

An illustration of a cityscape with a prominent watchtower in the foreground. The watchtower is a tall, blue, cylindrical structure with a glass-enclosed top section. A grey wall with vertical panels runs across the middle ground. In the background, there are various buildings, some with red roofs, under a hazy, orange-tinted sky. Two figures are visible: one on the left, a soldier in a dark uniform holding a rifle, and another on the right, a person in a black shirt and pants also holding a rifle. The overall style is flat and graphic.

#connect2:

**Israel and
the Occupied
Palestinian
Territory**

Commitment
for **Life**



The
United
Reformed
Church Youth

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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 focussed on Nicaragua), this resource focuses on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and in the future 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/3Evfw7

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.



Historical background for Leaders

History - pre-reading

The land comprising Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) holds a special place for Christians, Jews and Muslims, and is often referred to as 'the Holy Land'. The Holy Land has always had a diverse population: Arab peoples have lived in the land for centuries, including farmers, craftspeople, and Bedouins (Arabic-speaking nomadic or travelling people), and there have continuously been Jewish and Christian communities in the land. Today, Israel is a state recognised by the United Nations. Palestine is not currently internationally recognised as an official state, but it has asked to be recognised as one. The Palestinian Territory comprises two main areas: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In the nineteenth century, there was the growth of a nationalist movement called Zionism. Zionists wanted a Jewish state to be created in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine, which corresponded to the biblical Holy Land. This was largely a response to a long history of persecution and antisemitism, particularly in Europe. The horrors of the Holocaust meant that Zionism gained traction in the aftermath of World War Two, and the proposed state of Israel was seen as a haven for a persecuted people.

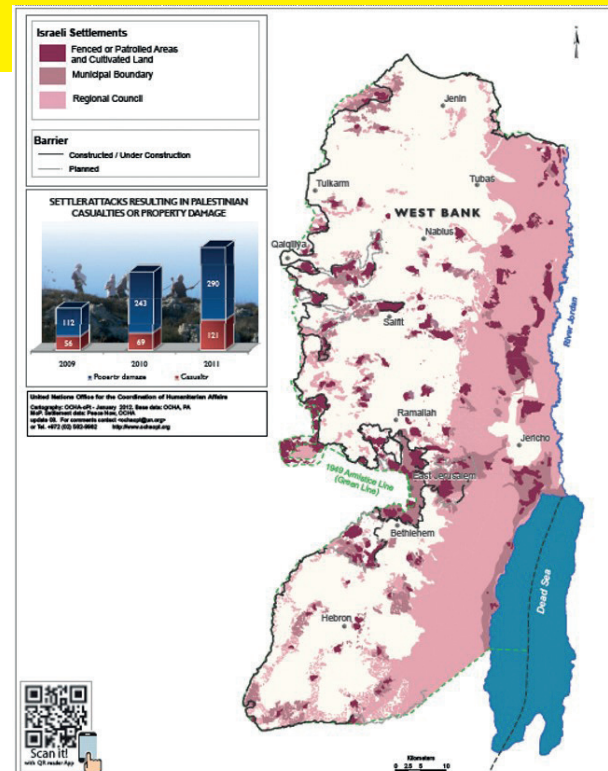
In 1947, the United Nations agreed a plan that would partition (separate) historic Palestine into two states: one Jewish state, and one Arab state. It was agreed that Jerusalem would have special international status and be administrated by the UN, since it is an important city for each of the Abrahamic religions. Palestine had become part of the British Empire in World War One, and the plan required the British to withdraw from the region when the partition took place. The Palestinians and other Arab states did not agree to the partition plan as they argued that it violated their right to self-determination and restricted their access to the land they lived in.

The partition went ahead in 1948. There was a war and many Palestinians were forced out of their homes and became refugees. Some fled to areas in the West Bank and Gaza that were more densely populated by Arab communities, and others fled to surrounding Arab countries like Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Palestinians call this time the *Nakba*, or catastrophe.

In 1967, there was a flare up in the tensions between Israel and the surrounding Arab states. During the 'Six Day War' of that year, Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This meant that Israeli troops entered Palestine and took control of the area. From 1967 onwards, Israeli settlements started being built on Palestinian land and Jewish people were offered the opportunity to live in them. Settlements like this, where an occupying country permanently moves its own citizens into an occupied territory, are illegal 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.

