks in which Palestinians and Israelis can work together.

"Why should any of this matter to us as Americans?" Mike White asked rhetorically. "Because we are paying for all of it." He stressed the fact that the United States gives Israel more than three billion dollars every year. Much of it goes to military armament and buying advanced weapons.

"Since the occupation is funded primarily through aid from the U.S. government, we can communicate with our Congress," he said.

The Whites urged the audience to travel to Palestine, advising them to communicate with the Interfaith Peace Builders and similar groups that coordinate such visits.

"Get more informed about this issue ... make the members of the Congress know what you feel about it," Mike White said. "But the most important thing you can do is to go there and experience it yourself."

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Journey for Understanding

by Carlie Numi

In October-November 2007 I participated in a delegation to Israel-Palestine co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace Builders (IFPB) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). The group numbered 23 ranging in age from 22 to 75 including both Christians and Jews and U.S. and Canadian citizens. We met with Israelis, Palestinians, and internationals & non-governmental officials across a wide spectrum of positions, activities, and life situations, including Israelis and Palestinians who have crossed the divide to work together for a non-violent solution to the problems which those in power have perpetuated decade after decade. We met no political or government officials.

ISRAELIS

Perhaps the most "ordinary" Israelis we talked with were those who live in **Sderot**, located close to the border with Gaza. They spoke to us about their personal experience of living with the daily reality of air raid alarms when rockets are launched from Gaza. Although the Qassam rockets kill very few people (15 in seven years) and usually fall in uninhabited areas, the psychological toll is great. There are at least a few alarms every day at which time they have 15 seconds to get to shelter (a safe room in their house or a public concrete shelter). They struggle to instill in their children an understanding that those firing rockets represent only a small minority of Palestinians and one of the presenters spoke of his participation in a dialogue group with Palestinians and his reaching out to people he knows in Gaza by way of telephone calls several times a week. Since 2000 Israel has permitted very few people to enter or leave Gaza. One person said, "I am living in Sderot for 20 years. I never lost my empathy with the other side. I

dialogue with Hamas. Without its participation, no true peace can be achieved.

In the West Bank city of Hebron, we met with the spokesman for the **Hebron Jewish Settlement**. Hebron is the place of an ancient Jewish community where Abraham, Sarah and Isaac are buried. Jews lived there peacefully from the 1500s till 1929 when Arabs (many from outside Hebron) attacked and killed 67 Jews. Some Arabs saved Jewish lives, but it is the deaths that are remembered by the Hebron Jews. There is a small museum honoring the dead in that 1929 incident. After 1967, Jews began to return. They have a reputation for being among the most extreme settlers. In 1994, a settler (Baroch Goldstein, M.D., originally from Brooklyn, NY) went into the Ibrahim mosque (site of the above-mentioned tombs) at dawn on the first day of Ramadan and killed 29 worshippers. Nineteen more were killed by the Israeli army in the demonstrations after the attacks. Our speaker did not refer to the 1994 events.

After listening to his angry speech in favor of a Jewish state in all of Palestine, one of our delegates said, "What disturbs me the most as a Jew is certain things I was taught. You don't cut the trees of an enemy. If they are hungry, you give them bread and water." The response was, "Most [of what] you are told is false. Foreign groups write 'Death to the Arabs' on walls and then take photos. Those on the left destroy trees and take photos... What do you want us to do? You want real Jewish law? It says you go in and take them out. If they are trying to kill you, you kill them." (For more from the Hebron settler point of view see www.hebron.com)

ISRAELI ACTIVISTS

Zochrot is an Israeli organization founded in 2001 to expose the truth about the expulsion of Arabs during the 1948 war. They do research to find the location of former Arab villages and produce educational materials and programs about what happened to those villages. As our

be here in my kibbutz. 150 people arrived. When my friends found out, they stood outside of the meeting hall and chanted 'Auschwitz, Auschwitz, Never Again.' We had to move to another place."

