

## PARTNERPLAN

# Kate McDonald - Israel April 2019

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Dear Friends,

Al-Masih qam! Hakkan qam. Alleluia! The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!



At 6am on Easter Sunday, eleven of us gathered in the gardens of the Scots Hotel to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. The major holidays of Easter and Christmas are unpredictable times here in Tiberias, a predominately Jewish town. Most people choose to worship instead in Jerusalem or Bethlehem, so I never know who might show up. When the start of Pesach (Passover) and Easter fall so closely together as they did this year, it adds to the uncertainty as members of the congregation in mixed marriages are usually celebrating Pesach with extended family and unable to attend our Easter celebrations.

There is something beautiful and intimate though about worshipping with a small gathering of believers in a beautiful garden overlooking the Sea of Galilee as the sun rises, and we continued our fellowship over breakfast at the hotel.

At our last Kirk Session meeting, we agreed to change our Sunday service time from 6pm to 10am, starting at Easter. It's more convenient for those who attend regularly and will allow a few others who previously weren't attending to come more often. But even on Easter, I wasn't expecting more than a few people to show up. However, we had a wonderful crowd including families who were visiting Jewish friends and relatives at kibbutzim nearby, a few guests and former volunteers from Beit Bracha, a Christian guesthouse in Migdal, and a young couple who were married at St Andrew's Jerusalem several years ago. I felt the joy of the resurrection fill my heart as we sang the great hymns of Easter.



I took a couple of days off after Easter, and on Tuesday went with a friend to Mar Jaris, the 6th century monastery of St George of Choziba in Wadi Qelt in the West Bank. As we drove south towards Jerusalem, we passed over 30km of traffic backed up along one of the

main motorways in central Israel. It has been an unusually cold and wet winter here (on Easter Sunday, it was the same temperature in Tiberias as it was in Edinburgh), and Tuesday was one of

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the first warm days we've had. Because of the Pesach holidays, it seemed everyone in Israel was heading north to the national parks on the Syrian and Lebanese borders. By 2pm, the major sites had reached capacity and had to close to new visitors, and police began blocking the roads. By 4pm, there had been eight road traffic accidents including one fatality.



When we arrived at Mar Jaris, I noted the military presence at one of the side roads. After a leisurely wander down into the valley (believed to be the 'valley of the shadow of death' from Psalm 23), we climbed the steep slopes back to the car and headed towards Tiberias up through the Jordan Valley. Again, we passed queues of traffic, this time coming up from the Dead Sea. There was a heavy police and military presence at the major junctions and some of the roads heading toward Area A of the West Bank (the areas under the civil and military control of the Palestinian Authority).

I remembered then — as we and hundreds of other cars with Israeli registration plates traveled freely into and then out of the Palestinian Territory — that the West Bank and Gaza were closed for the entirety of the Pesach holiday,<sup>1</sup> meaning it was closed for Palestinians wanting or needing to leave, but entirely open for Israeli and international tourists on holiday. The day before (Western) Easter, Israel had not yet granted permits to Gazan Christians,<sup>2</sup> wanting to visit Jerusalem and the West Bank for Easter, and only now has given permits to 500 Christians to travel to Jerusalem or via the West Bank to/through Jordan.<sup>3</sup>

It seems a cruel irony that while Jews and Christians are celebrating our great holy days of liberation, the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza are suffering under even greater restriction of movement.



Unfortunately, given the recent election results, it looks unlikely that the situation will improve any time soon. There seems a concerted effort by the right-wing parties to increase suspicion of the Arab community, not just in the Palestinian Territories but also within Israel. Reports emerged early on election day that Likud (Benjamin Netanyahu's party) planted over 1000 hidden cameras in the voting stations in Arab villages, a move which was not only anti-democratic but illegal. Its purpose seemed to be two-fold: to create a sense of threat to discourage Arab voters from voting, and to create a picture of the Arab

community as lawless and prone to voter fraud.

1. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/army-announces-9-day-closure-of-west-bank-gaza-for-passover-holiday/>

2. [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/20/gaza-christians-wait-easter-travel-permits-jerusalem?utm\\_term=Autofeed&CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu&utm\\_medium=&utm\\_source=Twitter#Echobox=1555794661](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/20/gaza-christians-wait-easter-travel-permits-jerusalem?utm_term=Autofeed&CMP=tw_t_gu&utm_medium=&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1555794661)

3. [https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-after-criticism-israel-lets-gazans-celebrate-easter-in-jerusalem-west-bank-1.7160189?=&ts=\\_1556034971921](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-after-criticism-israel-lets-gazans-celebrate-easter-in-jerusalem-west-bank-1.7160189?=&ts=_1556034971921)

It can be hard to have hope in the current political environment.

