

CNEWA-PMP President, Msgr. Peter Vaccari, visits with the Benedictine Sisters at their monastery on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.



### **CNEWA-Pontifical Mission**

#### establishment and work today

The 1948 Arab Israeli war killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and over 750,000 were displaced and forced to flee the war. Pope Pius XII established the Pontifical Mission for Palestine (PMP) to care for the those displaced by the war. He asked Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) to take on his special initiative, appointing the head of CNEWA as its president, and coordinating worldwide Catholic aid.

Pius's successors have continued to support this work, expanding the mandate of Pontifical Mission to assist all people in need throughout the Middle East.

PMP began implementing humanitarian and development programs and projects through three regional offices in Beirut, Jerusalem, and Amman. After the 1967 war and the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, with the blessing of Pope Paul VI, PMP began supporting a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) and Church-affiliated institutions throughout the Holy Land. These institutions continue to provide services for Palestinians until a final status agreement is reached and services are provided by a state.

PMP continues to work for, through and with the local Churches, and community based organizations, supporting programs and projects that benefit communities in Palestine and Israel. PMP seeks to accompany the local churches, provide emergency relief, respond to human needs and implement development projects.

Pontifical Mission School for the Blind in Gaza, 1950s. In later years, the school was handed over to UNRWA.



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Psychosocial intervention program at Old City schools in Jerusalem funded by Misereor and Embrace the Middle East

### **Forward**

As a Vatican agency driven by the Catholic Church social teachings and the Christian values, which are for the most part reflected in the human rights charter, PMP holds a special place for children whom we greatly value and appreciate. PMP looks to the Holy Family as the primary example of this. The Holy Family had a child in circumstances that are incomparable to any other; yet as Mary and Joseph decided



to accept the Child - a gift from God, He turned out to achieve a mission that changed history and continues to inspire us to cherish and love our children.

Based on this conviction and faith, PMP looks to the work of the local Church and community-based institutions in the Holy Land which continue to give special attention to God's children; especially underprivileged children, children with special needs, orphaned or abandoned children. CNEWA - Pontifical Mission in Jerusalem acknowledges the importance of supporting these childcare institutions as the needs continue to be great.

For instance, the Crêche in Bethlehem, a childcare institution established over 100 years ago, offers care, love, and support for orphaned, abandoned or abused babies and children. On a recent visit to the Creche, we were saddened by the story of a 12-year-old girl who was abused by her relatives and recently gave birth to a baby. The Sisters of the Creche receive social cases, like this case, each year. Our assistance has helped the sisters care for infants and toddlers, ensuring that they have a comfortable environment with which to fully grow and develop.

The Infant Welfare Center in the Old City of Jerusalem is another example of our assistance towards local childcare institutions. PMP provide aid towards the center's remedial education program. Thanks to this program, underprivileged and underserved children and teens from the Old City of Jerusalem and other neighborhoods of East Jerusalem could improve their school grades and succeed at school.

The Franciscan Boys Home in Bethlehem is another welcoming residential home for 30 Palestinian boys from Bethlehem, where sadly, most come from broken families, are abandoned or whose parents suffer from mental health problems, alcoholism, or abuse drugs. Many boys have no immediate family relatives to take care of them and are at risk of dropping out of school and being homeless. With PMP support, the boys can attend school full-time, have access to healthcare and have a warm and caring home environment with which to grow and draw the path for a different future.

PMP also prioritizes funding the needs of local schools as they continue to face challenges. Each year, PMP contributes towards procuring educational equipment, school desks and chairs or rehabilitate classrooms and other school facilities. Recognizing the need to help schools look towards cost-effective, environmentally friendly solutions which reduce operating costs over time; PMP installed solar panel systems that reduce electricity bills for schools which in turn, improves education and facilitates classroom learning.

In Gaza, PMP continues to provide an annual subsidy for the Near East Council of Churches Mother and Child Clinics. Aid supports operating costs of all three medical clinics in central Gaza city and Rafah, in the south. Additional grants support special programs that aim to reduce anemia and malnutrition among poor children in these areas, offer child health and nutritional education for parents and provide free psychosocial counseling for both mother and child.

Finally, PMP recognizes the need to invest in the next generation of Christian leadership in the Holy Land. A special program, "Koinonia" was developed after four years of planning and will concentrate on offering career and educational guidance, workshops and courses, internships, and scholarship opportunities for Palestinian youth.

