

BETHLEHEM ENCOUNTER MISSION TRIP 2019

Fourteen adventuresome Canadians participated in a unique **HOPE Outreach of Canada** encounter trip to the Holy Land **October 18 – November 2, 2019**. Organized by HOPE Outreach board member Beverley Timgren, who has spent her adult life serving in the Middle East, this trip allowed participants to interact with local people and ministries, particularly on the Palestinian side of the wall...ministries addressing issues of Christian education, peace, justice, and reconciliation, empowering women, as well as caring for the poor and marginalized.



The group was based at the guest house at **Bethlehem Bible College** which was celebrating 40 years of God's faithfulness. The College is currently impacting more than 200 students including a new on-line program reaching more than 20 Arabic speaking countries. Their goal is to transform the hearts of students as well as their intellect. A group of their students and faculty have just returned from another ministry visit among the Syrian refugees in neighboring Jordan. The College's humanitarian arm, **The Shepherd Society**, plans to provide 400 food baskets for needy families in the area this coming Christmas. – <https://HOPE Outreach of Canada.ca>

Time at the College allowed for featured lectures with faculty members to give biblical, historical and cultural insights relevant to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the local indigenous church as well as reconciliation ministries. The program also included biblical site visits in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nazareth, Galilee, Jericho and more, but most important was the opportunity to meet, interact with, and encourage a variety of local Christians—the “living stones” of the Holy Land.

The team agreed it was a full and exciting trip. One of the Canadian travellers said, “What struck us immediately upon arrival was the Palestinian oppression with the massive concrete wall in North Bethlehem and frequent checkpoints that the Israelis use to control the movement of the Palestinian people. Having the opportunity to see some of the reconciliation work from a Christian perspective, as well as the work with women and children's groups provided hope at the grassroots level that possible change can happen.”



Another group member wrote, “While we cannot discern or comprehend fully the politics there, we have come to know the plight of the Palestinians and their struggle to survive under inequitable social conditions.” And a summary from another: “Seeing the biblical sites, made our understanding of God’s Word come alive geographically and historically.

Three refugee camps are located in Bethlehem—Aida, al-Azzeh, and Dheisheh. Initially set up to shelter thousands of Palestinian refugees in 1948, they are now home to their descendants and have become densely crowded communities of concrete buildings on narrow, winding streets. Most cannot afford to live elsewhere. One highlight for the team was their visit to Aida camp for a cooking class with the amazing women of the **Noor (Light) Project** in support of the disabled children of families living in Aida and Azzeh camps.

The team participated in craft activity and singing with special needs kids at **House of Hope**; visited a family whose home on their own property had been bulldozed and later aided by the **Holy Land Trust** rebuilding project; helped pick olives for a Palestinian farming family; visited **Tent of Nations** (a harassed Christian Palestinian farm with an entrance sign, “We Refuse To Be Enemies”); and spent part of a morning working with the disabled young people at **L’Arche**. We left financial love gifts with all of the ministries we visited and encouraged.



Sami Awad is the founder of the non-violence movement under Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem. He said, “How does all this fit into our faith? If Jesus were here, would He stand with the marginalized, and against the occupiers? No, Jesus never stands against anyone. Jesus calls us to love. The concept of loving one’s enemy only exists in Christianity. How many of us really do so? Loving one’s enemy is a command. Think of Jesus’ life and the Roman oppression in His society? It was probably even more difficult for Him.”

There were also other devotional times built into our busy schedule. A major spiritual highlight noted by several was the time spent at the peaceful Garden Tomb in East Jerusalem where the group shared communion together. “He is not here! He has risen as He said!”



One team member concluded, “Our biggest encouragement of this trip came unexpectedly from someone at the **Bethlehem Bible College**. One night after dinner at the college, George, our Christian local guide, was downstairs with his two lovely children waiting for his wife, who is studying for her MA degree at the college. She came down to greet us after her class. One of us asked her impulsively, ‘Would you become a missionary after your education here?’ And she replied, ‘**Of course!**’ Please pray for her and her family.



Another was deeply impacted by the words of Bethlehem Bible College President, Dr. Jack Sara: “Please leave here with a new love for Jews and Palestinians, and a commitment to pray for both.” Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and pray for the peace of Bethlehem!

Join us in October 2020 for our next planned Encounter visit to the Holy Land! Contact us at: office@hopeoutreach.ca.