



Central
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focus

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KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

“In Jesus’ name?” CDC pastor asks

Examining biblical views that can lead to injustices in Israel-Palestine

Bringing a call for justice for Palestinians, Anita Rediger, retired Central District Conference pastor, shared stories, photos and opportunities for taking action at a meeting of Michiana Voices for Middle East Peace on January 30 in Goshen, Ind.

Anita, who served as pastor of Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship in Berne, Ind. until January 2018, presented from her own experiences gained from two trips to Israel-Palestine. She represented the Mennonite Palestine Israel Network (MennoPIN), an independent grass-roots network which relates to the Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA. Anita, along with Lydia Brenneman, also an ordained CDC leader, serve on the steering committee for MennoPIN.

One of the emphases for the Network this year is to bring more awareness of how Christian Zionism views of Israel-Palestine are in opposition to Jesus’ teachings and are detrimental to peace and justice in the area. The belief that the country of Israel fulfills biblical prophecy is held by 46 percent of social-religious Americans, Anita noted, making Christian Zionism a significant political force in the U.S.

However, Anita emphasized, “Christian Zionism distorts Christian theology by omitting Jesus’ command to love our enemies and seek peace based on justice.” When Christians believe that what Israel is doing is fulfillment of biblical prophecy, then “what we are practicing in many churches is complicit with genocide—‘in Jesus’ name.’”

Christian Zionism interprets biblical promises in ways that deny the rights of Palestinians. This distortion of the biblical faith and history legitimizes the occupation of Palestinian lands.

The harm is not only to Palestinians, Anita noted. Jews also are demeaned by this belief, because they are seen simply as tools to achieve Christian redemption.

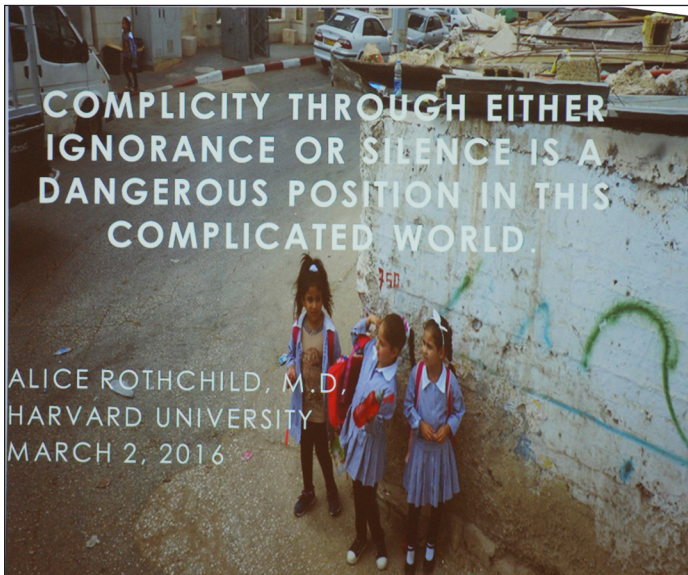
Opposing Israel is not anti-Semitic

Speaking up against the injustices done to Palestinians or speaking against Christian Zionism is not equal to anti-Semitism, Anita emphasized. However, some U.S. leaders have indicated that they view anything anti-Israel as anti-Semitic. Twenty-eight states have laws that discourage or prohibit boycotting anything related to Israel. Thirteen more states have considered or are considering similar laws. Anyone who works for one of these states is subject to these laws.*

“We know there is anti-Semitism; we see it in the horrific attacks on synagogues in this



Anita Rediger, retired CDC pastor, recently shared stories and perspectives on the impact of American religious views of Christian Zionism on the Palestinian people of Israel-Palestine,



A slide from Anita Rediger's presentation quotes Alice Rothchild, a Jewish physician at Harvard, in her book Situation Critical: "Complicity through either ignorance or silence is a dangerous position in this complicated world."

country." Anita said. "It is not anti-Semitic to question the state of Israel, but the US government wants to tell us it is."

Christian Palestinians respond

Part of Anita's presentation included stories and vignettes of the challenges for Palestinian people. She shared multiple examples of violence against and harassment of Palestinian people, including their families, businesses, farms and communities.

The people Anita has met on her visits to Israel-Palestine understand that the harassment and humiliation they are subject to are attempts by Israelis to drive them out. When Palestinian Christians choose not to retaliate but to respond nonviolently and continue to believe in justice, they do it with a commitment to act "in Jesus' name."

As she concluded the presentation, Anita shared recommended actions Christians can take to counter the flawed messages of Christian Zionism. As a minimum, Anita asked, "Can we at least join those who question the use of the Bible to support the injustices done to Palestinians?"

Suggestions for American Christians

Anita brought suggestions as ways we can use our awareness to make a difference:

*States with non-boycott laws encompass all CDC congregations.

Vigorously defend the rights of Palestinians and those who stand in solidarity with them, including supporting creative nonviolent resistance that pressures Israel to end the occupation. Actively reject attempts to label this as anti-Semitic.

Clearly condemn theological positions that justify the privilege of one group over another.

Recognize Israel as an apartheid state in terms of international law.

Challenge religious partners to include the occupation and injustices in Palestine and Israel as part of any interfaith dialogue.

Invest in resources and lead campaigns for church leaders to visit Bethlehem and other Palestinian communities in partnership with the Palestinian tourism sector to increase the number of people who will witness the results of occupation.

This emphasis of MennoPIN reflects the resolution passed at the 2017 Mennonite Church USA convention in Orlando, Fla.: "Seeking the Peace in Israel and Palestine." Read the resolution: <https://bit.ly/2HqaHlr>. Read a MennoPIN release about the resolution and the emphasis on raising awareness of the detrimental influence of Christian Zionism on the people of Israel-Palestine; mennopin.org/christian-zionism

MennoTwinning Initiative

The second 2020 emphasis of MennoPIN is the MennoTwinning Initiative with Gaza. This initiative will match Mennonite congregations with churches, mosques, hospitals or schools in Gaza in order to promote relationships, prayer, storytelling, education and advocacy. (See mennopin.org/mennonite-twinning-initiative-with-gaza/) MennoPIN is promoting this initiative as a faithful response to MC USA's 2017 Seeking Peace in Israel Palestine resolution.

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