Episcopal Peace Fellowship's presence was strong at this summer’s 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church in Salt Lake City. We began General Convention in the Dean’s Hall of St Mark’s Cathedral by honoring Newland Smith as the 2015 John Nevin Sayre award recipient. During his remarks that night Newland warned everyone that he was “just a retired theological librarian who plods along in life” but we know him to be so much more. Newland’s passion, faithfulness and authenticity make him a living example for all peacemakers. In his presentation of the Sayre Award, EPF’s National Executive Council Chair Will Wauters accurately described Newland’s leadership within the Palestine Israel Network as “gentle but firm and relentless.” It was truly an honor to recognize Newland Smith and his ongoing work for reconciling peace.

After celebrating Newland we gathered around our Wall of Injustice that bisected the Dean's Hall. We processed from station to station, pausing at each collection of images depicting injustice to pray and recommit ourselves to action. This litany inside St. Mark’s Cathedral set the tone for Episcopal Peace Fellowship at General Convention. We vowed to work for the end of the Gaza Siege and Palestinian Occupation. We promised to work for the abolition of the death penalty by reaching out to legislators. We committed ourselves to transformative action that we might end our country’s gun violence epidemic and live into God’s peaceable kingdom. Read the Litany for the Wall of Oppression at [http://epfnational.org/litanies/].

We carried these vows into legislative hearings, late night planning sessions and into our conversations with deputies. Many Episcopal Peace Fellowship members successfully testified in support of resolution D025 which reaffirms The Episcopal Church’s longstanding call to abolish the death penalty and also asks that bishops in states where the death penalty is legal to appoint task forces to develop a witness to eliminate this cruel and unusual punishment. This resolution was passed by Convention as well as B008 and C005, which call for handgun purchase licensing and stricter gun laws at federal, state and local levels, respectively.

Episcopal Peace Fellowship members along with our friends from Jewish Voice for Peace testified for many days before the Social Justice and International Policy committee on a myriad of resolutions concerning Palestine and Israel. EPF was well represented among the committee members, too, who kept the dialogue honest and on point. In the end, D016, a compromise resolution asking the Church to...
investigate its investments that support the occupation of Palestine and to generate a list of products produced in the illegal settlements, was sent by the committee to the House of Bishops. D016 intentionally did not call the Church to divest from such holdings; however, every single bishop who stood to speak about the resolution spoke against it and every one of them used the words divestment and dangerous. The resolution was thoroughly defeated, but the spirit of EPF's Palestine Israel Network was not. The Palestine Israel Network steering committee is already planning follow up steps to prepare us for the next General Convention where we will once again work for Palestine's justice and freedom.

More than sixty bishops and over a thousand other Episcopalians marched in the Claiming Common Ground prayerful procession on Sunday, June 28. Bishops Against Gun Violence sponsored this public witness event with the intent of urging people of faith to seek common ground in efforts to curtail gun violence. Diocese of Maryland Bishop Eugene Sutton said in his opening remarks that morning that our country faces an “unholy trinity” of poverty, racism and violence. Presiding Bishop-Elect Michael Curry concluded the morning’s event proclaiming that “we are really here because there is another trinity. There is another trinity that is not an unholy trinity. There is another trinity that is a holy trinity.”

And finally, for the fourth consecutive General Convention, Episcopal Peace Fellowship sponsored a Young Adult Delegation to testify, write and help with EPF's presence at General Convention. Under the leadership of TJ Geiger and Maryann Philbrook, these young adults arrived in Salt Lake City fully prepared to engage in a meaningful and productive two weeks. The YAD consistently worked fourteen hour days in the Salt Palace that began with daily testimonies at 7:00 am resolution hearings on topics such as minimum wage, marriage equality rites, disability rights, racial inequality and inclusive liturgical language. Every single day deputies intentionally visited the EPF exhibit to tell us how impressed and moved they were by the YAD members. EPF is incredibly grateful for their commitment and their dedication to justice and peace, as well as their willingness to be prophetic, vulnerable voices during General Convention.

Overall, I see the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church as an EPF success and it’s due to the many, many members who supported our presence, from the exhibit volunteers who tirelessly sold T-Shirts, curricula and recruited new members to the many members who financially contributed in the months preceding Convention. I'm so thankful for Episcopal Peace Fellowship, our efforts at General Convention and the ongoing tasks now that we are home. There is certainly plenty of work to do educating the wider church on the plight of Palestinians and I feel confident that EPF and PIN are up to this challenge.

