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FRIENDS of SABEEL NORTH AMERICA

A Christian Voice for Palestine

FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER

Dear FOSNA Community,

Hundreds of thousands of lives have been claimed by a fatal virus; a tide of right-wing nationalism is growing; fragile economies are leaving millions of people unemployed; and a sense of despair is brewing among those who cannot see brighter futures ahead. 2020 has been an apocalyptic year. Whether to you that word means mass destruction of the current systems, or, more literally, an unveiling of the true reality, we live in apocalyptic times. And yet we keep awake! (see p. 5)

We hope that this recounting of FOSNA's work over the past year offers testimony that a brighter future is possible. Thanks to your support, and by God's grace, FOSNA has shown resilience and creativity in these apocalyptic times. Together, we have powerfully confronted systems of destruction and cultivated the world we want.

We started this year by raising a prophetic voice against the so-called "Deal of the Century." In the voice of Jeremiah calling out that our leaders say peace, peace, when there is no peace. Now we are advocating for a bill that dares to condition U.S. military funding to Israel.

Together, we both challenged Christian Zionism and furthered Liberation Theology. For this year's Counter CUFI (Christians United for Israel) action, we protested virtually, as we took over CUFI's messaging, infiltrating their hateful lies with our messages of truth, justice, and peace (see p. 4). And, we gathered a collection of Black preachers, academics, and activists to reflect on the connections between the liberation of Black Americans and Palestinians in our webinar, "Tied in a Single Garment of Destiny." (see p. 7)

We continue to support divestment from the Israeli occupation and investment in justice. We see more denominations divesting, including Unitarian Universalist Assembly, who passed a divestment resolution with 95% approval. We are also an integral part of the Invest in Justice Coalition (along with organizations like U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, MPower, Adalah Justice Project, and more). Together we are pushing for government spending that aligns with our values.

In support of Palestine, a place of so much destruction and resilience, we are proud of our work blocking harm, and building a vision of liberation. We are grateful to walk this path with you.

Sincerely,

Rochelle, Tarek, Ashleigh, and Jonathan

A POWERFUL EASTER VIGIL CONNECTS THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

By Naim Ateek, Sabeel co-Founder



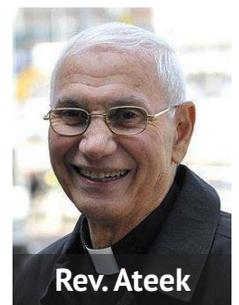
In early April, while many were still figuring out how much the virus would limit our lives, FOSNA recognized an opportunity that the broad shutdown offered. For the first time in Christian history, Palestinians would not be celebrating Holy Saturday at the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. (Western Christians gave the church the name “Holy Sepulcher,” but to us, it has always been the Church of the Resurrection.) So FOSNA invited Sabeel to share this holy day with Christians around the world over a Zoom worship service. I was intrigued because Sabeel had never led an Easter service before. Many of our people would go to their Churches to celebrate the feast.

The service brought elements of Sabeel’s Thursday Communion service with new technologies and ways of worshiping together. Palestinians, elders, and young leaders in Sabeel’s movement, shared a powerful Easter message. We shared our message of suffering and hope with the faithful throughout the world, and in unison bore witness of resurrection in the face

of a deadly pandemic. The service was more powerful than any of us could have imagined!

It was so wonderful to share symbolically, simply, and humbly our tradition of the holy fire that bursts out of Jesus’ tomb in the Church of the Resurrection on Holy Saturday, spreading the light from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Traditionally, the light would be passed from candle to candle, and rushed in special canisters to the various churches in Palestine in time for the Easter Divine Liturgy and the celebration of Easter. We were able to replicate this as we ended the service by inviting people around the world to follow the lead of Christians in Jerusalem in lighting candles of their own and spreading the message of Easter, Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen Indeed.

This mixture, bringing new and old ways together to powerfully meet the present moment, reflects FOSNA’s work more broadly. In these times, when the cries for justice have grown even louder, I appreciate that FOSNA is continuing the liberation work of Sabeel in new and exciting ways, weaving together the Palestinian struggle for justice and liberation with the same struggle of marginalized people around the world.



