

*January - December 2008
Activities and Events*

The Dialogue Project

Summary

In 2008 the Dialogue Project facilitators and participants dug deeper into issues that divide Israelis and Palestinians, and people of diverse faith and ethnic traditions

We have three main program areas:

- Israeli Palestinian Dialogues
- SPEAKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES - A Neighbor to Neighbor – New Immigrant and Long Time Resident Interfaith-Intergroup Encounters
- Public Dialogue Workshops, Forums and Teach Ins

Our transformative dialogue process encourages us to slow down the conversation and listen. We take in hear stories of the intersection between personal experience and the political world we inhabit. We examine our different understanding about very hot topics, like “Gaza”, “Israel”, “Non – Violence”, “Resistance” “Security”, “Women’s Empowerment” and “Religious Bias”. . By allowing "the elephant in the room" to surface, our common human values emerge.

Neighbors from Cobble Hill, Brooklyn Heights, Flatbush, Carroll Gardens and Park Slope explored difficult subjects such as: Fundamentalism and extremism; How to live or work with people who do or do not believe in G-d, if that belief is important to you; How to connect through the differences of culture. and lifestyle. Gay participants risked telling their co dialoguer's about their choices. A young Muslim man spoke about how good he felt in the dialogues because he could speak openly with people whose beliefs were different (atheists for example) and ask curious questions about others beliefs. Local long time residents, mostly Jewish and Christian - white and black, were able to speak together about the difficulties they face with each other, when issues in the Middle East arise. Non Jews asked their Jewish co-dialoguer's to not hear them as anti-Semitic, rather to hear them as concerned for Jews in Israel and around the world.

In the Mid East Dialogues we were challenged by what was happening on the ground in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian territories - the continued building of the wall, the blockade of Gaza, the targeting of Israeli citizens by Palestinian resistance. Participants pushed each other more openly and in doing so, were able to examine themselves. Issues about the morality of actions taken, and the need to see beyond one's own people's security to the need of security for the "other" came up, time and time again. Hot phrases like "Moral Condemnation", "Normalization", and "Moral Equivalency" "Trust - Is it possible", emerged as people struggle to understand why Israelis and Palestinian's in the room, and in the Mid East cannot see each other's unique, individual humanity. Some dialoguer's still struggle with the need for balance, though the power dynamics of the conflict are unbalanced. Participants are asking each other about specific policies that create violence which kills individual Palestinian's and Israelis. Most important we continued to provide the confidential space where people come to learn about "the other" and can meet in intimate face to face encounters.

We co sponsored events with activists who work within Israel and the Palestinian territories to empower their own people's voices. While we did not and do not take a political position, we exposed our dialoguer's to a variety of perspectives through film festivals at the Jewish Community Center and speakers in the heart of the Palestinian Community in Bay Ridge.

Our public programs also surfaced difficult issues such as Anti Semitism, Racism and Islamophobia, (issues of exclusion and exclusion), Occupation, Security, Home and Homeland. Educators from local colleges in Queens to Superintendents of school districts on Long Island asked us to provide class room instruction and administration and teacher training around diversity issues.

Highlights of All Activities:

January 2008 - Marcia Kannry and Father Khader El Yateem attend the Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information Peacemakers Conference at Tantur Monastery in Jerusalem. We met with teachers, conflict resolution practitioners, and activists from the Occupied territories and Israel. We traveled with Jeff Halper of the Israel Committee against House Demolitions to view illegal developments in East Jerusalem as well as traveled to the Shufafa Refugee camp. We also met with people at Neve Shalom Wahat Al Salaam.

February 2008 - Marcia Kannry presents to Methodist Lay leaders at the **Church of the United Nations**

March 2008 - **Brooklyn For Peace** and **Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture** host an evening on "Report Back from Israel and Palestine featuring Father Khader and Marcia who talk about dialogue as a peace making tool and also the difficulties and struggles they face as each tries to make dialogue meaningful in their own communities. Issues about apartheid and normalization are raised as obstacles to dialogue for the first time.

Breaking the Silence - brings a young Israeli to talk about his work with soldiers who offer testimony about their activities during Israeli army service. Father Khader hosts a large group of Israeli, Palestinian and Jewish and Muslim dialoguer's at **Salaam Arabic Lutheran Church**.

April 2008 - Marcia Kannry, Faozia Aljibawi and Jeannie Shama teach and lead dialogue and Mid East Workshops at **York College** at the request of Professor Charlotte Patton (India and Middle East Professor – 60 students).

May 2008 - **Adelphi University and UN Conference** on Peace and Human Rights- Marcia Kannry Keynote panelist and Paula Pace and Marcia lead teacher's workshop on dialogue (80 attendees, 12 workshop) Dialogue Project co-sponsors Gershon Baskin and Hanne Sinora - Co-Directors of IPCRI on the **Community Church** in Manhattan.

July 2008 - Paula Pace and Marcia Kannry develop a diversity training workshop as part of an administrators development day at **Hicksville, Long Island School District**. We are invited back to develop more programs in the fall of 2008 and 2009.

September 2008 –**Hofstra University Day of Dialogue** - Linda Sarsour, Paula Pace and

Marcia Kannry present a panel on dialogue at the Institute on Civic Engagement, Hofstra University (40 attendees) . Marcia Kannry guest speaker at the Ramadan Community Iftar at the **Al Andalusia School and the Muslim American Society of Westchester**. Dialoguers invited to **Muslim Youth Association Iftar and Dawoud Mosque Iftar** Brooklyn interfaith events.

