

# Study, Service and Worship Material for Disciples Women's Groups

## Palestinian Refugees



A Resource for Disciples  
Women from DHM's  
Refugee and Immigration  
Ministries Program



**Refugee and Immigration Ministries**

## Study

### Who are Palestinians?

Palestinian people are Arabic-speaking people with family origins in Palestine. The total Palestinian population in the world is estimated to be about 11 million people, half of whom lack citizenship in any country. Palestinians, worldwide, are predominantly Sunni Muslims, though there is a significant Christian minority (perhaps as much as six percent) as well as smaller religious groups. In Palestine, Israel, and the Occupied Territories the Christian population is closer to two percent and shrinking, relative to the percentage of Muslims and Jews.

Palestinians have never exercised full sovereignty over the land in which they have lived. Palestine was administered by the Ottoman Empire until World War I and then by the British Mandatory authorities. Israel was established in parts of Palestine in 1948, and in the wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the West Bank and East Jerusalem were occupied by Jordan and the Gaza Strip by Egypt, with both countries continuing to administer these areas until Israel occupied them during the 1967 war.

Today, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is generally recognized, having been affirmed by the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, the International Court of Justice and even by Israel itself. About 100 nations recognize Palestine as a state. However, Palestinian sovereignty over the areas claimed as part of the Palestinian state remains limited, and the boundaries of the state remain a point of contention between Palestinians and Israelis.

There are those who claim that Palestinian suicide bombings against Israeli civilians prove that Israel is justified in the continuing occupation and the restrictions it has placed on Palestinians. But it should be

pointed out that the first suicide bombing inside Israel occurred in 1994, after 25 years of Israeli occupation.

The maps below show the remarkable reduction in land belonging to the Palestinians since 1946. A map done today would show even less land belonging to the Palestinians, and what little land that does belong to them would be surrounded by walls and barriers to contain the Palestinians.



### Who are Palestinian Refugees?

On May 14, 1948 (over 60 years ago), the state of Israel declared its independence. For the Palestinian people, that date is remembered as the “Nakba,” the catastrophe, a time of suffering. During the last six months of the British mandate over Palestine, the declaration of Israel’s independence, and the following Arab-Israeli war, more than 700,000 Palestinians became refugees outside Israel. Their homes and properties were turned over to immigrants of the new state of Israel.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Palestinian refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. They are also the descendants of these persons. According to UNRWA there were 914,000 Palestinian refugees in 1950. Now there are more than 4.7 million registered with UNRWA. Palestinians constitute the largest and longest standing refugee population in the world. Only 28.7 percent of all Palestinians have never been displaced from their homes.

One-third of Palestinian refugees live in 58 recognized refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ten of the camps were established in the aftermath of the June 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Socio-economic conditions in the camps are generally poor with a high population density, cramped living conditions and inadequate basic infrastructure such as roads and sewers. The other two-thirds of the Palestinian refugees live around the

refugee camps or in towns and cities scattered across the Middle East. With the exception of Jordan, no country has allowed permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees. This means that many older Palestinians have been refugees for six decades! Many retain the titles to their land, recognized by the British before 1948 or the Ottomans before that, and many retain deeds of property and even the keys to the front doors of their former homes in what is now Israel, whether or not those doors still exist.

The situation of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza is especially tenuous in terms of their physical safety, ability to earn a living, and their spiritual and political well-being. Israeli settlement expansion, road closures and roadblocks in the West Bank are making everyday life almost impossible and undermining any chance for peace.

### **The 2008-09 Gaza Crisis:**

On December 27, 2008, the Israeli Defense Forces began a three-week military operation against the Gaza Strip. The operation, code-named Operation Cast Lead, was undertaken in response to the firing of rockets into Israel by units of the military wing of Hamas, the Palestinian political party administering the Gaza Strip. The justification cited by the Israeli government was the violation of a six-month ceasefire agreement by Hamas, even though Israel had not fulfilled its obligations under the agreement to end its blockage and allow much needed food, fuel, medicine, and other goods to enter. Israel had also killed six Palestinian men on November 4, accusing them of digging a tunnel toward Israeli territory.

The bombings resulted in the complete destruction of three mobile health clinics built inside small trucks and a clinic building that had been supported by ACT (Action by Churches Together), one of the organizations Disciples work through in situations like this. ACT worked through our partner, the Middle East Council of Churches Department of Service to Palestinian Refugee, to support the clinic.

The clinic building was established in 1968 to meet the needs of the Shijaiya community in Gaza, which is known for its high population density and where the majority of the residents are living under the poverty line. The clinic offered treatment free-of-charge, concentrating on pregnant women and children.



*Rubble of Shijaiya Clinic (Photo: Andrew Hogg)*

Due to the scale of the violence and the denial of access to Gaza, it was not possible for relief efforts to be undertaken until the fighting ceased on January 18. ACT immediately sent in food (mainly high energy biscuits), medicine, blankets, and trauma counselors.

The death toll from the three weeks of fighting was 13 Israelis killed and limited property damage in Israel and 1,440 killed and 5,380 wounded in Gaza, with property damage estimated in the billions. Those wounded included an overwhelming number of persons suffering from severe burns as a result of the use of white phosphorous bombs by the Israeli army. About 50,000 people were made homeless and about 400,000 people were left without running water. Because children constitute about 56 percent of the Gazan population, they were significantly affected.

