



FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION

FOR THE HOLY LAND

Franciscan Friar Appointed Custodian of the Holy Land

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The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land would like to welcome the new Custos of the Holy Land, as well as, the new Chairman of the FFHL, Franciscan Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM. Fr. Pizzaballa, a native of Bergamo, Italy, was appointed to this position by the Holy See and nominated by the General Definitors of the Franciscan order. He will succeed Fr. Giovanni Battistelli, OFM.

The appointment will also allow Fr. Pizzaballa to serve as President of the Commission for Missionary Evangelization and as a member of the Commission for Judaism and Islam of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.

"There is no other place in the world quite like Jerusalem, where all Christian religious professions are present. Beyond the evident difficulty of relationships, the Holy Land has a fascination that is unique," says an enthusiastic Fr. Pizzaballa.

The new Major Superior of the Custody of the Holy Land sums up in a simple way the challenge that the Franciscans face there. "It is necessary to be impassioned, but not to be taken up by passions,

in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians," says Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, of the Order of Friars Minor and at age 39, one of the youngest Custodians in history.

"The Holy Land is a fascinating place that continuously challenges, and the greatest challenge that we find ourselves facing now is that of not being limited to enduring the difficult situations in which we live, but to become involved in them with an active and critical attitude. The people do not only need money; they ask for hope, they want to be helped to believe in the future." said the Custos.



Fr. Pizzaballa, as one of his first acts as the new Custos, dedicates a new building of the Child Jesus Housing Project.

(Continued on Page 10)

OUR MISSION

THE FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND IS A WORLDWIDE ORGANIZATION FOUNDED IN 1994 UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND. THE FOUNDATION WAS CREATED TO SAFEGUARD THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN PALESTINIAN MINORITY LIVING IN THE HOLY LAND BY PROVIDING ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS, SUBSIDIZED HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, WHILE PRESERVING, PROTECTING, AND RESTORING THE HOLY SITES OF CHRISTIANITY. FOR THESE CHRISTIANS TRAPPED IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT OF ETHNIC DISTRUST, THE FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND HAS BECOME THEIR PRIMARY ORGANIZED VOICE.

LETTER FROM THE CUSTOS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Pax Christi!

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our trouble so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from God" (2 Corinthians 3-4)



Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM

Although our lives have been challenged in this Holy Land of Israel - we are not without hope. You, my Brothers and Sisters have held us up in your prayers, comforted us by your financial support and kind words – and for this we are truly grateful.

Please continue to financially help our Christian Brothers and Sisters in the Holy Land. They need to know you are present to them in love. Your actions have given them such hope and promise for a future.

May the Sacrosanct Trinity fill your heart with His love – May you live in His will.

In the Spirit of St. Francis,
I remain a Servant of God and Yours,

Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM
Custos, Provincial of the Holy Land
Chairman
Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land

Where Are They Now?

University Graduate: Niveen Saleh

"I am very happy with my scholarship and I am now serving at the school where I studied," states Niveen Saleh graduate of the Foundation's Scholarship program. Niveen graduated in July 2002 from Hebrew University in Jerusalem with a B.A. in teaching English and Hebrew. She has now returned to teach Hebrew at the Terra Santa Schools where she grew up.



"I decided to stay in this school to serve it – to give back what I received. They helped me when I needed it and now I have to help them in the same way. I am very happy."

Niveen grew up in Jerusalem, attended Hebrew University and is now working on her Masters degree in Administration and Policy in Education. She hopes to be a school administrator in the future. While attending the University she found it difficult to speak and concentrate while speaking 4 languages in the same day. "I would have to go to class in two languages, speak to teachers in another." This is a dilemma faced by most students at Universities in this area because of the multi-cultural nature of the Holy Land.

Niveen worked at the Terra Santa School while attending the University because she needed money for transportation and supplies. She was excited to be offered a permanent position, although she would rather be teaching English or French. However, there are many teachers licensed to teach those subjects and if she wants to stay at that school, she must teach what is needed in the curriculum.

