

## Appendix A: Stories of Hope

### **Ashley Wilkinson**

*Ashley Wilkinson is a Mission Intern with the General Board of Global Ministries. She works at the Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center. The Center blends a traditional Arabic method of conflict mediation (Sulha) with Western techniques to offer mediation services to the Bethlehem community. The Center also provides trauma coping programs for children and youth, job creation programs, women's initiatives, and exchange opportunities with international groups, such as the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR).*

I am no longer my own but yours.

Put me to what you will; rank me with whom you will.

Put me to doing; put me to suffering.

Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you; exalted for you, or brought low for you.

Let me be full; let me be empty.

Let me have all things; let me have nothing.

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed G-d, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on Earth, let it be ratified in Heaven. Amen.

When I was commissioned as a Mission Intern with Global Ministries nearly one year ago, I never could have imagined the ramifications of praying John Wesley's Covenant Prayer. I trembled with fear as I read it with my fellow Interns, knowing full well that we would each face life-altering experiences in the near future. I still tremble as I read these words and clumsily try to discern what they mean both in my Bethlehem context and in my "back-home" context. Thankfully there are faithful people on both sides of the ocean who teach me how to pray this prayer.

*I am no longer my own but yours.* I work at the Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center. It is in this place that I learn from my colleagues just what it means to give up my life, my time, and my agenda in order to serve G-d and neighbor. Wi'am is a grassroots organization that strives alongside other democratic forces present in the larger Bethlehem community to build a democratic and just society. The Center aims to improve the quality of relationships by: addressing injustices rather than avenging them, dignifying persons on both sides of the conflict, promoting human rights, and advocating for peace among all people.

People in the Bethlehem community know that Wi'am is the place to go when you need your neighbor most. During the day people constantly come to the office, and during the night they go to the homes of the Wi'am caseworkers. My colleagues listen compassionately to the struggles that face each person, and then they work to restore dignity and improve the quality of relationships among the people here. They practice every moment of every day what it means to no longer belong to their own hearts or desires. They teach me to belong to G-d, to be about what G-d is about, to surrender each moment to G-d's will instead of my own.

*Put me to what you will; rank me with whom you will.* Living in Bethlehem means living in a constant state of change. Working at an NGO just about anywhere means cultivating a personal and organizational adaptability to change. At Wi'am, we do

whatever needs to be done. Wi'am does not only help people work through their conflicts, but they also empower people to determine their own futures. Often times, this means that Wi'am is ranked with the marginalized of society—the women, the children, the youth, the unemployed, the hungry, the imprisoned, and the weary. My colleagues provide space for kids to be kids, to give them the space and time in which to deal with the ongoing trauma of living in an unstable environment. They inspire women to discuss, determine, and define their roles in society. They give work to the unemployed, food and love to the hungry, and they help seek justice for those who have been wronged. Jesus walks into this office each day—and my colleagues remind me to welcome Him in the face of the child, woman, man—they teach me to find Him in every situation. And they love to be ranked with Him, no matter in what form He comes.

*Put me to doing; put me to suffering. Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you; exalted for you, or brought low for you.* One aspect of my work with which I struggle the most is identifying just what it is that I am doing here in Bethlehem. As human beings, I think it is natural for us to want to do many things. As Christians, it is often difficult to avoid developing a savior complex. We want to help. We want to heal. We want to fix. We want to make a difference. But at the end of the day, we cannot save people. For that is not our role. In the short time I have been here, I am learning to recognize the times when G-d puts me to doing, along with the times I am employed and laid aside for G-d. I am beginning to realize that often when we are laid aside, it is not so much because we are not capable of doing or effecting change. Rather, G-d does not desire us to do these things on our own. We do not save others, and it is often in the vacuum of doing, in the vacuum of employment that we stop looking at our own work and start looking at G-d's work. Being available to people is equally as important as doing good things for people. My colleagues teach me this lesson continually when they drop their "work" in the middle of the day in order to attend a funeral or celebrate the birth of a baby with the people in this community. They teach me how to "do" what G-d does, how to "suffer" the way G-d suffers, how to be "employed" for G-d, how to be "laid aside" for G-d.

