

Franciscan Peacemaking

From Crisis to Hope

Toward a Just Peace in the Holy Land

Pope Francis' May 2014 pilgrimage to the Holy Land challenges all Franciscan-hearted people to recommit themselves to working for justice and peace in the Holy Land and saying, "No to a Sterile Pessimism." 800 years ago during the Crusades, St. Francis of Assisi went unarmed to meet the Sultan of Egypt. Placing himself between two armed forces, he witnessed boldly to the Gospel message of peace. Empowered by a profound sense of Christ's presence in the world, St. Francis treated a foe with great respect, as a friend. Unafraid of the other's truth, he was open to dialogue and to discovering the face of God in unexpected places, just as he had done in his encounter with the leper.

One of the longest and most tragic conflicts in the world continues unabated in a land that is holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Its terrible violence has left both Palestinians and Israelis suffering. Today, the open armed conflict has ceased. However, the mistrust and hurts it generated remains a high barrier to peace efforts.



Four decades of Israeli occupation have devastated the Palestinian economy and contributed to the continued decline of Christian populations in the Holy Land. Their situation is intolerable, with severe limits on basic food, potable water, and electricity. Poverty rates among Palestinians are nearly 65 percent, giving rise to increasing desperation. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, poverty, unemployment and frustration are rising. The expanding Israeli settlements, Palestinian home demolitions, and the separation wall continue to exacerbate these challenges. Furthermore, over two-thirds of Gaza's approximately 1.5 million people remain dependent on international charity for basic needs. The violence in Gaza and the Occupied West Bank has deeply shaken Palestinian society, with psychosocial trauma especially evident among youth.

The ongoing Palestinian – Israeli conflict is not contained to the immediate region; it sends negative reverberations throughout the world, escalating tensions and strengthening extremist elements throughout the Middle East.

Over the last several months U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has been leading a negotiation between the Israeli and Palestinian governments. In recent weeks, this attempt to foster peace has come to a standstill. There is still hope that an agreement can be reached in the next year. Yet, for this hope to prevail, it must overcome decades of mistrust and violence. A compromise becomes more difficult each day. For the two sides to breach the walls of mistrust and to help deal with the problem of an enormous imbalance of power between the Israelis and Palestinians, Catholics in the U.S. must become more active as peacemakers.

Signs of Hope

- There is a growing recognition that the Israeli struggle to provide security and peace to Jewish people, and the Palestinian determination to seek justice and create a viable state of their own, are not a zero-sum game; rather, they are mutually-dependent efforts.
- Majorities of Palestinians and Israelis want peace and still favor a two-state solution.
- Increasing numbers of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups in the U.S. are collaborating to help bring about a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land.
- The Obama Administration continues to show strong and determined leadership in pursuit of a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land. Secretary of State Kerry's recent efforts continue, and they challenge us all to help build a more positive future for the people of the Middle East.
- Finally, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Similar to the way that Pope John Paul the Great visited Poland and helped begin a process that ended the Cold War, might not a comparable concentration of good will from Pope Francis move us toward an elusive peace in the Holy Land?



Franciscan Call to Action

We are at a critical juncture in the long history of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The window of opportunity has not closed, though the opening is narrowing as suffering and insecurity remain the status quo. NOW is the time for action; bold American leadership must continue, bolstered by public support. We, members of the large Franciscan family, join the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and many Evangelical, Protestant and Orthodox faith leaders in offering prayers and bi-partisan support for the Obama Administration's strong leadership in the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Franciscans invite you to take action for Peace in the Holy Land through [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) advocacy efforts](#) (see also www.cmep.org/content/advocacy-center).



What Can You Do?

Watch

- **Keeping Our Vision Alive** - a short video from the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation. It's a powerful introduction to the plight of the Palestinian Christians and provides a number of ways that people in the U.S. can make a difference.
Visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJhVg8-oNgI#t=118
- **Love Your Enemies** - a video highlighting the Tent of Nations Peace project.
Visit www.vimeo.com/29677206
- **Searching for Peace in the Middle East.**
Visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jKkIXS-Ffg

Pray

- Include the cause of a just peace in the Holy Land in your daily and/or personal prayer.
- Ask your Church to pray for peace in the Holy Land at Sunday liturgy.
- Pray for unity, reconciliation and peace in preparation for the historical meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew (the Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch):
 - www.terrasanctapax.org/allegati/prayer-booklet.pdf
 - (IN SPANISH: www.terrasanctapax.org/allegati/propuesta-de-oracion.pdf)

Act

- Sign up for the [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) E-mail Advocacy Network](#) to receive timely action alerts (www.cmep.org).
- Be part of the Franciscan outreach efforts in the Holy Land: www.ffhl.org
- Help to preserve a viable Christian community in the Holy Land: www.hcef.org
- Support contemporary prophets of hope in the Holy Land, among them Daoud Nassar (www.fotonna.org) and Palestinian Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace (www.theparentscircle.com).