A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISLAMIC STATE by Jeffrey J. Weiss

The Islamic State emerged as a direct outgrowth of the invasion and occupation of Iraq that took place in 2003. They now govern a ‘self-proclaimed’ caliphate in territory that encompasses a portion of Syria and Iraq. They currently govern over a population of nearly eight million people.

The Islamic State has mastered ‘the language of terror’ through the use of video with the adaptability to carry their message across continents. Many of their invitations are enticing to people who see few avenues in other political directions that have failed in recent times.

The situation in Southwest Asia has been fluid since the 'Arab Spring' emerged four years ago in Tunisia, and spread to Egypt and then like wildfire throughout the region. Many of the political alignments and dreadful violence are a result of the positioning of power after the vacuum in Iraq and subsequent events that toppled the long-time rulers of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

Many of the problems in the region date back to the dynamics that took place both during and after World War I. The Sykes-Picot treaty between Britain and France divided up the Ottoman Empire and created artificial borders among the Arab peoples that are still contested today.

Hopefully our time together will be fruitful and lead to a better understanding of how our own foreign policy too often contributes to injustice. We must continue to seek avenues to persuade governments to assist refugees and uphold the human rights of women and all minorities.


See page 2 for article by Kathleen McQuillen

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War: Not the Answer Then; Still Not the Answer
by Kathleen McQuillen

In 2003 George W. Bush led the world to the debacle that is the Iraq war. One of the outcomes of that tragedy is the growth of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (also known as ISIS and ISIL). “It is now well documented that the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 played a critical role in fueling al-Qaeda in Iraq, which would eventually become ISIS…emerging as part of the insurgency against the US…” –Sarah Lazare (The Nation, Feb. 2015)

Now, under the Obama administration, the US is engaged in another undefined and seemingly unlimited war to destroy that which the US helped create—the Islamic State. In 2003 the world rallied asserting “The World says No to War.” In 800 cities, 12 to 14 million people took to the streets.

The voices of resistance are harder to find today but they are beginning to emerge. Perhaps not in the mainline media but they are there in the alternative media and gaining visibility.

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson- former aid to Secretary of State Col Powell, Kate Gould of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Phyllis Bennis of the International Policy Institute, and Raed Jarrar of the American Friends Service Committee, and numerous faith voices are but a few of the prophetic voices speaking as one in insisting that US military intervention and support of one Iraqi or Syrian faction over another will delay and not enhance real solutions.

Increasingly we are understanding there are real solutions and they include:

- End US bombing — a recruitment tool for IS.
- An embargo on weapons throughout the region. Weapons intended for perceived “moderate forces” end up in the hands of IS.
- Financial sanctions through UN Security Council to disrupt the flow of $3 million in oil revenue to IS.
- Humanitarian assistance in order to free communities from dependence on IS.
- Address through negotiations, the political and economic grievances to help build a stable and non-sectarian society in Iraq.
- Include Iran in the negotiations.

All of the above are important to stabilizing civil society and impeding the power of IS. War again is not the answer. The global peace movement must be reinvigorated and take again to the churches, congressional hallways, and the public squares and streets insisting The World Still Says No to War. Empire will not stop itself.

Kathleen McQuillen is Iowa Program Director for American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
From Iowa to Palestine
By Jon Krieg

“Intense” and “gut-wrenching” are the two words I’ve been using the most to describe my experiences on an early September AFSC staff delegation to Jerusalem, Gaza, the West Bank and Tel Aviv. I felt my emotions roller coaster from despair to hope as we witnessed the devastating oppression, racism and militarism of Israel’s illegal occupation – and the steadfast spirit of Palestinians in response.

A couple days before our journey began, the UN released a report saying that Gaza will likely be uninhabitable in five years. Not long after that report, my colleagues and I passed through three checkpoints to enter Gaza, a tiny, besieged piece of land home to 1.8 million Palestinians. We met with the head of the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and she laid out the dire facts (more at www.ochaopt.org). From there we toured a large neighborhood completely wiped out by Israel’s 50-day war in the summer of 2014.

