

## A MESSAGE FROM BETHLEHEM



Dear Friends,

Bethlehem is the symbol of peace and forgiveness, and the cradle of the three monotheistic religions.

Bethlehem was known to exist in ancient history 3000 years before the birth of Christ. As the Franciscan Pastor of Bethlehem city and the Church of the Nativity, and a member of HLCS Board of Directors, I would like to briefly address the issue of the Christian exodus.

People of the Holy Land are losing their jobs, and closing down their businesses because of the regular closure of the Palestinian territories. Such closures are also disrupting the educational system, leaving our children and youths without education.

The exodus of Christians has accelerated in the past two years as dozens have been driven out for political and economic reasons. It is well known that many Christians depend on tourism for their livelihood including tour guides, owners of olive wood and mother-of-pearl workshops, and owners of souvenir shops.

Many Christians are leaving the Holy Land. Those families won't come back, as those who left after the war in 1967 did.

According to the latest census, the percentage of Christians in the Holy Land has dropped from 20% of the population in 1990 to 1.8% in 1999.

I appeal to the Christian community in the United States of America for immediate action to support the steadfastness of the Christians in the Holy Land by promoting dialogue between them and the people of the USA through the HLCS Friendship Program. Also, the HLCS Board of Directors is looking for your sincere support to make dreams come true by supporting its job creation programs (e.g. training workshops, promoting olive wood and mother-of-pearl products).

HLCS is looking forward to the return of peace to the town of love and peace.

With Peace from Bethlehem,

Father Amjad Sabbarah  
Church of the Nativity of Bethlehem

## WHAT CAN YOU DO

The Christians of the Holy Land need your generous help and support.

1. Invite HLCS group to come to your church
2. Start an HLCS Chapter in your area
3. Establish relationships through our Friendship Program
4. Purchase a hand-carved gift from the Christian families of Bethlehem
5. Volunteer to help HLCS mission by joining one of our committees



## HOLY LAND CHRISTIANS SOCIETY

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# HLCS

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## WELCOME TO HLCS

### INTRODUCTION

The past few years have brought dramatic changes to the demographic composition of the Holy Land. The Christian population has declined from 30% of Palestinian inhabitants several decades ago to just 1.8% today. The tragic realities of military occupation and rising fundamentalism, combined with escalating economic hardship, have forced family after family to leave their homes and communities in search of better economic and social opportunities abroad.

At this rate, the Christian population will vanish within 20 years.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO US, AS CHRISTIANS?

Christian families are caught in the middle of the continuing regional conflict. Since most live near Christian holy sites in the West Bank and Gaza, these families must contend with the poverty and restrictions imposed by Israel's continuing occupation of the territories. At the same time, they are marginalized and at times oppressed by rising political fundamentalism. These two opposing trends are forcing Christians, in particular, to flee the land that they have lived in for 2,000 years.

Keeping Christian presence in the holy land is not only moral, it is a must in order to preserve the integrity of Christianity. These Christians of the Holy Land who helped spread the word of Jesus to the world in the first place. For 2,000 years, it has been these families who have protected the churches in the most holy places of Christianity (i.e. Church of the Nativity and The Church of the Holy Sepulcher). Today, the existence of these families depends on the support that they get from people like you.



St. Catherine Church,  
Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

The Christian presence in the Holy Land is not only important for religious reasons. It also represents a vital key to achieving peace in the Holy Land. The Christian community injects a moderate perspective into the often tense conflict and helps bridge the deep divide between Palestinians and Israelis. Supporting the well being of the Christian community is a goal that must be pursued by those who wish for peace in that region.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

- 1) Provide a healthy economic environment where Christian communities can find the means necessary to live at peace in their homeland. This needs to include income generation in the short term and long term. Over 60% of the population in the Bethlehem area relies heavily on crafting and selling olive wood carvings to visitors to the Holy Land. By promoting their work to groups in the United States we can provide direct income to these families.
- 2) Christian affairs in the Holy Land need to be studied through surveys, research, and field studies, to:
  - ?? know what the problems and needs are;
  - ?? work toward implementing programs to address these issues; and
  - ?? communicate these issue to people in the U. S.

### THE ORGANIZATION

Holy Land Christian Society (HLCS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the Christian communities in the Holy Land. HLCS plays an active and critical role as a messenger and a voice on behalf of the Christian families in the Holy Land. Our people have worked with the Christian families in the Holy Land for more than 20 years and therefore understand the problem and its complicated roots. We have established relationships on family-to-family levels and gained the trust of the community. Our programs directly benefit those Christian families who suffer from despair and social injustice. At the same time, they enrich the lives of American Christians who strive to unite with and support the people of the Holy Land.

At the same time, HLCS works to analyze challenges faced by the Christian community in the Holy Land and to help implement projects to address those needs.

HLCS also raises awareness among American Christians about the plight of Christians in the Holy

Land. Our growing outreach initiatives are aimed at introducing direct dialogue between Christian families and communities in the United States and those in the Holy Land, which will enrich and vitalize their lives and faith.

HLCS invests in human infrastructure, especially youth and children. We believe in order to support a generation that is strong enough to build a future of peace and maintain their roots in the Holy Land, we must invest in them at a young age. We do so by bringing funds to school projects and school research. We also encourage student exchange programs among high school students and teens. By implementing this we aim to introduce the children of the Holy Land to other children around the world which will broaden their level of thinking and understanding.

### WHAT WE HAVE DONE SO FAR

- 1) Renovated the historical Church of St. Joseph in Bethlehem;
- 2) Established a student sponsorship program to sponsor Children in the Bethlehem area;
- 3) Conducted seminars at churches around the U. S. to raise awareness;
- 4) Established a Friendship Program between the people of the Holy Land and the Christian community in the United States;
- 5) Conducted a survey and field study for the first time in the Holy Land; and
- 6) Planned a groundbreaking event to bring the Pastor of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to the U. S. to speak about the deteriorating economic situation there and to meet with Christian clergy and community leaders.

### VISIT US ONLINE

[WWW.HOLYLANDCHRISTIANS.ORG](http://WWW.HOLYLANDCHRISTIANS.ORG)

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For more information visit our web  
site  
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