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



Session 1

Here we are



Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) is made up of areas of land to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon and Syria are to the north, Jordan is in the east, and Egypt is in the south-west. This is where many of the stories in the Bible are set! Since 1948, this area of land has been divided into two: Israel and Palestine. Palestine is now often referred to as 'the Occupied Palestinian Territory' as it is under occupation by Israel. Israel enforces the occupation with its military.

Fun facts

Read through the facts and then try quizzing each other to see how much you remembered:

- The colours of the Palestinian flag are black, white, green and red. These colours are on the flags of many Arab countries.
- The colours of the Israeli flag are blue and white. The flag has a star of David on it.
- Arabic is the main language in Palestine and Hebrew is the main language in Israel. The words for "Hello" are very similar in both! In Arabic it is "Salaam" and in Hebrew it is "Shalom".
- The Dead Sea is a large salt lake that borders both Israel and the West Bank. It is the lowest point on earth and is too salty for any fish to live in.
- The River Jordan marks the eastern edge of Israel and the West Bank. The Bible says Jesus was baptised in the Jordan! The West Bank gets its name from being on the 'west bank' of the river.



Activity

Find Israel and Palestine on a map. They are located in Western Asia and connect Asia and Africa. Historically, this was a very important location as lots of traders passed through it as they crossed continents. Because it was on a trade route, lots of different empires wanted to control it. This area has been controlled by the Babylonian, Persian, Roman, Greek, Ottoman, and British empires!

Today there are two main areas to Palestine: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Can you find both of them? How big are they compared to the UK?



The population of this area has always been diverse; as well as Arab people, there have been Jewish and Christian communities living in Palestine since the religions began. The Bible is full of stories about Jews and early Christians who lived in this area. There are lots of places that are mentioned in the Bible that you can still visit, like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Sea of Galilee.

Across the world, Jewish people have been discriminated against throughout history. In the nineteenth century, a movement called Zionism arose. Zionists wanted to create a Jewish state in historic Palestine, as this is where Jewish people in biblical times lived. The idea was that Jewish people around the world could move to the new state and be safe from persecution. This became particularly important after the Holocaust, and more Jews fled to Palestine as refugees from Europe.

In 1948, the state of Israel was created by the United Nations. The land was partitioned (separated) into two and many Palestinians were forced to leave their homes. Although Israel was meant to be a safe place for Jewish refugees, the partition plan created Arab refugees. Palestinians call this time the *Nakba*, or catastrophe.



Prayer

Dear God,

We pray for people who have been victims of discrimination, and we pray for people who have been made refugees because of conflict and violence. Help us make your world a place where all people can feel safe and accepted.

Amen

Bible link

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

‘May they prosper who love you.

***Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers.’***

For the sake of my relatives and friends

I will say, ‘Peace be within you.’

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I will seek your good.” Psalm 122:6-9



Jerusalem has been a city of great religious and political importance since biblical times. When the state of Israel was created in 1948, the United Nations said that Jerusalem would be an international city that was administrated by the UN rather than by Israel or Palestine. Today, both Israel and Palestine claim Jerusalem as their capital. Internationally, most countries recognise Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel. Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be their capital, but Palestine is not officially recognised as a state by the United Nations. East Jerusalem has been ‘annexed’ by Israel since 1967, which means that Israel’s army took control of it and declared that it belonged to Israel.

Both Israelis and Palestinians argue that they have a right to live in the land. What do you think a peaceful city would look like? How should we act to build peace when there has been a lot of hurt in the past?



Discussion

There has been a physical barrier separating Israel and the West Bank since the 2000s. In some places this is a wall, and in other places it is a high fence. Israel built it as they said they needed to protect themselves from attacks by Palestinians. Palestinians argue that the barrier crosses over the internationally recognised borders, which makes their land smaller, and restricts their ability to move between areas for work or to access facilities.

Think about the town or village where you live. How do you get to school or to your friend’s house? Imagine that a high wall was built near your house. How would you get to school or your friend’s house now? How long would it take? Have a discussion with your group about how this would make you feel.



Session 2

A Holy Land



Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, along with parts of Lebanon, the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, western Jordan and south-western Syria, is often referred to as 'the Holy Land'. This part of the world is important in several world religions and Jerusalem has a unique international status as it is a special place for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Israel is a Jewish state and the majority of people who live there are Jewish, but Christians and Muslims have also lived there for generations, as well as people of other faiths (or no faith). Most people who live in the Palestinian territory are Muslim; Christians have lived in Palestine since Christianity was born in the first century, but the number of Palestinian Christians is decreasing and now only 1-2% of Palestinians say they are Christian.