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**EPF Young Adults with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry**

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**NEWS From the Young Adult Network**

EPF’s Young Adult Network is excited to announce an ambitious new opportunity for young adults to work for peace and connect with the greater Episcopal Church. Beginning in 2016, we are launching the Young Adult Network Ambassadors, an opportunity for young adults ages 18-35 to work for peace in their community while joining with the larger EPF movement through pilgrimages, retreats and leadership positions.

Ambassadors will be chosen through an application process this coming November through January. In early 2016, Ambassadors will join EPF's Young Adult Network in a leadership role, both locally and nationally. At the local level, Ambassadors will help operate the Network's social media channels, and will keep a keen eye for actions and initiatives taking place in their own communities. Later on in the year, Ambassadors will help Network Directors host a retreat or Urban Pilgrimage to be offered to the whole community.

This role offers a distinct leadership opportunity for the young adults of our faith. EPF has been at the forefront of lifting up young leaders throughout its 76 year history, and through our new Ambassadors program, we continue to lift high that mantle.

The Application period for the Ambassadors program runs from November 15 - January 15th, with decisions shortly thereafter. For more information, please contact our Young Adult Network Director, Michael Kurth, at youngadultnetwork@epfnational.org
This is a tale of 3 days in Gaza, and of encountering the truth of a thing.

We traveled to Gaza in April 2015, eight of us representing the Episcopal Peace Fellowship Palestine Israel Network, and felt privileged to be there. Yes, privileged. And blessed.

In August 2014 we had watched the horrific destruction and slaughter of Gazans by the military forces of Israel aided and abetted by its partner, the United States of America. We had listened to the accompanying mythical narratives that said the savage attacks and obliterating bombings were for self defense and to ensure peace and security. We were told that the people of Gaza who have been blockaded, starved, crippled, crushed, and killed since 2006 somehow constituted an existential threat to Israel. We suspected lies and felt called to go see for ourselves.

Our time in Gaza was brief – too brief – but we did not find there what we were told to find. We did not find danger or hostility. We did not find hateful people bent on violence. We found shattered, suffering people without homes and loved ones, but who still managed hospitality. We walked on the beach where four boys playing football were killed last August. A family there invited us to join them for tea. They said “Welcome to Gaza.”

We did not find people who do not value life or their children or peace. We found mothers who are desperate to know what to do with their frightened, hungry babies. Mothers who asked us to tell their stories back home. We found Gazans guiding their children through play, music and storytelling therapy to try to heal their broken psyches. We found children who are the sole survivors in their families.

We found hospitals and clinics doing the best they can to give care despite too few doctors and nurses, too few medications or supplies, too little electricity, too few resources for complicated cases. Doing the best they can while walls and security apparatus ration out life and sustenance in the name of power and authority.

We were welcomed into homes of the poorest in a place where the majority are food insecure and living below poverty.

And among all this we met people who told us that they love Gaza and will never leave. In any other place, we would name them Patriots and revere them for their resistance to unjust occupation and oppression. But here they are called “militants” because they stand in the way of the hegemonic colonialist project that seeks only dominion.

There is no documentary evidence that Jesus ever visited Gaza, but if traditions are true that he went to Egypt in his youth, then he surely would have passed through Gaza. And there on the outskirts of hope we met, time and time again, Christ-like endurance, fortitude, courage, and faith.

We left Gaza but did not want to. The destruction and suffering was hard to witness, but we were aware that the spirit of life we found there would be hard to find again. We found the Gospel there. We knew that if Jesus were present in the region today, he would be challenging us, scolding us, reminding us to remember the difference between the things that are Caesar’s and the things that are God’s, urging us to help the people of Gaza.

So as we walked out through the checkpoints intended to protect from the people we had just been blessed by, we asked ourselves, how can so many “Christ-ians”, followers of Jesus, ignore such a situation, or worse, believe it to be justified? Exactly which gospel are they following?

Further information on the situation in Gaza: http://gisha.org/en-blog/2015/09/09/gaza-fact-check-10-myths-for-10-years-of-disengagement/
Refugees from the Middle East are not an entirely new problem. Matthew 2:1-23 portrays Jesus as a refugee whose family fled political oppression in Judea. William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible* commentary on the holy family's flight to Egypt includes a charming legend that many fans of St. Francis will appreciate: a spider, spying Jesus and his parents taking refuge in a cave weaves a web to keep the family warm and to prevent a Roman patrol from discovering them. Theologically, refugees are neighbors, people whom Jesus calls us to love.

