

Monthly Report Spring 2009

Masar Ibrahim el-Khalil

Spring is now almost over and it was a very fruitful time for the path in Palestine. Our work is still in expansion, but we can now say that the Masar has taken on a personality and flavor of its own here, mainly because of the different people who are living in the villages along the way, welcoming and sharing their lives with the walkers. Recently, a couple in the village of Douma remarked that their main motivation for hosting walkers in their home is to give their children the chance to meet people from all over the world! Indeed, we continue to be touched by the depth and vibrancy of these meetings, and we are honored for the role we play in continuing the tradition of locals "welcoming travelers as Abraham welcomed the angels."

Our country team is also getting bigger, stronger, more skilled and more experienced. We are now able to propose different ways of experiencing the path, different way of discovering the meaningful Abrahamic heritage still alive in the daily lives of the people.

The country Team

The country team is now moving toward an important step in its own organization. A body structure was proposed by some of the members and is now being discussed among us. The main idea is to develop a shared leadership entity based on a strong partnership, honoring each person involved in the project.

We have now moved into our new office in Beit Jala, which is a beautiful old Arabic house that has been furnished with the generous help of the DED, who donated furniture, a computer, and printers, among other things. I have to say that the country team is more and more passionate about the project, which is creating a good atmosphere of work in general.

The walks

A total of 10 walks happened this spring, with more than 100 people walking on the Path. Almost all of them slept overnight in the villages. In total, we had travelers on the Masar for a total of 25 days in a two-month period of time! We were even so busy that at one point we had two different groups walking on two different parts of the path at the same time.

Our crowning achievement during the last period was a remarkable 7-day walk, during which French trekkers covered the entire path, which now extends 70 km. On this walk, we tested a new segment that stretches through a valley and into Jericho. Travelers were hosted by the Bedouin in the desert and slept in a tent beneath the stars-- the real experience of Abraham!

Each of these walks helps to ground the project a little bit more, by:

- Creating strong publicity both locally and abroad.
- Fostering deeper involvement of the villages with tangible benefits for them.
- Deepening our physical knowledge of the path itself, (distances, difficulties)
- building our reputation for quality and seriousness locally.
- Growing the sustainability of the project in Palestine.

A Summer Youth walk will take place the last week of July, and already two international youth groups are scheduled to walk for five days in July of 2010. The variety of the people walking (religious sisters, youth, Palestinian students, foreigners, trekkers, journalists etc...), as well as the vast geographical and cultural variety and richness along the path revealed to us another important aspect of the Abrahamic experience of walking:

"Discovering diversity"



3) Developing Projects

A program for training guides will soon be created between Bethlehem University and European institutions in charge of the European Mountain Guide Certificate. The main idea is to create a local certificate for trekking guides only.

Engineers Without Borders Palestine recently joined some of the partners in visiting villages on the path and selected in each of them old buildings and houses in order to write a joint proposal to restore them.

We started a close cooperation with the French Catholic Association for Development (CCFD), which brings groups on the path and might help the project financially.

4) Masar Ibrahim al Khalil

The country team is slowly moving forward in its internal organization. The administrative aspect as well as fundraising process and the question of our status here are becoming priorities in our vision of the path reaching real sustainability. The model of internal organization which was proposed is based on a shared leadership system instead a pyramidal one, where each of the partners has a voice, his ideas are expressed and shared, and his reality is considered and honored. A draft will be available soon.

Two German volunteers (ASA German exchange program), Henning and Jara, will come next August for a 3 and 5 Month period. We are glad to receive them in our office in Beit Jala and for them to join the dynamic of the team. They will also work directly with the different partners to help them in building the path.

The DED finally found an expert and we are waiting for a final confirmation in the coming period. Because the process is taking a long time, they generously offered us the financial possibility to hire a local employee and Areej Ja'fari will start working officially for the Masar next week. Her enthusiasm and skills were already really appreciated and we are now very happy to welcome her among us.



Areej Ja'fari in our Beit Jala office

5) Conclusion

The Masar in Palestine has realized great achievements since its beginning. The number of walks this spring and their real success, gave to the country team more assurance, deepened our motivation to move forward and strengthened our faith in the project. In the meantime, working together is helping us to gain more experience and we are now able to propose a real journey of quality.

Best Wishes,
The Palestinian Country Team