This event was more than 50 years after the end of WWII. It spoke to me of how extremely deep the fear is and how it permeates Israeli society. However now, New Profile is a going concern with lots of interest. Young Israelis are taking part in the Refuser Movement and participating in actions such as demonstrations in the West Bank, although Israeli law bars its citizens from going to the Palestinian West Bank. (www.newprofile.org)

Women in Black has been demonstrating 20 years in West Jerusalem for an end to the occupation. That means they started after the occupation was already 20 years old, and that they've been faithful to the cause much longer than we expect to be protesting against the Iraq war.

Other Israelis we met with included the IDF person in charge of security for Sderot, members of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow (a group struggling for its rights inside Israel), John Crossman/Mardechai Vanunu (recently released from prison for having exposed the Israeli nuclear industry to the world in 1987), and Hebrew University students.

PALESTINIANS

We were fortunate to be able to visit the **Palestine Fair Trade Association** at the height of the olive harvest. We met with Nasser Abufarha who explained the extensive process necessary for organic and fair trade certification, and how the revenues from the olive oil enable the PFTA to promote small women's co-ops, fund a tree planting program, and provide scholarships for local students to attend nearby universities. This is the second year of fair trade certification for PFTA. The excitement and pride of those involved in the enterprise were

DAILY LOCAL NEWS

November 27, 2007

With peace in mind: PENNSBURY WOMAN IN GROUP HOPING TO BRING UNDERSTANDING TO ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT



The Interfaith Peace-Builders delegation is pictured with Rami Elhanan of the Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families Parents Circle. Photo courtesy Interfaith Peace-Builders

What do some Jews, some Muslims and a Quaker from Pennsbury all have in common?

The desire to create awareness and understanding with a goal of bringing peace to a region that has been plagued by violence and wars for the better part of the 20th century and all of this one.

"I wanted to understand the conflict," said Carlie Numi, who retired from the American Friends Service Committee. Through a program offered by the Washington, D.C.-based Interfaith Peace-Builders, Numi and a delegation of 23 U.S. and Canadian citizens ranging in age from 22 to 75 spent two weeks traveling through Israel and the West Bank learning about the conflict and who it affects.

Conflict has plagued the region for centuries, but in 1917 the area known as Palestine was granted to Britain to create a home for Jewish people, causing resentment among Arabs already living there. The state, Israel, was carved out of land between the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

In 1947, the United Nations partitioned the land into Jewish and Arab states, and war broke out, creating fragmented Arab refugees living in what is referred to as the West Bank and Gaza Strip within the state of Israel. Wars again broke out in 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. And violence continues today.

"This little piece of real estate has aroused fears throughout the world," Numi said. Her delegation traveled throughout Israel and the West Bank getting to know the people who lived there and trying to understand their fears and hopes.

Numi, who is 65, had traveled to Israel five years ago. She said that in the five years that have passed, not much has changed, but, "I'm starting to understand the depth of the feelings for both the Jews and Muslims," she said. Numi's basic understanding is that "(Some Jewish people there have) such a great fear of another Holocaust."

As a result, Numi said, they are protective of the land they live on and their fellow countrymen. The Israeli government is so protective that the country is partitioned off into different zones. Walls and fences divide Jewish-controlled Israel from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are mostly inhabited by Arabs.

But there are "Israelis that don't see Palestinians as enemies," Numi said. "The Palestinians (continue) to live their lives. ... They get up in the morning and keep going with their lives," she said, adding that to them, Israeli occupation is the enemy, not the Israeli people.

"The Palestinians keep on keeping on," she said, adding that some Palestinians practice non-violent demonstrations hoping for a better tomorrow.

"(Some) Palestinians think that over time there will be peace and Jews and Muslims will live together unified," Numi said. "But when they say eventually (the Palestinians) mean decades."

It's an understanding of the situation that Interfaith Peace-Builders wants to grow.

"As Americans we have a part to play (in the situation)," said Jacob Pace, assistant director of the organization. "It's very important for U.S. citizens to be educated in this situation." The United States and Israel are strong allies and decisions the Israeli government makes could have an effect on the United States.

According to Pace, people who travel throughout the region return home with transformed views on the entire situation in the Mideast. "When you see the reality you will be changed," he said.