This part of the world is special to Jews as it is where Judaism began. The Hebrew Bible (which Christians call the Old Testament) contains many stories about people who lived in the Holy Land. It is often called the Promised Land as the Bible tells a story about how God led the Israelites out of slavery in



Egypt to live in Canaan (the biblical name for the Holy Land). A temple was built in Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant was placed there. People believed that God lived in the temple and the Ark of the Covenant was a sign of God's presence. The temple was destroyed when the Babylonians invaded in 587 BCE (Before the Common Era) and was later rebuilt. The second temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE (Common Era). The Western Wall in Jerusalem is the one remaining wall of the second temple and today many Jews from across the world visit the Western Wall to pray. Some Jews hope that one day another temple will be built.

For Christians, the Holy Land is important both because of its prominence in the Old Testament and because it is where Jesus spent his life. He was born in Bethlehem, lived in Galilee, died in Jerusalem, and is said to have ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives near

Bethany. There are many beautiful churches in the Holy Land. You can visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which is where Jesus is said to have been born, or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, where Jesus is said to have been crucified and buried. This is also where Pentecost took place which was the birth of the Church. Christians in the region provide us with a link to the earliest church communities.

Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) visited Jerusalem on Al-Burak, his winged horse. Jerusalem is the third holiest site in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. There is a shrine called the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which has a gold roof. You can often spot the gold roof when you look at pictures of Jerusalem.

The Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, an important place of worship for Muslims, are located in the area that Jews and Christians call Temple Mount, as it is where the Jerusalem Temple once stood. Because this is such an important site for different religions, there are often disagreements about who should be allowed to go there. Sometimes this leads to violence.



The Baha'i faith is one of the newer world religions. It was founded in 1863 in Persia (now called Iran), and today its headquarters are in Haifa in northern Israel. The headquarters, called the Universal House of Justice, have beautiful gardens that are popular to visit. Baha'is believe that there is one God and that Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed all carried messages from God to humanity.



Activity

Using a map of the Holy Land, see if you can find sites that are important to different religions.

- Jerusalem
- Bethlehem
- Nazareth
- Haifa
- Babylon – this city has a different name today! Can you find out what it is and find it on a map? You will need a map that covers a bit more of the world than just the Holy Land. After the first Jerusalem temple was destroyed, important Jewish people were exiled to Babylon (sent to live there against their will).

Prayer

In many towns and cities in the Holy Land, you can hear the *adhan* five times a day. The *adhan* is how Muslims are called to prayer. Watch this video to hear the *adhan* from Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. You will also see some pictures of the Dome of the Rock and inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Beautiful *Adhan* from Masallah al-Aqsa – <https://youtube.com/watch?v=z2xEwSi2vaI>

One of the most important prayers for Jews is the *Shema Yisrael*, which is traditionally recited in the morning and the evening. The words are: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one.” This passage is in both Jewish and Christian scriptures – look Deuteronomy 6:4 up in a Bible.

Look up the words of the *adhan*. What similar ideas are there in the *adhan* and the *Shema Yisrael*? What do the prayers tell us about Islam and Judaism? What similarities are there with Christian beliefs?

Write your own prayer that could either call people to worship or be used for a morning or evening prayer service.

Activity

There are lots of different restaurants and shops throughout the Holy Land that cater to different dietary requirements. In Judaism and Islam, there are rules about what people can eat. Muslims who eat meat, for example, must make sure their meat is *halal* ('lawful'). This means that the animal was treated well and slaughtered painlessly, and prayers were said as it was killed.

Food that Jews are allowed to eat is called *kosher* food (meaning 'fit' to eat). Jews are not allowed to eat meat that has blood in it and they must not mix meat and dairy. Both Muslims and Jews avoid eating pork as it is considered unclean.

Design a menu for a feast for Jews, Muslims and Christians to share. If you can, try making the food and eating it together! Make sure you ask the people you are sharing it with if they have any dietary requirements that you need to take into consideration.



◆ The Golden Rule

The Holy Books of each of the three main religions in IOPT, and indeed in many other faiths too, contain what is known as the 'Golden Rule'.

