



OPHIR YARDEN

**SENIOR LECTURER, JERUSALEM CENTER, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
DIRECTOR, ADASHA: THE JERUSALEM CENTER FOR INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER**

Country: ISRAEL

Denomination: JEW

Nominated for ICCJ BOARD MEMBER

Curriculum Vitae

I have a dual professional background of both teaching Jewish studies in Christian institutions in Israel/Palestine alongside many years of work with Israeli ICCJ-affiliated NGOs working in interreligious affairs.

For nearly three decades, I have been teaching Christian (and some Muslim) students at Christian schools and study program in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The topics of instruction have given me opportunities to be in continuous exploration of key issues in Jewish-Christian and interreligious relations. These course topics have included: Our shared scriptures, second Temple period Judaism, modern Israel, religious resources for peacemaking and the history of antisemitism. My students have come predominantly from North America and Germany as well as from South East Asia, giving me exposure to a wide range of global Christianity.

As Director of the *Jerusalem Center for Interreligious Encounter* I have the opportunity to work with many diverse groups of Jews and Christians (and others) who travel together to the Holy Land to learn about each other, explore their commonalities and learn how to live with their differences.

I have worked extensively with two Israeli affiliates of ICCJ (ICCI: The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel and The Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue).

It was my honor to serve as Conference Coordinator for ICCJ's 2008 conference in Jerusalem entitled "The Contribution of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue to Peace-Building in the Middle East." At this time, I also served as the Secretary General of IJCIR, The Israel Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations.

During the last 20 years, I have worked closely with the European Christian village Nes Ammim in Israel, regularly serving as a weekend scholar-in-residence. I have also conducted several Jewish-Christian-Muslim programs at the village's retreat center.

I am the author of numerous publications in Jewish and Israel studies, including a soon-to-be published introduction to Judaism for university students and material forthcoming on ICCJ's JCRelations website.

My studies at, teaching in, and affiliation with the schools and communities of several Jewish denominations have given me access to the diversity of Jewish communal life in Israel and the Diaspora.

I have a deep personal commitment to interreligious/inter-ethnic encounter, having enrolled my children in Jewish-Arab, Hebrew-Arabic schools in Jerusalem, and pioneered a program to enable Jewish children from religious families to be comfortable in the complicated reality of such a school.

How I would like to contribute to the work of the ICCJ

As one personally engaged in teaching across religious lines to one population about the ‘other,’ I am excited at the proliferation in recent years of such educational initiatives. I seek to use my position as a member of ICCJ’s board to encourage “research and education at all levels, including universities and theological seminaries, to promote interreligious understanding among students, teachers, religious leaders, and scholars” according to our mission statement.

As an Israeli – and I think it is desirable that there be an Israeli Jewish voice on the ICCJ board – I will facilitate ICCJ’s contacts and relationships in the complex context of the Holy Land with local populations, including Eastern Churches and Palestinian Christianity.

Living in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land, the Jewish-Christian-Muslim interrelationship is part of my daily life. As an ICCJ board member, I look forward to the opportunity to work with ICCJ’s International Abrahamic Forum to develop and enhance trilateral relationships alongside the Jewish-Christian framework.

I hope to facilitate connections and international cooperation between ICCJ member organizations around the world. Each member organization does its own wonderful work, but surely, we have much to learn from one another’s experiences and successes.

What is my broader vision for the ICCJ in the next three years

As the global demographic center of gravity continues to shift away from Europe and other regions with past or present Jewish communities, we are witnessing the development of Christianity which benefits less than ever before from connection to its shared roots with Judaism or from relations with contemporary Jewry and Judaism. While working to fulfill all aspects of ICCJ’s Mission Statement, I would emphasize efforts to further ICCJ’s stated goal of “outreach in regions that so far have little or no structured Jewish-Christian dialogue, such as Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Far East.” Thanks to my being located in Jerusalem, the *mater polis*, I am able to facilitate contact with students, seminarians and scholars from regions lacking their own Jewish communities who visit and study in Jerusalem. I would seek to pursue ways and methods to follow-up the opportunity for encounter with Judaism that time in the Holy Land affords Christians and develop ways to help those who pass through Jerusalem to become bridges, sharing their experiences and insights with their home communities.

I would like to help, ICCJ continue to develop projects such as our recent webinar and book addressing "Interreligious Dialogue about the Land" and the educational materials produced by ICCJ's Theology Committee.