"I can go somewhere else for a higher salary but I would like to stay at the school. I feel very connected to them." she said. "I am already serving my country as well as I can by teaching in a school, but I am looking for something better because I think I am capable of doing more than I am right now."

Niveen plans to work and go to school for 2-3 more years before she starts thinking about marriage. "I need to get myself ready before I open my home." she stated.

When asked about her future in the Holy Land she replied, "We are like a sandwich with Moslems. We are a minority. It is very difficult to live as a minority, religious and political. But, personally I feel something special in this land. I feel like I'm connected to it despite all the insecurities."

2004 Scholarship Awards

Late August brought Fr. Abdel Masih Fayez Fahim, OFM, Selection Chairman for the FFHL Scholarship Program, and Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, President FFHL, to Bethlehem to announce the 2004 University Scholarship Awards. The Foundation began giving scholarships to worthy students eight years ago in 1997. To date, some 80 scholarship grants have been given out, thus reaching the Foundation's million dollar goal! Fr. Peter congratulated the new recipients telling them that "the Foundation was so pleased to see six new young people who, by their hard work and determination, were being blessed with securing a four year college education in the midst of so many problems in the country." He reminded new scholarship winners of the generosity of the many supporters of FFHL both collectively and individually who made these college grants possible.



DIMA ATEEQ was born in Jerusalem and now lives with her family in Bethlehem. She has two brothers and one sister. Dima has chosen to attend Birzeit University in Jerusalem in the field of Engineering. Her sponsor is FFHL.



CHRISTINE AYOUB was born in Jerusalem and is the only child. Christine will be attending Hebrew University in Jerusalem for Pharmacy. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Durlé of Fishers, IN



TAMARA FALLAS was born in Jerusalem and has one brother. Tamara will be attending Hebrew University in Jerusalem and would like to major in Chemistry. Her sponsor is St. Louis de Montfort parish in Fishers, IN.



FADY ABU JABER was born in Beit Jala, a suburb of Bethlehem, and has one sister. Fady will be attending Bethlehem University and majoring in the field of Business. His sponsor is FFHL.



MICHLINE LAMA was born in Jerusalem and now resides in Bethlehem with her parents and one brother. She will be attending Bethlehem University in the field of Chemistry/Science. Her sponsor is FFHL.



GEORGE SABAT was born in Jerusalem and now resides in Bethlehem with his family. He has one brother. George will be attending Bethlehem University in the field of Chemistry. His sponsor is FFHL.

New Core Group Emerges from Indianapolis



In February 2004, a good number of parishioners together with their pastor, Fr. Tim Kroeger (pictured above with Fr. Vasko), joined other American pilgrims on one of the FFHL's pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Like most pilgrims who come to the Holy Land, they were deeply touched by the spiritual richness of the land and by the Holy Sites of Christendom where the major events of Christ's life took place. After visiting with Christian families and individuals during their trip and hearing about their plight, as well as their forced immigration from their land, these parishioners vowed to let more people in the U.S. know of the Christians' plight. Hence, this dynamic interchange gave them a new impetus and enthusiasm to begin helping the Christians in the Holy Land. They now comprise the "core group" of Indiana's region of FFHL.

At the same time, Fr. Kroeger, pastor of St. Louis de Montfort

parish, invited Fr. Peter to come to his church to speak at all of the Sunday Masses concerning the plight of the Christians. A substantial amount of money was raised at that time. In addition, Fr. Kroeger and the parish are also sponsoring a Christian student to receive a four year college scholarship grant.

Fr. Kroeger told his faithful, "If we do not provide hope and encouragement to your young Christians who are the future of the Holy Land, then we do not have a real understanding of our own roots and heritage as Christians. Without the Church of Jerusalem, there would be no Church here in Fishers, Indiana or, for that matter, anywhere else in the world. Our faith and our Church began in Jerusalem and we need to protect it and to support it in these difficult times."

The "core group" has now developed a power point presentation about the Christian exodus and is actively presenting it to various church groups and organizations throughout Indiana.



