



FRIENDS OF THE HOLY LAND

“FRIENDS – HELPING CHRISTIANS IN THE HOLY LAND”

April 2014 update from the FHL

- **Reflections from the Holy Land by Sean Higgins**

Arriving by coach late evening on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, we were at once aware of the special nature of the pilgrimage, walking in the footsteps of Jesus; albeit on a coach! Our first guide, Rami, a well informed and articulate Palestinian Christian living in Beit Sahour provided moving but factual information along our route from Tiberius to the River Jordan via Nazareth, Cana, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Our spiritual director Mgr. Mark Crisp from Wolverhampton provided excellent guidance. Catenian Grand President John Rayer lead by example being the first to launch into hymns and my fellow pilgrims filling the coach, strangers at the airport, were good friends when we parted. From the Jordan crossing over the Allenby Bridge, we were treated to the majestic Biblical scenery of the Hashemite Kingdom and another great guide Mo. We even saw the greening of the desert after four days of rain and the flowering of the national flower of Jordan, the rare Black Iris. Truly, we were blessed with good fortune.

- **Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. 17th May**

Make a note in your diary of an Assembly in Crawley between 10am and 4pm on Saturday 17 May, run by the Pastoral Team at the A&B Diocese. It will ask the question, “How should Christians respond to the challenges in Israel/Palestine?” Speakers will include Canon Anthony Ball, former diplomat in the Middle East and now the Anglican Rector of Worth Church and Mary Lucas, CAFOD’s Programme Manager for the Middle East. Please contact the FHL Office for booking details.

- **Tarantara Charity Concert. Saturday 21st June. Promoted by Worcester FHL**

An evening listening to the wonderful voices of the Tarantara choir. For tickets please contact Marie – mbbh464748@gmail.com See attached flyer.

- **Easter Cards**

Do you send Easter Cards to your friends and family? If not, how about starting this year! For the first time, FHL have ordered a small supply of two different cards from Bethlehem, where they have been designed and printed with all the sales going to support employment in the area and the work of FHL. Packs of 6 cost £2.75 plus postage. An order form with details is attached. Telephone the office or send us an email.

Friends of the Holy Land
2 Station Road, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 1JJ
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Email – friendsoftheholylan@btconnect.com Website – www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk

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- **Mass of Thanksgiving for Cardinal Vincent Nichols**

At the Mass on 30 March at St. Chad's, Chairman Jim Quinn accompanied by FHL Trustee, Norah Whelan received a gift from the Cardinal, being the collection of nearly £30,000 by parishioners in the Birmingham Archdiocese. In responding Jim handed over two plaques from the Holy Land; one from Laila Asfoura on behalf of the Christians in Bethlehem and the other from the Greek and Latin Patriarchs and the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem 'joining with Friends of the Holy Land in offering their congratulations to His Eminence on his designation as a member of the College of Cardinals and offering thanksgiving for his support for the Church in the Holy land and giving him assurances of prayers for his new mission in the Church'. To view some photographs of the occasion click this link to the Flickr Photostream of the Catholic Bishops Conference. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/catholicism/sets/72157643212886063/>

- **A New FHL Year. The start of a 5 Year Plan**

New Year's resolutions do not come bigger than the ones made by FHL Trustees and the Management Committee to grow income and donations by 35% each year until 2019. Peter Rand, Vice Chairman and Executive Trustee says "these are significant targets but if we are to extend our reach to more Christians from poor families across the West Bank and Gaza, in particular, then this is where FHL needs to be in five years time. We have achieved this level of growth every year since 2010, so with everyone's support and effective leadership, I see no reason why we will not just achieve our targets but exceed them".

- **A small office in Bethlehem**

One consequence of our growth is the increase in families we are supporting in the Holy Land. Everyone one has to be verified and, as a result, a small office is opening in Bethlehem. Mirna is our first part-time employee, an Administrator/Secretary who reports to our local Committee.

- **Recent family cases from the many we support each month.**

Two recent emergency cases were approved within 48 hours of them being notified to FHL. Samir Sara suffers from advanced cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. This has left his family without significant income and in serious financial difficulty, as debts for water and electricity have accumulated. The Committee negotiated with the utility companies and the outstanding debt has been paid to relieve pressure on the family at this difficult time. Secondly, the Sa'adi family suffered from a serious fire at their newly built house, following a gas explosion. The mother and daughter are still in hospital following burns to their face and hands whilst trying to extinguish the fire. The original builders are helping to repair the extensive damage and FHL have contributed \$3,000 towards windows and doors.

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Pilgrims' Progress: by Sean Higgins, Director of Development and Pilgrim.

Green was very much in evidence as we left England on St Patrick's day, March 17th and Spring had arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean as we alighted on day one of the pilgrimage at Capernaum and the Primacy of St Peter. A coach full of pilgrims ranging in age from early 50's to early 80's made a twelve day passage through the biblical landscape of the Holy Land, warmly greeted by all we met, including other pilgrimage groups and on day one an Irish soldier from the UN contingent based on the Golan Heights above Galilee; a reminder of the fact that this land has been a troubled home for many since the time of Christ 2000 years ago and remains so today. Within this context, the quiet dignity of many was very moving.

The calm of the Lake, including quiet reflection during our short boat journey and the pertinent daily readings on the shore side, would be in sharp contrast to the noise and bustle of Jerusalem and a visit to the Wailing Wall, above which stands the Dome of the Rock (Al-Aqsa Mosque) and on to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, all features of the historical sites which make this City a centre for all three Abrahamic Faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The noise and smells of the cobbled streets, the press of one person against another at the pinch points created by the barriers to movement, made our commemoration of the Stations of the Cross feel as it may have been at the time when Christ walked the route. Soldiers, noisy crowds, vendors and hawkers plying their trade all created the cacophony of a Biblical scene.

And so to Bethlehem and the practical aspects of support from FHL and its supporters. Over dinner at the reception for the Pilgrims at the comfortable Manger Square Hotel, a small example of the practical side of our work was in evidence as a coloured souvenir candle, made in Bethlehem and standing no more than three inches high, was given to everyone courtesy of Laila Tours. Wearing my 'sales hat', I then sold three cases of additional candles to my new friends, raising much needed revenue for this job creating initiative. I even agreed to transport fellow pilgrim Frank Miller's two large ones back to Solihull in my suitcase, customer service! My third visit to the Holy Land but my first as a pilgrim, I was struck by the nature of the wonderful shared experience with a group and the companionship it engendered. Daily prayer and reflection was juxtaposed by the stark reality of life for Palestinian Christians in the UN defined Occupied Territories of the West Bank and in Israel. Our coach passed freely through check points and borders in contrast to the restrictions placed on the indigenous population of Palestine (or Judea and Samaria as the Israeli's refer to the territory.) So Cheers to Rami, Shukran, thank you to our Arab drivers and guides and Salaam Alaikum, Shalom, Peace be with You as Easter celebrations approach. What a journey; one that everyone should experience. (A brief visit by me to Fr Imad Twal at the Peace Centre in Jordan will be covered next month.)

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