CHRISTIAN FRIENDS
OF YAD VASHEM

PLUS

CHRISTIAN ANTI-SEMITISM  BY SUSANNA KOKKONEN
ICEJ NEWS // "SEASONS OF HARVEST" // OBAMA VISITS ISRAEL
BETHLEHEM'S CHRISTIANS // VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA
Dear friends,

Early in April, Israel commemorated the Holocaust, when six million Jews were brutally and systematically murdered throughout Europe at the hands of the German Nazis. A week later, we were reminded of the 23,085 Israeli soldiers who have fallen defending the nation since 1948, followed by Israel’s joyous day for celebrating its independence – Yom Hatzmaut. Israel is 65 years old and has risen literally like a phoenix from the ashes of Auschwitz, Treblinka or Theresienstadt. This nation is truly a miracle before our very eyes!

Attending the official Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies at Yad Vashem this year gave us a strong reminder of one of the challenges facing the Jewish people today. One of the six Holocaust survivors chosen to light the six torches at Yad Vashem, representing the six million martyrs of the Holocaust, passed away just one week before the ceremony. There are still some 200,000 Holocaust survivors in Israel, but every day another 35 survivors are dying.

One lady residing at our home for Holocaust survivors in Haifa recently shared with me her biggest concern. “What will happen when we all have died?” she asked. “Will anybody believe that it all happened?”

I assured her that this is one of the core callings of the ministry of the Christian Embassy. Our partnership with Yad Vashem is a powerful tool against forgetfulness. Every year, we bring pastors from all over the world to Jerusalem for a week-long conference to learn not only the lessons from the Holocaust but also what can be done so that history will not repeat itself again.

Our vision is to double the number of pastors who are taking part in these annual seminars in coming years. One pastor from Singapore assured me of how important this week was for him. A ministry leader from Australia insisted that it was life changing.

Please help us touch and change more lives in the challenging days ahead!

May the Lord bless you out of Zion!

Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ Executive Director
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COMING UP IN NEXT MONTH’S WORD FROM JERUSALEM

Aliyah
Since 1989 the Christian Embassy has helped over 110,000 Jews journey home to Israel through more than 70 sponsored fully chartered flights plus numerous group and individual aliyah flights. We have also been active in other transportation and assistance efforts in many different countries.

Bnei Menashe
Over 7,000 members of the tribe of Manasseh are waiting in Northern India to return home to Israel. You can join us in being a part of the fulfillment of prophecy and help finance more flights for these precious people.

To follow our itinerary and list of conferences visit: www.icejusa.org
IN EARLY APRIL, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and Yad Vashem invited a select group of 23 Christian pastors and ministry leaders from 12 different countries to Jerusalem to take part in a special week-long training seminar on Holocaust education and combating the resurgence of anti-Semitism.

**Christian Leadership Conference**
The Christian Leadership Conference featured an array of lectures by scholars at Yad Vashem, moving encounters with Holocaust survivors, as well as tours of key biblical and historic sites in Israel.

The yearly conference is organised by Christian Friends of Yad Vashem to coincide with Yom HaShoah – the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day observances in Israel – so that participants can be present for the official state ceremonies held in Warsaw Ghetto Square on the Yad Vashem campus.

In cooperation with the International School for Holocaust Studies, the Christian Desk at Yad Vashem seeks to take already accomplished Christian leaders and enhance their knowledge on the Nazi genocide against the Jews, as well as their ability to address moral and historic issues related to the tragic legacy of Christian anti-Semitism.

Indeed, the pastors and other church leaders came away strongly motivated to spread what they had learned with clarity and passion. They were especially keen to now defend Israel from anti-Semitism disguised as anti-Zionism.

“It has been very moving and very meaningful to be here for these ceremonies and the leadership seminar”, enthused Barbara Dingle, a Christian pro-Israel activist from London. “I’m very aware of the growing anti-Semitism in Britain again, which is feeding the hostile boycott and divestment movement against Israel. It’s very important for Christians to learn about our mistakes and to teach others not to repeat them. I’m looking forward to applying what I’ve learned here on Israel’s behalf.”

“I felt that to be a better advocate for the Jewish
state, I needed to have a more comprehensive picture of what happened in the Holocaust and that is what we are getting here”, related Rev. George Annadorai from Singapore. “It’s especially good to hear from some of the surviving victims and learn where we went wrong in the past and how Christians can be a part of the solution in the future.”

“Coming here has re-opened my eyes to the need to stay informed. We need to be aware of the past and how it relates to current events”, concurred Rachel Michelle Toth from California. “When you get this close and this involved with Israel, we know we can’t be silent again. My prayer is that I will be able to speak up in the right situations and stand up for the Jewish people.”

“It’s been a wonderful and very informative experience”, said Pastor Marvin Barham from Little Rock Arkansas. “For years I have been studying the Jewish roots of Christianity, to get to really know my faith as it was given to us by Jesus and the Apostles. And the Holocaust is the story of churches that had cut themselves off from those Hebraic roots. We need to learn about this history lest we become a generation that is ill-informed. If you don’t know your own history, anyone can rewrite it for you.”