Indianapolis core group members: Michael LeCuyer, Janet Oliver, Mike Hirsch and William DeMaree, with Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM

Raymond Arroyo Joins FFHL Board of Trustees



Raymond Arroyo is an internationally known, award-winning journalist. Mr. Arroyo established EWTN News in 1996, creating several programs including: Newslink, Newslines, and the weekly international news magazine, The World Over Live.

Mr. Arroyo is also responsible for EWTN's live coverage of news events around the globe. Additionally, he has written and produced numerous documentaries and special programs; including the award-winning documentary: "Path of The Messiah" shot entirely in the Middle East.

In addition to his work at EWTN, Mr. Arroyo has appeared on "The Today Show", "CNN Headline News", "Access Hollywood", "Capitol Gang", "Deborah Norville Tonight", "Scarborough Country", and other national programs. His writings have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Times, The Financial Times, National Review, Our Sunday Visitor, and elsewhere.

Mr. Arroyo resides in New Orleans with his wife Rebecca and his sons, Alexander and Lorenzo.

Dallas Hosts Dinner to Benefit the Foundation

Prominent private and corporate citizens were guests at the fourth biennial fundraising banquet on Thursday, October 21, 2004, at the Park City Club in Dallas, Texas to benefit the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land.

His Eminence Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua served as Honorary Chairman of the Dinner which was attended by 160 people.

Honored guests in attendance included Rev. Luis Gerardo Arraiza, OFM, co-representing the Most Rev. Charles V. Grahmann, Bishop of Dallas, Dr. Francis M. Lazarus, seventh President of the University of Dallas, Rev. Peter F. Vasko, OFM, President of the FFHL and Rev. Mitchell C. Pacwa, SJ, Host for EWTN.

Following the invocation by Fr. Arraiza and welcoming remarks by Dinner Chairman, Susan Stanzel, a surprise presentation was made to Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM. He had been made an Honorary Texan by Governor of Texas, Rick Perry, at the 2002 Benefit Dinner, so Mr. Neuhoff belatedly gave Fr. Peter a dark brown Stetson hat to match his Franciscan robe.



Keynote Speaker for the dinner was Fr. Mitch Pacwa, SJ, Host of EWTN and former professor at the University of Dallas in Irving, TX. Father Pacwa (pictured above with Fr. Peter Vasko), who has visited the Holy Land 44 times, taking more than 1,000 pilgrims to Jerusalem, gave a brilliant talk entitled "Christianity: Its Life in the Middle East". He stated that history shows that when Islam turns radical against other religions, it destroys culture. "When Islam allows the Christians to live together with them, they flourish economically, culturally, scientifically and philosophically," said Fr. Pacwa. "Part of our own responsibility as a nation and as Christians is that it is very important for us to do what we can to have educated Christians stay in the Middle East to help them be a leaven ... to allow our cultures and education to permeate Muslim culture." Fr. Pacwa added that "part of our work is to offer them the best the U.S. has to offer, Christians supporting other Christians. It is this kind of influence that saves the world from corruption and collapse."

Dinner Chairman, Susan Stanzel, and Co-Chairman, Rose Lafferty, were encouraged by the enthusiastic and generous outpouring



Harry J. Chris, Papal Awardee, Susan H. Stanzel, Board Member FFHL, Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM and John R. Albers, Papal Awardee

of support from the Dallas community. The entire dinner, cocktails, wine, music, flowers, invitations, programs and transportation for the speaker, were underwritten so that all funds raised directly support the work of the foundation. The host committee, table hosts, and underwriters for the evening included: Mr. and Mrs. John Albers, Mr. and Mrs. Harry J. Chris, Mr. and Mrs. D.H. Baker, Mrs. John Bowden, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Corby, Mrs. Fay Hagan, Mrs. Frank Heller, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Meier, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Boyd Neuhoff, Mr. Lawrence Neuhoff, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Hoag, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Lafferty, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Longwell, Mr. and Mrs. Edward D. Nicholson, Olmsted-Kirk Paper Company, Mr. and Mrs. Tony Simon, Mr. and Mrs. William Sherk, Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Denis Simon, Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. Thompson, The Catholic Foundation, and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis F. Vasel.

