

Harvest

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The latest news from the Awareness Foundation



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Easter Message

from The Revd Nadim Nassar



"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Luke 13:34-35)

Jesus lamented the city of Jerusalem. It was a hive of activity, and a hub of business, and people came from all over the world to that hub. It's exactly like London, where I live and work today. I write this in the middle of the very busy, buzzing London. Our hearts are exactly like those cities - buzzing and busy.

Now Jesus entered Jerusalem like a king. The people threw their cloaks and garments at his feet. They also laid down branches of olives and palms, to receive him.

Later, outside Jerusalem, he was crucified.

What do we do with our hearts this Easter? Do we open the gates of our hearts to receive the risen King of Kings this Easter?

Or, are our hearts still Calvary, crucifying Jesus every day with our hate and conflicts?

Let's stop and think this Easter: what do we do with that Jerusalem, the heart?

Let's transform our hearts this Easter to receive the risen Lord, the King of Kings.

Let's make our hearts a throne for Jesus rather than a Calvary to crucify him.

It is a big decision which I leave you with, this Easter.

Easter Talk: The Kiss of Judas

This year, Nadim picked a particularly challenging topic for his Easter Talk!



We were delighted to welcome friends old and new to our centre on 11th April for Nadim's annual Easter Talk.

In front of a packed Longbottom Room, as well as live on Facebook, Nadim discussed the four narratives of the arrest of Jesus, and why the four Evangelists differed in their focus. Mark and Matthew concentrated on the kiss, while in Luke's account Judas is stopped in his tracks by Jesus' question. As for John, his focus is on the identity of Christ and the kiss is not even mentioned.

Another major question was answered: what would have happened without the kiss?



At the close of his talk, Nadim compared Judas and Peter, both betrayers of Jesus, yet one would go on to become the pillar of our faith, while the other is widely hated and reviled, even today. The difference is hope, which never left Peter but which surely deserted Judas.

Afterwards, there was plenty of time for questions and further discussion.

We hope to arrange more talks in the future.

To become a friend of the Awareness Foundation, please contact us.



awareness-foundation.com
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PAX

It's been a busy few months for PAX! Since the start of the year, we have released 6 videos, all with Arabic subtitles, many of which have been edited by our team of 10 volunteers:



Stewart Barbee: A Life in Pictures

In January of this year we were delighted to release our first full-length documentary. Stewart Barbee served as a photographer in the Vietnam war and went on to become a cinematographer and special effects creator in Hollywood. He has worked on films such as the Star Wars trilogy and Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan, as

well as TV series, documentaries, current affairs, and more. He has had a fascinating life and career but hearing him speak about the faith that sustains him is most beautiful of all.

High Commissioner Euripides Evriviades in conversation with Nadim Nassar

Nadim interviewed His Excellency Euripides Evriviades, a wonderful, interesting and passionate diplomat who seeks to build peace wherever he can. Currently the High Commissioner for the Republic of Cyprus to London, he has previously represented his country all over the world. He is a man of influence and responsibility, strengthened by a deep and confident faith. He is an ambassador for peace and an inspiration, and we are honoured to have welcomed him at the Awareness Foundation.



'Balancing forgiveness and justice': interview with Rhidian Brook

Josie conducted a very special interview with Rhidian Brook, author, screenwriter, and contributor to BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day. Rhidian is the author of 4 novels, one of which, 'The

Aftermath', has been adapted for the screen, and stars Kiera Knightley, Alexander Skarsgard, and Jason Clarke. We talked to Rhidian about the true story behind the novel, about the themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice which lie at the heart of the story, and about the faith which underpins and inspires everything he writes.

Do Christians have to go to church?

'In Christ alone, my hope is found' - so does this mean that Christians don't have to go to church?



In this short, challenging 'Nadim in Focus' video, we hear Nadim's thoughts on the kind of church that Jesus had in mind, and why Christians shouldn't give up on the institutional church just yet.



Why is religious freedom an important value? With Archbishop Angaelos

In the first of this mini series with His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, we talk to the Archbishop about the concept of religious freedom: why is it important, and how can we protect and uphold it in our increasingly diverse societies? We would like to thank the Coptic Orthodox Church Centre in Hertfordshire for allowing us to film in their beautiful cathedral.

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!' Nadim's Easter message

Watch Nadim's 3 minute reflection, and tell us: how will you respond to his challenge to you today?



We've also released a number of blogs, all of which can be found on the Awareness Foundation website. They've been written by staff and volunteers:

- Is it important for young people to engage with people of different faiths?
- How does it feel to be a Christian student at university?
- A new peace for Syria
- Who can be loved? (Valentine's Day blog)
- Love should always win
- The myth of tolerance
- Syria's journey into hope (Easter blog)

Keep your eyes peeled for upcoming video releases, including an interview with the Ambassador of Lebanon to the UK, a Christian plastic surgeon, and a pastor from Burundi who forgave the man who killed his father. Some amazing videos to come!

