

Mothers Become Peacemakers in Israel, Palestine

I've never met a mother who didn't want her child to grow up to be a kind and loving person.

But because my ministry often takes me to conflict zones, I've met many mothers for whom that challenge is unusually daunting.

In recent years, I've traveled extensively in Israel-Palestine, learning from women actively engaged in peacemaking. Convinced that a peaceful future depends on the attitudes and behaviors of their kids, these Israeli and Palestinian mothers are very intentional.

Here are just a few examples of the choices some of my Israeli and Palestinian friends are making.

A young Jewish woman from Jerusalem says, "Where children absorb their society's perspective toward the 'other' - the 'enemy' - from a young age, it's important to take an active role in working against the fear and hatred that seep into our consciousness through the media, our friends and even our families."

She added that when tension between Jews and Arabs is high, it's very obvious in her neighborhood.

More border police and soldiers are present and additional checkpoints are set up, which make it hard for Palestinians to enter or exit nearby Palestinian villages.

Her daughters see the frightening authority and power of the soldiers and the vulnerability of the civilians waiting in long lines, and they ask her why.

"I know my daughters can't understand the complexity of what they're seeing, but I do know how important it is to affirm both our humanity and that of the other, even when we're afraid," she said. "I remind my girls that the Israeli soldiers are just like our family members, some of whom serve in the army, and that the Palestinians facing hardship are just like us, trying to go to school, work and the park."

One way this young mother tries to counteract fear is by enrolling her children in a mixed school with both Jews and Arabs who study together in Arabic and Hebrew.

The [Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel](#) brings together Jews and Arabs in six schools. When Israeli extremists set fire to one of the schools, both Jewish and Arab families joined together to rebuild.

One parent said, “We found a home here, in our shared life - where we create something together that does not erase where we come from, but that builds a space with enough room for us all.”

Another young mother who wants to demonstrate peacemaking as a way of life participates in reconciliation groups with other mothers and children from a similar mixed school.

While the kids think the play dates are simply fun, their moms know they’re key to building a different future.

“At their young ages, they’re learning to love the ‘other,’” she explained. “As they get older, we’ll talk about systemic injustices and security threats, but for now, this is enough: friendship and love.”

Along with like-minded friends, this mom also takes her children to peaceful demonstrations where Jews and Arabs advocate together for nonviolence, reconciliation and a shared future.

One such group is [Combatants for Peace](#), a grassroots organization of former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters.

These men and women who formerly picked up weapons of violence now advocate for the weapons of words and shared stories.

“I want my kids to see that even people who used to participate in violent actions now realize there’s a better way,” one group member noted.

After the deadly Palm Sunday attack on the Coptic Christian church in Egypt, the Coptic Church in the Holy Land organized a silent demonstration at the site of Mary’s well in Nazareth.

Along with clergy from many churches, mothers and their children carried candles as a stand of solidarity against violent acts. Then they prayed the Lord's Prayer for the victims' families as well as for the perpetrators.

Explaining why she came, one young mother said, "The Coptic Christians responded to this tragedy by focusing on love and prayer for their enemies. I want my kids to see this in action."

A Palestinian Christian mother of three and director of the [Arab Israeli Bible Society](#) wanted to teach her kids the biblical foundations for peacemaking.

As she fasted and prayed about what she could do to help raise up a generation of peacemakers, she received an idea that fit both her skills and her network of relationships.

In partnership with her theologian husband, she published a children's Bible called "The King of Peace and His Followers."

This unique Bible pairs relevant stories from the Scripture with principles of contemporary peacemaking.

It is now [available in an app](#) - with English and Arabic versions - which employs video, stories, puzzles, coloring and interactive questions to challenge and inspire kids to be peacemakers.

Two American teachers, now living and teaching in Jerusalem, developed a [Peace Heroes Curriculum](#), which uses biographical sketches of peacemakers throughout history to instill in students and teachers alike the values and ethos of peace and nonviolence.

The ever-expanding curriculum now highlights 60 diverse heroes from around the world, including Lehman Gbowee, Malala Yousafzai, Vaclav Havel, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Sojourner Truth, Corrie ten Boom as well as many Israeli and Palestinian heroes.

The curriculum affirms the human dignity of all people, celebrates diversity, exposes students to important world issues and propels them to positive action. Some of the most enthusiastic supporters of the curriculum are mothers.

"Everything my daughter learns in the [Peace Heroes Curriculum](#), she brings

home and teaches me,” one mother said. “Then I tell my colleagues at work. It’s sad that we never learned these things in school. We need our kids to teach us!”

Currently, the curriculum is being piloted in schools in Israel, Palestine, Kenya and soon in South Africa.

[Musalaha](#) is a nonprofit organization that facilitates reconciliation based on the life and teachings of Jesus.

The staff recognize that children growing up in a conflict situation often harbor attitudes of hatred, bitterness, victimization, aggression and violence.

Dehumanization and demonization of the other side are ingrained in youth even though they may have never met the other.

To break this cycle of hatred, Musalaha takes young people out of their day-to-day environment to experience desert trips, summer camps, reconciliation leadership training and spiritual formation workshops.

Interestingly, many of the mothers I wrote about here - and dozens more I’ve met - were first inspired to pursue the path of peace through their experiences with Musalaha.

In the last eight years, I’ve traveled to the Holy Land a dozen times. I go back repeatedly, not just to see where Jesus walked in history, but to see where he is walking now, through the lives of those who take seriously his call to be peacemakers.

Seeing the increasing division and hostility in our own country makes me even more committed to learning from and highlighting the stories of the peacemaking moms in the Holy Land.

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Editor’s note: This article is part of a series for Mothers’ Day 2017 (May 14):

Previous articles in the series are:

[*A Mother's Day Prayer to Relieve Church-Service Angst*](#)

[*Is Your Church Building Authentic Community for Women?*](#)

[*Don't Shut Down if You Struggle with Infertility*](#)