A highlight of the evening's program was the presentation of the Papal Award, The Pope Leo XIII Gold Cross of Honor, to two individuals who have shown extraordinary support and love of the Holy Land: Mr. John Albers and Mr. Harry J. Chris. Fr. Peter Vasko, Delegate of Very Rev. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, Custos of the Holy Land, presented the medals along with their framed certificates. The dinner raised over \$60,000 to help the Christians of the Holy Land.



Jimmie Chris, Harry J. Chris, Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, John R. Albers, Janet Albers

In the Spotlight

From the site of the Dominus Flevit Chapel, on the hill above the Mount of Olives, comes to mind the indescribable spectacle of that spring morning when Jesus came into the City of Jerusalem in Glory. One can imagine that brilliant sun climbing up behind Olivet to the crystal clear sky and enveloping in its light the splendid city stretching over the opposite hills. The Herodian towers on Mount Zion glowing in the immaculate whiteness of their marbles; lower down, magnificent palaces following one another in many lines like the various flights of steps of a huge amphitheater; and finally in the foreground, the Temple, a marvel of antiquity, the Temple that rises majestically above the Valley of Kidron enhanced by its hundreds of monolithic columns, by its towers covered with precious marble, by its celebrated doors of bronze and by its golden laminate which reflected from every side the beams of the rising sun. Jesus saw all this; and He also He saw what to others was hidden; He saw the Roman legions advancing from the north, to cast a trench about that deicidal city; He saw the columns overthrown, the towers hurled down, the palaces smashed to pieces, the Temple consumed by fire and reduced to such a ruin that no stone upon stone was left. He saw thousands and thousands of Jews fallen by the sword and famine; He saw the fugitives scattered abroad among all nations, and His countenance grew sad, His eyes were full of tears, and from His lips came words of touching compassion." ... And they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another: because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation: (Luke, 19-44)

The Golden Gates that Christ entered through on Palm Sunday in the east wall of the Old City have long since been closed permanently. The walled city of Jerusalem during Jesus' time had about 80,000 residents and hosted about 100,000 additional worshippers during Passover (the Old City has 33,000 inhabitants today).

Today a Catholic pilgrim will get a panoramic view of this valley from the Dominus Flevit (the Lord Wept) Church on the Mount of Olives. An example of modern architecture (1955), its exterior is in the shape of a tear. This Franciscan church is built on the site of the remains of a fifth century building. In recent times the vestiges of a necropolis have been found nearby with funeral inscriptions in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. The designer, Antonio Barluzzi, wanted the priest to face the



Dominus Flevit



Golden Gates while celebrating Mass, which he did before Vatican II's changes.

The most noticeable landmark as one looks down on the Old City is the Dome of the Rock, which marks the spot Muslims believe Islam's founder Mohammed went to heaven in a fiery chariot. But the Dome also is over the spot where Jews believe that Abraham prepared to offer Isaac in sacrifice before an angel stopped him. It is also over the point of the Jewish temple that the Virgin Mary would have entered for Jesus' presentation.

Many believed that the site of Christ's weeping over Jerusalem was unmarked until the time of the Crusaders when they started to point out this site as remembrance of this event. With the withdrawal of the Crusaders their church fell into ruins. In 1518 a mosque existed on the site, presumably built by the Turks, but to the locals it was always considered a *madrasah* (school). The place was called *el Mansouriyeh* (the Triumphant) and also *el Khelweh* (hermitage). Unable to obtain the ruin the Franciscans bought a small property on the south side of the path leading up to the Mount of Olives and built a small church there in 1891.

In 1913 a Miss Mellon built a small house in front of the Franciscan chapel, and this passed to the Sisters of St. Joseph, who sold it to a Portuguese lady named De Mello. In 1940 the Benedictine Sisters, in hard straits, sold a part of the property to the Franciscans. The old boundary wall was moved to make the division. The Sisters were not content with the rather poor wall raised during the war, and so the Franciscans began the building of a more suitable one in 1953. The foundations struck tombs, and there followed an interesting excavation (1953-1955) of the whole property led by the late Fr. Bellarmino Bagatti, OFM.

