

Church of the Checkpoint: A Church Within Walls Whose Congregation Transcends Every Border

By Rev. Diane Dulin

Note: The following background and prayer were excerpted from resources provided for the 2015 World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, organized by the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) of the World Council of Churches. The theme for the week was “God has broken down the dividing walls.”

Checkpoint 300 controls travel between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. This checkpoint sees thousands of people pass through daily. It is staffed by rotating Israeli Defense Forces personnel. EAPPI volunteers (World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment observers) also report for duty here; they count the numbers who travel and note the treatment commuting workers receive. Additionally, many international visitors to Palestine pass through this checkpoint, with some arriving as early as 5:00 a.m. to observe firsthand the daily mix of humiliation, danger, desperation and boredom experienced by Palestinian workers who travel this route for jobs in Jerusalem.

The time required to travel via Checkpoint 300 can take multiple hours each way. Many workers begin showing up at 4:00 a.m. These workers rarely spend time with their children, who are still asleep when they depart in the morning and back in bed when they return home. Most who walk through the checkpoint corridors and turnstiles mention the term “cattle yard” to describe the method of moving thousands of people through long, narrow cages. The environment of Checkpoint 300 is oppressive, demeaning and dehumanizing.

Thus was born the idea of CHURCH OF THE CHECKPOINT. It is impossible to say who first suggested a practice of public prayer at Checkpoint 300, but United Church of Christ minister Rev. Catherine Alder has designed [a powerful website](#) to promote the idea and facilitate sharing of experiences.

Pilgrimage and study groups traveling to Bethlehem are urged to pause for public liturgy at this checkpoint. Stop to worship before entering the checkpoint on either side of the Wall, or after being allowed through the turnstile. You might read the powerful words of peace champions such as Jesus, Gandhi, or Martin Luther King Jr., the *Kairos Palestine* document, *Kairos USA Call to Action*, or your own denominational material. As you worship at the Church of the Checkpoint, you redeem the space. You display solidarity with Palestinians in protest against pervasive military control of their free movement.

A Prayer for Use at the Church of the Checkpoint

Your presence is here, O God. You are here despite the ugliness of iron bars.

You are here despite the stares of uniformed guards. You are here despite the metal turnstiles, daily bruises, scarred psyches and broken hearts.

We see you in the faces of workers desperate to reach their jobs. We see you in the crowded proximity of so many bodies, following a route designed to cause friction and fatigue.

Your suffering looks out from the lowered eyes of women bringing their children to medical appointments or commuting to reach their workplaces.

Into this place we bring our prayers. Into this place we bring words of truth. We listen for the Spirit who calls us to love and steadfast faith. We see faces of strangers and pray that we may somehow display support, solidarity, respect and commitment. Bless, strengthen and renew them, O God. Bless the international workers who monitor the travel here.

Bring a new spirit of compassion to military guardians of oppression; show them a better way.

Accept our prayerful repentance for the complicity of our government in this scene of brutal diminishment. Light within us the abiding fire of determination to bring change. Turn our tears into solidarity. Allow our memories of this place to live within our moral imagination until the day there is reconciliation with true justice. We claim this space as sacred space for healing, reconciliation and peace. All this we pray in your holy name, O God. Let it be so.

Rev. Diane Dulin is United Church of Christ clergy and Kairos USA Director of Church Participation.

If you have worshipped at Church of the Checkpoint, please share with us the liturgy, scripture, or song you offered in this hostile environment: worship@kairosresponse.org.