It is the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land’s mission to preserve the Christian presence in the Holy Land by providing key necessities for everyday life. We learned early on in our work, that one of the best ways to ensure that Christianity endures in the Holy Land is to help Christians grow and prosper there. We do this through a variety of programs, and perhaps most notably our scholarship opportunities.

With encouragement and support, these Christian scholars can obtain their degrees through dedication and hard work. Their degrees allow them opportunities for a promising career, including stability and fair wages. A degree leads to them becoming a fully functioning member of society and the Christian community, and it gives them the opportunity to reach their full potential in the Holy Land. Your donations for scholarships provide them with the ability to realize their dreams and to courageously pursue a life of love, happiness and faith in the birthplace of our Lord.

Cont’d on page 3
My name is Pierre Hani Salameh, and I was fortunate to receive an FFHL scholarship to attend University in the Holy Land. I am originally from the Christian quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, living in Pisgat Ze’ev. I am one of three siblings. My mother and father worked hard their entire lives to provide for our family – my mother as an Arabic teacher and my father as a tour guide. Thanks to their hard work and the support of the Christian community, my brother is in his final year of medical school and my sister is studying clinical laboratories.

When I was younger, I wanted to become a doctor because of my interest in the human body. At the age of 12, my parents sat me down to tell me more about my own health history. I was born with a congenital heart defect. As an infant, I underwent a 17-hour long surgery at just two days old. I had to have another procedure done on my heart at the age of eight months. When I heard how medicine played such an important role in my life from the very first days, I knew that my dream of becoming a doctor was not just a childhood fantasy. Medicine from that point forward was my desired path in life.

I graduated at the top of my class in high school, and then heard about the FFHL scholarship opportunity. After completing an application and interview process, I got the good news - I was going to be a recipient. The academic scholarship gave me not just the funds I needed to keep pursuing my professional dream, but also the push I needed to carry on knowing that there are people out there who care about their fellow Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

I graduated at the top of my class in high school, and then heard about the FFHL scholarship opportunity. After completing an application and interview process, I got the good news - I was going to be a recipient. The academic scholarship gave me not just the funds I needed to keep pursuing my professional dream, but also the push I needed to carry on knowing that there are people out there who care about their fellow Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

Thanks to the FFHL scholarship, I was able to attend University and achieve a lifelong dream. Education has helped me form a brighter outlook on life, create strong points of view, and open my mind to new possibilities. I will start my medical internship this June as one of the final steps to practicing medicine independently. Becoming a doctor means that I will have the opportunity to help people and allow them to lead a better life, with less pain and sorrow.

The occupation of doctor also allows me to practice values from my Christian faith. Born into a Christian family, Christianity to me means being kind, helping one another, loving my enemies, and following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Savior.

The words “thank you” are not enough to express how I feel toward the generous FFHL members who donated their funds to make my dreams happen. I have the utmost gratitude and appreciation for them. Thank you for giving as He gave and embodying the kindness of the Lord. We, the Franciscans of the Holy Land, will not forget and are humbled by your selflessness.

Please continue to offer your thoughts and prayers to our Christian neighbors in the Holy Land.

Together through the strength He gives us, we can make a difference.

I remain a servant of God and yours, in the Spirit of St. Francis.

Fr. Francesco Patton, OFM Chairman, FFHL Custos of the Holy Land
In 2018, we awarded four-year scholarships to 42 young Christian students in the Holy Land. We are extremely proud of their accomplishments as well as all of our past scholarship recipients as they strive to improve themselves academically, professionally and spiritually. It is with your continued generosity that we are capable of running programs in the Holy Land to better the lives of our Christian brothers and sisters.