### **Stories of Palestinian Refugees:**

**The generations of being a refugee:** Najwa Sheikh Ahmed lives in the Nuseirat camp in Gaza with her husband and three children. She spends every day remembering that being a refugee is her parents' and grandparents' past, her family's present, and her children's future. The photo on the next page shows the early days of the refugee camp in Gaza. *(Photo: UNRWA)*

*I am a Palestinian refugee. My parents as well as my grandparents are refugees, having fled from our homeland Al Majdal to settle in one of the eight refugee camps where UNRWA operates in the Gaza Strip. My grandparents passed away 15 years ago without being able to see their homeland again. My parents are old and sick now and will likely face the same fate. Examining the difficult lives of my parents and grandparents, I have no hope for the future my children and I endure as refugees.*



*Sixty years have passed since 1948 and we the Palestinians are still called refugees. Being identified as a refugee, in general, and as a Palestinian refugee, in particular, renders you bereft of the ability to plan for the future. Instead, you are relegated to knowing only the same existence as that of your ancestors, who lived and died in the same camp, under the same circumstances. You face the same sufferings and injustice by the Israeli occupation as they did.*

*Expecting to have the same life as your parents and grandparents is very disappointing in the sense that every aspect of your life is*

*wholly predictable: You are limited to the same streets, the same schools and to experiencing the same obstacles by the Israeli occupation. When your life is predictable, plans, dreams and even successes are irrelevant. In the end, your life will be the same: Trapped in a camp where day blurs into night. It is very difficult to feel that your life is being wasted, that your efforts will not bring forth any changes in yours or in the lives of others and that your dreams will be but a mere attempt to escape reality.*

*From one generation to another, nothing has changed. An education or a career is nothing as long as you are a refugee stranded in the same camp confines, forever a refugee. Therefore, "refugee" should be added to the list of citizenships in the world and the word "refugee" should be in our passports to define the stateless, restless and endless journey we have to endure, forever refugees.*

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**The continuing refugees:** Despite the fact that Palestinians have been refugees for generations, there is a new refugee tent camp with 332 tents that sits on the top of the hill that is Um Nasser, north Gaza. Salem Abu Atek, his wife, his sister-in-law, and 10 children live in Tent Number 1. In 2007, they were displaced from their home by sewage that poured from a nearby hill, destroying the town's infrastructure and killing and displacing hundreds of the refugees in one of the poorest areas of the Gaza Strip. (Photos: UNRWA)



*Salem: I was not home when the catastrophe happened, but I heard about it on one of the local stations; I felt devastated. I felt as though all catastrophes were somehow targeted at me. This is not the first time I have suffered in my life. I returned back to my neighborhood and found people giving me their condolences for losing my mother and my little son and the destruction of both my house and my life.*



*My family and I used to live in Al-Sheikh Zayed city. Then I moved with my brothers to Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza where I built a house. Only God knows how the Israelis could destroy my house totally during the incursions of 2003. I was then forced to move to the Bedouin village of Um Nasser to build a simple house there.*

*His wife Aziza: I heard people screaming and running outside, I was carrying my son close to my chest. I saw an enormous flow of water coming towards me. I tried to run away to escape, but the water kept following me. I fell to the ground. I was unable to resist the current and the sewage took away my little son. I became crazy trying to look for him. Finally the neighbors took me away from the running sewage worrying for my life. I cannot believe that I have lost my little boy. I always go to the same spot where I lost him. I hate this place and I really want to leave; I cannot handle the fact that this place is the reason for my life becoming a lasting misery.*

*Mahdi, Salem's brother: I hurried to the place the moment I heard what was happening. I tried to get my family out and I succeeded in assisting some of them. Suddenly, I remembered my mother, and refused to leave regardless of the high rising levels of sewage. I tried and tried to look for her, I was crying, but deep inside I was screaming because I realized, there and then, that I would never see her again.*



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**Property rights:** A two-story house built of big blocks of stone with a green, metal double gate is known as the Hallak house and it sits in west Jerusalem. This house tells the story of the unresolved tragedy of the Palestinian refugee crisis and the rise of the Israeli state built on the ruins of WW II and the tragedy of the Holocaust. Wilhelmine Baramki and Reuven Tsur (a Palestinian and an Israeli) born within two years of each other, both call this house their family's home.

The Hallak house was built in the 1930s by Baramki's family, a Christian Palestinian family. It was named after her grandfather and divided into apartments that housed her grandparents and at least three uncles and two aunts. Other rooms were rented out to tenants. Baramki has memories of visiting her grandparents in that house until she was 13 years old. In the spring of 1948, Jewish officials drove through the neighborhood with a loudspeaker instructing the Palestinians to leave their homes immediately – there had been a shooting nearby. Baramki's widowed grandmother and her uncles and aunts grabbed a bag and left quickly. The war raged on and eventually they took refuge from the fighting by crossing into Lebanon.

A year and a half later they finally returned to Jerusalem, but they were forbidden to enter. The Israeli state deemed them "absentee" property owners and their house, like the houses of nearly all the other 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were forced out in 1948, were given to Jewish Israeli families, often to newly arrived immigrants, survivors of the camps in Europe.

Reuven Tsur grew up in a Hungarian-speaking Jewish family in what was then Transylvania and is today the Romanian city of Oradea. During the war, the family managed to escape the ghetto into which they had been corralled and they fled eventually to Budapest. His parents had for years been planning to emigrate, with their hearts set on Australia. Eventually, and in large part down to the cajoling of their son Reuven, they flew to Haifa as new immigrants to a new Israel.