- You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD. — *Leviticus 19:18, The Torah (Jewish Scripture)*
- Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets. — *Matthew 7:12, The New Testament of the Bible (Christian Scripture)*
- [The] Prophet said: “As you would have people do to you, do to them; and what you dislike to be done to you, don't do to them.” — Muhammad, quoted in an Hadith, *Kitab al-Kāfi (Islamic Scripture)*

How would following this golden rule make a difference to the way you deal with other people? How hard/easy do you think it is to follow it?

Some people might say that the situation in IOPT has religion as one of its causes, and it can often be made more complicated by prejudice against those who follow a particular faith. Looking at this golden rule, which appears in all the Abrahamic holy books, do you think that the conflict is about religion or do you think there are other issues at stake too? How do you think that differences about faith can be overcome?

What opportunities do you have to learn about faiths and cultures other than your own?
How can you begin to break down prejudice?



Session 3

Everyday life for young people

Life can be very different depending on where someone lives in IOPT.

For Israeli children and young people, life can be quite similar to life in the UK. Children and young people go to school and have time to enjoy hobbies and time with their friends outside of school. Education is important in Israel and there is an emphasis on science and technology. Pupils also take lessons like Biblical Studies and English Language. Learning about the Holocaust is also a vital part of Israeli education.

Unfortunately, a number of schools and textbooks promote a negative image of Arab people, which means it can be easy to grow up being afraid of Palestinians. Israeli citizens are not allowed into areas that are governed by the Palestinian Authority ('Area A') and there are big red signs on roads leading into Area A, telling Israeli citizens it is dangerous for them to continue. This means that most Israeli citizens have never visited a Palestinian town. Palestinians must get a pass from the Israeli government to cross a checkpoint into Israel and these passes can be difficult to get. This means that, often, Israeli and Palestinian children and young people will never have had a conversation with each other until they go to university.

Some young Israelis are passionate about social justice and campaign for issues close to their hearts; these can include protesting the Israeli government's occupation of the Palestinian territory. LGBTQ+ rights are also important in Israel and lots of people join Pride marches each year.

Some Palestinians live in Israel; when Israel became a state in 1948, some Palestinian families chose to become Israeli citizens. Arab-Israelis have access to many of the resources that Jewish-Israeli children do, although they can face discrimination and do not always have the same opportunities.



Discussion

Imagine you are an Israeli young person. How would you feel about Palestinians if you had never been able to have a conversation with a Palestinian? How might you learn about life in Palestine if you were not allowed to visit?

Palestinians living in the West Bank also go to school and enjoy pastimes like sports or listening to pop music! Because most people living in the West Bank are Muslim and some people are Christian, the weekends are Fridays and Sundays rather than Saturdays and Sundays. This allows Muslims to go to a mosque for Friday prayers and Christians to go to church on a Sunday. This means young Palestinians in the West Bank have to go to school on a Saturday! At school, they will learn Arabic and about Islam, as well as other subjects like English Language.

Everyday life can be difficult in the West Bank though. Because the West Bank is occupied by Israel, the Israeli military control access to resources like water. Some communities do not have any access to running water, and in places that do have running water the taps often run dry. Palestinians must get a permit to dig a new well or install a pump. Permits are difficult to get and any wells or pumps without a permit are destroyed. Access to springs is also restricted. In Israeli settlements, however, a network of wells and pumps has been set up. This means that Israeli settlers always have access to fresh water, but nearby Palestinian villages often do not. Settlements are lush and green because plants can be watered, while villages a few minutes' walk away are still in desert conditions. According to Amnesty International, water consumption by Israelis is around four times as much as by Palestinians in the Occupied Territory. Palestinians consume less water each day than the amount the World Health Organisation recommends for a person to be healthy.



In Gaza, a lot of the water is contaminated by sewage or seawater. Only 5-10% of water in Gaza is safe for humans to drink. Living conditions are very poor and Gaza relies on humanitarian aid from other countries to get basic resources.

Activity

Make a list of everything you use water for. Remember things like cooking and laundry! Now imagine that you are only allowed a quarter of this amount of water. Write a plan of what you would use your water allowance for. Do you think you could live comfortably on this amount? What would you have to give up?

Watch: The Occupation of Water – Amnesty International (www.bit.ly/3RJvcBy)

The West Bank is surrounded by a wall that separates it from Israel. There are checkpoints in the wall where people can cross it. These checkpoints are guarded by Israeli soldiers.

