

Young Adult Engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:
Sustaining Efforts of Young American Christians in Advocacy and Peacemaking

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Guided Thesis

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ESSAY ONE: CONTEXTUALIZATION

Introduction

Contextualization is the backbone of young adult engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The contextualization of the conflict allows young American Christians to understand its history, current events, and theological significance compared to how they see themselves within their own context. Without contextualizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, young adults will continue to run into barriers and bias in their knowledge and effective engagement methods.

American Christians need to be aware of the United States' political context and the American church's relationship with Israel-Palestine. Young Christians cannot fully address the issue unless each side's narrative is given its rightful representation within the American Church to promote critical thinking, peace, and justice solutions towards a human rights issues and conflicts. The American church should be speaking of the problems in Israel-Palestine from a perspective which has taken contextualization of the issues into consideration.

The Christian American church has predominantly had a long-held support for Israel's nation-state since before the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had officially begun. Christian American churches have resonated with a Zionist ideology which has resulted in a presentation of the Israeli narrative far above the Palestinians. Some Christians do not realize Israel was once historically Palestine. They are also unaware of the conflict in the region. Although the support for Israel can be understood as a collectivistic motion, it represents extreme selfishness, individualism, and ethnocentrism. The Christian American church has continually upheld the belief that, "those who bless Israel will be blessed", which is formed from Genesis 12 in God's promise to Abraham (*English Standard Version*, Genesis 12:3). The Christian American church, following Genesis 12 rhetoric, reflects a logic that trades a blessing for a blessing. The motive

towards supporting Israel is to gain favor in God's eyes, rather than loving their neighbor by standing against the oppression of Palestinians.

Why is Contextualization Important?

Contextualization for engaging young American Christians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be dual-focused. Dual-focused means that the contextualization of the conflict and the context of young adults are understood as separate but also related by the need for inclusion of both contexts for the success of this project. For this project to be useful, the participants must identify their American Christian context. This means understanding their barriers to knowledge and who they will be engaging with in the future. This engagement and knowledge come from understanding the contextualization of Israelis, Palestinians, and the conflict. Without the broader context of history, current events, and theological significance, young American Christians will not have sustainable engagement. The three-day event “Young Christian Americans and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Starting Place for Advocacy and Peacemaking” is about creating a space for young American Christians to understand the conflict's contextualization and their role in working for change.

Contextualization is important as this project seeks to serve young American Christians' needs for engagement to advocate on behalf of the wants and needs for peace in Israel-Palestine. Charles Vogl, author of *The Art of Community* explains, "to create something that others want to join and support, we have to remember a core tenet: communities' function best and are most durable when they're helping members to be more successful in some way in a connected and dynamic world" (5). The duality of contextualization is critical in this project because the goal is for the project to be something that people want to participate and engage in as peacemakers within their communities and other communities in the world as well.

Dual Contexts

Contextualization of the Conflict

To engage young adults in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the contextualization of the conflict itself must be considered. This project is developed from the understanding that better knowledge and contextualization of these issues will help young adults to have more sustainable engagement. Contextualization of history, current events, and theology is essential because they allow young adults to understand why they should care and be engaged in the conflict.

Historical contextualization places into perspective where the conflict has come from and how the American church has become a perpetrator in the issues. Many young adults cannot gain accurate historical context from their churches. James Gelvin, historian, and author of *The Modern Middle East* elaborates on the intentions of international involvement. He states, “As we have seen, the superpowers viewed the conflict as just one more front in a global battle, and both the Soviet Union and the United States attempted to manipulate it to gain tactical advantage in that battle” (247). The likelihood these manipulative intentions of the United States discussed in American Churches is slim. History sets the stage for understanding the conflict in present day and how to work towards peace. Inadequate history can lead to inadequate understanding of why or how young adults should care. Without this contextualization, young adults may remain in their belief that they should continue to support Israel undoubtedly. Importantly, historical contextualization lays the foundation for current events of the conflict.

Current events’ contextualization allows for young adults to recognize current day issues which violate the human rights of Palestinians. These human rights are ones such as adolescent imprisonment, illegal settlements, and access to equal and fair healthcare to list few. Young American Christians are growing in recognition of human rights issues within America itself. For

example, since 2020 there has been a significant spike in recognition of the racial inequalities, LGBTQ inequalities, and harmful church practices to name a few. Their understanding of these issues may help them recognize and contextualize Israel-Palestine's problems and the importance of engaging in these issues. Karter Collins¹, who works in U.S. advocacy on the topic of Israel-Palestine explained, “a lot of people are making connections between the struggle for justice in Israel-Palestine for the struggle for racial justice here in the U.S. or the struggle for environmental justice because there are so many parallels with other struggles for justice across the world” (Collins). If current events within Israel-Palestine can be understood by participants in conjunction with injustices occurring in America, young adults will feel more inclined to find peace and solutions to the conflict. As American Christians, contextualization of both historical and current events must be viewed also through the lens of theology.

From a Christian worldview, theology must be contextualized. Young Christians must understand the various theological beliefs such as Zionism and Liberation Theology as they go into their communities to advocate on the topic the conflict. On the basic most level, Christian Zionism is about the support of the Jewish people’s claim to all of Israel from Christians. Liberation theology refers to following Jesus’s actions in caring and seeking liberation for the poor and oppressed. Christian Zionism is typically understood pro-Israel theology while liberation theology is understood to be pro-Palestinian. Many young adults will be returning into their communities where people are either pro-Israel, pro-Palestinians, or not entirely unaware. As they engage in this issue, the contextualization will allow them to keep in mind various perspectives. Instead of conversation barriers, young adults will be able to better engage in a

¹ Pseudonym

theological understanding of the conflict because they can understand perspectives even different from their own.

Contextualization of the Christian American Church

The American church has withheld information of a Palestinian perspective from their congregants. Young adults are unequipped to learn or engage with the issue because of their lack of knowledge. In a conflict with an “us vs. them” dynamic, otherness is extremely emphasized; the American church has allowed its influence to dominate many believers. Theological contextualization is needed to clarify how to engage and advocate for justice and peace in Israel-Palestine, keeping in mind that the American church has been a supporter of Israel for many years. Becoming an advocate for this issue means having tough conversations with other Christians holding an “us vs. them” perspective.

Young adults need to understand their contextualization in the broader scope of being American and Christian. As an American, there is a sense of responsibility due to the influence and political relationship which American and Israel have together. Additionally, as a Christian, churches have been too hesitant to engage and preach on this issue. Walter Brueggemann, scholar and theologian, dissected scripture which is commonly used in dialogue of the Israeli-Palestinians conflict. Despite scripture, he concludes it is “far better to face the facts on the ground, the fact of two peoples finding a way to live together. Such a way will not be found by an ideology of exclusion or by an appeal to a theological tradition that has no currency with Israel’s inescapable partners” (45). He acknowledges exclusion is not the answer and certainly not in theology traditions of American Christians; these so called “inescapable partners”. The United States and American Christians have been long understood to be a partner and friend to Israel. These traditions which Brueggemann speaks of are the Zionistic ideals mentioned

earlier. When thinking through a Christian worldview, Christians may view the importance which Jesus exemplified of caring for the weak or oppressed.

The United States is highly individualistic (“Country Comparison”), and this individualism dictates how Christians in America tend to view those facing social justice issues around the world. Individualism in America can be seen through extreme nationalism, and unfortunately, Christians can fall into this nationalism. In an interview with Father Elias Mallon, he compared nationalism to a pandemic. He stated, “Nationalism is the political COVID-19 going around the planet. That means not only me first but only me. It's all me and if you suffer, well too bad, that's your problem” (Mallon). The individualistic attitude of taking priority over all others is a sickness impacting people all over the world. American Christians' individualism and nationalism are embodied through support in blessing to gain a blessing at millions of Palestinians' demise. This larger macro-context is where many participants will be returning to and advocating in. Understanding this context will prepare young adult American Christians to combat the individualist, nationalist, and Zionist ideals the church has continued to represent in Israel's relationship.

Creativity in Engagement

Creativity and innovation are needed in the development process because the project will seek to meet the participants' contextualized needs while keeping in mind that not all participants come from or will be going to the same contexts. Contextualization for this project should be done creatively because the end goal of engagement is the same for everyone, but the way they arrive at this goal will be different. When developing creative contextualization, it must be kept in mind the young Christians participating in this event will be returning to their various communities. They may be speaking with their families, friends, churches, or other different

community places for their engagement. Some participants encounter accepting responses, while others may experience push back.