The family were taken to a camp for newly arrived immigrants. His father set up a bakery and Tsur went to study English and Hebrew literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He became a teacher in

the city and eventually a professor of Hebrew literature at Tel Aviv University, where he was a leader in the field of cognitive poetics. In 1957 he married Ilana, who was born near Tel Aviv. The couple began to look for a house, somewhere with large rooms where Ilana could run her physical education classes. One day an agent showed them a small apartment on the ground floor of a large and impressive Arab house. It was the Hallak house.

"I only saw the palm trees from the outside and I said: 'This must be a mistake. It couldn't be that beautiful,'" said Tsur. "It was empty and nobody wanted it." The Tsurs admit that they didn't think of its former occupants. Their neighbors were other Jewish immigrants from Europe and the Arab world who had poured into the new, fast-growing state of Israel. The Palestinians were long gone.

After the 1967 war, Baramki's uncle came to see the house. There were more visits in the months and years after that, all well-mannered and the two families sat and drank tea in the house they both called home. (Photos of the house can be seen in a video clip at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/slideshow/page/0,,2278057,00.html>.)

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**Travel restrictions:** Krista Johnson was sent by Global Ministries to work with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem to serve as a program assistant. She had difficulty with her visa on several occasions. In October of 2007, she was denied entry and had to return to the United States (see story in her words below). Her difficulties made her aware of the issue of Palestinians whose ID has been taken away from them for some reason. For example if they were studying in the United States in 1967 during the war, when new IDs were issued, they would not be given an ID. They would be forced to enter the country on a tourist visa, just like Krista. In the West Bank city of Ramallah there are over 10,000 Palestinian "foreign nationals" who are Palestinians but are forced to leave Israel every three months to get a new visa. One of them is Sam Bahour who started an organization called "My Right to Enter" which focuses on the denial of entry. (Photo: Global Ministries)



*Every time I re-enter Israel/Palestine I am nervous about re-entry and hope for a new three month visa. I have had problems twice before – a one week visa once and a denial of entry this past summer on the way back from a World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Amman.*

*Last Saturday morning I flew into Ben Gurion airport after attending a Sabeel conference in Boston and visiting my family in Indianapolis. As I walked up to the passport control counter the woman in the booth sneered at me and asked "what are you doing back here?" after seeing that I had been in Israel recently. She asked why I didn't have a different visa – why was I trying to sneak past them. She did an additional computer check and exclaimed, "you sneaky girl! You were denied entry in Jordan – you sneaky little girl!" I felt my stomach drop like I was on a rollercoaster, I knew what was coming, but I stayed calm as I was led from one interrogation to another, as my passport was taken from me, and as I was informed that I would not be allowed to enter the country. I was given no further reasons for my denial of entry other than continuing to be referred to as "sneaky." I was then taken to another room where I was photographed and fingerprinted. Then I was taken to identify my luggage and then taken to a back room where five security personnel searched through my luggage and I was given a body search by two female security officers.*

*Finally I was taken to a detention facility and held for 13 hours before I was put on a plane back to the US. I was treated decently but locked in a room with no door handle on the inside, bare bunk beds, and a bathroom. I stayed in the room for 13 hours, but they brought me something to eat twice. I requested to meet with the Ministry of the Interior representative at the airport, but was refused and taken directly to the tarmac and put on the plane. On the airplane my passport was given to a flight attendant with instructions to only return it to me when I got off the airplane*

*While in the detention facility, I was working with the American Embassy, lawyers, colleagues, and the MYRTOE (My Right to Enter) Campaign. I felt exhausted and sad – I had plans – I was in the middle of projects – I have friends that I love – and wanted to be able to say goodbye to at the least. One minute I had plans, and an apartment, and appointments – and the next my world was turned upside down.*

*I got a phone call from Sam Bahour of the MYROTE Campaign. He told me that I am "a real Palestinian now." Sam and I have a few things in common. We both grew up near Youngstown, Ohio. We were both denied entry to Israel in the past – but one key difference is that Sam is Palestinian-American. Sam is a passionate, creative leader in the Palestinian business community. I am in Palestine to learn – to work at Sabeel – but also to soak up as much as I can to tell the story when I get back.*

*For me, this was a scary experience. This was a challenge – an interruption – an inconvenience.... But for Sam – and the thousands like him who are foreign nationals – Palestinians holding foreign passports who are often the highly educated, committed, creative contributors to the fabric of Palestinian society – this is a much larger issue. This policy of visa renewal takes away the ability to plan, and the stakes are much higher when denial of entry could mean separation from your family, your business, and your home. I may have been detained for half a day, but Palestinians can be put in administrative detention for up to six months without a reason being given. I may have had to wait while my things were searched through, but that is something that happens every day at the terminal checkpoints to enter Jerusalem or the checkpoints that separate Palestinian villages from one another throughout the West Bank.*

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**The lack of education:** Nour Zuhair Ziyara is a 13-year old girl from Gaza. She is one of almost 1.1 million students in Gaza and the West Bank who have difficulty getting an education because of checkpoints, lack of sufficient income to pay school expenses, and overcrowding in the few schools that exist. (Photo: UNRWA)

*Last year half of the teachers in my school arrived late in the morning because there was no transportation (due to fuel shortages). But there were teachers who walked long distances in Gaza City to come to school and we appreciate their efforts.*

*If the blockade continues on Gaza, I will not be able to go to school and continue my education. There will be no text books and stationary, and teachers won't be able to come to school without transportation .... My father is not working and my family can barely afford food for us so it is difficult for them to pay for school needs and expenses. My brother Mohammed couldn't go to university and my sister Haya will not go to school to study tawjihi (grade 12) this year because there is no money to pay for the expenses and buy her new jelbab (secondary school uniform).*

*My goal in life is to continue in my education and not to stop for any reason. I don't want to step back. I will continue my education because I am a clever student and I am one of the top 10 students in my class.*

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**The lack of emergency care:** Sofian Sofian says he loves his job driving an ambulance in the northern West Bank. Over the course of 12 years, Sofian has transported hundreds of patients from refugee camps to hospitals. He estimates that he has come under fire ten times and that seven patients have died in his ambulance.