Some behind the scenes shots of our many, many organizing calls



PROPHETIC WORSHIP

By Emily Brewer, FOSNA Clergy and Seminary Action Council

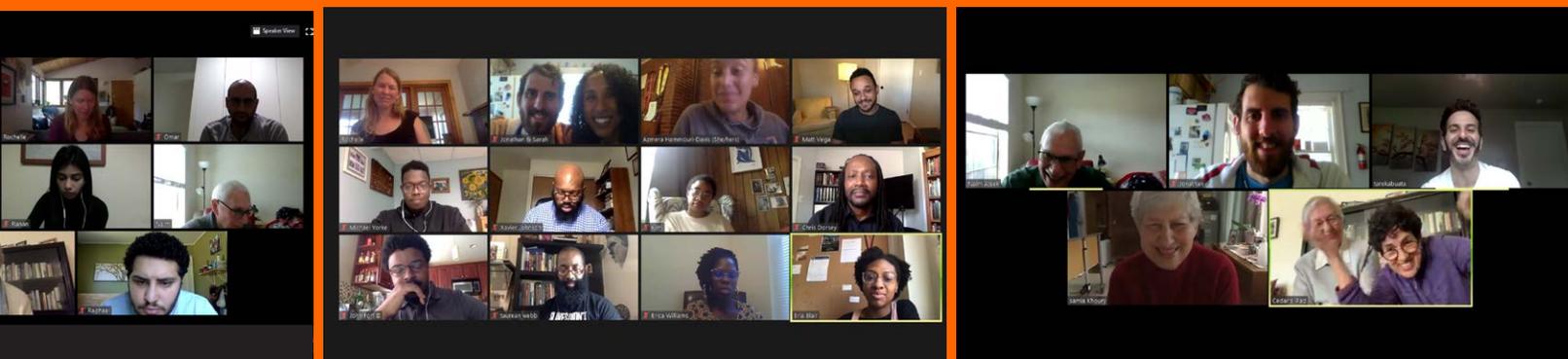
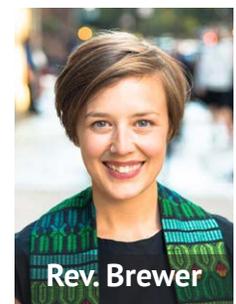
This year, the Clergy and Seminary Action Council (CSAC) of FOSNA focused on providing prophetic and meaningful worship experiences and resources that nourish our communities to take action.

Members of the CSAC planned and led **Enough! God Demands Justice and Righteousness**, the worship service that kicked off Counter CUFI. Speakers reflected on the words of the prophet Ezekiel and Mark’s gospel. Noura Carmi reminded us, “Everywhere, liberation theology is about ending oppression and seeking out just, nonviolent solutions.” And, to CUFI, she asked: “Can eight million Christians united for Israel become Christians united for justice? Can you imagine such a movement?” That is exactly the movement that FOSNA is building, alongside others in Palestine and around the world.



Rev. Graylan Hagler proclaimed, “There is a challenge going on against the empires of this world” as people who live under the boot of oppression unite in their struggles for liberation, understanding that crying “Black Lives Matter” in the US is deeply related to the call for Palestinian Liberation. It is our work as Christians to take the risks necessary to invest in justice—with our money, our time, our energy, and with our churches.

One way we can invest in justice with our congregations is by preaching for Palestine on November 29. The 29th is the first Sunday in Advent, the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The CSAC has gathered resources for worship planners from a diversity of traditions and voices that lift up liberation, from Turtle Island to Palestine. Can we count on your congregation to “Keep Awake! Preach Palestine?”



COUNTER CUFI 2020: AN INTERFAITH ACTION AGAINST CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Read the interfaith theological reflections of three of our Counter CUFI: Invest in Justice leaders.



Taher Herzallah

Islam's worst experience with Christianity was the crusades. We have an organization in the U.S. today, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), that follows the same tradition of the crusades: to manipulate, to occupy, and to colonize a foreign land in order to bring the manifestation of God's will.

In my tradition, true manifestation of faith is enjoining the good. The main way to enjoin the good is to forbid evil and actively stand against injustice. This is what made Islam such a revolutionary concept from the outset. It is what made the elites of Arabia oppose the prophet Muhamad. It wasn't that they didn't believe in one god. It was that he would upend the political and economic system that they put in place, which subjected the poor and destitute to the worst conditions.

So I stand in that same tradition today to oppose CUFI's Zionism and their erasure of our history and faith as a people and because their work continues the centuries-long attempt to malign and dehumanize my people and my faith. We are dreaming and fighting and working for a world where we don't need to prove our humanity to anyone anymore, where we can live freely without the oppressive boot of colonialism in all of its manifestations, so that we can finally live free as liberated people, the way God meant us to be.



Rab. Rosenberg

My tradition teaches that there can be no wholeness without justice, there can be no justice without repair, and that it is on all of us to call out against injustice.

The Talmud teaches in Shabbat 54b that anyone who has the capability to effectively protest the wrongful conduct of the people of their town and they fail to do so, they are accountable for the conduct of their town.