And as I stumble around in proverbial cultural education, I am learning what it means to be brought low for G-d. My colleagues and friends are patient and loving, forgiving and kind, despite my many missteps and blunders. I am learning to say I am sorry. And more importantly I am learning that true repentance is not just speaking remorse, but also changing my heart and changing my behavior. It is not so much that my feelings and my heart remain neutral whether I am exalted or brought low, but I am learning to accept both with humility, recognizing that no matter what place G-d would have me in, I always belong to G-d. The core of who I am is rooted in G-d's love and gift of grace to me. When I am confident of this identity, then it is possible for both triumphs and failures to be seen as opportunities for me to learn and grow. Whether I am exalted or low is not essential. That I belong to G-d is what is paramount.

*Let me be full; let me be empty. Let me have all things; let me have nothing. I am in between.* Many historians describe this land as the land between. This area has always been between superpowers and the local people have (for the majority of their history) lived under occupation by outside forces. There is great attachment to the land here. There is also a great attachment to the community. People here are dedicated and loyal, and they have a passion for the land and for their neighbors that I have never before experienced. Such existence leaves me feeling so full I often feel I might burst. There is so much to be joyful about here! Strong families, committed community, passion for a better life, excellent food, and the fabulous ability to laugh and enjoy the people close at hand. Yet there is so much to mourn here as well: lack of freedom,

dehumanization, trauma from past violence, a sense of helplessness regarding any desire to bring about helpful change.

*I am in between.* I feel overwhelmed and drained all at once; courageous and fearful of the effects of my actions; full of life and hope, yet despairing and weary, thinking that no one outside this place cares. I feel hyphenated. I am American, but one who has lived and experienced a different culture. I do not feel un-American, nor do I feel American in the way I had previously understood. I feel divided and yet rooted in this newly unfolding self.

*I am in between.* I feel I have all that I need and nothing that I want. I need love. I need family. I need people to support me and yet love me enough that they will challenge me to be the woman G-d has called me to be. I need change and challenge and growth. But I do not always want them. To be in between means cultivating the capacity to be faithful throughout change, throughout growth, throughout all the painful experiences of life.

*I am in between. I am full and I am empty. I have all things and I have nothing.* I learn from this land and this people to be fully present where I am—to be true to what and where G-d has called me. I am in between.

*I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.* In the past, I might have understood this to mean a yielding of material comforts or treasures to G-d in exchange for a humble and simple lifestyle. While I do not rule out that understanding now, I realize that to yield freely and wholeheartedly is to give up so much more than possessions or comforts. It is also yielding the familiar, yielding future plans, yielding expectations, yielding all your preconceived notions, your heart, and even your body to the disposal of the only One who can direct all of these in a way that will allow you to be the most true form of yourself. It is only when we yield all of our lives to G-d that we even begin to see ourselves as we truly are. Broken and brave, doubting and faithful, selfish and loving...we must yield in order to be transformed. Such yielding will look different for each person, but yield we must if we are ever going to live. I realize too that in this place people are often forced to yield involuntarily. They yield their freedom as they encounter walls and checkpoints. They yield their humanity as they are harassed in their homes and in the streets. They yield their security, living in the constant awareness that the military could enter their homes and communities at any minute. Often they even yield their hope for the future because history has taught them to do so. But yielding to G-d is different, isn't it? I believe it is. G-d does not ask us to yield our freedom because G-d gives the only true freedom we will ever know. G-d does not ask us to yield our humanity because G-d created us in G-d's image. G-d does not ask us to yield our security because G-d is the only real security we have. And G-d would never ask us to yield our hope. Hope is the heart of resurrection.

*And now, glorious and blessed G-d, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on Earth, let it be ratified in Heaven. Amen.*

## **Zoughbi Zoughbi**

*Zoughbi Zoughbi is the Director and Founder of the Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center in Bethlehem, Palestine. Zoughbi has worked in the fields of conflict transformation and peace-building in the Palestinian community for over twenty-five years. He actively participates in peace initiatives with locals and the international community, and in his work as an educator, trainer, peace activist, lecturer, facilitator, and mediator, he speaks from a unique and faithful perspective.*

I feel it is important to talk about partnership. I believe that without this partnership, without the possibility of celebrating family members' relationships across different areas and different nations, we will not be able to deliver the good news.

It is very important for us who live in this part of the Middle East, where things are not going in the right direction, where there is always conflict, to have partnership. We feel the partnership among The United Methodist Church, the local people, and churches in Palestine has had a positive impact on all of us. This partnership also has an impact on the mission and message we deliver to the people. We are members of the same body of Christ, with different tasks, responsibilities, and gifts. Through partnership, we can feel that we are not left alone.