The program's contextualization must consider the various background of those who will be coming to participate. The project seeks to empower and equip participants to return to their communities to continue their engagement. Katie Willis states that "While NGOs may be able to provide a context within which a process of empowerment is possible, it is only individuals who can choose to take those opportunities and to use them" (113). This program seeks to empower individuals, but ultimately it will be their choice to contextualize their learning into their communities. A way to creatively address the issue of young adults coming from many contexts is to broaden the scope and highlight multiple pathways for young adults to continue their engagement. This broadness not only allows contextualization for more young Christians, but it can prepare them to work with communities they might not actively be a part of but seek to be. Small-group facilitation will give young Christians a chance to speak to their peers and learn how they may apply it to their contexts. A creative way to make sure participants can apply their learning to their own communities would be to answer two questions at the end of day one: 1. Whom do you wish to share this information with? 2. How do you think they would respond? This will help them begin reflecting on their communities and how they can contextualize their new learning.

An asset young adults can take into their community is the contextualization of language. The language used to describe the conflict will show how these young adults feel about Palestinians, Israelis, and their fellow American Christians. The importance of contextualization in language is something that I encountered during my fieldwork. When understanding how people in general can be involved in dialogue on this conflict or show their understanding is

through the language. During my fieldwork, we had an intern meeting with the CMEP Director of Communication, Katie McRoberts. She explained various words with the same meaning in the conflict but the differences in their implications. An example is the word used to describe the wall between Israel and the West Bank. People who are pro-Israel call this a security fence. People who are pro-Palestinian use the term Apartheid Wall. Those who try to use more neutral terms use the term wall or separation wall.

Another example is the word terrorist versus the term freedom fighter. Actions of Palestinians or Israelis which incite violence or destruction can be classified as terrorism. However, those committing these acts do not see their acts as terrorism, but rather as actions to seek freedom for their people against their oppressors. When visiting Israel-Palestine in 2018, I constantly heard “One man’s terrorist, is another man’s freedom fighter.” These words have vastly different connotations. The use of these words speaks as a reflection of someone’s perception of the conflict. Contextualization will help young Christians understand when, how, and why to use specific words in various settings. Language is a critical asset in contextualizing and communicating about the conflict.

Introspection against Ethnocentrism

The contextualization of young adults is critical as well. Each young adult comes from a specific background and level of understanding. Through small group facilitation, there will be opportunities for young adults to place their learning back into their context in order to prepare for advocacy. These small groups will provide a space for young adults to reflect on themselves and to learn from others’ self-reflection. These small groups encourage finding learning opportunities from others from different contexts. This can contribute to a discussion of what has led each of them to this event and how they hope to use the knowledge in their future.

Ethnocentrism dictates the way young American Christians see the conflict.

Ethnocentrism is “the acceptance of one’s own culture and values as natural and superior to other cultures and values” (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 416). Opinions are dictated by the American church's primary influence; some of these young Christians may have an understanding that America and Israel share values feeding into the continued need for support. Ethnocentrism calls for the need for introspection. Participants should be prepared to look inward on their own beliefs and prepare for these to change. Paul Lederach, author of *Reconcile*, explains that to become peacemakers, Christians must go through a journey of self-reflection. In addition, Lederach claims, “from such a self-encounter, we become aware, and awareness often tainted by our experiences, perceptions, and feelings. Nonetheless, we are aware. In the self-encounter, we make choices about how to respond and engage the opportunity for reflection provided by conflict” (98). The thought of changing long held beliefs is scary. This change entails having difficult conversations with people who are ignorant to perspectives other than their own. Change should be seen in light of growth; an opportunity to go back to church communities and advocate for education on both narratives, and to constructively criticize the Church’s involvement. Moving from ethnocentrism towards introspection will allow young adults to re-evaluate their response and involvement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Americans come from a place of privilege; Christians in America come from a place a privilege. This privilege, even more so for those who are white, comes from residing in a global powerholding country whose foundational values were based around Christian values. A contextualized exercise will be to "... ask students to consider the ways they are privileged as well as the ways they are oppressed may increase recognition of similarities between one's own group and other oppressed identities” (Hagai and Zurbriggen 177). This introspective exercise

invites young people to encounter their privilege and contextualize their privilege with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The encounter with their privilege will help young Christians to understand their feelings towards the conflict and how they view the power and oppressive dynamic between both Israelis and Palestinians. Hagai and Zurbriggen suggest, "Attention both to the ways one's identity is disempowered and to the ways in which it is empowered is associated with increased sensitivity to the oppression of other groups, and increased self-efficacy to engage in coalition building to work towards social justice" (177). Young adults recognizing ways they feel empowered or oppressed, will allow them to realize the differences between the privilege and disempowerments in the dynamic between Israelis and Palestinians. Introspection against ethnocentrism encourages young adults to contextualize their own life into the conflict. Introspection will allow them to understand the similarity, differences, and gaps between their context and the context of those living in Israel-Palestine.

Joining the Long Haul

Change is slow for the United States, Israel, and Palestine. These countries take their time to make changes in their society and culture. According to Mindtools's focus on Hofstede's indices, low long-term orientation means that they are normative societies. The United States, Israel, and Palestine have a low long-term orientation. What this means for these two cultures is that "Normative societies, which score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion" (Midgie, et al). Although outward practices may change quickly, internal values can take more time. The slow change to culture does not necessarily mean a slow change to the practices such as removing checkpoints, sharing of resources, and removal of explicit bias and discrimination.

While public attitudes may shift with the political climate, internalized feelings may not shift as quickly. Hofstede states that in comparison to practices, “Culture change is slow for the nation’s core, labeled values. As already argued, these were learned when we were children, from parents who acquired them when they were children” (19-20). Although, it will be challenging to rewire an individual’s values held and ingrained from a young age, it is not impossible. The belief that Christians are meant to support Israel undoubtedly will take time to change. Young adult Christians should recognize all three cultures’ slow approach to change. This means those wishing to engage in activism for this conflict are in for the long haul because it will take time for these inward values and beliefs to change culture.

There is a hope for unity among the global church when joining the long haul. Engagement can help the global church become proactive rather than reactive in their actions for justice in places of conflict. Aubrey Jay², a former intern for Musalaha, acknowledged ways in which the global Church has often been slow to action during other times of injustice such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. Unity though, can be brought out from injustice, “there is room for being unified together when we recognize things that are unjust. But it seems like that always happens after the fact. But it is happening on a small fact” (Jay). Long-term engagement from young adults can be a possibility for the American Church to recognize the injustice within Israel-Palestine and build unity within the global church to find a peace solution between both groups. The global church and the American church have the opportunity to work against injustice while it is happening rather than reacting afterwards if the conflict is to become worse. Young adult engagement has a place in the greater context of unity in the global church.

² Pseudonym

Contextualization in My Future

In my future vocational work, I hope to work in project management or program evaluation. This means that I will need to continually seek to contextualize the work I am doing to make sure that it appropriately benefits those I seek to serve. The projects I design and the programs I evaluate will require me to know if contextualization has been considered.

Contextualization will help me to serve others best. Contextualization creates room for fruition. Rather than ethnocentric approaches to problems, contextualization allows people to have their needs understood and find creative ways for them to be met. The topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a passion of mine. I developed the “Young Christian Americans and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Starting Place for Advocacy and Peacemaking” project out of my desire to help young American Christian receive resources my friends and I never had.

I acknowledge the longevity this topic requires. Each idea and program must have an evaluation. An effective evaluation would need to be long-term to meet the needs of ever-changing contexts. The issue is that long-term can be a hard commitment for some projects. Michael Hobbes, in his article "Stop Trying to Save the World", asks, "It's an interesting question – when do you have enough evidence to stop testing each new application of a development idea" (Hobbes)? As context, need, and desires change, the contextualization of a project will also change. When it comes to implementation and evaluation, there may never be a point where new applications do not require further evaluation. As my projects truly seek to serve others best, I will continuously evaluate the project's contextualization. Contextualization for projects goes beyond long-term evaluation. Contextualize also requires long-term simultaneous research that seeks to understand the community I am serving. Contextualization calls me to adapt to the changes in culture and communities that will come over time.