Nighttime runs are the most dangerous, especially during curfews or military incursions. During one of the incursions into Balata Camp in the spring of 2002, Sofian and his medic were called to the camp around midnight to evacuate a wounded civilian. Sofian says that as he raced toward the camp, an Israeli helicopter fired two missiles, which landed directly behind the ambulance and gouged two large craters in the road.

Another time that spring, Sofian and his crew picked up an UNRWA office guard to guide him to a refugee who had been wounded after Israeli helicopters shelled a car in Tulkarm Camp. As they left the camp, Sofian says that two tanks blocked the road "for twenty-two minutes exactly". The patient died in the ambulance. An hour later, Sofian and his medic were on the way to pick up another gunshot casualty when he says that soldiers opened fire; the ambulance was riddled with bullet holes and an UNRWA staff member in the ambulance died. Sofian holds thumb and forefinger two centimeters apart to show by what narrow margin bullets missed the ambulance's on-board oxygen tanks.

(Photo: UNRWA)



Sofian, aged 40 with a wife and six children, might earn better money working for a hospital or finding a quieter job, but he says is not interested. *The best part is seeing patients after they have been treated. That's better than earning a hundred-million dollars. It's so interesting. We rescue people. I couldn't live without it.*

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**The lack of medical care:** Palestinians live without the proper medical care for many situations.

*I'm pregnant. That's the happiest news a woman can get...in normal circumstances. In Gaza, the news that you're pregnant comes with all the fears, worries, and anxieties you can imagine. I found the news that I am once again pregnant to be a source of concern, not a source of joy. It's a burden to have to worry about giving birth to a healthy baby in a safe environment; more so because I have to take medication during the entire cycle of my pregnancy. I'm constantly worrying about the availability of the medicine I need for my health and the health of my baby. Sometimes I find myself overwhelmed to the point of exhaustion by the negative thoughts that invade my mind. How will my pregnancy end? Will something happen to ruin my joy? (Photo: UNRWA)*

*When a friend of mine went into labor and was taken by her family to a private clinic, she thought she would get better treatment. Instead the clinic wouldn't take her in because there was no electricity. She was transferred to Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where they also refused to admit her this time because they didn't have all the equipment. With increasing labour pains and a heightening fear that she would lose her baby, my friend went to Al Shifa Hospital - finally she was admitted and was able to give birth.*



*The nine months of pregnancy should be one of the most beautiful experiences any woman can have; a time when she enjoys every move her baby makes up until the moment when she holds her child and feels its soft skin for the first time.*

*But what happened to my friend could happen to me. What would I do if I faced such a terrible situation? What if I were to lose my child? That's an experience I've had before and which I remember to this day with the same bitterness and pain as the day it happened. When you live in Gaza there is always a risk that something will end sadly, painfully and with great loss.*

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**The lack of food:** As in other parts of the world, the food crisis and other socioeconomic factors are prompting Palestinian refugees to drastically change their eating habits. However, the military and administrative measures imposed by the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory have an added



effect on the crisis. Palestinian purchasing power is at an all time low. Nearly half of the Palestinian refugees are food insecure, leading to a change in eating habits. Almost everyone has reduced their consumption of animal protein, fresh fruits and vegetables to save money. Um Mounir, a mother of seven living in the Arroub refugee camp in the West Bank, complains that drastic price increases are leading her to cut down on food consumption. Lacking a steady job or income, her husband only manages to work from time to time. The family owes \$6,000 for electricity and water. (Photos: UNRWA)

*Due to our financial problems, we always eat mjeddara (a meatless, rice and lentils dish) because we can use the rice and the lentils from our UNRWA food package. We rarely buy fruit as it's so expensive. UNRWA's flour isn't enough for our family, and the flour in the stores is too expensive for us to buy – a 50k sack of flour costs 250 NIS (\$75). A tank of olive oil is nearly double the price it was one year ago, up to 150 NIS (\$45).*

Ahmed Kamel Al Titi is an unemployed father of six young children, all of whom are excelling in school, living in Arroub camp. Due to a disability since birth, he walks with a cane. He receives food and some cash assistance under a special hardship case program.



*The saying around here these days is "a bride is cheaper than tomatoes." We are grateful for assistance, but because we are eight people in this house, and we have young kids who like to eat a lot, we wish we could receive more food aid.*

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**The lack of clean water:** Admnan Najeeb lives in the northern West Bank village of Burin with his wife and five children. He takes his children for testing for intestinal amoebas every three months and they always test positive for the parasite, which causes diarrhea. Burin is one of 40 villages in the northern West Bank not connected to the water network supplying Nablus, or the nearby settlements. They depend for their water on two natural springs in the village itself fed by subterranean springs.



