

MIDDLE EAST PEACE BUILDERS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF MIDDLE EASTERN PEOPLE

P.O. Box 359, Lynnwood, WA 98046-0359

Mission, Vision and Strategy

Middle East Peace Builders is a LifeGroup of the Mustard Seed ministry hosted by Trinity Lutheran Church, Lynnwood, Washington. Middle East Peace Builders exists to build strategic connections between the Christians of the West and the Middle East for the glory of God. We do this first by supporting churches and Christian organizations in the Middle East in their effort to be faithful witnesses in their context; second, through our own domestic initiatives of education, advocacy and building relationships.

An Overview Of Middle East Peace Builders

Mission – With the goal of serving as reconcilers, MEPB enables Christian community and witness by building stronger relationships between the peoples of North America and the Middle East, facilitating witness and service that extend Christ’s kingdom among unreached peoples.

Vision – Jesus taught us to pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The Bible makes it clear that it is God’s will that the biblical vision of Peace (Shalom/Salaam) be realized on earth through Jesus Christ. To that end we work with God’s help so that the North American, the Arab (both Christian and Muslim) and the Israeli can reconcile and work together for the common good of not just the Holy Land, but the whole world. This ‘dream’ inspires our prayers and guides our work.

Strategy – MEPB is engaged in domestic and international ministry through a variety of initiatives that bring together the people of North America and the Middle East. By initiating opportunities for education, travel and service, we facilitate partnerships that bear witness to the Kingdom of God in the Middle East. Over the next decade, MEPB will use these means to help recruit and train members of the American Christian community to work as servants of the peoples of the Middle East and to encourage Arab Christians in peacebuilding witness within their own society.

I. Introduction

Middle East Peace Builders (MEPB) is a Christian ministry organization founded in January 2009 as a LifeGroup sponsored by Trinity Lutheran Church in Lynnwood, WA. MEPB identifies and works alongside worthy indigenous church-based ministries and organizations throughout the Middle East. *MEPB acts as a bridge to represent these ministries among American Christians and to advocate*

on their behalf. As an evangelical agency, MEPB aims to bear witness to Christ through the combination of (1) Christian presence in places of great conflict, (2) proclamation of the Gospel, (3) training and (4) practical acts of compassion, justice and service. Through these partnerships we aim to strengthen Arabic Christian communities active in Biblical witness, discipleship, economic development projects, peacemaking and reconciliation efforts, emergency relief aid, children's programs and other means of empowering the indigenous churches in their witness to their non-Christian neighbors. This combination of Word and Deed aptly describes our understanding of the way mission is best undertaken in fidelity to the practice and teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Along with some 250 other evangelical ministries worldwide, MEPB is an endorser of the "Micah Declaration on Integral Mission".

Our vision is a transformed Middle Eastern society that experiences the realities of Gospel reconciliation between communities suffering from seemingly insolvable conflicts.

As part of our ministry to the Christian community in the Middle East, we seek to raise the North American public's awareness of their isolation and urgent needs. Consequently, MEPB is highly committed to developing educational programs for North Americans. Through these programs, we seek to broaden the public's understanding of the history, peoples and cultures of the Middle East and build a deeper fellowship between the Christians of North America and the Christians of the Middle East, aka "The Living Stones".

Currently, MEPB partners with Middle Eastern churches, nonprofits and community leaders to support outreach, service, training, relief and development projects in Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Among the current MEPB partners are: Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem; Bethlehem Bible College; Musalaha, Jerusalem; Manara Ministries, Jordan; the assembly of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches, Iraq; Evangelical Church in Baghdad; The National Evangelical Synod of Syria & Lebanon; House of Light, Nazareth; Bridges of Love, Lebanon; the Bible Society of Egypt; and many others.

Additional projects are planned for other parts of the Arab world as our network of partners grows. By working to raise-up a generation of churches and individuals concerned about the people and problems of the Middle East, we aim to help multiply the work being done in the region.

Your support is sought for the overall Middle East Peace Builders work, using education, cultural connections and interactive service learning ventures to accomplish our mission.

II. Problem Statement

“Many of us in the evangelical community live with a troubled conscience. We are learning that our vision is not what it should be. Our excitement at living in the ‘last days’ has led us to overlook some devastating facts about our faith, the Middle East, and what God would have us do. In some cases, we have not been told things, important things, about life as it really is in the Middle East.”

Gary M. Burge, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament
Wheaton College

A rift exists between the peoples of North America and the peoples of the Middle East. Similarly, there is a rift between the North American Christian community and the Christians and churches of the Middle East. Part of this is due to political conflicts. Wars, terrorism, the history of Western Colonization in the region—all of these things have deepened the mistrust between both peoples. On both sides, understanding of “the other” has also been limited by a lack of cultural awareness and factual knowledge which has led to deeply ingrained prejudices, animosity and, in some cases, violence.

