

February 2017 Monthly Update

'Gaza - 2 million living in a cage'

FHL Vice-Chairman Peter Rand has just returned from Gaza. Whilst there he witnessed FHL projects supporting Gaza's tiny and beleaguered Christian community. Covering an area the size of the Isle of Wight, Gaza is the most densely populated country in the world, occupied by nearly 2 million people, with the Christian community estimated to be a little over 1,000. Cut off from Israel by a 1 kilometre 'no go zone', only those with permits are allowed to enter, and these are increasingly difficult to obtain, even for aid agency workers.

Peter was immensely privileged to make this trip as part of the 'Holy Land Coordination', a pilgrimage, organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Attended by bishops from around the world the pilgrimage demonstrated active support to the Christian community in the land of Jesus' birth. Peter reports...

'The pilgrimage included time in Bethlehem, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and Hebron. Whilst in Jerusalem we met with Archbishop Suheil at St. George's, the home of the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem. We also spent two days revisiting Gaza, where FHL provides employments for 21 young Christians in four separate institutions, including the Ahli Arab Hospital. We also fund 10 students at Gaza University. I met 15 of these beneficiaries who are extremely grateful for the support provided to them; without doubt, it has transformed their lives.

What has changed since my last visit 12 months ago? Not much. 60% of young people are unemployed. 70% of the population are dependent on UN for food. Electricity is still only available for 6-8 hours in every 24, but solar panels, such as those installed at the Hospital, ease the situation in a few cases. Water is still the greatest challenge, being in short supply and often polluted. 32% of the children admitted to the hospital are undernourished. Many families still live in temporary shelters as construction materials are banned from entry. Over 250,000 children remain in need of psychosocial support following the conflict in July/August 2014.

Whatever FHL has been able to achieve in Gaza during the last 30 months, whether house repairs, psychosocial support, employment or education, it is having a significant impact and transforming lives. With your help our mission over there will continue. Wherever I went, the power of Christian witness was inspired by Christian values.'



The Erez Crossing into Gaza and evidence of the continuing need for reconstruction.

Creating Impact with a 'Strapline'

Communications Manager Marion Homer has been working with FHL Trustees and Management Committee to create a short, simple line to sum up the charity's work. Sometimes referred to as a 'strap line', such a phrase seeks to encapsulate everything there is to say about an organisation. In today's fast moving world, conveying such a message quickly and with impact is important; and in the digital world, it is vital. A charity has no more than a few seconds to engage with potential donors and encourage them to read more as they click on a web site or browse through social media.

FHL is keen to ensure its strap line sounds positive and reflects our Christian heritage. After some healthy debate, involving trustees on pilgrimage in the Holy Land at the time, the line 'Giving Hope to Vulnerable Christians' has been selected. Using the word 'hope' was felt to be important; providing both a spiritual and a positive dimension, whilst the word 'vulnerable' hints at both the vulnerability in numbers of Christian communities as well as the physical vulnerability of individual Christians. The line was checked with members of FHL's Bethlehem based Committee, to ensure Holy Land Christians would feel comfortable with its use. FHL are pleased to report they fully supported it. We hope you feel the same.

Logo Development

Design work was then required to ensure the strapline sat well with the FHL logo, for both screen and printed communications. This new 'identity' will be included in our website and can be seen on the header to this Update and also on the exhibition stand currently on display at the Ecumenical Bishops' Conference at Oscott, Sutton Coldfield.



The new FHL 'pop up' exhibition stand showing the new 'strap line' and slightly revised logo.

House Refurbishment in Beit Jala

FHL is pleased to share news of a house redevelopment project for a Christian family living in Beit Jala. Situated six miles south of Jerusalem the West Bank town of Beit Jala lies within the Bethlehem Governate. Its population numbers around 15,670 and is majority Christian; made up of a mix of Greek Orthodox, Catholics and Lutherans. The town's Christian community traces its origins back to the five Aramaic tribes who lived in the area since the 7th century. St Nicholas church, said to be built above the cave in which St Nicholas lived in the 4th century, dominates the Beit Jala skyline. Each 19th December the whole town, including many from the Muslim community, join together to celebrate St Nicholas' Day.

