

The Wall

A Pax Christi Peace Education Workshop



A workshop exploring the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. With a particular focus on the separation wall in the West Bank these activities encourage young people to critically engage with arguments from all sides of the conflict and to develop an understanding of the demands made on the peacemaker in this longstanding conflict.



Activity: Checkpoint

To move between Israel and Palestine for personal visits and employment Palestinians have to pass through Israeli military checkpoints. They have to have the correct permits, and even then they are not guaranteed to be let through. This activity attempts to give some sense of the frustrations of life behind barriers where checkpoints regulate and restrict movement and limit access to work, services and family.

Have the group gather outside and ensure the room is ready prepared with some treat—cakes or biscuits work well. Announce that the treat is awaiting them but only let some of the young people in. As they queue to enter send some of them to one side without reason and have them wait, letting others in to enjoy the rewards.

How did it feel for those left out? Those allowed to enter? What were you thinking as you were turned away and made to wait? How did it make you feel about the guards? Did the guards enjoy their job?

With a little advance planning it is possible to have a couple of young people playing the role of guards. You could decide on criteria for admitting people (for example, anybody wearing jeans is kept out) or keep it wholly irrational.

Discuss: Holy Land?

What do we mean when we speak of a Holy Land? What makes a land sacred or blessed? Here the group is encouraged to reflect on texts and their own experiences to develop their thinking about how and why land might be considered holy.

Think: Our Sacred Spaces

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:5)

Is there a place that is important to you? What makes that place significant to you? What memories, people or events make that place special?

Do you own the land you live on? How do you feel about where you live—would you call it home?

In your area have there ever been any conflicts over land? Maybe between neighbours or whole communities?

Do you know any young people who are part of a gang that identifies with a particular area?

Do people disagree about how land should be used - for housing, supermarkets, nature reserves, parks or play areas? How do these disputes get resolved?

The Holy Land of Israel/Palestine is sacred to three of the world's major religions. Christians, Muslims and the Jewish people trace their roots to this area and have some of their holiest pilgrimage sites there.

What do you think of when you imagine the town of Bethlehem? What images come to mind?

Look at the images on the PowerPoint *Images of Bethlehem* (see www.paxchristi.org.uk/thewall.html)

Read the witness testimonies in the bubbles. What picture do these give of this Holy Land and life there for young people?

“At the time of the suicide bombing, I was at home. When I heard about it, I knew that my brother was there... My aunt tells me to come over. While I was at her place, my parents went out to look for my brother. Around two-thirty in the morning, my uncle woke me up to tell me. That moment I felt that it couldn't be true, that it couldn't be my brother who was added to the list of those murdered... For something like this, there is no forgiveness!”

(Racheli, aged 13, lives in Haifa, Israel)

"At four o'clock in the morning, while we were asleep, more than 20 soldiers surrounded our home. The soldiers began forcibly knocking on the door with their guns and screamed: 'Open the door'... the soldier aimed his gun at my grandfather. The soldiers forced everyone out of the house... They made us sit on the street... One of the soldiers opened the fridge and threw on the floor flour, eggs, oil, plates etc. Not one of the soldiers objected to what was happening, on the contrary, other soldiers broke the kitchen cupboard with the gun and threw on the floor plates and cups." (Laila is 14 and lives in a refugee camp in the Palestinian town of Tul Karem)

"Everywhere in the land righteousness and justice will be done. Because everyone will do what is right there will be peace and security forever." (Isaiah 32: 16-17)

Read how Isaiah understands what a Holy Land will be like. Do our own sacred spaces reflect this vision? What about Israel/Palestine? What does it mean for us today? How does it call us to act?



Views of the Wall

In 2002, as part of their response to an increase in violence, the government of Israel began constructing a security wall in order to protect Israelis from Palestinian terrorist attacks. This barrier became the subject of a case at the International Court of Justice to debate the legality of the construction. In this activity the group is encouraged to break open some of the issues towards further understanding of the conflict and determining whether they support the wall.

Divide the participants into four small groups. Each group will take one of the roles in the presentation: **Palestinian Community**, **Israeli Defence Force**, **Israeli Community** and **Human Rights Workers**, and should be given copies of the appropriate role card.

You will need copies of the role cards for this activity. If you are a particularly large number then you might like to create a fifth group to act as judges; listening to the evidence, asking questions and delivering a verdict.

Encourage the groups to engage with the information, place themselves in the shoes of the people and prepare a presentation which explains the wall from their point of view.

Watch each presentation in turn—you could leave time for questions if you consider it appropriate—and at the end the whole group can act as jury in voting for whether they think the Wall is a good thing or not. Invite some people to share why they voted as they did.

