

## Appendix G -- Evaluation and Recommendations

This appendix combines the following two documents:

### ***Course Evaluation***

pages 2-6

After the final class meeting, the facilitators e-mailed a note of thanks and a short evaluation form to all participants. This document provides the questions, summarizes the numeric answers, and includes all comments submitted in response to the open-ended questions.

### ***Facilitator Recommendations***

pages 7-16

The *Facilitators' Manual* contains an abridged version of the facilitators' suggestions for reconfiguring the course in a six-session format (pages 33-35). This document provides the full set of recommendations, including ideas for using small group discussions, encouraging creative expression through art, and exploring options for individual advocacy.

## Course Evaluation

Course: *Israel/Palestine: Is There a Samaritan on the Road?*

Dates: Four two-hour sessions, November 22 - December 13, 2010

Thirty-four people signed up for the class; 33 attended the first session. One person was unable to attend any of the sessions because of a family health emergency. That individual received a full refund and was not sent an evaluation form.

At the final class on December 13, we explained that we would be e-mailing a short evaluation form to participants in a few days and asked them to respond as soon as possible. We e-mailed the evaluation on December 16 and encouraged participants to respond when we encountered them at church in the following weeks. By early January, we had received only eight responses, so we sent the form again to those from whom we had not heard. We reminded them that their responses would help the facilitators improve the course and also help the Co-Directors of Christian Education consider how to assist courses with a similar purpose and structure in the future.

By the end of January, seven more evaluations had come in, for a total of 15 respondents. Of these, two had missed two classes and four had missed one class. One person was able to attend the first class but then had to miss the remaining sessions. Having neither withdrawn from the class nor sought a refund, this individual did submit an evaluation but responded only to three questions: the number of years at St. Mark's, the number of previous classes taken, and the purpose of the class. Thus the summary below shows 15 responses for the first two items and 14 for the third and fourth.

### **I have attended St. Mark's (N=15)**

40 years or more	1
30-39 years	5
20-29	4
10-19	2
5-9	0
2-4	1
1	1
0	1 (occasional guest preacher)

### **Number of Christian Education Classes previous taken: (N=15)**

Many!	2
About 25	1
15	1 (actual response was: 5 taken, 10 taught)
12+	2
6-10	3
4-5	1
1	2
0	3

### **1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (excellent), how would you rate this class on its value to you? (N=14)**

- 1
- 2

3  
 4 8 (of these, one wrote 4+ and one wrote 4-5)  
 5 6

**2. On a scale of 1 (little) to 5 (very much), how involved were you in the class? (N=14)**

1  
 2  
 3 6 (two wrote 3-4; several said they rated themselves lower because of missed classes)  
 4 4  
 5 4

**3. What do you think the purpose of the course was?**

- To educate, inspire, cultivate, and engage us personally -- a tall order for a 4-part class!
- To inform participants on all perspectives of the situation in Israel and potential actions and policies that would lead to peace.
- To provide a current overview of the Palestinian/Israeli situation, staying as neutral as possible.
- The purpose of the course was to expose class members to facts and experiences about the Israel-Palestinian situation, to explore the feelings of people on both sides, and to help class members feel that they have a basis on which to try to understand and follow the situation, and to understand the very real facts on the ground that impact and limit the options at present and in the future.
- Open our awareness to the complexities of social, political, economic and cultural conditions contributing to the stand-off; bring to us "off-screen" issues and events to broaden the view of the struggle; introduce us to its many voices, both cognoscenti and everyday people; and put us into the situation as directly as possible so that we can better understand the stakes there, and how they affect us here, at the gut level, not just intellectually. Clearly, the primary effort in doing this was to give a truer picture of the impact of Israeli policies and actions, supported as they are by official US policy, on Palestinian Muslims and Christians. But the effort to maintain a balance in presentation was well worth it, as in the future that approach will work better to bring both sides to "Best Alternative To No Agreement", i.e. in further discussions with larger groups.
- (a) education; (b) engagement
- To educate about the complex situation in the Middle East and develop a core group interested in further action.
- To increase individual awareness and factual knowledge of Israeli/Palestinian situation and, hopefully, to inspire active involvement in working for peace in the Middle East.
- To plant seeds of understanding about the scope and complications of the Israel/Palestine crisis. To persuade the heart to be responsive to the people and possibly activate the feet and hands to respond.
- To increase awareness of the complicated struggle going on between Palestinians and Israelis. To note that some people (e.g., Palestinian militants or Israeli settlers who will not give up the land) will pose distinct challenges to those who reach out to them. To feel encouraged by the peace-makers who try to bridge the hatred and relate by finding common ground. To examine my own thoughts and feelings and to think about what I can do.
- The purpose, for me, was to learn more about both sides of the Middle East problem - and to see some hope for it.
- To understand the history and relationship of the players and to be able to form an informed point of view.
- To increase understanding of the Palestinian point of view and of the American bias towards Israel.
- To increase awareness of the Palestinian-Israeli issues in the Middle East.