The plight of Syrian refugees specifically, and Middle Eastern refugees more generally, is now stirring Christians to action. Many European Roman Catholic religious orders presently have facilities that exceed their needs. Some of these orders have converted that excess capacity into hotels that cater to tourists. Pope Francis, who describes himself as the son of immigrants, has told these religious orders to either use their excess capacity to host refugees or pay taxes to compete fairly with commercial enterprises. The Pope in his unprecedented address to the US Congress urged Congress to aid immigrants. Archbishop Welby has encouraged the Church of England to host refugees in empty houses and buildings. The Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, has exhorted Episcopalians to support the work of Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM).

What is new about this first migration crisis of the twenty-first century is that its magnitude overwhelms the perceived capacity of potential host nations to care for refugees. In the Middle East alone, millions of desperate people are on the move, including a million plus persons fleeing Syria. The European Union has announced that it will accept a greatly increased 160,000 refugees this year. Even if all Christians – Roman Catholic, Anglican, and others – joined wholeheartedly in assisting with those efforts, the help would still be inadequate.

My meditations on the burgeoning refugee crisis and Jesus' command that we love our neighbors repeatedly returned to three themes.

First, contrary to the self-serving carping of a GOP presidential candidate who remains unnamed to protect the guilty, people do not become refugees to access cable TV. Refugees seek improved security, more freedom, better economic options, or enhanced education opportunities for themselves or loved ones. Those are worthy aspirations, ones widely shared by all of God's children.

Second, aiding refugees is costly but mutually beneficial. Usually, helping one neighbor feels rewarding; helping a whole family leaves one feeling even better. Helping a dozen families can seem a worthwhile stretch. But helping a thousand families or a million people can feel threatening to one's way of life, likely to consume enormous amounts of time and money as well as perhaps irreversibly altering local culture. Unsurprisingly, every major wave of immigrants to the US, including refugees, has resulted in an atavistic backlash of hate language, discriminatory laws/policies, and violence.

Wise religious leaders and others supplement their calls to welcome and to care for refugees with reminders that caring, though often costly, can also be hugely rewarding. Refugees enrich their new community with their cultural heritage. Aiding refugees adds a fresh layer of meaning to the lives of those who provide the assistance. Additionally, performing the basic Christian duty of respecting the sanctity of a neighbor's life and protecting his/her human rights draws the Christian more deeply into God's embrace. In sum, when caring for our neighbors begins to feel overwhelming, it signals that we are again on the move, walking in Jesus' footsteps, passing through the valley of self-sacrifice and suffering toward the Promised Land.

Thrice in my lifetime, the US has faced what it perceived to be an overwhelming flood of refugees: first Cubans fleeing their homeland by boat after Castro seized power, second Vietnamese fleeing their homeland, again mostly by boat, after Vietnam's reunification under the Communists, and third, the illegal immigrants now arriving, mostly on foot, through the border with Mexico.

The first two times, the volume of immigrants resulted in the US rapidly changing its initial wide-open welcome to a more constricted embrace admitting relatively few. (In the case of Cuba, Castro responded to the US accepting refugees by forcing criminals, the mentally ill, and others he deemed undesirable to join the emigrants.) When refugees desperate (or forced) to leave their homeland persisted in making perilous and increasingly tragic ocean voyages, the US finally acted to ensure that refugees would have a safe haven and to devise multinational measures to reduce the flow of refugees.

This most recent flow of refugees into the US has once again triggered atavistic political outbursts, new laws to deny illegal immigrants access to basic services, and expanded border policing to keep out illegal immigrants. These efforts, which coincided with a US recession, marginal economic and political improvements elsewhere, and aggressive local campaigns to apprehend and then deport illegal immigrants, have been effective. The number of illegal immigrants peaked in 2007 at 12.2 million (4% of the US population) and has since stabilized at 11.3 million (3.5% of the population). (Jens Manuel Krogstad and Jeffrey S. Passel, "5 facts about illegal immigration in the US," Pew Research Center, 24 July 2015, at http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/24/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/.) Sadly, the US response virtually ignores the grinding poverty, lack of hope, and oppression underlying this massive tide of illegal immigrants.

These precedents suggested the third theme in my meditations on the Syrian refugee crisis: that welcoming refugees is an essential but only partial solution to an overwhelming flood of refugees. An effective solution also requires addressing the
forces that push people to become refugees. Aiding refugees without working to alleviate the forces that push people to become refugees is similar to treating workplace injuries without trying to prevent other workers from being injured in the same way.