Conclusion

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complex topic; good contextualization can create opportunities for young American Christians to understand it through a lens of their own context. The project development should include modes for participants to contextualize all parts of the conflict, something the American church has often failed to do, and for the participants themselves to reflect on their context of being an American Christian. To meet the dual-context needs of both the conflict and the participants, creative group facilitation paired with educational portions can create spaces for young American Christians to begin the work and understand how and why they should care about justice in Israel-Palestine. The conflict's growing history and problems calls for the need to constantly revisit project design and make changes as the conflict and the American Church change. Contextualization allows for young American Christians to push past barriers set in place and pursue a journey towards knowledge and engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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ESSAY TWO: QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Introduction

Qualitative inquiry should always be a part of community development. To understand and best serve a community, community developers must learn how the stakeholders view the world around them. Developers must collaborate with them and move towards a solution using a qualitative method, such as action research or appreciative inquiry. Through this process, interviews provide a way to understand better their stakeholders, their problems, and their goals. Interviews can highlight new solutions, challenge assumptions, or affirm observed problems. Qualitative inquiry should be used in the beginning, through the process, and for the purpose of evaluating after the process has concluded. Qualitative research is a developer's way of understanding the lives and cultures of communities they hope to serve.

ICD Values and Qualitative Inquiry

Contextualization is a value relating to qualitative methods and can result from research in program designing. Qualitative research, the process of learning "what is" within communities rather than "how much or how many" allows community developers to be able to understand life through the experience of their stakeholders (Clark). This understanding can allow community developers to learn the cultural characteristics, resources, and people's needs to serve and develop programs to meet those needs. With this knowledge, developers can form projects which are based on the contextualization of the community. If contextualization does not result from qualitative research, then this is likely a sign stakeholders' needs and context are not being taken into consideration.

Through qualitative research, opportunities for copowerment can be discovered. Copowerment is "A dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation

are made stronger and more effective by the other” (Inslee). Community development and qualitative research could easily be misunderstood as empowering communities based on influence from the developers on the community. Empowerment focuses on a linear movement from the developer to the community. Instead, copowerment focuses on the mutual exchange of empowerment between different stakeholders and the developers. To move away from a mindset of empowerment to copowerment, in the beginning of the qualitative research process, reflective thinking is needed to understand our own biases and set them aside. By prioritizing self-awareness, community developers will be able to better see and understand those who come from a different context. By understanding these independently, prevents developers from assuming what is right or the best for communities. Whether a developer is an outsider or an insider of a community, opportunities for copowerment should be sought out. Qualitative research may reveal opportunities for communities to work together to be strengthened and to become more effective.

In a qualitative inquiry of youth engagement in social justice, Kirsten Goeselling allowed her informants to “review and revise their interview transcripts and on the most active end they co-analyzed the data with me, [which allowed] ... for the youth to participate in research activities” (423). Qualitative inquiry as collaboration means allowing stakeholders to have a participatory role in the research and program development process. Stakeholders and developers, who acknowledge limitations and capacities, should work together towards accomplishing their shared goals. As a developer, it may be easy to control the entire process, but rather a more collaborative role “becomes oriented toward support and consultation rather than control ...” (Stringer 191). Qualitative inquiry can build relationships between developers and stakeholders, as well as allow for communities to be supported rather than controlled. The

stakeholders should be the informants and partners in research, design, and implementation processes. A collaborative relationship can start at the moment of qualitative inquiry and lead to goals being achieved. Qualitative research can inform and shape the way in which community development is done, meaning it shapes how communities and stakeholders are served.

Community Development and Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is needed for community development. In community development, there is a focus on identifying systems that are not functioning to the best of their abilities or are harmful. After this identification, developers must find solutions in the best interest of the community and stakeholders. Without proper research, inappropriate solutions to assumed problems might occur. Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell, authors of *Qualitative Research*, assert that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experience, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (6). The knowledge of how communities and individuals view the world around them will dictate how community developers will be able to best serve that community. Community development could easily be another form of modern colonization, meaning that they enter a community and exert power, opinions, and solutions based not on research but their assumption that they know what is best for all communities regardless of context. Rather, community developers should seek out collaboration with communities, promote copowerment, and utilize contextualization in their solutions. These efforts reflect actions that promote working with communities rather than exerting power over them.

Community developers cannot create solutions on quantitative data alone. David Chenot and Hansung Kim, researchers on a study about youth’s Social Justice Orientation (SJO), found a limitation in their work based on their use of secondary data and questionnaires. They reported,

"the study's analytic model could not include some potential factors that may influence SJO, such as participants' life experiences or personalities, because these variables were not available in the original data set" (707). Without this data, the researchers could not acknowledge how participants' lives impacted data, and the conclusion lacked having a full picture of what influences SJO. As compared to quantitative needs, qualitative is needed to learn the in-depth desires for identifying and meeting needs. Numbers can never describe how people feel, how they perceive themselves, and how they interact with the world around them. Communities are not just numbers, but people with lives, stories, hopes, and dreams. Learning about people's experiences can be done from different methods of research. As there is not just one community, there is not only one way to do qualitative research in development work.

Two types of qualitative inquiry are Action Research (AR) and Appreciate Inquiry (AI). Both can serve in the initial and on-going process of qualitative inquiry. AR entails the process of Look, Think, Act (Stringer 8). This is an on-going process of research that is rooted in collaboration with the community through the identification of problems (Look), solutions (Think), and means of action (Act). As developers enter into communities, they must first look and speak with stakeholders to identify problems. After these problems are identified, the thinking process begins between the stakeholders and developers to find solutions in the community's best interest. Finally, to address these problems and implement solutions, actions occur in collaboration between the stakeholders and community. AR is problem and solution focused.

AI, on the other hand, focuses on what works well within systems and organizations. Sue Hammond, author of *Appreciative Inquiry*, states, "The tangible result of the inquiry process is a series of statements that describe where the organization wants to be based on the high moments

of where they have been” (5-6). AI is a process of reflecting on real experiences; appreciating what is working well gives a lens towards solutions. AI emphasized doing more of what is working rather than being problem focused. In qualitative research and community development, it is not always easy to be focused on what is working well. AI provides an opportunity for communities or organizations to focus on what is positive within their situation and continue doing so.

AI and AR are focused on creating solutions which help community developers employ methods to serve their stakeholders better. Both AI and AR require research and interviews to understand better why people feel the way they do. Community Developers should be seeking out to work alongside their stakeholders to find a solution which would work best for them. A community developer may utilize either of these skills to help think of answers, but ultimately, they should be based on the community's ideas.

Qualitative Inquiry in Fieldwork

Throughout my fieldwork, I utilized interviews as a qualitative research method. They were instrumental because they allowed me to understand better how my stakeholders feel about their previous experiences, how they wish it was different, and how they would like to move forward in their engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Interviews allowed me to understand my interviewees' experience in the past, now, and how they have hope for the future. Authors of *Fieldworking*, Bonnie Sustain and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater emphasize how “Interviews provide the bones of any fieldwork project [and qualitative inquires]” (230). Interviews provide a platform for developers to begin at as they look for solutions to meet the newly learned needs. Interviews are also important because “you need your informants’ actual words to support your findings. Without informants’ voices, you have no perspective to share

except your own” (230). With my topic being a personal interest of mine, I leaned into interviews to learn what other perspectives young adults had on this issue. Through my interviews, I learned to be a better listener and observer, which are valuable skills for community developers.

My interviews helped me understand how engagement in the Israel-Palestinian conflict is working in other organizations. Learning about engagement in other organizations provided me insight into if the problem of engagement is experienced by other organizations other than Churches for Middle East Peace. Through my interview with Andie Stevens³ I learned how other organizations are taking an approach to engaging people in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Stevens, who works with Network of Evangelicals for the Middle East (NEME) told me that they are “trying to target those who aren't asking questions like they're not knocking on the door. We have to go to them. We think that if they had basic information they might start knocking on the door” (Stevens). Her explanation of NEME needing to go to those who are not yet asking questions helped me realize not many young adults will come to know the truth of both narratives without someone going to them. This interview confirmed the identified problem of difficulty in engagement among other organizations working on advocacy and peacemaking for the conflict. Although my thesis is focused on engaging young adults and the resources needed for sustainable advocacy, interviews allowed me to gain a broader understanding of how other organizations view the engagement process to all demographics regarding this topic.

Steven's elaboration on NEME's actions in targeting engagement can compare to the correlation between asking good questions and conducting good qualitative research.

Community members may not be asking the same questions as developers are; if they are

³ [pseudonym],

asking at all. NEME understands the American Evangelical community is not asking questions about the conflict, meaning developers can enter those communities and begin asking those questions. Over time, developers can learn which questions are being asked or what issues are not being addressed.

