

Tantur Ecumenical Institute Newsletter

*Celebrating 40 years of Learning, Community & Hospitality
1972 - 2012*

Resurrecting Painful Memories
by
Pastor Erik Graefe

Latest News and Events:

- **Resurrecting Painful Memories** by *Pastor Erik Graefe, Abeline, Kansas, USA*
- **A Milestone for Tantur – “Celebrating 40 Years of Learning Community & Hospitality** by *Keith Begg (Tantur), originally from Limerick, Ireland*
- **70 Years Later, Have We Learned Anything?** by *Mary Linton, Stephantown, New York, USA.*
- **A Reflection for November** by *Fr. Paul G Shannahan SM, Akaroa, New Zealand.*



“Little Donkey” the suffering in Hebron is often palpable and leaves the visitor with unforgettable memories and a lot of soul searching

Four years ago, a tornado devastated a community about 8 miles from my home in North Central Kansas. I had forgotten how the scene impacted me at such a visceral level as I visited the community in the days following the storm. Seeing the debris, the remains of the once beautiful trees, and the shambles where there once was a town was impossible for me to process. All of the normal ways in which one makes sense of and apprehends the world were seemingly short circuited. My senses, my emotions, my intellect, all of them were simply not working in the face of this scene for which I had no frame of reference. As I rode through the community on the back of a garbage truck, speaking with and praying with victims, I began to apprehend the world differently than I could have before imagined. This new way of understanding for me was born out of the sense of “nothing” and powerlessness that overwhelmed me initially. It took time, but slowly I began to see and understand again. In the residents’ eyes, in their willingness to allow me to be present with them, in their voices, I began to apprehend again something real, a kind of flotation device in the sea of powerlessness and nothingness in which I found myself. Out of this “nothing” we were able to experience resurrection together. This is how resurrection occurs.

I had forgotten the feeling or “non-feeling” of that experience in the last four years until this summer. I was a member of Tantur’s July group, and on the 20th, we visited together the community of Hebron. We began with a visit to the Ibrahim Mosque where the holy matriarchs and patriarchs are buried, and then continued on through what is termed the H2 section of Hebron. There were few people on the streets of H2, and as we moved away from the mosque, Hebron appeared more desolate. We walked past abandoned homes and shops and it became difficult to make sense of what we were experiencing. We walked the length of Shuhada Street and saw barriers that divided the areas where Arabs and Jews were permitted to walk or drive. Interactions with residents were guarded and felt contrived, as if we all were aware that something was wrong yet unable or unwilling to give it voice. We were being guided through Hebron by two EAPPI volunteers. Their descriptions were insightful and helpful, but the longer we walked, the less I was able to comprehend. Again, I found myself with no frame of reference, no way to make sense of what was right in front of me. At one point a donkey, clearly suffering from malnutrition and the heat of the summer walked right past us and crossed through an opening in the concrete barriers to the other side of the street. I was jolted out of my “nothingness” stupor by the pathetic sight of this animal that would soon die. The jolting helped me to vaguely identify sorrow and the absurdity of this animal that had more freedom of movement on Shuhada Street than the citizens of Hebron. I recall thinking briefly that the donkey was walking around in a daze, trying to identify some ancient memory in which he was supposed to carry someone into Jerusalem on his back. These are the thoughts a person clings to when the world does not make sense. At some point, we made our way through the internal IDF checkpoints that divide H2 and H1 and the entrance to the old city marketplace. As we stepped out of the darkness of the checkpoint and on to the streets of H1, our senses were immediately assaulted. Voices, car horns, music, smoke, laughter, smells of food, and countless other sensory delights overwhelmed us. We moved through the marketplace together, and I had to hold back tears. Here was life, and to move from “nothingness” to life in all of its confusion and joy so abruptly was like being awakened suddenly from a dream. This is how resurrection happens. I don’t want to forget again, and my love for the people of the July group, the Tantur staff, and all of those I remain in contact with from Jerusalem will forever serve to remind me.

