



FAITH IN THE FACE OF EMPIRE: FACE TO FACE IN THE CONTEXT OF OCCUPATION

“What do I see and hear in the Holy Land? Some people cannot move freely from one place to another. A wall separates them from their families and from their incomes. They cannot tend to their gardens at home or to their lessons at school. They are arbitrarily demeaned at checkpoints and unnecessarily beleaguered by capricious applications of bureaucratic red tape. I grieve for the damage being done daily to people’s souls and bodies.

I see and hear that ancient olive trees are uprooted. Flocks are cut off from their pastures and shepherds. The homes of some people are bulldozed even as new homes for others are illegally constructed on other people’s land. I grieve for the land that suffers such violence, the marring of its beauty, the loss of its comforts, the despoiling of its yield.”

-Archbishop Desmond
Tutu

Context

The people in Palestine are still suffering from 100 years of injustice and oppression that were inflicted on the Palestinian people beginning with the unjust and unlawful Balfour declaration, intensified through the *Nakba* and the influx of refugees, followed by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza and the fragmentation of people and Palestinian land through policies of isolation and confiscation of land, and the building of Jewish-only settlements and the Apartheid Wall.

People are still suffering because of one political declaration from a Western Empire, based on a twisted theological premise. Even some churches and few Christian leaders supported the establishment of the colonial state, and totally ignored – even dehumanized – the nation, people of Palestine that had already existed for centuries and paid the price for atrocities committed in Europe.

Hundred years later with thousands of lives lost, towns and villages razed from the face of the earth, millions of refugees, thousands of homes demolished and continued incarceration of prisoners, the *Nakba* goes on.

Hundred years later and there is still no justice in Palestine! Discrimination and inequality, military occupation and systematic oppression are the rule. Today, people of Palestine stand in front of an impasse and have reached a deadlock. Despite all the promises, endless summits, UN resolutions, religious and lay leader's callings – Palestinians are still yearning for their freedom and independence, and seeking justice and equality.

Programme Description

For several years now, the Council for World Mission has been involved in the organization of cross-cultural exchange to enable a wider global dialogue on theology, spirituality and mission. One of the means for facilitating this dialogue has been through the Face to Face programme which enabled the immersion of students from different parts of the world into a context alien to them. It was hoped that this immersion would enable theological students to reflect on both the motivation and method of mission in different parts of the globe and bring this reflection back to their own contexts.

The following programme is specifically designed for seminary and graduate students who desire to have an opportunity to travel to the Holy Land and study some of the most important historical, theological and contemporary issues related to the Middle East in general and in Israel and Palestine in particular. It is organized for advanced students interested in devoting some quality time for critical studies, and also in theological reflection, cultural interaction and spiritual renewal.

One of the important components of this programme is its understanding of the Holy Land as a kind of a “fifth gospel”. The reading of the Biblical narratives in these concrete geographical settings will shape not only the student's understanding of the Scriptures, but also give them a better comprehension on how the Christian faith lives in this specific and complex social, political and religious world.

Although we will have and enjoy lectures, dialogues, and guided excursions and trips to different sites of special importance in the Land, we will focus not only in the old stones of archeological remains but we will also study the life of what can be described as the contemporary “living stones” or “sixth gospel”, which are the local Christian believers as they live and share their faith as minority groups within the larger context of Jewish and Islamic communities.

This educational program and seminar is ecumenical and interreligious in nature, scope, and design. The participants, from various Christian traditions and religious persuasions, form a dynamic learning community, not only in the classrooms and guided educational trips, but also in the sharing of ideas and reflections, and in the traveling and praying together.

Philosophy of Education

The philosophy that guides the design, creation and implementation of this graduate seminar is based in the following pedagogical reality: Education becomes a transforming and liberating experience, when students and professors engage together in teaching and learning processes, that allow them personally and in groups to see, experience, reflect, analyze and evaluate reality as it is presented in contemporary society. In the particular case of Israel and Palestine, faith is lived and shared in the midst of a military occupation which affects all sectors and levels of local communities, and the mission of the church is continuously challenged by the religious, social and political dynamics in both nations.

Aim

- To visit and enjoy some of the most important historical, cultural and religious sites in the Holy Land
- To study the social, political and spiritual realities in Israel and Palestine
- To reflect theologically and critically on the possibilities of reconciliation and peace with justice in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Objectives

- To enable theological students to engage in a global dialogue on theology, spirituality and mission
- To enable intercultural exchange and theological reflection
- To travel to the Holy Land and to visit and enjoy some of the most important holy sites for Christians, Jews, and Muslims
- To relate the biblical narratives with important historical sites in the Land, and to understand the ministry of Jesus in its original geographical, sociological and religious contexts
- To study the origins, development and implications of the Israel and Palestine political crisis, specifically the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.
- To explore the Imperial interventions in the Middle East, specifically in Israel and Palestine
- To visit important institutions that works for the implementation of a just peace and reconciliation in the region
- To enjoy the nature, and some of the flora and fauna of Israel and Palestine
- To affirm the importance of ecumenism and reconciliation as major forces to foster and encourage peace with justice in the Middle East and the world

Who is this for

This is open to students of Theology; either currently enrolled or has already graduated but are not ordained ministers.

Programme Dates

The Programme will be from **10th August to 10th September, 2019.**

Where is it

Through the entire programme the participants will be located on the campus of **Dar al-Kalima College, Bethlehem, Palestine**

CWM Research and Capacity Development Unit administers the Face to Face Programme. However, the actual implementation is a shared responsibility among CWM, the sending church/college, the host college, and the participant.

The Council for World Mission will arrange for and will cover the participant's international travel, accommodation and meal expenses throughout the Programme, including stipend during the field placements. The participants must hold valid passport to travel. CWM will assist in processing necessary visa, including transit visas.

Participants will need to bring extra spending money for expenses outside those covered by CWM. They are expected to prepare an individual paper under the guidance of a college advisor, which critically reflects on their experience. This Programme is not designed to form part of any other degree or diploma course, however the paper may be included in the assessment process for the participant's academic coursework, subject to prior agreement with the participant's home college. CWM may also consider these papers for publication.

How to Apply

Interested applicants may contact the General Secretary of the Denomination Church or the Principal of the Theological College. You may also contact Sudipta Singh, Mission Secretary – Research and Capacity Development at (email): **empowerment@cwmission.org**.

Duly completed application must be submitted via email at the above-mentioned email address or at hard copy to this address: *Research and Capacity Development Unit, 114 Lavender Street CT Hub2, Singapore 338729.*

Deadline of application is on 30th April 2019.