Qualitative research should break previous assumptions. In my experience, qualitative research meant letting go of previous assumptions I had about the people I would be interviewing; specifically, on how interviewees' ideological standpoint on the conflict did not dictate their beliefs about peace. During my fieldwork preparation, my site supervisor recommended I speak with Darrell Bock who is more conservative in his theology, but I should not tell him I was working for CMEP because he may withhold some of his opinions. This made me assume that he was pro-Israel and not in favor of peace for Palestinians. However, in my interview, Darrell Bock continually expressed that despite him supporting Israel as a people and nation-state, he could not ignore the occupation and human rights violations against Palestinians and that it is equally important to be expressed within the church with the support of Israel (Bock). Interviewing with assumptions creates room for developers and researchers to realize that their assumptions are most often incorrect, even if they are open-minded. For this reason, it was best to try and set aside my bias during my interviews. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to have people challenge community developers' assumptions, whether they try to put them aside or not.

Interviews can highlight resources that may have been previously overlooked as necessary. Through my interviews, the idea of community as a resource was emphasized by many young adults. Before my qualitative inquiry, resources have always been objects, but people, or a community itself, was not, a resource I perceived. Audrey Warner, a former outreach

intern for CMEP and MESP alumni, was able to embrace her transition back to her life in America after being in Israel-Palestine because she found "a community of people who care enough about it to send resources" (Warner). Despite all the other resources she had or was lacking, she held the idea of community to be the highest. Qualitative inquiry can help to identify that the problems communities face are broader than expected. It may reveal that bonded community itself may be the solution to the problem.

Qualitative Inquiry and Evaluation

Outcomes for this proposed project would focus on the changes of the young American Christians participating in the event. It is imperative to remember it should focus on who is changing, what is changing, and in what direction it is changing when looking for outcomes. Theoretical outcomes would be: young American Christians have increased knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; young American Christians have an increased understanding of what it means to be an advocate and peacemaker; young American Christians have an improved sense of confidence in sharing their new knowledge within their communities, and young American Christians have increased access to resources for learning and sharing about the conflict. All of these outcomes must be based on qualitative evaluations from the participants. All participants may be participating in the same event, but their perceptions of growth and gain will be different. Participants come from various contexts and will be returning to their contexts to be advocates and peacemakers. The way young American Christians use their knowledge and skills will vary, but the goal is to have them all experience a positive personal impact from the event.

For this specific project, I plan to utilize a sustainable impact evaluation. The sustainable impact evaluation is "an ex-post evaluation measures the extent to which project outcomes and impacts have been realized through participant ownership" (*Revised Guide to the PMD Pro.* 61).

This would be through interviewing or surveying, with open-ended questions, the participants after having had time to implement their learning into their lives and their communities. For this project to be successful, the outcomes must come from the participants rather than a quantitative-based questionnaire. An open survey would allow participants to elaborate on what they liked, did not like, how they have improved or how they feel like they have not. This would enable the project managers and evaluators to return to an appreciative inquiry to recognize what went well.

This project would quantitatively measure participants' attendance, how many people signed up for further engagement opportunities, demographic information such as gender, age, education level, and faith denomination. These numbers could provide information about which demographics are being engaged and those who are not being reached. This information could shift the event's design or marketing to appeal to all people from various backgrounds.

Both forms of evaluation are continually needed for the life of this event. The event is meant to be a semi-annual event with improvement and adjustments after six months. Although the event is based on qualitative research overtime, young adults' needs and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's issues will change. Engagement should be dynamic and fluid but still sustainable. Community developers should include effectiveness evaluations with qualitative elements because the process of inquiry should be on-going. If qualitative inquiry is utilized to develop a program or project, it should also be used to assess if the implementation and outcomes meet stakeholders' needs.

An evaluation of some type is needed for any project or program, but quantitative evaluations do not reflect how stakeholders perceive the event or how it benefits them. Numbers cannot tell stories; they cannot respond with words that reflect entirely how people feel. For example, if the goal is to have 100 participants at the event and 90 people participate in the

event, it seems like the goal was nearly met! Numerically, it appears to be a successful event, but it does not reflect if any stakeholders gained something useful from their participation. If 50 out of 90 people report feeling like the event made no impact on their ability to be an advocate or left feeling confused about the entirety of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then the events failed to meet the needs of the stakeholders. Qualitative inquiry in evaluation is beneficial because it "may provide the detail necessary to understand why, for whom, how much, and under which circumstances stakeholders experienced real significance, not just whether measurable differences statistically significant" (Bramberger and Rugh 231). Without qualitative methods in the evaluation process, the outcomes perceived by participants will not be realized. Numbers matter more when the needs of people are being met. Both qualitative and quantitative show a full picture of evaluation.

Every evaluation requires acknowledgment of limitations and validity. Qualitative inquiry can help to highlight or "examine the overall trustworthiness of a study by assessing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the results" (Enberg 71). This can be done initially in the research process but should be done in the evaluation so that programs can be effectively contextualized to other communities. Acknowledgment of limitations also allows other developers to identify gaps in additional research and identify how to solve these gaps.

Qualitative inquiry can serve to improve programs and projects during the evaluation process. If a project begins with a stakeholder's input, then it should end with the input of a stakeholder. Their influence and collaboration are needed for the entire process to genuinely help communities in the way they experience and wish to share their lives. Qualitative research in

evaluation allows developers to restart the process of identifying problems and finding solutions to help communities.

Conclusion

Qualitative inquiry should greatly influence and be utilized by community developers. People should be understood from their experiences and perceptions, not just from a quantitative number. However, quantitative numbers are still crucial to a full evaluation of a project. Various tools and research methods, such as AR and AI, allow developers to address problems and find solutions differently. Research through interviews led me to understand my stakeholders and other organizations better and be challenged to disregard biases or assumptions. Community Development needs a qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research should be a continuous part of development work, through interviews, evaluation, and seeking to be collaborative with the community.

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ESSAY THREE: ICD VALUES

Introduction

Throughout my time in the International Community Development (ICD) program, I have learned what it means to be a leader, how to live out copowerment and clarify what social justice and service means to me. Justice, reconciliation, and peace are obtainable by learning to care for those around us, working collaboratively with them, and recognizing the unseen.

Through self-reflection, I better understand who I am in the dynamic of God, Neighbor, and Self and how to make these relationships right.

Personal Transformation

I have always wanted to help people, and I have always wanted people to know that Jesus loves them. I used to think helping people and evangelism had a hierarchy, leaving me to ask: which one comes first? I now know it is not one before the other, but both can be carried out in my life through my actions and my love for others. Before the International Community Development (ICD) program, I wanted to help the people I assumed needed help; people who were different from me religiously, ethnically, or economically. I did not think I was any more of a human than them, but I used to think I knew exactly how I could help people worldwide because I am a Christian, I am an American, and a person of privilege. Now, I am aware my idea of helping was wrong, my understanding of how to do so was wrong, and I never really took the time to understand why I wanted to help people in the first place.

When I first started the ICD program, I knew I cared deeply about issues in the Middle East and I thought that the rest of my life's work would focus on it. When studying abroad, I was able to witness firsthand how people who faced oppression remain hopeful. This hope made me hopeful and gave me the desire to work towards making hopes a reality for those in communities

facing oppression. Along with hope, I realized not all those contributing to oppression understand how their actions impact others. I also became aware of how the Church was seemingly doing nothing to step in or raise awareness. After getting a degree in Intercultural Studies, I thought learning the practical side was the next step in learning to adequately serve others.

The ICD program has helped me realize I do not need to separate service from my faith, but because of my faith, I can better understand how my actions of service reflect God's love. In addition, my passion and purpose involve more than injustices in the Middle East region but communities worldwide. I have come to recognize my ideology of helping was formed by what I had been taught growing up. As an American and a Christian in the west, I was never adequately prepared to help people in the broader world to make a sustainable impact. I learned to place Band-Aids but not to seek justice or reconciliation. The ICD program sent me on a journey to better know myself, why I care so much, and how I can make a difference. My "why" is my desire to work with communities facing conflict and oppression, especially communities that are misunderstood from most western perspectives and the western church. The western church has become divisive and exclusive. This division has come from views on politics, race, LGBTQ+, immigration, and other social issues. The Western Church has let many of these issues separate them from the world in the wrong way, which is problematic because "divisions and animosity among Christians is bearing counter-witness to the gospel of Christ" (Alva 258-259). The church has not only created walls against the world, but also against their fellow Christians. I want to build bridges between communities and end cycles that continue to keep people oppressed. I want each person to experience justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Self-reflection

My misconstrued idea of what I wanted to do with my life and how I would arrive there came from a place of never looking inward but only externalizing the ideas which I thought would be the right thing to do. I did not understand my place in the grand scheme of life, so I had almost no foundation beneath me. I knew what I wanted to do because it was what I felt God calling me to. However, sometimes it is better to question God. I needed to understand myself, my past, and my present to know how I could effectively get to where I want to be in the future. Self-reflection is not always easy. Reflecting on myself gave me the ability to see I do not need to become a different person to be who I want to be in the future, but I just needed to understand how I am already using my skills to be a leader.

