

Introduction to the Sharing Jerusalem Orientation Workshop

Hi, I'm <insert name> and I want to thank you all for sharing your Saturday morning with us. I hope you've all gotten your coffee, introduced yourselves to one another, and enjoyed listening to our Sharing Jerusalem music. In just a minute I'm going to tell you about the Sharing Jerusalem campaign and what's in store for you this morning, but first <insert name> is going to lead us in a special prayer for Jerusalem.

Thank you, <insert name>. Peace in Jerusalem and an end to the devastating conflict in the Middle East is what we're here for today. Sharing Jerusalem is a campaign focused on Americans who are members of faith communities. The original target audience is American churches, but we intend to broaden this to mosques, synagogues and other American spiritual communities.

The goal of Sharing Jerusalem is to help bring about a just solution to the Middle East conflict as soon as possible – specifically a two-state solution that addresses the concerns and rights of both sides. We believe that this is an achievable goal because we believe that it represents the will of the majority.

- Reputable public opinion polls show that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians support a two-state solution as a way of ending the conflict (a belief supported by reputable statistics), but the leadership of each side is not implementing the will of the people.
- We believe that a majority of Americans also want to see an end to the conflict and many – but not all – of them would also support a two-state solution if they were more educated about the issue. There are well-organized, well-funded US groups who represent and push for support of only Israel. Sharing Jerusalem is helping to organize a constituency that represents both Israeli and Palestinian interests.

Why is the focus on Americans? Because American foreign policy is the major obstacle to having fair negotiations and because America is the only global power able to make the two sides sit down together and make peace. We, as Americans, cannot change the policy of the Israeli government or Hamas, but we can put pressure on our own government to change its one-sided policies. And if we can educate and mobilize enough ordinary American citizens, we believe that we can provide a well-organized constituency to support courageous legislators who can help to change US policies - so that America can act like the benevolent super power that it can be and peace can be achieved.

I want to be very clear on two points – Sharing Jerusalem does not make judgments about the two sides in the conflict and it is not a passive 'discussion group' where we will simply meet and talk.

- On the first point, Sharing Jerusalem is not about calling one side good and the other evil or comparing the terrible acts that each side has committed. I'm sure there are people on either side of this issue – probably people here today - who will be upset that we aren't judging which side is morally right or wrong. First of all, we all know from our own personal relationships – with spouses, children,

friends, partners – that this kind of discussion never leads to any resolution. And on top of that, we can't objectively say what the 'facts' are because they differ depending on the speaker, and the very same act can be viewed in many different lights – terrorist versus freedom fighter, security versus oppression, fence versus wall. However, there is one indisputable fact – the United States government unfairly supports one side over the other and this creates a situation in which the two sides cannot fairly negotiate a peaceful, mutually acceptable solution. This is the fact that Sharing Jerusalem seeks to change through the constituency that we are building, and we believe that we can accomplish this.

- As to the second point, Sharing Jerusalem is not willing to be yet another discussion group or forum where we talk and talk but nothing concrete happens. Of course, we are interested in informing people about the conflict and the role that America has played and could play, and we look forward to and value interchange among ourselves as the campaign takes shape. But - in order for us to carry this campaign forward and achieve our goal, we are committed to having it be energized, proactive, and outspoken. Just meeting and talking isn't going to create the critical mass we need or change our government. We need to be seen and heard – but this can come in many ways because not every individual and every church can respond in the same way. We have worked hard to organize a variety of ways for you and your church to actively help end the conflict in the Middle East.
 - Most importantly, we have put together a campaign, called “Give Peace a Chance”, that will hold monthly worship services and educational workshops to help bring about changes in conditions on the ground in Israel/Palestine in order to give peace negotiations a better chance to succeed.
 - We have created special Sharing Jerusalem bumper stickers for individuals.
 - We have created two prototype Sharing Jerusalem banners that can be ordered and hung outside churches, buildings, or even homes.
 - We have created a lively and lovely ‘movement’ song especially for this campaign and recorded it in English, Hebrew, Arabic, and Spanish. It can be downloaded from our website for free or ordered as a CD. We also have a set of protest songs that can be sung at gatherings, marches, and rallies. The words and tunes can be downloaded from our web site.
 - We have created a regional Church Action Network – or CAN - to link you up with other groups who are also involved in this important issue and to provide support for you in your efforts. As this movement grows beyond the Washington area, we will be creating other regional CANs, which will each be part of a parent national CAN. This will allow you to network with other church groups all across the country.
 - We also hope that you will come up with new ways ideas of how we can gain critical mass and let that mass be visible and audible.

We firmly believe that this is a win-win situation – for Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and all citizens of our closely connected global

world. This is something we should do as Christians and members of other faith or ethical communities – to help those who are suffering on both sides and stop senseless deaths. This is something that we should do as Americans to restore our image in the world and make us safer at home. (Tony Blair said in a speech that 70 % of conflicts around the world are related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.) This is something we should do as friends of the Jewish people because the current course supported by the leadership of Israel and the US is not good for Israel or for Jewish people around the world. It incites anti-Semitism. This is something we should do as friends of the Palestinians because they are a people hungering for freedom and relief from an oppressor.

Because we felt that it was so important for you to fully understand what Sharing Jerusalem is, we are going to dispense with activities like going around and introducing ourselves. You each have name tags with your church and any other relevant affiliation so during breaks and at lunch, and we have a list on the wall so you can see the churches that are represented. If you give us your email, we'll also send you a list of all the participants.

Now I am going to quickly go over what we'll be doing this morning. This agenda is posted on the wall and you also have a copy in your packets. We have a lot to cover so we're going to be very tough on time. We won't have time for extemporaneous conversation except in the Q+A periods and even there we are going to keep you on track.

- First, we'll have a brief historical overview of Jerusalem, highlighting how each of the Abrahamic faiths has been both tolerant and intolerant.
- Then you will learn about some of the peace-building activities world-wide and in Israel and Palestine – groups that you will be joining through your activities in the Sharing Jerusalem Campaign.
- This will be followed by a new DVD called 'Searching for Peace in the Middle East' created by Landrum Bolling, a Quaker activist who was an advisor to President Carter during the Camp David peace talks with Egypt and Israel. In your packets, you each have a copy of this 30-minute DVD, which presents a well-balanced look at the current conflict, and an accompanying resource guide.
- After the DVD, we'll have a Q&A period followed by a 10-minute coffee break.
- At 11 am sharp, we'll jump right into the role-playing exercise that is the major activity of the workshop. This should be intense, informative and thought-provoking – and it should also let you walk away with some real tools to help persuade your church or organization to become a part of the Sharing Jerusalem campaign. There will be a summary period where we put everyone's experiences and insight together.
- After the role-playing, we'll try to pull everything together. This will include some actual nuts-and-bolts information and a brief discussion of a collaborative group that we will be forming called the Church Action Group.

- Finally, we will have a light Middle Eastern lunch for everyone who wants to stay. This will be a nice time to talk informally. During lunch, each of you will have a chance to share with others what your church has already been doing on this issue.

We hope that you enjoy the events we have planned for you today and we look forward to working with you as the campaign moves forward. In the interest of time, we have dispensed with introducing ourselves, having you introduce yourselves, and thanking our sponsors. In your workshop packets, you have a brief description of the Sharing Jerusalem Campaign, our sponsoring organizations, MFSA and WIAMEP, and the individuals on the Sharing Jerusalem board.