

## **A Focus on Peace**

Most people put the emphasis on “Development” whenever they think about the *Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace*, (CCODP). But the title and mandate of CCODP is clearly as much about “Peace” as it is about “Development”.

Mr. Paul Cliché, Middle East Projects Manager for CCODP and I attended the *Caritas Middle East and North Africa Forum* in Lebanon this July. CCODP is a member of Caritas International, a Vatican sponsored organization for human development. Our visit to Lebanon and Israel July 3-16 gave us the opportunity to discuss with our CCODP Middle East Partners the results of their peace projects.

With great delight and pride I learned of the many peace projects which CCODP supports in the Middle East. Here is what I learned from some of the brave people engaged in Peace Building that CCODP supports.

### **The Permanent Peace Movement**

Paul and I spoke with Fadi Abi Allam. He is President of the Permanent Peace Movement in Lebanon. He hopes to build a Peace Academy there to train people to run seminars on conflict resolution.

There are tens of thousands of Palestinians confined in refugee camps in Lebanon. They have been there waiting without work, dependent totally for their survival for the last twenty years. Imagine the potential for frustration, humiliation and rage in these camps. Much of that potential is acted out within the camps and among themselves.

Fadi, a young man, courageously enters the camps to run workshops and seminars on conflict resolution. Such a peace building initiative may seem small in the sea of human misery found in the camps. But it is aimed in the right direction. It is a small but effective step in the direction of non-violence and human dignity. It is a spark of hope and hope is what they and the world long for.

Currently Fadi is trying to raise funds to establish an academy in Lebanon that will train instructors in conflict resolution.

### **The Friendship Village**

The Friendship Village is a Palestinian/Israeli center aimed at bringing together young Arab Muslims, Christians and Jews to live together and to use focus groups for discussion.

Paul and I sat down with Jonatan Peled and a group of about twenty university students who were Israeli and Palestinian. Included in the group

was a member of the Kedema Party and a member of the Likud Party of Israel. When we asked these bright, young, educated men and women what it was like to meet and talk with one another one woman responded immediately, “It was good to talk *with* the Israelis instead of talking *about* them.” When Paul asked what they had learned from their discussions, one young woman answered, “I am not sure what I learned, but simply speaking my mind makes me feel like a winner.” It wasn’t all profundities and pleasantries. One young man protested passionately about the humiliation of the wall being constructed through Jerusalem and the ignominy of crossing daily through one of the many checkpoints in one’s own neighbourhood simply to commute to work or to visit family. I noticed at the end of our meeting one Israeli going directly to the Palestinian to say he did not realize the extent of humiliation as described by the young man.

On a political level, CCODP is helping young, university students, Palestinian and Israeli to face each other and to share their ideas and feelings. This too is a relatively small effort, but it is the kind of open, direct candid dialogue that does not seem to be happening among political leaders. Perhaps these future leaders will have a better chance at leading people towards peaceful co-existence.

## **Sabeel**

Rev. Ian Alexander and Nora Carmi coordinate ecumenical projects known as Sabeel. The word “Sabeel” means a river flowing with life giving water and it also means the way or right path for the journey. Their logo is a cross from which flows a river that is accompanied on one side by a path. The idea of Sabeel is captured by the this image. Sabeel tries to do on an ecumenical level what the Friendship Village does on a political level.

Sabeel hosts conferences and seminars for religious hierarchy within Palestine; namely, Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Latin Catholic, Protestant and Muslim leaders. In the Middle East the division among Christians has often turned violent and is a scandal that militates against achieving an effective political voice for Palestinians. The same may be said about division among the Muslims. Sabeel also runs ecumenical seminars for laity especially for lay women to promote a better understanding of Christian faith and Muslim faith.

In the Middle East conflict arises just as easily from religious motives as political ones. Through principles of Ecumenism Sabeel strives for peace among the variety of religions within Palestine.

## **Society of St. Ives**

In Jerusalem, Paul and I met with Raffoul Jabra Rofa. He is the Executive Director of St. Ives Society of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a Catholic Human rights Centre for legal resources and development. This Society defends the rights in Israeli courts of both Muslim and Christian Palestinians.

St. Ives, a patron of lawyers, is a Medieval French Priest and lawyer who defended those who were too poor to afford a legal defence. The work of the Society in Jerusalem carries on the ministry of St. Ives. Part of their purpose is to show to Palestinians that it is possible to defend rights in a legal non violent way in Israel.

The St. Ives Society has defended people whose homes on the West Bank were demolished without notice or compensation; has fought to reunite families especially in East Jerusalem who were separated by forced migration or expulsion; has defended Palestinians who were deprived of widow's or old age pension or child benefits and has sought to challenge the illegal occupation of Palestinian properties on the West Bank. According to Raffoul Jabra Rofa, *"The primary objective of the Society of St. Ives is to struggle against the fundamental and core injustice of the Occupation of Palestinian lands and through the application of the Catholic Social*

*Doctrine and action within the framework of International Humanitarian Law, Civil Rights Law and the Laws of the State of Israel to redress the injustices of the Occupation at both the level of legal principle and remedy for the aggrieved individual.”*

As I offered Eucharist on the altar of the Holy Sepulchre in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem the force of the Prayer for Peace and the Sign of Peace before Holy Communion struck me deeply and emotionally. I thought about Fadi and Jonatan and Nora and Ian and Raffoul. CCODP is about Peace building as much as it is about Development, especially in the Middle East.