

A vertical column of stylized, overlapping leaf shapes on the left side of the page. The leaves are outlined in a dark grey color and are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger plant or branch.

Nes Ammim Centre of Learning and Dialogue

Study Program
Local Dialogue
Christian Fellowship

Annual Report 2013





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Introduction

Learning, dialogue and fellowship: the key words of the ideological work in Nes Ammim. Mostly young European volunteers come to live, and work in Nes Ammim for a shorter or longer term to study the Jewish roots of Christianity, the diverse religious traditions of the Holy Land, the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to reflect on their faith and personal identity. This work is generously supported by the Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland. On its turn, the dialogue and fellowship work receives structural support from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands through Kerk in Actie in the framework of its Bridge Building in the Middle East program. The Kerk in Actie subsidy has two important goals: supporting local interfaith and interethnic encounters, as well as improving ecumenical relations between churches in Europe and in the Holy Land.

In 2013, over 80 volunteers participated in the study program, while 19 interfaith and interethnic, as well as 6 Christian fellowship initiatives were hosted. In this report a detailed overview of the Nes Ammim study, dialogue and fellowship work in 2013.

Study Program

In 2013, the Centre of Learning and Dialogue once again offered a challenging study program for the volunteers in Nes Ammim. The program comprises three main fields of attention.

1. Renewing the relation between Christians and Jews

This field consists of two subthemes. The first is called *In responsibility for the past*, focusing on (Christian) anti-Semitism and the Shoah, through visits to Yad Vashem, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum of Beit Lohamei HaGheta'ot, encounters with Shoah survivors and the annual Kristallnacht Commemoration. The second subtheme *Learning from the Jewish tradition* introduces Nes Ammim volunteers to the different Jewish holidays and their customs, typical Jewish ways of studying the Torah through the Beit Midrash, the weekly Erev Shabbat celebration, as well as different aspects of Jewish Israeli culture such as folk dance.

2. Israel – society, history and nature

The second element of the study program is the Israeli society, history, and nature. This is done through visits to archaeological sites like Beit Shean and Caesarea, trips to modern-day Jewish Modi'in, old Druze Peki'in and dynamic Palestinian Sakhnin, and hikes like the annual three-day *Negev Seminar*. Moreover, there are lectures about themes like kibbutz life, the role of the army in the Israeli society, and life as a young Palestinian in Israel. Nes Ammim also offers Hebrew lessons, as well as Arabic lessons, but the last ones are up till now only for Hebrew speakers.

3. Engagements

The third field of study activities aims at facilitating the encounter of Nes Ammim volunteers with different religious traditions as well as alternative views about the political situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories. This field comprises three subthemes: (a) ecumenical-Christian encounters; (b) interfaith encounters; and (c) political encounters. Within the framework of the first, the volunteers get acquainted with Arab-Christian communities in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories through visiting church services and celebrations of different Christian denominations as well as by lectures highlighting the specific position of the Arab-Christians in Israeli society. The *interfaith encounters* refers to the engagement not only with Judaism, but also with Islam, the Druze and the Baha'i tradition. The third subtheme *political encounters* focuses on introducing the volunteers to the social and political issues within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through lectures, tours and seminars. Most important in this segment are the three-day seminars, i.e. the *West Bank Seminar* and the *Jerusalem Seminar*.

Ideological Working Hours

Since a few years the CLD organizes the Ideological Working Hours (IWH), to involve Nes Ammim volunteers in the Jewish and Palestinian communities in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories. Volunteers can choose to do one so-called experience weekend, e.g. spending a Shabbat at a Jewish Orthodox family or working on the land of a Palestinian family in the West Bank. Volunteers can also assist during English classes at schools in the neighbourhood of Nes Ammim, visit elderly people or accompany people with a physical disability.

Broadening the study program

In 2013, the scope of the study program was broadened by including some new lectures and trips.

War of Independence and Nakba

Some of the new events are connected to exploring the different sides of the history of the Israeli War of Independence and the Nakba. Besides the visits to the cemeteries commemorating Henoah Denne-man and Jonatan Vermeulen, the two Nes Ammim volunteers who died while serving the Israeli army, we joined two alternative commemorations on Yom HaZikaron, commemorating both the Jewish and Palestinian victims. A special highlight was a guided tour by Yoseph Mbarki to the ruins of his native village in the area of kibbutz Kabri. Like two other villages, that town was depopulated and destroyed as a revenge for the Palestinian attack on the Yehiam Convoi in 1948. We also visited the memorial for the Jewish victims of that attack. We want to continue visiting and reflecting on the traces of the Independence War and the Nakba in our neighbourhood.