Brother Leo Gonzales, originally from Santa Barbara, Calif., has been assigned to the Dominus Flevit Church for the past 16 years. He has always been moved by the story of Christ's weeping over Jerusalem, anticipating the temple's destruction.

"He knew of their stubborn heart and the consequences," Brother Gonzales said. "They (all Jerusalem's residents) still need to give their hearts to Him. As long as they believe in a military solution they won't find peace. Christ is not violent."

Catholic School Creates Family

Far from their own countries, cultures, parents, relatives and friends, the Carmelite Religious live in Israel, sharing the destiny of the people chosen by God. They recognize their isolation and insecurity; they see the heartbreak of all the Near East: the hatred, the intolerance and the fanaticism. They welcome in the daily life of their community — a community “of many colors” — the call of the Lord to seek humbly the ways of communion. In keeping with this belief, the Carmelites have established a school in Haifa.



Haifa is an active seaport and a city which strives to set an example of peaceful living and coexistence with any culture choosing to live there. The school sets just such an example. The students in the tenth grade have even received a national award for volunteerism.

This past July a representative of the FFHL was invited to come and meet some of the teachers, parents and students in this exemplary school. Romeo Shoukry, an active parent, called the Foundation hoping to publicize the school’s vision for the future. The vision of “a Little Village of Education” is shared by families representing many cultures and religions who attend the school.

The main goals of the Latin Carmelite School are to empower students, parents and communities with Christianity and to increase the educational opportunities and scholastic achievements of Arab Christians in Israel. The school is composed of grades 1-8, number-

ing over 600 students and grades 9-12 with about 400 students. Eighty percent of the students are Arab Christians who are taught 2 additional languages (Italian and French) beyond the 3 basic languages of Arabic, Hebrew and English.

The high school receives funding for teacher salaries from the Israeli government, but the lower grades receive no funding from the state. These subsidies cover only the cost of the 52 classroom teachers, not the additional 7 people who are counselors, nurses, secretaries, and maintenance people. Nor does it cover the cost of maintaining the building, libraries, lavatories, extra curricular activities, or the expansion plans to create the “Little Village of Education”.

The main loss of income is suffered in grades 1-8 because many people in Haifa are unemployed. There is no money for tuition. “If people don’t work, they can’t pay. It is hard from day to day these three years.” said Bassam Sbait, a teacher of Arabic and Literature at the high school for 34 years.

“They pay what they can then they go to Sr. Albertina, the principal, and ask for assistance. Their stories break your heart. It comes down to letting the children go or offering an education to them. Some students have been here for 13 years. Sister always supports education and she is backed by other members of the community. We rely on the providence of God to make it work so that all who desire a Catholic education will receive one.”

“If you prepare a student for future life, you get a good society. You need to give the student what he needs for the future, not just the present. An old Arabic expression says it all: “If you open a school, you can close a prison. We have to keep up with the Jewish students otherwise we fall behind and cannot find jobs. When there are no jobs, people tend to emigrate.” added Bassam.

Oded Rosenthal, a school parent is also an architect and town planner. His family is Jewish and he feels that he has made a wise choice in sending his children to the school. “When I compare it to Jewish schools, the whole atmosphere is more serious. The relations between the nuns, teachers and pupils are better. The nuns here think that learning and education is the main goal in life.”

Another parent, Ahmad, travels 20 minutes a day so that his children can attend the school in Haifa. “I needed my children to go to a religious school, not only for the learning, but to get the atmosphere and the culture. It is very difficult to take children in the middle of the year, but Sr. Albertina talked to me for one hour and decided that we were family and needed to be in school here. That was nearly 5 years ago. My children both feel that it is family here with all the students, nuns, and teachers. For them it was a great experience.”