Take Action

During a visit to the Holy Land in May 2009, Pope Benedict XVI pleaded for an end to violence: "**No more bloodshed, no more fighting, no more terrorism, no more war.**" Is this a realistic aim? How can we play our part in making this happen?

1. How could you help people who have been forced to leave their homeland due to violence or conflict? Is there a local centre for asylum seekers or refugees where you could get involved or help out?
2. The ongoing conflict makes travel outside their country difficult for young Palestinians and many feel isolated. Could you support them by writing or emailing? Could your school build links with a school in Palestine?
3. How could you tell other young people about what you have learned of Israel/Palestine? Could you organise a Holy Land evening with food from the region? Do you know anyone who has been to Israel/Palestine who could speak to your group? Pax Christi could help.
4. How could you stand up for young people in Palestine and Israel? Could you write to your MP asking what they are doing to support the peace process in Israel/Palestine? (www.writetothem.com)
5. Pray for Peace in the Holy Land of Israel / Palestine. Plan a liturgy reflecting on land, walls and stones.
6. Make your school/parish aware. Why not make a display to highlight this situation and the need for prayer, support and solidarity? Perhaps you could build a model of a section of the wall as a focus to your display.

Role Play Cards

Copy and cut up the four role cards before distributing them to their respective groups.

You are representatives of the **Israeli Community**.

Two years ago your younger brother was killed in a suicide bombing outside a café in central Jerusalem. Your family was devastated and remains nervous about going out of the house, and worried for the safety of your young children.

You are concerned for the security of your people.

The fence is being built solely to protect Israelis against Palestinian terrorism. The threat from suicide bombers is real.

The route of the fence protects as many Israelis as possible, keeps terrorists out and saves lives. You have friends living in settlements in the West Bank who need to be kept safe.

The Palestinian authorities have no control over their people and cannot be trusted to control their own borders.



You are representatives of the **Palestinian Community**.

You and your family live in Bethlehem, a town completely surrounded by the wall.

To leave Bethlehem you must pass through a military checkpoint. Your father works in Jerusalem and must leave for work at 4am as he can be waiting for three hours to get through the checkpoint.

He has a work permit but it is very difficult for young people to get permits.

Your sister lives in Ramallah. The thirty-minute journey can now take five hours because of the number of checkpoints along the road.

You feel the wall is more about punishment than security. The effect on people's daily lives and the humiliation faced at the checkpoints is building up resentment amongst Palestinians. Peace will only be achieved when Israel stops building the wall and Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, when Palestinians control their own borders and the occupation is ended.

The wall has badly affected the Palestinian economy and you worry that you will be unable to find work after your studies.

The standard of living in Palestine is increasingly becoming like that of a developing country.





Role Play Cards

You are **Human Rights Workers** monitoring the checkpoints.

You have a variety of concerns:

Palestinians are turned back from the checkpoints even when they have permits.

The queues can take several hours as only one person is allowed through the gate at a time.

The checkpoint is often late opening for no clear reason.

The wall has cut off many Palestinians from their land, their jobs, schools, health and social services. It has badly affected the local economy.

The UN declared the wall illegal in 2003, calling it “an unlawful annexation”. The government of Israel dismissed the report.

The wall being built on Palestinian land rather than the border leaves the Israeli authorities accused of merely trying to expand their borders.

Many Palestinians are leaving altogether.

The problems faced by the Palestinian population clearly demonstrate that the wall breaks Israel’s obligation, under international humanitarian law, to ensure the humane treatment and well-being of the people living under its occupation.



You are **Soldiers in the Israeli Defence Force**.

Military service is compulsory for all Israeli young people aged 18 and over.

Your job sees you staffing checkpoints and roadblocks, being part of incursions to Palestinian towns to impose curfews or oversee house demolitions and act as an army of defence in Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory.

You feel vulnerable to attack and welcome the Security Fence which helps control entry to Israel and protect Israel from terrorist attacks.

You believe it is better to separate people who are unable to live peacefully side by side.

Israel has a right to self defence and to protect its citizens and the wall is a good security strategy.

You are proud of your country and your role in helping ensure its continued existence.

Israel came into existence in 1948 for the Jewish people who have suffered so much persecution throughout history. We must defend ourselves.



Background to the Conflict

Additional resources and background information can be found online at:

www.paxchristi.org.uk/thewall.html

Until 1948 the land now called Israel was known as Palestine. During World War I Britain promised to support the establishment of an independent Arab state which would also include the area of Palestine. However Britain also made a conflicting promise by supporting calls for a Jewish national home in Palestine. In 1918 the League of Nations granted Britain colonial authority over the areas now known as Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jordan.

In November 1947 the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into two states with the Jewish state taking fifty-four percent of the land. The Zionist leadership accepted the plan but the Palestinian Arabs did not. War broke out between Israel and the surrounding Arab states.

