

National Gathering 2017 Summary

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Overview of FHL in the UK and the Holy Land

Peter Rand FHL Vice Chair and Executive Trustee

FHL in the UK

- People
- Prayer
- Patrons
- Pilgrimages
- Parishes
- Pounds

Income £682,830

Grants to Holy Land £551,764

Up 22%

Investing in people, Investing in office structure, Investing in marketing, Investing in fundraising

FHL in the Holy Land

- People
- Parishes
- Pounds
- Progress

looking ahead

- Parish to Parish Partnerships

- Zababdeh Medical Centre

- Ramallah Vocational College

- Employment – Gaza/Nazareth

First hand experiences from the West Bank

Summary of Presentation by Husam Wahhab – Member of FHL Holy Land Committee

The socio-political situation in the Middle East is not going to get any better. As a result, emigration will remain the easiest choice to get away from such a situation. The Church must not limit herself to a purely human logic, but, on the contrary, inspired by the gospel, she must point out the right choice even if it is difficult: “Enter by the narrow gate” Says the Lord.

It is the duty therefore of the Church (including its people) to educate the faithful, accept the cross and carry it with dignity. But teaching is not the only way to strengthen the faith and hope of the faithful. Inspired by the example of the prophet Jeremiah who buys his cousin’s field when the Holy City was besieged, thus the Church is called on to carry out acts of this type: prophetic acts that give hope to the faithful.

Challenges that face the Palestinian people:

- Lack of Land - Settlements surrounding Bethlehem and various West Bank cities continue to suffocate the cities and take land away from Palestinians. The Wall dips into Bethlehem, surrounding Rachel’s tomb, which was once a major tourist attraction, ripping away olive groves, and isolating families and communities.
- Restricted Movement - Checkpoints monitor and restrict our movement.
- Crumbling Economy and Infrastructure.
- Insecurity and Instability.
- Unknown Future.

Restricted Movement:

- These checkpoints not only exist along the green line, they are present throughout the West Bank.
- Road blocks are also set up in the West Bank to prevent passage on certain roads deemed only for Israelis and Internationals, hence restricting movement.
- Closures also restrict the movement of Palestinians. Although many Palestinians used to work in Jerusalem where they could receive higher wages, the road is now closed, and only Palestinians with permits can cross. This not only has devastating economic effects, it also divides families. In the event of a Jewish holiday or escalation of violence a complete closure is implemented, not even allowing those with permits to enter.

First hand experiences from the West Bank (cont'd)

Summary of Presentation by Husam Wahhab – Member of FHL Holy Land Committee

Challenges in the Economic situation:

- Bethlehem suffers from high unemployment like most of the Palestinian cities
- The tourism industry is seasonal and affected by the situation in the Middle East
- The social and medical services that should be given by the Palestinian Authority are not given as needed due to the unstable financial condition of the Palestinian Authority. Also, in Palestine we do not have a social security system that guarantees basic needs

Lack of water resources:

- The Israelis control our water, and as a result we have a water crisis every summer. Water from our reservoirs go to keep lush settlements green, while our tanks run dry.
- The people are forced to get water from water tankers. This costs them almost four times the regular price of water supplied by the water authority through the mains pipes.

Unknown future:

- We are unsure when/if we will have our own state, whether today's calm will bring tomorrow's storm, or if we will suddenly all become refugees. The only thing predictable in our future is that it is unpredictable.
- As a result of the pressures on the society, day to day life on the ground has become tense. Factionalism and tribalism is on the rise, so too is stress related illness. Feelings of hopelessness pervade the society, and emigration is on the rise. The population raised under the culture of violence of the occupation has led to a pressure-cooker situation where conflict escalates very quickly
- number of Palestinian Christians have chosen and will continue to pursue emigration as long as their quality of life remains intolerable. There have been five inter-related reasons why the Palestinian Christians are leaving: political instability, socio-economic conditions (de- development) the lack of jobs, the lack of affordable and adequate housing, and the limited educational opportunities.
- Nevertheless, a number of committed Palestinian Christians are making significant effort to fight for justice and democracy and to remain in Palestine and rebuild their nation, communities, and churches. To become effective, Palestinian Christian were rooted in a deep sense of personal faith, political commitment, Christian identity, and worked on economic support from Christians around the globe, a dedication to non-violent direct action, and a vision for the development of a secular, democratic Palestinian state

The demographic situation has changed since the mid-nineties. Today, we speak of the Palestinian Christians being less than 1.5% of the entire population.