How to get involved with PAX

Connect on social

We are active on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Please support us by following and subscribing!

Volunteer

We are looking for a range of volunteers in digital marketing, fundraising, blogging, social media, and more! If you are interested, please email us at pax@awareness-foundation.com



Ambassadors for Peace

Syria, February 2019



In February 2019, we welcomed 50 young Syrian men and women from different denominations in the Province of Lattakia as they came to begin their own journeys to become Ambassadors for Peace.

This year, we began a new chapter in the life of Ambassadors for Peace. For the first time in five years, we opened our doors to welcome in a brand new group of young people, ready to begin their journeys to become Ambassadors.



50 men and women of every denomination arrived at the Royal Palace Hotel in Mashqita on 21st February, ready to discover how to be a peacemaker and reconciler in their communities. They already knew much about our Programme due to the work of past Ambassadors, and they were very eager to learn.

Nadim and Huda were joined by Fr Amer Kassar and Elza Nasra, plus eight previous Ambassadors who would help the new Ambassadors during the training. The theme for this first event was ***"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;"*** 2 Cor. 5:18.

After an opening service, Huda, Nadim and Father Amer gave a series of talks on the nature of reconciliation, the Christian understanding of reconciliation, strategies for and the implications of reconciliation and how this can be a long process.

The young people were enthusiastic; they have a sense that the conflict is coming to an end, and they have benefitted from years of support and encouragement from the existing Ambassadors in their churches. They had heard a lot about the Ambassadors' programme, but the reality was, in the words of one participant, "even better."



Nadim talks to the Ambassadors about reconciliation.

We then put on a new activity to measure their understanding of reconciliation. We asked each person to come up with their own slogan on reconciliation, and we printed these and put them up for consideration by their peers. Slogans included:

- Your peace is from inside: forget all your hatred - make peace a decision!
- One of the wings of peace is reconciliation
- The recognition of breaking is necessary to reach reconciliation
- If you are right, it does not mean the other is wrong. Reconciliation is about respecting differences.
- Reconciliation is the rebuilding of trust.
- Acceptance is the beginning of reconciliation, and its end is peace.

The young people were free to team up together in favour of a particular understanding of reconciliation, and in the end six teams were formed.

Fellowship, cooperation and creativity

The young people do much more than just sit and listen when they come to Ambassadors for Peace.

The training includes workshops, discussions and a rare chance for self-expression (see 2 & 3.)

Every minute counts. Even break times are used to discuss and to ask questions (see 1.)

There is also time for fellowship in the evenings as well as the chance to put on dramatic entertainments (see 4.)



1. Fr Amer (right) talks to the Ambassadors during break time.



2. The Ambassadors create their initiatives



3. Working on their presentation



4. The Ambassadors give dramatic performances

We provided the Ambassadors with training in advocacy and in how to vote; we taught them how to choose leaders, based on ability rather than family or church connections.



The Ambassadors consider the best slogans.

On the last day, the teams met for their first taste of actual democracy as they voted for their own leaders. Then, we gave each of these teams a task: to create their own reconciliation initiative built around a day-long event. The teams met to discuss their own initiatives and how they will promote reconciliation in their communities. The teams then presented their ideas in plenary, and the leaders asked questions to help them to refine their proposals. Proposals included demonstrating how to bring people together through the use of their talents; celebrating the different denominations through a festival of unity; promoting mutual support; and calling on people to take action for reconciliation now.

This was the young people's first step on the road to becoming full Ambassadors for Peace. We were so impressed by their energy and dedication, and by the imagination and creativity they showed in their work. They came to us ready and willing to learn, and at the end their positivity had only increased. To quote the Ambassadors themselves:

"For the first time I understood the meaning of democracy and practiced it here for the first time with conviction."

"Everyone talks about 'change', but for the first time I felt the meaning of the word 'change'."

"I had a new feeling of responsibility and I was determined to make the most of it."

We are especially grateful to all of the clergy in Lattakia who have been so supportive: Fr Habib Daniel, Fr Atef Falah, Archbishop Nicolas Sawaf and Revd Salam Hanna.

Thanks are also due to the students at Appleby College in Oakville ON, Canada, who produced their own video of support for the Ambassadors. The young Syrians were both moved and encouraged by this video (see photo, below).



While we were in Lattakia, we had an opportunity to meet the new Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Lattakia, Metropolitan Athanasios Fahd (see photo, below). We congratulated him on his enthronement, and we discussed opportunities for collaboration. We were delighted to spend some time with him, and to build what we pray will be a wonderful friendship for the future.





Ambassadors for Peace

Iraq, March 2019



In March 2019, we travelled to Erbil in North Eastern Iraq to continue the training of our Ambassadors for Peace there. This was our third visit to Erbil - time to begin Project Management training!

