

Fourth Threshing Session on Israel and Palestine Conflict, 1/25/15

Jan Nisenbaum and Liz Moore, clerks; Susan Davies, recording

Attendees: Jan N., Liz M., Skip S., Michael C., Cliff H., Camilla D., Sharon F., Bill S., John B., Kitty R., Bob S., Susan D., Rick T., Jim S., Ian H.

I. Updates

A. P & SC list of groups that are doing non-violent protest and bridge building –

no list was available for this meeting, but it was agreed that Skip would combine names and info on peace groups in Israel and those of groups in Palestine that Camilla has. Kitty indicated David R. has a list of Israeli groups as well, and he will send them to Skip.

Skip might have an opportunity to visit some of these groups, see what they are currently doing.

B. Compassionate Listening Project –

David M., Minga, Jan and Skip are the organizing committee for this. Leah Green has had a medical situation which means she cannot be sure she can come for the session, but she will suggest someone else if needed. A written set of goals could be sent out as a poll, to see what we would like to accomplish at the session. It was agreed we should keep moving forward, not necessarily wait for this training. One of us expressed the sense that such a training is not really necessary, that if we keep meeting and listening we will come to a new place ourselves.

C. Chronology / timeline of Quaker involvement in Palestine and Israel –

Skip sent Everett M. a timeline he had created, and Everett thought it was fine. A link will be sent out to the larger group for the timeline.

D. International Law –

Camilla and Bob S. had offered to review the international law applicable to the conflict. Camilla felt it is difficult to present, she has been focusing on the law related to Occupation and it is hard to do in a neutral manner. Bob has been focusing on organizations like the International Committee, and has been struck by the fact that none of the organizations have a way to enforce their decisions. The summary will be sent out to the group.

E. FCNL actions –

Ian said he has not had an opportunity to look into this, but generally FCNL focuses on issues that have a chance for legislation to be passed, so unlikely much is going on related to this topic.

F. Good Friday Peace Witness –

P & SC has not made a decision as yet regarding the topic for this year's leaflet. Under consideration are 4 topics: climate change, nuclear weapons, black lives matter and Israel-Palestine conflict. They are not very optimistic about getting a leaflet on the latter through MBW, so are unlikely to pick it. One of those present requested that the committee not make such an assumption.

II/III. Proposed Process for Developing Minute and Components/Structure of a Minute –

- 4 “draft” minutes have been prepared by individuals/ small groups, the authors for 2 of which have been identified, 2 have asked to be anonymous. Discomfort with this was expressed by an individual present.
- There was a sense from some present that structuring a group process can interfere with coming to a unified voice, writing by committee can be a problem. Some felt it would take hundreds of hours to come up with a minute which MBW is likely to support, and it would be so “watered down” as to be meaningless.

- A person questioned why we have not spent time on the 4 drafts we have in front of us.
- Another person expressed concern that each of the 4 drafts was written by an individual or small group sitting alone, that it would be better to move ahead with the discernment of the gathered group.
- Several expressed the need to know “Who is our audience?” Is it the “conservatives who think we need to protect our own people”, depending on the police and armed forces? Is it Quakers who are not sure how to react when people disagree with what they have to say about the uselessness of violence, of armed conflict? Is it the wider population who tend to think in terms of always siding with family, nation?
- One person suggested he thinks of it as concentric circles, with our own and other Quaker communities at the center, other faith communities – primarily Christian – in the next circle, and our leaders in the outer circle.
- Another suggested the audience can be identified when we have a sense of what we expect to accomplish with a minute.
- Yet another described the audience as the “fragmented Jewish community”.
- One of us wants a moral document, describing Jesus’ audience as “anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear”.
- Another said that her outrage comes from “inrage”, that she comes to our community desiring to be a good person, and that she is uncomfortable with our expressing a desire to correct and direct people far away living in their situation - this is not her theology.
- One of us expressed her sense that there is such a range of thoughts and feelings in the room that a minute that tries to come up with specific advice would be impossible.
- Jan as the person clerking the session felt sorry that it was time to end the meeting, and shared her feeling that we were beginning to come to a deeper place in our sharing.
- Another read a quote from Thich Nhat Hanh, saying he thought Quakers came from a position of fostering peace and reconciliation, that this is our unique offering because we do not take sides.
- One of us said there are already numerous statements from Quaker organizations describing our peace testimony and values, another is not necessary.

IV. Closing –

We talked about the need for more time, that 1 ½ hour sessions are limiting because we take much of the time coming back to that deep place. Perhaps a Sunday afternoon session, extending through dinner, would be helpful. It was agreed we would have another session like this one in February, at which we would consider the possibility of a retreat or extended period together, and a longer session in March.