



The Vine

June 2015

Becoming a community through which God's healing and hope can flow to the world

First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana

217 367-5353

office@fmc-cu.org

<http://www.fmc-cu.org/>

Compiled by: Amber Anderson



Middle East Sharing

Sarah Sutter

The obligation I feel to share a bit about my travels this past semester is not because of requests from members of this congregation, although I certainly appreciate your desire to hear about my trip, and not because of any personal need, but rather because of the people I met on my travels and because they asked us to.

I traveled to the Middle East to fulfill my cross-cultural studies requirement at EMU. The group was comprised of 26 students and our two wonderful leaders, Linford and Janet Stutzman. We began in Jordan, spent about 2 months in Palestine and Israel, and finally visited Turkey, Greece, and Italy before coming home.

During our journey we met Palestinians **and** Israelis, Christians, **and** Muslims, **and** Jews, people far right on the political spectrum, people far left on the political spectrum, and people somewhere right in the middle. We were encouraged to listen, question and observe, and attempt to reserve our judgements and opinions until we had heard as many pieces of the puzzle as possible. And just in case you didn't know, it is a puzzle; or rather, a knot. The lives of the people living in Israel/Palestine are so entangled with one another

and even with their own people's collective narratives that it is often difficult for them to see anything else.

We stayed for three weeks with Christian Palestinian host families in Beit SaHour, a small town right next to Bethlehem. My host mother, Nadua, was the most wonderful cook. She cooked a different meal for us each night for the 21 days we were there, and **all** of them were delicious. Our first evening in their home, we got right down to business. My host brother Awad sat down with us at the dinner table and without much further ado asked us, "Do you know what it means to be occupied?" No. No, I most definitely do not. How could I, a white, Christian, middle-class, straight American possibly begin to understand what it is like to live in an occupied nation??

But I began to learn slowly over those next three weeks, and to see with my own eyes what was happening around me. Here are just a few of the things I saw while living in Palestine for three weeks:

I saw black water tanks on nearly every Palestinian home and building, put there for se-





curity in case the water would be shut off unexpectedly as it had been in the past. In contrast, I saw no water tanks on the houses of Jewish settlers living in the same area.

I saw big red signs next to any road leading to an Arab village in Palestine, warning people (especially Jews), of the extreme danger they would be in if they continued. Our group successfully drove past one of those signs, lived in the town for 3 weeks, and shockingly made it out alive.

I saw an 8 meter tall concrete wall running through Bethlehem, bordering a stretch of highway, or masquerading as an electric fence cutting through fields of olive trees, separating farm from farmer. I saw stark grey concrete, sometimes adorned with graffiti on the Palestinian side, decorated with pleas for peace, justice, and the chance to leave this wall far behind. While a few weeks later on the opposite side I saw a wall that had been expertly built so as to appear shorter and expertly landscaped so as to appear as a decorative wall along the edge of the highway.

I saw people trying to lead relatively normal lives, children trying to walk to school without being stopped and searched at checkpoints, people trying to travel to Jerusalem for work or better medical treatment or to visit family without having to apply for a permit that may or may not be granted. Many of the people we met in Palestine asked us to do just one thing when we got back to the States, and that was to tell people what we saw. To tell people that what the media presents to the rest of the world is not always accurate, or in full, or maybe even is skewed. To tell people that not all Muslims are terrorists. To tell people that Palestinians want peace too.

Leaving Beit SaHour was the hardest transition of the trip because we left, spent the night in

Jerusalem, and then turned right back around to drive down the “settler’s road;” the road of the people who were constantly trying to steal more and more Palestinian land because they were greedy, selfish, and barely human, according to our Palestinian friends. And we were now driving down that road because we were going to live with host families on a settlement not 10 miles away from Beit SaHour, for 4 days. That bus ride was terrible. I felt like I was betraying my wonderful host family who had been so generous and hospitable to us for 3 weeks. I felt like I was stabbing them in the back.

Perhaps those emotions sound a little extreme to you, but the thing is, we were living in a context where everyone’s emotions are a little extreme. People don’t have the privilege of being indifferent when their freedom or safety is in question.

Our time living in Efrat is a bit hard to summarize, because we heard from such a wide variety of people, all of whom would fall under the category of “settler” because they were living on a maybe-legal-maybe-illegal-I-still-don’t-understand-international-law-enough-to-say-for-sure settlement in Palestine (aka the West Bank). But they ranged from nearly as inhuman as the Palestinians described to people that looked and acted remarkably (or perhaps I should say “frighteningly”) as you or I might. We stayed with Orthodox Jewish host families, talked with them, learned from them, and participated in Shabbat with them (think no lights, kosher, the whole shebang). I learned how little I actually knew about what it meant to be Jewish, especially a practicing Orthodox Jew and after talking with my host father we discovered that Mennonites share a few things in common with them. For example, community is very important. When a couple is married, or after there has been a death, the community surrounds the family or individuals providing them with meals, companionship, support, wisdom, and their presence while the newlyweds or mourners begin to learn again how to live in their new roles. Much as we do here at First Mennonite.