- To provide information and room for reflection/discussion on the history, nature, and future of the Arab-Israeli conflict. There was also a concerted effort to provide a variety of perspectives and to accommodate the opinions and view points of those present in the class.

#### **4. The thing of most value for me in this class was...**

- Taking on a character and hearing the voices of others; guest speakers, especially Ambassador Wilcox
- Guest speakers with incredible knowledge
- Hearing the comments from the speakers AND breaking up into small groups where we each were given a real person (Israeli or Palestinian) to portray. And the interactions that occurred amongst the people portrayed. I felt the tension and the insurmountable difficulties that exist.
- Hearing the former ambassador speak of his vision for what a solution should look like. Also hearing the two representatives of peace groups on each side was very impactful. Unfortunately I missed two classes that focused on personal experiences and the traumatic impact on people.
- Being taken behind the curtain of "editors" to a wider exposure of opinions, analyses, and first hand accounts of what this struggle is all about for the people directly engaged and affected.
- The history provided the first night; getting inside the situation w/o getting too mired in it
- The speakers opened a window of understanding to the situation that we could not otherwise have gotten.
- Hard to pinpoint one thing of most value because so much was helpfully edifying, informative, and thought provoking!
- To plant seeds of understanding about the scope and complications of the Israel/Palestine crisis. To bend my heart and hands in the direction of responding.
- The thing of most value for me in this class was to see the faces of those who are in the conflict; to hear from such knowledgeable people in the class, to hear about the difficulties and about the hope for change, to have a time of reflection.
- Gosh, hard to say -- loved the outside speakers - Phil Wilcox, Ori, Noura, and adored what your consultant on trauma had to say. But I also got a lot out of the small group role play.
- The guests, including the expert on trauma
- The role playing of those involved in the conflict
- To connect with other people at St. Marks who share an interest and passion for the Middle East

#### **5. One thing I would change is...**

- Plan fewer elements in the short time available -- for me that would mean more time for guest speakers and deepening the experience of the "voices" segment.
- Need at least one more class which might focus on what we can DO with what we have learned, if we choose to take any action.
- Could have been more sessions.
- I can't say one thing. It was a great offering that would be good to repeat, as I doubt the problem will be going away very soon. Your class plan would be a good template that could be updated in the future.
- Either narrowing the focus to fit within the same time frame, or extending the time frame to allow for the desired balance of speakers, discussion, and "functional education" methods (being in the struggle).
- Add one more class -- so we can have the Palestinian/Jewish "debate" we had on the last night, and then have the last night
- Nothing that I can think of -- it was an excellent beginning; good length, excellent topics and sequence.

- A group-compiled bibliography would be wonderful to create and helpful to have for our future continued learning.
- Reduce the demands of each evening so more focus and attention on the depth of what is presented can be soaked in by the participants.
- I don't think anything needs changing
- I'd let the outside speakers have more time for questions.
- I would make it 5 sessions
- Do more role-playing. Maybe same scenario, but playing different roles.
- To have more class sessions. I would have loved for the class to continue and hope there will be more classes related to the Middle East in the future.

(One class participant, who did not submit an evaluation, told one of the leaders that he would have liked having more reading, such as an assignment for each session.)

#### **6. As a result of this class, one thing I believe will be different for me...**

- It is always difficult to get the 'real,' unfiltered story. This course reminds me of the importance of being open-minded when faced with any polarizing issue. It is important to understand both sides to the extent possible.
- I feel less isolated with my thoughts about the Israeli/Palestinian situation.
- I will read the news without the sense of futility that I was experiencing. And with more hope that a solution can and will be found. I hope to watch the service in Bethlehem at the Cathedral next year, and recommend that the Middle East Working Group put out email or announcements next year to remind the congregation when it will be happening.
- Knowing more, I will be less wary/hesitant to involve myself in dialogues on this subject, and more willing to do something more active again. (I was a volunteer fundraiser awhile back for the bi-partisan effort to rebuild Palestinian homes). I am not sure what that will be, but am open to it.
- Thinking more broadly about how to get above/beyond the cacophony and putting my energy there; more desire to go see the St. John's hospital
- I will read and listen with more awareness and active interest about events in the Middle East.
- As a result of this class, one thing I believe will be different for me...is that the mustard seed will grow. I live into the Hope.
- I will seek other ways to have some involvement with the need that must be great in the occupied land.
- Is seeing Israel as the poor victim in this problem - that is just not the case for me.
- I will look at Israeli behavior differently
- Better understanding of the issues
- When I'm reading about and analyzing events in the Middle East, to stop and consider how I might react to developments *as a person of faith*, and not just on an academic/intellectual level.