What is a leader, and can I be one?

Beyond needing to see myself for how I truly am, I have finally begun to think of myself as a leader. I had never seen myself as someone who was in charge and someone people were looking to for guidance. When I used to think of leaders, I imagined people with authority whom everyone wanted to follow, but that is not what leadership is, and I will never be that way. Instead, I better understand what it means to be a leader. Leaders are people who “have chosen to look after the person to the left of them, and they have chosen to look after the person to the right of them” (Sinek). Being a leader means truly caring for others' well-being, a willingness to collaborate, and learn together. While recognizing each other's strengths and room for growth, leadership is journey alongside others moving towards mutual goals and desires.

Becoming a leader would not have been possible without the help of my communities encouraging me to dig deeper and learn more. My process of growth, or as Parker Palmer calls it, inner work, did not need to happen on my own, and “inner work can be helped along in

community” (92). By surrounding myself with people who are encouraging and willing to stand alongside me on the journey made me realize I’d rather be a partner, working collaboratively with others, than an authoritarian leader. I do not want to be a person holding power of the group as an authority figure. Collaboration with others is leadership, and through it, I have gained confidence I have something to contribute to communities and teams. I have the ability to be a leader, but it took understanding what it means to be a leader to see within myself.

By leaning into what I am already good at, I have grown in skills and practices that have made me anxious and uncomfortable for most of my life. A year prior to the program, I sat with my mentor, hoping that I would be as good as him at asking questions and listening one day. I have so many questions now. Through my constant reflection of myself, I am able to understand better what I want to know and ask questions. Before being reflective, I was comfortable with what I knew; I did not feel the pressure to ask any more questions because I thought I knew it all. Even if I did want to know more, I was usually too scared to ask. Recognizing I do not know everything or had been often wrong fueled me to learn more about people and how the world around me is truly at work. I now consider myself to be a person who asks too many questions. Beyond searching for better understanding, there are times where these questions are not only for me. Sometimes, these are questions for those around me who may be nervous to ask, or they are questions to begin self-reflection, which I myself need. If someone had never asked me why I want to do community development, I would not have spent the time to evaluate how I got to where I am now—a person who seeks justice, reconciliation, and peace.

Social Justice

What is social justice?

In my process of personal transformation, I have realized my deep passion for seeking social justice. I have come to understand social justice as a way of seeking fairness, equality, and others' well-being. I believe social justice entails calling out oppressors and walking alongside those who are oppressed. From my Christian perspective, I have come to appreciate how Mae Elise Cannon defines justice. She says that "Justice is the promise that one day the world will be made right" (location 162). Seeking justice is seeking to fulfill the promise God made and sent His Son for, to make everything right in the world. Although this definition clarifies what I believe about justice, it fails to clarify what is "right." It is true that "defining justice can be a bit slippery ... [when] defined as "equality and fairness," "common decency" or "enforcing laws"" (Clawson 20). The concept of making things "right" is also slippery terminology. However, words such as right, equality, fairness are a part of the journey in seeking justice because, without those goals, barriers remain in the way of justice. Justice can be understood as the restoration of relationships with God, others, and ourselves, which means seeking to make them right through fairness, equality, and seeking people's well-being.

Social Justice and the Church

Seeking out justice is one of the reasons why I began the ICD program in the first place. I saw a gap between what I thought the Church should be doing and what they are doing. Christians are called to be peacemakers, but we live in a world that is growing further apart. Oppression is happening all around the world, and we cannot continue to be blind to it. It is essential to speak out against oppression as a peacemaker. If oppression, division, and exclusion continue, how can we accurately carry out what Jesus had commissioned us to do?

Engaging in social issues has created divisions among Christian denominations for a long time. Along with the fear of division, the uncertainty of how to address social problems keeps the Western Church from speaking out against injustices around the world, or it leaves them to pick and choose which ones to care about. Rather than living out God's commandment to love all people and care for their neighbors (*English Standard Version*, Mark 12:30-31), the Western Church has chosen to be selective in which neighbors they care about. The term neighbor is not restricted to their physical neighbors in their local community, but rather neighbor applies to all people in the world in various communities. A selective neighbor care approach fails to carry out the call of God and continues to perpetrate a divide between Christians and the rest of the world.

The three-day event for engaging young adults is just one-way churches can engage in social justice issues or provide opportunities for their congregants to do so. Social justice comes from seeking action, but action should also stem from education and awareness. It may be challenging to engage in social justice if the injustices that are happening every day, appear in ways people, especially those not directly impacted, are unable to recognize. Regardless, actions in everyday life are moving away from social justice, away from the right relationship with God, neighbor, and self. Moe-Lobeda, the author of *Resisting Structural Evil*, expressed that collective theft happens from people all over the world through their unconscious choices (40). She mentions that "the theft is, for most of us, unintentional [but] makes it no less deadly" (40). Difficulty with social justice for many is the difficulty of taking responsibility for something so unintentional. Regardless, actions that continue to be unfair, unequal, and harm people's well-being must be collectively recognized whether damage has been done intentionally or not.

In the future, I hope to be a leader for social justice by collaborating with others and communities to strive for justice. This will take a collective effort and recognition of collective

actions. Working with others to uncover and recognize injustice through being continuously reflective will help me better understand myself, others, and how I impact the world around me.

Copowerment

In community development or any realm of service, empowerment is a word that is commonly used. There is an assumption that one way of serving people is to help them feel empowered. This terminology, however, does not encapsulate the truth of how service should be done. Although empowerment is a vital part of service, copowerment is a term which better explains how empowerment should function in the development sector. Copowerment is "A dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other" (Insee). This means that in development practices using copowerment, there are mutual empowerment efforts from individuals or communities on each side of the social equations. These individuals and communities can be understood as social actor because of their efforts toward social mutual exchange and because of the self-reinforcing nature of mutuality and reciprocity, key social actors can grow and become more effective. This differs from empowerment which can be understood as a power transfer from the developer to their communities, empowering them to seek change, rather than creating a collaborative solution that sustains change.

Reciprocity and Mutuality

Copowerment seeks to bring about change through purposeful actions. This is important because "focusing on *processes* and *purpose* of community engagement ... redefines the meaning and intentionality of the engagement, enabling a co-constructed and collaborative problem-solving approach" (Silbert 8). The intentionality of copowerment is essential. This intentionality comes from purpose and actions with various communities. Silbert explains that

“partnerships' and 'mutuality' are associated with *place* and *activity*, while 'reciprocity' is linked to *processes* and *purpose*" (8). If this is so, then copowerment considers a focus on contextualizing the place and activity while including an intentional purpose and process for community development. Mutuality and reciprocity are what drive copowerment to be a collective action in sustainable social change.

Collective

The purpose-driven from reciprocity and mutuality must be placed onto identified purposes and places in collective decision making. Petra Kuenkel, author of *The Art of Leading Collectively*, emphasizes that “taking steps toward a goal or vision collectively also requires us to identify focus areas” (91). Copowerment allows developers to identify problems and think collectively among the different social actors on which focus areas they hope to change. This identification process is how sustainable solutions can be made which promote growth and effectiveness for each other.

Although goals do need focus areas, copowerment allows for multiple areas to be empowered rather than a transfer of power from one place to the next. The Life Center in Zarqa, Jordan, could have been seen from the outside as a place for Syrian refugee women to learn how to make soap to earn money by empowering them to learn new skills. Instead, the Life Center is a place for Jordanian women from the community to serve refugee women and their children by meeting the needs of education, soap making, therapy, art, and more. Rather than it being a place for the staff to empower women and send them on their way, this community of Jordanian and Syrian refugee women has been able to grow together. Since copowerment is focused on the mutual exchange between various social actors, this means the dynamic can become a multidimensional tool to impact multiple means of social justice. Through good research and

collaborative leadership towards problem solving, it is possible to find solutions that address multiple issues of injustice through dynamic exchanges to better impact the world.

