



Go with Greta to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory



Commitment
for **Life**



The
United
Reformed
Church **Children**

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Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory have been the URC's Commitment for Life partners for many years now. The word 'occupied' points to a long-standing conflict in the region. In 2021, the highest decision-making body in the URC, General Assembly, passed several resolutions affirming Israel's right to exist, condemning all acts of violence and responding to the justice issues raised by the occupation of the Palestinian Territory. This booklet provides an insight into aspects of the occupation and why the denomination felt it so important to speak out in this way. The resource draws on visits that URC groups have made to Israel and Palestine, as well as the direct experience of partner organisations and voices from the region itself. It is an introduction to what is a very complex situation, with the hope that those who engage with it, will want to learn more. Thank you to all those who have given of their time to provide perspectives on a situation so desperately in need of peaceful and just solutions.

Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

This booklet was produced for URC Children's and Youth Work and URC Commitment for Life in 2021-2022.

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Go with Greta and *#connect2* were written and edited by a team drawn from the extended Children's and Youth Work team, Commitment for Life, and others.

Extra material was provided by Sabeel-Kairos, Quakers/EAPPI, and the Revd Dr Kevin Snyman.

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Welcome to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Welcome to the second mission magazine from United Reformed Church (URC) Children and Youth, produced in collaboration with URC Commitment for Life which, in turn, partners with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now.

Greta Global is the mascot of Commitment for Life, and each year she invites children aged 5 to 11 to *Go with Greta* to one of the regions that Commitment for Life supports through Christian Aid. The material in *Go with Greta* is designed for leaders to use in planning their sessions. #connect 2 is for the 11 to 14 age range, which could be used independently by young people or as planned sessions. Both emphasise our inter-connected world, aiming to build and explore the relationship between places, people and ourselves as a Church and as individuals. We have already visited Central America (the 2021 resource focused on Nicaragua); this year Greta visits Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and in future years we will visit Zimbabwe and Bangladesh.



Our part in mission involves learning more about the problems facing the most vulnerable people by listening to their stories, praying for God's Holy Spirit to bring justice, working for justice by amplifying their voices, writing to our MPs, joining in Christian Aid and Global Justice Now campaigns, and speaking up at school, work, in church and online. We can share our gifts and money to support people in these regions, either directly or via Commitment for Life. The primary aim of this work is to raise awareness and prompt a desire to learn more as we begin to engage with some of the issues of pressing importance to oppressed communities, including members of local Christian churches, in Israel and Palestine.

This booklet provides material for six sessions, including an intergenerational celebration. This might form the basis of a half term's sessions for a group meeting weekly. Alternatively, the material is adaptable for a holiday club, or an event over one or two days within your church. It can be used in face-to-face gatherings or adapted for use online. Each half of the magazine follows the same pattern, as this will allow mixed age groups to engage in the same theme but with slightly different activities. Of course, you could dip into both halves of the magazine for material to use. The booklet is available as a downloadable pdf at www.urch.org.uk/go-with-greta-and-connect, where you will also find additional resources. A video to kick-start your exploration of the region, most suitable for under 11s, is also available here: www.bit.ly/3yRg6n5.

This year we explore Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT), celebrating the region and its people and trying to understand some of the issues relating to occupation. As this is a challenging topic to tackle with this age range, we have included extra materials to guide you, giving clear guidance on the current URC standpoint following the resolutions passed by General Assembly in 2021. Please do ensure all leaders and volunteers have read this before embarking upon planning and leading sessions with children and young people.

We also signpost resources which could be accessed to take the subject matter further and deeper, especially for the 11 to 14 age range.

Learn more by visiting:

Commitment for Life: www.bit.ly/3Efw7

Christian Aid: www.bit.ly/3Etm7d2 and www.christianaid.org.uk

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) www.eappi.org/en

Razor Wire and Olive Branches: www.bit.ly/3VhU8TK for the pack and www.bit.ly/3CLDFzR

Sabeel-Kairos: www.bit.ly/3CLi4Ya

Solutions Not Sides: www.solutionsnotsides.co.uk



Introduction for Leaders

Commitment for Life's work in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT)

Talking about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory can be challenging as it is very complex and people have conflicting views. At its most basic, it is about disputed ownership of the land. The United Reformed Church is committed to speaking out about peace and justice for all the people who live in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Jesus' call for true justice for all demands that we side with the oppressed, no matter their religion or nationality. Our task is not to speak for them, though; it is to listen and reflect their voices and cries as best we can. Both Israelis and Palestinians have suffered oppression and persecution through history, but it is important to acknowledge that the current conflict in IOPT is not equal and balanced. The Israeli authorities have a far superior military system and control many aspects of the lives of Palestinians. Palestinian communities are overwhelmingly affected by Israeli government laws and military action considered by many to be unjust. The actions of Palestinian militants or the more powerful Israeli State do not necessarily reflect the views of many Israelis or Palestinians, who just want to go about their lives peacefully.

We refer to Israel as a state. Palestine is working towards becoming a state. The URC aligns with Christian Aid in referring to Palestine as a territory (in the singular). The West Bank lies to the east of Jerusalem and includes Bethlehem. You need to go through an Israeli military checkpoint to get in and out. Gaza is on the Mediterranean coast. The two parts of Palestine are blocked off from one another. The West Bank is broken up into sections by the separation barrier and Israeli settlements, making it difficult to travel for everyone except the Israeli military. There are hundreds of Israeli settlements of varying size being built on Palestinian lands, and an estimated 700,000 Israeli civilians living in them. These have a separate road system connecting them to Israel, which are not available for Palestinians to use, even though they are built on Palestinian land. These settlements and roads are illegal under international law.