In Syria, for example, several evils are prevailing over the common good. The Assad regime takes whatever steps it believes necessary to remain in power. Its past actions include bombing its own citizens, using chemical weapons against its own citizens, and the use of torture. Furthermore, Syria by renewing its conscription drive while easing emigration restrictions has also exacerbated the flood of refugees. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) causes yet more Syrians to seek refuge. ISIS is fighting to re-establish an Islamic caliphate in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East. ISIS employs pornographic violence and genocide to coerce compliance with its version of Islam by an often, though not always, unwilling populace. ISIS treats non-Islamic groups such as Christians and Yazidis particularly harshly. Other groups fighting against the Assad regime contribute to violence and instability in the region by seizing every opportunity to promote their own agenda, e.g., Kurdish independence.

The United Nations, Europe, and the US share some responsibility – indirectly and directly – for evil prevailing in Syria. Indirectly, refugee relief efforts in states near Syria are underfunded and grossly insufficient to serve the needs of the tide of refugees. Meanwhile, European Union (EU) expansion, EU laws that establish a right to asylum, and various EU internal policies have eased the difficulties refugees face in getting to and remaining in the EU.

Concurrently, living in Syria has become more hazardous, a condition for which the US and its allies must acknowledge some direct responsibility. The US led anti-Syrian coalition flew more airstrikes in a year (August 2014 – August 2015) than the US and its allies flew in five years of the Afghan war (January 2010 – August 2015). Those strikes, according to US military data, released 22,478 weapons over Syria and Iraq exceeding the 20,237 released over Afghanistan (Sudarsan Raghavan, "Chart: How much more the U.S. has bombed the Islamic State than the Taliban," Washington Post, September 18, 2015). In spite of these thousands of sorties, Assad remains in power and ISIS still controls substantial territory.

Airpower alone cannot end Assad's regime or defeat ISIS. Inserting US, NATO, or Russian foreign ground forces is much more likely to increase violence and instability than to achieve positive results.

Stauning the flow of refugees begins with the US and its allies acknowledging that limits exist to what states, including the US, can achieve militarily and diplomatically, with respect to projecting our own interests on other states. The failed states of Iraq and Afghanistan are poignant reminders of the consequences of ignoring those limits. Saddam Hussein and the Taliban arguably would have inflicted less suffering and death on their people than has occurred during and after the two US invasions. Christians, actively led by groups such as the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, have a message policymakers need to hear: employing military force will not bring peace to the Middle East.

The roots of conflict in the Middle East reach deeply into a sinful legacy of colonialism, racism, economic exploitation, support of authoritarian regimes deemed favorable to US or Western interests, and religious bias. (This is not to ignore or minimize other roots of conflict in the Middle East, e.g., establishment of the State of Israel under the aegis of the United Nations in 1948.) Non-Middle Eastern states and organizations attempting to impose a new normal perpetuate that sinful legacy. The messy, disruptive, uncertain, and almost assuredly sometimes violent creation of a new and better normal is something that only the people in the Middle East can do.
One of my best memories of General Convention this past summer was the sea of purple vestments that descended on the streets of Salt Lake City, Utah early one morning. Seventy-nine bishops gathered with other clergy, laypeople, and community members for a march against gun violence. As a recent seminary graduate, I was glad to see my church putting its values into action. This march came just days after the brutal massacre in Charleston, South Carolina, that left eight members of Emanuel AME Church and their pastor, dead. The shooting in Charleston had illuminated the ugliest aspects of our society—racial hatred and seemingly never-ending violence. It had also challenged people of faith to wrestle with forgiveness, justice, and hope.

A few months after General Convention I entered a Clinical Pastoral Education residency program in York, Pennsylvania. In the two months since I have been here, the other chaplain residents and I have encountered a full spectrum mental and physical wounds, including those related to gun violence. When a person comes into the hospital with a gunshot wound, there is no time to think about any of the larger societal issues. The medical staff works quickly to address the physical needs of the wounded person and we, as chaplains, look for ways to address his/her spiritual and emotional needs, or those of friends and family. We encounter fear, anger, helplessness; and we offer supportive counseling, prayer, whatever we can.

