

Forbidden Family

Discussion Guide (revised 2008)



Introduction

The social, political, economic, and religious situation in the Holy Land is complex. This video, “Forbidden Family,” highlights one very visible aspect of those complexities and its effect on a single Christian family—the Kasabrehs.

Rimaz and Ghassan Kasabreh live in a suburb of Jerusalem called Beit Hanina. They have been married since 1996. When they first married, they applied for a “Jerusalemite” identity card for Rimaz. Ghassan is not an Israeli citizen but is a resident of Jerusalem, which gives him a blue ID card and grants him health and pension benefits as well as the right to live and work in Jerusalem. *[Note: The video incorrectly shows a blue ID and says it is a West Bank ID. West Bank ID Cards are green.]*

At first Rimaz was told repeatedly that her case would be considered. Then the law was changed to require that she reapply every year. Finally in June 2003, the Israeli government officially suspended issuing such permits.

In spite of her conscientious efforts to gain the necessary permits, Rimaz was for years denied Jerusalemite status and told she may not reapply. As a result, she could not legally enter even East Jerusalem – which is on the Palestinian side of the internationally recognized border, but administered and controlled by Israel. The schools and hospitals that serve the greater Jerusalem Palestinian

population (including Rimaz’s children) are in East Jerusalem and, therefore, were all off limits to her. She was prohibited from attending her church. She was prohibited from going to work at the Christian school where she was a music teacher. She was forbidden to take her children to the doctor’s office or—in an emergency—to the hospital. She could not even do the grocery shopping.

The good news is that in 2007 Rimaz was granted a 12-month residency certificate by the Israeli government, which enables her to apply for a residency permit every 6 months. With this permit, however, she can’t drive and doesn’t receive any of the health or pension benefits of a Jerusalem ID. Hers is still an uncertain, fragile existence.

Rimaz’s situation is repeated throughout the Jerusalem area and the West Bank*—with people separated from family, work, and worship. Hers is not a unique story. Until recently, Rimaz, and thousands of people in similar situations, could manage to get to work or worship illegally—risking fines and imprisonment, but still contributing to their families’ livelihoods and being active in their

* The “West Bank” refers to the west bank of the Jordan River and is commonly used to refer to the Occupied Palestinian Territories that lie between the Jordan River and the internationally recognized border with Israel called the “Green Line.” East Jerusalem commonly refers to that portion of Jerusalem now occupied by Israel that was held mostly by Jordan (the exception being a small area known as “no-man’s land”) from 1948 until the 1967 war.



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faith communities. But with the construction of the separation barrier this is no longer possible.

For information on the barrier, go to www.elca.org/peacenotwalls and download the reproducible information sheet.

Discussion Starters

1. Rimaz and Ghassan both say that the barrier is separating Palestinians from Palestinians. Others have called the route of this barrier a “land grab.” The Israeli government spokesperson says it is for security purposes and is temporary. What accounts for these different perspectives? Try to imagine how each of the viewpoints seems so obviously right from a particular perspective.

2. What do you think should be your faith community’s response to the separation barrier? How might that response be different if you were Jewish? Muslim? How would your response differ if you lived alongside the wall instead of thousands of miles away?

What Can I Do?

The 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted **the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine**. To implement this strategy, the **Peace Not Walls campaign** seeks to work with ecumenical and inter-religious partners to promote a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically,

- a viable Palestinian state and a secure Israeli state at peace with its Arab neighbors
- safety and security for all Israelis and Palestinians
- reduction of poverty and unemployment, and

- a negotiated final status agreement that includes a shared Jerusalem as capital of two independent states and with access and full rights in the city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

As its name suggests, the **Peace Not Walls campaign** also calls for a halt to the construction of the separation and barrier and its removal from Palestinian land. Likewise, it calls on members of the ELCA to reach out to our Jewish and Muslim neighbors and to support our Christian brothers and sisters here and in the Holy Land.

In “Forbidden Family,” Bishop Munib Younan (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land) calls for building bridges rather than walls. What can you and your congregation or group do to build bridges in your community?

Pray

Participate—either on your own or in partnership with others in the community—in the Prayer Vigil for peace. Find out how at www.elca.org/peacenotwalls

Learn

Acquaint yourself with the issues and plan an adult forum, Sunday school class, or youth retreat using resources at www.elca.org/peacenotwalls

Speak Out

Go to www.elca.org/peacenotwalls to subscribe to the informational network, ME-NET.

Sign up for e-Advocacy at www.elca.org/advocacy and respond to e-Advocacy messages about U.S. efforts for peace in Israel and Palestine.



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