We would like to share news about two of the students you have helped through academic scholarships during the last year, Violetta Fatho and Khader Bandak. Violetta is an 18-year-old student studying criminal law. In her scholarship application, she wrote of the difficulties she has faced receiving a quality education and her desire to pursue a better life through a university program. Violetta is the oldest of three siblings, and she strives to be a good example to her brothers by studying hard and participating in programs like Kids for Peace. She wrote her sponsors, Cradling Christianity in Columbus, Ohio, over the Christmas holiday and gave them a brief update on her life and studies including her special 18th birthday celebration. Violetta writes in one of her thank you letters, “Thank you for your generous contribution to help with my college education...I hope in the future I will be wealthy enough to help students with their education since I personally consider education and knowledge as the biggest investment one could receive.”

Khader Bandak is an intelligent young man living in Bethlehem. He graduated first in his class from Terra Sancta College and has moved on to study architectural engineering at Birzeit University. Khader likes to draw and draft housing designs. He chose to study architectural engineering so he could help his country, writing, “in order to build a better country and to give Palestinian people a better life.” Khader dreams of helping his country by solving social issues like providing affordable housing for the expanding population. He also thanks Cradling Christianity in Columbus, Ohio in one of his letters saying, “…thank you for your efforts to help Palestinian youth, to make them more creative, and give them a better life.”

Violetta and Khader are just two examples of the many students we have been able to send to University over the last two decades thanks to the generous support from our contributors. If you are interested in learning more about the University scholarship program or want to make a donation to support education, please visit ffhl.org.
Palm Sunday ushers in the beginning of Holy Week and marks the last Sunday of Lent. Each year, scores of faithful Christians travel to Jerusalem to honor Jesus’ triumphant return to the city. They come from near and far to proclaim their faith and participate in a procession waving palms and singing “Hosanna.” This procession has been a tradition since ancient times, and although temporarily banned from practice has been consistently celebrated for the last 86 years. Christians from around the world gather to worship God for His almighty love of mankind through Christ Jesus.

The celebration starts with a mass in the Basilica at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and is presided over by local clergy from different communities in the Holy Land. Attendees walk around the Edicule, the holy site of resurrection, and then journey to Bethpage on the Mount of Olives. This small village is where Jesus mounted the donkey he triumphantly rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The pilgrims form a procession, waving palms, singing hymns, and offering up prayers on their way back to Jerusalem. Walking the same path Jesus took into the city, this powerful experience nourishes the connection between God and His faithful servants. Finally, the pilgrims walk to the Old City until they reach St. Anne’s Church where they receive a formal blessing.

The Holy Land of Israel tells the story of the birth, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. For many Christians, a visit to the Holy Land is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Each year, the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land facilitates pilgrimages where you can walk in the steps of our Lord and Savior, visiting historical holy sites and enveloping yourself in the strong presence of His Spirit. Previous FFHL pilgrims describe the experience as “the Gospel stories brought to life” and “truly a gift from God.”

You can join Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, President of FFHL on a pilgrimage of faith this year. Explore the holy sites of Jesus Christ’s life and begin a new chapter in your personal relationship with God. Mark your calendar for the 2019 pilgrimage dates – November 26 through December 6. Pilgrims on this tour will get a chance to see the places where Saint Peter preached and the prophets Elijah and Elisha lived. Journey to Galilee, where Jesus performed his first miracle turning water into wine. Explore Jerusalem where you can visit the Mount of Olives, walk along Palm Sunday Road and enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. These are only a few of the life-changing moments you will experience during your visit to the Holy Land with FFHL.

If you are interested in attending a pilgrimage and would like more information, or want to reserve your spot today, email us at info@ffhl.org. You can also call 855.500.3345 or visit our website ffhl.org for more details.

Turn to page 9 to read the powerful encounters of a recent FFHL pilgrim.
Jesus once walked along the River Jordan and was baptized in its great waters. During His time the river was a life source to many and a location for people to dedicate their life to God through the sacrament of baptism. Since then, the River Jordan has been renowned as a holy site and Christians cherish what it means to their faith. Unfortunately, the river has also been home to strife and war between Israel and Jordan. This conflict forced the closure of the river to devote followers who sought to visit the holy river. Tragically, it was used as an active military zone and was riddled with landmines and booby traps.