One participant came from an Eastern European country that stood out during the Holocaust for its response to the Nazi extermination campaign against the Jews.

“It’s been a great honour to be present at these ceremonies, especially because my country has a unique history concerning the Holocaust”, explained Pastor Ivan Hazarbassanov from Sofia, Bulgaria. “Even though the government was siding with the Nazis, the ordinary people began protesting the deportation of Jews. It was a matter of simply treating them as our neighbours. So thankfully, most of our Jewish population survived and the majority later came to settle in Israel after the war.”

Dr. Susanna Kokkonen
Dr. Susanna Kokkonen, Director of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem, described the seminar participants as “a group which seems to be very worried about the state of the Church today. They understand we don’t study the Holocaust just for what happened in the past but also for our day. They want to know what are the tell-tale signs of a nation in spiritual decline, when it enters into the kind of moral descent that Nazi Germany did.”

“These in-depth seminars are a life-changing experience”, she added. “For many it is the first time they encounter in person the historic reality that Christians played an underlying role in preparing the ground for the Nazi extermination of Jews.”

Meantime, more than a dozen Christian organisations, led off by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, were among the myriad of Israeli dignitaries and groups which laid wreaths in Warsaw Ghetto Square during the official state ceremonies on Yom HaShoah.

“This shows that the Christian world is becoming more interested in the Holocaust, even though it seems to be getting further away in our memories and the survivors are getting older”, noted Dr. Kokkonen.

Yad Vashem
Yad Vashem is considered the most revered institution in Israel, having been officially tasked with preserving the memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, and with teaching its universal lessons to future generations. To assist in this mission, the ICEJ has become the main partner in creating a Christian Desk at Yad Vashem.

DONATE TODAY
Please support the vital work of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem. Make your donation today at: www.icejusa.org/yadvashem
AS A CHRISTIAN, it seems to me that Christianity has sadly played a significant role both in anti-Judaism and the persecution of the Jewish people. The teachings of various established churches included the charge that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, and thus they deserved to be punished. The prolonged suffering and dispersal of Jews among the nations were seen as just retribution for their monumental crime of killing God. Another theological concept basically claimed that Christianity had replaced Judaism, due to the Jewish people’s poor performance as the Chosen People of God.

All in all early Christianity, spearheaded by the early Church fathers, began to view Judaism as inferior to Christianity and Jews themselves as evil and cursed, unworthy of mercy and love. In essence, a Jew was regarded as worse than a pagan.

One of the most well-known detractors of Jews was the Church father John Chrysostom (354-430), who accused the Jews of, among other things, idolatry and housing the Devil himself in their synagogues.

In his “First Homily Against the Jews”, Chrysostom insisted that, “Jews are dogs, stiff-necked, gluttonous, drunkards. They are beasts unfit for work... The Jews had fallen into a condition lower than the vilest animals... The synagogue is worse than a brothel and a drinking shop; it is a den of scoundrels, a temple of demons, the cavern of devils, a criminal assembly of the assassins of Christ.... I hate the Jews, because they violate the Law... It is the duty of all Christians to hate the Jews.”

Several centuries later, this visceral anti-Jewish propaganda was refuelled by the influential reformer Martin Luther. When asked, “What shall we do with this damned, rejected race of Jews?” Luther responded:

“First, their synagogues should be set on fire... Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed... Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing,
and blasphemy are taught... Fifthly, travelling privileges must be absolutely forbidden to Jews... If however we are afraid that they might harm us personally... then let us settle with them for that which they have extorted usuriously from us, and after having divided it up fairly, let us drive them out of the country for all time.”

Centuries later, such pronouncements were a source of inspiration to the Nazis. Both Chrysostom and Luther were quoted by Nazi officials and their works were reprinted by the Third Reich. Quite strikingly, their views were also quoted by the defence in the Nuremberg war crimes trials. For instance, Julius Streicher, editor of the anti-Semitic weekly Der Stürmer, asserted at his trial that Martin Luther also should have been there presenting his case. Thus one can clearly see the link between classic Christian anti-Judaism and modern racist anti-Semitism.

Because Christianity shared a tradition with Judaism, the Jews constituted a perpetual challenge to Christian truth. Even more disturbing was the fact that the Christian Messiah hailed from the House of David. One way of overcoming this dilemma was to increasingly diminish and blot out the Jewish identity of Jesus.

As a consequence, the Jewish character of Jesus was removed and he became first and foremost a Christian, leaving little to connect Christians to Judaism. However, Jesus was indeed a Jew, as were his family and disciples, and there is nothing in the New Testament which negates that.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus states clearly: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.”

Similarly, the Gospels record Jesus celebrating the Jewish holidays, and describe him as wearing the garments of a religious Jewish male.