The decline is not simply due to emigration, but, it is also because Palestinian Christians tend to marry later in life which means the number of children per Christian family is lower than that among the average family in the general Palestinian population.



Nablus has hardly any Christians left but the wider area around Nablus such as Rafidia still has a Christian population.

Taybeh 1,100 Christians

Ramallah 6,450 Christians
About 1.017 Christians

Jerusalem
Population 850,000
8,000 Christians

Bethlehem 6,600 Christians,
Beit Jala 6,343 Christians
Beit Sahour 7,335 Christians

Gaza Population C.1.9
million only 1,000
Christians

* Mount Sinai and St. Catherine's Monastery are further south, in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. See theholyland.net

First hand experiences from the West Bank (cont'd)

Summary of Presentation by Husam Wahhab – Member of FHL Holy Land Committee

Palestinian Christians are an active, dynamic, constructive part of the Palestinian community, and a valuable asset that should be reserved and kept in the home land. Churches should enforce more power to enhance the co-existence within the Palestinian community.

Churches with different denominations in Palestine should work collectively to achieve more extensive developmental results.

Christianity should not be politicized. Religion teachings and Christian faith should be embodied only to support community development.

Religion teaching as a whole must be moderate to suite and be valid for every time and place. A new religious discourse with balanced and moderate interpretation that addresses the mind is needed to achieve positive change.

Instead, we focus on encouraging Christians to remain in the land of their birth by supporting them to build resilient and self-sufficient communities, in what can often be a challenging environment.

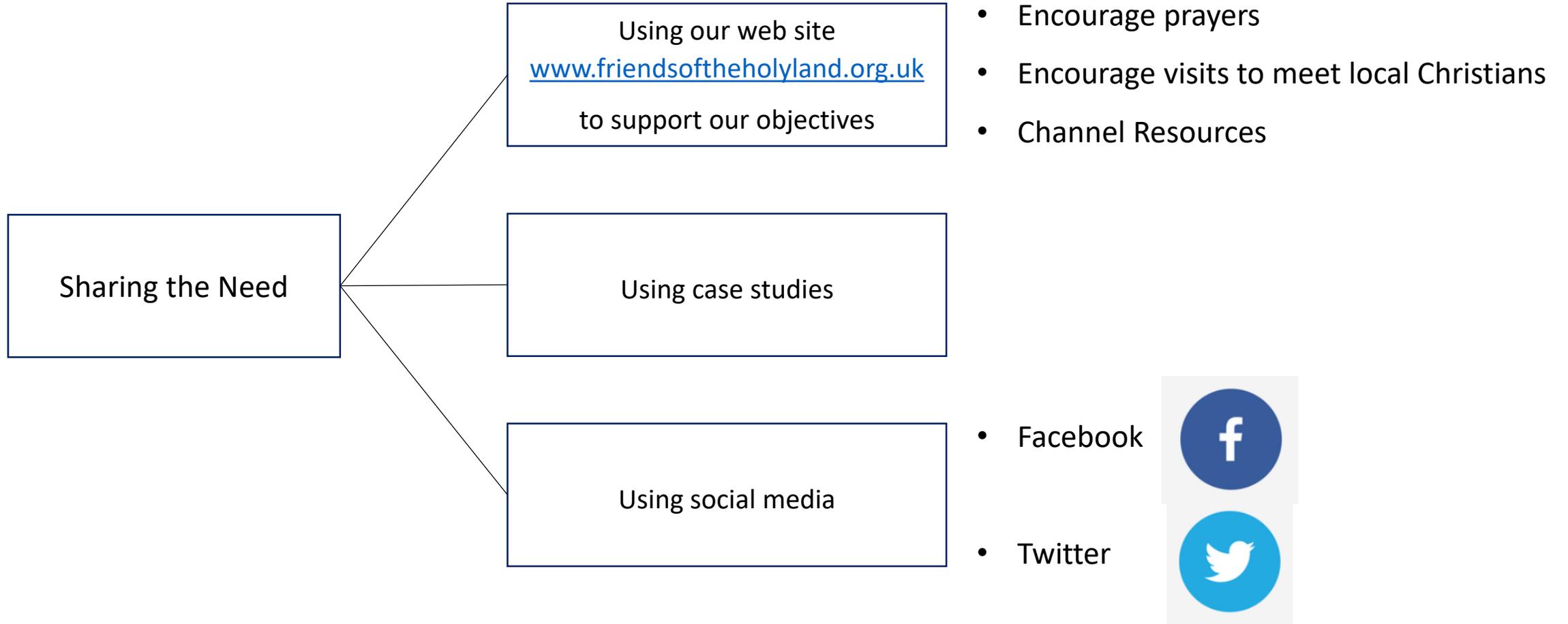
Church should open avenues of international relationships with other world churches and communities to promote pilgrimage to the holy land that creates more solidarity towards the Christian presence.

