

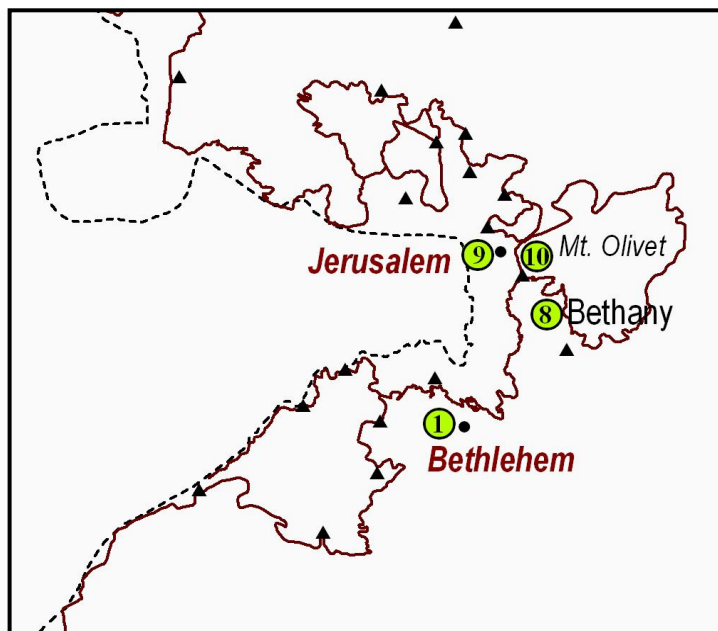
## 12: SOLIDARITY WITH THE HOLY LAND CHRISTIANS

Lawrence P. Grayson, DD, and  
Chairman, Holy Land Outreach Committee

---

The political and military conflicts in the area of the Holy Land have had dire economic and sociological effects, particularly on Palestinian Christians and their ability to continue living in towns and cities prominent in our Lord's life. The map below shows some of those locations. Bethlehem was where our Lord was born. Bethany is where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived, and where the Blessed Mother stayed on Holy Thursday evening. Jerusalem is where our Lord, as a boy, debated the rabbis in the Temple, and later suffered, died and was buried. Mt. Olivet is where He ascended to heaven.

The dashed line is the boundary set by the 1949 Armistice that ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. It divides Historic Palestine: Israel to the left and the West Bank to the right. The solid line shows the Wall erected recently by Israel to separate Palestinian settlements from Israel and its West Bank settlements. The Wall, which the International Court of Justice has ruled illegal, is about 550 miles long and lengthening, and up to 30 feet high in sections. The diamonds represent Israeli military checkpoints; there are 51 of them. Bethlehem is about 2 miles from Jerusalem, and Bethany about 10 miles away. Palestinian Christians living in Bethany or Bethlehem who wish to go to Jerusalem must obtain Israeli permission, which frequently is not given. They also must pass through one of the checkpoints, which is a slow procedure. Palestinian Christians living on one side of the wall effectively have been cut off from sites on the other.



Men cannot get to work; nuns cannot travel from their convents to the schools they serve; students cannot go on pilgrimages to Christian shrines; people cannot visit the places of our Lord's life on Holy Days.

As a result of the conflicts, which have lasted for several decades, many of the Christians have been deprived of adequate means to support their families, and Christian institutions are not able to maintain and promote their religious and humanitarian activities. With unemployment running as high as 60 percent among Christians and with little or no prospect for a safe and dignified future, there has been a constant exodus of Christians, especially young couples, from the Holy Land. When the boundary line was drawn in 1949, about 47 percent of the population of the area was Christian. Today, it is less than 2 percent. The Vatican has expressed its concern that without a Christian presence in the Holy Land, the sites of our Lord's life will become museums to a dead past, rather than remain living Christian communities.

As the Pope John Paul II said, "The Wall is an obstacle on the road to peace. The Holy Land does not need walls, but bridges". As disruptive as the Wall is, it is only a symbol of deep hostilities, whose roots extend back more than a millennium. If Palestinian Christians can remain, they are in a unique position to assist in developing a peaceful resolution. They share Biblical foundations with the Jewish peoples, and have a common language, culture and traditions with the Palestinian Muslims.

They can be the bridge for peace and understanding, as well as anchors to our Christian heritage. If they are to remain through the current turmoil, however, they require solidarity with Christians everywhere, expressed through spiritual and economic support.

The Knights of Columbus is reaching out to these fellow Christians. Our Supreme Council has provided monetary support since 2002 from the *Pacem in Terris Fund*. However, much more is needed on a personal level so that these people do not feel they are abandoned. They are not seeking charity, although charity is needed, but want to earn their living and lead dignified lives. Education of the young is essential if the Faith is to be maintained among the next generation. The 42 Catholic schools in the area, which enroll about 10,000 Christian students, must continue to exist and to provide quality Christian education. With the present economic conditions, tuition must be kept far below the actual cost of educating a child, and no Christian student is turned away because of inability to pay tuition. As a result, the schools are in dire need of financial assistance.

Our State Deputy in Maryland has created a Holy Land Outreach Committee, for the purpose of building a bridge for moral, spiritual and financial assistance to the Holy Land. Its first effort is to have every Council in the State support one child at a cost of \$300 for the year – and the Councils are responding. In the coming months, other efforts will be announced. In the meantime, keep these Christians, some of whom can trace their ancestry back to our Lord's first disciples, in your prayers.