And the reality that Numi saw was regions, cities, towns, farmland owned by one family torn not only between between religions, but physically divided by walls and fences. An anecdote that Numi likes to share involves the small agricultural village of Bil'in which isn't far from the Israeli town of Modi'in. To provide protection to the town and its surrounding areas, the Israeli government extended the protective wall within a half mile of Bil'in, which is mostly inhabited by Palestinian farmers.

The extension of the wall went through olive groves belonging to the Palestinian farmers and blocked roads that were used to ship their olives to markets.

Bil'in residents peacefully protested once a week.

After a short time, Numi said Israeli citizens also joined in the protests. Protesting the wall brought Palestinians and Israelis together, Numi said.

To her, it shows, "the courage of those who have been involved in many hateful activities in the past ... now reaching out to one another," she said.

Traveling in such a volatile area has its dangers, but, "I tend not to think about those things," Numi said. "I lived in Vietnam during the war."

Pace said the group travels with experienced guides and like the Palestinians, talks to locals about the possibility of violence where they will be visiting.

What Numi has learned is that "peace is overwhelming, groups (that were once fighting) are friends now."

She said that when she returned she couldn't stop thinking about it for four or five days and going back has crossed her mind, but "I didn't know five years ago (if I'd return) and I don't know this time, either."

-- *Carlie Numi is available to speak about her experiences traveling in the Mideast and can be reached at carliedick@aol.com. To find out more about Interfaith Peace-Builders, visit www.interfaithpeacebuilders.org.*

-- *To contact staff writer Justin McAneny, send an e-mail to justinm@dailylocal.com.*

Delegation witnesses Mideast challenges

Saturday, December 01, 2007

By Morgan Jarema

WOODLAND -- Having returned recently from a trip to the Middle East, a Barry County woman closely monitored news from this week's international conference in Maryland aimed at spurring peace talks among Israelis and Palestinians.

"While I'm not optimistic, I am hopeful," said Catherine Deyo Young, of the U.S. State Department-hosted talks. "My take on it is the facts on the ground have so changed over the past 40 years that the ability for a two-state solution doesn't seem possible."

Deyo Young returned Nov. 11 with a delegation to Israel and Palestine. The two-week tour was co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee.

The purpose of the 23-member delegation, the 25th to make the trip since 2001, was to gather information and educate U.S. citizens about the region.

Deyo Young is business manager at YMCA's Camp Manitou-Lin. It was her first trip abroad.

She said she has been interested in the Middle East since she watched news coverage of the Camp David Accords that led to the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty.

"Since the events of September 11, 2001, I have come to believe that, until there is peace in Israel and Palestine, there will not be peace for the United States or the rest of the world," she said.

During their stay, Deyo Young and other delegates toured the Israeli town of Sderot, which Palestinian militants have targeted, and visited the Palestinian village of Bili'in, which recently won a high-profile case challenging the route of Israel's Separation Wall and the confiscation of village lands.

She said people on both sides were angry but willing to talk.

"I went there with a very American perspective," Deyo Young said. "We tend to think, 'Israel will never budge on right of return (of land), so let's do something to compensate, a land swap.'"

"When I heard from people who can trace back their ownership of their land 400 years and consider the land their 'mother,' I got a better idea of how difficult what we're asking them to do is."

They also visited Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum, and heard from Israelis and Palestinians who work with Combatants for Peace, an organization that has rejected violence and promotes reconciliation.

Deyo Young said she is neither pro-Palestine nor pro-Israel.

"We really need to be on the side of peacemakers," she said. "I believe the Palestinians need to have self-determination and that the occupation should end. Both are good for Israel and for Palestine."



Enlightening experience: Trip helps local couple better understand Israelis Palestinian Conflict

Jarred Opatz

SAVANNAH -- Mike and Judy White didn't just take a trip to Israel. The local retired teachers gained a better understanding of that complex area of the world by meeting Israelis and Palestinians who live with the conflicts there.