Unfortunately, these have been contaminated mainly from sewage from nearby villages. To avoid the possibility of contamination, those who can afford to do so buy tankered water at a cost of NIS 60 per 300 liters. Those who cannot, about 40 percent of the villagers, continue to use the water. (Photo: UNRWA)

*I don't tell my children that I think they are sick from the contaminated water. I cannot afford to buy tankered water and if I tell them that the water is making them sick, they will refuse to drink at all.*

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**The increased pollution:** In Gaza, people are always poor even if they possess a lot of money. The sea is polluted for both the poor and the rich. The air, heavy with emissions of cooking oils used as car fuel because of the obstruction of diesel and gasoline supplies to Gaza Strip, is being breathed by camp inhabitants as well as those living in high-class downtown neighborhoods. Dr. Yousef Abu Safiyeh, an



expert in environmental issues, predicts a serious health and environmental disaster for the Gaza Strip population owing to the recent use of cooking oil as fuel by a large number of drivers. (Photo: UNRWA)

*The recurrent use and heating of such oil, causes it to breakdown and release carcinogenic substances. In addition, the heating of oil to the boiling point produces hydrocarbons, which are inadvisable to be consumed via the digestive system. However, people in Gaza Strip are unwillingly breathing these compounds via their lungs, resulting in grave damages.*

In the Deir Al-Balah refugee camp in the middle of the Gaza Strip, 58-year-old Ismail Abu Arraj, father of 11 children, swears that his family cannot sleep at night because of the insects and mosquitoes, which are attracted by the disposal of sewage water into the sea close to the camp. All camp sewage flows into the sea untreated. According to Mr. Khalil Abu Shammaleh, director of Al-Dameer Association for Human Rights, an average of 50,000 cubic meters of sewage per day is flowing into the Mediterranean Sea. This represents a serious pollution threat to the sea and coasts and can damage the marine life and the fishing sector. He believes the situation is causing untold damage to the environment in Gaza, and that the continual collapse of the environmental conditions in the Strip will eventually make life there even more difficult and unbearable than it already is.

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**The Wall:** This barrier, which is larger than the former Berlin wall, not only separates Israel from Palestine, but also separates Palestinian communities from each other. Special regulations require Palestinians to obtain permits even to approach the wall in some areas, while Jewish people are able to enter these same areas unrestricted. In 2004, the international Court of Justice ruled that the wall is illegal and must be dismantled, and ordered Israel to compensate Palestinians damaged by the wall's construction. The 2005 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) passed a resolution entitled "Breaking Down the Dividing Wall" that called for the wall to be torn down. Today the wall continues to be expanded. (Photo: Sabeel)



Bethlehem Wall Crossing

### Short Internet Video Clips:

General Information:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ewF7AXn3dg>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xCYmkZmWol>  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_IAuCPovjk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_IAuCPovjk)

Refugees in Jerusalem:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWBr11HlhQA>

Refugees in Lebanon:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFmK6S\\_u24A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFmK6S_u24A)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOUx9f1d42w>

Refugees in Jordan:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZITGr6ybnMA>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZkPd5vGzBk>

Refugees in Syria:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0wQL7t-yKU>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXXsE7RwiEY>

Refugees in Chile:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yzyi1My2snY>

Refugees in Brazil:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnSBMt1kQgM>  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_AgsCfrmWA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_AgsCfrmWA)

Gaza Crisis:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ev6ojm62qwA>  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gchf\\_4VgtK4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gchf_4VgtK4)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FOpQ9\\_FOes](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FOpQ9_FOes)

## Immigration to the Americas:

Estimates of the number of Palestinians in the United States range from 100,000 to 400,000. The difficulty in determining a more precise number results, in part, from the fact that there has never been an actual state of Palestine that immigrants could call their country of origin. While a small number of Palestinians, mainly Christian (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant), came to the United States before 1948, the vast majority have arrived since. The greatest wave of Palestinian immigration began after the Six Day War in 1967 and has continued to the present, although it peaked in the 1980s.

A majority of Palestinian immigrants initially settled on the East Coast, but industrial jobs drew them to urban industrial centers in the Midwest. Today, the largest concentrations of Palestinian Americans are in the New York area, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Cleveland, Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Jacksonville.

Additional hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are thought to reside in other parts of the Americas. Palestinian emigration to South America began for economic reasons that pre-dated the Arab-Israeli conflict, but continued to grow after that. Many of these immigrants were from the Bethlehem area. Those immigrating to Latin America were mainly Christian.

Half of those of Palestinian origin in Latin America live in Chile. El Salvador and Honduras also have substantial populations. Chile is home to the largest Palestinian community outside the Middle East, with an estimated 350,000 Palestinians. Most Palestinian Chileans are proud of what they are and what they have achieved in their new country. They don't wish to get involved in Middle East politics. It clashes with their self-image as successful members of the community. Some new arrivals have found they have been snubbed by those who would rather they didn't bring their troubles to Chile.

## How the Disciples are helping through financial support and delegations:

### Financial Support

**Disciples**, as citizens of the United States, help Palestinian refugees through their taxes which support UNRWA. The United States is UNRWA's largest bilateral donor. In 2007, the U.S. government contributed \$154.15 million to UNRWA.

As members of their local church, Disciples help Palestinian refugees through the Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries (DOM), Week of Compassion (WOC), Church World Service (CWS), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and Action by Churches Together (ACT). Each of these church structures relate to partner organizations in the Middle East that are involved in direct service and advocacy (read more about the partner organizations below). *You can see a list of the DOM partners at <http://globalministries.org/mee/partners/>; by clicking on each partner, you can learn more about them. You can read the latest news from DOM's partners at <http://www.globalministries.org/mee/>.*

Disciples also help Palestinian refugees through DHM's Refugee and Immigration Ministries resettlement program. During the conflict in the Gaza Strip in 2009, the U.S. State Department asked Church World Service (CWS) to facilitate the resettlement into the United States of Palestinian families from Gaza, under what is called "humanitarian parole." These families each had one or more members of the family

who were U.S. citizens. Three families were resettled, totaling 13 persons. The U.S. government provided no financial support to CWS for these humanitarian parolees, so the Disciples provided \$6,500 to make these resettlements possible.