In closing, let us be reminded that when a child is cared for, loved, and appreciated, he/she will grow up to do wonderful things in their lives and their community.

Joseph Hazboun Regional Director

# Country Brief Palestine

The Israel-Hamas war that erupted on October 7, 2023, created a humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip. Intense Israeli bombardment from air, land and sea continues to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip. Israel estimates that it has conducted at least 22,000 strikes on Gaza since Oct. 7th. Thousands of people have been killed and injured and 75 percent of the entire population of 2.2 million people have been displaced. There are acute shortages of shelter, food, clean water, and medical care, especially in the north of the Gaza Strip. Children are dying from malnutrition and dehydration while there is an imminent threat of famine and outbreak of infectious diseases. Life-saving humanitarian aid and basic services are urgently needed.

Israel intensified its military operations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 2023. Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, and some 8,800 Palestinians have been detained or arrested. There has also been an escalation of settler violence in the West Bank, especially by armed settlers. Settlement expansion has also intensified since the war began with settlers establishing at least 26 new illegal outposts in 2023, with at least 10 of them established during the war, and forced displacement of Palestinians; 21 Palestinian communities have been displaced and uprooted since the war began. Access restrictions in the form of fixed checkpoints, flying checkpoints, gates, earth mounds and concrete blocks, manned by Israeli military forces, have hurt the Palestinian economy, prevented people from accessing essential services and their jobs.

There was an uptick in anti-Christian hostility towards Church property in 2023, including vandalism, and desecration of holy sites, and clergy. Incidents against Christians threaten the Christian community, which numbers less than 2% of the total population in Palestine and will marginalize the community even further.

# Country Brief Israel

Anti-government demonstrations in 2023 were held across Israel in response to Israel's far-right government, its policies, and the judicial overhaul has led to a deep political division in Israeli society. However, Hamas' attack on October 7th, killing of about 1,200 people, shifted the public eye. Public discourse began to mount on Netanyahu's handling of the crisis and the hostages resulting in mass demonstrations throughout Israel. Left-hand Israelis have held protests calling for a ceasefire on Gaza.

The Arab Israeli community in Israel are facing a serious crisis, politically, economically, and socially. There are concerns regarding the escalation of internal violence between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Many Arab Israelis believe that mutual coexistence that has been built up for decades has been irreparably damaged. The Arab Israeli community as a minority feels unsafe.

Crime rates rose at an unprecedented rate. In 2023, 244 Arab-Israelis were killed in crime-related events. A population bulge of young Arabs from their late teens to mid-twenties comprise the highest percentage of Arabs in any age demographic category. Most of these young men are unemployed, and discriminatory policies and laws, most Arabs are unable to find well-paying jobs. Additionally, the lack of higher education among Israeli-Arab men is another factor driving the crime rate.

Arabs are mainly employed in low-income industrial jobs, tend to live in overcrowded towns and villages with infrastructure deficiencies and poorer-funded schools than Israelis.

Background photo: Syrian Orthodox Achbishop Mar Antimos Jack Yacoub shows the treasures of the Church's historic museum to CNEWA-PMP President, Msgr. Peter Vaccari, and the Jerusalem Office Director and Projects Manager

# 2023 Program Review

Thanks to donors and partners, CNEWA – Pontifical Mission was able to fund humanitarian and development projects that supported the local Churches and CBOs in Palestine and Israel. Funds amounting to \$1.7 million funded a total of 78 programs and projects in 2023. With your support in 2023, the PMP and its partners funded:

- 25 projects in the health, education, and social services which served thousands of marginalized people and those in need,
- 17 Palestinian youth leadership programs and Christian scout programs reaching hundreds of Palestinian Christian and Muslim youth,
- 25 pastoral programs of Churches and Church institutions that build faith and a sense of belonging for Christians,
- Distributed water, food, and other essential emergency supplies for internally displaced people (IDPs) and members of the Christian community in Gaza during the Israel-Hamas war,
- Emergency employment initiative that provided economic support for olive farmers and unemployed laborers at time when work permits were canceled and closure in the West Bank,
- Subsidized 3 health and education programs of local partners reaching thousands in Gaza and Bethlehem,
  - Awarded scholarships for university students in Gaza and Bethlehem.