**A Milestone for Tantur – “Celebrating 40 Years
of Learning, Community & Hospitality”**

by
Keith Begg

The Very Rev Timothy Scott Lowe, Current Rector of Tantur kicks off the Two Day Colloquium and celebrations to mark 40 Years of Learning, Community & Hospitality at Tantur.



The Reception and Banquet – the icing on the cake where our Jewish, Muslim and Christian friends came together to share a meal with each other.



They came from all different religious, cultures and traditions to make the event a memorable one.



Tantur is simply beautiful. It might sound like a biased remark considering I work here but when you get up in the morning look out the window and see the garden full to the brim with roses, water trickling from the fountains and the smiling faces of the many guests who arrive on our door step you get a complete feeling of wellbeing. It feels like a cross between an ecumenical center and a sanctuary where religious, cultural and social biasness is left firmly at the front gate as the masses come here to learn, renew and grow. So it was on the 26th of October that Tantur got the opportunity to celebrate its contributions to ecumenical life in Jerusalem but most importantly its anniversary to *40 Years of Learning, Community and Hospitality*. We are all initially a bit nervous, the truth be known, if anyone would show up and join us in commemorating this sanctuary on a hill in Jerusalem near Bethlehem.

A two Day Colloquium had been arranged and we had the pleasure to have world renowned speaker's lecture on ecumenism throughout the event. The Rev. Fr. Patrick Gaffney from Notre Dame University in the USA kicked off events with a very interesting speech about Vatican II and the Establishment of Tantur which led to healthy debate and discourse. Fr. Gaffney was followed by world renowned Dr. André Birmilé who was a student of Oscar Cullman in Basle and now is a research professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research of the Lutheran World Federation in Strasbourg, France. Dame Mary Tanner from the Church of England then took the podium with a riveting account of The Ecumenical Movement in the Western Churches focusing on Where we are at and Where are we going? This was counteracted by a fascinating lecture from the opposite angle given by Rev. Dr. Frans Bouwen who took a look at Dame Tanner's subject matter from the view point of the Eastern Churches. Much debate ensued and it was quiet an exciting way to end Day 1 of the Colloquium presided over by The Very Rev. Timothy Scott Lowe, Rector of Tantur.

Day 2 kicked off on a beautiful sunny day with everyone in high spirits. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran church in Jordan and The Holy Land and only the third Palestinian to hold this office was first to present. He gave a holistic account of the ecumenism movement in Jerusalem in light of local politics and context always a hot topic of debate in this part of the world. Again much group debate followed as the post lecture was opened to the floor. Rev. Dr. David Neuhaus who is the Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew speaking Catholics provided an in-depth account of The Challenge of New Christian communities in a land that is predominantly Jewish or Muslim. He captivated the audience with his work in this field being a huge support to the Hebrew speaking Christian population in Jerusalem and beyond. Over 120 people attended the Colloquium and the quality of speakers was matched by the diversity of the audience. We were joined by our many Christian, Jewish and Muslim friends coming from the four corners of the world. We had a Norwegian Bishop, representatives from the Swedish Theological Institute, Abbots, Pastors, Brothers, Sisters, Scholars from the Netherlands, Ireland, France, USA, UK, Palestine, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia, Brazil, Phillipines and many more countries. While the topics were serious the atmosphere was one of peace and tranquility with all the different religious orders coming together in unison to discuss, debate and celebrate Tantur's anniversary. The end of the colloquium was marked by a beautiful thanksgiving service attended by many of the participants and was capped by the opening of Tantur's impressive new outdoor icon designed by Ian Knowles and now pride of place in our garden. Fr. Michael McGarry former Rector of Tantur gave a beautiful homily with contributions from The Very Rev Timothy Scott Lowe current Rector and Sr. Bridget Tighe former Vice-Rector. Then the celebrations really began with a reception and banquet to honour all our guests, where a sumptuous feast took place and a lot of fun was had by all. Tantur would like to thank everyone who attended and all our friends from every corner of the world who sent us their best wishes. Most importantly of all this Colloquium could not have been realized without the hard and dedicated work of our amazing staff and Volunteers.