It is difficult for Palestinians to get through checkpoints. They often have to queue for hours and can be stopped and searched. Sometimes there is violence at the checkpoints.

If a Palestinian wants to cross a checkpoint into Israel, they must get a permit. This includes if they need to go to hospital. Israel has a very good healthcare system compared to healthcare in the Occupied Territory, but difficulty crossing the checkpoints means

that Palestinians cannot always access the care they need.

Even if they have a permit, they may be turned away at the checkpoint or told to come back another day. Some Palestinians have permits to work in Israel, but they can spend several hours just getting to work because of the time it takes to cross the checkpoints.

People can cross checkpoints on foot or in a car. If a car has an Israeli numberplate, it is much quicker for it to get through. On one road, the wall goes down the middle of the road and cars with Israeli numberplates drive on one side, and cars with Palestinian numberplates must drive on the other side.

Watch and listen to Obaida's story. Obaida is 15 years old: www.bit.ly/3CjDpXv



Craft

The Palestinian side of the wall is covered with paintings and graffiti. The graffiti is a way of expressing people's feelings about the wall and their hopes for the future. The artist Banksy has put pictures on it too! Have a look at some pictures of the wall and then design a picture or message that you would put on the wall.



Michal is a young Israeli woman who shared some of her story:

My name is Michal. I live in Tel Aviv. I am part of the Conservative Jewish movement that believes in adapting Judaism to the modern world so that we can raise issues like gender, politics and so on. I have a ginger cat who is like my child; he is ginger like me. He's a great cat. He loves fish and shouting when he wants fish. Those are his hobbies.

...Israel is my home. Here, I can speak Hebrew freely; I can practise my religion. I love people here and am prepared to fight to make this country a better place.

My identity as Israeli is being Jewish, and speaking Hebrew. I love the language so much that I did a degree in Hebrew literature. I also identify with the culture. I feel connected and like I belong.

When young Israelis go to school, they don't get taught about the Palestinian conflict. Only at 18, when I went into the army, I noticed what the conflict was all about. At school all we know is that we are supposed to be afraid of Palestinians. They were supposed to be bad. We are good. I never met a person from Palestine until I was 21, and he was nice. Not scary at all. He was just like me, and I was confused. Why was I afraid? The media, our schools, and families told us to be scared. But 50 years of conflict is enough.



Session 4

Challenges for young people of the region



Discussion

What job would you like to do when you are older?

In Palestine, it is very difficult for people to get a job and so unemployment is high. The occupation means that it can be difficult for Palestinian businesses to make any money. The separation barrier and its checkpoints means it takes longer to move goods and services in and out of the West Bank. Israeli settlements mean that it is more difficult for Palestinians to access land that is good for farming. Gaza is under blockade, which means that the Israeli military controls everything that goes in or out of it.

If someone can't get a job, they are likely to live in poverty. Although many people would rather stay in their home country, lots of young Palestinians are deciding to move abroad when they are older because life is so difficult in Palestine. They go to study at universities in other countries and then get jobs there. This means that lots of talented young people are leaving Palestine.

Some people decide to stay because they want to try and improve life for other people in Palestine. They may work for charities or try to raise awareness online or by talking to people who visit from other countries.



Make a difference

Buying Palestinian goods can help to support people in Palestine. One of the most popular things produced in Palestine is olive oil. With your family or your youth group, try making traditional hummus with Palestinian olive oil.

- 1 can of chickpeas
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tbsp tahini
- Salt
- Palestinian olive oil



- 1) Empty the chickpeas into a saucepan and bring to a simmer.
- 2) Once warm, drain and rinse the chickpeas and add to a blender with the lemon juice, garlic, tahini, and salt. Blend until smooth. Add more water if it looks too thick.
- 3) Drizzle with lots of Palestinian olive oil and eat with warm pitta bread.



Housing is another challenge that faces Palestinians. The people who govern Israel and Palestine both claim that the land referred to as the Occupied Palestinian Territory should belong to them. Because of this, the Israeli government will sometimes say that houses that Palestinian families are living in should belong to Israelis. The Palestinian families will then be evicted and their homes will either be given to Israeli citizens or demolished to make space for Israeli building projects.