Cooperation

Another new element was a daytrip to the Dead Sea region to get to know the problematic environmental situation and to meet persons and organizations that are engaged in nature protection (**Water does not know borders** and **Friends of the Earth**). We learned how much the occupation as well as

the discussion about normalisation hinder fruitful cooperation. We hope to strengthen the cooperation with organizations such as **Combatants for Peace, The Parents Circle Families Forum, Rabbis for Human Rights** and **Breaking the Silence**.

Kristallnacht Commemoration

Every year Nes Ammim commemorates the atrocities of the Kristallnacht. This year the volunteers decided to work with provocative cartoons about the Shoah. The discussion about this choice continued during the *Holocaust Seminar* in January. This year the main speech during the Kristallnacht Commemoration came from the Palestinian Lutheran Bishop Younan from Jerusalem. The bishop first spoke self-critically about the anti-Judaism of the Lutheran Church and the anti-Jewish remarks of Martin Luther. He found open ears for his critical remarks regarding burning churches and monasteries in Israel and the Middle East. He criticized religious fundamentalism in Judaism, Islam and Christianity and demanded an interfaith solidarity for justice and peace telling about his work in an interfaith coalition in Jerusalem.

Tours and lectures

Every year a lot of tourist groups, in particular members of European local churches, come to visit Nes Ammim. They are very welcome and have the possibility to get a guided tour through the village. Some groups stay longer and share a more elaborated program of tours in the neighbourhood, lectures and seminars. Especially, Christian groups from Germany ask for this type of two or three-day workshops. Every year, the CLD also organizes a few elements of the 10-study trip of students from the **Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam**.

Dialogue and Fellowship

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2013, Nes Ammim has from the start been a project of solidarity with all the inhabitants of the country. In the founding years, there was cooperation with both Jewish and Palestinian families neighbouring Nes Ammim. Presently, the building of a new mixed neighbourhood around Nes Ammim is in full progress. Future inhabitants were invited to participate in the community day organized during the jubilee celebrations to meet volunteers, ex-volunteers and renters, thus emphasizing the importance of encounter also within the village borders.

Representatives of dialogue organizations were present on one of the festive days too, to give an account of their work on the field of dialogue and to tell about their daily experiences in the process of reconciliation.

Representatives of the protestant churches from the Netherlands and Germany were present as well, including Rev. Karin ten Broeke, chair of the Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. During a one-day dialogue seminar the representatives met local professionals who are involved in dialogue. The main outcome of the seminar was that dialogue cannot be a purpose on its own, but a means to reach out to the other, to start up the process of seeking ways of coexistence and healing. Nes Ammim needs to stay a safe haven where this process can take place.

Today, more than ever before, Nes Ammim's dialogue work focuses on facilitating and supporting dialogue activities of local dialogue organizations and strengthening ties with Arab-Christian communities in the neighbourhood. Nes Ammim does this in close cooperation with the Local Dialogue Committee and the Christian Fellowship Committee whose members have broad networks within the country and are experts in their working fields. These two committees will emerge into one strategic committee that will have a better and integrated overview of all dialogue- and fellowship activities in Nes Ammim and will operate on a more strategic level of policy making and giving advice.

In order to achieve a more transparent and effective way of evaluating dialogue programs, the CLD, commissioned by Kerk in Actie, developed a document that can be used as a guideline for designing and evaluating future dialogue activities offered by Nes Ammim, such as the weekly bilingual circus workshop for children that will start in March 2014.

Another way to reach transparency was introduced as per the 1st of January 2014. Handing in a written evaluation after an event was already an obligatory part of receiving a subsidy for dialogue- and church groups. Unfortunately, many groups did not hand in such an evaluation at all. The CLD did not have any tools to compel them to do so as the subsidy was always deducted from the total price the organization had to pay for the hotel for facilities & services upon departure. From now on the subsidy will be only transferred afterwards, when the organization has met all subsidy criteria and the agreements made in advance with the hotel and the CLD. Furthermore, the process of application has been digitalized through the introduction of the website nesammimsubsidy.org with all information on the CLD's work, the conditions and the process of application regarding subsidies.