#### **7. Other comments, suggestions?**

- Many, many thanks for the team's commitment and hard work!
- Great job
- Keep this an active group at St. Mark's and have more speakers, etc.
- Thank you all for your dedication and good work. I long for the opportunity to go with a group from St. Mark's to the region, and hope that this class may create a basis for something on those lines.

- Well worth further thought: taking (opening up) the class to other groups beyond St. Mark's. This would have to be done with great care, and with necessary "boundaries." Promise: taking the subject and methods to more people. Cost: forgoing intimacy, particularly regarding the functional methods (although that is not out of the question either, just requires more "nurturing" and monitoring for the new folks). It might be possible to structure the course to maintain some activities, functionally based, for St. Mark's, while opening up more traditional format to larger groups. Scheduling the latter events at times other than the weekday evenings is one way to do that.
- I'd love to see us invite others in the community to join in any events we have in the future. I'd also like to continue to learn about the non-violent peace movement in Israel/Palestine.
- I'm glad we're reconvening in January! Keeping in touch and sharing our stories as we progress on our journey of expanding awareness and knowledge as we read and hear news is a good idea!
- I hope the leadership team will be tender with themselves. You all did an excellent job.
- You did a great job.
- This was one of the best classes I've ever taken! Many thanks to the team who worked their hearts out!
- Thanks
- Figure out a way to allow more interaction with the speakers.
- Keep us all posted on future events and classes put on by the Middle East Working Group!

## Facilitator Recommendations

Throughout the course, participants remained engaged and enthusiastic. Those who returned evaluations also gave the course high marks, although many said it should have included additional sessions. In general, therefore, the planning team felt that the course had met most of its objectives.

At the same time, in looking back over the way the four sessions had actually played out, we recognized that we failed to achieve several very important objectives:

- Providing opportunities for class members to interact in small groups,
- Allowing sufficient time for participants to consider the connections between course content, the teachings of our faith tradition, and their personal faith journeys,
- Providing an opportunity for class members to explore and express their response to course content using art materials, and
- Examining options for individual advocacy

In some cases, we simply were not very realistic about the time we allotted for some of these activities. In other instances, we chose to give them short shrift or to delete them outright by making changes to agenda for a given class meeting (such as Session 3) in an attempt to respond to questions that had arisen by that point. At other times, we made on-the-spot decisions to curtail or cancel planned activities in order to adjust to what appeared to be the dominant interest of the group (such as having more time to interact with Ambassador Wilcox in Session 1) or to unexpected changes such as the late arrival of a speaker.

Inevitably any team of teachers or facilitators attempting to engage church members in an exploration of the many issues intertwined in the conflict and continuing story of Israel and Palestine will face similar challenges and have to make adjustments. As mentioned in the “Note to Readers” at the beginning of the *Facilitators’ Manual*, we have not produced this summary of our experience with the intention that any other church will (or should) replicate it in every respect. Instead, we have tried to represent faithfully what we attempted, what worked, and what frankly did not work as well as we had hoped.

Our over-arching recommendation to anyone putting together a course on Israel/Palestine -- and by far the most frequent suggestion given by class participants in their evaluations -- is to devote more than four, two-hour sessions to the topic.

In the following pages, we will discuss how the course might be reconfigured in six sessions (with some possible options) and re-examine the benefits of allowing more time for small group work, creative expression through art, and the exploration of options for individual advocacy.

### *Expanding to Six Sessions*

If we were to offer the course with two additional sessions, we would generally follow the same arc as in the original course but rearrange the sequence of some segments in order to allow more time for each:

#### *Session 1*

We would still devote this session to an overview of the conflict, its history, and the current status of negotiations. Asking participants to read a short piece such as the pamphlet from the Foundation for Middle East Peace or appropriate pages from *Steadfast Hope* is a good way to give them some common reference points before they walk in the door, as well as to prepare them to interact with a guest speaker -- preferably one who can offer a succinct, insightful, and non-polemical review of the history.

As we discovered, inserting a small group segment in between the speaker's presentation and a Q&A segment interrupts the flow of the evening. Instead, we would recommend reserving perhaps 20 minutes at the end of the session for participants to gather in small groups. Rather than generate questions for the speaker (who would likely have departed by this time), the small groups would enable participants to get to know each other better, share reactions, and perhaps frame questions to be pursued during the remainder of the course.