Discussion

Israel and Palestine both claim that the land belongs to them. What does the word 'home' mean to you? What makes a house or an area a 'home'? Talk about how it feels to come home after you've been away, and how you would feel if you were forced to leave your home.



Israel has national conscription, which means that when anyone turns eighteen years old, they must serve in the army for a set period of time. Both girls and boys must join the army. Girls serve in the army for two years and boys serve in the army for two and a half years. Children grow up with the expectation that they will serve in the army and they spend their time in the army before they go on to college or university.

Because the Palestinian territory is occupied by the Israeli military, the teenagers who are conscripted to the army have to serve there. This may include working at the checkpoints or taking part in military action in Palestinian towns or villages. For many young people, this may be the first time that they have actually come face to face with Palestinians.

Although it is expected that all teenagers will join the army, more and more people are refusing to be conscripted. This is because these young Israelis do not agree with the occupation of Palestine and they do not want to be part of the occupation. It is not easy to refuse though. Because it is the law that everyone must join the army, people who refuse conscription are often sent to prison.

Or, an actor from Israel, tells about his experience of conscription

In Israel everyone goes to the army. No one thinks it's weird or absurd that at 18 you get a gun and that you might kill someone. The army in Israel is a big part of your personality. My parents met in the army. This connection to the army is called a 'battle legacy'. I was medically exempt from going to the army, but my parents insisted and so I volunteered, not for combat, but as a military reporter. I was good at writing, and I got to speak to all sorts of people. I did all sorts of cool stuff. I saw the entirety of the military. But doing that you get the feeling that something is off here. Something is very weird.



One time I joined in a *ma'atsarim* – or arrests, basically. That is going to a Palestinian village where there is intel about a terrorist. I tagged along excitedly, expecting action. We banged on the door of this family. They were half asleep, and the soldiers rushed in and wrecked the house. They could not find the knife they were searching for. The family was screaming. We took a guy from his bed, blindfolded him and took him away. The next day I followed up to find out if they'd found the knife. They told me they got the wrong guy. It was the brother. How twisted is that? Someone comes into your home and kicks you, soldiers with weapons. That kid did nothing wrong. I can only think he goes home and thinks about how much he hates me, all soldiers, all Jews.

That day I realised I should not be here. I have to be on another side of the conflict. I can't be on the "get in the van" side. I can't be on the passive side, like, "I don't care, I'm not looking at it" side. I have to be active, but from another perspective.

Bible link

***"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."* Jeremiah 29:11**

This passage was written to give people hope when they were forced to live in exile in Babylon, a city in a country far from home. Christians believe that there is hope for the future by trusting in Christ.

However, it is not enough to simply trust but do nothing. Jesus helped people directly by healing and teaching and having difficult conversations with people who disagreed with him. What could people do to give people in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory hope for the future?

Prayer

Dear God,

Sometimes the future can be exciting. Sometimes the future can be scary. We trust that you will be with us, whatever happens tomorrow and in years to come.

We pray for people who are worried about what will happen when they grow up. Give courage to people who must make difficult decisions about whether they can stay in the place they grew up. Give courage to people who stand up for peace, even if they will suffer for it. Give us the courage to help build peace and end poverty. Amen



Session 5

Jubilee and Peacemakers



The conflict in IOPT is deep-rooted, but there are also many people who are working to build peace. Social media means that both Israeli and Palestinian stories can be heard, by Israelis, Palestinians, and people around the world. Hearing stories from both sides can help build understanding. There are also many organisations working to bring people together and advocate for justice and peace.

Discuss

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.” – Martin Luther King

What does peace look like? Is it the absence of violence, or does there need to be something else in order for there to be true, lasting peace? What is the role of justice in peacemaking?

Sindyanna

Sindyanna is a fairtrade co-operative that brings Jewish and Arab women together. The women make oil from olives grown in Palestine and sell the olive oil, oil-based products like soap, and crafts. The business supports traditional Palestinian farmers and empowers women by providing them with work and an income. By working together, Jews and Arabs can learn about each other's lives and cultures, and even have the opportunity to learn each other's language. There is also a Visitor's Centre at Sindyanna where Israelis, Palestinians and international tourists can all meet and learn together. In the UK, Sindyanna olive oil is used in products sold by LUSH, and their za'atar spice is sold by Zaytoun.



