

BRIDGING THE GULF

Al Amana Centre's Quarterly Newsletter
Working to promote positive Christian-Muslim relations

THE HOPE FOR PEACE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

Spring 2013
Volume 21/13

Hope is utterly illogical; especially hope that there will ever be peace between religions. We may hear good news to the contrary, but the ever-present reality, the evidence, convinces us that hopefulness is foolishness.

I was watching the news tonight and noticed how so many of the stories revolve around a theme of Muslim-Christian conflict, narratives of hopelessness. It has become a well-worn storyline in our post 9/11 world. The story goes like this; there is an impending clash of civilizations taking place around the globe. On one side of the clash is Islam and on the other side the Christian, Jewish and secular west. In Nigeria, Christian militias are being trained to kill Islamic fundamentalists. Drones kill Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen. A spreading war rages in Syria with no end in sight. Christians are being forced out of Middle Eastern and North African countries as Salafi militias creep in. The evidence is indeed overwhelming and we may conclude that to have hope in the possibility of peace between Islam and Christianity or east and west, is foolishness.

Jesus defined foolishness in a different way. Jesus taught that true foolishness is to disbelieve in the hope that is promised, even when the material evidence is mounted against this hope. In the resurrection story from Chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke, the resurrected Jesus walks alongside the disciples as they follow the road to Emmaus. They don't recognize him. Jesus

asks them what they are discussing. They can't believe this stranger walking with them has not heard the terrible news. They answer that they were talking about "*Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*" (Luke 24:19-21). Their hopes had been dashed. Their nation had indeed not been freed from Roman occupation. The overwhelming evidence pointed to what seemed understandably like fact. Jesus was dead. He had not accomplished their hope for his mission. Their fierce pragmatism, their focus on the material world, kept them from seeing the new life that was in front of them.

Jesus reprimanded them. "*How foolish you are, and how slow to believe...*" (Luke 24:25)

Sensible hopelessness can rob us of the ability to see the hope that is before us.

So what about Islam and Christianity? Should we be foolish enough to wish for peace, for mutual understanding, for friendship and collaboration? The Al Amana Centre is just one of thousands of signs of the hope for peace and collaboration between Islam and Christianity that pervades the earth. There is far more hope for collaboration than there is despair of conflict. Al Amana Centre is a Christian organization tasked with seeking deeper peace and understanding between Muslims and Christians in the Middle East and through-

out the world. This is not a new project. We have been at this for over 122 years. If anyone has ever doubted that Muslims and Christians can accomplish great things together, then they should take a closer look at Oman. Christians and Muslims have been peacefully collaborating in this beautiful Arab nation for over a century, working side by side to provide medical care to millions over the years and access to a high quality private school education at a time before the development of Oman's exceptional public education system. Together Muslims and Christians have helped to build the extensive healthcare system in Oman and today we educate future religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, about the other's faith, opening the way for thousands of creative collaborations that are yet to come.

The 50-day season of Easter is a season of belief in new life at the precise moment when new life seems impossible. That is what the story of Christ's resurrection is about. Death and hopelessness are the overwhelming reality facing the community of Jesus' disciples. And yet God's plan is immensely vast and far more hopeful than the disciples' present material reality.

May you have the courage to believe against current evidence in the new life that God has promised.

- Doug Leonard

Director



"Al Amana Centre is a Christian organization tasked with seeking deeper peace and understanding between Muslims & Christians in the Middle East."

DR FAROUK ALDEIRY VISITS OMAN

As tensions rose in recent weeks between Coptic Christians and Muslims in Egypt, we have found great hope in the work of a Christian colleague. The Al Amana Centre was honored to have Dr. Farouk Aldeiry as its guest for several days early in March.

In his retirement following a distinguished career as a Presbyterian Minister in Alexandria, Egypt and as a professor of theology in a Cairo seminary, Dr. Farouk established the Anwar Foundation for Rural Development which has been granted a license to operate throughout Egypt. Its goal is a holistic ministry for

development. The foundation is initially working to establish at least one model village in each government department in the nation.

The first model village, Deir-Abu-Hemis, is already operating near Maalawy, a large city located 247 km to the south of Cairo. Here the triangle of a lack of access to a quality education, poverty and disease is being replaced by the triangle of knowledge, economy and health. Education plays a key role in this turn-about which is partnered with health and an improved economy. The economic element is spearheaded by a program

of local micro-financing endeavors, particularly focused on the women in the community who are seen to be strong agents of stability.

In response to the murder of a youth in Maalawy that led to the beginnings of inter-religious community strife, Dr. Farouk organized the formation of Beit Al Aila under a group of Christian and Muslim leaders who have united to work for inter-religious harmony seeking love, peace and reconciliation among people of different faiths in Maalawy. This effort has led to a much improved situation there and can serve as a model for other



communities.