### *Session 2*

We would still use this session to engage participants directly with an array of Israeli and Palestinian voices, experiences, and perspectives, using short narratives or testimonies drawn from a variety of sources. After the more intellectual approach of the first session, the narratives provide a more visceral experience, helping participants realize the many ways in which the conflict impacts the lives of real people. We also believe that if an expert in psychological trauma is available, having a facilitated discussion on that topic is an excellent complement to the narratives, especially as it can help people understand the generational impacts of trauma.

Combining the personal experience of the narratives, the small group sharing, and the discussion of trauma makes for a very full two hours with little "wiggle room." We felt that it was very important for each small group to hear eight distinct perspectives -- four from Israelis and four from Palestinians -- and to take the time to discuss the questions we posed. If there are only eight people in the class, this can be done in a plenary session. If there are between 8 and 16 participants, we would still recommend forming two small groups and asking some individuals to read more than one voice.

Unless class members are willing to have the class session expand by a half hour, however, it will be challenging to accomplish everything in two hours. As we discovered, participants got very engaged in sharing and discussing the narratives and were reluctant to leave their small groups on time. We ended up truncating the "debriefing" session that was to have taken place in a plenary setting before hearing from the trauma expert. Depending on the number of people in the class and the total number of narratives used, however, we strongly recommend that some time be devoted to this debriefing. If several small groups have read the same set of narratives, it will give different readers a chance to compare their reactions. If groups have read distinctly different voices, the debriefing will give participants a chance to discover additional facets of Israeli and Palestinian experience, thus "populating" the factual overview of the conflict presented in the first session.

One option to consider would be to hold the second session as a half day retreat so that its three major components -- narrative sharing, debriefing, and trauma discussion -- can be given ample time. Participants might share a meal together as part of the debriefing period and thus have more opportunity to learn about additional narratives and perspectives before reconvening to discuss trauma.

### *Session 3*

In a six-session format, we would use this session to delve more deeply into some of the troubling realities of the conflict, from the horrors of past suicide bombings, to the anxiety experienced by Israeli residents in towns bordering Gaza and Lebanon that are the target of missile attacks by Palestinian extremists, to the daily toll that the occupation takes on the people of Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. We would still use film excerpts so that class participants can see and hear what life is like on the ground in Israel/Palestine.

Though relatively brief, the narratives used in the previous session still described troubling situations and conveyed a range of emotional responses. But class participants had to rely on their imaginations to conjure up images of the places mentioned and the actions described. Film excerpts confront the viewers with the three-dimensional reality of the suffering that people are experiencing while also revealing the many different ways that force is being applied.

In our class, we chose to take time during Session 3 to address some of the questions class members had raised in previous sessions. Moreover, we decided to address those questions with three fact sheets that also complemented and expanded upon some of the issues addressed in the documentary film excerpts. Unfortunately doing these two things forced us to abandon in large part the original objective of this session: first, to let class participants feel the weight of this seemingly intractable conflict and the despair it can engender among sympathetic onlookers...and secondly, to let each person express his or her reactions non-verbally through creative expression in a drawing or collage.

Instead, by introducing the fact sheets and taking time to answer questions, we used up time that would otherwise have gone to the art activity. We also undermined or at least worked against the visceral impact of the films by diverting participants into the realm of facts, figures, and intellectualizing. Even though course planners might feel awkward postponing questions to a subsequent session, we would strongly recommend making Session 3 more experiential and less intellectual by limiting it to three major components: the films (with only key words or phrases elicited from viewers), the silent "Wilderness Walk" to listen to passages of Scripture, and then a 30-40 minute period of individual art expression. The art segment could conclude with an invitation to participants to share their work with each other, offering explanations or not, as they wish -- or the group could hold a final silent procession around the room, merely looking at the works created, then ending the class with a closing prayer.

Depending on the availability of screening equipment and on the desired combination of segments in the remaining three sessions, one option the teaching team could consider would be to show only film excerpts revealing the darker aspects of the conflict. We only had access to projection equipment for one class session, so we decided to pair two hard-hitting excerpts from *Peace, Propaganda, and the Promised Land*, with one excerpt from *Encounter Point*.

The segment we selected from *Encounter Point* tells the inspiring story of two fathers, an Israeli and a Palestinian, both of whom lost children to the violence and yet managed to move through their grief to a place where they could work together for peace. This segment still conveys many of the harsh realities of the situation, including the skepticism both men face in their respective communities, but it also offers a hopeful picture in contrast to the other film excerpts we used. Thus course planners might wish to reserve it for use in a class session that will examine the important contribution being made by peacemakers in a variety of organizations and faith communities in Israel, Palestine, and the U.S. (Another film from which inspiring segments could be drawn is *Budrus* which tells the story of Palestinians, Israelis, and international activists collaborating in nonviolent resistance to the Separation Barrier Wall.)