Bible study

“(God).. will judge between the nations. He'll settle problems among many of them. They will hammer their swords into ploughs. They'll hammer their spears into pruning tools. Nations will not go to war against one another. They won't even train to fight anymore.” Isaiah 2:4

Isaiah teaches us that God wants peace and not war. Sindyanna have transformed an old firing range into an organic olive grove that is run by both Jews and Arabs. Even when there has been pain and violence, this can be transformed into cooperation if both sides work together. How could you find common ground with people you have disagreed with in the past?

EAPPI

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine/Israel (EAPPI) is an international programme coordinated by the World Council of Churches and administered in the UK by the Quakers. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) spend time living in IOPT and acting as witnesses to daily life under occupation. If EAs witness human rights abuses, they can report these to the United Nations or other human rights agencies, so their presence helps citizens feel safer.

EAs act as impartial observers, meaning that they have not sided with either Palestinians or Israelis. They are there to advocate for human rights, protect people who are oppressed, and build peace through non-violence.



Discussion

What do you think 'impartial' means? How easy is it to be an impartial observer of things that are happening? Why is it important, do you think, to ensure that you are impartial in this kind of role? How can you judge whether things you read about IOPT are written or reported in a biased way or an impartial way? Why is it important to think about this when you are reading or listening to accounts?



You can read more about EAPPI on their website www.eappi.org/en/. You can read some of their reports there. Or watch this video about their work https://youtu.be/voVG_kWv2Gk (16:18) or https://youtu.be/3b6x3_8lg9E (2:48)

Peace Collage

Using magazines, newspapers, or printouts from the internet, cut out pictures or words that remind you of 'peace'. Make a collage on a large sheet of paper that you can display in your church. As a starting point, you could use the picture of a dove in a bullet-proof vest that Banksy graffitied onto the separation barrier.

Watch this video about Jerusalem Peace Players – two girls who get to know one another by playing netball. <https://youtu.be/MOUNdwjFKmw>

Solutions Not Sides

Solutions Not Sides is an education programme that runs in the UK. It aims to teach people about the Israel-Palestine Conflict and tackle antisemitism (prejudice towards Jews) and Islamophobia (prejudice towards Muslims). The aim is to find a solution, not to take sides! Facilitators lead workshops in schools or youth groups. In these workshops, students can learn about the history of the conflict, hear the perspectives of both Israelis and Palestinians, and think about how we can help build peace.



One of the most important things that people in the UK can do is to learn about the experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians and to encourage other people to learn more. By doing so, we can support people who are suffering (show 'solidarity') and also let our politicians know that we want them to find solutions that work for everyone, not one side over the other.

You could ask your teacher or youth group leader to arrange a Solutions Not Sides workshop for you.

Or, who you met in the previous session, met a Palestinian for the first time through Solutions Not Sides. He said:

"My dialogue partner was also an actor from Ramallah, and it sounds simple because he is just a dude that lived in a different place and speaks a different language, but it was mind blowing because his life was so different from mine. And he lives just there, so close, I can almost see his house from mine, and his life is like a million miles away. And we just talked to each other. He's super nice and we became friends... I was 25 and I had never met a Palestinian. Many Jews go their entire lives without meeting a Palestinian but think they have a firm idea about who they are and what they want, and that they want to harm us. I wish I could take people to show them my friends, family, mother, sisters. Just normal people."

Activity

In small groups, create a drama showing how a 'peacemaker' goes about solving problems and keeping the peace. Think about the different organisations you've learned about in this section. When you're ready, perform your drama for everyone. After the performances, discuss what characteristics of peacemaking were shown in each drama. How could we use these characteristics in our everyday life to help make a difference?

What can WE do?

What can we do in the UK to help the people of IOPT in their quest for a peaceful solution? We may feel there's little we can do to make a difference. But it is important to learn what we can and keep informed, maybe even hosting a talk by Solutions Not Sides or EAPPI or someone who can give an informed and unbiased view. We can support peace groups in the region (Find out about Women in Black, Palestinian Vision Organization (Palvision), Other Voice, Combatants for Peace, Youth Against Settlements, Al-Haq, Yesh Din, Addameer Prisoner Support and others.) We can campaign and can write to our MPs. We can establish friendship links with young people in or from IOPT and listen to their voices. We can give money through Commitment for Life. And, of course, we can pray. Look at the prayers in the intergenerational celebration in the centre pages of this booklet, or maybe you could write your own.



Credits

Illustrations

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