



# FRIENDS OF THE HOLY LAND

## Life in the Holy Land gets harder, the need for your help grows daily

Since FHL was established just six years ago to help and support the Christian people and communities in the Holy Land, life has gradually become more and more difficult for them. As a result there is more and more need for our help, and we're asking you, our many loyal Friends, to do everything you can to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters there.

No-one can avoid the stories and images coming from the Middle East every day, and no-one who's concerned about the Christians of the Holy Land can fail to wonder how even these extraordinarily brave, resilient people, with their 2,000 year history as Christians in the land where our faith began, deal with the ever-increasing tensions in the region. Worse still, as we can see, those tensions are now playing out in towns and villages in the West Bank and beyond.



Here at FHL we regularly hear of increasing concern about developments across the Middle East, and of the pressures that prompt Christians to consider emigration, for the chance of a better life, and to see their children grow up in peace. FHL's principal objective is the maintenance of a secure and thriving Christian community there, so we must do more to ensure that can happen. We cannot allow the Holy Land to become a museum of a Christian past.

**Please - give what you can, because every day that passes sees more Christians, especially the poor and the elderly, finding the daily struggle too much for them. And thank you for all the help you've given them in the past. We can assure you of their gratitude and their prayers.**

*Photograph: five boys at the School of Joy, a much-needed school for children with special needs supported by FHL since our foundation in 2009.*

### How can FHL send an extra £1572 a year to Christians in the Holy Land at no cost to anyone?

We can, if everyone to whom we now post this newsletter gets it electronically instead. It's the money we'd save on printing and postage! Please email the office- [friendsoftheholylan@btconnect.com](mailto:friendsoftheholylan@btconnect.com) - with your email address.

### *FHL's Objectives*

- to raise awareness of the challenges facing the Christians of the Holy Land
- to encourage prayers for their intentions
- to generate financial resources to give them a sustainable future
- to encourage visits to the Holy Land to meet local Christians

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## A request for Monthly Giving

**FHL has a moral commitment to continue regular help to the neediest Christian families, month after month. Standing orders let us plan ahead.**

# FHL in the UK

## Chairman's message



Each Christmas, all who have journeyed on pilgrimage to the Holy Land reap further rewards from their visit. Every Christmas card we receive, every carol that we sing and hear, every newspaper we open or image we see on television or on-line encouraging us to spend at Christmas, triggers memories of what we saw and experienced in the Holy Land.

It may be that the singing of the Shepherd's Carol, glossed over with Hollywood tinsel for our western audience, is dismissed because we recall the rock and exposure of the hillside that we visited. Certainly the atmosphere in Bethlehem is a short mental jump to the Roman oppression when 'Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census'. But above all, the crib scenes in our churches bring our memories of Nativity Square and the needs of our brothers and sisters in the modern Holy Land flooding in - memories we're privileged to have and share with our fellow pilgrims.

Part of my task in this message is to thank you for the involvement that brought you these memories, to thank everyone involved in FHL's past year of successful endeavour, to encourage continued involvement, and to remind you that the Lord seems always to provide a response and reward to those undertaking His work.

Let me also give you an insight into the strategic way forward that we hope and pray will be successful, so that you don't see my message as thrashing the willing horse! We see, and FHL's strategic plan guides us in this, that our income, outgoings and areas of activity will increase, based in the main in extending into areas now untapped. Although this financial year we reported a 36% growth of income year on year, we have a huge way to go before we can claim to have FHL supporters across the whole of the United Kingdom.

We hope that our current Friends will maintain their commitment and support, and we plan to make new Friends to provide us with our planned growth. To that end we continue to expand our volunteer organisation of Regional Directors, Diocesan Co-ordinators and Ambassadors. We are also extending support through the Dioceses of both Anglican and Catholic communities by getting Crib offerings, Advent and Lent Appeals donated to our work in the Holy Land. Most importantly, we are also extending in the Holy Land

to ensure that we can reach more Christians in need. Next year we shall encourage all those with whom we have contact to return to the Holy Land on pilgrimage and encourage others to do the same. Pilgrimage is the prime support for our brothers and sisters in that place, and is desperately needed, both to sustain the economy and to show them our concern and love.

