



## Western District Conference

An area conference of  
Mennonite Church USA

# Israel –Palestine Task Force March 2019

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## Christ at the Checkpoint

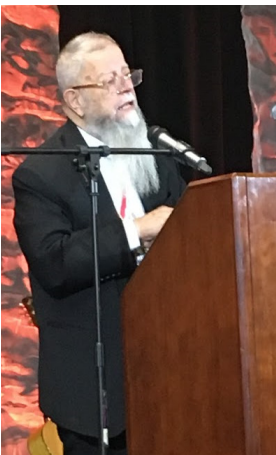
By Kathy Neufeld Dunn

WDC Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-Based)

I attended the Christ at the Checkpoint (or CAT-CUSA) Conference October 15-18. This is a group of Americans and Palestinians who...

*“are a community of evangelical Christians who believe that following Jesus with integrity means that our lives are formed by our love for God, the teaching of the Bible and a fearless life of discipleship in the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe that one of the first hallmarks of discipleship is love for both our own community and for our enemies. We wish to find Jesus at the center of everything we do and to make his life our life which means finding courageous love for Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews alike (CATCUSA website).”*

Within this context, Palestinian Christians poured out their hearts, sharing stories of their love of God, neighboring Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and their enemies. Calls for justice accompanied assurances of mercy and forgiveness in response to the many injustices experienced everyday by Palestinians living in Israel. Tears and laughter intermingled as we listened deeply to their stories of oppression and complications of life under occupation, as well as moments of joy.



Father Elias Chacour, author of *Blood Brothers*, told funny and poignant stories of how he got a school built in his tiny village. He asked for the building permit many times and was rejected. He finally recruited the help of a Jewish neighbor, who got the permit for him. When Chacour needed to expand the school, the permit was systematically denied. He finally got the

permit when then US Secretary of State James Baker intervened. That part of the story was Holy Spirit inspired.

Grace Zoughbi, the first female theology graduate of Bethlehem Bible College to be invited to teach there, cried as she spoke of the complications of accepting that call. Her spouse is a Palestinian who lives in a different part of Israel and must get a permit to move to Bethlehem which is seldom approved. The conference moderator asked her to pause in her story and invited conference-goers to pray for her and her husband, which we did. Two hundred-plus people walked forward and laid hands on her and each other's shoulders as we fervently prayed for a young couple separated through no fault of their own, but for the unjust system they live under.

Christ at the Checkpoint scholars have been criticized for not listening to Christian Zionists who believe that, through the covenant God has given God's chosen people, the land is their inheritance. There was spirited, respectful disagreement about biblical interpretation. Does God honor God's promise forever, even if God's people do not? There was a clear call to read the great theme of biblical justice—justice for the poor, the dispossessed, the orphan and the widow—in dialogue with God's covenant to Abraham.

It was a disturbing and inspiring time of storytelling, learning, and caring for some of “the least of these,” our brothers and sisters in Christ living in Israel.

### For More Information

- ◆ See WDC Resource Library reading list “Israel/Palestine” at: <https://tinyurl.com/y5ywk5ke>
- ◆ See WDC Israel/Palestine Task Force at: <http://mennowdc.org/committees-task-forces/>
- ◆ To receive our quarterly online newsletter, contact Western District Conference at: [wdc@mennowdc.org](mailto:wdc@mennowdc.org) or 316-283-6300

## **Boycott Leads to Lawsuit**

By Esther Koontz, WDC Israel-Palestine Task Force Member



In July 2017 I opened an email asking me to sign a document promising not to boycott Israel in order to get paid for some math trainings I was planning to give for the state of Kansas. I was shocked. What right did Kansas have to tell me

whom I was allowed to boycott or not? Our Mennonite Church USA assembly had just passed a resolution called *Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine* asking members to boycott goods that supported the Israeli settlements. Closer to home, our church, First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, KS, had just spent eight weeks hearing from a member who had traveled to Israel/Palestine with a Come and See Tour. He showed videos of the many injustices Palestinians and Arab Israelis were facing in Israel. In response to these injustices, some members of our church decided to join the Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions (BDS) movement to give a message to the government of Israel that these violations would not be tolerated. Now because of a Kansas law, I had to decide between boycotting Israel and getting paid to do my math trainings. A friend suggested that I call the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). With the ACLU I sued the state of Kansas, and in January 2018 a judge ruled in the preliminary injunction that the law was unconstitutional. This was a victory for first amendment rights for all and for the Palestinian cause specifically. In April 2018, Kansas changed the law so it no longer applies to individuals, but only to corporations with contracts over \$100,000. The law no longer applies to me. Now I am free to boycott Sabra hummus and HP computers and still work as a math trainer for the state of Kansas. People in other states including Arizona, Arkansas and Texas are now suing their states over similar laws that take away the right to boycott. Together we amplify our voices to make a change in the world and to help bring justice to Israel/Palestine, where so many people are suffering from a lack of human rights.

## **Airbnb Removes Listings from the WestBank**

By Robert Atchison, WDC Israel-Palestine Task Force Member

In November 2018 Airbnb recognized their company should not be making a profit where people are unjustly misplaced. They removed around 200 West Bank listings. The West Bank has been occu-

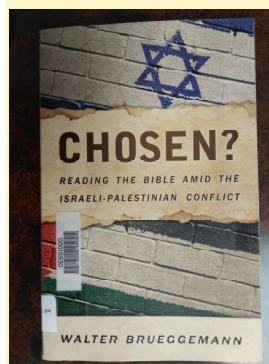
pled by Israel since 1967. Their policy of displacing Palestinians with Israeli settlements is viewed by most of the world as a violation of international law.

The ethical decision by Airbnb lines up with Mennonite Church USA's resolution, *Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine*. The resolution urges Mennonites to avoid purchases and investments directly related to military occupation of Palestinian territories (BDS).

Mennonites can participate in BDS by not buying Sabra or Tribe hummus which is made in the occupied territories by Strauss, an Israeli corporation. Strauss supports the Israeli Defense Force and the Golani and Givati Brigades through its Adopt a Warrior Program; these brigades have well documented incidents of human rights abuses against Palestinians.

## **Why You Should Read Walter Brueggemann's Chosen**

By Robert Atchison, WDC Israel-Palestine Task Force Member



*Chosen* addresses biblical questions surrounding the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Are citizens of the state of Israel descendants of the Israelites whom God called chosen? Was the promise of land forever or revocable depending on obedience? Is it anti-Semitic to criticize the nation of Israel?

Brueggemann points out that the Bible does not have a single voice, but argues with itself. The land was given to Israel unconditionally but held conditionally based on obedience. The stories of exile make this point. Brueggemann points out the irony considering Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

Is biblical Israel the same as contemporary Israel? There is a great difference between a covenant people and the contemporary, mostly secular nation that relies on massive military power.

*Chosen* is a good read for those truly seeking biblical guidance to understand the conflict. Brueggemann no longer sees a viable two-state solution and believes it has become a way to avoid dealing with the hard work that Israel must do to become a true democracy.