They were part of a two-week delegation of 22 Americans and Canadians co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace Builders and American Friends Service Committee. Both organizations strive to empower North Americans to educate their local communities about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after an eyewitness experience in the hopes it will help bring peace to the situation

The Whites' delegation took place a few weeks before a peace conference between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Annapolis, Md., earlier this week.

While the Whites took special interest in this week's peace conference of "officials," they said their contact with "regular people" in the country helped deepen their understanding of the conflicts more.

"The people were very warm and hospitable to us everywhere we went, and eager to tell their stories, and to just get the word out as to what their lives are like," Judy said

Thursday morning from the couple's home near Savannah. "It was a really intense delegation. We met people all day long and into the evening every day. We heard presentations as balanced as they could make them on both sides.

"The heart of the delegation was the people we met," she said.

Israeli Rami Elhanan and Palestinian Azziz Abu Sarah were two people they met who really impacted the couple. Both men lost relatives through the conflict and belong to a group called Bereaved Parents Circle, which has members talk across Israel.

"It was really moving when Rami turned to the Palestinian speaker and said, 'This is not my enemy, the occupation is the enemy.' " Mike said.

For security reasons, Israel occupies much of the land in the West Bank under Palestinian authority, the couple said. Mike said they met a lot of Israelis like Elhanan who believe the occupation situation needs to be changed.

Since the late 1940s when the United Nations created Israel that included land for the Palestinians already living there within its borders, the Israelis have occupied much of the Palestinian land to the point where it's all broken up in the West Bank by Israeli settlements, security walls around the settlements and checkpoints, as well as roads Palestinians aren't allowed to drive.

"What we saw is it makes it difficult in terms of negotiations because the Israelis have the power," Mike said. "They have a strong military. They control the borders. They control the water. They control the electricity. They control the economy. They control access in and out of the country."

There is no Palestinian army.

"I think when anyone has the much power it's very difficult to give it up, particularly when you're driven by fear," Judy said.

The Whites saw that fear firsthand when they visited the town of Sderot near the Gaza Strip, the other area in Israel under Palestinian authority on the Mediterranean Sea that the delegation didn't have access to.

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip often shoot homemade rockets into the Sderot area, the couple said. While they were there only one rocket landed out of the town and the delegation didn't see it the Whites said

"In spite of the fact they are being targeted by these rockets, they are just one example of many people we found who are very courageously working for peace," Judy said.

"We spent most of our time in areas that a lot of Israelis would not go into because of fear," Mike said. "I never felt any personal fear or personal threat anywhere. But there's a lot of fear on both sides."

Mike, who taught mostly at Mapleton, said he always has been interested in the Israeli-Palestinian situation, but never figured he would be able to visit the area because he had heard people can't travel to much of it.

Then a longtime friend of the couple from Washington, D.C., went on the same delegation a year ago, described it as a life-changing experience and encouraged them to go.

That got Judy, who spent most of her teaching career in the Ashland School District, interested in the situation, too.

After meeting the people there, she is even more interested, as well as both more encouraged and more frustrated about the chances for a peaceful solution there.

She was encouraged by all the people they met, such as the Israeli and Palestinian speakers from Bereaved Parents Circle, who are trying to work toward peace, but frustrated by the increasing security walls and checkpoints.

"To me, what has to happen is people have to get to know each other as people, and the increasing walls and checkpoints are making it harder and harder for that to happen," Judy said. "So, there's little contact now, and people have to work really hard to make contact with people on the other side."

The couple said Israel has a right to security within its borders, but the current geography makes it clear that all the repressive measures aren't needed for security and instead isolate and drive out Palestinians. They agreed that Israel can't have security without freedom and justice for the Palestinians, and Palestinians can't have peace and justice without security for the Israelis.

After people hear about their trip, Judy said she expects they will be accused of being pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli.

"All I can say is we are not pro-Palestinian," she said. "We are pro-human rights and pro-international law."



Mike and Judy White of Savannah pose next to a security wall in Israel that runs through Jerusalem from Tel Aviv to Jericho. The couple visited Israel as part of a delegation to gain a better understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Jarred Opatz can be reached at 419-281-0581, ext. 256, or by e-mail at jopatz@times-gazette.com, regarding this story and other story ideas.