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**The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC)** was formed in 1974 and now includes 28 Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical (including Protestant and Episcopal), and Catholic member churches. One of the units of the MECC is the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) which works in Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine (Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Galilee). DSPR's mandate is to work with the refugees, poor, and dispossessed.



According to both the UN and the World Bank, the poverty rate for the Palestinian territories stands at 59 percent and food insecurity affects at least 38 percent. The unemployment rate has increased to more than 32 percent in the territories, with an average of 27 percent and 37 percent between the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively. In response to this need, DSPR provides:

- Health Clinics (for over 70,000 persons, particularly in Gaza and Jordan);
- Health services (including medication to treat iron deficiency, a mobile dental clinic, and a fitness center)
- Construction of community centers, classrooms, libraries, and computer centers;
- A kindergarten that serves up to 40 families each year;
- Student and business loan programs (and micro finance training);
- Artistic, musical, craft, and cultural activities;
- Sports activities;
- The formation of women's groups ;
- The formation of youth groups (including groups for potential student drop outs and an interfaith leadership program);
- The formation of children's groups;
- Workshops and educational and vocational programs in carpentry, metal and aluminum works, electricity, motors, secretarial studies, literacy, English language, sewing, knitting, embroidery, folklore carpet weaving, computers, hairdressing and barbering, obstetrics, breastfeeding, child rearing, teacher training, guidance and counseling, capacity building, psychological care, drugs, contagious disease, cancer awareness, overall hygiene, the disabled, protection of the environment, human rights, civil society issues ;
- Tutorials in summer remedial work, official exam preparation, and English courses;
- Construction of water cisterns (especially in places with impure water or where water is available only two or three hours per day);
- Construction of a road to enable farmers to reach their plots in the winter;
- Cash grants to over 2,000 families (rather than material items because of the difficulties in transporting goods from the outside through various checkpoints);
- Advocating on behalf of Palestinian refugees; and
- Hosting international delegations.

DSPR is particularly active in Gaza, where the need is greatest. In Gaza, the population has suffered from the extended blockade, closure of crossing points and severe limitations on basic supplies being allowed into the territories. These policies, as a reaction to rocket attacks by Palestinian militants on Israel, have been characterized by top UN officials as collective punishment. DSPR has often heard Palestinians compare the Gaza Strip to the world's largest prison and even the world's largest mental asylum. The little that DSPR offers in terms of health, education and vocational training, community infrastructure, water cisterns, and agricultural roads, as well as the other advocacy programs and activities, continues to be in great demand. *(Photo: MECC)*

The population of Gaza is extremely poor, lives on less than \$2 a day, and depends on international humanitarian food assistance. Constantine Dabbagh, the executive director of the Near East Council of Churches based in Gaza, has said that while he and others working in humanitarian efforts in Gaza “appreciate all relief assistance provided to our people, we still need to be free and recognized, and live in an atmosphere of a just peace with our neighbors on equal footings.”



*MECC/DSPR water cistern*

Palestinians suffer from a permanent water crisis due to the Israeli restrictions on access to limited water resources available. Seventy-five percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip’s renewable water resources are used by Israel – which means that one Israeli consumes as much water as do four Palestinians. An MECC/DSPR water cistern program in the West Bank helps Palestinian people overcome the problems of water shortage and unavailability, improves access to safe water, and provides employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled laborers. Women and children also benefit by spending less time in the difficult risky and time-consuming task of collecting water. The DSPR has employed Palestinian refugees in making olive wood symbols that CWS has used to promote a campaign to help build these cisterns.

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**Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center** is a grassroots liberation movement among Palestinian Christians that seeks to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation and reconciliation. It also works to promote international awareness regarding Palestinian Christians. Over the years, Global Ministries has sent staff to help Sabeel with their efforts to promote this awareness, especially among Disciples congregations. See above the story on Krista Johnson who was sent to Sabeel by Global Ministries. Learn more about Sabeel at <http://www.sabeel.org/>. (Photo: Sabeel)



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**Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum** is an ecumenical advocacy initiative launched by a World Council of Churches conference in Jordan in 2007. Its goal is to help churches around the world work for a just peace in Palestine/Israel. The Amman Call, the forum’s founding document, acknowledges the fact that in Palestine/Israel “children of God – Christian, Muslim and Jew – are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair.” It also affirms that “the role of the churches is to heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation.” An olive tree offered by Christians from Palestine was planted on the banks of the Jordan River at a place traditionally considered as the site of Jesus’ baptism, to mark the launch of the forum. You can read the Amman Call at <http://www.churchworldservice.org/news/MiddleEast/2007/ammancall.html>. (Photo: WCC)

In 2008, a follow-up international conference held in Switzerland called for the re-framing of the religious dimensions of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Sixty-five theologians and church leaders from around the world gathered to focus on the issue of “Promised Land.” Those involved in the Middle East conflict often see their positions as having a divine mandate and being a matter of good versus evil. This conference was an attempt to challenge and dismantle ideological attempts to attribute specific political projects and systems to God’s will. “The churches have a key role in the resolution of this long and bloody tragedy of suffering and struggle,” said Samuel Kobia (General Secretary of the WCC), who compared the conflict to

"another apartheid situation." They are called "to heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation rooted in the ethical and theological imperative for a just peace." The key result of the conference was a better understanding of the question of land in the Bible, in theology, and in the conflict. The final document said that the Bible "must not be utilized to justify oppression or supply simplistic commentary on contemporary events."