In recent weeks, as details of the Oregon school shooting and subsequent school shootings have unfolded in the media, I have been jolted back to awareness of just how broadly gun violence affects our society. I have also seen how stuck we are in our thinking about guns. Every conversation seems to boil down to the same opposing views: one side thinks access to guns is the problem; the other side blames unstable people. These conversations fail to address what is really at stake — our sense of security, our faith in creation and humanity, our desire to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Violence against strangers—whether it is targeted as in the Charleston murders; or somewhat indiscriminate as in the Oregon shooting—makes all of us feel helpless. I understand why, for some, it seems that the best solution to gun violence is to arm more people. I too have imagined myself in the heroic savior role, like Liam Neeson in the movie Taken, blasting away all of the bad guys and rescuing myself and others. But as a Christian, I have to ask: Where does my help come from? I have to remember that it does not come from guns, or revenge, or my own desire to be a savior. My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Perhaps we could shift our conversations to acknowledge how overwhelming it is, for all of us, to live in a world with such terrible violence. Something is lost when we ignore our fear, our anger, our helplessness. What would it look like if we acted from a place of seeking God’s help in the midst of our uncertainty? Perhaps it looks like a sea of purple vests; or laws that consider both our rights and our safety; or a prayer with a weeping mother in a hospital hallway.

Anne Marie Witchger was a member of the EPF Young Adult Delegation at the 78th General Convention this past summer in Salt Lake City, Utah.
EPF Young Adult Shepherd, TJ Geiger Reflects on the Death Penalty at General Convention

Representatives to the General Convention will address myriad social issues, but only one will literally impact the lives of over three thousand Americans: the death penalty.

The Episcopal Church was at the forefront in opposition to the death penalty among Protestant churches. In 1958, the General Convention adopted the position that “[t]he Church believes that each individual is sacred, as a child of God, and that to legalize killing of an offender is to deny the basic Christian doctrines of forgiveness of sin and the power of redemption, and that mercy is a Christian duty.”

The church’s opposition to the death penalty has been reaffirmed and expanded in the last five decades, the most recent affirmation being made in 2002.

Despite ongoing efforts across the country to abolish capital punishment, thirty-one states still impose death penalty. Last year alone, 35 people were executed in the United States.

Several deaths were so gruesome and botched by state officials that a self-imposed moratorium has been put into effect in many states awaiting a ruling from the United States Supreme Court on whether drugs used by states violate the Eight Amendment of the Constitution, which bars cruel and unusual punishment.

A concurrent troubling issue is the possibility of executing an innocent person. Since 1973, states have released 153 inmates slated for death because they were found to be innocent! The latest individual to be exonerated was Anthony Hinton, an Alabama man incarcerated for almost thirty years for a crime he did not commit.

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship is supporting a resolution from New Hampshire that is a logical expansion of the church’s current position. It was written before Nebraska banned the death penalty, so it reflects 32 states. The resolution reaffirms the Episcopal Church’s opposition to the death penalty, and:

Requests that this resolution be forwarded to governors to repeal immediately the death penalty laws in the 32 states where it is still allowed and also will also forward it to the President of the United States to end the Death Penalty in all federal jurisdictions, and

Requests that the resolution be forwarded to the bishops in the 32 states where the death penalty is still legal in order to encourage them to appoint task forces of clergy and lay persons to develop a witness to eliminate the Death Penalty in their particular state.

Each state has its own political dynamics that can be only addressed effectively by the residents of that state. EPF supports the New Hampshire resolution because it calls for a locally developed plan based upon the political climate of each state, rather than a national plan that fails to recognize regional differences.

EPF will be working in conjunction with all delegates at the General Convention in an effort to erase the death penalty stain from our social conscience. Talk with the delegate to the convention from your parish and ask them to support EPF’s resolution. If you plan to attend the convention, go to EPF’s booth and you will be given an update on what you can do to help pass the resolution.

In a religion established on the non-violent philosophy of a leader who was innocently murdered based on perjured testimony, surely Christians have an extraordinary duty to work towards ending the death penalty. Let’s continue the work in Salt Lake City.

SAVE THE DATE!

Thursday, March 3, 2016
Wilmington, DE
Episcopal Urban Caucus EPF Luncheon
EPF Executive Director Allison Liles, speaker
Please Join Us.
http://www.episcopalurbancaucus.org/ for more information

Membership Reminder

If you have any questions regarding your dues or membership status, please contact Shannon at 312-922-8628 or email epfmemberservices@gmail.com
Introducing the New EPF Treasurer, Robert Burgess

Like many young men who came of age in the 1960s, I did so under the shadow of the Vietnam War and the draft. By about 1970 if not earlier, I talked myself into believing that I was a conscientious objector. My home priest and church at the time were not exactly friendly to those with such beliefs. For that and other reasons, I lost interest in religion. John Lennon seemed more sympathetic. Imagine that.