Nardeen Sbait (at left), a recent graduate shared her feelings. “I started here from the first grade. We feel like a family and I

(Continued on Page 8)

Christians made up 2.1% of Israel's population in 2003

A total of 144,000 Christians live in Israel, of whom 117,000 are Arabs who are the indigenous Christians while 27,000 are "new" immigrants, according to a report released by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) ahead of Christmas. In 2003, Christians constituted 2.1 percent of Israel's population.

The "new" immigrant Christians, who came to Israel under the Law of Return that grants citizenship to non-Jewish first-degree relatives of Jews, arrived mainly during the major wave of immigration in the 1990s from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

Approximately 11 percent of all 12th-graders in the Arab education system are Christian, and they lead the population in attainment of matriculation certificates. In 2003, 64 percent of Christian students were eligible for matriculation certificates, as opposed to 49 percent of Muslim students and 57 percent among Jews.

Approximately 98 percent of Israel's Christians live in urban settlements, with 20 percent in Nazareth, 12 percent in Haifa and 10 percent in Jerusalem. Sixty percent of all Christians live in northern Israel. In terms of their statistical profile, Christians resemble Jews more than Muslims. The number of births per woman stands at 2.3 for Christians, while among Jews the number is 2.7, and among Muslims, 4.5.

The birth rate among Christians has been in continuous decline over the years, along with their proportion in the general population. Their proportion in the Arab population has declined precipitously from

20 percent in 1949 to 15 percent in 1972 to 9 percent at present.

In 2003, 34 percent of Christians were less than 19 years of age (the same percentage as in the Jewish population). However, they were older than the Muslim population, in which 53 percent were in the 19-and-under age group.

Some 8 percent of Christians were 65 years or older, as opposed to 12 percent of Jews in this age group, and less than 3 percent among Muslims. In 2003, approximately 4 percent of those emigrating from Israel were Christians, the same percentage as in 2002.

In 2002, the median age when Christian men married for the first time was 28.6 years of age, almost two years later than Jewish men and three years later than Muslim men. The median age for Christian women to marry for the first time was 23.4, younger by a year than their Jewish counterparts and three years older than Muslim women.

Of all Christian students who finished high school in 1994/5, 34 percent began higher education within six years, as opposed to 31 percent of Jewish students, 22 percent of Muslims and 21 percent of Druze. Some 50.8 percent of Christians 15 and older were in the civilian work force in 2003, while among Muslims the number was 37.7 percent and among Druze, 35.9 percent. Among Jews, 57.1 percent of those 15 and older were in the civilian work force.

By Moti Bassok, reprinted with permission.

(Continued from Page 7)



don't meet Jews in our daily life."

"We look on all the students as our children" interjected Bassam.

"Everyone here is a family. The sisters here are my mothers. I treat them as my mother and the staff, they are my friends. I talk to them about everything. That is the best thing about this school." stated another student.

"This community, which is run by nuns, is a community full of love, of peace and coexistence. The school brings us closer to love and unity instead of war and separation. We kind of live in a utopian type of

would not think of moving. There is something special about the school. There are those who have their problems but we try to help them, as friends in the same class, because they are family. It is a Christian and Muslim school. In the school we have several events where we meet with students who are Jewish in other schools because we

school where we do not look in the world outside because we are happy here. The school is somehow like a dream that the world is going to be like this in the future. We set an example to children around the world that things can happen. We can change our reality! Rebellion always starts with something small. Maybe we are the seed of changing."



Mr. Sbait (at right) reiterates that these children are trying to build a bridge of tolerance and coexistence, to know how to respect and understand one another - especially the pain, both sides of the pain. As educators we try to target the feelings of the first pain of the others and then try to understand it.

"We feel very deeply the word of Christ and we have to work very hard to teach our children these ways. I don't think I could teach my children my beliefs if they did not come to this school. It does it better than me. There is no contradiction of beliefs between home and school," stated Ahmad Kassis, a pediatrician in Haifa.

Inspired Pilgrim Raises \$5,000 for Bethlehem Children



Faith Libbe, the Foundation's Regional Representative in the Florida area, traveled to the Holy Land this spring and returned with a strong desire to help some of those Christians she observed while on her pilgrimage.