"DO NOT THINK THAT I HAVE COME TO ABOLISH THE LAW OR THE PROPHETS; I HAVE NOT COME TO ABOLISH THEM BUT TO FULFIL THEM." - JESUS

Perhaps the saddest attempt at removing any traces of Jewishness both from Church practices in general and from Jesus’ persona in particular took place in the Nazi era and the effort to ‘de-judaize’ Germany. To this end “Deutsche Christen”, the so-called German Christian Church, disassociated Christianity from the Old Testament altogether and turned Christ into a perfect “Aryan Jesus”. They also published their own de-judaized New Testament, altered their hymn books, and updated their catechism, all in the effort to rid German Christianity of all Jewish influence.

It is no wonder then that when Kristallnacht – the Night of the Broken Glass – took place on November 9, 1938 the churches of Germany were silent. The mass pogrom saw 30,000 Jews rounded up and taken to concentration camps, while 1,000 synagogues were burned all over Germany. The lack of public criticism left the Nazis with a sense that they now had a license to forge ahead with anti-Jewish actions, including the confiscation of Jewish property. As far as I know, there was only one church leader who publicly lamented that “synagogues too are houses of God”.

By the time Germany ignited World War Two in 1939, many opportunities to react had been lost. Increasingly, churches throughout Europe mostly kept silent while Jews were persecuted and murdered. Any protest was exceptional.

Several factors lay behind this deafening silence: anti-Judaism in churches expressed in sermons and by other means; Europe’s identity as a primarily Christian continent and a perceived need to protect the church institutions themselves. This, in turn, raises a very profound question: In times of crisis, is it more important for a church to protect its institution or to be a voice of morality?

What does come through clearly are the limits of human compassion. In such a situation, how was it possible for only some to react to the Lord’s leading while most of humanity were deaf to His gentle voice.

Let us all remember the words – very serious words – of the detained pastor and concentration camp inmate Martin Niemöller: “Christianity in Germany bears a greater responsibility before God than the National Socialists, the SS and the Gestapo. We ought to have recognised the Lord Jesus in the brother who suffered...”

Dr. Susanna Kokkonen is Director of Christian Friends of Yad Vashem. Learn more about this vital work at: www.icejusa.org/yadvashem
Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread [...] and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labours which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labours from the field.” (Exodus 23:14-16)

Three times a year the people of Israel were required by God to come to Jerusalem for a holy convocation. Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles are the three great pilgrimage feasts which the Israelites were instructed to celebrate. All three biblical feasts were celebrations of thanksgiving for the different seasons of harvest in Israel’s calendar. In this and coming issues of the Word From Jerusalem magazine, we will feature a three-part teaching series that looks at the important lessons these festivals teach us about “Harvest”, which is the theme of this year’s Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem.

FIRST FRUITS
The Passover feast was the first of the three great harvest festivals, and it was also called the feast of the firstfruit or chag habikurim.

“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. (Leviticus 23:10-11)

Every Passover, “on the day after the Sabbath”, a sheaf of firstfruits (bikurim in Hebrew) were to be waved before God. The firstfruit represented not only the very first produce of each year, it also represented the entire harvest. Paul explains this in Romans 11:16, saying, “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy...” This means that through the offering and the setting apart of the firstfruits, the entire harvest was set apart.
ISRAEL THE FIRSTBORN

God called Israel as a nation His firstborn. “Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn.” (Exodus 4:22)

This means that Israel has been given by God the rank of the firstborn among the nations. In saying so, God declared in a beautiful way His intention to bless all the nations of the earth. Remember what Paul said: “If the firstfruit is holy then the lump is holy.” (Romans 11:16)

In calling and blessing Israel as His firstborn, the Creator was declaring that He was also going to call and bless a redeemed people from all the nations. This corresponds to the election God placed upon Israel from the beginning: “In 617; Zechariah 9:12). As the inheritance of a firstborn is ensured by God, in the same manner we know that He will fulfil all His promises given to Israel.

JESUS, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD

During the Passover week, “on the day after the Sabbath” – that is, the first day of the week – the firstfruit offering was waved in the Temple. The Gospels record that it was on that very day when Jesus rose from the dead.

“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb…” (Matthew 28:1). Jesus thus became “the firstborn from the dead.” (Colossians 1:18; see also 1 Corinthians 15:20).

‘Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.’

Waving the firstfruits before God was a declaration that all the produce of the coming year belonged to Him. He owns it all, and His blessing on the seed is crucial as it is also He who gives the increase.

The same was true for all cattle and even for each family. God said, “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, […] it is Mine.” (Exodus 13:2) So for each first child, there was a symbolic sacrifice brought to the Temple to represent the firstborn of the family.

By honouring God with our firstfruits, we declare that our families and all our possessions belong to Him. This holds a great potential of blessing for us. If we decide to dedicate our family and our possessions to God, we submit them to His Kingship and place everything under His hand of blessing. It means that we give our best to God, just as Abel gave the firstborn (bikurim) and it found favour and acceptance with God (Genesis 4:4).

That is why the Bible calls him “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

Jesus is the “firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15) and thus has the supremacy in all things (Colossians 1:18). Even though we can call him our elder brother, we honour and worship him as our King, Lord and Saviour.