But I am reminded in this Easter season that the empty tomb of Easter invites us to see life where we expect only death. The empty tomb invites us to search for love where there only seems to be

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hate. The empty tomb invites us to seek peace where violence is said to reign. The empty tomb invites us to sing a song of redemption when the world sees only sin. The empty tomb invites us to proclaim hope where there seems to be only hopelessness. Because whether we are grieving or joyful, Christ rose again. Whether we are doubting or believing, Love conquered death. Whether we are afraid or hopeful, God's new creation has begun and is present here, now, all around us.

Here in this beautiful but conflicted land, I remind myself to look for signs of the Kingdom, in the flourishing of the earth after a winter of rain, and in the resolve of the organisations we are privileged to be partnered with, working for the flourishing of all people.



In a climate where the public space for critical political discourse is dramatically shrinking, it is becoming even more important to stand in solidarity with and support our partner organisations who continue to speak out against the military occupation of the West Bank and work for a more just and egalitarian society within Israel itself. I've attached below a report I wrote recently on one of the Church of Scotland's partners, Sadaka-Reut, whom I visited last month. Recognising the limited opportunities for meaningful engagement between youth of different religions, cultures, and socio-economic groups in Israel,

their work brings Arab and Jewish young people together, in an effort to challenge the dominant narratives of fear and suspicion, while encouraging them to work together for positive change in their schools, universities, and communities. Please do read the report and encourage your congregations to pray for these remarkable young people.

I pray that the joy of this Eastertide may lead us to a new hope for liberation from fear and renewed efforts for justice in our communities. Thank you, friends, for your continued prayers and support.

Everyblessing,  
Kate

## **DEPUTATION 2019**

I will be back in Scotland on deputation in the autumn and will be visiting Dundee Presbytery 5-15 September and Dunfermline Presbytery 16-25 September. I'm looking forward to being with you all then to share more about life and work in Israel and Palestine. If your parish is hosting an event, please do consider inviting neighbouring churches of other denominations to come here more about the challenges faced by the Christian communities in the Holy Land and the inspiring work being done by our partners here.

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## BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE A Visit to Sadaka-Reut, Jaffa March 2019

On any given weekend, the market of Jaffa is bustling with activity. Tourists wander the streets, stopping to browse the antique shops and boutique clothing stores. Animated conversations in Hebrew, Arabic, and English mingle, interspersed with bursts of laughter. The many restaurants and cafes offering a range of foods from all over the world are filled with young people and families. The atmosphere is lively, trendy ... and at first glance, the picture of coexistence. But sadly, the day to day reality for those who live in Jaffa is very different.

Through a long history of displacement, immigration and gentrification, Jaffa has become a 'mixed' city of Palestinians and Jews, but its residents live in neighbourhoods largely separated by ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. Arab communities suffer disproportionately from poverty, drug use, gun violence and domestic abuse. **In the space of two months last year, six members of the Arab community were murdered in Jaffa, four of them women.**<sup>4</sup>

This separation of Jews and Arabs extends to the educational system where Jewish and Arab students attend different schools. Even for those from families or communities who are politically centre/centre-left who are open to cross-cultural interaction, there are few opportunities for meaningful encounters with those of a different religion or ethnicity. And an atmosphere of fear and suspicion is reinforced by divisive rhetoric from politicians, on mainstream media, through social media, and often in the classroom.

### SADAKA-REUT: ARAB-JEWISH YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

**Sadaka-Reut**<sup>5</sup> ('Friendship' in Arabic and Hebrew) is an organisation of Palestinian and Jewish activists from Jaffa who recognise the inequalities present in Israeli society and are working to build bi-national partnerships through education programmes for youth and young adults. I went to visit them to hear more about their work in March.

I was immediately struck by the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere in the offices. The staff chatted to one another in a mix of Hebrew and Arabic (recognising the importance of being able to speak one another's languages, the Jewish staff are learning Arabic; the Palestinian staff already speak Hebrew as it is the dominant language in Israel.) When Rawan, one of the Co-Executive Directors, walked in having just returned from a conference in London, she was enveloped in enthusiastic hugs and surrounded by questions about her time away.