Each PMP program consists of sub-projects with objectives associated with the overall response plan.

Donor contributions from CNEWA and other donors generously provided USD 1.7 million in contributions that supported 93 projects across 4 strategic areas.

#### USD 1.5 million

donor contributions and grants that supported CNEWA-PMP programs in 2023

#### 93 projects

implemented in collaboration with local partners in Palestine & Israel

67% of funding from North America (\$1.2 million) 25% of funding from Europe (\$420,000)

of funding from the UK (\$120,000)

Palestine			Israel
Gaza USD 400,000	Jerusalem USD 400,000	West Bank USD 720,000	USD 200,000

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# Enhance and improve access to better public facilities

Churches and CBOs in Israel and Palestine continue to face mounting challenges. Their programs and services have been reduced or cut as a result of these challenges, curtailing vital service support for people in need. Churches and CBOs need donor aid to procure new equipment, upgrade facilities, or cover basic operating costs.

PMP's program channels donor aid to Churches and CBOs in Israel and Palestine, to provide the necessary means in order continue vital services for people, especially the marginalized and needy. In 2023, the PMP raised a total of \$379,000 towards enhancing and improving public services. These grants procured needed equipment, rehabilitated facilities of kindergartens and schools, retirement homes and healthcare centers, and supported education, health, and social programs.

Some of these examples include:

• A 3-month supply of food for 38 elderly residents of the Salvatorian Sisters' Emmaus Qubeibeh retirement home. The Salvatorian Sisters were unable to cover the costs of food due to the increased cost of living and high unemployment rate in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, which impacted the care and support of elderly residents.

• Subsidized 250 newborn check-ups and other health monitoring services for children; assisted 25 births of women who cannot afford their healthcare costs; and covered the costs of doctor's fees for deliveries and home visits to ensure the health and welfare of both mother and child through local partner Beit Sahour Cooperative Society for Health Welfare.

• Established a safe playground serving 160 kindergarten and early elementary students, aged 3-8 years old, at the Laura Vicuna School, Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco.

• Rehabilitated the multipurpose hall of Ephpheta Institute for the Hearing Impaired, ensuring the hall was safe for 190 hearing impaired students including 18 refugee children, and 18 boarding students as well as 39 school staff and 5 Sisters of St. Dorothy.



# Provide systematic assistance to youth programs

PMP's youth program provides donor aid to support programs of local schools, youth centers and clubs, scout troops. These programs encourage healthy childhood development and wellbeing.

In 2023, PMP allocated \$363,911 of donor aid that supported education, cultural and recreational activities for children and youth, educational workshops on leadership and development, and activities that promote inclusiveness and tolerance.

In particular, PMP's three-year extracurricular program consists of 4 extracurricular programs in collaboration with partner CBOs located in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah. Extracurricular activities provide positive outlets for Palestinian children and youth who continue to live in isolation; in communities where street violence and limited recreational and educational opportunities are limited or unavailable.

The benefit of the program is profound for children and teens who face violence and uncertainty in their neighborhoods and villages.

Ghada is a 16 year-old teen who lives in the Old City of Jerusalem with her parents and 5 siblings. Her mother noticed that Ghada was introverted and had few friends and struggled in school. Ghada's mother turned to the Al-Saraya Center – a center that empowers youth through youth development programs and academic support. Since joining Al-Saraya Center, Ghada has become an active leader in the center's activities, participating in a youth life skills group. Ghada says: "I would like to study law in the future. I always strived to develop myself, and for this reason, I am here at Al-Saraya Center. At the center, there are many opportunities that develop myself further and help me develop relationships with others."