The URC as a denomination does not support the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement directed at Israel, although the structure of the URC is such that individual members or local congregations may choose to do so. International partners of the URC such as the WCRC (the World

Communion of Reformed Churches) call on us to declare the situation to be Apartheid (racial segregation); the URC has not done so. Any claim that the URC position on IOPT is in any way antisemitic is strongly rejected, as it is founded on the principles of international law and human rights. The URC condemns both antisemitism and Islamophobia and is committed to striving to become an anti-racist Church.

In July 2021, a report and ten resolutions were brought to the major decision-making body of the United Reformed Church – its General Assembly. This is a summary of what General Assembly agreed:

- It affirms Israel as recognised within the international community of States, with rights and responsibilities. The United Nations is committed to supporting the establishment of a State of Palestine, with the same rights and responsibilities. **All** acts of violence are condemned by General Assembly.
- There is concern about the worsening situation for the Palestinian people. The Israeli government is urged to abide by international law.
- The URC encourages local churches and individuals to contact their MPs to ask what the UK is doing in response to this situation. It asks people to consider not purchasing products produced in the illegal Israeli settlements, and to actively support the purchase of Palestinian products.

Remember: not all Palestinians are Muslim, not all Israelis are Jewish, not all Arabs are Palestinian and not all Jewish people identify with the State of Israel. 'Jewish' and 'Muslim' describes religious groups; these are groups which are often subject to prejudice or hatred. 'Palestinian' or 'Israeli' are national identities. Do not assume people are responsible for or support the decisions and actions of their leaders.

It is not possible in this short booklet to tackle all the issues of this complex situation and the limitations of space mean it runs the risk of only skimming the surface. This booklet is intended for younger generations of the Church; to introduce the basic issues affecting children and young people in the region, engendering empathy and a desire to investigate and learn. Please use the links to more detailed and extensive sources of information to take this topic further.



Go with Greta – Historical background for leaders

The land known as Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) holds a special place for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Many different people have lived side by side here for centuries, all sharing the land at different times: Arab peoples, including farmers, craftspeople, and Bedouins (Arabic-speaking nomadic or travelling people); Jewish communities and Christian communities. After the First World War, Palestine became part of the British Empire.

Throughout history, Jewish people around the world have been treated badly and persecuted just for being Jews (this is called antisemitism). During the Second World War, many Jewish people were discriminated against, driven out of their homes, or even imprisoned, tortured and killed (this was called the Holocaust). Some Jews called Zionists believed a Jewish state should be created in the Holy Land, which would be a safe place for all Jewish people to live without fear of persecution.

In 1947, the United Nations (UN) agreed a plan that would separate (partition) historic Palestine into a Jewish state (Israel) and an Arab state (Palestine). Jerusalem is an important city for Jews, Muslims and Christians, so this would be shared and administrated by the UN. The partition plan said the British would leave the region. But the Palestinians and other Arab states did not agree with the partition plan, and nor did many Jewish groups. They felt it did not treat them fairly.

The partition went ahead in 1948. There was a war called the Israeli-Palestine conflict and the Israeli-Arab conflict, but Israeli forces were much stronger. Many Palestinians were forced out of their homes and became refugees. Some fled to areas in the West Bank and Gaza and others fled to nearby Arab countries. Many tried to defend their homes and lands. There was a lot of tension until, in 1967, the 'Six Day War' started between Israel and the surrounding Arab states. Israeli troops entered the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, land given to Palestine by the UN, and took control. This is called 'occupying'. From this point, Israeli settlements started being built on Palestinian land and Israelis were offered the opportunity to live in them. Settlements like this, where an occupying government permanently moves its own citizens into an occupied territory, are not allowed under international law.

In the early 2000s, Israel began building a separation barrier between itself and the West Bank. It said it was to protect Israel from people in Palestine who were trying to hurt Israelis. The barrier did not follow the internationally recognised border, however, and it often cut Palestinian families off from their land, villages, families and schools. The separation barrier still exists today. In Gaza, the borders are controlled by Israel so it is very hard for people to get in or out of the region. The quality of life is very poor. There is often violence between Gaza and Israel, with both arguing that they have the right to defend themselves.

Today, Israel is a state recognised by the United Nations. Currently, Palestine is not recognised internationally as an official state, but it has asked to be recognised as one. The Palestinian Territory is composed of two main areas: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Tensions and violence in IOPT are ongoing and the URC is committed to helping build peace in the region.

It is not important for children to spend a lot of time going through the history of the region, which is why we have not focused greatly on it during the sessions. What is important is that children understand that conflict has arisen between two groups of human beings, particularly in areas of the region where there are disputes about ownership of the land and their right to call it home. All sides have genuine fears for their security and wellbeing. The URC wants to listen to their stories and help to build peace.



Session 1

Here we are



You have probably heard of Israel from the Bible. But where is Israel and where is Palestine, and what do we mean by Occupied Territory? Let's look at a globe or a map of the world and see what we can find out.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) covers an area much smaller than the UK – it would fit into Britain about seven times – and over 11 million people live there compared with over 67 million in the UK. The region borders Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Syria and its coast lies on the Mediterranean Sea. Israel is a state. Not all countries recognise Palestine as a separate state – the UK does not but currently 136 countries do.

The climate here is very varied. There are snow-capped mountains in the north and hot desert in the south.

The narrow land near the Mediterranean Sea to the west is where over half the population lives. The Dead Sea between Israel, the West Bank and Jordan is the lowest point on the Earth's surface at 416 metres below sea level. The water is so salty and full of minerals that no plants and animals can survive there and you can float on it easily without sinking. The water is warm all year round.



In the south and east, the land is hot and dry. In Southern Israel you will find the Negev Desert, which gets only about three centimetres of rain a year, while in Galilee in the north you will see fertile farmland. This variety means the region has all sorts of animals, including boars in the damp oak woodlands, gazelles in the mountains, Caspian turtles in the coastal marshlands and hyenas in the desert.