And so my message this year is to wish you every blessing, thank you for all that you do, encourage you to extend awareness of the needs of the Holy Land wherever you can, request your continuing support, and remind you of the personal benefits of pilgrimage.

*Jim Quinn*

## FHL's inspiring film

**Have you seen the FHL film? Has it been shown in your parish? Why not arrange a film evening to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by Christians in the Holy Land? We can supply a DVD, and will be pleased to follow it up with a short presentation and discussion. Please contact FHL's office, 01926 512980, or email [karen.baxter@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk](mailto:karen.baxter@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk).**

## And a recipe

Why not serve a Holy Land treat when you show the film or run an awareness event or group get-together? Here's a simple recipe for cinnamon balls. Traditionally served at Passover, they are now widely served as a treat whenever families gather together.

2 egg whites, 100g caster sugar, 200g ground almonds  
1.5ml ground cinnamon, 2.5ml mixed spice, icing sugar for dusting

Heat the oven (200 Deg C, Gas Mark 6). Whisk the egg whites until very stiff. Whisk in half the sugar, then fold the rest with the ground almonds and spices. With wet hands roll into small balls. Place on a greased baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes. While still warm, dust with icing sugar. Cool on a wire rack.

## An appeal to all Rotarians

Thank you to the Rotarian Clubs who support our work. Peter Rand recently met the President and Committee of the Bethlehem Rotary Club to develop suitable projects in the Holy Land. Please contact the office for the latest developments.

# FHL in the UK

## Pilgrimage - the options

*John Rice, FHL's pilgrimage coordinator, has written about planning your pilgrimage to the Holy Land.*

At this year's Regional Gatherings one of our Friends asked about the high cost of pilgrimages and the availability of a 'budget' option. FHL encourages pilgrimage to the Holy Land as the best way to walk in the footsteps of Christ and the first Christians, and to meet the current Christian population of the Holy Land and see a little of their lives. We thought it may help Friends who are considering a pilgrimage to look a little closer at the options.



*A Pilgrim service on the shores of the Sea of Galilee*

The standard pilgrimage lasts 8-10 days, staying at 3 or 4 star hotels full board, flights with either BA or El Al, air-conditioned coaches, a guide, entry fees to religious sites and all gratuities. There's limited scope for reducing the overall cost, though.

Flights are available with EasyJet, about £100 cheaper than BA or El Al, though passengers pay on board for anything they eat or drink. Groups pay for seats at the time of booking, and any change incurs a charge. Hostel or pilgrim accommodation with religious orders is often just as expensive as the discounted rates tour operators get from hotels, and any kind of self-catering may increase food safety risk without saving money. You could shorten your stay, of course, but once the flight is paid for, many people prefer to spend several days there.

A Christian guide is essential, and indeed it's now a local legal requirement for groups to be accompanied by a guide. Anyway, common sense suggests that it's handy to have someone who speaks English

and Arabic, particularly in an emergency. The use of cheaper coaches raises maintenance and driver competence concerns and passenger safety. Finally, doing away with gratuities flies in the face of one of the objectives of pilgrimage, to support the local Palestinian economy, especially when it is struggling even more.

For many, pilgrimage to the Holy Land comes once in a lifetime. With some research you may find cheaper pilgrimages, but do look carefully at the offer and decide if every detail meets what you need - and please make time to meet the Christians who remain there.

*John Rice*

## How you can help Christians in the Holy Land -

- **FHL's Family Support Fund gives regular help to those families most in need. £90 a month (that's £3 a day) makes a huge difference to feeding the family properly, or keeping them warm during the winter.**
- **We're finding more and more young people who can only attend Christian schools and continue their education with FHL's support. Just £20 a month by standing order (Gift-Aided) will let us help one extra child.**
- **St Martha's House. £15 for each day visit will fund a lady at this wonderful Day Care Centre in Bethlehem.**
- **Don Bosco Vocational College. £10 a week will fund a young person on a nine-month vocational trades course, helping them get long-term employment.**

**Contact FHL's office for details -**

**[friendsoftheholylan@btconnect.com](mailto:friendsoftheholylan@btconnect.com)**

# FHL in the Holy Land

## FHL's team in Bethlehem

*Nancy and Reem, FHL's small team in the Holy Land, recently wrote to us about their work in 2015.*

Reem wrote 'As we're facing a bad political situation here, as well as economic problems, we're now in a very difficult position. This affects our work, as it increases the demands of the poor Christians we help. Don't forget we have high rate of unemployment in the area and this creates social tragedies.'

