



# A Dialogue Process Idea with Focus on the Middle East

By Charles Gibbs

## Setting

Recently, I had the privilege of facilitating a dialogue on the Middle East for a clergy lunch of the Marin Interfaith Council, a URI Cooperation Circle. Marin County, where I live, is just north of San Francisco across the Golden Gate Bridge.

Those attending were arranged at tables to ensure the best possible religious diversity at each table. Mirroring the demographics of the county, the group was predominantly Christian, though of diverse branches of Christianity; but also included a Baha'i, two Buddhists, two Brahma Kumaris, three Jews, and perhaps a few others I'm forgetting. Sadly, I don't believe there were any Muslims there.

For their dialogue, I asked them to share with each other the answers to three questions –

## Dialogue Questions

- 1) What is going on in your heart about the conflict between Israel and Palestine and in the larger Middle East?
- 2) Imagine Israel and Palestine, and the larger Middle East, transformed so it sends ripples not of division, fear, hatred and violence, but of peace, justice and healing around the world. What do you see?
- 3) What can you, and what can we do today and tomorrow and the next day to bring that imagined future nearer and nearer to the present?

## Reflection

The dialogue around the tables was engaged, intense, respectful -- modeling URI's principle – “we listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.

One suggestion/desire about what people could do that emerged from nearly every table was to reach out to talk with those from other traditions -- especially Jews and Muslims; Israelis and Palestinians -- in an effort to learn from each other and build new community here that might in some way support the building of new community in Israel and Palestine.

At the end of the dialogue, I asked everyone to return to their image of a Middle East as a beacon of peace, justice and healing and to offer our prayers that those images might become real.

This is a small offering but I wanted to share it in the following spirit:

In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King called people to "hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope." I have often said that if enough stones of hope are hewed out of the mountain of despair, the mountain of despair ceases to exist and is replaced by a mountain of hope.

Love,  
Charles

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