



FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

SAFEGUARDING THE CHRISTIAN
PRESENCE IN THE HOLY LAND

Dear Friends of the Holy Land,

The Holy Land is not simply where Christianity began. It is where Christianity still lives.

This truth lies at the heart of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land's mission.

For more than 800 years, the Franciscan Friars have served in the land made holy by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have cared for the sacred places of our faith while walking alongside the Christian families who continue to call the Holy Land home.

Today, that mission is more important than ever. Many Christian families depend on pilgrims for their livelihoods. With fewer visitors in recent years and ongoing instability throughout the region, daily life has become increasingly difficult. Christians now represent less than two percent of the population of the Holy Land, yet they remain faithful witnesses to Christ in the very place where our faith was born.

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land exists because the Holy Land needs more than churches and shrines. It needs a vibrant Christian community.

Scripture reminds us that we are "living stones...built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Preserving Christianity in the Holy Land means supporting the men, women and children whose lives bear witness to the Gospel each day.

That mission is reflected throughout the programs featured in these pages.

A student receives an education that can shape a future. A family finds support during a difficult season. Sacred places remain places of prayer for pilgrims from around the world.

As St. Paul reminds us, "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). The Christians of the Holy Land are part of our family of faith, and their future is connected to ours.

I invite you to explore these pages and see how lives are being transformed through the work of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. More importantly, I invite you to see the people behind these programs... Christians who continue to live their faith with courage and perseverance in the homeland of Christ.

Thank you for standing with us in this important mission.

May God bless you and your loved ones abundantly.

Pace e bene, peace and all good,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM
President, Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land



CONTENTS

<i>Christian Student Education Programs</i>	3
<i>University Scholarship Program</i>	4
<i>Elementary & High School Program</i>	5
<i>Vocational & Technical Education Programs</i>	6
<i>Magnificat Music Scholarship Program</i>	7
<i>Christian Humanitarian Programs</i>	8
<i>Franciscan Boys Home</i>	9
<i>Children Without Borders</i>	10
<i>Children Without Borders March for Peace</i>	11
<i>Children's Christmas Program</i>	12
<i>Christian Social Services</i>	13
<i>Legacy Programs</i>	14
<i>Good Shepherd Society</i>	15
<i>Maintenance of the Holy Sites</i>	16



THE CHALLENGE

The Christian population in the Holy Land has fallen sharply – from 20–25% in the 1950s to less than 2% today. Economic hardship, political and religious tensions, safety concerns and a desire for better opportunities have driven many to consider leaving. Nearly 60% of Christians are thinking about emigration. Without stronger economic support and job opportunities, the future of the Christian presence and its mission in the Holy Land remains in jeopardy.



CHRISTIAN STUDENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS



At the start of the 20th century, Christians made up about 25% of the population in the Holy Land. Today, they represent less than 2%. One major reason for this decline is limited access to higher education. Without it, many Christians struggle to find stable employment, leading to long-term financial hardship. Addressing this challenge begins by opening doors to higher education for the next generation.

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) plays a crucial role in this effort. Through its University Scholarship Program, FFHL provides financial support that helps Christian students pursue higher education, build careers and remain in their homeland.

Since 1997, FFHL has provided millions in scholarships and grants to help Christian students pursue higher education, creating opportunities that support their future and the future of the Holy Land.

UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land's University Scholarship Program covers up to \$6,000 per year for four years of college, including tuition and books. This financial support has helped hundreds of financially disadvantaged Christian students be able to attend university, which yields a 97% graduation rate. The program supports both bachelor's and master's degrees in fields like law, medicine, engineering and business. Tuition in the Holy Land typically ranges from \$4,000 to \$6,000 per year – much lower than the U.S. average of \$34,000.



INVESTING IN TOMORROW'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS TODAY

In the Holy Land, where Christians face increasing challenges, education is a critical tool for survival and growth. FFHL provides financial support to help young Christians gain the skills necessary to build a future in their homeland. Graduates go on to establish careers and play active roles in their communities, directly contributing to the stability and strength of the Christian presence in the region.

By sponsoring a student, donors are investing in the future of Christianity in the Holy Land. Since 1997, this program has opened doors, changed lives and created lasting change for the next generation.