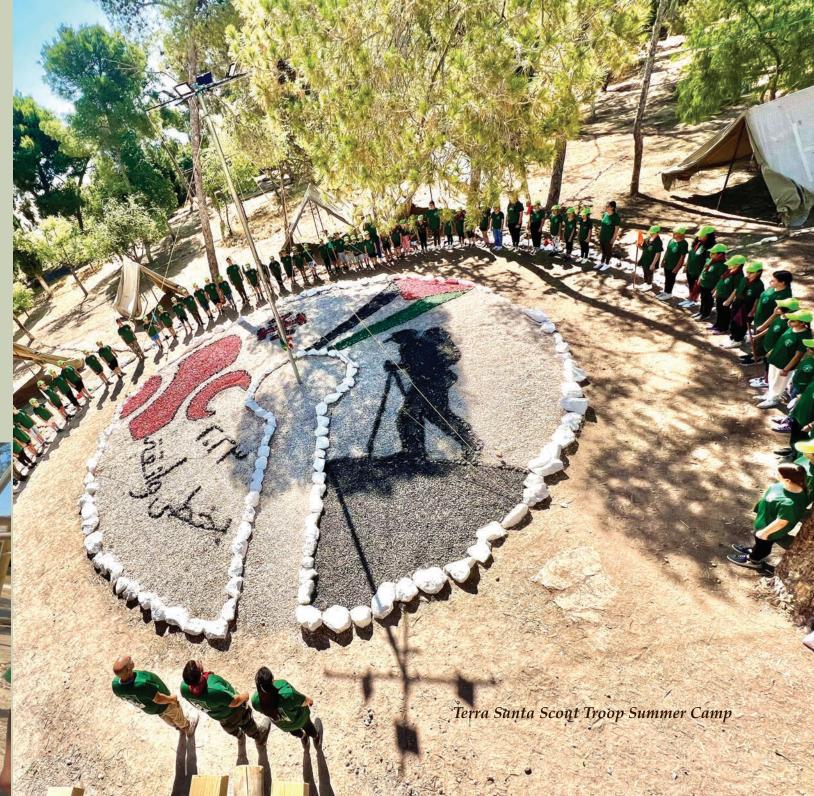


PMP's youth program also supports scout troops in both Israel and Palestine, focusing on pastoral and leadership programs that aim to strengthen the relationship between the Christian scouts, and better serve the Church and local community.

Grants have made a significant impact on the local scout movement. According to the scout leaders, the program enabled the scout troop members to learn life skills, build relationships with other scout members and develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. The activities also helped scout members realize their role in their communities and how their contributions make a positive impact on others.

A Terra Sancta Scout Leader said, "PMP's grant supported the Terra Sancta Scout Troop summer camp program which offered activities that improved their social and emotional skills". PMP's grant supported the summer camp which was led by experts and scout leaders who centralized the summer camp program around helping out and giving back to others. "Scouts learned what it means to be an active member in their own community, to help those in need. The program encouraged them to give back which made them feel proud and part of society."







## **Pastoral Program**

Palestinian Christians, who are a minority group in multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society, struggle with their own self-identity and sense of belonging. PMP's pastoral program was developed to help Christians understand themselves better, deepen their faith, and understand their role in the Christian community and greater society.

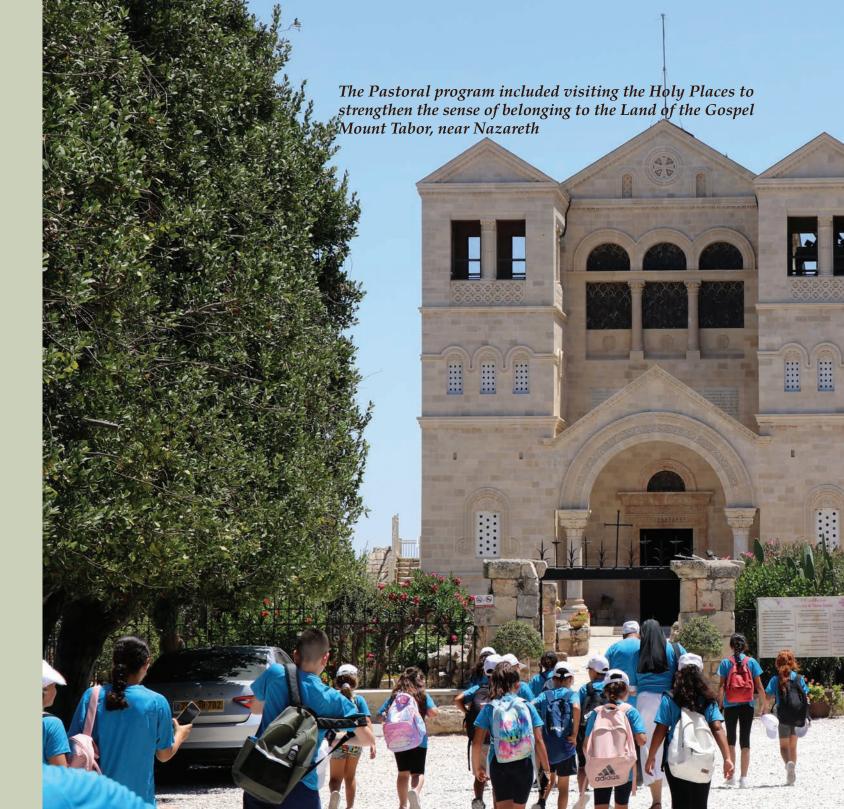
PMP works in partnership with Churches and Church-affiliated organizations (CROs, funding pastoral programs at parishes, monasteries, Churches, and Christian youth centers in Israel and Palestine. Grants are allocated for equipment, furniture or rehabilitation work that supports these important programs. Grants fund pastoral activities such as catechetical and Sunday school programs, Bible summer camps and Bible competitions.

