

Holy Land Project

Project Name: Education Program for children and youth at risk

Project submitted by: CNEWA Canada for the Infant Welfare Center

City: Old city of Jerusalem

Why help Christians in the Holy Land

Christianity was born in the Holy Land. It is where the angel Gabriel told Mary, “Do not be afraid.” Where Jesus proclaimed the Gospel and was crucified and rose again. Where the Apostles first preached about God’s mercy and love.

But today, Christianity is disappearing from the Holy Land. Extremism, Israel-Palestine political instability and economic hardship are driving Christian families away. Whereas 63 years ago Christians represented 20 percent of the population, today they only account for a meager 2 percent. As they leave, fewer voices are witnessing for forgiveness and peace — the very values needed to stop this downward spiral.

Christians are too small in number to have a direct political impact in the region, but they have a great responsibility to keep alive the message of Jesus through their teachings and actions. Indeed, Christianity is the only Abrahamic faith to claim forgiveness as a condition to dialogue and reconciliation. In a region dominated by a culture of honor, which calls for vengeance when the tribe or family feels humiliated, forgiveness becomes an important value in order to build lasting peace.

Thus, to allow Christians to disappear from the region would mean deep spiritual loss for Catholics and the church in general. It would certainly be a great loss for the region, where Christians continue to serve society through their schools, hospitals, numerous social service outreach initiatives and inter-religious collaboration.

The good news is that we can stop the exodus of Christians. They want to stay in their homeland. And Catholic leaders are committed to helping, as the Synod of Bishops on Middle East Christians told the Holy Father in October 2010.

Since then, Pope Benedict has made them a priority for the universal Church. He is inviting Catholics all over the world to concretely support these Christians’ initiatives – like supporting children and youth in Jerusalem through the Christians’ lead organization, the “Infant Welfare Center”.

1. Infant Welfare Center Profile:

In the heart of the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, just a few metres from the Holiest Christian Shrine in Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and a few steps from the “Upper Room” where Our Lord Jesus Christ had His Last Supper with His disciples; the Infant Welfare Center was established in the year 1956 originally as a mother and child health care clinic serving the local Palestinian community in the Old City and the nearby villages.

Over the years, the Center adapted its mission to a new social and economic reality hitting the old city's population, which today is 58% under the age of 25 years old. Amongst many initiatives, they opened up a nursery for mothers from poor families who need to find work to make ends meet.

One wouldn't suspect walking in its narrow streets visiting the holy places that the old city is plagued with major social problems: drug addiction especially among young boys and girls, alcoholism, high school dropouts, broken families due to chronic unemployment, violence or criminal conduct. Families aren't equipped to deal with such issues and the Center has developed a program to address children and youth at risk.

2. Project Description:

The Center and its staff of professional psychologists, psychiatrists and teachers, set a program that will target 100 children and youth, 30 teachers and 50 parents from 5 Christian schools in the Old City.

The Center's education program will organize a series of curricular and non-curricular educational lessons to help develop the educational capacity of the children, use creative methods to reconnect these children with the academic material they are required to memorize at school, introduce arts and other tools to make studying an interesting task.

The program is very much needed. The first program implemented last year had direct impact on many families in desperate needs. The Center needs more resources to reach out to more mothers and their children, especially to prevent school dropout.

A major problem comes from nearby Israeli restaurants and hotels which are offering good money to teenagers. Attracted by the salary, they leave school until about one year later when they are let go and replaced by other teenagers.

The results are devastating; a large number of them end up in the streets with no education, no profession and no tools to live normally.

The Infant Welfare Center's education program tries to tackle these issues by working with the children, their parents and the teachers in order to help youth with their studies and teenagers to reintegrate into school and accompany them until they graduate.

3. Budget Details:

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET = \$16,500.00

This project will include:

- Educational initiatives and student projects
- English & Arabic-language program materials
- Training sessions for women/mothers
- Learning tours and educational trips
- Science and math program resources
- Student initiatives and printed material