This unique partnership has led us to be proactive and not to be at the receiving end all the time. When the Oklahoma tornado occurred, one of our volunteers flew to the States to be in solidarity with the people there. Waseem assisted in many different ways. We need to find ways to have partnerships and to understand that this is a two-way street with multilanes. Using this approach, we will be nourished and transformed. We will grow and we will be changed. This will help us to shift from blame, victim-hood, and finger-pointing to responsibility.

Thank you for giving us the space, time, opportunity, and synergy to assume with you our collective responsibility toward the issues of the whole world. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., says, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I believe that everyone suffers in his or her own way. It is not possible to have a monopoly over suffering. At the same time, one of the most important things in human nature is to believe that we belong to a bigger community. When we believe this and feel ourselves to be part of that bigger community, then suffering will not be as intense; and in one way or another, this community will help create a healthy atmosphere for all of us. This is especially helpful for the psychology of the oppressed, to remind them that they are not alone. Experiencing a sense of the larger community also serves as a remedy for the temptation to perpetuate victim-hood.

I see the churches in the United States as having potential for change, and this is often where I find hope. I have a dream for the church in the States, because without such a change, without such depth in the relationship you have with us here, we cannot see any positive outcome on the horizon.

And of course this could not be done without hope. I see hope in those people who come as interns, volunteers, and staff workers into this area where there is protracted violence and conflict. Each of these people has a choice, and anytime you have a choice, you take a risk. Coming here can be a very risky mission. At the same time, plans and hopes are everywhere. We receive hope since you, our international brothers and sisters in Christ, are here to hear us. Through your compassionate listening, we are redeemed. We are healed. You create a healthy atmosphere for us to air out our frustration and anger, to channel it in a more positive way, and to transform it. We are then able to create a different scenario.

As a Christian, I am always hopeful. But I cannot be hopeful without my brothers and sisters in Christ in other countries. Hope is a matter of choice. Hope is not only an emotional thing but also a reasonable approach to fight against hopelessness and frustration, which will lead only to hate. Hope is the non-violent approach to struggle that will not demonize the other but will *invite* the other to join. Hope is an oasis of interactions of people from different backgrounds and walks of life to see new possibilities. Hope allows people to adopt different approaches to create a healthy atmosphere. Hope is the gift of uplifting the spirits of the people who are paying a heavy price in pain. Hope is to walk with them, to share with them, and of course to help them see the possibility of a different reality. Through the work of Wi'am and through our partners, we see that hope truly soars even in the midst of trauma and injustice.

I remember the siege of Bethlehem for forty days in May and June of 2002. One of our many friends is the Rev. Sandra Olewine. Many times we would call each other and say: "What is going on? Did you hear that? Is it a bomb? A shell? Where did it land?" Sandra was living in Bethlehem, near some Palestinian official offices, and facing Beit Jala. This was a very risky area. People were always in danger. We tried to talk to her about moving, but Sandra insisted on staying put and going to work on foot.

If I walk to work during curfew, it is courageous and risky. But I was born here, and I am stuck without options. So to see a Methodist minister from the United States, walking at that time to the place where she works, risking her life—not moving not only from her office or home but from Bethlehem—gives me insight. It empowers my walk. And it creates in me a different approach. Many times when we would call each other or when we would meet after the lifting of curfew, I was shivering with hope. During the times when I felt down, I would say "G-d, where are you? Don't forsake us." And I could hear a gentle voice, a human voice, a blessed presence in response.

This not only gives you hope but plants hope: the seeds of love, the seeds of agape. The message of the good news travels through people like Rev. Sandra. They walk in our shoes and also live with us in terrible times. Enduring the rough times and challenges as a single person in a strange land during a hostile Occupation, she was still giving.

People were lacking food and security. And we saw that Sandra was sharing with the people around her whatever was left. She was able to keep a smile on her face and to resist the paranoia. And she was able to resist the false god of this or that voice telling her that she ought to leave. She insisted she would stay. I was really humbled. Many times I see that that situation was amazing. G-d is there when I see Sandra and people like her—those who by choice come to this part of the world knowing it is risky, knowing it is not going to be a vacation. I see Christ in their faces. I see Christ's wounds and at the same time I see Christ's transfiguration. I see a Christ transformed in their social gospel, and of course for me this is a big source of hope.

This hope speaks to me whenever I doubt that there is a G-d. I see hope in my friends, colleagues, and partners. When I doubt justice, I see that some people are struggling for and willing to pay a price for it. When I question authority and see someone giving an unexpected answer to create a different synergy and thereby enrich and empower people—this hope enhances the walk that we adopt.

Despite all of the doubts.