We went on to visit people rebuilding amid the rubble – including a small business owner assisted by AFSC staff in Gaza. We met the wives and children of some of the workers. We met with bright Palestinian youth whom AFSC is helping to envision a different future. We were able to put a human face on a conflict too often defined by incomprehensible numbers.

Our visits to refugee camps in the West Bank took us past and through the foreboding Separation Wall and heavily militarized checkpoints. We learned about the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements – and how Israeli law often deems Palestinians to be illegal in their own houses and on their own land.

Our spirits were buoyed by meetings with leaders of the movement for liberation. Omar Barghouti is a co-founder of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), a 10-year-old international effort that has already grown faster than a similar movement which ended Apartheid in South Africa. (More at www.bdsmovement.net). Hind Khoury talked about Kairos Palestine, Christians’ call to end the occupation. And groups based in Tel Aviv, including the gutsy Coalition of Women for Peace and the research group Who Profits, shared their work and visions with us.

Peace and justice won’t be easy for Palestine and Israel. But change is coming – and we can be part of it.

Jon Krieg is Communications Specialist for the Midwest Region of the American Friends Service Committee in Des Moines.
“Gather at the River”

by Ruth Anne Petrak

The invitation went out: United Methodists committed to full inclusion for all—come and Gather at the River. And gather we did, from many directions, for four days of witness, struggle, celebration, sharing, worship, laughter and tears.

Our gathering place was Travis Park UMC in San Antonio, TX, a Reconciling congregation. The event was co-sponsored by MFSA, Reconciling Ministries Network, and Love Your Neighbor Coalition.

Worship leaders Marcia McFee and Mark Miller created spirit-filled experiences rich with music and visual arts. We heard four powerful sermons: Rev. Peter Storey of South Africa; Rev. Sara Thompson Tweedy of Kerhonkson, NY; Nikilas Mawanda of Uganda (founding director of Trans-Support Initiative—Uganda), and Rev. Theon Johnson III, associate pastor of Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco.

Rev. Grace Imathiu, born in Kenya and lead pastor of Community United Methodist Church in Naperville was our Bible study leader and—really—you had to be there to appreciate her insights, her passion, and the connections she made among the four selected passages, from Revelation, Joshua, Ezekiel, and Luke.

Plenary sessions included “Biblical Obedience” with a presentation by Bishop Melvin Talbert and others; “United Methodists at the Intersections of (IN)Justice” featuring several leaders in the forefront of working for change in the UMC; “General Conference 2016”, a look ahead at what we might expect there; and a powerful father-son dialog with the Rev. Frank Schaefer and his son Tim. You may remember that Rev. Shaefer officiated at the same-sex marriage of his son, was subsequently defrocked and later reinstated by the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals (which was upheld by the Judicial Council in October of 2014). Rev. Schaefer now serves a UM parish in California.

A total of 24 break-out workshops were offered on the topics of “Being Church”, “Changing Church”, “Doing Justice”, and “Queerly Forward” and we also had opportunities for small-group sharing during our lunch breaks.

We nine attendees from Iowa were delighted and proud when Rev. Chet Guinn of Des Moines received the Lee and Mae Ball Award from the Methodist Federation for Social Action, the organization’s highest honor.

MFSA’s Lee and Mae Ball Award presented to Chet Guinn

The Rev. Chet Guinn received the 2015 Methodist Federation Ball Award during “Gather at the River” in San Antonio. Chet has been a life-long advocate for justice and peace, through the church and in the community. He protested wars and injustices, prayed and worked for civil rights and led efforts to install public visual symbols of peace in Des Moines. Chet has been an integral leader in Iowa MFSA Chapter from its founding in 1976, including as Peace & Justice Advocate.

Read more at www.mfsaiowa.org/awards.

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