The area is famous for olive trees, which produce olive oil and which many Palestinians use to make olive wood carvings. Beautiful pottery is also made in this region.

The region has a long and complicated history. There are two main groups of people who live there. Arab people are not only from this area but throughout Western Asia. Many, but not all, of the Arabs who call this region home are known as Palestinians. Arab peoples have lived in the land for centuries and there have continuously been Jewish and Christian communities here too. The Jewish people we read about in the Old Testament lived here. Jewish people live in other countries too but, throughout history, Jews around the world were treated badly. They wanted a safe place to live, a country that they could call their home. Many more Jewish people started to move into Palestine, the land their ancestors came from, especially after the Holocaust during World War 2, when millions of Jews in Europe were murdered.

But what was to happen to the Arab people who had lived throughout the land, now that the Jewish population was increasing rapidly? In 1947, The United Nations suggested setting aside two areas within Israel for Palestinian people – the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – with Jerusalem being shared. They drew up a new map creating the state of Israel. The land was partitioned (separated) into two and many Palestinians were forced to leave their homes.

Over time Israel has taken more of the land that was given to the Palestinians by the UN. (See the history page for more detail.) Many Palestinians have become refugees. Many have resisted and tried to defend their homes and their land. A separation barrier has been built in some places because Israelis felt threatened. This means Palestinians can't travel without going through checkpoints where soldiers check who they are and where they are going. Since 1967 Israelis have been building houses and living in settlements in Palestinian lands. While occupying an area to keep it safe is allowed, there are certain rules to follow. Sadly, the Israeli government is not making sure that these rules are observed so the UN says that aspects of the occupation are illegal.

Most Palestinian and Israeli people feel afraid and want peace; they just don't all agree on how that peace should be brought about and what they might have to give up to bring peace.



Bible link Genesis 13:9-12

“We should separate. The whole land is there in front of you. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left.” Lot looked all around and saw the whole Jordan Valley. He saw that there was much water there. It was like the Lord’s garden, like the land of Egypt in the direction of Zoar... So Lot chose to move east and live in the Jordan Valley. In this way Abram and Lot separated. Abram lived in the land of Canaan. But Lot lived among the cities in the Jordan Valley.

Who were Abram and Lot? Can you find out? See if you can find on a map which area Lot chose.

Prayer

We thank you, God, for our homes, the places where we feel safe, the places where we belong. We pray for all families and people who worry about having somewhere safe to live. We pray for peace in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, so that people can share fairly and live without fear.

Active Prayer

Olive oil is not only used for cooking, it’s also used for anointing. Anointing means putting oil on someone’s head or hand when you bless them. Use a bowl with a drop of olive oil in it and some cotton buds. (Check where the oil comes from – the bottle should be clearly labelled.) In turn, dip the cotton bud into the oil and touch it into the palm of each hand and draw a cross on the forehead of a partner. As you do it, say, “God bless you and use you to do good things.”

Game

Water is scarce in IOPT. At one end of the hall have two buckets for each team, one filled with water and the other empty. You may want to put some protective covering on the floor for this and have a mop handy for spillages, or go outside. In turn, runners race to the buckets, dip a sponge into the bucket of water and wring it out into the empty bucket. Then they run back and hand the sponge to the next runner. When the whistle blows, see which team has the most water. You could encourage discussion by giving one team a smaller sponge or further to run and explain how Palestinian access to water is controlled by Israeli authorities.

Activity

We sometimes see Palestinian ceramics for sale in this country, especially at Christmas markets. They have very distinctive colours and patterns. One lovely pattern is a very traditional one. The whole design of blue flowers is drawn with just one single line to represent the circle of life. Use paper plates with crayons or felt tips or use cheap plain ceramic plates with ceramic pens. Make your own circle of life design without lifting the pen from the surface of the plate. You might put flowers in your design or something different. You could use these plates to serve food on at the intergenerational celebration!



Greta Wonders...

- Does it matter where you live? What makes your home special?
- How might children in IOPT feel about where they live?
- How is IOPT different to where you live? How is it similar?

Action Point

By buying things produced by Palestinian people (rather than from the illegal Israeli settlements) we can help families there. Try to remember to read the labels in supermarkets to see where the things you buy come from. This is especially important for products like olive oil or dates. Please note the URC General Assembly resolutions do not suggest a boycott of Israeli goods, only items produced in the settlements.

Watch

This video might help you learn more about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory <https://youtu.be/Y58njT2oXfE> *Israeli Palestinian conflict explained: an animated introduction to Israel and Palestine* (Jewish Voice for Peace) – suitable for older children.



Session 2

A Holy Land



Some people refer to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) as the Holy Land. But what does that mean? 'Holy' has two meanings. It can mean something that is special to God or dedicated to serving God. It can also mean something or somebody that is perfect or pure in God's eyes.

The Holy Land is important in the history and stories of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. These three religions are called Abrahamic religions because Abraham (or Ibrahim as he is called in the Muslim holy book, the Qu'ran) is important in their story, and Moses, David, and Solomon are also important figures in all three. Christians, Muslims and Jews all believe in one God who created the world and cares about people, and all three religions believe we should pray, worship God, and follow God's teachings. All three religions have special holy places in IOPT, especially in Jerusalem. In IOPT, 80% of people are Jewish, about 14% are Muslim and 2% are Christian. In Jerusalem you will find sites which are important to each of these religions.