OUR PARTNERING UNIVERSITIES

Al-Quds University | An-Najah National University | Arab American University of Jenin/Ramallah
Azrieli College of Engineering Jerusalem | Bethlehem University | Birzeit University
David Yallin College | Hebrew University | Jerusalem Multidisciplinary College
Ono Academic College | Open University of Jerusalem | Ort Braude
Reichman University (IDC Hertzliya University) | Technion-Israel Institute of Technology

ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

FFHL's Elementary and High School Education Program bridges education gaps in communities where financial difficulties make it hard for parents to support their children's schooling. Operating in areas such as Jericho, Jerusalem and Nazareth, the program provides quality education while promoting important values. It serves economically disadvantaged students, including newcomers, and combines Christian teachings with global awareness to help students make informed decisions for a better future.

"With tolerance and coexistence comes the stage of equality where one accepts the other as he is with all his rights and privileges. In many ways, the future is linked with and dependent upon this type of education."

FR. PETER F. VASKO, O.F.M., FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF FFHL

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Elementary and High School Education Program plays an important role in overcoming financial barriers to education. By providing access to quality schooling, the program equips students with knowledge while promoting Christian values and community involvement. It ensures that all children, especially those in need, have the opportunity to succeed. Your support helps shape the future of Christianity in the Holy Land, giving children the tools to live with integrity and compassion.





VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

FFHL's Vocational and Technical Education Program helps students gain skills for stable jobs. The program covers tuition and materials for a two-year training in fields like plumbing, carpentry, auto mechanics and culinary arts. In partnership with respected institutions like the Lutheran World Federation Vocational Training Center and Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, this program offers Holy Land Christians a chance to learn trades that lead to steady employment.

TRAINING FOR TOMORROW

FFHL's program goes beyond traditional education by providing vocational training in trades like plumbing, electrical work, and more. This initiative offers scholarships to students who otherwise wouldn't have access to this training. While it primarily serves Christians, it also encourages connections across different communities

*"The support from America and other countries is very important.
We can see that with nearly 90% of our graduates working."*

FR. PETER F. VASKO, O.F.M., FOUNDED PRESIDENT OF FFHL

By teaching practical skills, the program gives students opportunities for stable work and helps strengthen relationships within the Holy Land's diverse communities.

MAGNIFICAT INSTITUTE MUSIC SCHOLARSHIPS

The Magnificat Institute in Jerusalem offers young musicians the chance to study piano, violin, flute or composition. Its goal is to promote peace and understanding among children from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The program focuses on earning academic diplomas recognized in the European Union and promotes cultural exchange and dialogue.



MELODIES OF UNITY AND PEACE

The Magnificat Institute, founded in 1995 by Father Armando Pierucci and now managed by the Custody of the Holy Land, is a powerful example of unity. It brings together Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Palestinian students, using music to bridge cultural and religious divides.

FFHL supports this important program by providing scholarships to talented young Christians. The Institute not only prepares future music educators but also offers students the chance to perform at Holy Land shrines and parishes. These relationships serve as a bridge, building positive relationships between different communities.

The Magnificat Institute trains music educators to teach in schools and features student performances at Holy Land shrines and parishes. It builds cross-cultural friendships and peaceful interactions, breaks down cultural, religious and language barriers and creates opportunities for a united future.

*The Magnificat Institute's goal is to connect people from different backgrounds through music, promoting coexistence and understanding. **Your support helps make this possible.***

Top instruments and majors chosen for study include violin, piano, cello, flute and composition.

HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMS



With Christians making up less than 2% of the Holy Land's population, FFHL focuses on supporting this community to prevent further displacement. The programs help stabilize families, enabling them to maintain their Christian heritage.

FFHL works to raise awareness of the human rights challenges facing Christians in the Holy Land. Our mission is to promote equal opportunities and protect their right to stay in their homeland. As a minority group, Christians often face the harshest impact of political crises and conflicts between Palestinian and Israeli interests.



FRANCISCAN BOYS HOME

Located in the city of Bethlehem, this home cares for Christian children facing difficult circumstances. The program supports those dealing with serious social, psychological and economic challenges, offering a stable and loving place where they can live, study and grow.