In my future, it will be essential to be observant that all these needs are met, and social actors are able to grow, becoming more effective through reciprocal, mutual, and collective exchanges. Working in program evaluation or management, it will be important to identify if these steps are being taken so that copowerment is functioning. It will be questioning, "Am I empowering? Or is this copowerment?" The three-day event serves so that young adults can grow in their understanding of ways to be involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and encourage the Christian church to become involved in other social justice movements.

Theology of Service

My understanding of social justice shapes my theology of service and how to obtain restoration in the world as it was once created to be. God created the world so we may live peacefully and happily in his creation. To see social justice and properly serve, our perceptions must begin to be informed by the reality of how people and the earth are treated. As a person of privilege, I may not always recognize ways in which I am contributing to systemic evil. Without recognizing the existence of injustices around the world, I will continue to stay in my mindset of being unaware. To be in development work, there must be recognition of a starting point, and "to break out of a cage one must first see the bars" (DePaola 38). This metaphorical cage can look different for people of all different contexts. For example, as a person of privilege, it requires me to recognize privilege. I believe this goes beyond just seeing our own cages to helping others identify theirs or the ones they have placed on other people. Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, authors of *Reconciling all Things* express, "convictions about the "things not seen" [inspire] actions toward a new identity that [are] often disturbing to those comfortable with the

status quo" (97). Once the cage has been seen, there is the option to remain there and stay complicit or fight against this status quo to seek fairness, equality, and better well-being of others by removing cages and barriers.

In my future vocations, as someone who wants to work in development while also helping people realize God loves them, I feel called to live out neighborly love and social justice through my actions. This means being a good listener, asking questions, seeking to learn more, and walking alongside those I have decided to take a journey with. Paul Lederach expresses that "reconciliation [and justice] cannot be done by proxy but can be supported by way of witness and accompaniment" (38). I cannot speak for my neighbors, but I can stand by them as we seek justice. In this sense, the bare minimum is to look after your neighbor and care for them. This means speaking out against things that harm them or seeking to change the systems that maintain the status quo.

Along with changing the status quo, I hope to be a prophetic advocate. As Cannon describes it, this means "transformation of attitudes, hearts, and behaviors on an individual level as well as transformation of a systemic level. Entering into confession and lamenting the brokenness of the world changes us" (location 312). Prophetic advocacy for me means intertwining my faith with justice for the now with preparation of what God promised for the future. In recognition of the hurt in the world around us, we can take action to change ourselves and work with communities to impact systems that continue to harm the world and people's well-being. It takes the journey inward along with the community to move towards justice, reconciliation, and peace.

Conclusion

Once I begin, as I have, to see myself more clearly, I can understand where I play a role in the large scheme of God's plan. By uncovering the things unseen, I can begin to seek social justice through actions and copowerment. Caring for those on my left and my right, will help me see and understand the barriers they experience as I walk alongside them. All of this is the movement to make the world right as God intended. Service and justice are the outpourings of seeking to make right relationships between God, neighbor, and self.

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT PROPOSAL

Young Christian Americans and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Starting Place for Advocacy
and Peacemaking.

By Dayna Riecke

Introduction

The age demographic among American Christians engaging and working towards peace in Israel-Palestine is often individuals above the age of forty. Young American Christians, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, are a decreasing age demographic of those engaging in the topic of peace and justice in Israel-Palestine. Young Christians can play a pivotal role in peacemaking efforts but often lack the tools to make their engagement sustainable. For young American Christians to be engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they need more available resources and guidance for sustainable advocacy. This project serves as an outline for an event that will include and promote information and tools such as historical background, education of current events, theological significance, advocacy, and what it means to be young adult peacemakers.

This three-day event guide aims to meet the various needs of different young adult Christians. It is suitable for them whether they have had no previous knowledge or are seeking to increase their already existing awareness of the conflict. The first day covers the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and current issues within the region. The second day will cover the theological significance of Israel-Palestine and advocacy training. The third and final day will end on defining how to be a Christian peacemaker for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of being an American Christian and tangible ways to work towards transformation. The

event will also include sample handouts and quick guides for reference when engaging in advocacy work.

All three days aim to provide the information needed to gain a fuller understanding of the conflict, why it is crucial to engage in the issue as a young adult, substantial ways to make efforts sustainable, and the confidence to be a peacemaker and advocate within their communities. This event guide is intended for organizations and churches seeking to engage their younger demographics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as a structural foundation to introduce other social justice issues to church members.

Fieldwork (Qualitative)

In the Spring of 2018, I was introduced to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during a semester abroad with the Middle East Studies Program in Jordan. We spent a month studying the conflict before traveling and meeting with Israelis and Palestinians. Our cohort stayed with Israeli and Palestinian families and met with influential people from both sides. We were able to hear their stories, experience their living conditions, and grow in understanding the conflict's weight. As an American Christian, I was shocked by most Americans' views on the conflict, as well as most Christians' perspectives. Americans and Christians have most often sided with the oppressing power or acted ignorant to the realities of what was going on. My beliefs do not match those of majority of Americans or Christian, but because I am one of them, I felt responsible. I felt like I needed to do something. As I returned to America a few months later, I felt as though I had nowhere to go with my new passion for seeking justice and no one to talk to who would understand. As I tried to speak with family and friends, I found that people did not understand or disagreed. Although there were many organizations in the Israel-Palestine region

doing peacemaking work, I struggled to know how I could engage in my larger American Christian context if I could not do so with my smaller community.

I only wished I had known what I could do with my experience and how to share it. As I began to look for fieldwork in Graduate school, I found Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP). They seek to engage Christians of all denominations across America in the conflict. Once I began my fieldwork with CMEP, I found that they too, were struggling to keep their eighteen to thirty-five-year-old demographic engaged. Through my work with CMEP and my interviews with staff, former volunteers, and interns, I found hope in creating a project to meet the needs that young adults were experiencing.

Jasmine Curry, Donor Engagement Intern for CMEP and fellow young adult, was introduced to the conflict through a three-month internship with Tomorrow's Youth Organization. As her feet were on the ground in Nablus, she encountered the conflict's realities for the first time. During my interview with her, I asked her about how she came to know about the conflict. Jasmine described her introduction to the conflict:

Basically, to say that I was pulled into the conflict and I didn't even like know about it ... I really thought that it was just like a nonprofit working with kids and like very light and fluffy ... I thought that I was going to see you know like some poverty and that's not even how I would think about it then but just like I might see some [stuff] but not conflict related stuff ... I watched an hour-long video on the history between Israel and Palestine and I Googled active conflict zones and saw that Israel Palestine was on the list and like feeling surprised. (Curry)

There was no work to prepare Jasmine for the realities of the area she would be working in or the people she would be working alongside. Her introduction began as she lived and worked with

people impacted by the conflict. After the experience she began to believe in secondary trauma. Secondary trauma, based on how Jasmine explained her experience, is the idea of taking on the emotions of trauma by witnessing others experience it. Although she was not directly traumatized from the situation, her empathy caused her to take on emotions she would not have experienced if she had not worked so closely with Palestinian children. Secondary trauma can affect anyone who works or visits closely with those who are facing oppression. Unfortunately, trauma does not disappear overnight; therefore, the secondary trauma she witnessed other people go through weighed on her even after she left the region. She described her difficulty in connecting and staying involved once she returned to America: "I couldn't talk about it with friends and family, and I couldn't find any other groups" (Curry). She felt unable to connect with and share this secondary trauma with her closest community. She was left with emotions, passion and the uncertainty of how to use them until two years later in her internship with CMEP.

