

Olive Oil Ministry-Sponsored Young Adult Mission Trip to the Holy Land October 30-November 10, 2019

Pilgrimage Background Information

The Olive Oil Ministry (OOM) is a network of 23 Washington, DC area congregations, which have joined together to sell Palestinian olive oil and to work together on various related issues concerning Palestine, Israel, and the larger Middle East.

The OOM's 2018 annual meeting on February 24, 2019 agreed to allocate \$5,000-\$6,000 to support fact-finding trips to Israel-Palestine for young adult (ages about 18 – 35) members of our 23 partner congregations.

We have selected to support the "Israel and Palestine Mission Trip for Young Adults and Professionals" organized by Overlake Christian Church in Seattle, Washington, which is most consistent with the objectives of the Ministry. This 10-day trip (October 30-November 10, 2019) combines guided visits to important holy sites in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, learning and hearing first-hand the contemporary, multi-narrative story of the people of the Holy Land, and 3 days of volunteer work and residence at Tent of Nations, a Palestinian Christian family-owned farm near Bethlehem that has received OOM support. The trip is timed to coincide with the olive harvest, a unique time when multiple generations of Palestinian families come together to harvest the olive crop.

Overlake Christian Church is an independent evangelical church founded in 1969 and based in Redmond, Washington (in the greater Seattle area). It is among the largest congregations in Washington State and has founded eight other churches in the region. The church has undertaken various social service initiatives including assistance for refugees, street children, people living with HIV/AIDS, and victims of human trafficking. It has also encouraged providing for orphans through fostering and adoption, and has helped homeless people and single mothers in the Puget Sound region.

Overlake Christian Church welcomes young adult members of the Olive Oil Ministry's partner congregations to join this unusual, well-structured, and well-priced trip. The trip will focus "on learning and hearing first-hand the multi-narrative story of this region of the world." It has been designed for young adults with an interest in direct service opportunities and a willingness to accept less luxurious accommodations in return for an affordable, budget price. The trip requires a minimum of only 6 participants (an exceptionally low number), in part to help ascertain the attractiveness of such a trip to a larger audience of young adults and professionals. Maximum group size is 25 people.

1. Group Leader. The trip leader is Victoria Falkner, the Youth Ministries and Outreach Pastor at Overlake Christian Church (OCC) and a member of the Churches for Middle East Peace 18-35 Leadership Team. She expects to have two young members of OCC as apprentice "trip leaders."

We intend to identify a young minister/leader from one of our partner congregations as a “shepherd” for the OOM participants to assist in trip leadership. This individual’s specific duties would include:

- Organize and attend pre-travel orientation meetings and get acquainted with the members of the OOM pilgrimage group;
- Assist the OCC leader in preparing daily meditations, reflections, and prayers and provide spiritual leadership to the OOM participants;
- Assist the OCC leader, as needed, in organizing logistics for the group and communicating information to the OOM participants; and
- Encourage the OOM participants to write down their reflections and experiences and share their photos during the trip, and post-trip follow up to compose their individual trip reports and prepare jointly a presentation on the trip to be made to OOM congregations.

2. Financial Support. The Olive Oil Ministry is offering grants of \$1,000 per person, within the overall budget limit of \$6,000 approved by the Ministry. Participants are expected to cover the additional cost of the trip from their own resources. We encourage participants to raise funds to pay for the balance of the trip cost, including from their own congregations, denominations, or other sources.

Young adults from OOM congregations may participate in the trip without applying for financial support.

3. Estimated Trip Cost and Payments. The trip’s cost (excluding airfare) depends on the number of participants. The cost would be \$1,925 per person based on 6 to 8 participants, \$1,610 each with 9 to 11 participants, and \$1,370 each with 12 or more. Round-trip airfare is expected to cost about \$1,200.

a. The trip fee includes:

- Nine nights’ accommodations, most meals and water
- Seven days’ bus transportation including local group airport transfers
- Guides, entrance fees and speaker honorariums
- Customary tips for drivers, guides and hotel staff

b. The trip fee does not include:

- Passport fees (passports must be valid for 6 months from the date of return to the US)
- Round-trip airfare
- Travel insurance (see below Section 4)
- Immunizations
- Meals in airports plus a few local meals on the go
- Personal spending money

c. Trip payments are due as follows:

- May 15, 2019 - \$200 deposit due with application
- July 15, 2019 - \$300 deposit due
- September 1, 2019 – full amount due (the actual amount will be known once the number of participants has been established).

Overlake Christian Church will handle all payments to MEJDI. Westmoreland Congregational UCC will pay individual OOM scholarship funds to OCC, not to the individual recipients, for onward-payment of trip fees to MEJDI. Payments will be non-refundable once paid to MEJDI.

4. Travel Insurance: Appropriate travel insurance coverage is essential in order to protect participants who must or choose to cancel trip participation, even if just before departure. Most insurance policies require “cause”, such as a confirmable medical or family emergency; some cover cancellation for any reason. The best and most expensive travel insurance provides for a full refund of an individual’s pre-payments for a trip and air travel upon trip cancellation, whatever the reason. Individuals receiving OOM grant funds will be required to repay the grant amount if they do not travel with the group. For this reason, evidence of travel insurance will be mandatory for all OOM scholarship recipients. In the event that a scholarship recipient chooses not to travel with the group for a non-covered [by travel insurance] reason they will be responsible to repay their portion of OOM scholarship funds to the Olive Oil Ministry.

5. Selection Criteria and Process. A committee of representatives from four OOM congregations will review written applications and select scholarship recipients on the basis of the following selection criteria:

- Priority will be given to applicants ages 18 to 35
- Individuals who demonstrate a strong interest in the Holy Land and the ongoing search for peace and justice in the region

Every attempt will be made to provide funding to members of various congregations within the OOM.

6. Application. An application form is attached. It may be submitted at any time up to May 15 with a \$200 check included. The selection committee will make its best efforts to review the applications and inform applicants of its decisions by June 1, 2019. Successful applicants will receive a letter from the Committee attesting to the scholarship award. The deposit check of applicants who do not receive a scholarship will be returned.

9. Orientation. We plan to orient OOM participants through a combination of directed reading and personal group events in the Washington, DC area.

For questions, email: ramertz@gmail.com
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