CONCLUSION

We end part one of this teaching series with the thought that the firstfruits are a representation of the best that we have and of all we own. If we present this back to God with a thankful heart, He promises us His blessing.

“Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.” (Proverbs 3:9-10) Be encouraged to give God your very best! 😊

(Next month in Part II: Shavuot – the Harvest begins!)
During his recent visit to Israel, US President Barack Obama also made a stop in Bethlehem, known as the birthplace of Jesus. This historic city relies heavily on tourism, but the influx of visitors dropped sharply during the second Palestinian intifada and is only now starting to recover. However, the local Arab Christian community continues to struggle, as the Muslims are now in the majority and there are few jobs available for local Christians.

Over recent decades, many proud Christian families in Bethlehem have been pressured to sell their homes and businesses to Muslims and have moved abroad. Barely 10% of Bethlehem’s residents today are Christian, a complete reversal of 100 years ago when the town was 90% Christian. Those Christians who are left have a hard time finding employment as Muslims dominate the local branches of government and all the main businesses, and they give preference to hiring fellow Muslims when job positions come open. Arab Christians from Bethlehem also have trouble competing for the limited number of work permits available for jobs in Israel. So without help from the outside, the future of Christianity in Bethlehem looks very bleak.

In recent years, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has partnered with local Arab churches to assist needy Christian families and try to stem this exodus of Christians from Bethlehem. One such partner is the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem, one of the largest Evangelical congregations in the Palestinian areas. The church is pastored by Dr. Naim Khoury and his son, Rev. Stephen Khoury, who have been very bold in sharing their faith over the years and now oversee a growing network of churches and Bible study groups in several other Palestinian cities as well.

In ministering to Palestinian Muslims and even traditional Arab Christians, the Khourys face a number of unique challenges. Families often cut off contact with their followers. They may lose their jobs, or their children may face persecution or expulsion at school.

“There is joy in seeing people’s lives changed, but there is also a lot of sorrow and a lot of suffering”, explained Stephen Khoury. “Yet at the end of the day we are making a difference, and that’s the most important thing.”

For the past year, the Christian Embassy has teamed with the Khourys to help feed dozens of struggling Arab Christian families in Bethlehem through a special food voucher program. What makes this humanitarian project truly unique is that a third partner is also involved – a Jewish interfaith center based in the nearby settlement of Efrat.

“We have been engaged in interfaith dialogue with local and Western Christians for some time now, but we felt a need to go beyond that and reach out to our ‘neighbours’ with actions that match our faith”, said David Nekrutman, an Orthodox Jew who directs the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation in Efrat. “I have known Pastor Stephen Khoury for three years now and we’ve identified two areas of great need among Bethlehem’s Christians. One is fighting poverty, which we are doing through the food voucher program, and the more long-term problem is finding them jobs.”

In April, Nekrutman and the ICEJ AID team were invited to Bethlehem to finally meet the Arab families that are being assisted one year into the food voucher program.

“I have dreamed of moments of reconciliation like this”, Nekrutman told the gathering. “We are two people living in the same land but in two different worlds, and we need to learn to love each other.”

Speaking in Arabic, Nicole Yoder of ICEJ AID told the families, “I have heard many Arab Christians in the Holy Land talk about how they feel forgotten by the rest of the Christian world. But we are here to reassure you that we are committed to helping meet your needs during these difficult times.”

At the event, the ICEJ team encountered Arab Christian men and women who are very talented and skilled, and more than willing to work, but there are simply no jobs for them. They do not want the food voucher program to be permanent, as they want to earn their own way. But until the political situation improves, they are grateful that other Christians are showing they care.

“It is such a blessing to open the fridge and see food for my family”, one Christian woman testified.

“Many of these precious brothers and sisters in Christ don’t know what to do after university. There is no hope for them”, noted Rev. Khoury. “We have people here with Bachelor’s degrees, but instead of working in their professions they are carving wood. So I can’t say enough about
Teaching little hearts to love

BY ESTERA WIEJA

When it comes to teaching children to love and accept one another, there is no such thing as ‘too young’! Such is the work of “Little Hearts”, a unique pre-school program in Jerusalem supported by the Christian Embassy, where several staff families also send their youngest children.

At Little Hearts, a rich diversity of Jewish, Arab and foreign children between the ages of two and six years old mingle daily in a warm, cheerful setting. The children at Little Hearts are learning reconciliation and cultural understanding at tender young ages.

The teachers at Little Hearts reflect the same broad array of background, with Israeli Jews, Arab Christians, a German and an Italian serving on staff.

Yet the day-care center is most unique because it founder, Taysir Abu Saada, was once a PLO militiaman who today is an evangelical Christian Arab at peace with his Jewish neighbours. He came to faith in Jesus and went through a long process of healing and reconciliation, all recounted in his book “Once an Arafat Man”.

Today, he and his wife Karen seek to bring that healing to the younger generations in the Holy Land, through their ministry “Seeds of Hope”, which first started a kindergarten in Jericho and last year opened the Little Hearts preschool in Jerusalem.