Izy Voth, a former Advocacy Intern for CMEP and Middle East Studies Program Alumni, was introduced to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when through a semester abroad in the fall of 2019. Izy's introduction to this conflict was similar to my own experience. This is understandable considering we participated in the same study abroad program. She spent a month learning about the conflict, and her cohort visited Israel-Palestine. As her semester ended and she prepared for the return home, she felt she was left unequipped to have a conversation about her experience. In an interview with her, she expressed:

I felt very unprepared to talk about Israeli – Palestine with friends and family members, to talk about, to talk about like the conflict with people who are either very pro-Israel or just didn't know anything. I did feel really unprepared for that. I think it was also hard because here was so much that went on. (Voth)

Similar to Jasmine's experience returning to her American context, Izy felt the difficulty of sharing her experience with those in her community and family. After Izy's time in Israeli-Palestine and the broader Middle East, she also felt responsible for engaging as a young American Christian, which led to an internship with CMEP post-college graduation. Although she felt capable of diving into a form of advocacy, her ability to process and express her personal experience was minimal. I asked Izy what resources she wishes she would have had exiting her experience. She told me, "I think it would have been really helpful to have more resources and maybe even like a little guide or bullet points on... good tips about how to explain to someone who just doesn't know... [or] how do you start off talking with a friend who just doesn't know" (Voth)? Having the knowledge and skills to engage in conversation about the conflict would have helped Izy and Jasmine feel more prepared to share her experience and enter somewhat challenging discussions. The knowledge and the skills to communicate on this subject can increase sustainable young adult engagement in the conflict.

The Need for Young Adult Engagement

Young adult American Christians should feel welcomed and capable of sharing their experiences in their communities. Charles Vogl, author of *The Art of Community*, emphasizes seven principles of belonging, one of which is the Stories Principle. Vogl states, "Members need opportunities to share their own stories, whether formal or informal venues (or both). This helps them feel that they're seen and understood. It also helps members understand the shared values in the community" (78-79). A sense of belonging comes from being able to share our stories. As young American Christians learn about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they should feel equipped to engage their communities about this issue, whether their value or view of it is shared or not. By providing young American Christians with a space to express their concerns and their

experiences, they will feel more inclined towards sustainable engagement and advocate for justice-focused solutions to the conflict.

Why Young Adults?

Young adult Christians Americans need to be involved in the conflict because of their influence as an American and as a Christian. Relationships with Israel, from both Christians and Americans, can dictate movements towards peace in this conflict. In my interview with the Director of Operations at CMEP, Nicole Morgan, she explained it is vital for young adults to be engaged in this issue because "Americans specifically have this connection to global power and global policy, that actually does impact the lives of others and that we have a responsibility to advocate because our voices and our names are being used in ways that hurt and oppress" (Morgan). Morgan expressed how the United States, as the powerholder, impacts making a positive difference in this conflict. However, a positive and equal impact may be difficult because Christians and Americans are thought to be a friend of Israel. Jeremy Mayer, in an article for *Social Science Quarterly*, discussed the relationship between Christian fundamentalists and Israel. Mayer found: "in the current debates over America's policies toward Israel, it has seemed that Israel's strongest Christian supporters are fundamentalists" (697). The world sees Americans and Christians as the most considerable support of Israel.

Unfortunately, this means as Morgan said, the American Christian name is being used by many to oppress Palestinians. The lack of awareness of the conflict creates a dynamic where American Christians are unknowingly complicit in power dynamics in the conflict. However, awareness allows for young adults to stand against having their names used in support of harmful actions. They are giving the opportunity to change the perceptions of support from American

Christians. Young Adult American Christians can change this by using their voices in their families, communities and politically advocating for justice and peace in Israel-Palestine.

This issue should also strike young adults on a relational level because this conflict impacts young adults who are Palestinian and Israeli. Shiri Yadlin, an Israeli American Christian, and former volunteer with CMEP, expressed the importance of Young Adult American Christian involvement:

... it is young people who in many ways are like bearing the brunt of this, of this conflict too. Like its 18-year-old Israeli soldiers and you know teenage Palestinians who are getting arrested and killed. Like it's young people who are feeling this and young people who are going to continue to feel it. (Yadlin)

She placed this in the relational perspective. For young adults, it is impacting other young adults who happen to live within Israel-Palestine. It is relational because it is people of similar age fighting with each other and through this situation. To help people make connections to other problems in the world it is important to "Make the mission human: Give it a real face whenever possible" (Lynch and Walls 108). In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is very human as it is about the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. Being able to see the face of someone facing oppression shows who is being fought for. Making an impact is no longer a theoretical idea but rather advocacy is acted out on behalf of the real stories, real people, and the problems they face. This reason should call young American Christians to grow in their sense of empathy and to act. Young American Christians can impact their families, communities, and country policies by using their voice to advocate for those in Israel-Palestine.

Project Description

An event addressing education on historical context, current issues, theological significance, and trains on advocacy and peacemaking will help young adults feel more equipped to enter their communities to share their experiences, thus bringing more awareness of the conflict. This event would span three days consisting of five sections broken up into two full days and one-half day. The first three sections are educational, while the last two are educational and practical. This event would integrate guest speakers, lectures, and time for participants to practice the skills learned before heading back into their communities. The sections covered in this event are Educational: Historical Context of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, Current Events and Issues, and Theological Significance, and Practical: Advocacy Training, and Peacemaking as a Christian. These five parts are critical for engagement because it seeks to meet the needs of those with no background knowledge and those who have already initiated the engagement process. Providing three sections of context can meet the needs of those newly aware while the last two practical sections apply to the backgrounds of participants.

Historical Context

As young adults are introduced to the conflict, it is essential to include the conflict's historical context. Although participants might understand the current context of issues, the event must cover the information that has brought Israel-Palestine to where it is today. This broader historical context will help participants understand beginning issues and attempts at peace, along with why peace agreements have failed. As participants seek to engage others, they must understand the historical context so they can contextualize current events and motions for peace based on the conflict's past.

Current Events

As peacemakers and advocates, they should also focus on advocating for issues currently impacting lives as a result of the conflict. These issues are ones such as human rights, Jerusalem, and various liberation movements. These issues will help young adults to understand what they can advocate for and participate in actively. Participants should view these issues considering the historical context as a foundation which has already been discussed.

Theological Significance

This section is vital to the work of advocacy because as Christians, varying theologies can impact the way the conflict is viewed. Stances such as liberation theology or Christian Zionism can taint how peace solutions may be understood. Additionally, this section would cover what it could look like to be pro-peace driven. Being pro-peace means not taking a side for the specific group to “win”, but rather recognizing the importance of siding with the oppressed for the sake of peace and justice. Katie McRoberts, director of communication at CMEP, highlighted this thinking practice in an interview on her theology of peace and reconciliation, "I think of my philosophy as pro-peace. So, if somehow the Palestinians became the powerholding figures in Israel and Palestine, I think my approach would switch to ‘how can I help elevate Israelis?’ instead of ‘Oh yay. We accomplished our goal’" (McRoberts). Her idea is no matter which theology is practiced, as Christians, they should focus on finding peace and just solutions for both parties of the conflict. The theological context training will help participants understand various perspectives and help them engage with people of differing views.

Advocacy Training

After setting the context and introduction to the conflict for participants, they need to know how to take the next steps in action. Tom Kelley and David Kelley, authors of *Creative*

Confidence, express "Many of us get stuck between wanting to act and taking action. The uncertainty of the uncharted path ahead can be daunting" (119). As participants move forward in their engagement, it is critical to provide guidance on how they can shift from wanting to act to taking action. Additionally, young adults need to understand advocacy goes beyond just speaking about politics. Young adults can still be advocates even if they are not calling or mailing political figures to sign bills and pass legislature. Advocacy comes through various avenues of speaking with people, sharing stories, and having hard conversations. This could look like developing small groups on the topic, or simply posting on social media about current issues in Israel-Palestine. This training would seek to help participants to learn and practice communicating with their families, friends, churches, and others within their community. Young adults learning to share their knowledge is essential because our language and words can move people. Language and words "empower not only because they claim to provide insight about events or developments but also because they generate calls to action" (Divine 3). Young adults can learn to move others to a call of action, but they first must be impacted by the desire for change and the call to advocacy.

Peacemaking as Christians

The final section would cover what it means to be a peacemaker as a Christian. This section integrates the context and the advocacy skills and is then fueled by values as a Christian community. Integration would help participants to look at this conflict and their engagement through the lens of transformation. Author of *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Paul Lederach, explains, "Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures and respond to real life

problems in human relationships" (22). This transformational lens could help young adults understand their role in the conflict, the responsibility as a Christian, and how their work within their communities can impact transformation on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The idea of holiness, being legalistically perfect within the eyes of God or that which is perceived by Christian fundamentalists, can be a barrier to participation in engagement with social justice issues and being peacemakers. The complex issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be daunting or taboo to some young adults based on their understanding of how they are to interact with the world and its issues. To preserve perceived understanding of holiness or proper Christianity, "The church [might be] pulled away from life rather than toward a deeper participation" (Beck 153). Rather than being pulled away, young Christians should learn how social justice and peacemaking are a calling of caring about the world and others within it. Young American Christians need the opportunity to challenge their understanding of what it means to be a Christian peacemaker.

