

Mission Partner Updates



John McCulloch - Children playing together at Um Al Khair

It is four o'clock on a weekday afternoon, and we are driving through the West Bank with our children through a parched landscape of saffron yellows and various shades of ochre, at the end of September. We are on our way to meet our friends who live in the Bedouin village of Um Al Khair, in the south Hebron Hills. The Bedouin village lies along the perimeter fence of the illegal Israeli settlement of Karmel. Although it is a school week, our children are excited at the prospect of seeing their friends again, and playing with them as the evening sun sets over the distant hills.

The road from Beit Jala takes you along Route 60, criss-crossed with military checkpoints and watchtowers, and ever-expanding Israeli settlements deep into the West Bank. Between the villages and settlements are clusters of olive trees and vineyards, in an otherwise harsh landscape that is scarred by the injustice of military occupation.

The undulating beauty of the olive groves and vineyards contrasts with the man-made slabs of reinforced concrete and barbed wire that encircle the military checkpoints.

We arrive at Um Al Khair, and are warmly welcomed, with sweet mint tea which we drink on the floor of one of their tents, as the sun begins to set. The children have already run in different directions, one to go and look at the goats, another to play football, another to pick up a small baby. Seeing how children make immediate connections across the boundaries of language and culture is an art that is often lost on grown-ups. Our conflicted world could learn a lot from how children interact. Over the fence I can see some Jewish children playing, and although they are only metres away, they are in a world apart. They too, are just children, born into a context which is not of their making, and yet, even though they can see my children playing with the Bedouin children, they are divided by a fence. I lament the fact that children are born into our world of structural injustice, violence and fear. A world where walls and fences keep us apart.

It was Mahatma Ghandi who said if we wish to create a lasting peace we must begin with the children.