#### *Session 4*

If Session 3 has been used as described above, there will be pent-up demand among class members to discuss their reactions to what they have learned and felt thus far in the course, as well as to ask questions. We would therefore recommend that the fourth session be used to dig into the issues raised by the films. Fact sheets, such as we prepared, could be e-mailed to participants prior to the class meeting as a reading assignment. Alternatively, complementary readings from *Steadfast Hope* or other sources could be used. If the list of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) were also provided, each class member could be asked to read one of the fact sheets and then to explore the web sites of at least two organizations working for peace.

The first part of the class could focus on reviewing the fact sheets in a plenary session, breaking into small groups to share insights from the exploration of NGO web sites, and then reconvening to hear two guest speakers: preferably one Israeli and one Palestinian, working for two of the organizations listed.

### Session 5

This session could focus on the role of the Church in the Holy Land, the role of the Episcopal Church and other denominations in promoting peace and justice in Israel/Palestine, and options for individual advocacy. Options for a pre-class reading assignment could include one or more of the following:

- *Advocating for Peace and Justice in Israel/Palestine -- Resources for Episcopalians*  
This is one of three handouts prepared by St. Mark's Mid-East Working group for an event we held for members of the parish in May, 2011. (See *Discussing Options for Advocacy* below.) It summarizes relevant policy resolutions by the General Convention and the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, provides links to statements by the Presiding Bishop, and describes the role of the Episcopal Public Policy Network, the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, the Palestine Israel Network of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and Churches for Middle East Peace. (Updated January 2012)
- *Promoting Peace and Justice in the Holy Land: Faith-based and Other Groups*  
This is the list of NGO and faith-based groups prepared for the Israel/Palestine course in the late fall of 2010. The first three pages provide brief descriptions and web links for major denominations, inter-religious organizations, and other faith-based groups that are involved to various degrees in promoting peace in the Holy Land. (Updated January 2012)
- A sample of resolutions on the Holy Land recently passed by Episcopal Dioceses in the United States.
- Information from the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem about the work of the Diocese through its parishes, schools, and health facilities.
- Excerpts from *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*. Modeled on the Kairos document issued by churches in South Africa in 1985, this is an appeal to the global church issued by Palestinian Christian leaders in 2009. The full text is included in a 24-page study guide from the Israeli/Palestinian Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA).
- Handouts 2 (*Options for Individual Action*) and 3 (*Sources of Information*) used for the St. Mark's advocacy event, May 2011. (Described below and available in *Appendix I*.)

During the first half of the session, class members could discuss the important role still played by the Christian community in the Holy Land despite its diminishing numbers. Particular attention could be given to the role of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem in ministering to Palestinian Anglicans, working for peace, and strengthening the broader community (regardless of faith tradition) through education, health and development programs. Excerpts from the *Kairos Palestine* document could be used as a focus for small group reflection. Within that context, the class could then examine the work being done by the Episcopal Church and other denominations and faith-based groups in the U.S. to promote peace and justice in the Holy Land. A guest from the Episcopal Public Policy Network, the Companion Diocese Committee, or the Palestine Israel Network of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship might be invited to join in the plenary discussion.

In the second half of the session, class members could review the range of options for individual advocacy available to them, using the handouts for reference. The facilitators might ask participants to break into small groups to discuss their comfort level with different approaches, to share personal examples of past activism, and to brainstorm possible actions vis-a-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The session could conclude with a plenary session in which the groups could report out key suggestions, concerns, or questions.

As an alternative to a two hour session, course planners might consider holding a half-day or all day retreat on the dual topics of the church's response and individual advocacy. This would allow time for additional speakers to be involved. For example, representatives from groups such as Churches for

Middle East Peace, Interfaith Peace Builders, or the U.S. Coalition to End the Occupation could talk about the resources and training they provide to help individuals speak up for peace and justice by communicating to elected officials, the media, the business sector, and fellow citizens.

### *Session 6*

We strongly recommend that the final session be devoted to personal reflection by participants and not involve outside speakers. As mentioned previously, we seriously erred in over-programming our final class by attempting to combine outside speakers, small group and plenary discussions of “next steps,” and a meditation on Scripture -- all within a two hour period.