The war didn’t just affect the river and its crossings, but also the surrounding area. The Land of Monasteries was evacuated and the Christians who practiced in peaceful harmony there were forced to relocate. Made up of seven buildings, the Land of Monasteries houses different denominations of Christianity. During the war, the river’s edge and nearby buildings were rife with landmines and blocked from public visitation.

Although Israel and Jordan have been at peace since 1995, the River Jordan and its surroundings have experienced a painfully slow and meticulous rehabilitation. In 2000, Israeli authorities started clearing a pathway for Pope John Paul II to visit the river. But it took nearly a dozen more years for that pathway to be reopened to the public for pilgrimages. Since 2011, many Christians have traveled to the River Jordan as a part of their spiritual growth.

Now more than two decades after the end of the war, Israel is starting to clear more landmines in a plan to completely rehabilitate the Land of the Monasteries whose buildings have stood vacant for nearly 50 years. Once the area has been cleared of any threats, then the Christians will be able to rebuild the Land of Monasteries to the glory it once possessed.

This plan for rehabilitation was a lengthy negotiation between interested parties and will cost over $4 million. Halo Trust, a company specializing in demining around the globe, will handle the removal of the mines with assistance from the Israeli government. As of December 2018, officials have confirmed they have cleared over 1,500 landmines from three of the seven buildings in the Land of Monasteries.

After the area has been cleared of threats and reinvigorated, it will once again invite pilgrims from around the world to visit its hallowed ground. This will only increase the power a pilgrimage can have on an individual and enhance the experience of the Holy Land. The Land of Monasteries represents peaceful habitation among His servants and will soon serve Him again.
An anonymous donor from the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land recently provided the generous funds to reconstruct a new elevator for the friars residing at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The previous elevator broke down after 50 years of service.

On behalf of the friars living at the sanctuary, Fr. Zacheusz, Guardian of the community, expressed his thanks for such kindness by saying, “We have a number of elderly friars who have been climbing the many steps found in our friary. In many ways, it has been a burden for them but with the new elevator, that problem has been resolved. We want to thank our donor for such magnanimity.”

To right, Fr. Peter and Fr. Zacheusz standing in front of the new elevator.

SUPPORT CHRISTIANS IN THE HOLY LAND

This Holy season for Christians around the world is a period of reflection and repentance. Many Lenten promises have been made with the purpose of strengthening individuals’ faith. As we make our way through the remainder of Lent, we remember the sacrifice God made for us through the death of His only Son.

Jesus suffered for 40 days and 40 nights in the desert leading up to his crucifixion. Using the time to connect with others meaningfully and spread the Word, His last days were some of his most remarkable. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he knew his fate and willingly sacrificed to save us all from a life apart from God. When we hear the gospels of Lent and pray the Stations of the Cross, we are transported to the Holy Land, the cornerstone of Jesus’ most important moments - birth, baptism, death and resurrection.

While it still holds remarkable significance, the Holy Land has been plagued with strife and misfortune. Christians who lived and worshipped at the place of Christ’s death and resurrection, have been fleeing their homeland. Christians who stayed have sacrificed jobs, health, family and wellbeing to continue practicing and preaching the Word of the Lord.

We ask that as a part of your Lenten reflection you look within to help our brothers and sisters of the Holy Land. Prayers, time and donations can help rebuild the Holy Land and keep Christianity alive and well there.

We thank you for anything that you can give, and wish you a blessed Easter.

DONATE BY:

call (toll free) 1.855.500.FFHL(3345)

email info@ffhl.org

online www.ffhl.org

Your donation to FFHL will allow us to serve families and give them the opportunity to continue to live in faith.
World Youth Day was founded after Pope John Paul II requested that young people gather on Palm Sunday for an International Jubilee in Saint Peter’s Square in 1984 and 300,000 young people from around the world answered his call. Impressed by their fortitude and values, Pope John Paul II extended a second invitation to youth of the world. The following year, the Year of International Youth, the Holy Father again asked young people of every nation to join him in Rome on Palm Sunday. His call was once again strongly answered, and in response, the Vatican founded World Youth Day, an event for young people to come together and receive the love and Word of God.