Fortunately, if my memory serves me correctly, 1972 was the last year young men were actually drafted. My lottery number that year was 280 something. Only the first dozen or so lottery numbers were activated. America was tiring of war. Thus, that fall I attended college with the plan of studying English literature.

Fast forward to 1974, I had spent a year and a half in school before running out of college grants and funds. The Michigan economy was in recession. Jobs were sparse. I naively enlisted in the United States Navy for the GI Bill and guaranteed training as a journalist. That’s the closest the Navy has to English literature. Not sure too many veterans can say this, but in my four years of active duty I never touched a loaded gun once. The one time in boot camp we were required to go to the gun range, I had pneumonia and was in sick bay overnight.

Perhaps the most prominent remembrances I have from my Navy days took place in 1975. In the spring of that year, the North Vietnamese overran Saigon and the United States evacuated. Most of the Seventh fleet home-based in Japan were called to assist in that evacuation. My ship was the one Seventh Fleet ship which remained near Japan rather than travel to the South China Sea to aid in April.

My ship visited Guam a few weeks after the fall of Saigon. To this day, I have a vivid image of that island or at least what it looked like in spring 1975. It was covered by a massive tent city of refugees. In the camps, there were young Vietnamese women dressed in ao dai clutching pictures of American service men which they showed the Marine guards and sailors who were nearby, asking questions like, “Do you know Joe (or Fred or Bill?)” Thousands of Vietnamese children, old women and men were everywhere. Today, refugees of war or violence flee Syria, the Congo, Central America. In 1975, it was Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos. In earlier generations refugees have fled other lands. The images of refugees are always heart rending and disturbing.

Not long after visiting Guam, my ship returned to Japan. In my two years based there, I grew to appreciate that country’s culture. I have ascended Mt. Fuji to view the sunrise and watched monks praying at the Great Buddha in Kamakura.

I also visited Hiroshima. I am not sure how much time we spent in the Peace Memorial Museum in that city, perhaps a couple hours. For someone of my generation, touring Hiroshima is a second hand experience of war, unlike seeing the refugees on Guam. In Guam, I was overwhelmed by so many Vietnamese refugees who were then living in temporary tent cities. In Hiroshima, even though it was 30 years after the dropping of the atomic bomb, I was simply overwhelmed. Images of the cruelty of atomic warfare, images of shadows of people who once were flesh and blood are difficult to view. Tens of thousands dead instantly is hard to comprehend. To this day, reading the annual August proclamation of the mayor of Hiroshima seems the least that I can do to remember the insanity of atomic warfare.

In 2006, I joined Veterans for Peace about the same time as I first became a member of Episcopal Peace Fellowship (EPF).

I recently attended my first meeting of the EPF National Executive Council in Chicago. Chicago is also where John Dominic Crossan teaches at Depaul. He and other scholars from the Jesus seminar seemed to agree that the Bible most accurately quotes Jesus when he said “blessed are the meek” and similar words. Perhaps, Professor Crossan is right. God bless our brothers and sisters who work with Doctors (and Nurses) without Borders, UN Commission on Refugees, Episcopal Migration Ministries, and other organizations who comfort the meek fleeing wars and violence.

We humans have spent centuries inventing and perfecting the tools of war. Too many refugees and some veterans know that all too well.
**Financial Report**

Thank you to our Peace Partners!

Instead of the usual chart of numbers, we’d like to take a moment to say thank you to our Peace Partners, both the individuals and the congregations that make up the EPF Peace Partners.

We currently have nearly 60 Peace Partner Congregations across the United States. These are parishes that wish to be known for their commitment to promoting peace and social justice. These parishes have contributed an average of $250 each to the support the work of EPF. We have a growing number of individuals that have also pledged to help EPF at this level, through either monthly contributions or by an annual donation. If your parish is interested in this ministry, contact EPF at epf@epfnational.org, call us at 312-922-8628 or check out the application at http://epfnational.org/sermon/peace-congregations-application/

You can view our list at http://tinyurl.com/epfpeacepartners.

**If your congregation has recently become a Peace Partner Congregation, be on the look out for your “welcome kit” and for your listing on our EPF website. We are in the process up updating the Peace Partner Congregation list and contacts on our website.**

**Book Reviews**

By Newland Smith

The Blue between Sky and Water: a novel & Children of the Stone: the power of music in a hard land


These two books give voice to the amazing steadfastness of Palestinians in spite of dispossession and occupation. For Abulhawa it is the voices of Gazans. For Tolan it is the voice of Ramzi Aburedwan, who grew up in the Al Amari refugee camp near Ramallah and at the age of eight was caught on camera as he was throwing a stone at the beginning of the First Intifada. Ramzi grew up to become a violinist who realized his vision of a music school whose orchestra would give performances, many of which were impromptu, in the West Bank. Abulhawa was born of Palestinian refugees and is now living in Philadelphia. Her first novel, *Mornings in Jenin*, tells the travails of a Palestinian family during the Nakba and the subsequent sixty years from the West Bank to Lebanon and America. She has now written a novel of the struggles of an extended Gazan family’s resistance to Israeli occupation and military assaults from the 1940s to the present.