Our goal is to continue our presence in the Middle East and develop our programs in a way that attracts more and more people to be witnesses to our Lord Jesus and to Spread the Word of God in our community and to live our Christian life in pride in order to be a living example to our future generation.

“Thank you from me to everyone on behalf of the Christians in the Holy Land - Pray for Us, Spread the word among your parishes about what I have shared with you and encourage you to support FHL”.

Leveraging Social Media

Marion Homer – Communications Manager



Please help us share our work

Sharing Ideas:

Gail Brown from Wyre Forest described the Dental Project. Following a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Gail, a dentist, suggested this project and \$7,000 was raised to fund it. Two local dentists were employed to go into schools to teach dental health and give out toothbrushes and paste. They also checked the children's teeth and recommended treatment where necessary. This has been very successful and cost-effective. A number of schools have benefitted and it will be rolled out to others in the future.

Steve Fitzgerald from Lichfield described how the Lichfield group have been running Olive Wood sales in their parish for a number of years. These have been very successful generating work for craftsmen in the Holy Land. He is working with Pam (who is responsible for the Olive Wood sales at FHL) and the supplier to try to increase the range of products that are offered. He feels that sales could be increased by offering an additional range of kitchen goods for example chopping boards, graters and bowls. He encouraged everyone to host Olive Wood sales in their parishes particularly before Christmas.

Chris Haines from Kenilworth described her visits to the Holy Land with her husband, Andrew. They go out to the Holy Land for 8 – 12 weeks each year to work at the Garden Tomb. This gives them a wonderful opportunity to meet local people. She showed pictures of a lovely lady they had met. She had suffered from a stroke and was being cared for by her two sons.

Bev Jameson from Worcester went to the Holy Land with the Worcester / Birmingham Ecumenical Pilgrimage which visited many FHL projects. She said that what we can do may only be a drop in the ocean but it gives hope to people. And hope is infectious and encourages others to get involved. One group have started knitting jumpers for babies, someone else asked for donations to FHL rather than birthday presents. She encouraged everyone to remember the Christians in the Holy Land in their prayers every day.

Jenny Roper from Solihull described how her group had raised £900 by hosting a strawberry tea. This was quite easy to organise and very popular. They also raise money by offering coffee and cake after one mass per week, this raised £500 last year. They also raised £400 with a pancake lunch on Shrove Tuesday. Creating an opportunity for the community to share time together and have some fun.

Pat Revans from Wallasey spoke about engaging with young people. He said that if we don't win the battle to engage with the young then we won't win the war. Later this month 20 young people from Shrewsbury Diocese are going on a pilgrimage. He encouraged everyone to work with the head teachers and heads of R.E. at their local colleges to get the message out to young people. He asked for prayers for their youth pilgrimage.

John Scanlan from Westminster described the fund-raising lunch that he organises with the Papal Nuncio. This is a joint venture with the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre and he is waiting to get a date for another one next year. These raise about £5,000. He is also hoping to organise a dinner in Westminster Cathedral Hall with the support of the Cardinal to raise funds and awareness.

Answering the call for help

Rev'd Lynn Boyle

Lynn had just returned the previous day from a pilgrimage. She described meeting Christians, Jews and Muslims, all wanting to live in peace. She felt that the Christians in the Holy Land are feeling disheartened but they have a strong faith and believe that the Lord will provide. She quoted Dean Hosam who said, "If you put your head down you cannot see hope, you just see death." She described how pilgrims are profoundly changed by their encounter with Christ present in the people of Bethlehem.