'We get a variety of people for special needs, the old, middle aged and young. For example, their health problems, operations, medicines, hearing devices, electric and water bills, school and university fees, house repairs. We get emergency cases - sometimes people ask for any help because they have no income or they have no breadwinner to help them. Once we get a new case, we hear their needs, complete application, gather information from trusty people who know them and call the other social associations in the area.



*Reem visiting Rene and her new baby, Nicholas.*

Then we visit the home to see where they live and their conditions, and coordinate with other Christian social associations to share the help we can offer. We discuss the case with FHL's local Chairman, Fr. Jamal, write a summary to the Committee for their meeting and to decide the kind of help needed and how much we can do. We keep the UK office up to date with progress, of course.'

'When we get the approval conformation from the UK Nancy starts to work with the cases. Sometimes we participate with workshops held by other associations, like Caritas Baby Hospital, Daughters of Charity, the Bible College and Franciscan Social Services office, to exchange information.'

'We always follow up the families listed in the family support to decide whether to continue. Unfortunately

not all the applications get help immediately, and a few cases go to waiting list file for those who will be helped in the future, especially the needy families and students.



*Nancy Wahhab, with her new baby boy, Majd.*

Nancy handles payments. 'When FHL's Committee finishes discussing the cases and agrees the amount to pay, and this is confirmed by UK office, I ask the hospitals and the other associations to make sure that the amount we will pay is correct. Then we write the cheque, to the hospital, for example, or the pharmacy, or the beneficiaries, or any institution that we deal with. We always ask the beneficiaries to give receipts. I write the payments and do the bank transfers. I also deal with schools and universities, do all the accountant work and enter data to the accounting system programme and send financial statements to Tony at FHL in the UK and local authorities.'

'We hope to do our best always and keep on helping people. We send our best regards to Friends in UK.'

*Nancy and Reem*

## Norwich Diocese's health project

In 2015 the Diocese of Norwich Lent Appeal chose to fund a 3-year programme to help up to 200 Christian patients a year at the Arab Episcopal Medical Centre in Ramallah. They raised £29,000, and we're grateful to the Bishop, clergy and people of the Diocese. Now this great project is in place, more needy Christians will get first-class medical care, and their health will improve.

The Bishop of Lynn, the Rt Revd Jonathan Meyrick said 'The Lent Appeal has become one of the key planks in our Diocese's outreach to fellow Christians in more desperate parts of the world. It's particularly appropriate when the suffering is in Christ's own homeland. Please continue to pray for the Church in the Holy Land and for the work of FHL.' We hope to get other Dioceses to work with us on similar projects. Can you help?

# FHL in the Holy Land

## An English Christian in Nablus

*Oliver Doyle, from Kenilworth, a keen supporter of FHL, is studying Arabic and Hebrew at the University of London. He's spending this year in Nablus and Jerusalem, and has sent us his thoughts on Christian life in Nablus.*

I've had an interesting four months in the Holy Land since I swapped life on the rainy streets between the colleges of the University of London for the palm tree lined walkways of An-Najah National University's sparkling new campus. It's in Rafidya, once a quiet Christian town, though now an important part of the busy city of Nablus, where both church bells and the call to prayer, *al-adham*, can be heard in beautiful harmony.



*The city of Nablus*

Nablus is wonderful, but quite different from Jerusalem, Bethlehem or Ramallah. Christians aren't even 1% of the population, and while there is a tremendous amount of goodwill towards the Christian community here, being in such a small minority can put a strain on daily life. And as intermarriage is uncommon and unemployment high, many young Christians are leaving Nablus either to start a family or simply to find work elsewhere, with a direct effect on Christian life in the city. As the young move away, those who remain feel uncertain over their future place in the community, and whether Christianity will remain a living part of Nablus's 4000 year history.