Sandy Tolan in his book, *The Lemon Tree* (2006) addressed both the Israeli and the Palestinian side of the conflict. *Children of the Stone* focuses on the West Bank as Tolan shows “what it’s like for ordinary Palestinians to live under a military occupation.” (p. xxv) Tolan weaves Ramzi’s life and his fellow Palestinian musicians with the ongoing occupation both in the text and in a hundred pages of footnotes. As Tolan says in the Introduction, “this book is the story of Palestinian children learning and playing music in a war zone.” (p. xiii) This book is based on five years of research and reporting based on extensive interviews with Ramzi and the other people in this book including Daniel Barenboim and Mariam Said who supported Ramzi in his founding of the school, Al Kamandjati, Arabic for the Violinist.

As Ramzi was establishing Al Kamandjati, he was also a member of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra founded by David Barenboim and Edward Said. But after struggling unsuccessfully for four years to persuade his Israeli colleagues to support a statement condemning the Occupation, in the late summer of 2010, Ramzi left the orchestra. Tolan writes, “The Divan’s refusal to criticize the occupation meant it tacitly accepted the situation as ‘normal’. Ramzi was convinced the best way to counter the normalization charges … would be for the Divan orchestra to draft a document denouncing Israel’s occupation of his homeland.” (p. 222) Music, for Ramzi, his teachers and his students, was both an inner freedom and “an assertion of independence in direct resistance to the occupation itself.” (p. xxiv)

Abulhawa’s novel begins with the Nakba when the Palestinian inhabitants of Beit Daris are either killed or driven by the Israeli military to Gaza. One Israeli soldier kills Mariam, the sister of Nazmiyeh whose life is traced in all of its tragedy and joy until 2014. Although Nazmiyeh loses her husband, her sister, and a grandson and her oldest son is captured by the Israeli military and sentenced to life imprisonment, she still throws impromptu parties. Women all over the neighborhood bring food and people dance dabka after dabka. Why? Nazmiyeh’s answer: “‘Because life is magical and gives us second chances that should be celebrated.’ Many agreed, adding that a good hafla [celebration] was the best traditional medicine in their seaside prison.” (p. 233).

Sam Bahour, Palestinian American entrepreneur, sums up well the essence of both of these books when he says, “Every Palestinian carries around two hearts. One is similar to that which all others carry; it keeps us alive, active, working, loving … and hopeful that tomorrow will bring a better day. The second is very difficult to explain; it is the one that carries within it dark and heavy memories of our existence … There are days when the heavy heart crams the other heart into a corner of our chest … But I refuse to despair. I refuse to be defined by this conflict. I do not want to mold my existence into days of commemorations of exile, massacres, death and destruction. I refuse to live in the past, but I also refuse to forget the past.” (“The Sabra and Shatila massacre is personal” http://epalestine.blogspot.com/2015/09/epalestine-sabra-and-shatila-massacre.html) Each of these books captures these two hearts in the lives of Ramzi, Nazmiyeh and their fellow Palestinians.
In his recent encyclical letter “Laudato Si’” Pope Francis calls our attention to climate change and our care for our common home. He makes connections in what he calls “integral ecology.” “The violence in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the air and in all forms of life.” Integral ecology insists that our treatment of the poor and marginalized is intimately connected to the consequences of our selfish and poor stewardship of the environment. The historic suffering and movement of refugees from the Middle East and Africa is intimately connected to wars in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Nigeria and distorted religious understandings as well as a global insatiable hunger for fossil fuels. The violence in our hearts that incessantly seeks security in the fully armed nuclear arsenal of too many countries is connected to gun violence and the proliferation of weapons in our homes, our classrooms and our streets. A global ethical respect for the dignity of human life surely must include the elimination of the death penalty. Real peace, shalom, insists on the integral understanding of causes and effects.

Science and theology find common ground in integral ecology. The Brazilian eco-liberation theologian Leonardo Boff writes,” The universe of energies is constituted by a web of relationships. All things, even sub-atomic particles, exist for, with and through one another. Nothing exists outside relationship. To exist is to be in relation.” Our Trinitarian understanding of God is also an existence of relationships.

