

PRESIDENT'S REPORT*Committee of Management*

When the 2007 Annual Meeting was held in Melbourne, we were anticipating an imminent transfer of the Committee of Management to Melbourne. However, as events transpired, it became clear that the incoming committee based primarily in Melbourne was not yet ready to take on those responsibilities. We also discovered that moving the committee to another state may require us to relinquish our incorporation as a voluntary association in Queensland. In the end we opted to co-opt a couple of Queenslanders onto the new committee, retaining the administrative functions in Brisbane, and I have continued to serve as President.

The committee members for 2008/2009 have been:

President: The Revd Dr Gregory Jenks
Vice-President (Australia): The Revd Dr Ray Barraclough
Vice-President (Aotearoa New Zealand): Dr Jenny Te Paa
Secretary: Mr Greg Marsh
Treasurer: Fr Clarrie Gomersall
Committee: Ms Kay McLennan, Fr James Minchin, and Mr Denis Oakley

The routine administrative functions have been mostly executed by the "two Gregs" (Greg Marsh and myself), sometimes to the confusion of various people corresponding with us. As needed, the wider committee has considered various matters by email discussion with input from Auckland, Brisbane and Melbourne.

In particular I want to acknowledge the immense effort put into the organisation of our affairs by Greg Marsh during the past year. Through his efforts we have registered our own internet domain (www.sabeel.org.au), updated the membership database, cleaned up the membership subscription records and maintained the regular distribution of the weekly (sometimes less predictable) Wave of Prayer posts from Sabeel in Jerusalem. The year has had its share of frustrations for Greg, and I deeply appreciate all he has done for us over the several months.

1948/2008—Sixty Years of Occupation & Dispossession

In the first part of 2008 the sixtieth anniversary of the declaration of the State of Israel, which coincided with the expulsion and forced relocation of thousands of Palestinians, was in the forefront of our minds. The committee made a decision to participate in a series of national advertisements calling on the Australian Government to match its messages of congratulations to Israel with a bi-partisan motion on the plight of the Palestinians and the need for their national rights to be respected and honoured. Such advocacy efforts are appreciated by the Sabeel organization in Israel, mostly ignored by the Government and problematic to some local members of Sabeel. However public advocacy for justice and peace seems an essential element of our mission, and we pray it will bear fruit at some future time.

Seventh International Sabeel Conference

In a few hours time, the 2008 Sabeel Conference will begin in Nazareth. We are represented at the conference by Denis Oakley and his wife, Lesley. Thanks to your support over the past year or so we were able to make a significant contribution to their travel costs to attend this event without launching a special appeal to members, and we look forward to hearing reports from Denis and Lesley over the next days and weeks. This time the conference will begin in Nazareth before moving to Jerusalem for the final sessions, and I know that many of us will have fond memories of our own visits to those places in the past.

Facebook

We recently set up a Sabeel Oceania group on the Facebook social networking site. This allows those who wish to do so to develop stronger links with one another, and we hope it will strengthen our capacity to act together when necessary. Anyone with access to the internet can create a user account on Facebook and then request to join the Sabeel Oceania group. Participation is by invitation only, so that we avoid some of the problems that could arise if anti-Palestinian activists targeted our group.

Nazareth

We have been accumulating gifts for the Nazareth branch of Sabeel, and it seems we now have sufficient funds to send a further US\$500 to Nazareth to assist them with their work.

Future Directions

Both Greg Marsh and I are looking to this meeting to offer some guidance on future directions for the organization. It seems timely to review our effectiveness and the need for a formal organization in this part of the world when so much of what we are doing is simply to act as a channel for information between individuals in Australia and New Zealand and the Jerusalem office of Sabeel. The work required to maintain our organization is not insignificant, and we seek your advice on whether we continue on the present path or seek another way of networking with one another and with Sabeel.

The Revd Dr Gregory C. Jenks
President
Friends of Sabeel Australia Inc.