PACKET & TIMES

Mideast trip an eye-opener; Orillian's experience of conflict cause for both tears and hope



Judy Gilbert points out one of the many areas she visited as part of a delegation that travelled recently to Israel and the Palestinian territories. Packet photo/Courtney Whalen

When Judy Gilbert left for a two-week visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories at the end of October, she was hoping to gain an on-the-ground perspective of the issues facing families and those working for peaceful solutions.

What she found made her cry, gave her hope, and reinforced her belief that a peaceful resolution in the Middle East is needed.

"I said I'd come to learn about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What I was really doing was learning to be a human being," she explained yesterday. "I kept meeting people who kept taking my breath away by their determination to make a choice. That is the best part of being a human being, the choice to find the solution with the least harm."

Gilbert was one of two Canadians in a 22-member delegation sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee.

During her time in the Middle East, Gilbert heard from organizations working to find a peaceful solution between the two factions.

But it was through conversations with Israeli and Palestinian people that she was able to gain an understanding of what families are faced with every day.

In Sderot, she spoke with a couple who have remained in the small Israeli town with their children despite frequent rocket attacks from nearby Gaza. The two are working to help a town and its occupants battling economic difficulties and a recent influx of people.

Gilbert, who said the town averages four or five rocket hits a day, said the mother talked about the toll the stress was taking on her children. Yet the family stays because they feel they have important work to do.

"I know it must be very hard to keep your heart open when a rocket lands and you know the person who launched it hopes it killed you," Gilbert said.

Most troubling to her is the effect the conflict is having on children of the region: Palestinian youths watch their families' movement restricted, parents humiliated at checkpoints, and homes demolished, while Israeli youths in the army are required to enforce the occupation.

"Most of the non-violent groups are saying the problem isn't the Israelis and the Palestinians - it's the occupation," she said.

But, along with current realities in the Middle East that sometimes made her wake up in tears, she said there are positive aspects.

"There are so many people of goodwill working in so many ways to make a difference.... I think there can be a tipping point," she said of the chances for a peaceful resolution.

Near the city of Jenin, the delegation visited the Palestinian Fair Trade Association's Olive Harvest Festival. Gilbert said the area used to be troubled by violence, but families now work to produce and sell olive oil and other products to support themselves.

"The people there really have been without hope, and this turns it around," she said. "The economic stranglehold is incredible, and anything to overcome that (is positive)."

Here in Canada, she said people can make a difference in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians caught in the conflict just by speaking up.

"We need our government to simply say to Israel, 'Respect international law,'" she said.

She looks forward to sharing her experience.

"People took the time to come and tell us their situation. I now feel I have an obligation to let people here know."

On Dec. 2, Gilbert will be at the Friends Meeting House on Westmount Drive South talking about her experience. The presentation starts at 2 p.m.



TUESDAY NOVEMBER 27, 2007

Middle East up close

BY JOSEPH S. SIEGEL / FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

SEEKONK: Martha Yager has returned from a two-week visit to the Middle East with the hope that Israelis and Palestinians can resolve their conflict.

"Resolving the conflict there is essential to assuring long-term stability in the region," Yager said.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are in the midst of preparations for a peace conference in Annapolis, Md., hosted by the Bush administration, and scheduled to begin this Sunday.

Yager believes a resolution to the conflict can be achieved, noting the Israelis and Palestinians are willing to work things out.

"They're tired of the fighting," Yager said. "There are just people on both sides who want a safe place to live and raise their families."

Yager, a community organizer with the American Friends Service Committee in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts, participated in a tour co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee. Yager and 22 other members of the delegation entered Israel on Oct. 29 for the trip around the conflict zone.

The delegation focused on the Palestinian olive harvest which takes place each autumn. The group visited the Palestinian Fair Trade Association's Olive Harvest Festival and supported Palestinian farmers harvesting olives near the cities of Jenin and Bethlehem. "It is an amazing place," Yager said.