I'm here to say that CUFI's militarism, land grabs, and racism do not speak for me; for my friends, family and community; and for Jews who support justice for Palestinians and teshuva and repair from the Nakba. We are many and our numbers are growing every day.

We are working for a world where we live in the truth that all land is holy and all people are sacred. We are living into a world where we can make real accountability and repair for the ongoing harms of the colonization of Palestine, of Islamophobia, of Christian supremacy, of antisemitism, of white supremacy, and of Zionism.

We are creating a world where we pray alongside one another in our myriad of languages, to the infinite expressions of holiness that are present through creation. Today we get a taste of that world to come.



Rev. Tanner

My faith tradition teaches that God is a God of Justice and Righteousness and expects God's people to live according to justice, kindness, and humility. It teaches that God is a God of love and liberation, caring especially for those who are oppressed and actively working for their freedom.

I'm here to oppose CUFI for the ways it misrepresents and co-opts Christianity for its racist and settler-colonial projects against the Palestinian people. Last December, I was in Bethlehem with an international Christian gathering, Global

Kairos for Justice. Our Palestinian brothers and sisters asked us, especially those in the U.S., to do everything we could to denounce Christian Zionism as the driving force of the ever-increasing violence done to Palestinian people, their lands, and their culture.

In direct contrast to CUFI's teachings, my faith community is dreaming, fighting, and working for a world where everyone belongs, everyone is needed, and everyone is cherished – for a world where Black Lives Matter; Palestinian Lives Matter; Immigrant Lives Matter; Indigenous Lives Matter; and Poor Lives Matter. My faith envisions a time of healing for the nations and I firmly believe that Investing in Justice together is a significant step in that direction.

SABEEL KEEPING THE FAITH

By Omar Haramy, Sabeel

Today, as Palestine faces many challenges, strengthening the faith is essential. As I surf different media platforms covering Palestine, I encounter numerous depressing news stories: internal Palestinian divisions, Arab nations seeking unconditional normalization with Israel, a military occupation since 1967 that seems destined to be eternal, and an apartheid system in Israel attempting to obtain legitimacy from the powerful worldly structures. The challenges are numerous, and our community must be equipped with the faith to overcome these challenges.

Palestinians continue to cry for hope. We recognize that it is important to make the world aware of the injustice in the Holy Land, yet we also realize that the solution mainly lies in the hands of our people. We Palestinians are the ones who are able to turn the sad realities into true liberation and justice.

As a faith-based organization, Sabeel is focusing on helping people have faith in an inclusive and loving God, and faith in themselves that they can refuse to surrender to victimhood. Since 2016 and in coordination with the different churches in Palestine and Israel, Sabeel has been training bible study facilitators to help our Christian community read and interpret the bible in a contextual and a liberating way. The over 30 groups, mainly groups formed of young people and women, are the most important part of our work. Only by educating people that they deserve and can obtain a better reality, can one accomplish restorative justice through costly nonviolent resistance. This is the heart of the work of Sabeel.



Omar Haramy

MEET FOSNA'S NEWEST MEMBER



Jonathan joined the FOSNA team as Communications Manager in March of this year. He has mixed Mennonite and Palestinian Christian lineage. Jonathan worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams' Palestine Project in Al-Khalil (Hebron) before returning to advocate for Palestinian rights among his home denomination, where he facilitated the writing, passing, and implementation of a divestment resolution. Jonathan holds a master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame's Kroc Institute. He brings his passion for intersectional justice to our team.

A BLOSSOMING PARTNERSHIP WITH SURJ

Interview with Rev. Anne Dunlap, Faith Coordinator for SURJ by Jonathan Brenneman

In the late spring, FOSNA, with partners AROC (Arab Resource and Organizing Center) and Catalyst, led a webinar series for Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) on Palestine and Christian Zionism.

Jonathan (J): Tell us about SURJ's work and how it connects to FOSNA's.

Anne (A): SURJ has a mission to organize and mobilize white people into the broader multi-racial movement for racial justice through national work and local chapters. We had 130 chapters before the uprising this summer, and 700 interests since this summer! Our chapters work on a variety of issues in their local context in accountable relationships with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities. The top issues include policing, immigration, indigenous sovereignty, and economic justice. I work with SURJ-Faith to resource people of all faiths to be part of this movement. We focus on white Christians because we see white Christianity as key in creating and upholding white supremacy.

I was excited to work with FOSNA because of the alignment between SURJ, FOSNA, and AROC with the Movement for Black Lives, and collective liberation. The way FOSNA locates Palestine as part of an overall movement toward collective liberation was important. I see deep alignment in the work of our two organizations. It's been great to find faith folks that hold this lens.

