



**PAX
CHRISTI**

International Catholic Movement for Peace

HOT TOPICS

Monthly bulletin for secondary teachers and youth leaders focussing on topical peace issues

The Holy Land at Christmas

Nov 2007

While we are singing our Christmas carols are we really aware of what life is like now for the people of the Holy land? Since September 2000 there has been an escalation of violence in Israel/Palestine. Palestinian suicide bombers entering Israeli towns, counter attacks and incursions into Palestinian towns by the Israeli Defence Forces. In June 2002 Israel began building what it calls its "anti-terrorist fence" and what others call the "the Wall" or the "Separation Barrier". Most of the separation barrier is being constructed on Palestinian land dividing Palestinians from their land, work places and schools. The 'Little Town of Bethlehem' is now surrounded by the separation barrier, making life increasingly difficult for the people of Bethlehem.



Credit: Amos Trust

Did you know?.....

- After the six day war in 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including East Jerusalem. The occupation has been a significant cause of extreme poverty for those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. 64 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line. The majority of the Palestinian population now exist on less than £1.10 a day¹.
- From September 2000 to July 2007 1024 Israelis and 4228 Palestinians were killed in the ongoing violence in Israel/Palestine².
- In June 2002 Israel began building its separation wall, mostly on Palestinian land, dividing Palestinians from their land, work places and schools.

1 Life Lines, Christian Aid 2007
http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/facts/facts_figs.aspx
2 <http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp> accessed 4/9/2007

Prayer

Living Lord, ignite in us a passion for justice and a yearning to right all wrong.

Strengthen us to work for peace in the land we call holy;
For peace among Jew, Christian and Muslim
For reconciliation between communities
For harmony between faiths.

Inspire us to act with the urgency of your quickening fire, for blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called children of God.

Amen.

Ramani Leathard, Christian Aid

Discussion questions

- 1 Do you think walls and barriers make peace?
- 2 How do the media portray the situation in Palestine/Israel? Is it an accurate picture?

Bible bits

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 4:28-29

"For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end." Ephesians 2:14-16

Action ideas

Send a Christmas card to Bethlehem. Send cards via the Pax Christi office with your peace messages to Bethlehem or send e-cards via the link on our website <http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/Wall.HTML>

Write to the Foreign Secretary, FCO, London SW1A 2AH, explaining your concerns about the situation in Palestine and Israel and asking what action the UK government is taking to promote peace and challenge the separation wall.

Sponsor an Olive tree. The Olive tree campaign – Keep Hope Alive, aims at planting 50,000 live trees in the very places where trees have been uprooted by the Israeli army or where fields are threatened with land confiscation. Send £20 per tree to: Ycare International, 3-9 Southampton Row, London, WC1B 5HY or go to www.ej-ymca.org

Share your stories with young people in Palestine. Pax Christi partners, the Arab Educational Institute, work with young Christians and Muslims. You can send emails, look at photos and read their stories at <http://www.aeicenter.org/youth/index.htm>

Recommended resources

1. http://learn.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Trouble%20in%20the%20Holy%20Land_tcm16-19377.pdf clear and concise 2 page summary of the history of the conflict
2. http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/Documents/ME/Remember_Bethlehem.pdf photographs taken in the Holy Land and used here to illustrate the well-known Christmas carols, 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' and 'Silent Night'.
3. <http://trocaire.org/news/publication.php?id=38> - Voices for Peace – changing perspectives on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Paper version available from Pax Christi office for £2 + p&p.
4. <http://www.aeicenter.org/youth/index.htm> Youth page of Arab Educational Institute – photos, stories and how to set up email links with young people in Palestine.
5. www.btselem.org/English B'tselem is an Israeli human rights group. Read testimonies of those who are affected by the wall and the occupation.