

Dar al-Kalima Program: Interfaith Engagement in Palestine and Israel

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Program Description This 10-day program will be a transformational learning experience for 10 Augsburg Interfaith Scholars. Immersed in Israeli and Palestinian communities, participants will focus on the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Lectures, readings, and facilitated conversations will deepen understandings of the sacred texts, beliefs, and practices of the three faiths, but the exploration will not be merely historical. Particular emphasis will be given to the roots of current conflicts in the region, to peacebuilding movements, and to the ways in which religious belief can support or impede peacebuilding. Similarly, as participants visit holy sites that are at the center of the three faiths, they will learn how those sites can serve either as points of collaboration and mutual understanding or as points of tension and contested narrative.

Here are just a few of the questions the program will examine:

- What is interfaith engagement? Is it something more than people of different faiths living next to each other?
- What can interfaith engagement achieve and not achieve in promoting peace and community?
- To what extent is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a religious conflict, and to what extent is religion a proxy for political divisions?
- What are concrete examples of interfaith engagement among both clergy and community members in the region?
- How does Occupation affect opportunities for interfaith engagement in Palestine and Israel?

Augsburg's Program Partner The program will be administered through Augsburg's Center for Global Education and Experience (CGEE) and offered in partnership with Dar al-Kalima University College in Bethlehem. Dar al-Kalima is the only institution of higher education in Palestine that offers advanced training in the visual and performing arts. It also offers programs in tourism, cultural heritage, and design. Through these disciplines, Dar al-Kalima not only equips its students with skills for the 21st century. It aims to build a culture of democracy, civil society, and free expression in Palestine. In May 2018, Augsburg University and Dar al-Kalima University signed an MOU laying out a plan for student and faculty programming and, ultimately, for Augsburg to act as the intermediary between Dar al-Kalima and colleges throughout the rest of the United States. The agreement represents Augsburg's first-ever long-term partnership in the Holy Land.

Program Participants Ten Undergraduate Interfaith Scholars, representing each of the three Abrahamic faiths, will be selected to join the program. They will be led by Sonja Hagander, Lutheran pastor and Vice President of Mission; Fardosa Hassan, Muslim Student Program Associate in Campus Ministries; and a leader from the local Jewish community.

Outcomes The program is conceived as an “alternative” spring break. First, students will be expected to write a paper on their experience, “problematizing” interfaith engagement as an idea and drawing on lessons from Israel and Palestine for our own interfaith work on campus. Students will also be asked to share their findings in a convocation-style forum, as well as during class.

Additionally:

- Students will demonstrate knowledge, strengths and challenges to respectfully engage other religions and worldviews

- Students will demonstrate the knowledge of the practices of one’s own worldviews/core commitments and the capacity to appreciate and value the practices of other religious traditions.

- grow intercultural competence skills that “empower personal and social transformation,” (from CGEE Pedagogy article)

- define the skills and attributes of the leading interfaith leaders in the Holy Land context and assess their own level of competency in those areas.

- demonstrate and critique theory and practice of religious tradition in the social context of Israel and Palestine -demonstrate knowledge of and development of Christian-Muslim-Jewish relations and practice interfaith dialog onsite as well as in the Twin Cities community.

- Discover and explore spiritual resources for conflict transformation and peacebuilding from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian lens.

- demonstrate the capacity and growth to respectfully engage religious pluralism and diverse core commitments, including “best practices” in American society through the lens of Palestinian-Israelis context (final paper).

Program Costs and Funding Need

Number of persons: 10 students (Interfaith Scholars) + 3 faith leaders = 13

Estimated program fee: \$3,000 x 13 = \$39,000

Estimated airfare: \$1500 x 13 = \$19,500

Total cost: \$58,500