The ICEJ has been supporting Little Hearts in various ways, such as purchasing furniture, art supplies and music materials for the children. Also, a scholarship was provided to a family in need that wanted their child to grow up in this welcoming environment. As the school expands, more scholarships will be needed.

So please help us to offer more scholarships for the school and to meet its financial challenges. Give today to ICEJ AID at www.icejusa.org/aid

(From left) Nicole Yoder and Yudit Setz of ICEJ AID, David Nekrutman, Stephen and Naim Khoury

how thankful these families are for righteous people like the Christian Embassy who are standing with us.”

Meanwhile, the ICEJ is sponsoring tuition costs for a number of families in the Khourys church so their children can attend Christian schools, rather than Palestinian public schools that require study of the Koran.

The Christian Embassy also is providing funds to sponsor young Arab pastors being trained for future ministry at the Bible school run by First Baptist Church of Bethlehem. The Leadership and Career Training Program includes the possibility of a scholarship to learn a profession besides pastoral ministry.

DONATE TODAY

Please give to ICEJ AID today to help us meet these urgent needs. Donate at: ww.icejusa.org/aid

A PURIM PARTY at Little Hearts
ICEJ playground helps orphanage ‘celebrate a better life’

BY EMMANUEL MFOUKOU

IN APRIL, ICEJ International Director Rev. Juha Ketola led a group of Finnish Christians on a visit to special home for orphaned and abused children in Ashdod that the Christian Embassy has been supporting for nearly three decades.

During the visit, the group spent time with children from difficult backgrounds living in the Neve Galim center, which provides them with a unique and warm family atmosphere. Many of the children carry heart-breaking stories, and to deal with the traumas of their earlier lives each is placed in a house with an adult couple who serve as loving ‘parents’ to them.

The center has seven such family units, which give the 90 children at the home the feeling of a normal upbringing, many for the first time.

ICEJ AID has been engaged with the center since the 1980s, sponsoring the care of many children. Funds also have been provided for new furniture, and for medical, psychological and educational services. Recently, the ICEJ also financed the building of a new playground for the children, who are between the ages of four and thirteen years old.

As the Finnish group arrived at the orphanage, they were welcomed by children singing and handing out flowers. The group toured the family homes and listened as several children opened up about their previous struggles and their loving adoptive parents.

The highlight of the day was the inauguration of the playground, which was a source of great joy for the kids. As soon as the ribbon was cut, the children ran straight to the slides and swings.

The ICEJ also surprised Danny Toura, manager of Neve Galim, with a cheque for building an additional playground. He was overwhelmed by the gift and grateful for the ICEJ’s faithful support over the years.

“This is a real celebration. There is a lot of joy and happiness here”, said Toura. “I can see the fruit from my work. I can see how the children are happy and how they are laughing. Thanks to your support we have been able to give the children a better life.”

“From now on this playground will be the heart of the village, and this motivates me to continue to enlarge the playground, because I don’t want to stop here”, he added.

“It is really wonderful to see this place”, responded visitor Rut Sahramies from Helsinki. “The children are so happy and it’s awesome to see how much this means to them. When I get back home to Finland I will really encourage my family and friends to support this center. It’s special to see the love between the children and the manager.”

Give today to ICEJ AID at int.icej.org/aid/icej-aid
CELEBRATING
THE PASSOVER

BY ESTERA WIEJA

Passover is a special time for Jewish families in Israel. For most, the Passover seder meal is the family highlight of the year.

Yet not everyone can enjoy it properly due to poverty and other setbacks in life. So every year during this season, the ICEJ steps in with traditional Passover baskets or food vouchers to make sure the holiday table is suited to such a special night as celebrating freedom from bondage.

During March, the ICEJ AID department was busy crisscrossing from one end of Israel to the other to distribute Passover baskets and food vouchers. They also handed out funds to sponsor community Passover seder meals for various groups of needy and disadvantaged people who long to be part of a warm family atmosphere on this occasion.

Thanks to generous support from Christians in many countries, we were able to increase our Passover assistance this year. Among those assisted were impoverished families, needy new immigrants, single-parent homes, the handicapped, the elderly and especially Holocaust survivors.

In Jerusalem, we joined in sponsoring a community Passover meal at a social club run by Enosh, a non-profit mental health association which provides services for mentally ill adolescents and adults from all parts of the city (photo above). Volunteers prepared fun contests for everyone, while some of the club members provided songs on guitar and flute.

Elsewhere, the ICEJ provided food vouchers to hundreds of individual families, including 70 families of new Bnei Menashe immigrants from India. The ICEJ AID team paid a special visit to some of these families now living in Kiryat Arba.
IN MARCH, I had the privilege of visiting the beautiful country of South Africa, with its breath-taking views and scenery. One’s eyes can rest while gazing at the vast green hills, the majestic mountain peaks and the huge waves where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet.

While enjoying this beautiful country, I had speaking engagements at church services and community meetings in the cities of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.