Local Dialogue Committee

The present Local Dialogue Committee (LDC) coordinates, in cooperation with the manager of the CLD, the local dialogue program. The LDC members are Jewish and Arab Israelis representing the different (religious) groups in the Galilee. In 2013, they convened four times to review the program and to decide about subsidy applications. Candidate dialogue partners were invited to present their plans and methodology to the committee.

The LDC still has one important goal: to find funding for a local dialogue coordinator who speaks the local languages, is experienced on the field of dialogue, has access to a broad network of dialogue organizations, is able to evaluate the different programs in Nes Ammim and can initiate new partnerships. The CLD started to apply for funds in Europe to achieve this goal.

Local Dialogue Program

Between the 1st of January and the 31st of December 2013, **19 groups** came to Nes Ammim, bringing in total of **961 participants**. Most of the organizations had been in Nes Ammim before, which proves that they experienced Nes Ammim as a suitable environment for their activities, both from the perspective of the facilities as well as from a financial point of view. Nes Ammim hosted several encounters of the **Givat Haviva** Face to Face program in which children from Jewish and Palestinian high schools meet during a two-day workshop to get to know each other. Moreover, Givat Haviva organized seminars for teachers who are involved in this work in their own schools.

Alternative organized a three-week bilingual summer camp for Jewish and Arab kids in the age groups of 7-10, wherein 92 children participated. They were offered activities of sports, dance and arts. The camp's finale was a circus show by the children, ending with a joint meal where all the parents and the Nes Ammim volunteers were invited. The circus acts were rehearsed with the Dutch **Circus Poehaa**. Being a link between Dutch (and other Western) and local dialogue organizations is one of the important roles Nes Ammim fulfills as a bridge builder.

Every group has two facilitators, an Arab and a Hebrew speaking one. The contact between them needs to set an example for the children. Many 'conflicts' between the kids that occur especially in the beginning, can be solved with a chat and a good dose of humor.

Davi Vindholz, director of Alternative

As circus workshops proved to be a great success, in 2014 Nes Ammim will offer a weekly bilingual circus activity for children in the age 9-12, in cooperation with the **Galilee Circus**. Since many years, the staff of the **Galil Hand in Hand School** has a weekend of retreat in Nes Ammim.

The yearly three-day seminar of teachers and students from the **David Yellin College** in Jerusalem also took place here. Their annual meeting is part of a program that also consists of a meeting with Roman Catholic and Protestant colleagues from Northern Ireland.

The women group of the **Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations**, led by Zahava Neuberger-Keller had four workshops in Nes Ammim.

The Dutch association **Stichting COME**, which organizes seminars for Palestinians and Arab and Jewish Israelis on Cyprus, held a follow-up meeting. **Together Beyond Words** was another returning group. This organization mainly focuses on the empowerment of Jewish and Arab women by facing old traumas and finding inner energy through dance and music rather than by spoken word.

Many other organizations used the Nes Ammim facilities, either only with reduced prices or with extra subsidy: **Peace trough Commerce**, **SparkPro** together with David Yellin and with a group including British and Israeli students, **Partners for Peace** (with the **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung**) and **Lead Haifa** (empowering women in leading positions). Newcomer was the youth movement **Histadrut HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed** (The Federation of Working and Studying Youth) that has a Jewish and an Arab Israeli branch. These two branches do not integrate very well and a meeting was organized in Nes Ammim to start a process of renewed cooperation.

The **Leo Baeck Educational Institute** in cooperation with the Rotary Club brought 140 international students to get acquainted with Nes Ammim's history and to meet the young volunteers.

I think that for all of us who came, it was important to meet again and maintain the friendships with each other.

Participant follow-up seminar COME

At last, part of the Local Dialogue program is a weekly Arabic course for local citizens. To get to know Arabic is one of the ways to build bridges. 10 people enrolled for this course till the spring. Unfortunately, as at the beginning there were not enough applicants for the study year 2013-14, the course had to be postponed and started only in February 2014.

A big disappointment came in August, when the youth camp that Nes Ammim was organizing together with the **Interreligious Coordinating Council of Israel** from Jerusalem had to be cancelled, as most of the Jewish participants from West Jerusalem withdrew their participation due to summer holidays elsewhere. The Arabic students from East Jerusalem spent two days in Nes Ammim as a preparation for future dialogue activities. They had a very cozy and instructive evening with Nes Ammim's young volunteers around the camp fire with activities to raise awareness about one another's background, feelings and prejudices.

