

Arch Street Hosts Presentation by Palestinian Christian

By Hugh Macsherry, OFM

BOSTON — On May 3, St. Anthony Shrine hosted Daoud Nassar, a Palestinian Christian farmer from outside Bethlehem.

Nassar and his family founded Tent of Nations, an organization that strives to build bridges among various communities in his area of the Palestinian territories. He spoke to an audience of more than 100, including friars from St. Anthony Shrine and St. Anthony Residence. Friars **David Convertino, OFM**, and **Richard McFeeley, OFM**, guardians of these respective communities, were both in attendance.

The effort was spearheaded by **Jacek Orzechowski, OFM**, in collaboration with Friends of Tent of Nations, North America (FOTONNA) and Jackie Stewart of St. Anthony Shrine. Both Jacek and Stewart entered this effort with Holy Name Province's 2008 Vision and Strategic Plan in mind, consciously seeking to "Develop our peacemaking efforts by becoming more deeply involved in dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims, while engaging the religious, social, economic and political factors that, when unaddressed, become catalysts for violence" (Holy Name Province Vision and Strategic Plan, June 2008, "Mission," goal D).

Stewart reached out to several different Jewish congregations in the Boston area from which members were in attendance. Such outreach was especially meaningful given Nassar's testimony of interfaith outreach at Tent of Nations to the Muslim and Jewish communities. Phyllis Tobin, one of the Shrine's Jewish interfaith partners, said she was impressed by Nassar's story.

Tobin said she and Stewart "will be sure to meet with our Rabbi at Temple Shalom about having an adult education offering in the fall on Elias Chacour's books and the Tent of Nations. And, I will be contacting my friends in Jerusalem about Tent of Nations. They should know about this!"

Nassar was accompanied on his visit by Kay and Bill Plitt from FOTONNA, based in Northern Virginia. Jacek, who has visited the Nassar family several times while leading Franciscan peacemaking pilgrimages to the Holy Land, also helped coordinate presentations at The Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi in Raleigh, N.C., and St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church in Hartford, Conn.

John Maganzini, OFM, described the presentation as "powerful," adding: "God bless every effort. You can see God's hand in it all, despite the struggles and obstacles the Nassars move forward in their conviction for peace and unity. So Franciscan!"

Nassar returned to his home in Palestine on May 4 after completing his tour along the East Coast, which began on April 17. He regularly visits the United States to promote the work of Tent of Nations for non-violent peacemaking in the Middle East.

— Fr. Hugh is a resident of St. Anthony Shrine in Boston. He was ordained a priest in May 2009.

Cultivating Peace

By Megan Nerz

RALEIGH, N.C. — To a crowd of Jews, Muslims and Christians gathered on the evening of April 26 at the Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi, Dahoud Nassar — a Palestinian Christian farmer and peace activist — described the ongoing struggle to maintain his family’s almost 100-year-old homestead south of Bethlehem and to sustain the activities of the Tent of Nations, an educational and cultural organization aimed at fostering peace and reconciliation.

Nassar told the often dramatic and inspiring story of his family’s struggle to defend their land nonviolently from illegal confiscation by the Israeli government that wants to seize the land to build more roads into Jewish settlements and to continue the construction of its security wall.

Surrounded by violence, Nassar decided on another, more courageous and creative, option to break the cycle of pain and frustration. “We refuse to be enemies — instead we are building bridges of understanding and reconciliation.”

Believing that “peace should grow from the grassroots,” Nassar established the Tent of Nations on his family’s land. Its goal is clear and straightforward: to build bridges of understanding between people of different backgrounds, and between people and the land.

David McBriar, OFM, who organized the event at St. Francis, sees Dahoud and his commitment to the cause of peace as shining examples of hope and grace at work in a region of perpetual violence and aggression.

“There is no one more dedicated to the pursuit of peace in the Holy Land than Dahoud Nassar,” David said. “It is at the Tent of the Nations that you meet the ‘Living Stones’ of the Holy Land — Christians struggling to hold on in the midst of an occupation.”

Tent of Nations, established in 2000, welcomes international visitors — including many Israelis, to join together and plant trees, harvest olives and fruit, teach at the women’s education center, lead activities in the youth summer camps, and come together in solidarity and shared goals for the pursuit of peace through non-violent activities.

As legal battles drag on and the difficulties to remain on the land grow increasingly complex, Tent of Nations and the Nassar family remain steadfast in their commitment to non violent resistance — planting olive trees, collecting rain water, connecting children to the land, collaborating with international witnesses and, most importantly, bringing a vision of hope and peace to the parcel of land they call home.

— *Megan Nerz is a member of the JPIC Directorate and a parishioner at St. Francis in Raleigh.*