



“Recently the number of children killed in this war surpassed 17,000. More than 17,000! It’s terrible... **One more day of war won’t solve the situation, it will only make it worse.** God grant that we have true peace soon, that this war should end.

“We need humanitarian aid for over two million people who live here and who, for the most part, have lost everything – their homes, their workplaces, their children’s schools, their belongings.”

“**Although Christians are a very small minority in Gaza, the Catholic Church has played a leading role in providing aid.**” The Latin Patriarchate has managed to get blankets, food, medicine, mattresses and shoes among other vital items into Gaza. **ACN’s offices around the world are supporting this vital work, with aid being channelled via the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, but money from the UK office cannot be used for Gaza due to UK counter-terrorism sanctions** – despite all aid being checked by Israeli security.

“Thanks to the Church we have been able to help thousands of families, ensuring that aid reaches everyone in real need, because the situation in Gaza at the moment is one of extreme poverty.”

## “More war isn’t the solution”

Fr Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of Gaza’s Holy Family Church – where hundreds are still sheltering – made an impassioned plea for peace.



The Sisters told us: “**The ongoing expenses of the convent weighed very heavily on the community.**” Energy costs were a particular worry, as Israel and Palestine have one of the highest electricity costs in the region,

so coupled with the community’s commitment to the fight against climate change there was only one answer for the Sisters – to run the convent on solar power.

Aid to the Church in Need was only too willing to come to the Sisters’ assistance to support their vital mission in the town where Our Lord and Saviour was born.

The Sisters wrote: “**To live as Carmelites in Bethlehem is to accept its spiritual heritage, praying that the seeds sown in hope may bear fruit despite all the upheavals here.**”

## Sisters go solar

Running a nineteenth-century convent with twenty-first century technology was the solution when the Carmelites in Bethlehem faced financial crisis.

First came the coronavirus pandemic, then the war in Gaza, and all the while prices were soaring.

# HOLY LAND

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## Witnessing to love in a war-torn land

A child carrying a lamb in the Shepherds’ Field, Bethlehem, where – according to local tradition – the angels announced Our Saviour’s birth.

**A personal appeal to ACN (UK) benefactors and friends from Bishop William Shomali from the Holy Land.**

“Our situation in the Holy Land and the need for support is critical. The suffering has been immense, especially since the violence which erupted on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023.

Healthcare facilities are overwhelmed and there is a severe shortage of medical supplies and personnel. Access to clean water and electricity is extremely limited.

The ongoing cooperation between the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and ACN has become a cornerstone of our humanitarian and pastoral initiatives.

ACN was one of the first to mobilise resources following October 7<sup>th</sup>, providing critical support in [the Holy Land].

Your swift action has delivered essential aid including medicine, food supplies and job creation programmes.

Almost all our parishes and other communities have benefitted from ACN’s generosity, including internally displaced persons, the unemployed and the very poor.

We need to speak about hope.

**The strongest foundation of hope is faith, and ACN is nurturing that faith through support for catechesis, liturgical activities and Christian education.**

Your commitment to helping build up the faith of the people means so much.

**Because of that faith, a Christian knows that living in the Holy Land is a privilege, a call and a duty.**



Bishop Shomali visiting the UK.

**Bishop William Shomali is Vicar General and Patriarchal Vicar for Jerusalem and Palestine.**

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Historic image of workers passing the checkpoint to the West Bank.

## “The situation continues to deteriorate...”

Since violence engulfed the Holy Land on 7<sup>th</sup> October, the Church has done everything it can to support a Christian community hit by the conflict.

Hundreds of migrant Christian workers fled the Gaza border following the Hamas attack, seeking safety in Jerusalem where the Church offered shelter and provided trauma counselling for those who lived through the attacks – just one of many projects where ACN works in partnership with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The patriarchate’s Sami El-Yousef said: “Our emergency humanitarian response continues to grow... **ACN enabled us to reach out to over 12,000 sufferers from the most affected people from the war**, we offered basic lifeline food supplies, hygiene kits, lifesaving medications and covered critical medical operations.”



ACN is supporting the Christian community in the Holy Land.

Christians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were hit hard as the tourism sector imploded. With work permits for Israel tightly restricted – 180,000 permits have been revoked as a security measure – and up to 72 percent of Christian workers in tourism having no employment, the Patriarchate has run job schemes and training, as well as supporting micro businesses and small entrepreneurial start-ups. “By acquiring the necessary professional skills and tools, they can create progressive futures for themselves.”

Bishop William Shomali said: **“The situation continues to deteriorate in the West Bank and East Jerusalem triggering the highest unemployment rate of all time among the Christian community.** Our partnership with ACN allows us to reach out to thousands of powerless people who were caught in the middle of this tragedy.”