J: I feel that alignment, too. It's been important for Palestinians (and those in solidarity) that Palestine is not exceptionalized. So it's been important for a long time to connect what's happening in Palestine to other situations of colonization and racism.

My understanding is that this was the first time SURJ had a conversation on Palestine. Is that right?

A: Many of our folks have been supportive of Palestine for a long time. This came up when the organization supported the Movement for Black Lives platform, which included Palestinian liberation. We got some pushback for that. We have been growing recognition that our work connects in an internationalist movement. We want thriving for everyone. Palestinians included.

Rochelle offered to do a webinar on Christian Zionism. It was the first major focus on Palestinian liberation as a racial justice issue.

J: I remember Rochelle first connecting with SURJ about our Counter CUFI work. How does your work in SURJ-Faith relate to Christian Zionism?

A: Opposing the power of the Christian Right's hold is an important strategy. Those who espouse Christian Zionism also stand against much of what SURJ is for: the Movement for Black Lives, healthcare, LGBTQ liberation, abolishing police and prisons, just immigration. And it's a cynical and violent, antisemitic, and, honestly, antihuman theology that should be opposed in its own right.

J: We're grateful that SURJ was willing to have this particular courageous conversation. What was the reception to the webinar series from the SURJ base?

A: These were the best-attended webinars SURJ-Faith has had. There was clearly a hunger for this. It was overwhelmingly a positive reception. Even some of the pushback was appreciative. People are still asking for the recordings. I think framing Palestine as a racial justice issue, and the focus on right-

wing Christian Zionism, helped people connect deeply to the content.

J: Exactly. It seemed like part of the webinars was education around how Palestine is a racial justice issue. It's all connected.

A: It's the same tactics. It's the same people making the money. It's the same interests being served. So international solidarity is not just about warm feelings. We have a mutual interest in getting free from the same thing! It's often white Christian wealth trying to play these sides against each other. Part of our focus in SURJ-Faith is getting white Christians to be on the right side of history.



Rev. Anne Dunlap preaching in the streets for Black lives.

FOSNA AND BLACK 4 PALESTINE

By Matt Vega, Theologian, Black 4 Palestine

Amid the chaos and uncertainty of this difficult year, there are glimmers of hope found in the collective struggle of people refusing to accept the given order as a fixture in their lives. It is this vision of a better world that unites Palestinians and Black Americans in their fight.

Since FOSNA and Black4Palestine collectively issued a Black Church Call to End Israeli apartheid last year, 500 signees publicly endorsed a world free of various forms of violence. This historic act of public solidarity is fitting for an age of growing despair. Coronavirus reminded us in the most sobering way that we are only as healthy as our neighbor. The Samaritan who stopped and heeded the wounded traveler realized this. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the church is like a body, where each member is indispensable and when one suffers, all suffer, when one rejoices, all rejoice. (1 Cor. 12).

This is why many Palestinians saw their own frailty in George Floyd. None of us are self-

sufficient. We all rely on the grace of God, and we must learn to close the empathy gap between ourselves and our neighbor, despite arbitrary national borders. Whenever I see a Palestinian suffering, I am reminded of my own mortality. Whenever I see a Palestinian struggling, I am reminded of my own struggle here in the USA. Despite the differences between the struggles, Palestinian and Black American Christians have relied on the spiritual resources they have to transcend difference. And when prophetic communities respond to the call of God to struggle for justice and dignity the foundations of apathy and complacency become undone.

FOSNA's work from the Black Church Call to the "Single Garment of Destiny: Black Christian Reflections on Palestine" webinar to their commitment to supporting young black leaders like me is such a response.



Matt Vega



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THANK YOU

By Tarek Abuata, Executive Director FOSNA

FOSNA is the strong Christian voice for Palestine that it is today because of your unrelenting support for what matters most.

The year 2020 has been very difficult for all of us, as we witness profound confrontations with global injustice. This year has also opened opportunities to push harder for our long-held vision of change. Alongside the incredible partners featured in this newsletter, we are forging ahead to realize our vision for collective justice. We believe that Palestinian rights are central to the struggle of all people for a better world. As Taher, Jessica, and Allison have articulated, we know that when we all work together, liberation is possible.

Amid the cacophony and disarray, your commitments are clear. Your beliefs are well-backed, and your purpose is prophetic. You are one who recognizes the prophetic voices of our time, and supports the many local and international leaders of this movement. Will you give today?



Tarek Abuata

To give today, complete the enclosed donation form or visit

www.fosna.org/newsletter