

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Often individuals look at the suffering in the world and wonder, "How can I make a difference?" They often feel that social problems like starvation and war are so entrenched that there is no way for one person to truly make a difference. One of the areas of our world which has experienced great poverty and violence for the past 60 years is Palestine. Our parish has decided to join with others throughout our country to make a difference in the lives of Palestinian Catholics. This difference will be made through education.

While the Good Friday collection which is taken up on in Catholic Churches throughout the world is successful in preserving the Christian biblical Sites in the Holy Land from environmental degradation and vandalism, the Christians in the Holy Land fair much worse. The number of Christians in the Holy Land has steadily declined over the years. Ten years ago there were over 600,000 Christians in the Holy Land. Now there are approximately 160,000. The United States government sends from 5 to 10 billion dollars to assist Israel each year. The Saudis send the same amount to the Muslims. No group sends significant funds to the support Christians in the Holy Land. Thus, they are being squeezed out of their homeland which is the birthplace of Christianity.

Most of the Christians in the Holy Land are of Arab descent and are discriminated against by the Israelis. Muslims often consider Christians as "traitors" to their Muslim heritage. Palestinian Christians are moving out of the Holy Land to avoid this persistent and crippling discrimination.

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, led by Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM is attempting to change this trend through supporting the education of Palestinian Christians. The Franciscan Foundation of the Holy Land helps to educate Christians so that they will be able to enter a profession and thus have the financial resources to remain in the Holy Land.

The parish has decided to sponsor a Christian student in the Holy Land. Our student is named Jihan Gabriel Gideon. Jihan was born and raised in Bethlehem. She has just begun to study biology at the University of Bethlehem. I have placed a photo of Jihan on the parish bulletin board in the link. I will post all communications from Jihan on the bulletin board.

The cost of her tuition is \$6,000 per year. To raise the money for her tuition the parish will take up a second collection on January 10, 2010 and have a fundraiser after the first of the year. Individuals are invited to support this effort through writing checks to The Church of Jesus the Good Shepherd and place Holy Land Scholarship Fund (HLSF) on the memo line. If every family in the parish donates at least \$50 we can raise Jihan's entire college tuition in one year. Holy Land Scholarship Fund envelopes are located on the gathering space table. The parish will sponsor Jihan over the four years that she is in college. I hope you will participate in helping strengthen the Christian community in the Holy Land through making the education of Jihan a reality.

Fr. Mark Watson and Dr. Ralph Armstrong