World Youth Day 2019 was held in Panama City during January. Pope Francis journeyed to the country to carry on the tradition and deliver a special message to the youth. He opened his speech calling the event a “hope for the whole Church, and for the world, a witness of faith.” He also called upon the young people to renew their faith and become better witnesses of the gospel. The Holy Father asked this to be done not in a vain effort to create a Church that appears fun or cool, but rather to, “reawaken the Church’s constant freshness and youth.”

The Holy Father said youth could accomplish this goal by listening, sharing and acts of service to our brothers and sisters. He commended the crowd for the amount of dedication they have shown and their commitment to the Lord. Pope Francis described a disciple as someone who, “is not afraid to take risks and keeps walking.” He noted that the crowd had kept walking together on the same path to reach this point, on a journey to serve God and proclaim His Word.

The group represented people of different nationalities, languages and religions. But they all shared the same dream and act at the will of God. The dream that brings fire to hearts and inspires many every day is written in John 13, “that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” By encountering each other at World Youth Day, attendees are already practicing God’s command, offering their hands and hearts to spread His love to every corner of the world.

World Youth Day will continue on as a powerful message of the Lord’s love and support for young people who trust in Him. At the last World Youth Day that Pope John Paul II was present, over 800,000 youth attended. He said, “When, back in 1985, I wanted to start the World Youth Days... I imagined a powerful moment in which the young people of the world could meet Christ, who is eternally young, and could learn from him how to be bearers of the Gospel to other young people. This evening, together with you, I praise God and give thanks to Him for the gift bestowed on the Church through the World Youth Days. Millions of young people have taken part, and as a result have become better and more committed Christian witnesses.” As young people grow older and continue to proclaim their faith in Him, let us remember these words and love one another as He loved us.
BISHOP DEWANE MAKES PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

The Most Reverend Bishop Frank J. Dewane, DD is the Bishop of the Diocese of Venice in Florida, and member of FFHL board of trustees. He lead 32 pilgrims from his diocese to the Holy Land from February 4-14, 2019. Father Peter was their official guide.

The 10-day pilgrimage began in Galilee where they visited the Holy Sites of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Cana, Mount Tabor, the Beatitudes, Primacy of Peter and the Multiplication of the loaves and fishes and the Jordan River where they renewed the pilgrims’ baptismal promises. Later, they traveled to Judea and carried the cross along the Via Dolorosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre housing the Crucifixion and Tomb of Christ. They were also able to visit the Mount of Olives where the Ascension took place, where Jesus wept over Jerusalem at Dominus Flevit, and where Jesus agonized in the Garden at Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. They also traveled to Ain Karem where John the Baptist was born and visited the site of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. From there, they enjoyed experiencing Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity where Jesus was born. Masses were celebrated by Bishop Dewane along with Fr. Sean Morris, Fr. Peter and Deacon Rich Frohmiller at the many Holy Sites along the journey.

In their final days, the pilgrimage group made a visit to the Latin Patriarchate where Bishop Marcuzzo, DD presented the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre ‘Pilgrim Shell’ to Janine and Steve Marrone of Venice, Florida.

Above: Bishop Frank Dewane, DD Bishop of Venice, Florida and board member of FFHL recently brought over 32 pilgrims from his Diocese to the Holy Land guided by Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM. This photo shows The Most Reverend Giacinto Marcuzzo, Auxiliary Bishop of the Latin Patriarchate, along with some members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

YOUR AMAZON PURCHASES CAN SUPPORT THE FFHL

The FFHL is excited to announce that we are now an AmazonSmile charity beneficiary. This means that a percentage of your Amazon purchase will be donated to the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land at no extra cost to you. When you purchase products through smile.amazon.com, 0.5% of your eligible purchase can be directed to FFHL. AmazonSmile sells the same products and has the same prices as Amazon. Log on to smile.amazon.com with your regular Amazon account. You will be asked to select the organization of your choice. Simply search for Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land and click next. When shopping on AmazonSmile, products that qualify for donations will be marked with “Eligible for donation” on their product detail page. You can continue the convenience of online shopping while supporting Christians in the Holy Land. If you have any questions, please email us at info@ffhl.org or read more about AmazonSmile at http://smile.amazon.com/about.