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship could be described as a “big tent” organization. Peacemaking for us engages abolishing nuclear weapons, conscientious objection to military service, the death penalty, gun violence and gun control, reconciliation involving past and present racial, gender and sexual orientation discrimination, non violence training at home and in Haiti, trauma healing from domestic violence and the systemic violence of poverty, a just peace in Palestine and Israel, the prevention of armed conflict that is the consequence of climate change, promoting economic development for peacemaking, exploring the dynamics of homelessness and young adult urban pilgrimages. And the list goes on. Some have argued that our agenda is too broad and our effectiveness is diluted. Important issues are not given the necessary attention. Certainly a valid critical question is “how do you do all that with only two part time staff?”

There is good reason to worry that our operating strategy is too big of a tent. Yet how do we live out only part of the Gospel? In Luke 4 Jesus sets forth his mission,” The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news for the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.” Matthew 25 also offers us a daunting expectation of our work. Hear Jesus’ response to the concerns of his disciples when after his teaching he expected them to feed the hungry crowds. We don’t have the money or physical resources to handle this crowd of 5000. Trusting in the abundance of God, Jesus offers the satisfaction that can be felt from only a few fish and some pieces of bread. Our work as EPF can only know such satisfaction by putting our trust in God.

Integral ecology looks for relationships in our work for justice and peace. Not everyone needs to be involved in all our issues. Still we cannot draw in our tent. We must have more financial resources and people working on the local level to address the critical issues that make up the web of peacemaking relationships. “Faith with out works is dead” notes the Epistle of James. Francis of Assisi, a primary source of inspiration for the current Pope and many others, heard a voice from the cross asking him to “rebuild my church.” Perhaps too literally Francis foolishly thought that meant to rebuild the broken down church of San Damiano outside Assisi. He set about doing that stone by stone, in the cold of winter and the scorching heat of summer. In time it became apparent to Francis that the church that God needed rebuilt was not just the small church of San Damiano but the people of God. EPF is charged with relentlessly proclaiming the Gospel of Peace. And we do that stone by stone.

There are so many ways each of us can heal the violence in our hearts and the hearts of our brothers and sisters. We need only to start. There are those in this world who choose to make war, to greedily create intolerable poverty, to violate the dignity of all of God’s children. They choose to seek selfish worldly power and by their policies and actions oppress others. They choose to exploit natural resources for their economic and “security” needs disregarding the agony of hunger, displacement and desperation that results from the Darwinian ethic that both nature and portions of humanity are commodities and expendable. They, too, are relentless.

We must choose to be peacemakers. To be “doers of God’s word and not just hearers.” We must practice peace daily, stone by stone. Brothers and Sisters look into your hearts to discern how you are being called to be a promoter of integrated peace and justice. Share your aspirations with others and EPF. We need you time, talents and treasure to do this important work. In faith, we will see the universality of peace, integrated peace, that is humbly offered by and through Jesus.

Peace,
Will Wauters TSSF
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News and Upcoming Events for 2016

*EPF is updating our member database systems. We want to keep in touch with all active members, Peace Partner congregations and Chapters. Make sure you are current on your membership dues.*

Winter/Spring 2016 Dates
Dec 3-5 Christian Peace Circle Retreat, Stony Point Center, NY
Dec 18– Last day to order from the EPF store for 2015 http://epfstore.myshopify.com/
Jan 15 Young Adult Network, Ambassadors Application Deadline
Feb 18-20 PIN Leadership Retreat, Albuquerque, NM
March 2-5 Episcopal Urban Caucus, Wilmington, DE
March 3 SAVE THE DATE EPF Luncheon, Episcopal Urban Caucus, Allison Liles, speaker, Wilmington DE
April 1-3 EPF National Executive Council Meeting, Dallas, TX
April 15-18 Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Arlington, VA
Episcopal Peace Fellowship
PO Box 15
Claysburg, PA 16625

Isn’t it time you joined an EPF Action Group?

Looking to connect with an EPF Chapter in your area?
Interested in starting a Chapter for your Parish or Region?
Go to epfnational.org or call 312-922-8628 for more info!

Our current action groups include:
Death Penalty Abolition
Gun Violence Prevention
Palestine/Israel Network
Non-Violence Training
Young Adult Network

Let us know if you are Interested in energizing a group:

Care for Creation
Conscientious Objection
Iran
Nuclear Abolition/Disarmament