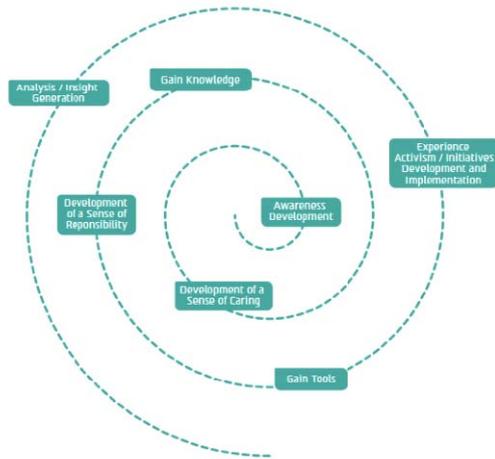
I had been impressed by the way they describe their work on their website: *As Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel, and as activists, we feel that it is our responsibility to correct the current reality. Our work is based on our sense of belonging to our people, and on the belief that partnership, solidarity and a joint struggle are the only way to secure real change and build a more just and egalitarian society.* But it was only when I met them that I realised the depth of relationship these women have (9 women and 1 man work in the offices). It was clear from listening to them that they not only shared a common vision, they had also done the hard work of critical self-awareness and deep listening. The result was a conversation that directly addressed issues of discrimination and separation with a tangible sense of shared responsibility and concern for one another.

As five of us sat together (Rawan and Dina, the Co-Executive Directors; Lee, the Resource Development Coordinator; and Leor, an intern from California) and Lee outlined Sadaka-Reut's theory of change (image below), I could see how they themselves embody the model they employ

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across their programmes.

As they write in their **Annual Report 2017-2018**:<sup>6</sup> The theory of change encompasses the process of transformation the participants go through. It begins from the individual-personal level, continues on the relational level as partnership continues to develop in shared spaces, and concludes in the cultural level, widening the circles of influence as they carry on the Sadaka-Reut model wherever they go in life — from their own families and communities and to the wider society.



I listened as they described their work, as interested in *how* they were communicating as *what* they were communicating. Confident and collaborative. Passionate and compassionate. Responsive and reflective. These are women of different religions and ethnicities who have created a space in which they can hear, respect, and challenge one another. And it was clear that they do not speak on behalf of ‘those who have no voice’; they are committed to a way of engaging which allows for the voices on the margins to be heard. This is also reflected in the way they have written their Annual Report, with each section beginning with ‘The view from the margins’, followed by ‘What we’re doing about it.’

They recognise that the first steps through the theory of change — those which enable individuals to find their voice — must take place in the safety of a uni-national setting, where participants can explore issues unique to their religious/ethnic/socio-economic context. Only later in the process will facilitated bi-national conversations be meaningful and transformative.

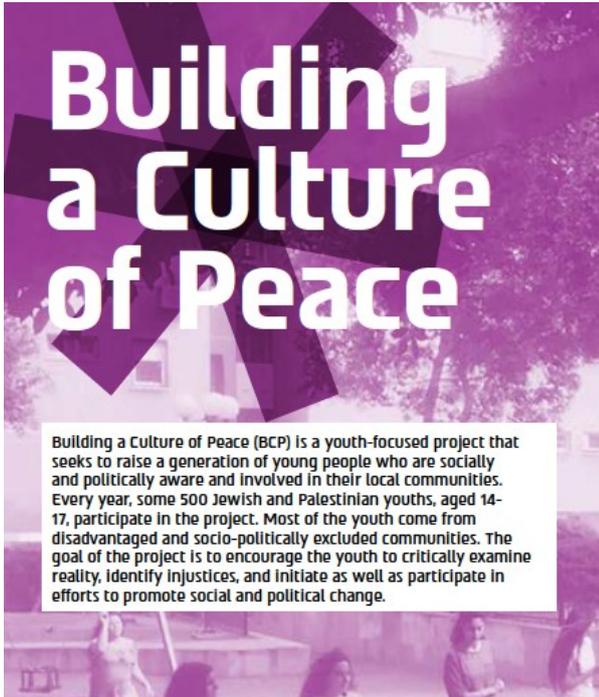
More can be read about the specific programmes run by Sadaka-Reut in their Annual Report and on their website. Below I’ve included brief summaries and statistics (all taken from their 2017-2018 Report). Their main focus is on education, not political advocacy. They firmly believe that ‘any societal change must begin at the individual level and spiral out from there’.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/magazine/.premium.MAGAZINE-a-tel-aviv-favela-jaffa-residents-tell-of-life-in-a-cycle-of-violence-1.6198495>

<sup>2</sup> [www.reutsadaka.org/](http://www.reutsadaka.org/)

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## BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE



**Building a Culture of Peace**

Building a Culture of Peace (BCP) is a youth-focused project that seeks to raise a generation of young people who are socially and politically aware and involved in their local communities. Every year, some 500 Jewish and Palestinian youths, aged 14-17, participate in the project. Most of the youth come from disadvantaged and socio-politically excluded communities. The goal of the project is to encourage the youth to critically examine reality, identify injustices, and initiate as well as participate in efforts to promote social and political change.



