

Kids4Peace

Creating Peace in the Middle East — 12 Families at a Time

by John Plumadore

Scouts Canada recently participated in a Kids4Peace event at Scarboro Missions in Toronto. Kids4Peace is an interfaith education-for-peace initiative of St. George's College Jerusalem, with the cooperation of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. The Scout group was invited to attend to learn more about the peace initiatives of this program, and observe ways on how Scouting can promote peace.

The program was launched in 2002, when twelve children from Jerusalem attended a summer camp in Houston, Texas. Since then, one hundred and twenty children from Jerusalem and Galilee have participated in summer camp programs in Houston, Atlanta and Toronto.

Through the Kids4Peace programs, Israeli and Palestinian children are brought together across the cultural divides in the Holy Land. These programs are unique by encouraging dialogue between kids of three different faith traditions; a process which is also beneficial to the hosting communities in the West. Eleven year-old children are old enough to embrace friendship with children of other faiths and appreciate their cultural differences.

Both the children and their parents participate in a program of interaction in Galilee leading up to the visit to Canada. Children continue for a year afterwards to be guided by professional advisors and facilitators of the three faiths. Israeli and Palestinian staff work faithfully with both sides of the conflict.

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Families are offered the option of continuing their dialogue beyond the first year as well. The program is designed to foster, support and strengthen the growing community of interfaith families working together to create peace in the Middle East.

Kids4Peace is non-denominational, non-political and non-partisan. All participants — staff, families and children — share a commitment to peace. They also share a belief that an educational experience of respect

and understanding for cultural and religious diversity should begin *with the very young*, and reach out to invite adults as well into mature ways of coexistence.

These children are the leaders of the future. Our hope and prayer is that they will have the inter-cultural and inter-religious tools necessary to transcend the conflict and, over time, create new realities for peace.

Scouts Canada's own peace initiatives complement the Kids4Peace program and the need for the younger generation to influence the world to follow the path for **peace**. Countries around the world, such as Sudan, El Salvador, Argentina and Chile are being impacted by Scouting's *Gifts For Peace* initiative. Visit www.scout.org to find out more.

Scouting's "One World, One Promise" vision, and the 28 million members in 155 countries dedicated to peace and the environment, speaks to Scouting's commitment to a better world. λ

— John Plumadore, Director of Community Development.