Local ICEJ Representatives Jan and Huibre Venter from Pretoria had organised a busy and meaningful program in the northern part of South Africa for us “to inject into the Body of Christ” a nourishing dose of teachings about God’s plans and purposes for the people of Israel, and how this is all linked with the worldwide Church of Jesus today.

Our first priority when in the nations is edifying the Church and we are grateful to the Lord for the doors He opened on this ministry trip. It was great to visit new churches and break new ground for our ministry, as well as to meet with pastors who are responsible for God’s work in that part of the world.

However, we did not stop there, but also had a lot of other activities and ministry opportunities. These included one-on-one meetings with local Christian leaders, a meeting with Jewish community leaders under the banner of the Zionist Federation, sharing with students at Pretoria University, addressing businessmen, and conducting radio and TV interviews. It was a great pleasure to sit down in the studios of Radio Impact and Radio Pulpit to share with their vast audience of listeners and remind them afresh of how the Bible is all about Jesus – yet how He never came in a vacuum, but his first as well as his second coming have the same context and setting: the Jewish People and their Land.

We spoke of what a wonderful blessing the Jewish people have been for all nations, especially with all the spiritual treasures God has given to the world through them. No wonder they are still the “apple of God’s eye”, and surely God’s promise remains that whoever blesses Israel, the same shall be blessed (Genesis12:3)! The presence of the Lord upon us was also exceptionally strong during the TV interview for the Gospel program “Love, Life, Light”, on the national secular TV channel. There, I was also offered the chance to lead the viewers in prayer on behalf of the whole nation of South Africa.

One of the highlights of this ministry trip to South Africa was definitely the “Mighty Men Conference” with Angus Buchan in Polokwane. Thousands of men – and I would like to emphasize real men – came to this gathering organised under the leadership of this dear servant of God, evangelist Angus Buchan. He is a true friend of our ministry and allowed me to share a message from my heart to these men. What a joy!

In the sub-tropical city of Durban, I was joined by my good host in the southern part of South Africa, our National Director Dave Wilken. Together, we spent time with two couples who each had previously served for several years as staff managers at the ICEJ
headquarters in Jerusalem: Arthur and Paddy Ivey, and Charles and Sharon Lorens.

At the church service that evening, we had a powerful time of intercession involving the whole congregation praying for the national leaders of both Israel and South Africa. Afterwards, we sat down for a lovely dinner prepared by Sharon and had a blessed time of fellowship. It was especially home-like, since all of them have served in Jerusalem – including Dave Wilken and his wife Ellen, who spent three years as administrators in our head offices early in the ministry of the ICEJ back in the 1980s.

Just as in the north and east of the country, the local ICEJ team had gone before us arranging a productive schedule in the Cape Town area, in the south. Dave Wilken, together with fellow ICEJ-South Africa board members and friends, had prepared local Church meetings, one-on-one meetings, meetings with the Zionist Federation, and a radio interview with the local Christian radio station CCFM.

During our meeting with the Jewish leadership in Cape Town, I shared about current developments in the Evangelical movement worldwide and their friendly relations with Israel. I was happy to bring them the encouraging news of what is taking place at the moment in the southern hemisphere of our planet and especially in western Africa (Please see the April 2013 issue of the Word From Jerusalem).

Among the many appearances in the south, one of the great privileges for me was to minister at the Christian Life Camps Bay church in Cape Town. At the moment, this fellowship has as their interim pastor a solid friend of Israel, brother Tiny Jones. A skilled accountant, he too belongs to this special group of South Africans who have volunteered to serve in management positions at our Jerusalem headquarters.

In addition, it was very inspiring to meet a young couple ‘on fire for God’ from the Helderberg Christian Fellowship church, which draws a lot of young people to worship the Lord in a place right by the seashore. The response from this younger generation of believers to the biblical message on Israel was truly something that gives hope!

But then again maybe this response should not be surprising, since this church was established just a few years ago from nothing and is growing and going strong in the Holy Spirit, indicating that God’s hand is upon them! And before long, they will be coming to visit us in Israel!
ICEJ-ITALY HOSTS TEACHING CONFERENCE ON ISRAEL

In March, ICEJ media director David Parsons traveled to Italy to give a series of teachings on Israel at a weekend conference organized by the new ICEJ-Italy branch and its national director, Rev. Tony Rozinni. The three-day conference was held under the theme of Ezekiel 37, “Can These Bones Live?”, and took place in a small picturesque village right on the Adriatic coast. Christians from across the country were in attendance, including several pastors eager to hear teaching on Israel and its relations with the Church. Later, David, with his wife Josepha and son Yonathan, ended up in Rome, where he also spoke in one of the oldest and largest Evangelical churches in this historic city.

LARGE CROWDS AT ICEJ EVENTS IN HEART OF EUROPE

In recent weeks, ICEJ international speaker Doron Schneider had a busy touring program to speak in churches in Germany, Austria and Denmark. ICEJ-Germany and ICEJ-Austria both arranged full schedules of meetings at churches and other venues that saw packed audiences hungry to hear about Israel from a biblical and current affairs perspective. Doron noted that the crowds in Germany and Austria just seem to be growing due to increased interest in Israel, and many felt the need to repent of past anti-Semitic and anti-Israel attitudes. After Doron’s speaking tour through Denmark, our Danish national representatives Joorn and Silweg Leenders were contacted by many local Christians who said they were extremely blessed by the messages he brought.