**85**  
Palestinian and Jewish youth participants

**6**  
local groups

**15**  
session educational program including 1 weekend seminar and 2 facilitated bi-national encounters

**4**  
public outreach initiatives

## COMMUNITY IN ACTION



**Community in Action**

Community in Action (CIA) is a volunteering and leadership development project for young Palestinian and Jewish high school graduates and university students. Each year, it creates a bi-national cadre of young committed activists and leaders who have the tools, knowledge and capacity to promote socio-political change towards a more just and equal society.

**15** participants  
7 Jewish, 7 Palestinian, 1 mixed; 12 female, 3 male

**32** weeks of 3 volunteering days and 1 learning day per week

**2** weekend seminars and 4 tours

**2** public initiatives planned and implemented by the participants

**4556** total hours volunteering with 120 Palestinian and Jewish children in 5 local schools

CIA participants during their seminar in Jerusalem

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## PARTNERS IN SHAPING REALITY



**Partners in Shaping Reality**

The Partners in Shaping Reality (PSR) project engages university students in dialogue and action groups. Promoting a space for civic, political, and social discussions about the conflict and Jewish-Arab relations on campus, it encourages students to play an active responsible role and to be involved in changing their environment, while giving them skills to continue strengthening their voice once the program ends.



- 17** participants  
12 Palestinian, 5 Jewish; 15 female, 2 male
- 1** group met for a 12-session educational program
- 1** activist course, 6 sessions long
- 2** public initiatives initiated and executed by participants on campus
- 2** tours attended by participants

## TOURS OF JAFFA

I have heard it said on more than one occasion by church groups visiting Israel and Palestine that they do not go to Jaffa because it does not present a 'real' picture of what is happening in the region, and there is nothing to be learned about the conflict there. They take the 'coexistence' they see on the streets as evidence that all is as well as could be expected in the current political environment.

But Rawan challenges this view: 'Coexistence is eating humous together. Coexistence is not enough. We need to talk about the conflict.'

And so another aspect of Sadaka-Reut's work is offering tours of Jaffa, asking the participants, 'Is there coexistence in Jaffa?' before leading them through the different neighbourhoods and telling the history and current reality from the perspective of the Palestinian residents, as an alternative to the Zionist narrative so often presented. For groups visiting, this is an invaluable way to learn more about the lived reality of the different communities in Jaffa.

I am inspired and challenged by Sadaka-Reut's approach, which both recognises and honours the importance of community identity, but does not shy away from engaging in the sometimes difficult encounters and conversations necessary for societal change.

As our discussion came to a close, Lee said, 'Education is key to conflict resolution. We are empowering youth to find their own voice and seek their own future.'

## Tours and Group Meetings

Sadaka-Reut has been offering tours of Jaffa for multiple years, and recently solidified the program by training its staff to lead these tours. Each tour lasts three hours, and is led by a Palestinian and a Jewish member of the staff. The tour, combining alternative history, current struggles facing the community, and personal narratives, is followed by a processing workshop. Alternatively, two members of the staff meet with groups at our Jaffa office for a shorter conversation and analysis away from the sun and rain.

As we celebrate our 35th year of education and action, this year Sadaka-Reut staff met with over 350 people to share our accumulated knowledge about existing gaps in the education system, Jaffa's social and political environment, and how these issues can be addressed. Our audiences included students, academics, international visitors, and local residents alike who reached out in order to get a binational perspective on current and historical events as an alternative to mainstream narratives.

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In a land where even many of the activist organisations and NGOs work only within their own communities, theirs is unique and important work which **deserves recognition and support** <sup>7</sup> from those of us in the international community who share their vision of a just and egalitarian Israeli society.

— Reverend Kate McDonald

<sup>7</sup> [www.reutsadaka.org/support-us-4/](http://www.reutsadaka.org/support-us-4/)