Community for Justice in Palestine and Israel
By Kay Tarazi

The Alliance Community for Justice in Palestine and Israel (JPI) seeks to follow the model of the First Century Jesus in the Twenty-first Century in loving justice and celebrating the worth of all individuals. The goal of justice is that both peoples flourish – Israelis and Palestinians. We believe that if justice exists, peace will be found. The JPI Community expresses love and advocates for justice in many ways. It raises awareness about the current situation, encourages pilgrimages to the Holy Land, networks with other like-minded faith-based groups and individuals, and advocates for the pursuit of justice with elected policymakers, encouraging them to speak truth to power, even as Jesus did.

Several Alliance churches are supporting Palestinian refugees or students who are finishing advanced education degrees. These persons have come to this country for safety, for jobs, to study, and to provide a better life for their families. We have seen up close what Palestinian resilience and faith looks like. Some Alliance churches raise money by selling Palestinian olive oil and products; they use the resulting proceeds and donations to help with Palestinian humanitarian needs and to support awareness and peace efforts.

To raise awareness, two Alliance churches in the D.C. area sponsored a recent book talk. Often the JPI Community hears the question, “How do our Jewish friends and colleagues feel about what is happening in Israel and Palestine?” The book selected for the book talk has over forty chapters, each written by a different Jewish American. The editor and several writers of the chapters spoke on the panel. Their personal stories and their evolving passion to work for justice in Palestine and Israel were riveting. If interested, read Reclaiming Judaism from Zionism: Stories of Personal Transformation, Carolyn Karcher, Editor. (Amazon link).

Many individuals in the JPI Community are active in meeting with and trying to influence their local, state, and federal legislators. Individuals from one Alliance church in North Carolina practiced speaking truth to power as they successfully participated with a coalition of churches and organizations in resisting the possible militarization of local police. Israel is influencing many district police forces in the United States. The police force in this part of North Carolina was going to be trained by the Israeli Defense Force, which would have encouraged the same military tactics used with the Palestinian people; this coalition kept that from happening. An Alliance church in Virginia participates in a coalition that is meeting with local, state, and federal officials. The group is protesting an inaccurate portrayal of Palestine in Virginia textbooks and is also educating legislators on many other issues involving Israel and Palestine. Some local Alliance churches in Virginia, Maryland, and D.C. meet regularly with federal congresspersons and senators to lobby against legislation that seeks to prevent the criticism of Israel in our country, in spite of the First Amendment and the millions the United States sends to Israel every day. They also support legislation to protect children in Palestine who are illegally incarcerated and are experiencing many violations of their human rights. Another way the Alliance Community participates in advocacy and education is through the national organization, Churches for Middle East Peace.
(www.cmep.org), and also The Faith Forum, of which the Alliance is a participant. The Faith Forum of Global Ministries alerts us monthly to needed prayer and political actions; these 3rd Thursday alerts are sent out to those in the JPI Community.

The JPI Community participated heavily in the Alliance Annual Gathering in Washington D.C. in April. It sponsored a keynote speaker, a woman who had recently arrived from Gaza and whose personal story had remarkable similarities to the story of the African American woman Baptist preacher who also spoke. We organized and led two workshops. One workshop highlighted a panel of recent clergy travelers to the Holy Land; these clergy shared what they observed and what surprised them. Another panel included two African Americans and two PalestinianAmericans who told their personal stories; the parallels of injustice they had experienced were clear. One member of an Alliance church in California shared her church’s journey in becoming an HP Free Church (Hewlett Packard); the goal is to boycott HP products in our churches and homes since Israel uses HP equipment for electronic surveillance that supports the occupation. In addition, the community provided an information display table and a walk-through museum presenting history from a Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspective.

If you would like to be added to the JPI Community’s email list, contact Chairperson Leslie Withers at leslie@ml1945.com. A wonderful resource for studying justice in Palestine and Israel is the document created by Alliance Community member Ken Sehested in Prayer and Politiks ("Signs of the Times."). Another way to learn more is to explore one of the organizations listed below that some of our Alliance churches support.

www.stjohnyehospital.org. St. John’s Eye Hospital (One Alliance church recently supported a nurses training program for the eye hospital located in Gaza.)

www.mecaforpeace.org. Middle East Children’s Alliance (MECA – Several Alliance churches support The Maia Water project that brings clean water to the children of Palestine.

www.fosna.org. Friends of Sabeel North America (HP Free Boycott is supported by a statement voted upon by the Alliance)

www.eyewitnesspalestine.org. Eyewitness Palestine (Offers trips that have interfaith connections with Christians, Muslims, and Jews.)

www.nwttac.dci-palestine.org. No Way to Treat a Child Campaign (This focuses on the incarceration of children and is sponsored by the Defense for Children International–Palestine and the American Friends Service Committee.)