The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third most important site for Muslims after Mecca and Medina. It is a very old building. The Dome of the Rock is a shrine near to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It has a beautiful gold dome. Muslims believe you shouldn't draw pictures of God or holy people, so the mosque and the Dome of the Rock are decorated with geometric patterns. Many Muslims believe that their most important prophet, Mohammed (peace be upon him), was taken up into heaven from Jerusalem and then returned to earth in Mecca after talking and praying with the prophets in heaven. Muslims also believe that Jesus was a prophet and that he spent his last days on earth in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was the site of a temple that was destroyed in 587 BCE (Before the Common Era), rebuilt, and destroyed again in 70 CE (Common Era). When it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, it is said that just one wall was left standing. This wall is said to be the same wall that stands in Jerusalem today. It is called the Western Wall, or Wailing Wall, and many Jews go there to pray. Some people write prayers and put the folded paper into cracks in the wall. Jewish people believe that Israel is the land that God promised them. The Hebrew scriptures hold the same stories as the Christian Old Testament.



Christians believe that Jerusalem is where Jesus preached, where he was taken after his arrest, where he was put to death, and where he rose again. There is a special church called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the middle of Jerusalem, which is said to be on the site where Jesus died and was buried. A sepulchre is a small room or building where a dead body is laid. In Jerusalem, you can follow the Via Dolorosa, which means the 'sorrowful way', the path Jesus walked to the place where he was crucified.

Bethlehem is the town where the Bible says Jesus was born. Today, Bethlehem is a town in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. What other places in IOPT do you recognise from Christian Bible stories?



Bible Link Luke 10:25-28

Then a teacher of the law stood up. He was trying to test Jesus. He said, "Teacher, what must I do to get life forever?"

Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

The man answered, "Love the Lord your God. Love him with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind." Also, "You must love your neighbour as you love yourself." Jesus said to him, "Your answer is right. Do this and you will have life forever."

The 'Golden Rule' of loving all others as yourself is common to all religions, including Islam and Judaism as well as Christianity. I wonder what you think it means? How do we show that love? What did Jesus mean by 'neighbour'?

Prayer

Creator God, who made all things, all people and all places, thank you that we can see signs of your goodness wherever we go. Help us to remember that your son Jesus isn't just a story. He lived and loved and laughed and learned just like we do and he understands just what life is like when we talk to him. Help us to follow Jesus' golden rule in all we do. Amen.

Active Prayer

Use a map of your local area. Can you see places on the map where you might like to talk to God or spend time with God? Or places which you love for some reason? Maybe because you connect them with someone special, or they hold special memories, or they are just good places for praying. Stick a sticker in those places and thank God for them.

Game

Sharing and working collaboratively is tricky sometimes but can be fun. Split into teams of about five. Each team should have a large sheet of paper and a matching set of felt tip pens or wax crayons at the far end of the room. The leader chooses one colour pen/crayon to give to the first member of each team (e.g. each team gets a blue crayon) and names a picture to draw (something like a beach scene or a farmyard scene would be good). The first runner runs to the paper and starts drawing something blue to contribute to the overall picture. After ten seconds the leader shouts "change" and the first runner swaps their crayon for a different colour, runs back to the team and hands the new crayon to the next runner, who runs to the paper and starts drawing something in that colour. Allow each runner a few runs before getting together to judge the pictures. (Ten seconds may be too short for younger players so you may choose to give longer.)

Activity

Many holy buildings started life as just a stone or a pile of stones as a shrine or an altar. A shrine is a place where people go to worship because of its connection to a holy person or event, while an altar is a table (or just a big stone) where people would place gifts and offerings to God. Decorate some pebbles with pictures and words, using Sharpies or paints. Choose words and images of what is special to you about God or about the Golden Rule. When you have all finished you can put them all together like a shrine and take a photo. Perhaps you could reconstruct your shrine for the intergenerational celebration.



Greta Wonders...

- Why might people from all around the world really want to visit Jerusalem and other places in IOPT?
- What else might the followers of Judaism, Islam and Christianity have in common?
- Why do you think most people (including us!) find sharing so difficult?

Action Point

If there is a mosque or a synagogue near you, perhaps you could arrange to visit it or to meet up with a group of children who worship there. If you can't do that, watch these two videos: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mwxn> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mx8x7>. How would you explain your faith, if you have one, to someone of a different faith? The more we learn about each other and understand each other, the easier it is to share and to care for each other.



Session 3

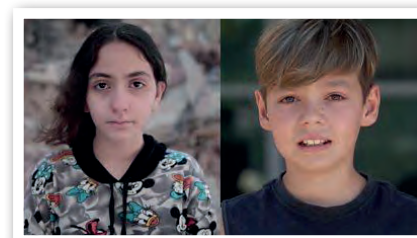
Everyday childhood in the region

'I try to do fun things, so I don't think about the bombs'

Edan, aged 11, 22 May 2021 (taken from www.bbc.in/3VbhNoV)



Like children everywhere, children all over IOPT enjoy playing with friends, going to school, spending time with their families and generally being happy. However, daily life for children is not straightforward and can be very frightening. Children in IOPT have always known a situation of conflict. Almost half of Palestinian children are refugees and can't return to their family's old homes. And, for some offences, Palestinians over the age of 12 can be arrested, tried, and sent to jail just as if they were an adult!



In May 2021, eleven days of fighting broke out in the Israel v Gaza conflict. This was part of a conflict that's been happening on and off for decades, with devastating effects on life for ordinary people living in both communities. Once a ceasefire had been agreed – a ceasefire is when both sides reach an agreement to stop fighting each other for a while, often to allow peace talks to take place – the BBC talked to two children about their experiences. You can watch the full interview at www.bbc.in/3rHamb1

Edan, aged 11 (pictured right), is an Israeli boy who lives with his parents in Moshav Dekel, a small village in Southern Israel. Edan explains that when the sirens sound they have to run to the bomb shelters, and it is very scary. The shelter contains clothes and other supplies they may need, and Edan prefers to sleep there as he feels afraid going upstairs to his bedroom. Even though the school classrooms also have bomb shelters, he is sometimes unable to go to school as it is too dangerous. Edan tries to keep himself busy doing fun things so as not to think about the bombs.