Along with the preservation of a perceived holiness, there may be opinions based on the global church's negative impact to some countries in history which hold the idea that Christians should not have a place as peacemakers in this issue. Due to the long history of Christian involvement in the conflict and the existence of Palestinian Christians in the conflict, there must be Christians working towards peace. It could be easy for Christians to remove themselves but "[They] need to stop apologizing for being Christian and insist on being able to contribute to the conversation" (Myers 66). Being Christian is not a reason to disengage, but rather should be a driving force for seeking peace. Participants must understand this issue would be a life-giving opportunity to advocate for within their communities and that they can be contributing to the conversation.

Implementation

This three-day event would occur semi-annually to provide those with no previous background of the conflict with knowledge and provide training for young American Christians with previous experience but looking for ways to further their engagement. The event is open to continually participate as current events and peace agreements are constantly developing. The resources needed to make this event possible would be a venue, guest speakers, a project manager, as well as the handout resources to be developed as a take-home guide. Take-home guides for example would include links and lists of programs to be involved in, conflict specific language, and a conflict timeline. This project proposal will be presented to CMEP for its use in the CMEP1835 program. As they seek to grow their CMEP1835 engagement, this event could increase their participation numbers and donations after implementation.

Goals and Evaluation Methods

Goals

Christians need to gain the knowledge and skills to advocate, so they do not stay in the space of avoidance or ignorance. Dale Hansen Bourke in *Land Full of God* describes his introduction to the Israeli-Palestine conflict topic; "I equated peace with avoidance ... If there was ever a topic that seemed to attract conflict, it was the mere mention of Israelis and Palestinians. My view of peacemaking was to gently change the subject" (17). One goal of this event is to help young adults feel equipped to engage in these conversations. Peace is not avoidance and changing the subject will lead to nowhere. The conversation is difficult to engage in by Christians with other Christians, depending on their theological views. It is difficult as an American because of the United States' deep-seated support for Israel. If peace is to be achieved,

young American Christians must help positively move the United States policy, raise awareness of the issues, and the good work already being done in Israel-Palestine.

Additional goals of the project are that young adults would be and feel confident on the knowledge of history, current context, and the various theological perspectives of this conflict. The confidence in their knowledge is needed so their engagement in these conversations are set in educated thoughts. Finally, it is the mission of this project to give young American Christians the confidence in themselves as peacemakers and advocates to join the long-run journey of engaging and advocating on behalf of a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Evaluation

The project's success evaluation is based on quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods relate to quantity whereas qualitative methods relate to the quality of the project. Quantitatively, the number of attendees vs. registrants would be calculated, the number of people who sign up for further engagement opportunities such as newsletters or advocacy alerts, and the number of participants who take home additional resources packets.

Qualitatively this project would be evaluated by a survey composed of questions that ask the participants to compare their prior knowledge and experience on the topic compared to how equipped they felt post-event. Three months after the event, another open-ended question survey would be administered to check-in on participants and how they feel their engagement is going months after the event. There would be a section to report testimonials of the advocacy or peacemaking efforts participating in. This three-month post-event survey would also ask for feedback so CMEP or other organizations utilizing this structure can make changes before the next semi-annual event. It is helpful to have both quantitative and qualitative data because if the focus is on “quantitative measurement, the subjective qualitative dimensions of development are

excluded. This means excluding feelings, experiences and opinions of individuals and groups” (Willis 13). Therefore, both forms of evaluation are needed for improving future events.

Conclusion

Young Adult American Christians should be engaging in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Christians and Americans have ties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whether they know it or not. Young adults are becoming less engaged in this conflict, and those who have been introduced lack the skills or guidance needed to continue further engagement. A three-day event focused on setting an education context and providing practical skills would help young adults feel more equipped and confident to share their experience and knowledge within their families, communities, or advocating politically. It is with the hope that this knowledge and skills would encourage young American Christians to have sustainable advocacy and peacemaking efforts in finding a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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APPENDIX B: SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

Day One: History of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict

- a. Historical Palestine
 - i. What was Palestine?
 - ii. What is Palestine today?
- b. Historical Israel
 - i. What was Israel?
 - ii. What is Israel today?
- c. Historical Events with Impact on the Conflict
 - i. WWI and WWII
 - ii. 1948
 - iii. 1967
 - iv. Intifadas
 - v. Peace Agreements
- d. The Historical Church
 - i. Christians and the Holy Land
 - ii. Palestinian Christians in History
- e. Historical Context must be included in the journey to Peacemaking and Advocacy work

Day One: Current issues around Israel Palestine

- a. Human Rights issues within Israel Palestine
 - i. Annexation of the West Bank
 - ii. Land security

- iii. Young Adults in Prisons
- iv. Future education opportunities
- b. Jerusalem
- c. Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS)

Day Two: Theological Significance

- a. Christian Zionism
 - i. Liberal Zionism
 - ii. Fundamental Zionism
 - iii. History of the Evangelical Church
- b. Liberation Theology
 - i. Progressive Theology
 - ii. Jesus the Liberator
- c. Pro-Peace thinking
 - i. Siding with the oppressed as a means of moving towards peace
 - ii. If the rolls were switched.

Day Two: Advocacy Training

- a. Advocacy as a call to engage.
 - i. Political – Engaging on change within the larger scope of U.S. involvement.
 - ii. Communal – Advocacy at our churches, schools, and anywhere we gather.
 - iii. Familial – Getting comfortable sharing.
- b. The power of experience and how to be storytellers.
- d. Language as power and influence
 - i. Term, their definition, and the implications of their connotation.

- e. Language of Peacemaking
- f. Young adults are pivotal to sustainable efforts towards

Day Three: Called to become Peacemakers.

- a. As Christians we are called to be peacemakers
 - i. Road to Reconciliation
 - ii. Resolution is not the same and transformation.
- b. Leadership as peacemakers and advocates
- c. The change within ourselves

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE EVENT OUTLINE

Day One:

Time	Mins	Topic
9:00 - 9:15am	15	Welcome & Introduction to History of the Conflict
9:15 - 9:45am	30	Historical Palestine
9:45 - 10:15am	30	Historical Israel
10:15 - 10:25am	10	Break
10:25 - 10:55am	30	Historical Events and Impact on the Conflict
10:55 - 11:25am	30	Historical Church
11:25 - 11:55am	30	Importance of Historical Context
11:55 - 12:25pm	30	Small Groups
12:25 - 1:25pm	60	Lunch Break
1:25 - 1:35pm	10	Welcome Back & Introduction to Current Issues
1:35 - 2:35pm	60	Human Rights Issues
2:35 - 3:05pm	30	Jerusalem
3:05 - 3:15pm	10	Break
3:15 - 3:45pm	30	Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS)
3:45 - 4:30pm	45	Small groups
4:30 - 4:40pm	10	Closing Statements and Preview of Day Two

Day Two:

Time	Mins	Topic
9:00 - 9:15am	15	Welcome & Introduction of Theological Significance
9:15 - 10:00am	45	Christian Zionism
10:00 - 10:45am	45	Liberation Theology
10:45 - 10:55am	10	Break
10:55 - 11:35am	40	Pro-Peace Thinking
11:35 - 12:00pm	25	Small Groups
12:00 - 1:00pm	60	Lunch Break
1:00 - 1:10pm	10	Welcome Back & Introduction to Advocacy Training
1:10 - 2:00pm	50	Ways to Advocate
2:00 - 2:40pm	40	The Power of Experience & Storytelling
2:40 - 2:50pm	10	Break
2:50 - 3:30pm	40	Language as Power and Influence
3:30 - 4:30pm	60	Small Group Practice
4:30 - 4:40pm	10	Closing Statements and Preview of Day Three

Day Three:

Time	Mins	Topic
9:00 - 9:10am	10	Welcome, Review of Day One and Two
9:10 - 9:15am	5	Introduction Peacemaking
9:15 - 10:15am	60	Christians as Peacemakers
10:15 - 11:15am	60	Leadership as Peacemakers and Advocates
11:15am - 12:00pm	45	Lunch Break
12:00 - 12:30pm	30	The Change Within Ourselves
12:30 - 1:30pm	1	Practice Session
1:30 - 2:15pm	45	Showcase
2:15 - 2:30pm	15	Conclusion and Call to Action
2:30 - 2:40 pm	10	Farwell

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