In 2023, the PMP raised funds totaling \$336,556 from donors to fund pastoral programs in Israel and Palestine. Some of the grants:

- Supported pastoral work of the Greek Catholic Church including pastoral activities, a Bible summer camp program, Sunday School and a Church rehabilitation project. According to the Parish Priest Fr. George Jahshan: "It's the first time in many years that the community felt a sense of belonging to the Church. The Sunday School activities were well-received by parents, and children were thankful for the Sunday School program which helped them learn more about the Bible and their Christian identity".
- Salesian Convent Bethlehem, Don Bosco's 2023 summer camp hosted nearly 200 people, including 121 children (male and female), aged 6-14 years old, from July 10 till July 28th. The summer camp's diverse activities provided youth with a holistic experience that positively contributed to their overall growth. The activities were centered around the main theme Don Bosco's life and experience, and the three elements of a relationship: connection with oneself, relationship with others, and relationship with parents.



- Latin Parish 2023 Bible Summer Camp, "Walking with You", or walking with our Lord Jesus. Activities included visits to the holy sites in the country, workshops and lectures that aimed to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Land of Jesus. Summer camp activities were divided according to the age of participants: 11 families, 80 youth and 110 children. All these programs and activities were supervised by 50 volunteers.
- A group of people, priests, or laity and the Greek Orthodox Church in the village of Kfar Yasif, carried out several spiritual, social, and cultural activities, in order to build a Christian generation that grows on love of God, virtue and giving. CNEWA's support funded summer camps for university, high school students and children as well as a spiritual workshop for the leaders and supervisors of the Sunday School. The funds made an impact on the ability for the church to reach other churches in northern Israel. More youth and Sunday school meetings have been organized in neighboring Churches of the Archdiocese of Acre, after receiving the blessing of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, and the support of Archimandrite Silwanos Hanouna, the Patriarchal Vicar in Acre, and the judiciary. The first youth and Sunday school meeting was organized in the village of Rameh, then the village of Al-Baana, and with the village of Al-Bqai'a, and the pastoral mission will be launched in the near future.
- The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has assembled a pastoral care team within the Diocese to oversee this program. The team is a lay-led ministry caring for the congregation, members, and friends. The pastoral care team aimed to provide a ministry of support and hope for the congregation. The team works collaboratively with Syriac Orthodox priests in order to expand the congregation's pastoral care presence. The project made an impact on children and youth as well as families. A new approach for the youth and children who participated in the pastoral activities. Children and youth learned about life skills, decision making and the importance of volunteerism, especially in the Church and in their communities. This effort helped build and foster a sense of belonging to the Church and community.





### **Subsidized Institutions**

PMP maintains its commitment to support three public institutions in the health and education sectors: Near East Council of Churches Mother and Child Clinics (NECC) in Gaza, Pope Paul VI Ephpheta Institute for the Deaf in Bethlehem, and the Pontifical Mission Educational and Cultural Center (PMECC), also in Bethlehem.

#### Paul VI Ephpheta Institute

Ephpheta Paul VI Institute for the Hearing Impaired provides specialized education services for the hearing impaired since 1971 and it is still one of only a few specialized schools in Palestine. Ephpheta Institute is operated by the Sisters of Saint Dorothy, an Italian congregation who are specialized in educating the deaf, in addition to a team of 39 teachers and specialists trained in the field of oral deaf education and auditory-verbal therapy. A total of 190 students are enrolled at Ephpheta Institute in 2022-2023 academic year. Financial support towards the Ephpheta Institute ensures the continuation of the educational services provided the Institute towards the students enrolled at the Institute.