"Upon my return from the Holy Land, I prayed and discerned, with the help and blessing of Fr. Peter Vasko, that I would coordinate



an effort to purchase Christmas gifts for the needy children of Fr. Amjad's parish in Bethlehem," reported Faith.



She then took it upon herself to contact people in her region, as well as friends and relatives, and ask them to help purchase 1,277 gifts for the 1,277 children in St. Catherine's Parish in Bethlehem.

Her efforts produced \$5,000 for these children. The gifts were distributed at the annual Family Christmas party at the Catholic Action Center in Bethlehem. Santa distributed the gifts as many happy parents watched their children open their gift. The day concluded with a Christmas pageant and refreshments for everyone.

In addition to the children's gifts, the families received food for a Christmas meal through the foundation and the charity of its donors.

Cincinnati Benefit Dinner Raises Awareness

On Monday evening, October 18, 2004, the Ohio Chapter of the FFHL, under the chairmanship of Dr. William Kitzmiller, Regional Representative for the Foundation and Rev. Barry Windholtz, Pastor of St. Rose Catholic Church, held a very successful Benefit Dinner for the Foundation. Some 120 people attended the event.

In his talk, Fr. Peter Vasko, President of FFHL spoke about the on-going problem of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. "Closures, curfews, checkpoints and now the Wall continue to be an obstacle to securing a just peace." He went on to say that "There can be no justification whatsoever for the taking of innocent lives, whether it be carried out by militant suicide bombers or the Israeli army via their military invasions." Fr. quoted the Patriarch Sabbah of Jerusalem, saying that "Israel has won so many military battles and has been sole victor in every case, but without bringing about peace or security. Military victories by themselves do not bring about security. Only peace built on justice and respect will bring about security."

In regards to the Wall, which is referred to by Israelis, as the "Security Wall" and to the Palestinians, as the "Apartheid Wall", has only a few months to completion. When finished it will be twice as high and three times as long as the former Berlin Wall and will cost \$1.6 billion dollars. Fr. Peter went on to say that "some 320,000 Palestinian people will be cut off from their jobs, their children from their schools, and with no access to medical facilities. Some 41,000 acres owned by Palestinians were simply confiscated to build the wall. In Bethlehem alone, some 17,500 acres of land devoted to agriculture was also confiscated by the Israeli government.

Fr. Peter concluded that it is one thing to read about the Wall or to see it on television, but to actually see it is both depressing and emotionally draining. Unless the Wall is taken down, it will continue to prolong the distrust among the two people and will eventually breed a new generation of Palestinian militants who will ensure that Israel, regrettably, will continue to face violent attacks for decades.

New Chairman Meets Board of Trustees

On October 9, 2004, Rev. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, Custos of the Holy Land and new Chairman of the FFHL attended the bi-annual Board of Trustees meeting in Naples, Florida.

At the meeting, Fr. Pizzaballa (pictured below with Fr. Vasko looking on) expressed his thanks to the board for their strong commitment to assist the Franciscan Custody in maintaining the Christian presence in the Holy Land. "Maintaining the Christian Province is a long term goal," said the Custos, "but a most important and relevant one." He added that, "we must continue to improve our schools and our housing projects and provide more community awareness programs for our people as well as finding new ways to create employment opportunities." He thanked the Board of Trustees for all the work that they have accomplished and more specifically for funding the Franciscan Family Center in Bethlehem. He encouraged the Board to establish similar projects in other parts of the Holy Land.



Some of the Board of Trustees with the new FFHL Chairman, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM: (l to r) Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, President; Br. Callistus Welch, OFM, Treasurer; Bishop John J. Nevins, Bishop of Venice, FL; Karen Carroll of Atlanta, GA; Susan H. Stanzel of Dallas, TX; Anthony Sansone, Sr. of St. Louis, MO; William Conwell of Birmingham, AL

He also stressed the importance of "making the Holy Sites of Christendom vehicles of renewed spiritual life, not only for the pilgrims but for the local Christians as well. We need to provide more access to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, as well as, making the Mass schedules more available to the pilgrims."

