

Middle East Collaborative Report, 2023

1. What do you want the PYM body (all 10,000 of us in PYM membership) to know about your collaborative?

- PYM Middle East Collaborative is a group of Friends –mostly PYM Friends-- dedicated to learning about details behind current issues, developments, and opinions connected to the Middle East Region. Many in our group have spent time living in the Middle East. We historically have continued the connection begun at Yearly Meeting Sessions in 2002 with Ramallah Friends Meeting in Ramallah, PALESTINE.
- Together with Ramallah Friends School and Brummana High School outside of Beirut, LEBANON, we have direct connections to both the history and current events at each of these Quaker schools.
- Complexities of and search for a just peace in Israel/Palestine together with current situations in Lebanon are a frequent focus of our conversations. We have also considered Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, UAE, and Jordan.
- Beyond the Middle East Region itself, we examine ways that MEC members and PYM Friends might work here in the US in collaboration with local (e.g., American Friends Service Committee, Jewish Voice for Peace, Christian-Jewish Allies, Al Bustan Seeds of Culture) and national (e.g., Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends of Sabeel North America, Quaker Palestine Israel Network) organizations.

2. How does your group meet and how frequently?

- Middle East Collaborative meets every other month, First Sunday at 1:30pm: January, March, May, July, September, November. We have met virtually since mid 2020 and likely will continue via that mode. All are welcome.

3. How is the work of the collaborative being shared with the PYM community?

- Our group has led PYM workshops. We have made our selves available to monthly and quarterly meetings for presentations. We invite Friends and non-Friends alike to join our presentations (both virtual and in-person.) We have a website that is improved and expanded in the last year. Most notably in our expansion is a timeline of Quaker history in the Middle East. <https://www.pym.org/middle-east-collaborative/timeline> The timeline itself has links to present day and historical resources.

4. How does your collaborative remain spiritually grounded through its work?

- We begin and end with a time of silence. We enjoy ‘check-ins’ as a means of staying connected to each other and the spiritual bases in our individual actions.

5. A report showing the requested budget vs actual expense

- We greatly appreciate the support of PYM in the form of underwriting the cost of registrants’ copies of the book Why Palestine Matters.
- As we moved through the process of offering and conducting the Why Palestine Matters course, MEC was granted a working budget of \$1,000. The cost of purchasing and mailing copies of the book to registrants was/will be covered by that grant. We’ll have funds remaining to use in 2023-24. Most helpful use of those remaining funds might be offering an honorarium to a guest speaker or purchasing another round of books for Why Palestine Matters next participants.

6. What are the major accomplishments for the year?

- Brummana High School principal, Mr. David Gray, visited the region in October 2022. MEC helped facilitate two of his many presentations: virtually on 10/18/22 and in person at Newtown MM on 10/23/22. Two of our members were closely working with David Gray and the school to organize all his presentations in northeast US.
- Shepherded and mentored by our collaborators at Philadelphia Christian-Jewish Allies, five Friends (three from PYM; plus two former teachers at Westtown School and Wilmington Friends School now active in NEYM) taught the content of the book Why Palestine Matters. Across seven evenings in early 2023 we hosted numerous guest speakers to present the issues of intersectionality, white supremacy, and injustices not only in Palestine but also as experienced by our African-American and Indigenous American neighbors. We were able to focus the last class or two on current events gripping the news and our hearts with the new, very conservative administration in place in Israel by late January 2023. It is our intention to offer the Why Palestine Matters course again in the next year. Friends are asked to be in touch with MEC Clerk, Sandy Rea, at drsandyrea@hotmail.com for more information on content or scheduling.
- Five of our members traveled to Israel/Palestine for a dual narrative tour organized through Friends Council on Education. Four of our members, all very experienced through years’ living in the region, were in the group of the tour’s six co-leaders.
- For Quaker Timeline including link, see above.
- Through BRIEF REPORTS and DISCUSSION in our regular meetings, we are able to focus on news from Ramallah Friends School and Meeting, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and other countries.

7. What are the things that are stopping/hindering your mission,if any?

- There are plenty of worthwhile, not Middle East related issues to which PYM Friends may give their attention and direct action efforts.

- Congresspersons fear backlash from specific elements of their constituencies if they are to support legislation sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, or Lebanon, or Iran, or Yemen...
- The issues of justice with equity through non-violent resolutions to bring improvements – concrete movements toward peace -- in the Middle East region seem overwhelming and distant, if not impossible, to many. I suspect that learned helplessness restricts the participation of many.

8. Is there anything you need of PYM administration (from PYM staff, the Clerk(s) or the Program Committee?

- Thank you for that offer. First, may I offer my and our endless and totally huge thank yous to Olivia Brangan for her excellent and tireless work facilitating all we do. Additionally, Malcolm McAtee was very helpful in getting the Quaker Timeline up and running.

Please let me or your Program Committee liaison know if you need support or have further questions.

Thank you all,

Sandy Rea

Clerk, PYM Middle East Collaborative