

## Nazareth Circle 373

On Thursday June 18<sup>th</sup> Hastings and Bexhill Circle had a Zoom meeting at which several Brothers from outside the UK took part. One of these, Brother Habib Karam spoke about the dire situation of Christians in Nazareth.

Several emails have since been sent around to Province 18 Officers about this and the following is a summary.

It starts with an email from Brother Ed Murphy to those who attended the Zoom meeting:

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Brothers

A note from me to thank each of you for joining us last night. Our meetings would not be the same without you.

I would also like to update you on matters arising from and after Brother Habib Karam's talk. But first, for some who may not have gotten the full drift because technology did have its hiccups last night, here is the issue he spoke of....

Nazareth is now the largest City in Northern Israel. It is often known as the Arab capital of Israel. Its local government is Arab and therefore Moslem. The national government is very protective of the Jewish Israelis and it is seen that much government legislation and allocation of funding is extremely one sided. The Arab local government looks to balance matters by ensuring that much of what is decided and legislated in Nazareth gives greatest benefit to Moslem Arab people. Just 40% of the population is Christian but Nazareth is now bordered by *Nof HaGalil* which is totally Jewish with a population equal to that of Nazareth - so, out of a combined population of 145,000, only 28,000 are Christian. A tenth of this number is Catholic. Many Christians do not easily get jobs in the non-Christian community. This has led to the establishment of many cottage industries based solely on tourism. Tourism died for three months with COVID 19 and with virtually no state aid to help them, people used up their savings and assets to survive. Only recently have Churches like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre reopened in Jerusalem but tourism in Nazareth remains virtually non-existent. Catholic and many other Christian people have no income unless they are lucky enough to work in a non-tourism sector. In September children must return to school or university and the costs of attending the Christian schools is around €1000 p.p./p.a. For a university student it is around €2,500. Schools may let children attend for a while if their parents are trying to raise the fees but eventually, if no fees are paid the child has to stop attending and if insufficient fees are collected overall, the prospect of Christian schools closing also looms.

So: on the face of it, Bro Habib's talk was about fund raising to pay for Catholic kids to go to school... but in reality, IT WAS NOT!

The real story is this.... Nazareth is at the heart of our faith and the bible story. It is important to each of us that there is Christian and especially a Catholic presence there to protect the heritage. Parents and grandparents on quite low incomes when they are working, have sacrificed and pawned and sold so much to feed their families for the past three months whilst unable to work. Now they are facing the need to pay city rates and rents for their homes, for their travel and soon.... for children's schooling. Those who cannot afford this will do what their community has historically done... leave the city and head out to family members *wherever*, for shelter, food and cheaper schools. They don't come back. This will not be one child per family of course but usually several Catholic children per family would thus leave the city with their parents. Because of family bonds in their culture, this may well mean their parental brothers and sisters may go with them as well as the parents/grandparents. In other words, not being able to meet one generation of a single family's school fees may mean up to twenty Catholic people cease to live in Nazareth. If this affects one family it will affect many. To some degree, this has already begun. This leads to the failure of the Christian schools and residential areas. Without Christian schools or safe Christian communities in which to live, more will leave the City. Christian communities will dwindle and local and national governments may be delighted accordingly. Fewer residents will mean what little representation happens at council level will fail and in turn, will have a depreciatory effect on what is left of a shrinking Catholic community. Along the way, Nazareth and Bethlehem will cease to have significant Catholic communities. Christianity and protection of our churches and shrines shrinks. This is the forecast of Catenians - our brothers - in Nazareth. Being a Catholic in Nazareth has been difficult for 2,000 years but never more so than now.

So, what is to be done? Of the 24 or so brothers of the Nazareth Circle some are quite well off and for three months they have been dipping into their personal resources and contributing heavily to their community. The Catenians there have been leading the way in many of the initiatives to support the local community with food, clothes, medical care and where needed, cash. There is a limit of course for individuals and having reached it, they are asking for help. Their focus is not on 'today' because today's needs for essentials are still being met by their community but within a couple of months the big outlay for school fees are due. People are already considering their options. Brother Habib asked to speak and put this to us all. He did - but was apprehensive through pride about getting to the point and so we heard endless statistics and percentages until he got it said. **"Please, if you can help, will you?"** This is a 'one off' until people get back to work and every penny will be welcomed. People over there have always met their own costs. This time they need help to provide.

