
Abroad in Accompaniment

A Year in the Holy Land



Some favorite students and staff on a trip to Jericho this month.

A School of Hope

by Kelsey L Johnson on April 21, 2018

It seems all my newsletters have started the same way... “I can’t believe it has been another two months!” As the school year comes to an end, I again echo this sentiment, and feel myself steeped in moments of sadness, love, and deep appreciation for this experience. Before coming into this year of service, I had been considering teaching as a career path, and planned on enrolling in a masters program once returning stateside. Serving the School of Hope has been both a blessing and a curse in this regard, and has helped me continue my passion serving youth, and has helped discern a passion for justice and ministry in a non-traditional setting. I could go on about each of the classes I work with, and each of the students... how they have shared their stories about growing up in Palestine and the way it impacts every aspect of their daily lives. Please meet some of my students, as they share their hopes for the future, and thoughts on where they live:

"I am a 13-year-old boy and I am studying in the 7th grade at the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah, Palestine. I would like to be like every single child around the world- to live freely without fear. I wish I could travel easily between the cities in our country, but I can't because the occupation disallows Palestinians to move. The occupation can be brutal and cruel, and Palestinians sometimes suffer from gas bombs, and bullets. I dream to be a journalist because there are a lot of ways to fight the occupation, but I've found the most effective way is by my pen. I want to express our pain and the complicated conflict to make others aware of the political situation here and bring change."

-Anton, grade 7

"I'm Leen, a 10th grader at the school of Hope in Ramallah. I want to be an architect to reconstruct the demolished buildings in Gaza. I decided to do this after seeing children sleeping on the sidewalks .

The mosques were destroyed the Christians used their churches to shout the Azan(call to prayer). I want to build new mosques and to honor the Christians for their help.

I also want to be an architect because I want to rebuild my grandfather's old house because when I was young I went there and I saw the house, but it was taken by the occupation.

When we went back to visit, I was surprised that our house was destroyed and a large building was there instead."

-Leen, grade 10

"My name is Mohammed. I haven't decided yet what I want to be in the future, I am still 12 and exploring the world. My family is from Jerusalem; the heart of the Israel-Palestine conflict. My school, however, is in Ramallah(25 minutes away), but because of the checkpoints it takes me about an hour to get to school each day, and two hours to go home. To change the world, I want all weapons to be destroyed and disappear, so kids can grow up in a safer place."

-Mohammed, grade 7

"I'm Talia, a teenager who belongs to this world and lives in Palestine. Our world is not perfect, and will never be but working for a better world must always be our goal. I want to become a mathematician, as math has always been a fascinating subject for me. I like when I am given a problem to solve by reasoning and logic. I wish this type of problem-solving would be applied in the real world."

-Talia, grade 9

“My name is Marcel, and I am 12 years old. I am studying in the Evangelical School of Hope in Ramallah. I’m in the 7th grade. Since the time I first opened my eyes, I’ve known that I live under an occupation in my country. It is impossible for us to live lives of freedom. I live in Palestine, the cradle of heavenly religions, which should be the land of peace and love but unfortunately it has become an occupied land without love or hope for the last 70 years. I want to be a lawyer in the future to hold the case of my country, show the world what is happening to us, and ask the international community to end the occupation. They need to provide support and safety for the Palestinian people. I want to change the world from war and destruction to love and peace and provide all the strength and support I can for my beloved Palestine.”

-Marcel, grade 7

“I’m a normal student with a future and dreams I wish to accomplish. I hope I can always be myself in my career. I hope to become a policeman in the children’s branch to help kids as much as I can and to protect them. I belong to help and to give love and change the world through helping others.”

-Dana, grade 9

“My name is Wadie. I’m a young Palestinian who lives in this world and belongs to its people, and who will finish school next year and go on a new journey.

I want to become a pianist(both performer and teacher). I believe that music is what brings calmness, clearness to the mind and soul. It is a source of joy and relaxation, as it lets you imagine and dream freely without any restriction. When I’m performing I feel peace and can transfer it to the listener; when I’m the teacher, I can teach my students to find peace in their own way.

Good exists in the world we live in, bad too, just like the white and black piano keys. Our responsibility is find ways to make a good changes and positively contribute to this world.”

-Wadie, grade 11

"I am a girl with a dream for when she grows up. I am a girl from Gaza, who still hasn't seen her city because of the occupation. My dream is to free Gaza. I'm only 12 years old, but my dream is the same as many Palestinians- to unite and help each other to solve the conflict of our people. The conflict isn't shown to the rest of the world in a way that shares our people's story, and I wish this would change. People think Palestine does not exist and never did, but this is simply not true. My dream is to end the conflict by showing the world we exist."

-Malak, grade 7

"My name is Laith and I'm a 16 year old teenager. I'm a Palestinian refugee from Deheisheh Refugee Camp. My family moved to live in the camp after the war of 1948 "Al-Nakba," after the occupation forced them to leave our village "Zakaria." I was born in this refugee camp and saw the misery people have, but my father got the opportunity to move to a better place where we live now. I have dreams and would like to see them fulfilled in the future. I want to become a doctor and a businessman at the same time. A doctor because I'm really tired of seeing dozens of Palestinian kids and teenagers injured across all the Palestinian cities, villages and camps. I want to be a businessman as well, to help families in the refugee camps, and in particular Deheisheh Camp, because it's the place where my father was born and raised. Those refugee families deserve a better life than what they currently have and they need some support to fulfill their dreams. I want to give these families the opportunity to have a nearly normal life, because there is no normal life under occupation. This is hard but not impossible to achieve.

I wish to live in freedom and to go back to my father's lovely village as part of a free Palestine. Education is the main weapon for me, and I want to succeed so I can serve my community and the people who sacrifice their lives to achieve the national aim. We are a nation who respects life but have been denied a free life; no one talks about the security and the dignity of the Palestinian people. For this we need the support of the free people worldwide who can support our cause and should not let us down. We need to give hope back to the young generation; this was lost when our people stopped trusting the world and reached the conclusion that they have nothing to lose anymore. My role is to build a network of international free world supporters to achieve new hope and support in our case."

-Laith, grade 11

The students at the Lutheran School of Hope are exceptionally articulate, informed and engaged in discussion about politics and peace, and have welcomed me into their school with enthusiasm frequently sprinkled with teenage sass and comradery. I have enjoyed sharing stories with them and listening to them share what their lives have been like in the West Bank. They speak openly about their frustrations and sadness, and also love and hope for life. I'm constantly impressed by their self-awareness, steadfastness, and faith even though life under occupation can be extremely difficult.

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