As always we thank you for your support. God bless.

FFHL WELCOMES JOYCE BABIAK TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The FFHL is happy to announce the addition of Dame Joyce K.S. Babiak, PhD to the Board of Trustees. Joyce Babiak holds a Bachelor and Masters of Science, and a Doctorate in Business. She is a business founder, president, and CEO. Dr. Babiak retired from the Air Force, having served in many executive roles in science & technology during her career. She earned the honorific title of Dame Commander with Star in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, and has been a member of the order since 2007. She received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice honor from Pope Francis in October 2017– the highest award a layperson can receive from the Catholic Church. Dr. Babiak is extremely active in her local parish church and community, serving in multiple leadership roles for decades. Following her retirement from the Air Force, she worked as Co-founder and Director of SKYLET, Inc. Currently she is serving as the organization’s President and Chief Executive Officer, providing executive management services in support of various government agencies, commercial and academic interests and short-term position trading on equities.
“A TREMENDOUS EXPERIENCE.”

Going on a pilgrimage of faith to the Holy Land had been on Bill Russell’s “bucket list” for over 30 years. When he found out that his good friend Deacon Ken Reisor led pilgrimages with the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, he eagerly signed up.

Reflecting back on his “remarkable” experience, Russell talks about how meaningful it was to walk where Jesus walked and visit places like Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee that were right out of the Bible. He was able to see first-hand the difficulties and poverty Christians are experiencing in the city of Jerusalem, all compounded by the tensions of the three major religions. During his pilgrimage, his favorite experience was visiting the Holy Sepulchre where he said he would have enjoyed being locked in for the night as an opportunity to absorb even more from the church. He described his trip overall as tremendous, and better than he anticipated.

When asked how the FFHL pilgrimage had changed his life, Russell responded, “This is one of those times in life that you gain a better perspective on what life should really be about - preparing to go to heaven and be with Jesus. Daily distractions and life's challenges do not always make that easy.” He feels that every Christian should go on a pilgrimage, especially Americans who have not seen and experienced firsthand the historical places so important to our faith.

Russell says he would like to go on another pilgrimage one day, perhaps to see Masada and visit Dome of the Rock in the Old City. Having Father Peter, OFM, president of FFHL, as a guide was special to Russell and he felt very blessed to have met and learned from him during the pilgrimage.

INTERVIEW WITH A FIRST-TIME FFHL PILGRIM

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING A PILGRIMAGE AND WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, OR WANT TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT TODAY, EMAIL US AT:

INFO@FFHL.ORG.

YOU CAN ALSO CALL 855.500.3345

-OR-

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FFHL.ORG FOR MORE DETAILS.
Jesus Christ’s burial was first described in the New Testament Canonical Gospels. These writings took place decades after His crucifixion (30 A.D.), but described His resting place in detail. Centuries later in 2016, archeologists believe they have uncovered the tomb and burial site of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Old City of Jerusalem, the ruins of a tomb were found that match the description of Christ’s burial site. Many followers of His Word have searched in vain to find Jesus’ tomb. Around 325 A.D., the Christian emperor of Rome, Constantine, sent a cavalry to Israel in search of His final resting place. When the cavalry arrived in Israel, they were able to locate the tomb and sent word back to Constantine of their miraculous discovery. The emperor then ordered the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to mark the spot and act as proclamation of the Christian faith. The church was designed to be beautifully ornate and worthy of serving the Son of God.