However, two characteristics of the Christian community in Nablus have inspired me - hope that this isn't the end for Christianity here, and faith in the saving grace of Our Lord. In this land Christianity is not a cultural phenomenon of secularised society, as we often feel it is in Europe. Here it's all that people have to sustain them throughout the hard times brought about by the occupation and blockade. In Nablus faith and hope are not empty words falling

on deaf ears during a Sunday service, they're the most fundamental expression of the Christians of Nablus. This shows in every part of Christian life here.



*The Greek Orthodox Church of St Photini at Jacob's Well, Nablus*

Families with six or seven children still pray together before meals, and still join together every Sunday to go to church. As children become adults, they don't leave their faith behind, they take it further, putting their church at the centre of their social setting so that they can grow in their faith.

So how do those of us living in Britain respond when confronted with such a pure form of Christianity? Perhaps we should realise that this Christianity exists in a very vulnerable state, and that despite the faith and the hope, which are both found in such abundance, without proper care it could all come to an end. It is for this reason that FHL's work is of such high importance to the Christian community in Nablus. With the help of FHL, Christians living in Nablus have started to find opportunities for employment and opportunities to fulfil the material needs that they cannot fulfil themselves.

I've come to realise that if we want to experience the faith and hope of the Christians here we must live in solidarity with them, because, although we might have more abundant lives, they have the more abundant faith.

*Oliver Doyle*

## Chester Diocese - 'FHL Parishes'

Thanks to FHL's Diocesan Coordinator, Revd Lynn Boyle, every parish has been invited to be a 'Friends of the Holy Land Parish' and sponsor a needy family with £100 a month. Each parishioner is asked to give just £1 every time they visit church - it's that simple!

# FHL in the Holy Land

## Taybeh

Fr. Johnny has now moved from Nablus to Taybeh, where Peter Rand met him on a recent visit. Taybeh, 45 minutes drive north of Bethlehem and with a population of 1,300, is entirely Christian, and is famous for its brewery and its ceramic factory producing the Taybeh peace lamps. The parish runs two guest houses



for pilgrims as well as a care home. Fr. Johnny's first task is to get to know his 'flock', and he's spending time visiting them in their homes and identifying the needy families who might benefit from FHL's support. There have always been warm relations with the residents of the local settlement, and many young Taybeh people have jobs refurbishing houses there. Others travel to Ramallah and Jericho for work, but there is still a high level of unemployment in the village.

## Nazareth

We've been careful to put down roots in whatever area of the Holy Land we've been working. 'Spreading ourselves too thin can reduce the value of what we do' said Peter Rand. 'It's essential that all applications are fully verified, and this means having FHL people on the ground who know the individual circumstances of families and know the most needy.

This is why we began in Bethlehem and the surrounding area six years ago before moving out into the towns and villages, most recently to Ramallah and Zababdeh, and, of course, into Gaza. It's now time to understand the different challenges facing Christians living in Israel beyond Jerusalem. Nazareth, with a 30% Christian population, is an obvious first step.

Following a recent visit and meetings with Anglican and Latin Parish Priests and other community leaders, we now have a better idea of how FHL can support the specific difficulties faced by local Christian families. Many of these are caused by the increased cost of living in Israel, and the difficulty



of finding work. Fr Nael Rahmoun, Parish Priest at Christ Church Anglican Parish in Nazareth, told Peter Rand that he was shocked when he returned to the town recently, where he was born, to find so many families in real need of help. We'll work with the

local community to identify appropriate projects for support from our generous donors in the UK. Thank you again.'

## Gaza – a mix of projects

We're anxious to offer support for the 1,300 Christians remaining in Gaza, a tiny minority in a population of 1.8 million. In the last 12 - 18 months this has ranged from repairing houses for those families who suffered damage in the most recent conflict, funding a psycho-social programme at the local parish school to help young people overcome the trauma of war, providing employment to five young Christians for two years on a project improving communications among the clergy and parishioners across the Middle East, to funding 10 students at Gaza University for a three year programme and contributing to the fees for 16 students for the last two academic years at the Rosary Sisters School. Please remember the people of Gaza in your prayers - their lives are exceptionally difficult.