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**The YWCA of Palestine** aims to promote women's full and equal participation at all levels of society through leadership opportunities and training, to work for social and economic justice through development and advocacy, and to mobilize women's collective power for action on vital issues. There are three local associations in Jerusalem, Jericho and Ramallah, and three centers in refugee camps. The YWCA of East Jerusalem was established in 1949 in a tent in a refugee camp near Jericho. Today, its programs include a Vocational Training Center, an Extension Services Unit to stimulate employment-related training in the West Bank and Gaza, a Women's Training Program, a Rehabilitation Program for the physically challenged and traumatized, and an Advocacy Desk to advocate for peace with justice, tolerance, equality and respect for the fights and dignity of human beings. *(Photo: YMCA Jerusalem)*



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**Augusta Victoria Hospital** is a Lutheran World Federation institution that has long received assistance from CWS and ACT. It runs four village clinics in the West Bank. One of those is in Shuqba where Dr. George Imseih, a pediatrician, says that emotional and psychological problems are becoming increasingly prevalent among the clinic's patients, due to the area's high rates of unemployment and increasing militarization. A particularly dire problem is the increase of family violence. In a culture marked by modesty and decorum, people don't speak freely about such things. *(Photos: P Jeffrey/ACT)*

The relatives of Yousef Abed Elatif Sedqee took their 7-year-old from the West Bank village of Megaer to the nearby clinic run by August Victoria Hospital in the village of Turmus'ayya. Yousef had hurt his hand in an accident, requiring the removal of a nail from one of his fingers. Normally the family would have taken him to a Ramallah hospital that the family uses, but a strike of public hospital employees angry about not getting paid (due to international sanctions imposed on the Palestinian Authority) prevented that. The choice of which hospital to go to gets complicated for others living in the West Bank because of border checkpoints, travel time, and permits needed to go to restricted areas. Stories of pregnancies ending in death for either the newborn or mother, due to time at checkpoints are common, as are the frequent recollections of travel restrictions that can turn a 45-minute trip into a 17-hour journey.



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**The Rawdat El-Zuhur (Garden of Flowers) Primary School** is for lower-income Palestinian children in East Jerusalem. Individual children are supported at the school through Global Ministries Child

Sponsorship Program. Learn how you can sponsor a child at the Rawdat El-Zuhur Primary School at: <http://globalministries.org/get-involved/child-sponsorship/>. (Photos: Rawdat el-Zuhir)



## Delegations

Many U.S. delegations have gone to Israel and Palestine to learn more about the situation there and to demonstrate the solidarity of the American people with the Palestinian refugees. Our own Disciples Woman-to-Woman delegation went in the fall of 2008, led by staff of DOM/Global Ministries and Sabeel. Sixteen women from 13 Regions and four constituency groups and Peter Makari from Global Ministries spent 10 days in Israel/Palestine. (Photos: Women to Women)





Other Disciples delegations have included a delegation of Regional Ministers in December of 2009 and a visit by Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Disciples, in 2007.

In the fall of 2006, Church World Service sent a special delegation of leaders from Historic African American Baptist and Methodist Denominations. One of their main purposes was to discuss the effective prophetic witness by the church on behalf of and with the oppressed during the struggle for equality and full civil rights in the United States during the 1960s and against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. It was hoped that the individual and collective experiences of the delegation would contribute to finding just and lasting resolutions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Photo: L. Crosson/CWS)

Individuals also support the Palestinian people by living among them through the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program that seeks to support local and international efforts to end the Israeli occupation and bring an end to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict with just peace, based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. You can learn more about the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program at <http://www.eappi.org/> and <http://www.eappi-us.org/>.

## Service

*To learn about the official Disciples Women's service project for this Middle East study, see the Disciples Women's Web site at [www.discipleswomen.org](http://www.discipleswomen.org).*

**In addition, RIM offers the following ways for Disciples Women's groups to provide for the needs of Palestinian Refugees.**

### **The service of prayer:**

Prayers are especially needed for Palestinian refugees who have spent generations in refugee camps with no possibility of having a stable life where they can plan for the future and determine their own destiny. Pray that they might find a solution to their unstable lives that will provide them the opportunity to start their lives over in safe and secure situations.



### **The service of giving:**

Week of Compassion and the Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries continue to respond to the needs of Palestinians through each of the partners described above. Your Disciples Women's group can play an important part in continuing to make that possible. Make a contribution to WOC or DOM designated for Palestinian refugees. Send your check to either WOC or DOM at P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206. Additionally, you can sponsor a child at the Rawdat El-Zuhur Primary School. Details are available at: <http://globalministries.org/get-involved/child-sponsorship/>.

### **The service of advocacy:**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is a coalition of 22 public policy offices of national churches and agencies, including the Disciples' Middle East office. This organization began its work in 1984 and seeks to maintain an on-going dialogue with Congress, the Administration and the diplomatic community. The work of CMEP focuses on Washington in the knowledge that sound United States policy is crucial to achieving and maintaining just and stable relationships throughout the Middle East. In addition, CMEP seeks to help the members of our organizations advocate in a knowledgeable, timely and effective way their concerns about justice and peace for all people and countries in the region. Among its principal advocacy concerns are: the avoidance and resolution of armed conflicts, human rights, arms control,

foreign aid, and the unique nature of Jerusalem - sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims. You can learn more about CMEP and join its e-mail advocacy network at <http://www.cmeop.org/>.