We wish Dr. Farouk every success in these ministries and join him in our support for the people of Egypt during these difficult times.

- Gary Brown
Ex Principal RCA School,
Bahrain

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

We lowans are known for being hard-working, hospitable and generally good people. I still think this is true, but another feature of this friendly way of life has come into view. Typically, the coasts of the States are viewed as worrisome, frantic and production-minded while Midwesterners tend to be more laid back. The Omani mindset takes this to yet another level. Omanis are by far the most welcoming and easy-going group of people I've ever encountered.

What seems unplanned in Oman comes from an almost total lack of worry about the future. What seems to be a poor work ethic is truly a graceful presence in the mo-

ment. Rather than being ruled by a schedule, Omanis realize that they are not in control of their environment, so they don't try to be. Instead of being perpetually concerned with the next step and fearing the future, Omanis take life slowly and spend their time in the here and now.

This attitude runs so deeply in the culture that an Omani rarely makes a claim about the future without affixing the phrase "in sha'Allah" to the end. This basically means, "If God is willing". "I'll see you later, in sha'Allah". "By the end of the term, you will be speaking Arabic, in sha'Allah".

The connection between this

phrase and the helpful nature of the people of Oman is undeniable. They firmly believe that whatever happens will happen and they don't deny that the efforts of humans are small in the grand scheme of things. Their culture accepts the humble position of people in the universe. However, this realization moves them to service and accommodation.

Sometimes our planning gets in the way of working, loving and serving the way we should. Maybe it's time to seek some inspiration from our Omani friends.

- Mathew Latchaw
Student, NW College

“Omanis take life slowly and spend their time in the here and now”



Picnic, Arabian-style

Hajar Mountains, Oman



TECTONIC MOVEMENT

The Hajar Mountains jut into the sky as though some hand punched out through several thousand feet of shale with a sudden sense of rage. Lines don't flow horizontally, but diagonally from ground to sky. Layers of rock and sand measuring epochs of the past seem to contradict gravity as they stand next to one another like books on a shelf. They were not always like this. They used to lie on top of one another, but their current arrangement informs us that the earth is alive. What once was, is now not. What is, won't be tomorrow. Change is a reality to be reckoned with. Slicing through these peaks is the Samail Gap, the main pass from the northern coast to the interior desert plateau. If you get the chance to visit Oman, this is a drive you won't want to miss.

For the last several million years, the Arabian tectonic plate and the Eurasian plate have pushed and slid against each other, buckling billions of tons of rock at the same rate that our fingernails grow - centimeters per year. It is a dreadfully slow process. Change always happens.

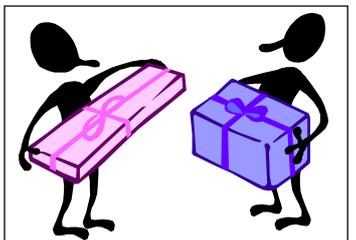
Whether we detect it or not is simply a matter of scale. Sometimes it seems so quick that it captures your attention, and sometimes it is so slow that you never know anything has been happening until after the fact. But it is always happening. Life exists in a constant state of push and pull, in tension and pressure.

This semester, students have been able to take an introspective look at their own faith. They have sat with Muslims to talk about a faith that is different than their own. They have had the chance to mingle with shopkeepers, soak in the hospitality of locals, listen to stories that provide a new dimension to the global human experience. They experienced a traditional weekend picnic, slaughtering a goat, preparing the meat, seasoning it, skewering it, cooking it, eating it, and informally interacting with their Arabic teachers, reminding them that even the act of eating is a sacred act and that they are far removed from most of the food on their own tables back home.

The semester program creates a kind of tectonic drama in students' lives. They live together--not always an easy feat--they bump up against cultures that are different from their own, they dive deep into the study of faith, both Christian and Muslim, and they rub shoulders with people whose stories sometimes challenge their own. Through all of it, we hope they continue along the path of growing and changing, understanding themselves and those around them, in the hope that God's truth and love is revealed in their relationships with others. Sometimes the growth is slow--dreadfully slow--and sometimes the ah-ha moment is so quick that a student feels an instant change in who they are and how they should relate to the rest of the world. The learning process can be painful, but the end results are often beautiful and powerful, reminding us that the forces at work deep beneath our feet are the same as those in our own hearts and minds.

—Brian Moriarty
Programme Co-ordinator

“Sometimes the growth is slow—dreadfully slow and sometimes the ah-ha moment is so quick that a student feels an instant change”



To make a donation to [Al Amana Centre](#), please email us at:

alamanacentre@hotmail.com

and we will forward our bank details.