The delegation also toured the Israeli town of Sderot, which has been targeted by Palestinian militants from within the Gaza Strip, and visited Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum.

Delegates also met Israelis and Palestinians who once took up arms in the conflict and who now work with Combatants for Peace, an organization which has rejected violence and promotes reconciliation between the two peoples.

Snohomish woman travels to Mideast, works for peace

While fighting in the Mideast is common, Ursula Gallagher of Snohomish insists that peace can exist

Saturday, December 15

By Justin Arnold
Herald Writer

To most people, the tensions and strife that exist between Israelis and Palestinians is as confusing as it is misunderstood.

Snohomish resident Ursula Gallagher, 69, has traveled to the region as an active participant in the Christian peace movement in an effort to bring understanding to Israelis and Palestinians, and to Americans as well.

"I wanted to really see in-depth the other side and go with an organization that is interested in listening to both sides," Gallagher said. "We spoke to Palestinians in a city beyond Gaza. We spoke with Israelis and Israeli settlers in Hebron. Spending time with them was the goal, to get a less biased opinion."

Gallagher was part of a 24-person delegation that spent two weeks in various parts of Israel in October as part of the Interfaith Peace-Builders and American Friends Service Committee. Gallagher, who has visited the region twice before, found her third and most recent trip to be an eye-opening experience, visiting towns such as Sderot in Israel which are frequent targets of Palestinian militants.

Yet what she saw was not the typical characterization one gets from an evening newscast.

"What I picked up during the trip is how Palestinians are portrayed in America," Gallagher said. "Yes, there are people who shoot rockets, but the Palestinians we have met, Christians and Muslim, were extremely kind and hospitable, very family-oriented, and determined to make their situation better."

Gallagher was impressed by the current nonviolent peace movement, stressing that in contrast to the violent clashes between Israeli and Palestinian forces that nonviolent protest succeeds where bombs and bullets have failed.

"There is a village called Bil'in that has a wall being built which is cutting off the villagers from their agriculture," Gallagher said. The Palestinian village is located in the West Bank and is home to nearly 2,000 Muslim farmers. The construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, which is a system of vehicle-barrier trenches and fences, also includes concrete walls.

According to Gallagher, nonviolent protesting led to a Sept. 4 Israeli Supreme Court ruling that the Israeli government redraw the plans for the barrier to accommodate the needs of the Bil'in villagers.

"No arms, no violence, but protesting," Gallagher said. "It has been successful, and two weeks ago (it was) decided to reroute the wall for the olive oil orchards. It has encouraged the villagers and other Palestinians to continue demonstrating in nonviolent ways."

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A couple's take on Middle East peace

December 10, 2007

By JOHN FLOWERS

BRIDPORT — Ask most people to share their views about the relationship between Israel and Palestine and they will describe a political conflict of epic proportions that is often punctuated by tanks, missiles and suicide bombs.

But a Bridport couple recently returned from the Middle East with a far different take on the state of Palestinian-Israeli relations. Diane Nancekivell and Tom Baskett spent two weeks in the region as part of a tour co-sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee. They were part of a delegation that toured Israel and Palestine, speaking to many regular folks and citizens' groups that are quietly working on peaceful solutions to one of the world's most volatile disputes.

The simmering feud centers on land claims dating back at least to the mid-1940s and the establishment of an Israeli nation under a United Nations plan. Palestinians have seen their territory shrink over the years and have sought to reclaim territories they believe are rightfully theirs. Israel has disputed those claims.

"We think it's very important for people to understand the truth over there, that it's not one group that is good and another that is bad," said Nancekivell, a retired Episcopal dean and assisting priest at St. Stephen's Church in Middlebury. "It's about two nations trying to find a way to share the land, feel secure in a sense of national identity and prosper in the future."

Nancekivell had been to the region before, as part of a trip organized by Sabeel — a Palestinian Christian organization. She enjoyed her time, and this year wanted to go with her husband. Baskett, a Quaker and retired psychotherapist, was game for the journey.