# Worship

## Worship center:

*Ideas of things to place on your worship center include: a Bible opened to Mark 11:15-19, a globe of the world (with the Middle East facing those gathered), a menorah (a seven branched candelabra was used in the temple and a nine branched one for Hanukkah) or other candle, and your offering basket.*



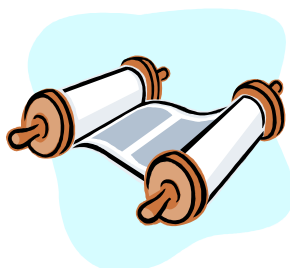
## Call to worship:

Leader: I was glad when they said to me "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

**People: Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.**

Leader: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.

**People: Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."** (Psalms 122:1-2, 6-7)

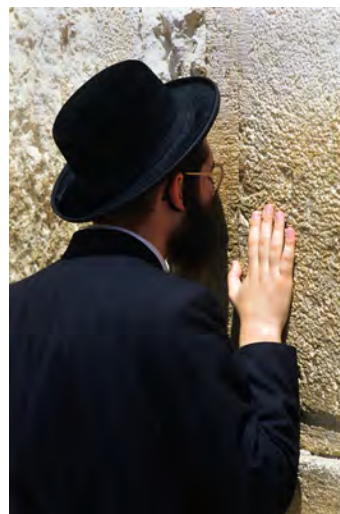


## Scripture reading:

Mark 11:15-19

**Reflection on scripture:** *Some or all of the following thoughts could be shared as a reflection on the scripture reading.*

The temple in Jesus day had many courts. The court that Jesus cleansed was the outer court, which was the place where Gentiles (those who were not Jewish) could worship. There was no sacred significance to the outer court, but there were some regulations. No one could pass through with dusty feet; it was not to be used as a short cut; and the sick were not allowed in. The authorities allowed the sale of sacrificial animals and money changers (to exchange the coins of the worshippers for the shekels used to buy animal sacrifices and to pay temple tax of one half shekel per year). Jesus cleansed it not because money changers were involved in corruption or graft. Jesus was angry at the treatment of the Gentiles. There was a bizarre or circus atmosphere and that atmosphere interfered with the Gentiles' worship of God. Jesus said: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers." The phrase "for all the nations" is very important because the Gentiles were being robbed of a place of worship. The phrase "for all the nations" is from Isaiah 56:6-8. Isaiah felt that the temple service as he knew it was not final or complete and that one day when the Messiah arrived, the Jewish temple would become a house of prayer for all the nations. Mark tells the story to declare that through this act Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah 56 and declaring himself to be the Messiah. When the chief priest and scribes saw how Jesus had cleansed the temple, they sought a way to destroy him. They were upset that Jesus had become a threat to the temple by declaring it open to all. The early Christians reading Mark saw the cleansing as the major factor leading to Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus sacrificed his life so all people might become equal before God. The Palestinians and all of us are Gentiles, the foreigners of Jesus' day. We need to realize that the Palestinians and all others have been welcomed – the dividing walls have been knocked down. How can walls be built when there simply are no longer any courts to the temple? Jesus has made the temple open to all nations.



*A House of Prayer for all the nations!*



*Illustration of the Temple in Jesus' day.*

**Prayer:** *The following prayer was written by the heads of the churches in Jerusalem. They invite churches around the world to pray with them.*

Heavenly God,

We give you thanks and praise for your gift to us of your only Son, Jesus – His birth in Bethlehem, His ministry throughout the Holy Land, His death on the Cross and His Resurrection and Ascension. He came to redeem this land and the world. He came as the Prince of Peace.

We give thanks to you for every church and parish around the world that is praying with us this day for peace. Our Holy City and our land are much in need of peace.

In your unfathomable mystery and love for all, let the power of your Redemption and your Peace transcend all barriers of cultures and religions and fill the hearts of all who serve you here, of both peoples – Israeli and Palestinian – and of all religions.

Send us political leaders ready to dedicate their lives to a just peace for their peoples. Make them courageous enough to sign a treaty of peace that puts an end to the occupation imposed by one people on another, granting freedom to Palestinians, giving security to Israelis and freeing us all from fear. Give us leaders who understand the holiness of your city and will open it to all its inhabitants – Palestinian and Israeli – and to the world.



In the land you made holy, free all of us from the sin of hatred and killing. Free the souls and hearts of Israelis and Palestinians from this sin. Give liberation to the people of Gaza who live under unending trials and threats.

We trust in you, Heavenly God. We believe you are good and we believe that your goodness will prevail over the evils of war and hatred in our land.

We seek your blessing especially on the children and young people, that their fear and the anxiety of conflict may be replaced with the joy and happiness of peace. We pray too for the elderly and the handicapped, for their well-being and for the contribution they can make to the future of this land.

We pray, finally, for the refugees scattered across the world because of this conflict.

God give the politicians and governments responsible for them the wisdom and courage to find suitable and just solutions.

All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Offering:** *As the offering is received, invite the women to visualize themselves as a Palestinian woman trying to care for herself and/or her family without safe drinking water, enough food, or proper medical care. Then invite the women to visualize Jesus standing with the Palestinian woman to cry out against the oppression and injustice and to knock down the walls that divide people from each other.*

**Offering Prayer:**

Through our offering this day, we affirm, O God, that we are your people. You sustain your Church, the new and eternal Jerusalem, by your loving presence even in times of trouble. We offer these gifts in an effort to share your love to us with all those who struggle in the Middle East to bring a lasting peace. May our gifts help to end the suffering and tear down the walls that divide so that all can attain life sufficient. Amen

## How to Contact RIM

Please feel free to contact us for any further information you may need, or look us up on the Internet at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/RIM/>. You will find a lot of material about various refugee and immigration issues on our Web site.

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