Lastly, he spoke about the Franciscan Friars living and ministering in the Holy Land and their importance to the local church as well as their connection to the Holy Sites. Fr. Peter thanked the new chairman for his remarks on behalf of the board and stated that "all of us are looking forward to being under your able leadership."

(Continued from Page 1)

His first Christmas message develops these thoughts in ways that can be lived throughout the New Year.

"We are joyfully united to the voice of the prophet to proclaim to the whole world: Behold, your Savior arrives, behold, today on this holy night and in this holy place, the Lord God comes to save us, making Himself become one of us, making Himself God-with-us, Immanuel" (Isaiah 7: 14).

Two thousand years have passed since the angels sang, in one voice, a song of peace to the shepherds in the countryside of Bethlehem: and yet, time has not weakened this song, because the word of God is present yesterday, today, and always. And today, as in that moment, the word comes back to speak to all people, but above all to the humble, to the poor, to those who, like the shepherds back then, in their smallness are more available to receive the revelation of a God that makes Himself into a baby, of a God

that offers Himself to communicate with us, placing Himself at our same level.

What a sublime lesson of humility our God gave us! What a valid lesson even today for the whole world, but especially for this Holy Land, still with so much suffering!

We must put aside our egotisms and our interests; we must cross the barriers of incomprehension and of mutual diffidence; we must climb over the walls of fear and hate that still divide us: God gives us the ability to do this, the God that knocked down, every difference and every distance, reconciling Heaven with earth, the Creator with creature, making them coincide, making them One!

May the Lord Jesus, give us the graces to be attentive disciples of His example, in order for us to be, in Him and like Him, craftsmen of reconciliation and peace.

Communities Across the Nation Work to Bring Awareness

Indiana



Indianapolis - A power point presentation of the Christian exodus from the Holy Land was given by Fr. Peter in early October at the Hillcrest Country Club in Indianapolis. Mr. & Mrs. David Kinder, the sponsors for this event, are pictured above as they receive a relic crucifix from Jerusalem.

Georgia



Atlanta - A meeting of the Core Group of the Atlanta Chapter of FFHL met in middle October to discuss plans for next year's fund-raiser event in Atlanta which has been set for September 24, 2005. The group has been quite successful in providing scholarships via their fund raising projects. Other core members not present were Mr. & Mrs. John Gillin and Mr. & Mrs. Michael Aquino.

Arizona



Tucson - The Arizona State Council members of the Knights of Columbus, including Jim Butsback, District Deputy #6, State Deputy, Pedro Najera and State Chaplain, Rev. Patrick Crino were among some of the Knights in attendance at a talk by Fr. Peter Vasko, President of FFHL.



Tucson - FFHL's Board of Trustee member, Dr. Christopher Maloney and Mrs. Maloney, held a special reception for Fr. Peter at their residence. Some twenty-five people attended the reception and later Fr. Peter spoke about the issues facing the Christians in the Holy Land. Pictured above are some of the people who attended.

Pilgrimages to Benefit the Work of the Franciscan Foundation

Join us on a pilgrimage of faith to the Holy Land, Jordan or the Marian Shrines.

- February 17-28, 2005 – Holy Land with Fr. Dave Hellman. Guided by Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM
- October 2005 – Marian Shrines – Fatima and Lourdes with Fr. Jack Druding, Atlanta Georgia
- November 10-22, 2005 – Holy Land and Jordan with Fr. Loyd Morris. Guided by Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM

These pilgrimages exploring the Holy Land, Jordan and the Marian Shrines will provide an opportunity to open a new chapter in your own faith journey and your own response to God's generous grace. **Now is the time to reach out in support of our Palestinian Christians. Your presence can make a difference.**

For information or to receive a brochure call toll free (866) 905-3787

*Upper: Pilgrims kneel at the altar marking the site of the Arch Angel Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary
Lower: A view of the Old City walls. In the background you can see the Church of the Dormition*



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