## Westminster Pilgrimage

FHL Vice Chairman Peter Rand and our Holy Land Committee Chairman, Fr. Jamal, met the Westminster pilgrims towards the end of their autumn 2015 pilgrimage. 'Between them they shared with Bishop Nicholas Hudson and all pilgrims the reality of life on the ground for the local Christian community, and how everyone could continue to help them when they return home' said Peter Rand. 'All the pilgrims were very moved by what they had witnessed, and many told me how they were determined not to forget their Christian brothers and sisters after their pilgrimage. We've had offers to sponsor young people at the School of Joy and ladies at St. Martha's House, both visited by the Westminster pilgrims during their stay in Bethlehem. They also bought plenty of candles, made as part of an FHL employment initiative'.

# FHL in the Holy Land

Here are a few of the people helped by Friends of the Holy Land. Life there is increasingly hard, so please help us help more needy Christians have a secure future.



Nadir and Shireen with their four children. Jussian and Selena's school fees are sponsored by two FHL Friends in the North West of England. Shireen hopes to start work for three months teaching English, Arabic and Maths, covering maternity leave. She'll be paid around £300 a month, though travel to the school will cost her nearly £130.



John's school fees are sponsored by FHL. He's 11, and does extra work at school to encourage him to study. He likes Real Madrid, and enjoys the Scouts and drums. John has two older brothers and a sister.



Rimon was a cleaner in a hospital, and now delivers medicines to the wards. Mansour, aged 21, was in a car accident five years ago and has liver problems. They've received FHL Family Support for three years



Elva's son, Johnny, recently died suddenly. Now she spends her time making rosaries and bead bracelets and necklaces to sell to her friends. FHL has helped her with Family Support for three years.



Siham and her mother have FHL Family Support. She's been disabled with a serious spine injury since a baby. She's often in hospital with leg problems, and walks with crutches. She also has a painful peptic ulcer. Her mother also suffers poor health.

## JUST A FEW POUNDS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Please donate to FHL and help our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land. Please consider -

**A one-off donation.** Sent a cheque payable to Friends of the Holy Land to the office (address below).

**A regular payment by standing order to help FHL plan ahead.** Ask the office for a form, or download from the website by clicking the 'donate' button.

**Gift-Aid your donation** if you're a UK taxpayer. That way your donation is worth a further 25% to FHL. Complete a Gift Aid form and send your donation to the office.

**Ask for donations to FHL** instead of presents at your next celebration.

**Leave a legacy to FHL** in your will.

**Ask for a retiring collection in your parish.**

Contact the office, and we'll send you a supply of Gift Aid envelopes.

**Donate to FHL on-line** through BT MyDonate by visiting our website.

## What makes FHL so special?

100% of all donations from individuals, FHL Groups, dioceses, parishes and charitable trusts goes to needy people and projects in the Holy Land. Nothing is held back for overheads, thanks to the generosity of a charitable trust that continues to fund our modest overheads (13% of donations in 2014/15).

90% of FHL funds go to individual named families, all verified by our small team in Bethlehem or our partners elsewhere in the Holy Land.

FHL recognises the importance of institutions to maintain a Christian presence in the Holy Land and their work for the whole community, and we support the invaluable help the give to our Christian brothers and sisters.

**If you'd like further information on FHL or for one of our team to visit your parish to make a short presentation or address a group of parishioners, call the FHL office on 01926 512980. Speak to Karen Baxter or one of our volunteers, or email [vicki.urch@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk](mailto:vicki.urch@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk)**

## FHL's Patrons

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## Prayer of Approach

Spirit of the living God,  
Come afresh on your holy land.  
Help your people to restore broken relationships.  
Give them patience to break down barriers of suspicion and mistrust; ability to discern personal prejudices and the courage to overcome fear.  
Teach them to respect each other's integrity and rights so that your kingdom may be established on earth.  
For Jesus' sake. Amen.  
(*Rt Rev Riah Abu El-Assal*)

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