Unfortunately, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been at the center of religious and political conflict since Constantine ordered its construction. It has been destroyed and rebuilt, leaving many to wonder if Jesus’ tomb was still intact or lost forever. In the past, many other tombs have been found near the location of Christ’s, but none with the unique characteristics described in the original writing. The tomb found in 2016 stands out based on the stone, location and ornate detail.

Inside the tomb is a burial bed carved from limestone and covered in marble. Researchers spent 60 hours in the tomb carefully learning what they could in that time frame. They uncovered a marble slab with a cross engraved into the stone as they lifted the cover of the tomb. Scientists were able to collect samples to allow them to learn more about the history of the site. These samples were analyzed, and in 2017 confirmed the construction happened in the mid-4th century. This timing is consistent with the Romans’ construction of the original Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Professor Antonia Moropoulou leads the archeological restoration that led to the discovery of the tomb. She described the burial place saying, “The Holy Tomb is the most alive place in the world. It gives the message of resurrection.”
The Stations of the Cross are a devotion of Lent, reflecting on Jesus Christ’s last day before His crucifixion. Each station, fourteen in total, tells of a different moment in that day, starting with His condemnation to death and ending in His burial in the tomb. The Stations often are used as a pilgrimage as individuals move from each visualizing and mediating on what Jesus endured for us.

WE INVITE YOU NOW TO REVISIT THE STATIONS AND SAY A SILENT PRAYER AS YOU REFLECT ON EACH.

1. Jesus is condemned to death: Pontius Pilate tried Jesus for crimes He did not commit. Knowing He was to die for our sins, Jesus does not defend himself and willing sacrifices His life for us.

2. Jesus accepts His cross: Jesus is forced to carry the cross upon which he will die. It is heavy and made of wood, as he walks to the place of His crucifixion each steps brings unbearable pain.

3. Jesus falls for the first time: Under the weight of the cross, Jesus stumbles and falls. He gets up and continues on the hard path to death.

4. Jesus meets His mother: Along the path Jesus meets Mary, His beloved mother. He stares into her eyes and continues His journey.

5. Simon carries the cross: Jesus struggles to continue His walk. The guards pull Simon of Cyrene out of the crowd and force him to help in the burden of the cross.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus: A faithful servant of the Lord, Veronica steps forward to wipe the face of Jesus covered in sweat and blood. As she removes her towel she find the image of His face there.

7. Jesus falls for the second time: Tired from the long journey and torture, Jesus falls for a second time. He gets up and continues to walk nonetheless.

8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem: The women of Jerusalem come forward from the crowd with their children and greet Jesus, they experienced His love.

9. Jesus falls for the third time: the last fall of His journey, Jesus summons all his strength and trust in God to continue on.

10. They strip Jesus of His clothes: Stripped of His clothes, they prepare to hang Jesus from the cross reopening His wounds and gambling away His clothes.

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross: They drive nails through the hands and feet of Jesus into the wooden cross and lift it for Him to hang.

12. Jesus dies: On the cross Jesus takes his last breath.

13. Jesus’ body is taken from the cross: Jesus’ body is put in the arms of His mother as faithful disciples prepare Him for burial.

14. Jesus is laid in the tomb: They take Jesus to his resting place and cover the tomb with a large stone.

Above: All Photo Credits: Gabriel Gross, 2018
WALK WHERE HE WALKED! PLAN YOUR PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND WITH THE FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION.

Join Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, president of the FFHL on a pilgrimage of faith.

» NOV 26 - DEC 6, 2019
» MAR 20 - MAR 29, 2020
» NOV 29 - DEC 8, 2020

Pilgrims will explore the Holy Land as they embark on a journey of faith and grow closer to God.

YOUR PRESENCE IS SUPPORT. For more information on upcoming pilgrimages call 855.500.FFHL(3345)

If you are open to receiving future communications electronically please email info@ffhl.org or register online at https://www.ffhl.org/media/subscribe-to-the-ffhl-enewsletter.