

Thank Offering Grant for *In His Steps: Pathways of Peace*

Judy Rops received word in March that the grant application she had submitted on behalf of *In His Steps: Pathways of Peace*, was accepted for funding. This is a Thank Offering grant from Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc. It means that over the next year and a half, the Mara l'll Mara Breast Cancer Project in Palestine will receive \$50,000.00.

The project involves Muslim and Christian women working together to improve health and quality of life for Palestinian women living in the West Bank. The purpose of the project states, as submitted in the application, "Breast cancer, the most common cancer among Palestinian women, is an urgent public health problem. This project will develop, within the local health care system, a culturally sensitive program to provide quality medical services for early breast cancer detection, diagnosis and treatment (within Palestine) for the most marginalized."

The detection of breast cancer will involve local Palestinian patient navigators trained through monies from the grant, to assist women diagnosed with breast cancer. It will also provide the navigators with skills to educate other women to do breast self-examination, improving early detection.

The following is an article Judy wrote about her trip to Palestine with IHS:

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Palestinian women. In fact, 70% of Palestinian women who come for breast cancer treatment are already in Stage III or Stage IV, often incurable. As a breast cancer survivor, I was touched by these words.

In His Steps: Pathways of Peace is a USA-based organization seeking to change the health status of these Palestinian women. No one could have told me that I would be traveling to Bethlehem to work on this project. But so it was that on April 8th I began my journey. I did not travel alone. A friend of mine, Claudia Kapp, accompanied me. Also accompanying us was Judy Kronmiller (a Presbyterian from San Francisco area) who joined us at JFK airport in New York. What the three of us had in common is that we are all breast cancer survivors. In Bethlehem we met Lauren Miller, a young graduate student from Tennessee studying Global Health in London. She had spent time working on the project previously. The four of us conducted four workshops in various areas of Bethlehem and visited three refugee camps.

Bethlehem is in Palestine. Getting from one place to another is difficult if you are Palestinian wanting to go somewhere else. Each Palestinian has an ID card which they carry with them at all times. We had the experience of going through check points with Israeli soldiers questioning us. They carry arsenal weapons. We did not have any difficulty going through any check points, but they are unkind to Palestinians. They can set up a check point anywhere and anytime making traveling to work in Jerusalem or traveling to Jerusalem for a doctor appointment difficult. We heard countless stories of harsh treatment by the Israeli soldiers and how they "shoot" very easily knowing they can justify their behavior without being prosecuted.

We traveled to two remote villages and I will tell you our experience in one of them. In the village of Beit 'Awwa, we were welcomed by 35 Muslim women ranging in age from the young to the old. A sign said, "WELCOME to AMERICAN MEDICAL TEAM." My first thought was, I wonder who's coming and then realized it was us! These women were warm and inviting and

listened attentively as we talked about breast cancer. Most have known someone who died from this disease. This village is fortunate in that it has a trained navigator. If someone is diagnosed with breast cancer, the navigator will assist them to the next step for cancer treatment.

Mammography is not available like it is here. As cancer survivors, we told our stories of surviving this disease and then taught them BSE (breast self examination) using prosthetic models. At the conclusion of the morning, they were laughing and taking “selfies” of themselves with us. There was overwhelming acceptance of our teaching.

In addition to the workshops, our team met with two mayors, a director of nursing in a hospital, several physicians and clinical staff and even the governor of Palestine. We were also privileged to see many Holy Land sites including a tour of Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee. Walking where Jesus once walked was an unbelievable experience.

It will take some time to process what I have experienced. I will continue to support IHS to train more navigators needed in more remote villages. I am looking forward to sharing my story with other Presbyterians. I will be speaking to the Madison PW group in September. RSVP to Trudi Nelson or the church in Madison if you would like to attend.

You may send your donation for ***Mara l'il Mara - In His Steps*** to the following address:

In His Steps Medical Project

Attn: Norma

PO Box 575

Lennox, SD 57039

Or donate on-line at www.ihsholyland.org