By dawn this morning (19<sup>th</sup>) we had received offers of donations of around £1000. By lunchtime it was up to £2200. Many brothers have been in touch to ask how can they get money to Habib or to tell me they have begun spreading the word. Brothers, when you have any funding offers may I respectfully ask you to let me know and by then I will have arranged for our Circle's Treasurer to hold a secure, ring fenced fund for this purpose. I and my Circle are donating so our Brother Treasurer will have what he needs to start off. Please DO NOT send me any money.

The outlay for nursery places comes earlier than September and for this there is a need for the first £1000. It looks like we have that covered. Then it is up to you. Brother Habib will be joining with us when I host the **Johannesburg 305 Circle** meeting by Zoom on Tuesday 14th July at 18.00 London time. If before then, people would like me to set up a Zoom meeting with just Habib talking about the issues over there and assuming he can make the time, I will happily comply.

In summary: this is not just about the school fees for children ... vital though this is. It is about keeping a Catholic community in Nazareth and from it, growing the Catenians into Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Please help if you can. The fight is to keep Catholics in Nazareth.

Fraternally, Ed.

## **June 25<sup>th</sup> message to Circle Secretaries from Brother John Gramme, Secretary of Hastings and Bexhill Circle.**

Dear Brothers,

As the appeal for financial help with school charges came from Brother Habib Karam from Nazareth Circle and was made at our Circle meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> June, I feel it is appropriate to recirculate the message sent by Brother Provincial President David Tillson below as an update. What has not been mentioned below is that there are many families needing help and with large families there, the need could be for £20,000 or more. Personal donations may be sent to our Circle Treasurer Brother Solomon Ezobi who has opened a special named account for this purpose – ‘Nazareth Fund’ within our Circle’s Account No 089299 68351649 please refer to ‘Nazareth’ with the donation. All transfer of donations will be free of transfer charges (met by us) and sent to their Circle’s Nazareth account.

Many thanks for your help,

John-L Gramme

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## **Email from Brother Provincial President David Tillson to Province 18 Circle Presidents**

Brother Presidents

I have been attending numerous Zoom meetings around our Province and they are an amazing way of keeping in touch with each other and we are slowly getting the hang of them!

On Thursday July 18th. I attended a Hastings and Bexhill Circle Zoom meeting and there was a very large attendance from Catenians including overseas visitors and an excellent meeting. One of the guests was Brother Habib Karam from Nazareth Circle number 373.

Brother Habib who spoke perfect English gave us a very harrowing update on the situation in Nazareth with regards to schooling for their children and the total lack of funds available due to Covid 19 and the lack of tourists which is their main stream of income.

Brother Presidents: the simple facts are that the cost for one student for one year in a Christian School is £1000; for a University Student for one year £2500. They are desperate for help as there is no governmental support. I have a long and detailed email from Ed Murphy which I am very happy to pass on to you. This lays out the current precarious situation with a lot of information with numerous facts and figures.

At the end of the meeting (actually during it) it got me thinking along the lines that surely Province 18 could help even if only supporting one of the students for £1000.

If you agreed that this would be an excellent idea my thoughts are that each Circle/Group if they agreed and could possibly help would donate £100 from their President's Charity from the monies accrued during the year. As an example, due to Covid 19 BR17 Circle are not having to pay for the hire of Hove Place for their meetings. As a result, we have agreed to donate the considerable sum saved to our President Andrew Davey's Charity.

Of course, I am well aware that each President/Chairman has his own choice of the Charity he wishes to support in his year in office. If you could see a way to donating £100 I know Brother Habib and the students would be eternally grateful.

A dedicated bank account has now been set up and this is outside Province 18's bank account and will be very strictly controlled.

After the HasBex meeting had finished a number of Brothers were so moved by Brother Habib's account of the dire situation that they made Personal donations which so far have amounted to over £2000.

Initially Brother Presidents can you let me know as a Circle as to whether you can support this plea and are happy to help. I will then collate this information and pass it on to Brother Ed who will provide the banking details. As stated, I am more than happy to let you have a copy of Ed's email covering the situation in Nazareth in more detail which may be of help to you and your Circle Brothers.

Keep well

Sincerely and Fraternaly

David Tillson PP

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