The Middle East has been the fervent focal point of American Christian prophetic interpretation. Unfortunately, this same level of enthusiasm and commitment has not been put forward to help realize God’s larger calling for the peoples and communities of the region. The Middle East, despite its location in the 10-40 Window, receives less attention from Churches and Christian communities in the United States than almost any other region in the world. Unfortunately, a number of prominent Christian leaders have taken actions that were profoundly counterproductive from the perspective of the Middle Eastern church, harming their witness and deepening divisions in the region.

Secular institutions, such as public schools, have apparently not fared much better. Despite the centrality of the Middle East within the U.S. government’s foreign policy agenda, most Americans still know very little about the region. A 2004 National Geographic Society survey, for example, indicated that only 13% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 could find Iraq on the map.

While casualties on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continue to mount, most Americans are largely ignorant of the history, causes, and proposed solutions to the conflict. Much coverage was given to the reasons for and against the Iraq war but most still know very little about the country’s history, culture or people.

Animosity and lack of understanding have strained the fellowship between North American Christians and the Christians of the Middle East. Non-governmental

organizations of both regions have also struggled to cross cultural boundaries and develop meaningful and lasting partnerships.

III. Proposed Solution

Middle East Peace Builders seeks to help solve the problem described above. through three long-term actions:

1. Serving the Peoples of the Middle East

- * Connecting Middle Eastern churches and non-profits with talented and highly committed American Christian volunteers every year.

- * Partnering with indigenous churches and organizations to create and sustain evangelism and discipleship, economic development projects, emergency relief aid and assistance and community service programs. Such partnering takes the form of education and raising awareness, recruiting short and longer term mission volunteers, grant writing and donor relations, leading teams to the Middle East for first hand exposure and service, and other forms of advocacy.

2. Deepening Friendships and Relationships

- * Facilitating relationships between North American Christians and Middle Eastern churches, ministries and nonprofits.

- * Creating opportunities for personal friendship and dialogue through face-to-face interactions during the course of our pilgrimages, short-term trips and service learning programs to the region.

- * Creating opportunities for dialogue about issues of faith, peace and reconciliation, justice and oppression, cultural diversity and social values.

- * Building lasting relationships between North American churches and funders and deserving indigenous Middle Eastern Christian organizations, nonprofits and church-based social service programs

3. Educating and Inspiring Tomorrow's Leaders

- * By way of its activities, Middle East Peace Builders aims to inspire a generation of individuals dedicated to partnering and supporting the Middle East. Specifically, MEPB seeks within the next decade to identify and encourage at least 50 individuals who are prepared to fully commit themselves to life-long service on behalf of the peoples of the Middle East. In addition to these 50 "lifers", we aim to raise up and support 5,000 individuals who will work through their existing careers to engage the needs and opportunities of the Middle East, and also help equip 50 Middle Eastern Christian leaders in witness and service within their own society.

* Developing a network of Christians interested in engaging in a meaningful dialogue with the peoples of the Middle East through study groups, guest lecturers, campus and community dialogues and events, Biblical reflection and overseas service learning programs.

* Helping American Christian students and adults explore contemporary problems and issues facing the Middle East on a deeper level with a focus on the Biblical basis for Christ's kingdom values of peacemaking, justice, service and compassion.

IV. Methodology

Middle East Peace Builders believes that it is important to build deeper and more faithful friendships and partnerships between the Middle East and the global community. We aim to accomplish these goals through a threefold approach:

1. Cultural Connections

Middle East Peace Builders has discovered that the single greatest tool for creating awareness, empathy and friendship between the peoples of North America and the peoples of the Middle East is *person-to-person encounter*. Believing that reconciliation begins with relationships, MEPB promotes a number of programs that facilitate experience-based learning through journeys to the Middle East.

Travelers to the Middle East develop an understanding of the region that would be impossible to attain without a direct, personal contact with the local peoples, cultures and communities of the region. Each of the travel delegations we promote include a home-stay component where participants are given the opportunity to stay with a host family, share meals, hear stories and gain insight into their everyday lives.

In October 2008 MEPB's John Berg led a team of 17 people from the Northwest region on a two week journey to the holy land. In 2010 John Berg led another team of twelve on an 18 day pilgrimage from March 10-27 that included participation in a major Conference called "Christ At The Checkpoint" to be hosted by the Bethlehem Bible College. Additional delegations and pilgrimages are being planned.

