

## **Christian Educators from the US Visit Israel: Transformational and Spiritual Journey**

*This winter, Oranim International School had the unique opportunity of facilitating a 9-day program in Israel for graduate students from Yale Divinity School and Andover Newton Theological School. The program explored "Religious Education in the Holy Land."*



### **Trip of a Lifetime**

"This was a transformational and spiritual journey for each of us," one participant described the group's experience in Israel. Twenty graduate students participated in the program, all of whom are already working in the field as Christian educators in the United States. Most of the participants had never been to Israel before, and were excited to see the Christian sites and learn about religious education in Israel. As one student explained, "This is a trip of a lifetime. I am so incredibly grateful for this opportunity. Coming to Israel has opened my eyes to the world."

### **Interreligious Dialogue**

This was the second trip that Oranim International School facilitated for the Andover Newton Theological School, which will merge with Yale Divinity School this fall. The group aimed to explore different models of religious education in Israel, including Jewish, Muslim, and Christian; to engage in interreligious dialogue with religious educators and clergy in Israel; and in so doing get to know themselves as religious educators.

The group met with educational leaders from different religions and visited diverse schools and educational frameworks throughout the country. In the words of one student, "The educational settings... were incredibly inspiring and thought provoking."

They also participated in encounters with young Jewish and Arab students at Oranim College, exploring questions of Jewish-Arab dialogue. Two Oranim students, Duaa Saker, a Muslim Bedouin, and Asil Hanaa, an Arab Christian, hosted the group at their homes in the Galilean village of Zarzir.

### **Christian Historical Sites**

As religious Christians, they found it extremely meaningful to visit Christian holy and historical sites in Jerusalem and the Galilee. One student explained: “The most amazing aspect was being able to encounter the places that I’ve read about for so many years.” This experience had a deep impact on them; “[it] really informed my understanding of God and has profoundly affected my faith.”

### **Personal and Professional Growth**

Students reported that the program in Israel led to growth on many levels. Personally, a student reported that the trip “deepen[ed] my own spiritual practice.” On a professional level, one student described how the trip changed her: “I am profoundly altered by what I have seen, learned, and experienced and look forward to how will my ministry unfold and be realized in the weeks/months/years to come.”

Students plan to share their insights from the program in Israel with their church communities at home in the United States, through presentations and/or sermons. In this way, we hope that Christian communities in the United States will learn about possibilities for interreligious dialogue in Israel.