A HAVEN FOR HOPE AND GROWTH

Christian families in the Holy Land face significant challenges. The Franciscan Boys Home offers refuge for boys ages 6 to 18, providing care and stability during uncertain times. It helps children navigate difficult situations while keeping them connected to their families.

The Home's staff focus on character development through daily guidance and example. By providing a supportive environment and meaningful life lessons, the Boys Home cares for its children while strengthening the Christian community in the Holy Land.



CHILDREN WITHOUT BORDERS

The Children Without Borders program uses soccer to bring together kids from different backgrounds, teaching them values like peace, equality and teamwork. It provides a safe, positive space for children after school to develop their skills and learn important life principles through sports.



BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH PLAY

Children Without Borders plays a key role in overcoming divisions in a region with complex social and political issues. Using activities like soccer and the Folkloric Dance Dabkeh group, the program teaches kids critical life skills such as leadership, cooperation and peace-building. With the support of FFHL, it brings together over 400 children from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This program provides a safe environment where children grow in confidence and learn to work together, shaping them into positive leaders for the future.



CHILDREN WITHOUT BORDERS MARCH FOR PEACE

The Children Without Borders March for Peace unites youth from Bethlehem and Jerusalem, promoting peace and teamwork. Held during Christmas, the event features gift exchanges, games and performances. White balloons are released from Manger Square to represent peace and freedom. FFHL began supporting this event in 2008 at the request of parish priests in Jerusalem.

UNITING THROUGH TRADITION

Since 2003, the March for Peace has brought children from the Holy Land together, offering them a day of fun and connection against the backdrop of the Nativity story. The event brings the local community together, celebrating a shared Christian heritage and strengthening a sense of identity.

Inaugurated by Bethlehem's Mayor and Minister of Tourism, with guidance from Fr. Ibrahim Faltas, O.F.M. and Fr. Peter F. Vasko, O.F.M., Founding President of FFHL, the March highlights the Holy Land's ongoing commitment to peace and communal celebration.





CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

The Children's Christmas Program in Bethlehem brings the message of hope to a city facing hardships. Thanks to FFHL supporters, this initiative provides gifts to more than 900 children each year and hosts a community Christmas concert, spreading joy throughout the city.

BRINGING LIGHT TO BETHLEHEM

In Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, this program offers hope to children dealing with hardship. Through festive gifts and community events, it brings joy to those who need it most. With the support of generous donors, the initiative keeps Christ's spirit alive by showing how people's care can make a difference, even in tough times.



CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES SUPPORT

The Franciscan Social Services Organization (FSSO), with support from FFHL, provides practical help to struggling Christian families in Bethlehem. This includes financial aid, medical support and assistance with basic needs. Parish priests and staff visit homes to identify where help is most needed and connect people to the right resources.



HELP THAT HOLDS

FFHL also supports Christian Family Centers in Nazareth, which offer steady aid and a place to build community. These efforts are especially important for people who are homebound or have lost jobs due to ongoing crises. Together, FSSO and FFHL help families move forward and stay rooted in their homeland.

LEGACY PROGRAMS



FFHL's legacy programs provide ongoing support for Christians in the Holy Land as families continue to face economic pressure and instability. These efforts rely on the continued generosity of donors to sustain this work.

GOOD SHEPHERD SOCIETY

The Good Shepherd Society was created to help Christians remain in the Holy Land while sustaining FFHL's long-term mission. Through this program, donors are invited to include FFHL in their estate plans, creating a lasting impact that helps families remain rooted in their faith and communities while preserving the Christian presence in the region.



LEGACY GIVING

Becoming a member of our Legacy Society is simple and impactful. When you make a planned gift, no matter the amount, you automatically join. We respect your preferences, whether you wish to remain anonymous or share information. Whether you contact us by phone, email or online form, we'll honor your wishes. As a member, you'll receive exclusive recognition and updates about special events, keeping you informed on our mission's progress.