October 2008 - Union Theological Seminary - Inter faith Caucus Event “Dialogue Not Debate” presentation with Father Khader El Yateem, Marcia Kannry, Paula Pace and Jeannine Shama (110 attendees) **Hicksville, Long Island** - Over 700 teachers and administrators take part in a presentation on diversity and dialogue, with Omar Chadhury - Pakistani immigrant attorney, Karina Kim, Asian new immigrant psychologist and Louis Valenzuela - Immigrant Coalition of Long Island. Marcia and Paula provide dialogue training.

November 2008 - Plymouth Church over 180 people attend the Annual Inter faith Teach In on Exclusion and Inclusion- Racism Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism with key note speakers, Rev. David Fisher, Rabbi Justus Baird, and Imam Khaled Latif. Teachers included: Kirk Lyons-Union Theological Fellow, Rev. Jeanne Person, Rev. Chick Straut, Dr. Ahmad Jaber, Anisa Mehdi, Prof. Ibrahim Abdul Malik, Rabbi Serge Lippe, Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, Rabbi Barat Ellman.

December 2008 - Hicksville, Long Island Teacher workshop for elementary school staff. Omar Chadhury, Marcia Kannry and Paula Pace present to 30 teachers on issues of diversity sensitivity in the schools. We approached how to talk about religious holidays and encourage participation and curiosity about Muslim, Hindi, Asian cultures and traditions.

SAMPLE DIALOGUE AGENDAS AND DESCRIPTIONS:

Mid East Dialogues continue to meet in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Westchester. Conversations/encounters include former Israeli Soldiers, Holocaust Survivors, Naqba Survivors, College youth raised on Settlements in the West Bank, Palestinian Americans whose children are now studying in the West Bank, , Jewish Americans with family in Israel, Palestinian's who left following the 1967 war and more recently, Russian and Easter European Jews who found refuge in Israel, Yemeni and Iraqi Jews who identify as Arab and many “interested others” from all walks of life with a deep concern for and connection to the land and the people who live there. Groups vary each month with an average of 42 - 80 people meeting face to face all around the city.

Agenda I: Palestinian commemoration of Naqba
Jewish celebration of founding of state of Israel

Discussion Questions: Our stories about these events. How can our speaking about these events promote an environment for understanding and curiosity about each other’s experience?

1. How do you participate (or not) in these events?
2. How do you speak about these events in your own community?
3. How do you speak about these events with those outside your community?

4. Is there a difference between how you speak to people in your community and how you speak to those outside your community?
5. How does it make you feel when you hear the “other” speak about these events?

Agenda II: Discussion: Meaning of “home” as it relates to Israel/Palestine

- a. Reflections from last Dialogue: Feelings about “the land”: “Where do I belong? Some dialoguer's said:
 - “Israel as the place where she can be herself, feeling as a guest in US.”*
 - “Going to Germany torn between feeling herself an American or Palestinian”.*
 - “Experience of persecution here, belief in Israel as the end of oppression, sense of betrayal”.*
 - “Proud American, Palestinian home”*
- b. For Israel or Palestine to be considered “home” does that require a Jewish or Palestinian majority?

SPEAKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES:

In 2008 we drew about 28-35 people to each monthly dialogue.

Dialoguer's took the risk and explored the places of tension in the intersection between their religious and cultural values, lifestyle, and the public, secular, civil law that governs our shared society. Some examples: pledge allegiance in school; young age marriage (Court has to approve); legalized prostitution; state sanctioned torture (justified for security); homosexuality (failure to protect). Below is a sample agenda.

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| 6:45-7:00 | Mingling, eating and Name Go-Round
Own a Guideline |
| 7:00-7:15 | Ice Breaker – <i>On a 4X 6 card write down the name of a person, place or thing towards which you have negative feelings (anger, fear, concern) – it could be an idea, an institution, a place, even a building, preferably something connected to the neighborhood.</i>
<i>Now that you have written this down, think about the positive in this item (beauty, security). Write a few sentences as if you were a mirror reflecting only the beauty or good parts of this institution, idea, person to itself.</i>
<i>Example: (a building that is all glass arising on a former garden and parking lot by Prospect Park).</i>
<i>Don't put your name in.....Just thrown the card into the basket....We will pick a few and read.</i> |
| 7:15-8:20 | Have you experienced any Transformative Moments in the dialogues. What were they? Has anything challenged your own assumptions? What have you heard in the dialogues that caused you to want to come back and dig deeper, learn more? |

During these past months in the dialogues:

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Was something new revealed to you?

Was there anything you thought or said that surprised you?

Did you recognize assumptions, your own or others?

Did you think differently about how to accept those whose ethics, beliefs, world view, life style, religion differ from yours?

Were there any "AHA" moments, for you or a moment where you went "Oh, Oh"?
What were they? Would you want to explore these ideas, differences more deeply, and specifically?

Example of an Oh, Oh moment: One of our dialoguers spoke of a young Yemeni student who told her Jewish teacher that she did not want to be sent to Yemen to be in an arranged marriage, and the teacher could do nothing, though she did not support such arranged marriages. This is a difficult issue to raise, but I think for many it was an Oh, Oh...

Example of an AHA moment: Being in relationship with people whose ideas about G-d differ from yours, even finding you like them and experience them as more honest, comfortable to be around than those who may practice a religion yet not live it.

8:20-8:30 Wrap-up

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