

How Christians, Jews Are Uniting to Help the Most Vulnerable in Israel

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a real-life encounter is worth volumes of knowledge and research.

I have always said that one of the greatest advantages of The Fellowship is that we are on the ground in Israel, so we are able to get a close look at Israeli society and understand the intricate and subtle needs of Israel's most vulnerable populations. Just over two years ago, I visited Yehudit, an elderly woman in Israel receiving Fellowship aid. When I arrived at Yehudit's apartment building, I saw how run-down the building looked. The inside was not any better, and I quickly realized that there was no elevator or electricity in the stairwell. By the time I climbed up the six flights of stairs to reach Yehudit's apartment, I was out of breath. Curiously, the door was already open.

I walked in and greeted Yehudit with my biggest smile and hug. It was winter, so I gave her a blanket and heating fuel on behalf of Christians around the world who support The Fellowship. Then, I began to chat with her, because emotional support and companionship to our elderly are just as important as physical aid.

In the course of our conversation, I asked Yehudit if she had left the door open by accident. She explained that she always kept the door open because she suffered from severe asthma. She said the open door helped her breathe better.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Yehudit started weeping. She told me that she was terrified of having an asthma attack in her apartment and dying alone. I suggested that she could call an ambulance if she ever needed help, but Yehudit explained

that she never would. The last time she did, she received a bill for more than half of her monthly stipend. Yehudit preferred dying to a life without food or dignity.

This was heartbreaking. I assured Yehudit that The Fellowship would help her. Sadly, we never got the chance. Just a few days later, a social worker told me that Yehudit had died of an asthma attack alone in her apartment, just as she had feared.

This tragedy really shook us up. The Fellowship realized it was up to us to take better care of the elderly because if we did not, no one would. We augmented our food program that was already feeding thousands of the elderly in Israel and mobilized volunteers who would check in on them regularly. In addition, we created a medical program that covered the cost of medicine and provided a 24-hour medical hotline. If one of our elderly felt that they needed an ambulance, we sent it immediately, free of charge.

Today, in Yehudit's honor, over 10,000 elderly have wearable emergency buttons so that they can always call for help. Over 17,000 elderly receive food and regular visits so that they no longer have to feel alone. I am so grateful that despite the tragic loss of Yehudit, we were able to save countless others.

There is no substitute for being in Israel, on the ground, seeing firsthand what help is necessary. This is the strength of The Fellowship—we care, we are here and we continue to find ways to help the most vulnerable in our society live with peace, love and dignity.

With blessings from the Holy Land,

Yael Eckstein {eo}

Yael Eckstein is the president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. As President, Eckstein oversees all ministry programs and serves as the organization's

international spokesperson. She can be heard on The Fellowship's daily radio program airing on 1,500 stations worldwide. Before her present duties, Yael served as global executive vice president, senior vice president, and director of program development and ministry outreach. Based in Jerusalem, Yael is a published writer, leading international advocate for persecuted religious minorities, and a respected social services professional. As president of The Fellowship, she also holds the rare distinction of being a woman leading one of America's largest religious not-for-profit organizations.