

YWAM Leaders Tour Israel With Aim to Bring Back Message for the Next Generation

What is it going to take to pass on Christian support of Israel to the next generation of evangelical leaders and combat the alarming rise in antisemitism around the world?

This is something that Bishop Robert Stearns, executive director of Eagles' Wings Ministries, is taking personally.

"The single most important way to fight anti-Semitism is to reach out to young leaders who have large spheres of influence and bring them on a trip to Israel and give them an educated, firsthand look at facts on the ground," Stearns said. "There is no stronger, effective strategy to combat anti-Semitism than to bring non-Jewish influencers and to let them experience it firsthand themselves."

That is why Stearns hosted a milestone visit last week—a group of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) leaders representing some of the organization's larger training and sending communities.

YWAM is a worldwide ministry with 2,200 bases in 190 nations and about 30,000 full-time staff. Basically the Chabad of evangelicalism, Stearns told ALL ISRAEL NEWS, comparing YWAM to the Jewish organization that has emissaries around the world to bolster Jewish communities wherever they may be.

"It is so important that this movement continue its ongoing positive impact and get grounded in a thorough framework and understanding of Israel," Stearns said.

Stearns founded Eagles' Wings, a Christian ministry that seeks to connect believers to the roots of their faith and to the Jewish people, in the late 1990s. While he leads several

diversified groups for a year to the Holy Land, including young, influential ministry leaders and pastors, the YWAM group was particularly significant because of the organization's global reach, Stearns explained. The organization sent more than 30 leaders from Australia, Cambodia, Brazil, Nepal, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines and the U.S. on this trip.

By bringing this "homogeneous group," Stearns expects to see long-term benefits and "positive interaction between the YWAM people and the State of Israel around the world."

The impact will be felt in YWAM, as well. Andy Byrd, one of the organization's leaders based in Hawaii, said a trip like this focuses its members on what the Lord is doing in a specific location.

"Any time this many leaders would visit any nation, it's gonna bolster prayer, it's gonna bolster sending, it's gonna disseminate God's heart for the nation across the different bases and communities that we represent," he said. "It means more focus, more prayer, more energy devoted to what God is doing in Israel."

The group was privy to top meetings including with Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem Fleur Hassan-Nahoum. They also met a Holocaust survivor and visited key sites around the country, such as Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

When interviewed, the leaders told ALL ISRAEL NEWS how their first-time experiences in Israel will impact not just their Bible teaching but their approach to the news, anti-Semitism and political support of the nation.

Marlies Hoogteijling, who was born in the Netherlands but now lives in the U.S., could relate to the history of the Holocaust which plagued the European continent.

"We grew up in Europe so we grew up with a lot of this in our

history books—my grandparents going through the war. How does this affect our students now?” she said, saying the challenge is how to introduce young people abroad to the modern-day people of the Bible.

Daniel Hoogteijling, Marlies’ husband, admitted they have their work cut out for them.

“A lot of young people in the West, they are not tracking with Israel,” he said, noting a poll that showed only 2% of millennials have a biblical worldview. Anything they would know of Israel is from the news and they wouldn’t have the vision of God’s purposes, he explained.

“We have to find ways to communicate the storyline and how to connect to it,” he said, in order to help them form “a biblical worldview of Israel and the Jewish people.”

This was a journey of discovery for the leaders—many of whom were in Israel for the first time.

“It’s more complex than I thought—in the city (Jerusalem) and the nation,” Daniel said. “We are all just taking it all in, listening to people, processing it and asking, ‘How can we bring young people into the storyline?’ The Bible is easy, but the current events going on are complex. So I’m still thinking about how to connect young people in the West to this.”

Paul and Rachel Dangtounda, currently based in Nigeria, will take back an immediate call to action: Prayer for the peace of Jerusalem. Rachel said she’s always quoted Psalm 122, “but this time it had a new meaning to me because I began to understand.”

“The Jewish people don’t have any other place to go to—that is very sad. I understand so much more how to pray for these people,” she said.

The Dangtaoumdas work with widows whose husbands were beheaded

for their Christian faith. They deal with much trauma and hope to offer them a purpose through prayer.

 Paul, originally from Burkina Faso, said he can also bring back Israel's example of hope.

"In my own country, it's really sad to see that the terrorists took 40% of the country and are killing so many people and Christians," he said. "But looking at how the Jews fought for their nation and God's intervention ... it gives me hope that miracles can happen in Burkina Faso and they will be able to stop the terrorists." {eo}

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