

George Augustus Stallings and Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) Visits Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Holocaust Center

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The imams, Jewish activists and Christian ministers of the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) prayed at some of Christianity's holiest shrines and mourned Judaism's deepest loss on, May 16, 2013, its third day in Jerusalem.



Group posing on the Mount of Olives facing the Old City.

The day began with prayer and testimonies at 6:00 a.m. Imam Regillio Frank Haselhof of the Netherlands told the group of his thoughts on the previous day: “As we sailed on the Sea of Galilee, I understood our true reality. All humanity is on the same boat, therefore, we have a common responsibility. Although there is an upper class and a lower class on this boat, we must learn to help each other; otherwise the whole boat may sink. We need to help each other fulfill our needs. To know God is to know each other. We are humans. We are capable to do huge things but also bad things. But we must remember: We are all on the same boat.”

After breakfast, the 46-person tour made its way to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives and knelt in the Church of All Nations alongside pilgrims from around the world. They then walked up the steep hill to a grove of olive trees about 200 yards away, where Father Moon established a Holy Ground for prayer in 1965. There the group held hands and raised their voices in prayers for a revival of the love that Jesus had ignited 2,000 years ago. Some also prayed to realize the vision for the world of peace that the True Parents have made their life's work.

By 10:30 a.m. the group was on its way to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Center where they honored the martyrs of Nazi hate before and during World War II. The collection of films, fixed tablets and memorabilia documented how Nazi propagandists dehumanized their victims with hate language as a first step of instituting total control over them. As one participant later remarked, he was struck by two polar opposites of human behavior today, one the moral example of the Son of God, and the other the nadir of human cruelty.

Back on the buses again, the clergy and activists passed through a checkpoint on the border between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and found themselves at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. They walked downstairs to the cave where Jesus was born, and where St. Jerome is said to have translated the Hebrew Bible into Latin between 381 and 394 C.E.

Returning to the Hotel Dan for dinner and fellowship, the participants were worn but eager to testify to what they had experienced.



A MEPI participant enjoys a ride on a camel during the visit to Jerusalem.

“I came to Israel to pray. I didn’t come to play,” said Rev. Vandy Kennedy, pastor of Walker Mill Baptist Church in Capital Heights Maryland. He went on to say: “Yesterday when I got to the Sea of Galilee, I gave a little sermon on the boat. I said, Christ uses fishing as a metaphor for fishing for souls. Christ wants us to follow him and to make us fishers of men. Making us into fishers of men develops our faith in Him, and that gives us faith that all men can live in peace. I am excited about the possibilities of what God will reveal to me on this trip to the Holy Land.”

“This is first public event after [the Unification Church’s] Foundation Day that allows journalists to see Father Moon’s legacy to build a world of peace,” Archbishop George A. Stallings, Chairman of the American Clergy Leadership Council, said. He added, “Father Moon planted seeds through the MEPI pilgrimages. In fact, it is the hope of all the ages to see a unified world of peace. It comes out of the construct of allowing me see you as I desire you to see me. Then, the God in us is seeing the God in each other.”

In a similar vein, Rev. Mark Abernathy, pastor of Connect Point Church in metro Atlanta, said,

“I am really excited that the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) has reopened MEPI after Father Moon’s death. Seeing the difference between Israelis and Palestinians and how segregation is at work reminds us of what Father Moon has been talking about for years: living for the sake of others, giving and expecting nothing in return. This is not a Unification Church message; it is a universal, worldwide teaching. We are engaging new people here. The fact that the Unification Church is willing to continue this is really interesting to me.”