In Ambassadors for Peace, the training we offer can be broken down into two distinct parts: preparation and project management. The first part helps the young people to process all that they have experienced and it introduces them to leadership, conflict resolution and advocacy/democracy. Once that part is complete, the Ambassadors are ready to begin learning how to design and manage their own peacebuilding projects.



Our Ambassadors in Iraq (*above*) had completed the first part, and they were now ready to begin the journey to become Project Managers.

After the Ambassadors programme in Syria (*see previous article*), Nadim and Huda flew to Erbil to meet the young Ambassadors who had been waiting eighteen months to continue their training due to the unstable situation there. Sadly, some of our young people had left Iraq, but we were delighted to find that 50 men and women had signed up!

We began the event by providing spiritual support for the young people; a time of Bible study, prayer and reflection helped them to gather their thoughts, become more positive, and to centre their hearts on the love of God and the liberating work of the Holy Spirit.



Singing hymns in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke.

After lectures on project presentation and planning, the Ambassadors' first task was to come up with their own definitions of reconciliation and how to explain it to the community. There was passionate support for the idea that reconciliation needs words - and actions! Perhaps inspired by the earlier period of prayer, the young people also agreed that we should see reconciliation as the embodiment of God's love for us all.

As one Ambassador said, **"The reconciliation of people is the reconciliation of a nation."**



An exercise in defining reconciliation

Then they had to decide on who among them would lead each team. A free 'election' took place, and the team leaders worked with their teams on how to present their own peacebuilding initiatives using the templates we had given them.



The teams discuss how to present their initiatives

Afterwards, the six teams presented their peacebuilding initiatives. The initiatives they had chosen included:

- Our Children are our Energy for our Future: a project to integrate disabled and able children in society.
- Rainbow Colours: showing children that we are all equal and to encourage them to be an active part of society.
- Dinner for our Muslim friends in Ramadan: a programme to establish new relationships between the faiths at the university in Erbil.
- One in Christ: an ecumenical programme aimed at young people to bridge the gaps between the denominations.



Measuring change: filling in the questionnaires

As in Syria, we were overjoyed to encounter such commitment and creativity in every one of the Ambassadors. They are wonderful role models and we do hope that the training will continue this year if funding can be found.

We should like to thank the clergy who have supported this programme in Iraq through their participation, namely Fr Bools Afrem, Fr Stiefanus Al-Kateb, Sister Samira, and Dr Btris. Thanks also to Mr Laheeb & Mr Abou Ban for hosting us at their hotel, the Karalovy Vary Hotel.

We are very grateful to be working in partnership with Tearfund, who have generously support Ambassadors for peace in Syria and Iraq since 2015. We look forward to working with them for many years to come.



Working with the support of churches and clergy

We always work in close collaboration with clergy and community leaders wherever we are in the Middle East. We could not hope to achieve our goals without their support.



1. We meet Mor Timothy Mousa Al Shamani, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Mor Mattai Monastery.



2. (L to R) With Mor Nicodemus Daoud Matti Sharaf (Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Mosul) and Archbishop Najib Mikhael Moussa, (Chaldean Archbishop of Mosul)



3. (L to R) With Brigadier General Khaled A Kurachi, Iraq Army, and Nawzad Hadi, the Governor of Erbil



4. Meeting Mr Akeel Al Toreihi (far left), the Governor of holy Karbala



5. (L to R) Meeting Vana Xanchy and Amminadab Muny at the Tearfund office in Erbil.

Our Easter Appeal

Help us raise £20,000 so that 200 children can become Little Heroes in Syria!



Every year, disadvantaged children aged 6-12 from across Syria take part in our Little Heroes programme. Through a series of events, each lasting three days, we enable and inspire the children to come to terms with all that has happened to them in the Syrian Civil War, helping them to develop a positive outlook and to become Little Heroes, beacons of hope, acceptance and the love of God wherever they go. Most of these children have known nothing but war; help us to put a smile on their faces and hope in their hearts.

Through our work, these children regain the courage to make friends with those who are different, to show love and acceptance rather than mistrust or fear, and to celebrate difference. In this way, as the children talk to their families, to their classmates, and to others in their community, their words and actions encourage an attitude of reconciliation and a rebuilding of trust between the faiths and between the different Syrian groups and communities.

Our Little Heroes programme has already empowered over 2,000 children in Lattakia, Safita and As-Suwayda, Syria. With your help, we can help many more!

To help, please contact us or go to <https://www.awareness-foundation.com/easter-appeal>

How to support us

United Kingdom

Please visit <https://www.awareness-foundation.com/donate-1> to donate through our website or to find details on how to transfer funds to us.

Alternatively, please send **cheques**, made payable to "Awareness Foundation", to the address of the Main Office, below.

United States

In the US, Please send **checks**, made payable to Awareness Foundation America, to the person below and clearly marked for deposit to the account of Awareness Foundation America:

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