The subsidy amount that was budgeted for the camp will be used mainly to finance the weekly bilingual circus activity.

Since some events that we had granted subsidy to, were cancelled on short notice, there is money left that we would like to reserve to support more dialogue organizations in 2014. Moreover, there is a need for employing a local expert for 2 days in a week to support the local dialogue work. Quality assurance of the dialogue seminars in Nes Ammim without a local expert who knows the languages

used is a challenge. Also to apply for local funds is difficult without the right network and command of Hebrew and Arabic.

Christian Fellowship Committee

The present Christian Fellowship Committee (CFC) has five members, all key persons of the Arab-Christian community in the Galilee. Three of the members are related to the Baptist churches. Attempts to broaden the denominational scope of the CFC were unsuccessful. The committee met twice in 2013. In the past meetings the committee initiated, in cooperation with Nes Ammim, the organization of a three day students' seminar on Jewish–Christian dialogue in local context. This conference – supported with 10,000 Euro from the PKN as a jubilee gift to Nes Ammim – is planned for 20-22 October 2014.

A very diverse group of local experts on interfaith dialogue is involved in the preparations. The conference is meant for local Jewish and Arab Christian and European theology students to have a personal encounter and to address the challenges of Jewish–Christian dialogue in the local religious and political context. Composing a balanced and intellectual program proved to be very challenging, but both the Jewish and Arab organizers are very much committed to the task.

Christian Fellowship Program

The Christian Fellowship program rests on two pillars: congregation building and theological training. Congregation building consists first and foremost of hosting retreats of local churches. Since Sunday is a working day in Israel it only rarely happens that all members can be present during church activities. As compensation, they organise a yearly retreat-weekend for church members, including families with children. Nes Ammim hosted the **Local Baptist Church Nazareth**, the **Kufr Yaseef Evangelical Baptist Church**, and one of the **Baptist Churches from Haifa**.

When it comes to theological training, Nes Ammim supported the meeting of wives of Baptist pastors in the Galilee, the annual retreat of the **Arab Baptist Association**, and an inter-denominational mother – daughter/son conference on the issues of relationship, trust and openness within families. Nes Ammim also facilitated the retreat for pastors involved in **Sabeel's** work in the Holy Land.

The response of the participants was overwhelming. We plan a series of similar programs in the coming years about rebuilding relationships within Christian families on Biblical foundations. We would like this initiative to become more and more inter-denominational.

Dina Katanacho, organizer

The CLD committed to host seven different groups within the fellowship program in 2013. As the organization **Musalaha** postponed their yearly women's conference – that will be held here for the third time – from December 2013 to January 2014, the CLD was not able to meet this commitment. Furthermore, the PKN asked the CLD to give more insight in Musalaha's work in the form of an interview with people engaged with the organization's work. Musalaha promotes reconciliation by bringing together Messianic Jews and Arab-Christians, offering them the possibility of fellowship based on their shared faith in Jesus. Their activities remain controversial as the European churches and especially Nes Ammim oppose missionary activities among Jews. The CLD prepared this information and forwarded it to Kerk in Actie.

Kerk in Actie Interactive Program

Nes Ammim is a partner in the Kerk in Actie Interactive Program. The manager of the Centre of Learning and Dialogue visited churches in the Netherlands like Alkmaar, Heemstede and Utrecht. Moreover, churches are regularly updated about the activities of Nes Ammim.

At last, Nes Ammim tries to link specific projects to the churches in the Netherlands to increase involvement. In 2013, cooperation was initiated between Dutch and local Baptist churches that will involve twinning of congregations, mutual visits and joint conferences. In June 2014, a meeting between Baptist pastors from the Netherlands and from Israel will take place in Nes Ammim.

The New Neighbourhood

A representative of the CLD attended in 2013 a majority of the meetings of the founding group of the new Nes Ammim neighbourhood. The founding group consists of 12 future inhabitants who together with a professional community builder were to describe a common vision for Nes Ammim, and to think about the implementation of it in daily life. This process of community building started with talking about everyone's values in daily life, what values you find important in a community, the values of Nes Ammim, and how to implement values in daily community life.

After many meetings and deep discussions, the founding group presented their vision to the rest of the community, volunteers, renters and new inhabitants: "Nes Ammim is a multicultural tolerant community with mutual respect between all its inhabitants with no differentiation between religions, race and gender and which stands for a green environment."