Nadeen (pictured left) is ten years old, a Palestinian and lives in the Gaza City with her parents and five siblings. Nadeen tells how, during the conflict, she would hear screaming and cries for help, and mothers crying for their children. She would witness buildings falling and the hospital having no water. She feels terrified, but has to hide it from her younger brother, not wanting him to feel scared. Nadeen has not been able to go to school and her parents have not let her out much because they all want to stay close together. Nadeen has been posting videos online to show what life is like in Gaza. She has lots of dreams for the future, including studying hard to be a doctor and spreading the message about what is happening in her country.

Living in fear – This is the story of a 9-year-old girl, called Sumayah. She is from Albustan, Silwan, Jerusalem. Her family received a demolition notice from the Israeli authorities (informing them their home was to be knocked down) and each day they waited for the bad news. Every night Sumayah says she dreamt about soldiers coming to take her stuff away. She lives with constant fear and feelings of isolation, she experiences anxiety, and she hasn't been able to communicate properly with her classmates or her family. Sumayah's mother said that the demolition notice transformed all their lives into a nightmare. Relationships between every family member were affected by the constant stress and fear as a direct result of lacking the basic human need to feel safe.

(By Rami Khader, Director of the East Jerusalem YMCA Rehabilitation Programme)



Bible Link Mark 10:13-14

Some people brought their small children to Jesus so he could touch them. But his followers told the people to stop bringing their children to him. When Jesus saw this, he was displeased. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them. The kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these little children."

I wonder what Jesus meant when he said this?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for your wonderful world and that children everywhere have so much in common. Thank you for fun and friendship, for families and learning, for games and sharing. We pray for all children in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory who are frightened for any reason. Help them to be brave, and send people to comfort, encourage and protect them, so they can live their lives without fear. Amen

Active Prayer

Think about some of the things that you believe every child should be able to enjoy, no matter where they live. Use some playdough to make a model or to spell out the things you have thought of. While you are making your model, bring your thoughts to God and pray for those children who don't have the things they need or should be able to access freely.

Game

Remember how many New Testament stories are about fishing? This is a game that some Palestinian children like to play. It is called Fishermen and is played with a ball. The rules are very simple. The ball has to stay on the ground and you can only hit it with your hands to roll it, you must not pick it up and throw it or kick it with your feet. You try to be the last person in by avoiding the ball hitting you and trying to hit the other players with the ball. If it touches anyone's feet, that person is out.



Greta Wonders...

- What does a 'normal' day look like for you? What sort of things do you do? How might it differ from children in IOPT?
- What do you think children in Israel and children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have in common and what do you think is different? Do both get treated fairly? Do you think the children get to play together often and, if not, why not?

Activity

Make a circle of paper chain people holding hands, to illustrate acceptance and peace and everyone joining together as one. **Instructions:** Draw a circle on a piece of paper and cut it out. Fold the circle in half, then into half again forming a large cone shape, and fold once again, to get a smaller cone shape. With the point at the top, draw on one folded edge half a person. On the other folded edge, draw another half of a person, with the two holding hands in the centre of the cone. Carefully cut along your drawing outline, but not cutting the folded edge. Carefully unfold and you should have people holding hands in a circle. Colour the people.



Action Point It's not fair

You will need two dice, one normal and one with only fives and sixes on (see template online). In pairs, one has the ordinary die and the other person the special die. Both roll their die five times. The person with the highest score wins. Afterwards discuss who won, why, how the loser felt and how the game could be played more fairly. Can you think of any ways that this is like real life?



Watch

Most children in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory never get to meet each other. Hand in Hand is an organisation that encourages Jews, Arabs and Muslims to learn together and play together, to learn each other's languages and about each other's culture and religion. Find out more by watching <https://youtu.be/JK62G7z-xJ4> or <https://youtu.be/iYsvtMqxElo>



Session 4

Challenges for children in the region



'Buildings not far from my house were hit at least with 20 airstrikes... it was terrifying for the kids. My eldest didn't leave my side. I could hear her throbbing heartbeats all night.'

Rana Abdallah, Women's Affairs Center in Gaza (taken from www.bit.ly/3eFJk1m)

Some walls keep us safe and warm, but others divide and separate people and can stop freedom of movement. In the West Bank there is a 'wall of separation'. This wall was built by the Israeli government who felt that it was needed to protect their communities from Palestinians on the other side who might threaten them. It helps Israeli families feel safer. Some of it is an 8-metre-high concrete wall, some of it is a fence. Palestinians living near to the wall report that it has separated them from their families. It stops them from getting to work or to land that they own or to schools or hospitals. As you will see from the pictures, it has been decorated on the Palestinian side with prayers and graffiti.



Freedom of movement is a big challenge for Palestinians living in occupied territory. A check point is a barrier staffed by the Israeli Military Police, the Israel Border Police, or other soldiers to prevent those who might wish to do harm to Israel from crossing into those areas from areas of OPT. Palestinians have to show a pass to get through. There are 593 checkpoints and roadblocks scattered throughout the West Bank (OCHA 2020) and these are used by more than 100,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank every day, mainly to get to work or school.

