



MINUTE FOR MISSION

April 15, 2007

Waiting on Resurrection

In Bethlehem today, a wall thirty feet high surrounds the city, and there are military checkpoints at its entrances. The Israeli government claims the wall is for security, a way to stop terrorists. Palestinians say the wall is a way to annex Palestinian land into Israel since much of it runs deep into Palestinian territory. No one goes in or out without a permit, except dignitaries and tourists. None of the wall surrounding Bethlehem is built along the internationally recognized borders of Israel and Palestine, which were set by the United Nations in 1949 as an armistice line.



A thirty-foot-high wall surrounds Bethlehem.

The Anastas family is one of the Christian families trapped behind this wall. Claire Anastas's house is not just behind the wall: the only view on all four sides of her house is the wall, just a few feet away. The Anastases were once prosperous merchants, and their home stood on Bethlehem's main street, a few hundred feet from Rachel's Tomb, a site held holy by Jews and Muslims. The tomb is now annexed onto the Jerusalem side of the wall, practically ensuring that it remains a holy site accessible only to Jewish pilgrims and other tourists. Access to the tomb by Bethlehem's Palestinian population is virtually cut off. Many houses lining the street were destroyed, unlike the Anastas house that was instead surrounded. Two families with a total of nine children now live there, scraping together enough to live on. With little access to the street, their businesses have closed and the families are in debt. They have no money to buy a new house elsewhere, and they reportedly have not received compensation from the Israeli authorities.

Eight-year-old Daniel asked his mother, "Mommy, why are we living in a tomb?" His mother says that her children cry at night, "Mommy, can't you do something?" But there is nothing I can do. I can't offer them anything and this has killed me."



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Claire Anastas is pleading that Christians around the world notice her family's situation and help remove the wall so that they can be resurrected into life. "They are burying us alive," she says.

The family name, Anastas, means "resurrected one." The Palestinian Christian community insists that Jesus came to this walled-off world to lead us out of deadness into new life. The Anastas children of Bethlehem invite us to pray with them as they await resurrection:

Lord God,
Author of all life, we confess that we often search for miraculous signs and wonders of your activity in our lives. We have failed to trust you or acknowledge that you see far beyond our human capacities. As we prepare our hearts to remember Christ's death and the coming joy of his resurrection, we pray that you will bolster our commitment to you that we might believe, even in our unbelief. Help us to inspire others to faith as your disciples did for us on that first Easter morning at the tomb.

We accept the fragility of life, yet we know that only through you can we serve as agents of hope and healing in a world often as cold as the stone that closed your grave. Instill us with the wisdom and courage to follow where you lead us, and to humble ourselves to seek your guidance in faith. In your name we pray,
Amen.

Material is adapted from reflections written by the Ecumenical Advisory Group, which sponsors international church workers living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Prayer is by Michele Finseth, PC(USA) mission worker and Joining Hands facilitator in Palestine.

To donate to the work of the Joining Hands initiative, visit the Web site at www.pcusa.org/joininghands/support.htm

Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: www.pcusa.org/witness. New minutes for mission are posted on the 1st and 15th of each month.

For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org.

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