

Middle East Trip Planning Suggestions

Pre-trip Planning

It is important that the trip be presented as a congregational experience, a small group traveling on behalf of the whole. Include the congregation in the preparations, connect during the journey, and share the experience over a significant period of time in a variety of ways.

1. Begin the planning with a small group, perhaps an Outreach or Global Mission Team.
2. Decide on clear goals, time frame, and financial limits.
3. View a number of itineraries used by congregations and seminaries which can be obtained from your travel agent. Spend time researching unfamiliar references to make sure you don't miss lesser known but significant sites.
4. List in detail for your travel agent the people and places you wish to visit. Make sure your lodging has space for the group to meet daily. (The Ein Gev Kibbutz, the International Center of Bethlehem and the Lutheran Guest House in Jerusalem are ideal places.)
5. Make sure you include conversations with representatives of Israeli and Palestinian groups working for a just peace, visits with the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, archaeological sites, and biblical sites, and a visit with a settler.
6. Schedule at least four preparatory sessions with travelers. Use materials listed on the Peace Not Walls website. If possible, invite a local Palestinian Christian and/or someone with Middle East experience to speak to your group.
7. Keep the congregation informed of preparations through the parish newsletter, a "calendar" bulletin board showing the itinerary, and other visuals.
8. Schedule educational opportunities with speakers and/or DVDs to acquaint the congregation with the Holy Land and with "Peace Not Walls."

During the Journey

1. Because of the intensity of this journey, a daily worship and group debriefing time is crucial for the spirit health and processing of the group. (Prior to the trip, it is helpful to prepare a small devotional booklet with daily scripture references and music related to the day's plans.)

2. It is wise for the leader and small planning group to meet periodically throughout the journey to share observations and concerns.
3. To connect the congregation during travel, prior to departure invite a technologically savvy trip participant to set up a website for periodically uploading and labeling pictures. It is unwise to create a blog due to sensitive issues in this area of the world.
4. Toward the end of the trip, brainstorm various ways of sharing the experience with the congregation. How will you bring this home?

Post-trip Sharing with the Congregation

1. Host one or two “A Taste of the Middle East” sessions for the congregation. The first one might include pictures, food, brief presentations by group members on various aspects of the trip. A second might be “digging deeper,” presenting a broader or deeper perspective. Remind the audience of the journey goals and how these were carried out.
2. Schedule a travelers’ meeting to brainstorm ways of continuing to share with the congregation the gifts of the Holy Land experience through worship, study, action, and service throughout the year. How can this experience touch every group in the congregation?
3. Schedule periodic planning group meetings to introduce the ideas suggested in the brainstorming session into the life of the congregation.