

Holy Land Christians in Profile

Dr. Bernard Sabella

Dr. Bernard Sabella is an Associate Professor of Sociology with a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. He taught for 25 years at Bethlehem University and at American University in the United States. In January 2006 he was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council (parliament) representing the Palestinian Christian community in Jerusalem. He has been involved with work for the refugees with the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches. Dr. Sabella lives with his wife, Mary, who works as a student counselor at Bethlehem University and his three grown children who are continuing their education. One is in the US, the other in the UK and the third is working now as communication specialist in Jerusalem but also is looking forward to a Masters program either in the US or in the UK. Dr. Sabella is Roman Catholic and his family belongs to the Saint Saviour Franciscan Parish in Jerusalem.

1. As a long time resident of the Holy Land, especially in Bethlehem, how do you look at the present conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians? Is it something that can be resolved in the future?

The prospects for a solution to the present conflict are not encouraging. There are ongoing negotiations between the Head of the Palestinian Negotiation Team, Ahmed Qra' (Abu Ala) and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Where these negotiations will lead no one knows. There is a slim hope among both peoples that something will give. The role of the U.S. Administration is vital; the visit of President Bush in January of this year was very important signal that the U.S. Administration is serious about peace between the Palestinians and Israel. On the ground, though, not much has changed since the President's visit; the checkpoints remain; the conflict in Gaza with rockets and counter measures flaring up and threatening to escalate; ordinary people do not feel a change even though they aspire for it.

The conflict needs to be resolved for the good of all people in this region. Israel cannot have full security without peace and the Palestinians cannot have their promised state without peace. Peace is vital. The

conflict is a national political conflict and not a religious conflict as some would prefer to portray it. All people of good will and those who have had enough with this century-old conflict want to move forward. All should subscribe to the efforts of peacemaking. Peace is the only insurance for our children, irrespective of whether they are Israelis or Palestinians; Jews, Christians or Muslims.

2. As an expert in Christian emigration from the Holy Land, can you give us some insights into the phenomena, i.e. its causes and perhaps some solutions? Can you give us a numerical breakdown of indigenous Christians living in Israel proper and the territories?

Christians from the Holy Land leave because of the negative effects of the political conflict and its effects on the economy and society. In several surveys undertaken since the mid-1990s, the causes of emigration by Christians have been consistently the bad political situation and economy, particularly so in the Palestinian Territories. When there is stability and relative calm, tourists and pilgrims return and the economy in general grows. This creates new job opportunities, especially for young people. The young people are the most susceptible to leaving the country because they can not see the "light at the end of the tunnel."

There are 115,000 Christians in Israel and 50,000 in the West Bank.

3. As you know, the first organization that officially began to take up the specific challenge to help stem the Christian exodus from the Holy Land was the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, the humanitarian arm of the Custodia di Terra Santa. In fact, you were one of its first supporters. Some ten years later, do you see any of the



fruits of this Franciscan endeavor to help keep the Christians here?

The FFHL has done wonderful things. What I like about it is that it has a clear mission and vision. The mission is to help young Christians stay and to provide them with quality education in order for them to gain skills that would encourage them to stay and to serve their community and the country in general. The vision of FFHL is that one day this holy land would become an oasis of peace and Christians will be an integral part of this oasis through their presence and work. Throughout this decade, the FFHL has succeeded in extending support to educational programs from grammar school to the university. Christian youth have been encouraged to proceed in the career path; to earn degrees that would enable them to be proud and to do professional work needed for the community and country. The youth who have been supported by the Franciscans remain in the country thus strengthening their own churches and encouraging others to stay and to overcome the various causes that easily would have led to emigration.

The FFHL has also constructed housing projects throughout the land where those same young people with university degrees can

Two New Board Members Join FFHL

Edward James Kaleff, Jr.

Mr. Kaleff is a product of Catholic education from Michigan and California where he was raised. He and his wife, Christina, have 2 children and 1 grandchild.

Edward is the owner of Quality Container Corporation in Los Angeles, California. He is active in his parish as a Eucharistic Minister and the Parish Renewal Program. He is also a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre with the rank of Knight Commander with Star.

Edward has also been active in civic organizations such as: St. Mary's Medical Center Foundation, California Pools for the Handicapped, Squires Club of Los Angeles, Pasadena Police Dept. California Highway Patrol, Sacred Heart Retreat House, and Right to Life Foundation.



John Bamberger

Mr. Bamberger was raised and educated in the Catholic schools in New York City. He attended RCA Institute N.Y., Fordham University N.Y., and the University of Southern California, Claremont College School of Business.. He also served in the United States Air Force as an electronics specialist.

His business experience was with Lockheed Marin Corporation serving in the Aircraft Service Division from 1955-1996. As Director of Marketing and Vice President of Business Development he worked extensively in the Middle East from 1965 through 1996. He worked with the late King Hussein of Jordan among others in the region. He conceptualized, designed and delivered to Saudi Arabia several special personal transport aircraft. Ten of these planes were full hospitals capable of major surgery. During his 31 years of working in the Middle East, he came to understand and respect the Arab culture and mentality.

He is actively involved in his parish, the local Carmelite Community, and the United Way. He is a member of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre.

He and his wife, Pat, were married in 1951 and live in Upland, California. They have 2 children and 3 grandchildren.

rent an apartment at affordable rates. This is a further step that encourages Christians in the Holy Land to remain, forming new families, thus strengthening the Christian presence through the variety of churches. Some of the youngsters have been called to the priesthood and this also is a contribution of the active involvement of the Franciscans in the spiritual life of the community and their model as faithful followers of St. Francis and the teachings of Jesus.

4. As member of the Fatah party of the Palestinian Parliament, what challenges face the Palestinian people - including the Hamas party?

We need to unite and to come to terms with the desire of our people and all in this region for a lasting peace and an honorable end to the conflict with Israel. The situation

of division between the West Bank and Gaza does not look good for us. We need to work hard and to convince Hamas in Gaza to join the efforts for peace and to bring Gaza back to the authority of President Abbas and the Palestinian National Authority. We all need to build institutions of service and business that can serve our people. This cannot happen without internal peace, on the one hand, and without peace with Israel, on the other. Accordingly, we need courageous and wise leaders who will take us forward rather than for us to remain in this grim situation where no one wins and all lose.

5. Do you see any hope on the horizon for Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace and what is needed to bring about that peace?

In spite of the quite conservative as-

essment on the prospects of peace, I am convinced that the only way out for all of us is the way of peace. All sides need to give something for the sake of peace. This could be difficult at the beginning but eventually it will pay off. We need to develop a long term vision for what peace can mean to Palestinians, to Israelis, and in fact to the whole region. We should not be short sighted and look only at what we are going to lose if peace arrives; on the contrary we need to look at what we will gain in the end if peace prospers. The U.S. Administration and the International Community need to encourage peace negotiations. In the end though, no peace can happen without both the Palestinians and Israelis putting their heads and hearts together in order to mold a different future to the Land and its two peoples.