In an expanded format allowing for speakers to appear in other sessions, we would start the final session by thanking class members for participating in this “journey” and by acknowledging the many different issues and emotions we have explored together in the previous weeks. We would then ask participants to break into small groups to discuss where the journey has brought them in terms of their understanding of Israel/Palestine, their concern for the people living there, and their own possible next steps.

While many different questions could be used to launch this discussion, course planners may wish to consider using or adapting the facilitator guidelines that we prepared for the small groups originally intended for our final session. Despite the fact that we chose on the spot to skip the small group segment and thus have no way to evaluate the effectiveness of this rubric, we have included it in *Appendix F* on the course web page and offer it as one approach.

In the facilitator guidelines, we acknowledged that the human instinct to retreat from further involvement in any complex and emotion-laden situation is both natural and understandable. At the same time, we tried to fashion questions that would remind class members of themes touched upon during the course and of specific calls for engagement either made by several speakers or contained in many of the passages of Scripture we used.

To start the small group discussions, we would ask participants if they can relate to one or more of the following statements:

- I want to be an active listener and empathetic “witness” to people’s suffering.
- I want to work for peace and justice and speak truth to power.
- I want to be left alone.

We would then ask participants to share examples of times in their lives when they had experienced one or another of these responses to an issue of importance -- and then acted on it in some way.

With respect to the situation in Israel/Palestine, we would then ask:

- 1) What does “empathetic listening” and being a witness mean to you in the context of what you’ve learned about Israel and Palestine? How might you act on this desire as an American?
- 2) What does “working for peace and justice” mean to you in the context of Israel/Palestine?
- 3) What does “speaking truth to power” mean in this context?
- 4) Are there things that our church or our Diocese could do to help you feel more confident either in being an empathetic listener to those who suffer as a result of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians...or help you work for peace and justice in the Holy Land...and speak truth to “powers” of one sort or another?

To do justice to these questions and the range of potential responses from class members, the small groups should meet for at least 45 minutes. Facilitators might ask each group to select some of the “next steps” they identify and be prepared to share them in the concluding plenary. Alternatively, the facilitators could simply ask participants to think of one example each of them might share with the larger group. Then after a brief break, the class could reconvene for a closing plenary session. Depending on the option chosen, facilitators could ask for a representative of each group to “report out” its key ideas or ask for random responses to the four questions posed in the small groups.

For the final 45 minutes of the session, we recommend using the Good Samaritan story, allowing ample time to provide clarifying information about the status of Samaritans in Jesus’s time and to ask class members whether or not they can relate to one or more of the characters in the story. (See *Appendix F* on the course web site.) The class could then conclude with 5-10 minutes for silent reflection, the filling out of “commitment cards” if that seems appropriate, and a concluding prayer.

### ***Small Groups***

At St. Mark’s and many other churches, small groups are used within adult education courses to provide a more intimate setting in which individuals can share their personal stories, thoughts, and concerns with one another. This can be especially comforting to those individuals who may be shy about speaking in a large group or simply hesitant in the presence of more vocal class members.

To ensure a good mix of people in each small group, facilitators can ask class members “count off” according to the number groups desired. This method helps integrate newcomers to the community with “old-timers.” While friends may still choose to sit together during plenary sessions, forming small groups in this way can encourage participants to listen more attentively to the stories and opinions of people they may not know so well.

Small groups can be an especially important method to use in a course examining the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simply because the topic is fraught with so much emotion and, sadly, with so many prejudices and different interpretations of history. Even if course planners have taken pains to promise that the classroom will be a “safe space” in which people can share differing views, many participants -- including those who are at ease speaking in a larger group -- may feel more comfortable voicing their concerns or raising certain questions, at least initially, in a small group rather than in a plenary setting.

If the composition of a small group remains the same throughout the duration of a course, the bonding that results may enable participants to delve deeper into topics with one another. The group may become so cohesive that it leads to collective action within the church community after the class concludes. On the other hand, sticking with the same groups throughout a course limits the number of opportunities class members will have to interact with different individuals in that more intimate setting.

In a course consisting of six sessions, we recommend that small groups not remain consistent throughout the course with the exception of the groups formed for the second session (in which Israeli and Palestinian narratives are shared) and those used in the last session (in which next steps are discussed). More time will likely be needed for the discussion of narratives and next steps than when break-out groups are used in other class sessions. Moreover, the sharing of narratives will be an intense experience that will create a special bond among the participants of each group. Similarly, the discussion of personal next steps will require participants to be honest and vulnerable with one another. Having assigned narratives to specific participants to ensure that each small group contains the full range of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, course facilitators will have a record which they can use to reconvene those same groups during the final class meeting.