On 15th May 1948 Zionist leaders declared a new state of Israel taking seventy-eight percent of the land and creating more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees. This left Palestine with the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

An armistice agreement, signed in 1949, created a temporary ceasefire boundary. This Armistice Line is known as the Green Line.

"I live in a settlement in the West Bank. Because of the conflict we have a military escort on the bus. If that doesn't show up we can't go to school... The Arabs think this is their land and we Jews think God gave it to us. There is no way of proving who is right. But I'm not willing to give up and leave."

Tsippi, aged 13

"I have lived in a refugee camp in the West Bank all my life. My family originally lived in the village of Malha near Jerusalem. They had orchards, olive groves, vineyards, fig trees and fertile fields. In 1948 the Israeli army took over the village and destroyed most of the houses."

Maysoon, aged 12

After the Six Day war (with Egypt, Jordan and Syria) in 1967 Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip—including East Jerusalem. Israel confiscated, and built settlements on, Palestinian land. Highways connected Israeli territories while bypassing Palestinian towns. Israel also controlled the water resources in the West Bank.

All of this led to intense discontent amongst Palestinians, the majority of whom lived in poverty with limited job opportunities and restrictions on their movement and trade.

The Yom Kippur war in October 1973 saw Egypt and Syria attack Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. US intervention secured victory for Israel.

In December 1987 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza started a mass uprising, or *intifada*, against Israeli occupation of their land. Hundreds of thousands of people of all ages joined the resistance. Actions ranging from stone-throwing and civil disobedience to gunfire and grenades resulted in the deaths of 170 Israelis.

Israeli forces fought back and upwards of a thousand Palestinians were killed between 1987 and 1991.

The occupation has been a significant cause of extreme poverty for those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Sixty-four percent of Palestinians live below the poverty line. The majority of the Palestinian population now exists on less than £1.10 a day¹

¹ Christian Aid (2007) Life Lines

In June 2002 Israel began to build the separation wall/fence. The assumption was that the wall would follow the border established in 1967 marking the frontier between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However most of the separation barrier is being constructed on Palestinian land inside the West Bank in order to encompass and protect Israeli settlements.

A second *intifada* followed in September 2000 and led to an increase in suicide bombers. Israel's response was increasingly repressive. Collective punishment of Palestinians became common, including curfews, house demolitions and road closures. Tens of thousands of acres of Palestinian land was confiscated and torture of Palestinian prisoners widespread.

Throughout all of this international peace initiatives have taken place. To date all have failed and the work of finding a just and peaceful solution continues.



Sumud

Faith and Hope in Bethlehem



Sumud is Arabic for *Steadfastness*.

Sumud, for Palestinians, means preserving deep roots with their homeland, remaining on the land with hope for the future. It is a refusal to give up on Palestinian rights and dignity.

Below are a number of organisations, both Palestinian and Israeli, working nonviolently for a just peace in the Holy Land, working to maintain and promote Palestinian rights and dignity, and reflecting the spirit of Sumud.

OliveAid (www.oliveaid.com)

The olive tree is of great significance to the Palestinian people. Not only is it a source of income and financial security but it is also a symbol of the Palestinian people. The wall and occupation have meant hundreds of thousands of trees being uprooted with many more separated from the people and lost to them. OliveAid replants olive groves and thereby provides families with a sustainable income from olive based products.

The Arab Education Institute (www.aeicenter.org)

AEI is a community and youth project working to empower people's participation in public life and action for peace and justice. The building of a free and democratic Palestine, and sharing the realities of life in Palestine with a broad audience, are two of their principle aims. AEI is a member of Pax Christi International.

The Lajee Center (www.lajee.org)

The Aida refugee camp is the home of people displaced from their original villages ever since the war of 1948. The Lajee Center (Lajee means refugee) provides cultural, educational, social and developmental opportunities for young people.

B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (www.btselem.org)

B'Tselem endeavours to document and educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories, combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel. B'Tselem in Hebrew literally means "in the image of," and is also used as a synonym for human dignity.

Breaking the Silence (www.shovrimshatika.org)

Breaking the Silence is an organization of veteran combatants who served in the Israeli military during the Second Intifada and have taken it upon themselves to expose the Israeli public to the routine situations of everyday life in the Occupied Territories.

Shministim (www.shministim.com)

A network of Israeli teenagers who refuse to take part in an army that illegally occupies the Palestinian Territories and who are willing to pay the price for their struggle against the occupation and in favour of peace.

For more information or to discuss other possibilities for acts of solidarity with the Christian community of Bethlehem please contact the youth and schools outreach worker at Pax Christi.



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