The FHL Bethlehem Committee identified the Saliba Bader family as needing significant help to improve their living conditions. Initial reports revealed water coming in through the roof, leaking pipes and damp. 54-year-old Saliba lives with his wife Kawthar and their two grown up sons. Youngest son Majd is 20 and in good health, but unfortunately their oldest son George passed away last year, following an operation for a heart problem. 23-year-old Alaa, suffers with epilepsy and mental health issues, and attends a school to help with his specific needs. Saliba and Kawthar both work; Kawthar works at the College de Freres School in Bethlehem and Kawthar as a cleaner. Their small income cannot meet the families many educational and medical demands, and they are unable to make any changes to improve their appalling living conditions. FHL's Bethlehem committee will be managing the refurbishment and we will bring you news as the building works develop.



Rooms from the home of the Saliba Bader family showing the poor state of repair.

Kingdom Season Awareness Raising in Ely

The Kenilworth office has seen a steady stream of donations from the Cambridge area in the last few weeks, evidence of awareness raising in the Diocese of Ely during 'Kingdom Season'. Not really, a 'season', like Epiphany or Lent, the 4 weeks starting All Saints Day (1st Nov) marks the last 4 weeks of the Church's year, and presents an opportunity to ponder the mystery of the Kingdom that beckons us. For Bishop Stephen Conway of Ely and FHL Diocesan Coordinator Revd Alan Partridge, this more reflective period, before the business and excitement of Advent, provided an ideal moment to ensure every Parish in the Diocese was aware of the work of FHL. The focus of activity was not on making financial donations but on taking time to learn, reflect and pray, trusting to the Holy Spirit to guide parishioners on what to do next. The FHL office supported this initiative by sending over 100

DVDs of the FHL film 'The Suffering Church' to Ely. (*To see the film for yourself click here <https://vimeo.com/117795365>*). The Diocese then, with an enclosed letter from Bishop Stephen encouraging every Parochial Parish Council (also known as PCCs) to view the film, posted the DVDs out. The results of this quiet initiative speak for themselves; donations from Ely keep coming in and the Parish Church of St John the Evangelist, located in the south of Cambridge, selected FHL as its Lent Charity. If any other group, Parish or Diocese would like similar support for this simple form of awareness raising please call the office on 01926 512980 or email Vicki Urch on vicki.urch@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk .

Crib Boxes

May we remind supporters to empty FHL crib boxes well before the year-end on 31st March 2017? If you are a Diocesan Coordinator, or have a crib box for collecting change for Friends of the Holy Land, please empty it and send a cheque to the FHL office at the address below. Crib boxes are an important part of our fundraising and we thank all those who support us in this very practical way. If you need labels with the new FHL Office address, or have any queries regarding the crib boxes please contact Karen at the office on 01926 512980 or email office@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk

Diary Dates

FHL Conference, Lambeth Palace Thursday 9th March 10am-4pm

All FHL Diocesan Coordinators and Communication Officers have been invited to the FHL conference to be held on 9th March and hosted by The Rt. Revd. John Inge, Bishop of Worcester. The conference venue is once again to be the prestigious surroundings of Lambeth Palace and the focus will be 'working together to better support our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land'. Our headline speaker will be The Very Revd Hosam Naoum, Dean of St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem and member of the FHL Holy Land Committee.

2017FHL National Gathering Kenilworth Saturday 30th September

The date for this year's National Gathering has been set as Saturday 30th September, 10.30am-4.30pm and the venue will be St Francis of Assisi Church, 110 Warwick Rd, Kenilworth CV8 1HL. More details will follow in due course but please mark this date in your diary



The Very Revd Hosam Naoum, Dean of St George's Cathedral
Photo credit Diocese of Jerusalem