Among the programs we help represent is the three-month *Palestine Summer Encounter* (PSE) program, run by Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem. PSE participants study Arabic in intensive daily language acquisition classes, volunteer with local organizations and live with indigenous Christian families. Since 2008 MEPB has helped recruit some 9 Seattle area university students to participate in PSE and is engaged in mentoring them for continuing involvement including outreach to Arabs living in Puget Sound.

2. Relief, Development and Reconciliation

Through the **LAMPS** [**Lamps of the Middle East**] program MEPB seeks to identify worthy indigenous organizations that lack significant recognition and support from North American organizations and foundations. MEPB always works in response to the initiative and invitation of our indigenous partners in each arena of activity.

Middle East Peace Builders connects American Christians to indigenous Arab Christians active in several relief and development projects throughout the Middle East. One of our **LAMPS** partners is Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem, Palestine. HLT undertakes children's programs that promote resiliency and teach peaceful conflict resolution, nonviolence training for Palestinian and Israeli community leaders, as well as an annual children's festival and other manifestations of Christian witness where conflict demands peacebuilding.

Also among the MEPB partners in the holy land is the Bethlehem Bible College, which is preparing a new generation of Arabic-speaking Christian leaders equipped not only in Biblical expertise but also in music and worship, media, conflict resolution training, and imparting vision for a more hopeful future for all people of the holy land. Another partner is Musalaha, a team of Arabs and Jews led by Salim Munayer based in Jerusalem and working to reconcile Arabs and Jews through a series of dessert encounters, retreats and other means of breaking down walls of separation and drawing enemies into the peace found in Jesus Christ.

In partnership with Syrian Christian Nuhad Tomeh, MEPB helps form bridges for emergency relief and longer term development for those in the Iraqi Christian community who have been the hardest hit by the continuing war in their land. Many of those receiving aid are refugees now forced to live in Syria and Jordan.

In Lebanon, MEPB is partnering with both Nuhad Tomeh and a local ministry called "Bridges of Love" to assist Arab Christians and their Muslim neighbors suffering in the wake of the summer 2006 conflict with Israel that at one point resulted in a million southern Lebanese fleeing their land and homes for refuge in Beirut, where local churches provided shelter, food and clothing as a witness to the reconciling grace of Christ.

Other partners include "Manara Ministries" in Jordan, "Venture International" projects in several countries, the several Bible Societies of the Arab world, etc. As our network of **LAMPS** partners continues to grow, we will continue to build bridges between American Christians who wish to respond to the needs and opportunities of the Middle East.

3. Educational Initiatives

- Monthly MEPB meetings held in Lynnwood, Washington, featuring a variety of guests who engage participants in learning, conversation and outreach activities
- Other MEPB local chapters formed as an outcome of teams visiting the Middle East
- Facilitating/co-sponsoring periodic conferences, e.g “Standing With the Living Stones of the Holy Land” held in Seattle in April 2008 and a similar event held in Seattle February 2010 that drew 400 participants.
- Periodic special events such as three “Palestine Café” benefits for the people of Gaza including a Christian hospital partially destroyed in January 2009
- Delegations to the Middle East, such as the March 2010 “Northwest Churches Holy Land Reconciliation Team” led by John Berg

MEPB is developing a Puget Sound network of concerned Christians who want to learn more about the Middle East. As part of the network we have organized guest lectures, and film/DVD viewings in order to build a relationship with students to better respond to their questions and needs. MEPB aims to provide an arena for participants to exchange ideas, share resources and support one another’s outreach and advocacy work.

MEPB is also working to form a network of similar groups nationwide. These will provide a platform for all facets of the MEPB strategy to be undertaken at the local church and community level, including education, relationship building between Christians, Jews and Muslims, advocacy work for peace with justice and reconciliation, recruitment for experience-based travel, follow through for those who have journeyed to the Middle East, and other means of interactive learning in fulfillment of the MEPB mission.

VI. Funding

We seek support through building relationships with churches, foundations and individuals, particularly those who benefit from the programs and events that MEPB facilitates. Support for MEPB staff member John Berg and other program activities can be sent to:

Middle East Peace Builders Trinity Lutheran Church, 6215 196 th St. SW, Lynnwood, WA 98036-5982 Make checks payable to Trinity Church. Please designate if support is for John Berg or for MEPB general funds: \$ _____ John Berg ministry support \$ _____ John Berg expenses for leading teams to the holy land. \$ _____ MEPB Ministry Funds for activities of education, cultural connections, and building partnerships with indigenous Middle East Christians \$ _____ Other _____
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CONTACT: Tel: (425) 218-3682 Email: JohnTBerg@msn.com