• 10 teacher's salaries covered in 2023 ensured that the teaching staff received monetary compensation on a monthly basis for their work in educating Ephpheta students.

Ephpheta Institute ensures that graduates can continue their education or find jobs in the local job market. Yahya Mirie Salem Masri, a recent high school graduate, is now employed as an electrician in a local Palestinian company in Hebron which produces solar panel systems. The school team, together with the social worker, went to his home in September to see the progress Yahya has made since graduation. Yahya's experience has been absolutely positive.

He attended a two-year course in 'Technology and Solar System', at the Palestine Ahliya University in Bethlehem under the motivation and suggestion of Ephpheta's social worker and was awarded a vocational training diploma certificate. At the end of the course, the young man found a job and is now independent trained worker. Indeed, the training made the young student economically independent and more integrated in society.

#### **PMECC**

The PMECC's main programs include children's reading and educational programs which are free of charge for school-aged children and their families. These activities benefit both Christians and Muslims, as well as youth and adults from Bethlehem and surrounding areas. The programs offered by PMECC contribute towards the education, development and wellbeing of Palestinian children, youth, and their families in Palestine.

PMECC's programs have received recognition by the Palestinian Ministry of Education in addition to local private and public-school support for the quality of creativity of their programs, especially the PMECC reading program.

CNEWA's annual subsidy covers the operating expenses such as the staff salaries, utilities, and activities, to ensure that members of PMECC have access to academic resources that promote reading and knowledge which contribute towards the development of children.

One of PMECC's programs is the PMECC reading competition which has been ongoing for three consecutive years - since 2019, targeting 5th grade students in Bethlehem and Jerusalem area schools. This year's reading competition reached 1,265 5th grader students from 32 government and private schools both in Bethlehem and Jerusalem area. This was the first time that five private schools in Jerusalem were involved in the competition.

Winners of the reading competition program to

children

encourage reading among school



#### **NECC Mother and Child Clinics**

CNEWA's support towards NECC Mother and Child Clinics ensured that healthcare and psychosocial support were provided to beneficiaries during the project period. The project was halted abruptly on October 7, 2023 when the Israel-Hamas war began. Since then, the work of NECC Mother and Child Clinics in Shiajia and Darraj clinics and vocational training centers have been halted. CNEWA-Pontifical Mission reports that both NECC clinics in Gaza City (Shijaia and Darraj) have either been partially or completely destroyed; only the Rafah clinic is operational and provides minimal healthcare assistance and psychosocial support for the displaced in Rafah.

NECC reported in December 2023, "in middle and south Gaza, DSPR-NECC operates a medical clinic, one of only four remaining centres serving a population in desperate need". "DSPR extended use of its offices to increase capacity for needed clinical services. Since it was reopened in December 2023, the [Rafah] clinic serves more than 400 patients every day, providing dental, maternal, and child healthcare and psychosocial support; offering medicine and distributing hygiene kits when available; and offering primary health care, in close liaison and coordination with the UN health cluster and the WHO in Gaza."





# **Emergency Aid and Relief**

In emergency crisis, Pontifical Mission - Jerusalem works alongside local CBOs and other partners to assess the immediate needs of the local communities. Funds are allocated to provide emergency relief and assistance to local partners in the target area.

#### **Scholarship Program**

In response to the ongoing humanitarian and political crisis in the Gaza Strip, CNEWA/ Pontifical Mission - Jerusalem (PMP) launched a scholarship program in 2015 that awarded underprivileged Christian high school graduates with a scholarship for a four-year university diploma. There were 31 students under the Gaza Christian scholarship program in 2023, 45% are female and 54% are male. The program was implemented from April 2023 and continued until October 2023, with the onset of the Israel-Hamas war. The scholarship program has been canceled as all universities in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed and the whereabouts of the scholarship recipients is unknown.

CNEWA-PMP awarded several outstanding students attending universities in the West Bank who had limited to no financial aid to cover tuition costs. Scholarships were awarded to these students to be able to continue their studies.

#### **Gaza Emergency Aid Project**

2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza are struggling to survive since the Israel-Hamas war erupted on October 7, 2023. Intense Israeli bombardment from air, land and sea continues to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Thousands have been killed, more injured and more than three-quarters of the population is displaced.