While in Efrat we had the opportunity to sit down with several young people from the settlement, many of whom were currently serving their mandatory time in the IDF. While talking with one young man, I had an eye opening moment. As we introduced ourselves, he explained that he was in the IDF and at the moment was stationed in Hebron (which as we had learned a few weeks prior during our own visit to Hebron, was one of the best – or rather worst – examples of Palestinian/settler tension due to the proximity of the settlement being smack dab in the center of this primarily Arab town). And as he talked, and explained how difficult it was at times to discern what the “right” thing to do at any given moment was, I began to realize that I had done a very poor job of withholding my judgements until I had seen the whole picture. I vividly remembered standing in Hebron, on a deserted street because no one wanted to be out, glaring at the IDF soldiers patrolling the area, sure that they all wanted the Palestinians gone as much as the settlers. I saw their machine guns, not their faces. And then, as I sat and listened, I realized that this very pleasant young man might have been one of the faces behind those machine guns, and I realized, first of all how quick to judge I was, and second of all, how no one has the whole picture or story.

And then something remarkable happened because these young Jews, especially many of the soldiers we had the great privilege to meet and talk with, asked us to do just one thing when we returned home, and that was to tell people what we saw. To tell people that what the media presents to the rest of the world is not always accurate, or in full, or maybe even is skewed. To tell people that not all Jews or IDF soldiers are heartless, Arab-hating machines. To tell people that these young soldiers, many of which are just out of high school, have a very, very large burden to carry and that the lives of both Palestinian and Jews hang in the balance of their decisions.

Both the Palestinians and Jews we met, asked us to do one thing when we returned to the States – tell people what we had seen. They didn’t tell us to tell you x, y, and z. They simply asked us to tell you what we had seen.

And so, after having told you just a few of the things I saw this past semester, having not even gotten to the Bible-related aspects of traveling in the Holy Land (which were also incredible, and which made me reconsider how I read the Old Testament, who and what Jesus was, and how small the Holy Land really is, just to name a few) I will leave you with one of the most important things I took away from this trip. Our actions, and through us the actions of our government, however distant they may seem while reading the newspaper or watching the news, lead to **very real** things happening in other parts of the world, and while we have the privilege of being able to ignore these actions because they might not directly impact our day-to-day lives if we so choose, we have a responsibility to the very real people living across the ocean, to at least pay attention to, and maybe even speak up for or against, what is being done here and how it impacts the rest of the world, on a very real, day-to-day basis. Thank you for listening, and I would ask you to keep all of the people in Palestine and Israel in your thoughts and prayers.





Why a Pastoral Visit

Deb Sutter

As a church community, we care for those within our community as well as those outside of our community. Our whole congregation is involved in such care as we relate to each other through small groups, committees and friendships. One specific aspect of care is pastoral visitation. Although pastors do visit in times of sickness, death in the family or crisis, a routine pastoral visit is about getting to know you, your joys, challenges, needs and faith experiences. Part of my job since joining the pastoral team includes routine pastoral visits, and I

will be trying to gradually visit all in the congregation over the coming year or years. So when I call or email to set up a time to visit, please don't think that you have been singled out because of a problem! I just look forward to listening to what is important to you and asking how we as pastors, SLT or a congregation can better pray for you. I joyfully anticipate many good visits!

Solar Panel Update

Holly Nelson

Monitoring Website: https://enlighten.enphaseenergy.com/pv/public_systems/WgEG401654

Hey everyone! Greetings from Maryland! I am having fun checking up on FMC's electricity usage and solar panel generation. The panels are really producing as the days get longer! In May our generation exceeded what we used. Next month I'll be able to give a report on our system's first year.

FMC Solar Panel Dashboard			
	Electricity Generated (kWh)	Electricity Used (kWh)	Percent Solar Energy
MARCH	404	1,627	25%
APRIL	1,026	1,317	78%
MAY	1,205	1,191	101%
TO DATE	8,051	15,736	51%

<p>FUN FACT: Source: EPA Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator</p> <p>Our electricity generated to date avoided annual emissions equivalent to:</p> <p>1.2 passenger vehicles</p>	
---	---