He explained he wanted to go on the trip to "better understand the ongoing conflict; how the violence in this area is affecting the lives of everyday people; to learn something about our common humanity from the experiences of those to whom I speak; and determine what — if anything — I can do to improve the lot of fellow humans living in this melee."

Nancekivell, Baskett and the other members of the visiting delegation set off in late October. Their busy itinerary included:

- A tour of the Israeli town of Sderot, which has been targeted by Palestinian militants from within the impoverished Gaza Strip.
- Visited Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum, and listened to a talk by Rami Elhanan, an Israeli whose daughter was killed by a suicide bomber and who currently works for peace with the Bereaved Parents' Circle.
- Met with Palestinian and Israeli members of Combatants for Peace, an organization made up of one-time fighters who have now rejected violence and advocate reconciliation between the two peoples.
- Visited Lifta, a destroyed Palestinian village in West Jerusalem.
- Stayed with Palestinian families in the Jenin area in the West Bank.
- Met with members of the group "Israeli and Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace."

Both Nancekivell and Baskett said they were moved by their experiences. They spoke about hearing from older Palestinians and Israelis who were pessimistic about the chances of seeing peace in their lifetime, but nonetheless committed to working toward that goal for future generations.

Baskett said the trip washed away many of the stereotypes held by many westerners of Palestinians.

"We saw (no acts of terrorism) at all while we were there," Baskett said. "People there were hospitable, wanted to tell their stories, and were not hostile at all."

They voiced concerns about a new wall that is being built to provide security and separation for approximately 300 Jewish settlements in the West Bank. They also lamented what they said are many obstacles toward Palestinians being able to work in Israel.

The couple returned to Bridport shortly before Thanksgiving. They hope to share their experiences with civic groups and others keen on listening.

"It's about trying to get all sides out in a way that people can talk about without feeling defensive or offensive," Baskett said.

December 27, 2007

Letters to the Editor: *Problems persist in Middle East*

We believe the headline to our interview (*Addison Independent*, Dec. 10, 2007, "Bridport Couple Discovers Peace During Fruitful Trip to the Middle East") was very misleading and not representative of our experiences. In no way did we discover peace in Israel/Palestine.

The absence of bombings and military reprisals while we were there does not signify an absence of conflict or violence. Oppression is a form of violence even in the name of security. What we did find were many Palestinians and Israelis dedicated to working for peace and often taking considerable risks to do so.

The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by the Israeli military is oppressive as we saw it. There are 300 illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

They are "protected" by the separation barrier, a 30-foot cement wall in some places and electric fence in others that runs some 600 kilometers, often through Palestinian lands, cutting villagers off from their markets and fields.

Access to the settlements from Israel is assured by modern roads crisscrossing the West Bank on which Palestinians are not permitted to drive and which often force Palestinians to find circuitous bypass routes to neighbors, family and markets.

Strategically located Palestinian lands are confiscated or isolated from their owners, olive trees are uprooted, and houses routinely bulldozed on little pretext. A web of legal permits are required for Palestinians for any number of reasons, including entering and exiting Israel (few approved), building or renovating houses, and digging wells for water. Israel controls electricity and water supplies in the West Bank. Checkpoints and closure points dot the West Bank landscape, making it difficult for children to go to school, farmers to go to markets, and neighbors to communicate.

And Gaza at present is a virtual prison for its 1.5 million inhabitants. Israel controls the land, sea, and airspace surrounding this tiny strip of land. Few people are allowed in or out.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, people in Gaza are not getting adequate food nor necessary medical attention, much less able to import and export goods.

The Israel/Palestine conflict is complex, made more so by virtue of competing cultural narratives about who has rights to the land. Our trip taught us that it is important to try to understand both sides of the issue if a peaceful and just solution is to be found.

Israel has its legitimate concerns about living in peace and security. Nonetheless, it is important also to recognize the daily trials, losses, and humiliations of the Palestinian people at the hands of it's considerably more powerful and wealthy neighbor. And it is important for us Americans, who provide Israel \$3.5 billion a year in non-accountable aid, to be informed of the full picture.

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