

INTERFAITH PILGRIMAGE TO JORDAN

A PART OF THE ACTIVITIES OF GOD'S HOUSE IN FISKSÄTRA, SWEDEN
DURING THE WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK 2017



AS AN EVENT DURING THE WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK 2017, A DELEGATION FROM GOD'S HOUSE, WITH MUSLIMS, PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS, MADE AN INTERFAITH PILGRIMAGE TO JORDAN.

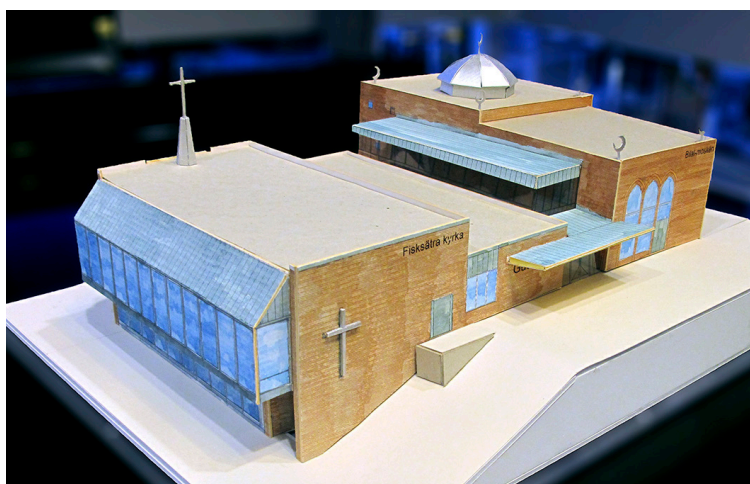
ONE PURPOSE WAS TO MAKE A FIELD TRIP TO JORDAN, A COUNTRY WITH A LONG HISTORY OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, TO LEARN MORE, AND TO SHARE EXPERIENCES AND THOUGHTS ABOUT INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS.

THE TRIP ALSO HAD A SPIRITUAL PURPOSE. THE INTERFAITH PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND, GAVE THE GROUP A CHANCE FOR SPIRITUAL RECHARGING AND EXCHANGE, BASED ON COMMON "RETURN TO THE SOURCES" RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE SHARED BY ALL. THE TRIP BROUGHT US TOGETHER ACROSS THE RELIGIOUS BORDER, WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRAY TOGETHER FOR WORLD PEACE AND AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OUR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS.

GOD'S HOUSE IN FISKSÄTRA

In God's House the local Lutheran, Catholic and Islamic communities have joined forces to create a peaceful, friendly and harmonious society for the inhabitants in the Stockholm suburb of Fisksätra. The local religious communities have come far in the joint endeavours to shape a positive, integrative environment for the local population, which consists of a broad mixture of Swedish nationals and a majority of immigrants from some 60 countries – Poland, Finland, Chile, Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine, Syria, Morocco, The Gambia, Turkey and many other.

The cooperation in God's House has been going on for fifteen years, and the plan is to let the existing Christian church on the spot be combined with an adjoining new-built mosque, to form the building God's House. Here Christians and Muslims can gather for worship, each denomination in its own premises but in close neighbourhood to each other. The building project is estimated to cost approximately five millions USD, and right now there is a fundraising going on in order to complete the building project.





A high number of the population belongs to different Islamic traditions. There are two minor basement mosques in Fisksätra, but a big new mosque as the one planned in the God's House concept would allow the establishment of a proper mosque for all the local Muslims. The third major Abrahamic religion, Judaism, is so far not represented in the local cooperation team, since there are no, or only very few, Jews among the population in the area. However, members of the Jewish community would be most welcome to partake and contribute in God's House activities. Believers of all kinds, irrespective of their religious or philosophical position, are essential links in the construction of a good society based on a sustainable ground.

With the purpose of assisting vulnerable groups in Fisksätra, our common social work "Källan", The Source, organises joint activities, like

Swedish-language courses, a daily meal for everybody, study support and leisure time activities for the young, study groups in cooking, healthcare, arts and handicraft, medical and legal counselling, cultural and educational activities for women, the elderly and the youngsters.

An annual "Festival of Cultures" aims at presenting the richness and diversity of religious traditions through scenic performances by popular artists and leading figures from the international cultural field as well as local talents from various backgrounds. Another regular event is the inter-religious "Prayer for Peace" during Pentecost, when adherents of the various traditions formulate and express their desire for a peaceful world, in a micro as well as macro perspective. This event is felt to be the more urgent and important, as unrest and conflicts tend to arise, remain and torment humans in many parts of the world. National Swedish TV has recently transmitted a series of religious programmes from Fisksätra, conveying its spirit of collaborative coexistence in a religious spirit to a broad public in Sweden.

INTERFAITH PILGRIMAGE TO JORDAN 2017

In order to honour the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017 God's House looked for an opportunity to deepen the interfaith work with a field trip to Jordan. Also being a part of the Holy Land, the country has several interesting biblical sites and a long history of inter-religious dialogue. The ecumenical dimension, with several Christian churches side by side, in the Jordan valley also woke the group's interest as well as Jordan's impressive work with refugees.

The interfaith pilgrimage tour 2017 of the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017 gave us a chance to get new input, ideas and experience from other similar work on the international scene. It also gave us chance to deepen our interfaith work with in the leading group of God's House, with the spiritual dimension of the Holy Land.