## Witnessing to the Faith

**One-hundred-and-fifty Christians from across Israel and Palestine came together for three days of prayer and talks on the theme “Witnesses of the Faith”.**

The event was organised by Focolare which promotes building bridges between different people and groups. With many Christians living in strained economic circumstances, the fee was heavily subsidised for those struggling to make ends meet.

Organiser Luis Riera told ACN: “Taking into account the situation that the country is experiencing, and the consequences that the current conflict leaves on those who experience it,

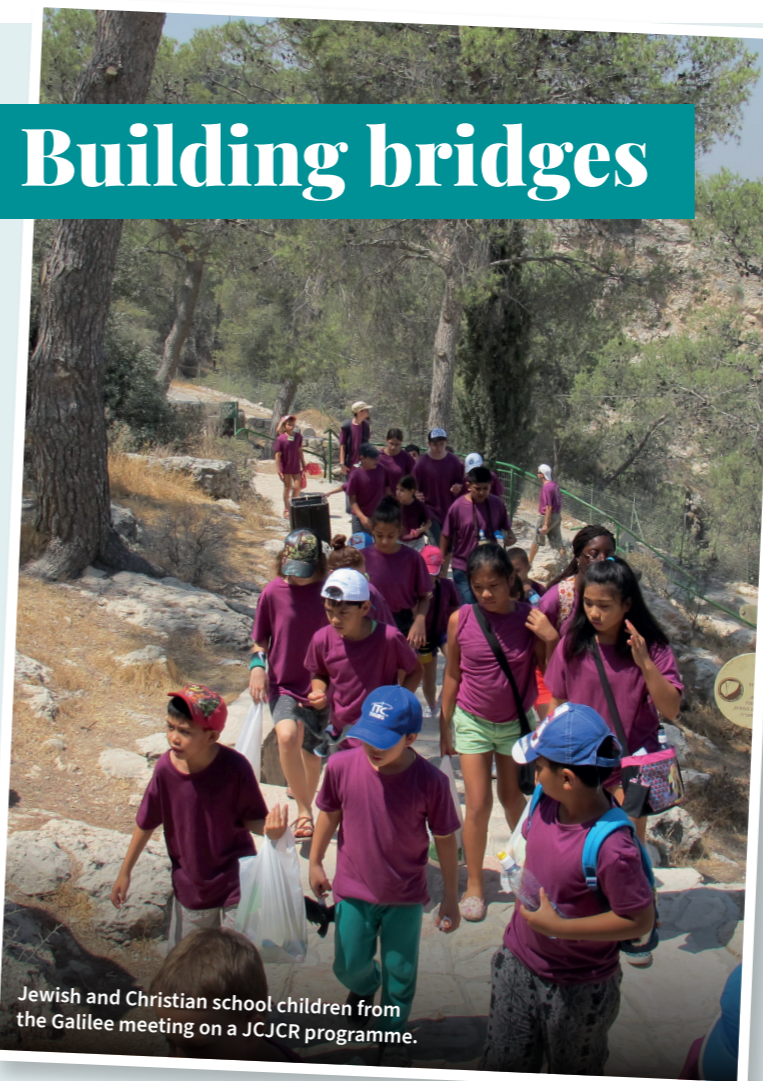


Young participants in the “Witnesses of the Faith” event.

**we consider imperative today more than ever the commitment to create spaces of encounter where everyone can find the energy and enthusiasm needed to live and bear witness to God’s love even in difficult times.”**

One participant said: “I experienced the strength of living as one family, of sharing, of caring for others, as well as the strength of praying together.”

## Building bridges



Jewish and Christian school children from the Galilee meeting on a JCJCR programme.

**The only way to build peace in the Holy Land is to build peace between the three Abrahamic religions – and that is exactly what the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations (JCJCR) is achieving through its various initiatives.**

Its director Dr Sarah Bernstein said: **“Our mission is to build the desire and capacity of Israelis and Palestinians to create truly shared societies for all groups.”** The centre works with specific groups, including teachers, tour guides, young adults and the Israel Defence Forces.

Among its initiatives is a scheme training schoolteachers to bring Jewish, Christian and Muslim students together to build their understanding of the others’ faiths and traditions, and their ability to dialogue in these areas. Another initiative is a similar interfaith project carried out in partnership with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for older students.

**Thanking ACN for supporting the JCJCR, Dr Bernstein said: “Your continued belief in our work has enabled us to carry out vital initiatives aimed at building bridges of interreligious understanding, fostering dialogue, and working to ensure the welfare of religious minorities in Israel.”**