ICEJ TEAM AT GLOBAL WOMENS’ CONFERENCE IN STRASBOURG, FRANCE

In April, ICEJ staff member Estera Wieja led a delegation of women from Jerusalem to a Women in Leadership congress in Strasbourg, France and attended by women from across Europe, as well as Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas. The Israeli team included Sandy Shoshani, wife of a Messianic Jewish pastor and head of the pro-life group Be’ad Chaim, and Elvira Khoury, wife of a noted Arab Christian pastor from Bethlehem. Estera Wieja, who is originally from Poland, was also joined by Lisa Schmid of the ICEJ-Germany office. The conference theme was “May Your Kingdom Come”, and was convened to motivate Christian women in leadership to bring hope into their spheres of influence and change to their nations. Shoshani and Khoury were especially invited to give their perspectives as an Israeli Jewish believer and an Arab Christian on how man-made boundaries cannot hold us back from praying for God’s Kingdom to come and His peace to reign.
During the recent Passover holiday, several ICEJ staff members visited families of the victims of the brutal terror attack at the Dolphinarium club in Tel Aviv back in June 2001, to comfort them and present food vouchers for Pessach.

“It doesn’t matter how much time passes by, I miss my daughter every day, especially on holidays”, explained Raissa, who lost her daughter Irena in the terror attack. “It happened two weeks before her seventeenth birthday... Thank you for remembering our children, that you have not forgotten them!”

In another home, Anna recalled how she made aliyah from Russia in 1999 together with her daughter Anja and her younger son.

“We came to Israel for the health of my daughter”, recounted Anna. “We learned Hebrew for half a year and I studied medicine. Then the horrible day came. Just ten days before her sixteenth birthday, my daughter and a friend went to the Dolphinarium. They never came home again.”

“I still suffer depression”, she continued in tears. “But I get up every morning because of my son. He lost his father and then his sister. I am so grateful that I have him. He finished three years of army service and is studying in Tel Aviv now.”

In yet another home, Liya and Faik talked about how they both survived the terror attack.

“It is a miracle that I am still alive”, insisted Liya. “I was very close to the suicide bomber.” Though injured from the blast, her new pair of platform shoes saved her feet from being hit by shrapnel that struck the 15-cm high heel. Today she is an eager young lawyer, though she is still haunted by the incident.

Meantime, Faik said he had his mobile phone in the pocket of his pants, which blocked shrapnel that would have torn into his leg. “Thank you for coming”, Faik told his visitors. “You are a comfort for those families who lost someone. You are giving us hope and strength to live our dreams and move forward in life.”

During the recent Passover holiday, several ICEJ staff members visited families of the victims of the brutal terror attack at the Dolphinarium club in Tel Aviv back in June 2001, to comfort them and present food vouchers for Pessach.

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Image: Faik and Liya

**COMFORTING THE DOLPHINARIUM FAMILIES**

BY BIRTE SCHOLZ

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The Christian Embassy hosted a Passover seder meal for its staff in late March, following many of the Jewish traditions associated with this occasion. ICEJ Executive Director Dr. Jürgen Bühler provided a teaching on Passover and its relation to the sacrifice of Christ, our paschal lamb.
VISITORS TO THE EMBASSY

The Christian Embassy receives a steady stream of visitors each month, from local Israeli dignitaries and walking tours to Christian tour groups and interfaith study missions. In recent weeks, the list of visitors has included a group of Finnish Christians and a contingent of Jewish and Christian students from Yale University on a joint tour of the Holy Land. The Yale students hold a Bible study together back on campus and requested a briefing from the ICEJ on the history and tenets of Christian Zionism. This led to a lively discussion on the importance of the Abrahamic covenant for both Christians and Jews. You are invited to arrange your own visit to the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem during your next tour of Israel.

CONTACT US AT icej@icej.org

THOUSANDS JOINING ISAIAH 62 PRAYER CAMPAIGN

The Christian Embassy has been receiving many responses to our invitation to join the global Isaiah 62 Prayer Campaign and a number of positive reports have come in regarding churches and prayer groups that are participating each month. In Stuttgart, where the offices of ICEJ-Germany are located, a core group of around 100 Christians, both young and old alike, are gathering to pray on the first Wednesday of every month as part of the Isaiah 62 initiative. The group rotates the meeting among a network of churches in the city, and even invites special guests to share and lead the prayer times. Speakers have included ICEJ Vice Chairman Rev. Malcolm Hedding, Berlin pastor Andreas Bower, and most recently the team of Elvira Khoury, an Arab Christian pastor’s wife from Bethlehem, and Sandy Shoshani, wife of a Messianic Jewish pastor in Jerusalem.