148 girls and boys attend Cordoba Primary School in Hebron. It is set in part of the town controlled by the Israeli army and 500 Israelis have built five settlements there. Every day the children pass through checkpoints controlled by soldiers, sometimes being searched in order to get to school. Sometimes the children feel threatened and attendance at school can be affected by danger and fear. The fear of violence can also lead to poor concentration and lower marks in class. (Taken from Razor Wire and Olive Branches case study 2)

Access to water

Because of controls on access to water supplies, and regulations which mean that they cannot dig wells without a permit, Palestinians rely on Israel for their water supply. On average, West Bank Palestinians have access to about 73 litres each per day for domestic use and personal hygiene. This is much lower than the 100 litres minimum recommended by the World Health Organization. In some areas of the OPT, people survive on as little as 20 litres. Palestinian villagers depend on water delivered by truck. It can be expensive, unreliable, and impure, which can especially impact the poorest people. In some parts water is only received once every 15 days! Black-and-white water tanks can be seen on the roofs of Palestinian homes across West Bank cities and towns. These are used during water shortages or stoppages.



Such tanks are rarely seen in the neighbouring Israeli settlements because water is always available and never shut off because of 'shortages'. There is always enough water for their needs and for activities such as swimming and washing the car. Their clean water supply provides three times as much as for Palestinians – 250 litres per day. (www.bit.ly/3ShGcGH)



Bible Link Psalm 91:2

I will say to the Lord, "You are my place of safety and protection. You are my God, and I trust you".

I wonder what it means to trust in God.

Prayer

Dear God, help us to recognise and appreciate the freedom we enjoy in this country, that we can walk to school relatively safely and easily and access hot and cold running water 24/7. We pray for things in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to change so that people can live side by side in peace and share resources fairly. Amen.

Active Prayer

Graffiti prayer wall. By either using some brick patterned paper, or using sponges, paint the outline of a brick wall on to a large piece of paper and stick it on to a wall. Use this as a prayer wall. Ask the children to write or draw prayers about living in peace and loving one another direct onto the wall or on post-it notes and stick them to the wall or board.



Game

Fill the bucket

You will need two buckets and paper cups per team. Sit each team down in a straight line, one behind the other, with the last person in the line turning so the last two players are back-to-back. Put one full bucket of water in front of the first person in the team and an empty second bucket in front of the last player. Give the first player an empty cup. They dip the cup into the full bucket of water and pass it over their head backwards to the next child. The second child then passes it over their head to the third child and so on, until it reaches the last child who then empties the water into the empty bucket. The cup is then passed back down the row to the first child and the whole process is repeated. The first team to fill their bucket wins. For a shorter game set a time limit and the team that has collected the most water in the time wins. Remember to have a mop ready for spillages, or to play the game outdoors.



Greta Wonders...

- In which places do you feel most safe?
- What fears or worries do you have? What helps you to feel less afraid?
- How would you feel if you had a limited supply of water, yet the people across the street from you had an abundant supply of water or vice versa?

Activity

Make some stress balls. You need balloons, flour or cornflour, a funnel, black Sharpie pens. Stretch the opening of the balloon over the end of the funnel. Scoop the flour into it and shake it down until it fills the balloon. Tie a knot in the end of the balloon. With the black Sharpie, draw a face on it. Whenever things get stressful, or difficult, giving the balloon a squeeze can help relieve some of the tension.

Action Point

The World Health Organisation recommends individual water usage per day is 100 litres! In Britain we use 150 litres per day. Israelis use over 250 litres per day, Palestinians use 70 litres per day and Palestinians in the Jordan Valley use 20 litres per day.

How much water do you use? A litre is the size of a medium sized carton of milk. Guess how many litres of water you use in a week.

List all the things you use water for in a day, eg showering, bathing, washing up, flushing the toilet, cleaning your teeth, food, and drink etc.

If there was a water shortage, what do you think you could happily manage without? Can you put them in order of importance?



Session 5

Jubilee and Peacemakers



2022 marked a special year of Jubilee in several ways – Our late Queen Elizabeth II celebrated 70 years on the throne; the United Reformed Church celebrated 50 years since its formation; and it was a special year for *Commitment for Life*, which has been going for 30 years. In the Bible, the word Jubilee – a celebration every fifty years – reminds us that we worship and follow a God who wants to bring freedom and peace.

The Galilean Flavour of Business for Peace

In the Autumn of 2019, a group of people went on an educational visit from the United Reformed Church to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. While they were there, they visited Sindyanna, which is near Cana in Galilee.

Sindyanna was founded in 1996. It is the only fair trade olive oil producer in Israel. The business is a female-led non-profit business that promotes ‘business for peace’ and fair trade in Israel. It does this by selling Arab producers’ olive oil and other products internationally, paying the farmers and workers a fair wage for their goods. The money the business makes is put into educating Arab women. Its work aims to bring people together and to support and encourage organic and eco-friendly farming. It has a visitor centre, which welcomes tourists from abroad as well as Israelis. It is staffed by both Arab and Jewish women who all believe in living together in peace. They work side by side with skill, care, and a passion for what they do. You can try Sindyanna soap by contacting *Commitment for Life*, or see a full product range at www.sindyanna.com.



Learning together at Oasis of Peace (Wahat al-Salam or Neve Shalom)

Often, even within Israel, Jewish children and Arab children don’t get to meet or play together. Oasis of Peace is a cooperative village set up by Israeli Jews and Arabs in an attempt to show that two peoples can live side by side peacefully and that working together and learning about each other is the best way towards peace. There is a school for all the children and they learn together to speak each other’s language, to understand each other’s culture and religion, and to do all the usual school subjects and extra curricular activities together. On their website you can see interviews with three children: Ya’ara Zer (9 ½), Aya Hamdan (10) and Yoni Zer (7) www.bit.ly/3CKfikG They were asked what was special about learning in a school with Arabs and Jews together:

Yoni: I love making peace!

Ya’ara: I really love our school, because I love peace. I think it is really nice that we Arabs and Jews learn all together.

I can tell you, a lot of people try to make peace, but they do it the wrong way. You can’t use force to make peace; you have to be sensitive and ask first. Should I be prime minister, you ask? A lot of people have told me that. I think I would like to try to be prime minister one day, and to make peace.

