



*The people in these stories and the millions of others who love Jerusalem invite you to share in the struggle. These stories can be freely copied for use as discussion starters for Sunday School classes, articles for church publications, bulletin inserts and illustrations for advocacy work. With the exception of Ghassan Andoni, all names and identifying details have been changed to protect the people involved.*

### Ibrahim and Kifayah

The hearts of Ibrahim and Kifayah, Palestinian refugees in Gaza, have been broken into pieces – one part back in their ancestral village in what is now Israel, another part with their struggling people in Gaza, and a very special part which is always in Jerusalem, the city Palestinians consider their capital and a city sacred to Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Ibrahim, a teacher, and Kifayah, a social worker, center their lives on their Islamic faith, praying, fasting, and helping others. Their children share in this religious life – Muhammed, 7, voluntarily fasts during the holy month of Ramadan, and 2-year-old Amina imitates her mother during prayers, covering her head with a scarf and copying her prostrations.

Jerusalem is home to the third holiest site in Islam, the al-Aqsa Mosque, in which a single prayer is worth 500 prayers offered at home, and the neighboring Dome of the Rock, erected where Muhammed made his miraculous night journey to heaven. For devout Muslims like Ibrahim and Kifayah, forced separation from such sites is perhaps the most painful consequence of the Israeli siege of Jerusalem.

Palestinian Christians, too, regret their exile from such Jerusalem holy sites as the Via Dolorosa and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection). While Jews from all over the world have free access to Jerusalem and the sacred Western Wall, Ibrahim, Kifayah and their Palestinian brothers and sisters – Christians and Muslims – are barred from the city they call Al-Quds, 'the Holy.'

Perhaps the traditional Jewish hope "Next year in Jerusalem" now constitutes a more authentic cry coming from the Palestinian Christians and Muslims who share the love of this unique city.

*Please become an advocate for justice and peace – join the Shared Jerusalem Advocacy Network: e-mail at [cmepdc@aol.com](mailto:cmepdc@aol.com) or mail to Churches for Middle East Peace, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, #108, Washington, DC 20002. Stay informed, visit [www.cmep.org](http://www.cmep.org).*



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### Maher and Yasmeen

Maher is a refugee in Jerusalem. Even though he was born in Jerusalem he lacks a Jerusalem identity card. He, his wife Yasmeen, and their six young children are residents of Sumoud ("Steadfastness") Camp, an abandoned building housing 20 families in deplorable conditions. Israel's policies of house demolitions, ID card confiscation, refusal to grant residency rights and lack of commitment to affordable housing have created yet more Palestinian refugees in the age of 'peace.'

Maher is a skilled butcher who desperately wants to work and support his growing family. He has first class qualifications and finds work easily as there is a local shortage of butchers. Unfortunately, when his employers find out he is without a Jerusalem ID and therefore an 'illegal' worker, they regretfully let him go. Maher must then sit idle until he finds another opportunity to squeeze in a few days work before the inevitable discovery that he is an 'alien.'

When Maher hears that police are coming to Sumoud to check IDs, he leaves his family and hides for a few days. On occasions when there isn't time to escape, he spends short periods in jail, although he has no record of security offenses.

Yasmeen recently required surgery. Because Maher lacks the all-important Jerusalem ID, the whole family is ineligible for insurance and suffered further financial hardship with her hospitalization. But at least Yasmeen was able to use the hospital, unlike the many Palestinians who can't enter Jerusalem itself!

With enough money Maher believes he could hire a lawyer and obtain the coveted Jerusalem identity card, but without work he can't afford legal services. Meanwhile, Maher and his family remain steadfast at Sumoud camp, living on rice and vegetables (meat is a luxury this butcher can no longer afford) and hoping that someday the Israeli policy makers will be willing to share Jerusalem with the Palestinians who were born there.

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### Maryam

Maryam is an energetic Palestinian woman with a ready smile and sparkling eyes. Fluent in English, she is an office manager for an international, Jerusalem-based organization. Maryam was born in Jerusalem and became a refugee in 1948 at the age of three when her parents fled their Jerusalem-area village in the wake of Israeli massacres. They took only their three small children, the clothes on their backs and their radio, so they could listen to the news and know when it was safe to return.

Maryam has often seen her people suffer from overt Israeli violence, such as the 1967 war or Israel's brutal response to the Intifada, the largely non-violent Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.

Currently, Maryam's family is struggling with less obvious forms of warfare in this time of 'peace.' For example, the extremely high municipality tax imposed on tenants in Jerusalem is threatening the future of many Palestinians in the city. Although the tax is also levied on Israelis, it affects Palestinians disproportionately, as they earn significantly less than their Israeli counterparts. This heavy tax burden forces Palestinians out of Jerusalem, giving the Israelis an excuse to revoke their ID cards and residency rights.

Maryam hopes for a shared Jerusalem, but the reality does not encourage optimism. While housing demolitions and ID card confiscations continue, what little remains for a Palestinian state is carved into disconnected cantons. Still, Maryam is willing to share her home city with the Israelis: "I see Palestinians ready to live in peace with Israelis, but the Israelis aren't giving us a chance."

Maryam recently acquired a postcard of the village from which her family fled in 1948. She showed the card to her mother who stared at it speechless for 30 minutes and then began to speak, remembering "This was my father's house, this was the road we took to our olive trees and fig trees." Surely a true sharing of Jerusalem will mean that Palestinians receive more compensation for their historic losses than the consolation of a postcard.

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### Ghassan Andoni

Ghassan Andoni, a Palestinian Christian from the West Bank village of Beit Sahour, directs the Palestine Rapprochement Center, an organization dedicated to the nonviolent empowerment of the Palestinian people. Ghassan's justice and advocacy work, as well his role as a physics professor, often take him to Jerusalem. But he refuses to comply with Israel's policy of requiring permits for Palestinians wanting to enter the city.

Ghassan willingly jeopardizes his personal freedom every time he enters Jerusalem 'illegally': "Any time I want to go to Jerusalem, I should be ready to take that risk. If I adapt to this procedure, I will adapt to more inhuman, racist procedures. I would end up caging myself."

Ghassan longs for a shared Jerusalem, but his hopes rest not in the near future but in the coming generation. In fact, Ghassan has been working at issues of Palestinian-Israeli co-existence since the late 1980s and he knows firsthand that there are no easy answers. The Palestine Rapprochement Center started the first dialogue groups that brought grassroots Palestinians and Israelis together. Although these dialogues continue to this day, Ghassan cautions against surface solutions where people make 'peace' without justice. "Now is not the time for joint picnics and youth camps – we need to talk politics."

One way Ghassan and his colleagues are working to "build power inside people" is through establishing a 'Palestinian settlement' in East Jerusalem. By building Palestinian housing on land threatened by Israeli confiscation, Palestinians pro-actively counter the Israeli policy of ringing Jerusalem with Jewish settlements.

Under normal circumstances, for people to build homes on their own land is not considered a radical act of nonviolent resistance. However, Palestinians haven't lived under normal conditions for more than 50 years. Creative attempts to build justice and peace, such as the Palestinian settlement project, provide the only real hope for a justly shared Jerusalem.

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