

Click here to save 40% every day  
with the new Birmingham Weekly card



**Free Classifieds**   
Post Your Free Ad Here

CLICK HERE TO VOTE!



**BAMA's** BIRMINGHAM AREA  
MUSIC AWARDS

**BIRMINGHAM**  
**WEEKLY**  
CITY NEWS + ENTERTAINMENT + POINTS OF VIEW

February 1 -

ON STANDS NOW:

Vol. 10, Issue 24  
02 / 01 / 2007

*"What we call real estate — the solid ground to build a house on — is the broad foundation on which nearly all of the guilt of the world rests." — Nathaniel Hawthorne*

**WHERE THERE'S A WHIM, THERE'S A WAY** Column-making sans calumet can culminate in calumny

**RESTORATION OR DESECRATION?** Which of these words describes a new plan for Edgewood?

**EAT BEAT**

**NEWS**  
**PUSHING FOR PEACE**  
**Sabeel conference brings Middle East conflict into focus**

By Dale Short

Rev. Richard Toll was traveling with an old California seminary

classmate who led a tour group to the Middle East in the early 1980s when he had a realization that would change the direction of his life: "I saw that I was totally ignorant about what was known as Israel's occupation," Toll recalls. "I was not an activist. All I knew was what I had read in the newspapers, but when you go over, it's quite a different story. I've been back 17 or 18 times now, and I always feel that way."

Toll's classmate, an Anglican priest named Naim Ateek, would go on to found an organization known as Sabeel, which describes itself as "an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among



**FEEL GOOD AT BELLA BISTRO**

Simple décor belies complex tastes at Crestline eatery

**HOT SEAT & LIMELIGHT****BAMAS BALLOT**

**2007** Cast your votes here!

**GROOVE SCHOOL**

Summit aims to jazz up high schoolers

**PUSHING FOR PEACE**

Sabeel conference brings Middle East conflict into focus

**WEEKLY PICKS****THE CHILDREN'S HORROR**

Pan's Labyrinth traverses the realms of the unreal

**MIRANDA R.**

June 17th 4:38 A.M.

**THE THIN GRAY LINE**

Politicians dance between correlation and causation

**AND AS USUAL...**

**Small World, News of the Weird, Free Will Astrology** and

the city's most comprehensive guide to local happenings.

Palestinian Christians." And Toll, now of Portland, Ore., would eventually become chair of Friends of Sabeel – North America (fosna.org), which will host its first educational conference in the Southeast U.S. next week, at Birmingham's St. Paul United Methodist Church Feb. 9-10.

"I believe the occupation is doing two things," Toll says. "It's denying the hopes of Palestinians, and it's killing Israelis' understanding of who they are. Israel is not doing itself a service, and nobody is winning."

In the conference brochure, Friends of Sabeel uses the subtitle "Voice of the Palestinian Christians," but Toll says that he's found audiences almost totally unaware, over the years, of the fact that there *are* Christians in Palestine. "Naim Ateek tells me that he's frequently asked, 'When did your people become Christians?' and he tells them 'Since the early roots, since 2,000 years ago.'"

One factor in the low visibility of the Christian presence as it relates to the conflict between Jews and Muslims, Toll says, is that "most of the 12 indigenous Christian denominations there are Orthodox and Roman Catholic. There are relatively few Protestants, and the only ones with a presence in the community are Anglicans and Lutherans. So you don't have a lot of people coming back to the U.S. and talking about it to congregations. Mostly, the ones talking about it are the Christian Zionists, who tend to deny the importance of the Christian presence."

Dr. Ruth Lamonte, priest of Trinity Episcopal in Bessemer, is one of the Birmingham conference's organizers. She was teaching at UAB in 1976 when she became interested in the university's some 1,000 foreign students, many of whom held either Iraqi, Irani or Jordanian passports. "It was disturbing for someone like myself, who grew up in southern Ohio with a Christian Zionist family, to be tossed into that milieu," Lamonte says. She applied for a Fulbright senior research post in order to visit the region herself and, she says, "came home driven."

Like Toll, Lamonte expresses frustration with getting a well-rounded picture of events there: "There's really not much of a way for somebody who only listens to American media to know what's happening, except to know some of the right websites. We say we have a free press, but we can't even watch the news from Al-Jazeera [the 24-hour news and current events channel headquartered in Doha]."

Among the conference speakers is Dr. Lucille (Sis) Levin of Birmingham, whose organization The Children of Abraham (thechildrenofabraham.net) is an interfaith effort to prevent violence and build Middle East Peace through education. The group operates a model mission in Bethlehem using kindergarten through university teaching materials, and she says "The results have been awesome, in spite of the fact...or maybe because of the fact...that we're teaching, learning, and practicing nonviolence in what's probably the

most violent ethos in the world.”

Levin, who describes herself as “the only Episcopalian in Bethlehem,” received her MA and Ph.D. at Columbia on the subject of preventing violence in schools, after becoming involved in a personal way with Middle East violence in 1984 when her husband Jerry Levin was kidnapped by gunmen while working as CNN bureau chief in Lebanon. He was later released.

“The medical world now has come on board with the idea that violence prevention begins in the classroom,” Levin says. “We can sew people up in the emergency room afterward, or if teachers are trained to recognize it early... and most are not; remember Columbine?... we can get the traumatized ones good counseling.”

Levin, who often refers to the faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism as “the dysfunctional Family of Abraham,” is currently collaborating with a neurobiologist and a Catholic priest on a book with the working title *The Crisis, Prevention, and Cure of Violence*. “It can be done,” she says, but only if we find the courage to face the truth universally, and go to work to save our children.”

*“Sabeel: Making a Difference in Palestine and Israel” will be held at St. Paul United Methodist Church on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 9 and 10. The church is located at 1500 Sixth Ave. North. Contact Dale Short at [dale@bhamweekly.com](mailto:dale@bhamweekly.com).*

---

[Home](#) | [advertising](#) | [archives](#) | [contact us](#) | [Birmingham Weekly Card](#) | [links](#)

SPECIAL SECTIONS: [Local Dish](#) | [Local Music](#)

© Copyright 2000 - 2004 Birmingham Weekly