Aya: In our school, you can make more friends, get to know a bit more about the world. I get along with just about everyone. We learn that people have all kinds of religions – it is not just ours. And some of the things we learn are outside the regular lessons. We learn how to behave around other people, for example, ones who speak a different language and stuff like that.

When I am big, I want to be a teacher – to work with children – or to be prime minister, so I can make peace.

Perhaps one day all Israeli and Palestinian children will be able to learn side by side and understand each other.



Bible Link Leviticus 25:10

Make the fiftieth year a special year. Announce freedom for all the people living in your country. This time will be called Jubilee.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

2022 was the URC's Jubilee year and reminded us that we are all called to be peacemakers. Who needs setting free? How can you be a peacemaker?

Prayer

Dear God, we know that you are a God of celebration, peace, and love. We pray that all people living in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory will find ways to break down the barriers that separate them so that they may live together in peace side by side. May this begin with the children. Amen.

Active Prayer Bubble Prayers

You will need small pots of bubbles. God loves you and wants to take care of you. Tell God something that you are worried about or are fearful about and ask God to help you. Blow the bubbles and burst the bubbles as a sign that you are giving your worry and fear to God. Blow some more bubbles, thinking about your own prayers for IOPT.

Game

Matkot – a popular paddleball game played in Israel, similar to beach tennis. It is often referred to by Israelis as their national beach sport. There are no rules! The goal is to hit a rubber ball (similar to a squash ball) with a racket from one player to the other as many times as they can without dropping it. It's usually played between two players but can be played with more. It's fun to play a game which is cooperative instead of competitive, with everyone on the same team!



Greta Wonders...

- Why do people build walls? Do you think walls are good things or bad things?
- What other ways can we build 'peace' between ourselves and others and overcome our differences, rather than building barriers between us?
- Is it easy to be a peacemaker? Why do you think people do it?

Activity

Make a Dove of Peace. A dove has been used for thousands of years as the universal sign for peace. You need: paper plate, template, scissors, marker pen, glue, or stapler. Using the scissors, cut out the body of the dove while making sure the tail is lined up against the edge of the plate. When cutting out the wings, ensure they are lined up with the rimmed edge for texture. Stick or staple the wings on to the body. Using coloured pens, add a beak and eye. Write on the dove **'Peace is**' and finish the sentence in your own words. (*Christian Aid*)



Action Point

Look up some famous walls that have been built over the years, for example the Berlin Wall, Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall of China, peace walls in Northern Ireland, the Separation Wall in Bethlehem and any other walls you know of. When and why were these walls built? Are these walls still standing today? Build a wall out of boxes and use paints or Sharpies to cover it with graffiti. Then, once finished, have fun in knocking the wall down and celebrating the freedom that it brings!



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Session 6

Intergenerational Celebration



This is an opportunity to get together with members of your whole congregation or your families and friends and share with them a little of what you have learned about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.



Preparation

Decorate your hall or your Zoom backgrounds with images of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, such as both flags, banners, buildings, pictures of animals and birds. Can you make a big banner to say 'Welcome' in Arabic and Hebrew? Set up some activity tables around the room.

During your celebrations, try saying please and thank you in Arabic and in Hebrew.

Arabic: "Min fadlak" is how you say please to a male, "Min fadlin" is how you say it to a woman. "Shukran" is the easiest way to say thank you. There are lots of different ways to say please and thank you, depending on who is speaking to whom and what the circumstances are, but these are fairly universal.

Hebrew: "Toda" is thank you (pronounced toe-DAH) and please is "Bevakashah" (pronounced be-va-kuh-SHAH), which can also be used to mean "you're welcome" in response to someone saying thank you.

Activity tables

Table one – You will need paper (or blank flags or bunting) and pens and examples of how to write 'peace' in both languages. Instructions: Both Arabic and Hebrew are written from right to left instead of left to right as we do when writing English. Choose some words and try writing them backwards – especially if you know how to join your writing. Alternatively, try writing the word for 'Peace' in Hebrew or Arabic script. Look how similar the two words are when you say them!

Arabic: Salam

سلام

Hebrew: Shalom

שלום

Table two – Use different coloured sugar paper and encourage everyone to draw around their hands and cut out the shapes. On the paper, write or draw your prayers for IOPT, for peace and justice, for sharing and understanding. Fasten the hand shapes to a big circle to form a wreath shape. You could glue on some dried olive leaves too, if you choose, to symbolise peace. Or you could link two handprints together, like in the photograph, to form a dove and a handshake to symbolise peace.

Alternatively, cut some olive leaf shapes out of green sugar paper. Encourage people to write their prayers on the olive leaves and tie them to a bunch of twigs to make a peace tree.

Table three – Light a candle for peace – you need empty jam jars, ceramic pens, tissue paper, LED nightlights.

Decorate your jam jar – you could use tissue paper glued to the outside of the jar to make some of the special buildings of Jerusalem; you could design a drawing to represent your response to the situation in IOPT; you could use tissue paper or pens to create an image or symbol that reminds you of peace or justice or fairness. Light your LED candle and place it inside the jar to bring God's light and peace.



Table four – Set up a table where people can make some postcards to send to your MP. Decorate one side with an image of something that concerns you about IOPT. On the other side, write the address of the MP for your area (it might be good to have these already written) and write a message, sharing your concerns about the region and what you would like the MP to do.

To eat

Falafel and hummus with pitta

The instructions for making hummus can be found in #connect2 on page 10.

To make falafel you will need:

- 1x 400g can of chickpeas, drained
- 4 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 1 shallot, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp freshly chopped parsley
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 3 tbsp plain flour
- Pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Vegetable oil for frying



Blend all the ingredients together in a food processor with a metal blade. Form into balls about 5cm in diameter. Fry until golden then transfer to a plate lined with a paper towel to absorb the fat, and sprinkle immediately with a little salt. Serve in pitta with hummus.

