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Dear Friend,

So much of the news of our day is centered on the current events of a relatively small crossroads of the world. But the Middle East and its conflicts play a very important role in our lives, even in the West. Who are the people who live there, and what are the roots of their conflicts, specifically the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? As a believer in Christ, how can I understand these people and what role might I play? Hope Ventures International invites you to join us on a Journey of Understanding.

The purpose of this Journey of Understanding is to understand the issues and challenges facing both sides of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in order to have a better understanding of how to work and pray toward reconciliation. The trip is designed so that we spend the first three days in Jerusalem gaining the Israeli perspective, then three days in Bethlehem gaining the Palestinian perspective.

The group will meet with Israelis and Palestinians, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and will visit with strategic leaders who are involved in reconciliation works. Our desire is to help dismantle stereotypes and help to build bridges of understanding that will cross cultural, historical, and religious barriers, both in the region, and at home, among our spheres of influence.

Normally our Journey would end in the Galilee visiting the sites where Jesus ministered and spending time processing what we have learned, but this year we have a great opportunity for something different. We will be joining in the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference sponsored by Bethlehem Bible College. The theme of the conference is "Hope in the Midst of Conflict" and will feature such speakers as Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, Stephen Sizer, Bishara Awad, Jack Sara, and many more. The aim of Christ at the Checkpoint is to provide an opportunity for Christians who take the Bible seriously to prayerfully seek a proper awareness of issues of peace, justice, and reconciliation. (The cost of the conference is included in the Journey of Understanding.) More information may be found at [www.christatthecheckpoint.com](http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com).

Dates of the 2012 Journeys of Understanding are February 27 - March 11. The cost of the trip will be \$1550 per person plus airfare. This price includes ground transportation, meals, lodging, tour fees, and all conference costs. (Hope Ventures will arrange for the airfare, but we anticipate the cost being somewhere between \$1400-1600.) We will stay in hotels and eat most of our meals in restaurants.

Hope Ventures International is hosting this Journey of Understanding in partnership with The Reconciliation Walk...the Journey Continues. You may learn more about these organizations on our websites: [www.hopeventuresinternational.org](http://www.hopeventuresinternational.org) and [www.recwalk.net](http://www.recwalk.net). Your spot on the team may be secured with the submission of a \$150 non-refundable deposit and an application form (found on the Hope Ventures website, [www.hopeventuresinternational.org](http://www.hopeventuresinternational.org)).

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have. Please call me at (830) 708-1243 or email me at [info@hopeventuresinternational.org](mailto:info@hopeventuresinternational.org). I will look forward to hearing from you soon.

Be blessed!

*Marianne Smith*

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