70 Years Later, Have we Learned Anything?

by
Mary Linton

Crystal blue skies sparkled with the desert heat and morning temperatures soared into the nineties as I and fourteen companions boarded the bus at Tantur for our first visit to Jerusalem. Anticipation was running high as “The June Group” began to get acquainted with one another, to talk about our hopes for the month ahead, and about what we might learn in this sacred land. Riding along the Hebron Road, we suddenly found ourselves staring through the bus windows at the infamous “wall,” the 26-foot high concrete barrier that separates the West Bank and its Palestinian people from Israel and the Jewish people. Despite the shock of confronting this divisive structure, we would soon recognize its impact on daily life here, and our perceptions of the Holy Land would be forever changed.

Throughout the month, our program included field trips, as well as classroom discussions with academic and community leaders. Both Palestinian and Israeli lecturers acknowledged the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Speakers discussed the history and major religions of the land, its diversity of cultures, its governance, social mores and economic issues. Although we visited traditional holy places, ethnic neighborhoods, ancient sites and houses of worship, the wall and its captive people remained an enduring image.

We had many opportunities to talk with Palestinian employees of Tantur, as well as with Palestinian waiters, cab drivers, and shop keepers, and we heard similar stories from people in all walks of life. Palestinian grandmothers and professors, housekeepers and clergymen throughout the country told of their loss of homelands, of their confinement behind walls and barbed wire, and of the checkpoints. We learned that their taxes are 30% higher than for Israelis and that their water supply, the courts, and the military are controlled by the Israeli government.

In order to leave the walled territory for any reason, Palestinians must have Israeli-issued permits, which can be rescinded without explanation, causing the loss of precious job opportunities. When leaving a Palestinian enclosure for the Israeli side, everyone (including tourists) must pass through full-length steel turnstiles at their checkpoints while armed Israeli soldiers inspect permits, passports, etc. Many workers arrive by 4:00 am to avoid being late for work should passage be delayed. They must return before curfew. At the checkpoints, ambulances have been delayed for hours while permits are disputed.

Prior to this experience in Israel, I had never questioned the news reports about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Now I’ve seen the other side, and I am left with feelings of profound sadness about the plight of the Palestinian people. I also feel angry that we in America do not seem to be given the whole story. Every citizen of the world no matter what creed, colour or culture has an inherent right to peace, free from prejudice, suppression and discrimination. There are so many examples all over the world where man has not learned from previous mistakes, Bosnia, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar just to name a few. It is the ordinary people on the street that suffer the most but who also need peace the most.

Seventy years ago there was another infamous wall, surrounding a ghetto in Warsaw. (I’ve been there, too). Have we forgotten so quickly that two wrongs don’t make a right?

Two wrongs don’t make a right



Some of the June Group enjoying a relaxing evening in The Bethlehem Room, Tantur



40th Anniversary at Tantur – Our Jewish, Muslim and Christian friends coming together in unison. Peace is a gift that should be given to all of humanity.



A Reflection for November 2012 by Fr. Paul G Shannahan, SM.

As a New Zealander seeing a 1000 milking cows under cover in near desert conditions caught my eye. With rocky land and no pasture in sight I had to wonder how do they rear such healthy Frisian cows that produce all the milk Israeli population of eight million require. Such 'industrial farms' are a technological achievement and a symbol of Israeli success in a land that gets not a drop of rain from May to October. But there is darker side to life that confronts this Kiwi and many others who visit this not so Holy Land. The 26 foot high concrete wall that snakes its way through Bethlehem and beyond is the symbol of a deep division that appears as an open oppression on the centuries - old Palestinian residents. All young Israeli men do three years military service and women do two and they patrol the checkpoints and drive around in covered military bullet proof vehicles – and noisy USA supplied jet fighters fly over Jerusalem every day. It is clear this is a military zone. Peace talks have come to halt so a nervous calm prevails. With both Israelis and Palestinians claiming the land has been divinely bequeathed to them it seems any true peace is a long way off. But this caution of Fr Benoit OP makes sense "After one week here you could write a book, after a month perhaps an article and after three months you can write nothing". If it is true that God works in the mess then it would appear he has job on his hands here.

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