There is limited to no water and the entire population is affected by hunger.

With the onset of the war, PMP launched an emergency aid project in cooperation with local community members and iNGO partners in the Gaza Strip. Emergency funds raised by donors and CNEWA totaling \$133,505 procured and delivered emergency supplies to those in urgent need. From October – December 2023, PMP provided several weeks' worth of food for hot meals for hundreds of displaced Christians sheltering at the Holy Family Church and the St. Pophyrios Church. The generous donation was made by CNEWA and contributions from the local community which has enabled hundreds of displaced people including families with children, elderly people, and others, have hot meals, medicine for those with chronic illnesses and diseases, hygiene kits and diapers, fuel and cooking gas for both cooking and heating, water, and cleaning materials.

#### **Bethlehem Governorate Emergency Aid Project**

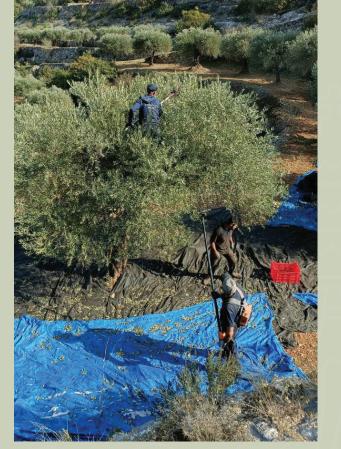
Local Palestinian landowners faced a serious challenge to recruit and hire Palestinian laborers during the Israel-Hamas war which began on October 7th and was the peak of the 2023 olive harvest season. The Israeli military closures and

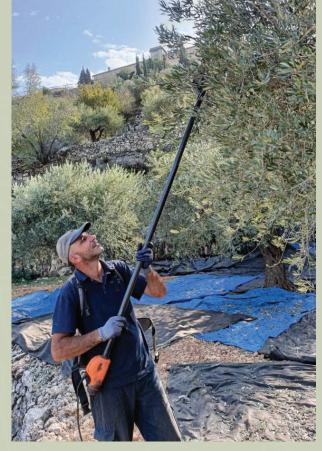
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cancellation of Palestinian West Bank work permits caused critical disruptions to everyday Palestinian life and has since negatively impacted the economic stability of Palestinian households.

PMP's Emergency "Olive Harvesting for Empowerment" Aid Project, conducted by Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Pontifical Mission, represented a comprehensive effort to empower Palestinian landowners and unemployed laborers in Bethlehem during the 2023 olive harvest season. The implementation of the "Olive Harvesting for Empowerment" project has been notably positive. The generous grant from Embrace the Middle East – UK provided immediate employment and economic support for 33 unemployed Palestinian laborers and 9 Palestinian landowners in Bethlehem Governorate. Olives were harvested from a total of 8.27 acres, including olive groves located in Beit Jala (Cremisan Valley) and areas behind the Israeli Separation Wall, totaling 55 working days. This income earned from the sale of olives can sustain a small family for six months to a year. Moreover, unemployed people are in desperate need of an income to maintain their livelihoods.

A 29-year old day laborer hired for the project said, "I was among thousands of Palestinians who'd lost their jobs due to Israel's cancellation of Palestinian work permits at the start of the Israel-Hamas war. For several months, I have struggled financially to cover my basic living costs. This project enabled me to be part of a group of unemployed people who were hired to work as olive pickers for local landowners in Bethlehem. As soon as I became part of the olive picking project, things started to change positively for me. I benefited greatly from the income I earned. This amount wasn't just financial support but changed my life's outlook. No longer did I worry about finances and the pressure of being unemployed but also yearned to restore stability back in my life. Now, I aspire to improve my economic situation and find new job opportunities."







The Orthodox Church Building, destroyed late October, killing 21 Christians.

One of the Rosary Sisters School buildings destroyed during the war.

## **Donors & Benefactors**

In addition to CNEWA, PMP is grateful to partner donors and benefactors that fund our work in the Holy Land. Without your generosity and support, our work would not be possible. Thank you!

- Children's Relief Bethlehem
- Diocese of Stockholm
- Embrace the Middle East
- Friends of the Holy Land
- Kindermissionswerk
- Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, Holland
- Manos Unidas
- Misereor
- Swiss Holy Land Foundation