The delegation of nine people, Muslims, Protestants and Catho-





lics led by Vicar Carl Dahlbäck, started the trip with a beautiful weekend in Bethany beyond the Jordan as pilgrims to several holy places. The delegation stayed in the beautiful Russian Orthodox guesthouse near the river, allowing prayer and meditation, strolls and talks in close distance to some of the most holy places in Christianity and Islam. A one day pilgrimage to the well of St. John the Baptist and the very spot where Jesus was baptised brought us together across the religious border, giving us the opportunity to pray together for peace in the region, in the world and between ourselves and our religious traditions. Walking through the green valley and ascending towards a series of churches of different Christian communities, some ready-built, some under construction, made us feel the strong genius of spiritual reality and vision in this place.

A week in and around Amman followed, in order to explore the basic context, and idea and practice of "Interfaith Harmony" from a Jordanian perspective, to meet with government officials, religious and spiritual leaders and university representatives and discuss and exchange with them about the God's House concept. The purpose was also to find examples of good practice, fruitful projects and important research relevant for the Swedish God's House.

The group were welcomed by the Swedish ambassador to Jordan, Mr Erik Ullenhag, who presented his view on the situation in Jordan and its successful efforts in promoting peace among the various religious groups in the country. He also arranged a reception for the delegation, attended by a number of representatives of Jordanian interfaith organisations, groups and individual initiatives, which led to interesting discussions and exchange on the issue.

Among his guests was Mrs. Bassima Sam'an, managing director of the Jordan office of Noursat TV Channel. The God's House delegation was invited to visit her office, presenting its work and results and engaging in a lively discussion on the importance of journalistic networking to present fruitful initiatives and endeavours concerning interfaith peace and harmony in the media, nationwide and internationally.

The visiting programme was outlined in cooperation with deacon Jonas Bodin of the Lutheran church in Bethany beyond Jordan, Father Nabil Haddad of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center and Dr. Raida Alwan of Yarmouk university in Irbid. They arranged a programme that was diversified and interesting, taking in account the local celebrations of the WIHW taking place simultaneously.





One such opportunity was the WIHW morning celebration at a military institution in Amman. In the presence of military personnel, foreign military attachés and other guests, among them the Swedish delegation, three Islamic leaders addressed the audience, followed by father Nabil Haddad. The lectures and homilies, focusing on the role of religion for peace, were translated simultaneously into English. After the celebration, and a lunch, our delegation was received by the Supreme Mufti of Jordan and the Chief Mufti of the Jordanian army.

Our delegation was received by H.E.Dr. Wael Arabiyat, minister of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places, who took great interest in the different aspects of the work within God's House. From the ensuing discussion it became clear that the Jordanian Royal family and the government are very keen on promoting the existing peaceful pattern of relations between Muslims and Christians in the country, making the country somewhat of a harmonious haven in the region. Even if traditions and methods, expressions and practices differ, the aim and ambition of the Jordanian state and the local Swedish God's House converge: inspiring people of different religions to live peacefully together and thereby confirming that religion is a way to peace.



On February 7th, the 18th anniversary of H. M King Abdullah II's taking the oath, the delegation visited Yarmouk University in Irbid. It was received in the consistory hall by the university's president Professor Refat A. Alfaouri and heads of faculties. The university, with its 40 000 students, is one of the leading centres for research and education in the Arab world. The university has various religious traditions and approximately 50 countries represented by the students and researchers. Islam and Sharia are taught on



an academic level, as well as human sciences. The delegation got very inspired how our work in God's House can be linked with the academic scene in Sweden in the future.

The highlight of the day in Irbid was the festive concert arranged in the Great hall of the university, to honour the anniversary of H. M. King Abdullah II and to celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Surrounded by a large public of enthusiastic young students, our delegation enjoyed traditional Jordanian music and dancing on the scene, charming and captivating. Here we could relax and just feel warm and welcomed by Jordanian hospitality, energy and optimism for a future with interfaith harmony in our countries and in the world.



The last day of the field trip include a visit to Caritas Jordan's institutions, which unveiled the diversified activities in face of the enormous inflow of refugees from neighbouring countries, especially Syria. Medical service, legal counselling, psychosocial trauma treatment – a large range of fields of assistance are addressed to meet the needs of refugee families, lonely elderly, small children, youngsters, disabled, who found shelter in Jordan from violence and war. The delegation got a deeply moving impression of the tragic conditions of humans – some of whom might one day be resettled in Sweden and reached by the work of God's House. The delegation where deeply moved by the Jordan hospitality, welcoming a large number of refugees.

The last day our delegation also met with a group of women, linked to a Swedish female promotion organisation "Kvinna till Kvinna" (Woman to Woman), working in the MENA region for the empowerment of women on different levels. This visit gave the group a new understanding how important inter-religious dialogue also involves women situation at large in the world and how different cultures affect the work in Sweden.

After an intensive week in Jordan, the group returned to Sweden filled with strong impressions and memories of touching experiences of brotherhood, friendship and prayer before the eyes of God. The new knowledge and understanding of interfaith living and acting in the spirit of World Interfaith Harmony Week filled the delegation with new energy and inspiration to carry on the local work in God's House. With Jordan as an inspiring example the group returned home with the conviction of the importance to continue working towards bringing peace and friendship across religious borders.

Pax, Salaam, Shalom

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| Carl Dahlbäck Vicar | Awad Olwan Imam | Stefan Herczfeld Office coordinator | Pernilla Landin Deacon | Mohammad Muslim Eneborg Imam |
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| Lars-Erik Olsson Head of administration | Maria Orrung Public relations | Muhammad Aqib PhD Sharia | Kaj Engelhart Interfaith relations |
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MORE INFO GUDS HUS (GOD'S HOUSE): <https://vimeo.com/202294064>

KÄLLAN: https://drive.google.com/file/d/OB_Ut23LAnAgJNUdaSVEyaONyY1k/view?usp=sharing