### *Personal Expression through Art*

In describing Session 3 in the *Facilitators' Manual*, we mention having placed art materials on all the tables in case any class members chose to respond to the film excerpts or to their reflection on the passages of Scripture during the “Wilderness Walk” by making a drawing or collage. A few participants took advantage of these materials but there was simply insufficient time for a meaningful art activity.

In our initial planning for the session, however, we had reserved approximately 30 minutes at the end of the class for such personal expression. Then as the class approached, we felt obligated to revise the format so that we could address some of the questions that had arisen in the previous two sessions. Composing fact sheets enabled us to answer some of those questions while also complementing the subject matter of the film excerpts and providing background information on some of the issues they raised. Doing so, however, not only used up time that would have been used for an art activity; it also emphasized an intellectual response to the films over an equally legitimate emotional response.

Despite our having abandoned the use of art as a substantive and meaningful component of Session 3, we do believe that it can play an important role in most adult classes -- especially in a course that grapples with the myriad of issues and emotions encompassed in the Israel/Palestine conflict. So we recommend that readers consider including such a segment in any course they develop, particularly in conjunction with the screening of troubling visual material such as film excerpts that depict the Occupation.

Often in both adult and youth education courses at St. Mark's, participants are asked to draw a picture or create a collage as a means of expressing what they feel about an issue, a situation, a reading, etc. Depending on the context, they may be asked to depict their vision of how they would like the world to be or to illustrate their relationship to God, to other human beings, or to all of creation.

The purpose of such exercises is to help participants get “out of their heads” and “into their hearts.” Among well-educated, highly-verbal individuals, in particular, there is a tendency to intellectualize, theorize, and parse meanings. Taking a break from words and the demands of verbal communication can be very liberating. Often after a period of silent reflection, one finds insights in the feelings and images that arise.

The products of such self-expression may at times be pictures that appear to be realistic depictions of people, settings, and events. More often they are quite abstract, perhaps combining shapes and colors with symbols understood only to their creator. The point is never to produce a “work of art.” Nor generally is there any requirement that each person explain what he or she has produced. Class leaders may simply ask participants to display what they have done and -- only if they wish -- to interpret it for others.

Our initial thought was that an art exercise such as this would be the perfect complement not only to the first two classes, with their emphasis on reading and discussion, but also to the film excerpts, which would immerse viewers in so many disturbing aspects of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We considered keeping discussion of the film clips to a minimum, thereby intentionally frustrating the natural inclination of the human mind to grapple with chaos by trying to categorize and organize it -- and thus directing participants' energies and emotions into their personal art projects.

We intended to start the art activity by reading an evocative passage of Scripture and then play Middle Eastern music softly in the background while participants concentrated on their art work. We would give a five minute “warning” near the end of the activity. Then during the final ten minutes of the class, we would ask participants to sit or stand in a circle and show their drawings or collages to one another. If time permitted, we could go around the circle letting each person explain -- in just a sentence -- what had inspired the work or what it was intended to convey. Before beginning that process, we would also state that participants could also opt to remain silent rather than speak about their work.

If there were not enough time for participants to create as well as speak about their work, we considered concluding the class not with a sharing circle but with a meditative walk. In this alternative, participants would leave their work on the tables and the class would form a single line weaving among the tables so that each person could see the work of every other class member. We might use a bell to establish the pace and underscore the meditative nature of the walk. After the line had passed by all the pictures, we would offer a closing prayer and send participants out into the night to mull over what they had seen and heard that evening. (Although we subsequently abandoned the art exercise for lack of time, we transformed the walking meditation into the “Wilderness Walk” used in Session 3 to contemplate passages of Scripture.)

We still believe that devoting time to the deep reflection and personal expression that art allows can be a very powerful method to help people explore their own reactions to what they have learned about the conflict in the Holy Land and the commingling of fear, frustration, despair, and hope there.

### ***Discussing Advocacy Options***

Prior to holding the course in November-December 2010, the Mid-East Working Group had only been in existence as an ad hoc interest group at St. Mark’s for about 18 months. We had submitted a draft Charter to the Vestry but it had not yet been approved. To fulfill its mission, the draft (which was approved in January 2011) stated that the Working Group would carry out six broad activities, including the following:

- Educate members of the parish and others about the policies and actions of The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Washington pertaining to Palestine and Israel,
- Bring to the attention of parishioners advocacy positions, actions, and organizations that they may wish to support as individuals, and
- Seek Vestry approval for any actions not aligned with the policies of The Episcopal Church and for St. Mark’s membership in appropriate non-profit groups or coalitions.