We invite you to get your church, prayer team or Bible study group involved in the Isaiah 62 Prayer Campaign. For more information, go to: WWW.ICEJUSA.ORG/ISAIAH62
In recent months, the German Christian group Saxonian Friends of Israel once again sent professional work teams to Israel to assist with various building projects at the Christian Embassy headquarters and at our charitable partners around the country. In Haifa, the workers renovated several apartments to house new residents at the Haifa Home for Holocaust survivors. They also refurbished the apartments of Holocaust survivors living in Jerusalem, cleaning and painting the homes as well as repairing broken water pipes and electrical wiring. Dozens of the skilled Saxonian workers take annual vacation time each year to come volunteer at building and maintenance projects throughout Israel in cooperation with the ICEJ.
IN A RECENT BRIEFING, IDF Military Intelligence chief Maj.-Gen. Aviv Kochavi warned that “for the first time in dozens of years Israel has four borders threatened by terrorist breaching”.

He was referring, of course, to the active Gaza and Sinai borders in the south and the Lebanese and Golan borders in the north.

Hamas has presented a constant threat of rocket and terror attacks along the Gaza border for years and Hizbullah has repeatedly struck at Israel from Lebanon since its inception in the early 1980s. The Golan and Sinai borders, however, had been fairly quiet over recent decades, until the turmoil of the Arab Spring suddenly rendered them both extremely unstable.

As chaos reigned in Cairo and brutal civil war has torn Syria apart, radical Islamist militias have moved into the security vacuums created in both the Sinai and the Golan Heights, giving Israel’s security establishment new headaches to deal with. Hamas and al-Qaeda elements are operating in Sinai, while al-Qaida and other Sunni militias have now driven the Syrian army from the Golan border area and begun firing into Israel.

So how serious are these new threats? And what is Israel doing to meet them?

“We definitely see a deterioration in the capacity of our neighbours to control their side of the borders”, assessed Prof. Efraim Inbar of the BESA Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv. “They are consumed with domestic disputes and... it is true that radical groups with high motivations are now moving into these border areas.”

“So we see greater low-intensity challenges from Gaza, Sinai, Lebanon and now the Syrian border is warming up”, Inbar told ICEJ News. “As long as they are not state supported, we can manage. But if they get state sponsorship, as we’ve seen from Iran’s backing of Hizbullah and Hamas, then the threat is amplified.”

In this regard, Maj. Gen. Kochavi noted in his recent security briefing that “for the first time in many years the four main [regional] powers – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt – are controlled by religious leadership.... The State of Israel is considered by them as unacceptable.”

In the South, the terror and rocket threat from Gaza and Sinai has been growing for some time now, and has worsened in Sinai as Egypt has descended into chaos due to the Tahrir Square uprising.

Cross-border terror raids, kidnapping attempts and rocket barrages have all been launched from Sinai in recent years. And according to a recent UN report, an array of lethal weaponry from the Libya conflict has found its way to jihadist militias on the Gaza/Sinai front.

To meet this growing security challenge in the Negev, Israel has pressed ahead with developing and deploying the Iron Dome anti-rocket system which performed so brilliantly in last November’s Operation Pillar of Cloud – intercepting 85% of the rockets headed for populated towns.

In addition, the newly completed 260-km. security fence along the Sinai border has presented a serious impediment to terrorist infiltrations. The successful border fence will now be duplicated on the Golan frontier with Syria, with completion expected by mid-summer, and then later on the country’s eastern border with Jordan.

Speaking to his new cabinet last month about the mounting threat in the North, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel needs to construct a border fence on the Golan because “the Syrian army has moved away, and in its place global jihad elements have moved in”.

Indeed, in recent weeks the Syrian government withdrew several thousand of its best troops from the Golan Heights to defend the regime’s tenuous
Hold in Damascus. Rebel groups have moved into the vacuum and already are using the area as a staging ground for attacks on Israeli targets.

Alarmingly, Syria has become the new breeding ground for jihadist fighters, with thousands of foreign 'holy warriors' joining the fight to topple Assad. The Free Syrian Army commands about 50,000 fighters, but they are outnumbered by an estimated 70,000 radical Islamists spread among several al-Qaeda affiliates and Saudi-backed Salafist militias.

These jihadist forces in southern Syria have already begun spraying gunfire and artillery shells towards IDF patrols in the Golan, with Israel responding each time. But Israel's biggest fear is that some of Syria's deadly stockpile of chemical weapons could fall into the hands of either Hizbullah or the rebel Islamist militias.

To prevent this from happening, Israel reportedly carried out recent air strikes on a convoy of chemical munitions being moved from an army base in Syria towards the Lebanon border. Launched with a green light from Washington, the air raid was meant to send a signal to Damascus and Hizbullah not to cross an Israeli "red line".

So with the Golan border an active front once more, Israeli leaders are scrambling to erect the security fence and may consider the urgent deployment of Iron Dome batteries in the North.

They are also hoping Jordan and the West Bank do not fall prey to the political upheavals rocking the rest of the Arab world, lest jihadist elements get greater footholds there too and heat up the rest of Israel's borders.

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