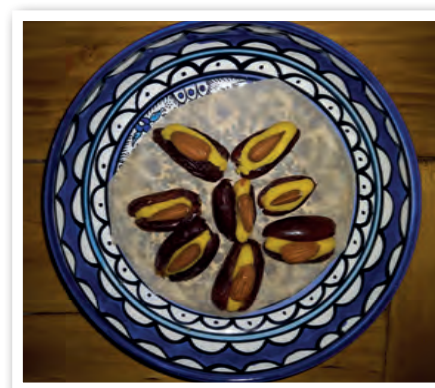
Almond Stuffed Dates

You will need:

- Large medjool dates
- Marzipan/almond paste
- Whole almonds

Cut a slit in the side of each date and remove the pit (stone). Pinch off a small piece of the marzipan and roll it into a cylinder that is a bit shorter than the date. Stuff the date with the marzipan and top with a whole almond.

Alternatively, you could stuff the dates with goats' cheese, pomegranate seeds and pistachios.



To drink

Orange Blossom and Honey Lemonade

You will need:

- 1 large lemon
- 1 orange
- 1 tbsp honey
- 2 tsp orange blossom water
- 1 litre cold water
- 1 small handful mint
- 10 ice cubes

Put the juice of the lemon and the juice of half the orange into a large jug and add all the other ingredients. Mix thoroughly and decorate with slices of orange and lemon. If you prefer, you can use sparkling water instead of still.

Orange blossom water is not cheap to come by but you only need small quantities. You can get it from Amazon, Lakeland or Waitrose amongst other places.



Dance

The *Dabke* dates back centuries in Palestinian culture and is traditionally performed during happy occasions like weddings or festivals. There are some variations on the dance but *Dabke* (which means 'stamping of the feet' in Arabic) is like a combination of circle and line dancing, complete with plenty of half kicks and stamping of feet. Why not have a go at learning how to dance it? Or just watch the experts: <https://youtu.be/xKhi9LUk8tU>. Dance can be used as a peaceful way of protesting about things that concern you. What other forms of protest and awareness raising can you think of?

Sing

https://youtu.be/52KmT1fN_ak *Matisyahu* 'One Day' song. Why not learn this song and sing it together?

Pray for Peace

From Christian Aid report

Pray not for Arab or Jew,
for Palestinian or Israeli,
but pray rather for ourselves,
that we might not
divide them in our prayers
but keep them both together
in our hearts.
When races fight,
peace be amongst us.
When neighbours argue
peace be amongst us.
When nations disagree
peace be amongst us.
Where people struggle for justice
let justice prevail.
Where Christ's disciples follow
let peace be our way.
Amen.

Prayer For Israel And The Occupied Palestinian Territory

By Diana Paulding

Creator God, God of Palestine, God of Israel.

When the Jubilee comes, all will be free, all will be forgiven, all will be returned. Bring a new jubilee to your Holy Land, Lord.

Let there be freedom for those who queue at checkpoints in the West Bank, freedom for those imprisoned for refusing military conscription, freedom for those blockaded in Gaza.

Let there be forgiveness for longstanding tensions between neighbours, forgiveness for acts that stem from fear instead of love, and we ask for forgiveness for our own country's history in dividing the Holy Land.

Let refugees return to their homes, let olive trees be returned to their farmers, let the persecuted return to a place of safety.

Let our call for justice and peace be the trumpet call that heralds the Land's jubilee.

Amen.

Games

Play Fishermen or Matkot, which you will find on pages 9 and 13 in Go with Greta

Share

How might you share with one another the things you have learned about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory? In intergenerational teams, perhaps you could create a display or a news report or a quiz to share as part of your celebration. Or perhaps you could make a short video for your church website or Facebook page. The Children's and Youth Work team at Church House would love to see what you've done, so send your videos and photographs to children.youth@urc.org.uk



Labi Siffre song – Something inside so strong

The higher you build your barriers
The taller I become
The further you take my rights away
The faster I will run
You can deny me
You can decide to turn your face away
No matter, cos there's
Something inside so strong
I know that I can make it
Tho' you're doing me wrong, so wrong
You thought that my pride was gone
Oh no, something inside so strong
Oh oh oh oh oh something inside so strong
The more you refuse to hear my voice
The louder I will sing
You hide behind walls of Jericho
Your lies will come tumbling
Deny my place in time
You squander wealth that's mine
My light will shine so brightly
It will blind you
Cos there's
Something inside so strong
I know that I can make it
Tho' you're doing me wrong, so wrong
You thought that my pride was gone
Oh no, something inside so strong

Oh oh oh oh oh something inside so strong
Brothers and sisters
When they insist we're just not good enough
When we know better
Just look 'em in the eyes and say
We're gonna do it anyway
We're gonna do it anyway
Something inside so strong
And I know that I can make it
Tho' you're doing me wrong, so wrong
You thought that my pride was gone
Oh no, something inside so strong
Oh oh oh oh oh something inside so strong
Brothers and sisters
When they insist we're just not good enough
When we know better
Just look 'em in the eyes and say
We're gonna do it anyway
We're gonna do it anyway
We're gonna do it anyway
We're gonna do it anyway
Because there's something inside so strong
And I know that I can make it
Tho' you're doing me, so wrong
Oh no, something inside so strong
Oh oh oh oh oh something inside so strong

Source: Musixmatch

Songwriters: Labi Siffre

Additional information

If your group would be interested in exchanging letters with a group of young people in IOPT, contact team@solutionsnotsides.co.uk and let them know. They are beginning a project linking British and Palestinian young people through an exchange of letters and are looking for groups to get involved.