Because of the different backgrounds of the founding group members, there were discussions about certain words, for example: do we use the word *pluriform* or *multicultural*? In Israel *pluriform* reflects the broad segment of the Jewish Israeli society. In the end, the word *multicultural* was chosen to reflect the many different backgrounds of European, Jewish Israeli, Arab Israeli and even Vietnamese Israeli inhabitants of the new neighbourhood.

Another topic was the use of the word 'multi-religious'. Most of the new inhabitants are secular, and by describing the community as 'multi-religious', they were afraid religion would take a too prominent place in the public space. The solution brought up in the founding group, was to use the phrase "...with no differentiation between religions, race and gender..."

The challenge for the coming year is how to really *live* the multicultural vision, not only to speak about it. How do you implement the vision in daily life? For instance, what do you do if your neighbour is fasting on Yom Kippur or during Ramadan?

Future Actions

The Nes Ammim subsidy program is a success story. Both in the local dialogue program and in the Christian fellowship program the evaluation of the groups' stay in Nes Ammim is mainly positive. The greatest asset Nes Ammim has is its European volunteers' community and thus its 'European' atmosphere that gives the groups a sense of neutrality and equality that are both essential in any form of dialogue and encounter.

The volunteer's concept will significantly change in the course of 2014. Learning and dialogue will become even more the keywords of Nes Ammim's ideology that imply that volunteers in the future will come here in the first place to study and in the second place to work. This also means that they will have to finance their stay themselves.

This new concept will enable volunteers to be more involved in dialogue projects outside of Nes Ammim, thus gaining more insight in the daily challenges of these projects in and over the borders of the Galilee.

In 2014, Nes Ammim will organise its first 10-day journey through Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories for European tourists in cooperation with the Arab Educational Institute. An important Dutch tour operator showed an interest in including this trip in its regular offer for church groups.

Nes Ammim hopes to continue its study, dialogue and fellowship work in the future cooperating more and more with local partners, becoming—however small—a sign of hope and peace for the nations.

Appendix

Overview members Local Dialogue Committee

Mr. Yochanan Eschar (chairperson), Head of Educational Department at Menasha Regional Council
Mrs. Noha Khathib, policy advisor Ministry of Education
Mrs. Rivka Lion, trainer
Mr. Yoseph Mubarki, teacher
Mrs. Zahava Neuberger, trainer

Overview members Christian Fellowship Committee

Mr. Fuad Farah, pastor
Mr. Elias Jabbour, director House of Hope
Mr. Yohanna Katanacho, PhD, Academic Dean Bethlehem Bible College
Mr. Bader Mansour, secretary Association of Baptist Churches in Israel
Rev. Ibrahim Simaan (chairperson), pastor
Rev. Rainer Stuhlmann, PhD, Nes Ammim Study Leader

Overview members of the Council of the Amutah Nes Ammim Communication Centre

Mr. Werner Böcker
Mr. Peter Hoffer
Mr. Matthias Holtmann, PhD (chairperson)
Mr. Yoseph Mbarki
Rev. Ibrahim Simaan
Mrs. Gonny Smeets

Overview advising members of the Amutah Nes Ammim Communication Centre

Rev. Pieter Dronkers, PhD
Mr. Volker Haarmann, PhD
Rev. Simon Schoon, PhD

Overview of the volunteers working at the Centre of Learning and Dialogue in 2013

Mrs. Judit Blom (0,4 fte, secretary, group management)
Mr. Tjitte Dijkstra (1,0 fte, study program), until the 30th of April
Rev. Pieter Dronkers, PhD (1,0 fte, manager, Christian fellowship)
Ms. Doro Flecken (0,2 fte study assistant), as of 1st of November
Ms. Maaïke Hoffer (0,2 fte, local dialogue)
Mr. Simone Scotta (0,8 fte, secretary, group management), as of the 6th of December
Rev. Rainer Stuhlmann, PhD (1,0 fte study leader)
Mr. Joris van Walt van Praag, (0,8 fte, assistant CLD), as of the 3rd of June
Ms. Kristin Tolk (0,8 fte, fundraising, study program), until the 1st of July
Ms. Maartje Valk (0,8, joint internship with Kids4Peace: the first three months at Kids4Peace and the second three months at the CLD), as of the 1st of October (at Kids4Peace)

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