GIVING OPTIONS

Bequest in a Will | Charitable Trust | Life Insurance Beneficiary
Retirement Plan Beneficiary | Family Foundation Beneficiary



MAINTENANCE OF THE HOLY SITES

FFHL is committed to preserving the Holy Land's Christian heritage by supporting the maintenance of key holy sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus Christ was crucified, buried and resurrected. Through the generosity of donors, FFHL helps cover the ongoing care and necessary upkeep that protect these sacred places for worship and pilgrimage.

PRESERVING THE PAST, LIVING THE FAITH

FFHL also supports the Custody's Foundation, which funds the monthly maintenance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other important holy sites throughout the region. As one of Christianity's most sacred places, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre remains a central destination for pilgrims who come to pray and reflect on the life of Christ.

Preserving these holy sites protects their historical and cultural importance while sustaining the Christian presence in the Holy Land. This work also supports local livelihoods and helps ensure that the region's Christian heritage remains visible and accessible for future generations.



OUR VISION

FFHL strives to create a world where the Christian minority in the Holy Land can flourish spiritually, socially and economically, and be a vital part of the region's diverse cultural fabric.

We envision a Holy Land where Christians can practice their faith freely, where Catholic Christians live in peace with other Christians, with Jews and Muslims, with Israelis and Palestinians, and where the holy sites are preserved for generations to come.

OUR MISSION

FFHL provides financial resources for educational, social and housing programs to support Christians in the Holy Land, critical support for people in the Holy Land affected by crisis and conflict, the maintenance of Christian Shrines for the spiritual formation for pilgrims, and the life and work of the friars of the Custody of the Holy Land.

FFHL raises awareness to the challenges of Christians and the Christian presence in the Holy Land through education and communication in the United States.

OUR VALUES

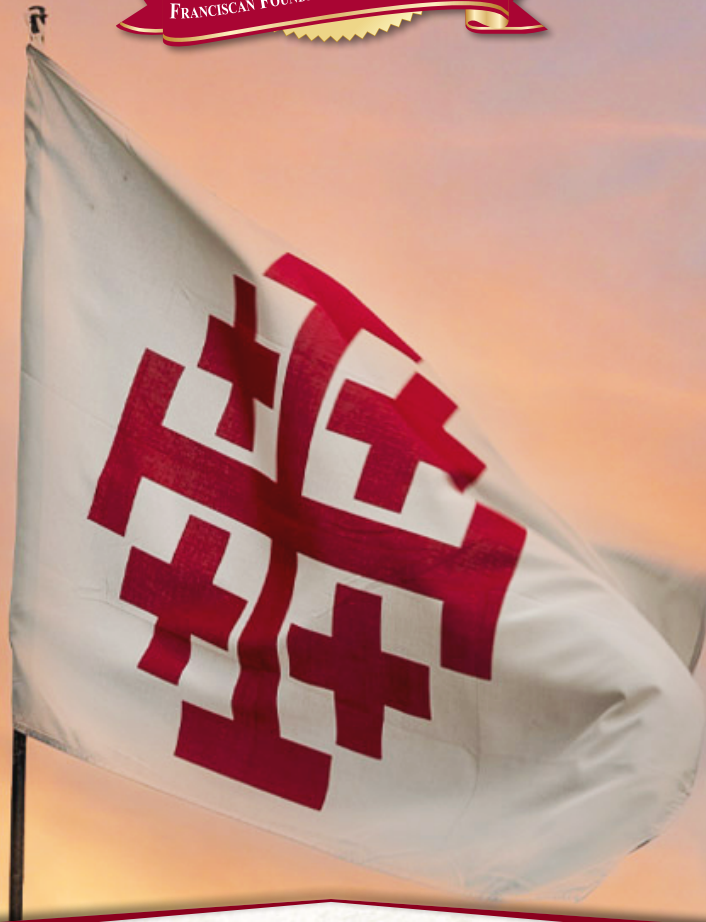
INTEGRITY: We act truthfully in everything we do.

STEWARDSHIP: Acknowledging that all we have is a gift, we act with responsibility as caretakers and not possessors of the resources we have at our disposal.

TRANSPARENCY: There are no secrets in what we do; we act with openness in everything we do.

ACCOUNTABILITY: With ever grateful hearts, we are responsible to the generous donors who support our efforts.

SERVICE: Not for ourselves, but for the glory of God, and in response to the needs of Christians in the Holy Land.



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