



The Catholic Women's League of Canada

C-720 Scotland Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3M 1X5

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Velma's Dream: Support for Children and Youth in the Holy Land

The Catholic Women's League of Canada and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association join forces to support children and youth at risk in the heart of Jerusalem.

WINNIPEG, Manitoba – The Catholic Women's League of Canada (CWL), with the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) Canada, is launching a new fundraising initiative to support the establishment of an educational program for children and youth at risk through the Infant Welfare Center in the Old City of Jerusalem.

National President of The Catholic Women's League of Canada Velma Harasen is an ardent supporter of the project for its clear resonance with the League's current theme *Centred on Faith & Justice* and sees the project as a fitting response to Pope Benedict XVI's call for support of Christians in the Holy Land. The fundraising initiative is becoming known within the League as "Velma's Dream". The CWL, founded in 1920, is the largest organization of women in Canada with a membership of over 92,000.

The Canadian National Director of CNEWA Carl Héту notes that although Christianity was born in the Holy Land, today it is disappearing from the region. Extremism, political instability and economic hardship are driving Christian families away. Over the last 60 years the percentage of Christians has dropped from 20% to only two percent. The importance of a Christian presence in Jerusalem is essential to the quest for peace. To allow Christians to disappear from the region would be a deep spiritual loss for Catholics and the church in general. It would also be a great loss for the city and the region, where Christians continue to serve society through education, health care, service outreach initiatives and inter-religious collaboration.

Donations are being gathered through CNEWA Canada, an organization mandated by the Holy Father with 85 years of experience in humanitarian and pastoral assistance throughout the Middle East, Northeast Africa, India and Eastern Europe. Donations can be sent to CNEWA Canada; contact information is available at www.cnewa.ca or by phone at (866) 322-4441 or by e-mail at cnewa-canada@cnewa.org.

The Infant Welfare Center was established in 1965 and has expanded to work with youth, families and teachers. The project will offer the services of professional psychologists, psychiatrists and teachers to benefit 100 children and youth at risk, 30 teachers and 50 parents from five Christian schools in the Old City. The project budget totals \$16,500.

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For further information contact: (888)656-4040 or Barbara Fawcett at communications@cwl.ca