By the time we offered the course, there had been no discussion within the parish of seeking Vestry approval for any particular advocacy position. So in planning Session 4, we decided only to raise the issue of options that individuals might consider rather than divert participants’ attention with a discussion of hypothetical actions by the Vestry. The former approach would be in keeping with the session’s emphasis on encouraging individual class members to consider their own next steps; the latter would likely raise questions about the appropriateness as well as the range of possible actions that a church might take on political issues.

Given the number of components we wanted to include in the final session as well as our two-hour time limit, we realized that it would not be feasible to provide class members with an additional reading assignment about advocacy options nor to devote a specific segment completely to that subject. Instead, we structured the small group segment so that the questions would encourage participants to share examples of how they had “spoken truth to power” in the past and how they might do so on issues of peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. We anticipated that this discussion would allow facilitators the latitude to suggest options (e.g., letter writing, participation in rallies, etc.) that participants might not mention.

In the event, however, we cancelled the small group segment and held only a brief plenary discussion of possible “next steps” before concluding the session with the Good Samaritan story. During the truncated discussion, several class members did bring up the subject of advocacy, both in terms of what they might do as citizens and what the Mid-East Working Group might do, such as organizing letter-writing campaigns.

Having not been able to devote time during the session for a substantive discussion of next steps that individuals might consider or the ways in which the Mid-East Working Group, St. Mark's, or the Diocese of Washington might assist them, the facilitators offered to hold a post-course "follow-up" meeting that could examine these issues as well as provide an opportunity to address any unanswered questions.

As described in the manual on page 31, this meeting took place on January 18, 2011, and included interested members of the congregation as well as class members. By that date, the Vestry had approved the Working Group's Charter, so we distributed copies. We also drew attendees' attention to the Charter's brief *Addendum*, which provides a brief summary of the Episcopal Church's policies on Israel/Palestine and the evolving relationship between the Diocese of Washington and the Diocese of Jerusalem.

During both round-table discussions and a concluding plenary, ideas about advocacy surfaced. In recommending next steps for the Working Group and the congregation as a whole, the group endorsed the idea that we

*Educate ourselves about options for action either as individuals or as the community of St. Mark's (e.g., individual letters to editors and elected officials, individual participation in the boycott of products produced in the illegal Israeli settlements, participation as a church in marches or sign-on letters, divestment of church endowment funds from companies benefitting from the Occupation, etc.)*

In subsequent months, the Working Group discussed ways to expand the discussion of advocacy options, particularly for individuals. When we learned that two advocacy-oriented conferences would be held in Washington from May 21-24, 2011, we decided to schedule a discussion of individual options for advocacy, open to any interested parishioners, several weeks in advance. One meeting was the annual policy conference of *Churches for Middle East Peace*, including advocacy visits to members of Congress. The other was *Move Over AIPAC*, a special conference organized by the U.S. Coalition to End the Occupation and other groups, timed to coincide with the annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the largest pro-Israel advocacy group in the U.S.

For this educational session at St. Mark's -- to be held for an hour after each of our morning services one Sunday -- we prepared three handouts under the general title of *Advocating for Peace and Justice in Israel/Palestine* (see *Appendix I on the course web page*).

- 1) *Resources for Episcopalians*
- 2) *Options for Individual Action*
- 3) *Sources of Information*

The first handout is discussed above on page 10. The second handout provides basic tips for communicating with elected officials and other government representatives, including specific contact information for the White House, Members of Congress, the Israeli Embassy, and the PLO Delegation to the U.S. It also includes tips on contacting media editors and journalists and cites two web sources that analyze media coverage of Israel/Palestine and provide examples of "corrective" op-ed's and letters to the editor.

The remainder of the handout describes options specifically relevant to expressing concern about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

- Support ad campaigns to reach American voters, taxpayers, consumers, and investors with a new narrative about Israel/Palestine (example cited)
- Attend advocacy conferences (examples given)
- Participate in non-violent, non-discriminatory rallies and marches
- Participate in some aspect of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement to influence consumer and corporate behavior that supports the occupation of Palestine (global and U.S. sources of information cited, as well as examples of actions taken by the Presbyterian Church and Jewish Voice for Peace)

Because this handout cites advocacy positions and actions adopted by a variety of groups, we prefaced it with this note to readers:

*Neither the Vestry of St. Mark's nor the Coordinating Committee of the Mid-East Working Group has officially endorsed any of these positions and actions. They are presented here merely for consideration by individual members of the congregation.*

The two sessions were less well attended than we had hoped, most likely because of their being scheduled immediately after our church services. Nevertheless those who attended appreciated the materials and engaged in a lively discussion of options. The Mid-East Working Group will seek additional opportunities to inform members of the parish about options for individual advocacy.