She was very surprised when their Christian guide, who lives in Jerusalem, was unaware of the situation in Bethlehem when he visited with them. Although he lives only 10 minutes away, he had no idea of the situation behind the wall.

Lynn talked about the needs of a number of people that she had met in the Holy Land and how she was determined to help them. She suggested that supporters ask to make a presentation at their local primary school about the School of Joy and have a collection for them. We need to make the most of every opportunity even if it means taking risks. We need to 'Put out into the deep'.

Many pilgrims see and appreciate the buildings but they do not see the living stones, the Christians in the Holy Land. We need to be Christ at work in their lives. She urged everyone to go and see for themselves, to go on pilgrimage and encounter Christ as they have never encountered Him before.

Q&A

Question 1: I went on pilgrimage in 2007 and at that time the environment in Bethlehem was very depressing. There was a lot of litter in the streets and it was dirty. Has this changed?

Answer: Husam said that the situation is improving now as they want to make it more attractive for visitors. Water shortages mean that it is impractical to have pot plants. There is still a need to educate the locals. The general atmosphere is much improved. Money has been raised to develop the roads. They just need more visitors to make the city come alive again. Peter said that in 2010 this was the case, but it is not just about money. He thought that at the time residents had little hope and so didn't care about their environment. Now the attitude is very different.

Question 2: I was surprised that Husam said that there are no longer any Christian families left in Nablus. What is the situation there?

Answer: Nablus itself does not have any Christians left but the 'suburbs' of Rafidia and some others still have a number of Christians. Husam described how there has been an increase in fundamentalism in the area and many Christians have left. Fr Jonny has moved to Taybeh.

Question 3: This is more of a comment – I am a Traidcraft representative and we sell Palestinian olive oil, dates, cous cous, herbs and soap on our stall.

Answer: This is a good idea. We need to increase our range of products and be better at looking for opportunities to sell Palestinian products to support their economy – Traidcraft stalls are a good idea.

Question 4: Another comment – If you shop on line then access the on-line stores via Easy Fund-Raising and FHL will receive a percentage of what you spend. It is very easy to do and costs us nothing. (Jenny Roper)

Answer: Yes, we encourage everyone to use this facility. FHL has an account. www.easyfundraising.org.uk It allows you to select the charity you wish to receive the donation and then gives you links to the shops to shop with, it includes Amazon, John Lewis supermarkets and many more. You just need to remember to give online shopping via easyfundraising website to keep adding small amounts to FHL. Easy fundraisng then send us the monies raised every month. We have raised over £800 from this so far.

Question 5: Why don't Palestinians work to improve their own situation like boring wells to produce water and improving hospital facilities?

Answer: Husam: We don't have the means to help ourselves. Everything in the Palestinians territory is controlled by the Israeli authorities. Even to dig a well you have to obtain a permit from them. We have no reservoirs, so all our water has to be bought from the Israeli Water company. This might be running water through our taps or tanks of water when there are shortages. Similarly for electricity, we have no control. VAT and Taxes are collected by the Israelis and they then charge 3% before paying it to the Palestinian authorities. This means that it can be held back if there is any unrest.

The way forward

Summary of actions for attendees

- Raising awareness through prayer, using website resources
- Try to revive Parish Group
- Ask Parish priest for support for FHL
- Share FHL facebook pages and Newsletters
- Increase contributions/standing order
- Volunteer to teach for a term in the Holy Land
- Go on pilgrimage / Organise a pilgrimage
- Introduce FHL to new Parish
- Give more talks about FHL
- Talk to 6th Formers, engage youth via youth workers in Parishes
- Add FHL as partner on own company website
- Sign up to easyfundraising
- Have a social fundraising event at home / use birthday celebration to raise funds for FHL rather than Presents (we have a poster for this)
- Liaise with Churches together
- Share the film

Summary of actions for FHL

- Work with the Methodist Conference
- Make relationships with commercial organisations to generate funds
- Make links with Schools/ 6 form colleges
- Look at setting up a micro loans company
- Work with Youth Pilgrimages
- Do more presentations, approach more churches, sell more olivewood
- Get more Scottish parishes involved
- Generate positive media stories of individuals and families helped
- Ensure we can link up with other FHL supporters in and around local area