Dear Friends,

In this Newsletter you will see some of the diverse services that we offer and the range of our work including care of the elderly in Gaza and the West Bank; sustainable food security, empowering youth and introducing them to the richness of Catholic Social Teaching that encourages them to do more voluntary work in their parishes.

The consignment of scarfs of different colours and textures arrived just in time for Mothers’ Day and senior mothers (and fathers) enjoyed choosing their new scarf. Local people, including schoolchildren, gave generous donation of food, fresh and dry stores for our elderly day care centre.

In Gaza the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate but thanks to our many donors we continue to offer high quality primary health care in 10 marginalised areas near the border fence, to treat the wounded including those discharged early from hospital, and to give health and nutrition education and medical care to the elderly. In addition to our regular staff, new medical and paramedical graduates offer their service as volunteers in order to gain experience to better serve their people.

During the past week I heard that a parish in Ireland will do another walk to raise money for our projects in Gaza and that a parish in the UK will raise money for one of our projects in the West Bank. As I reflect on what I’ve seen and heard while visiting these projects, and as I listen to people offering support in whatever way they can, the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew Ch 25 come to mind: ‘Truly I say to you, as you have done it for one of the least of these brothers/sisters of Mine, you have done it for Me’. These words of Jesus are surely addressed to the elderly who donated scarfs for their less fortunate brothers and sisters, to the people including children who donated food, to the young medical graduate volunteers, to the parishioners who contribute to our projects for the very poor, and to the farmers trying to maintain their land and make it fruitful in environmentally friendly and sustainable ways. To all of them, and to all of you our friends and supporters, we in Caritas Jerusalem say Thank You.

May you have a blessed Holy Week, and may you be filled with Easter hope and joy.

Sr Bridget Tighe FMDM.
General Director

Land rehabilitation in Area C

Meeting with Deputy Mayor of Beit Jala
Israel retains near exclusive control of Area C, which is over 60% of the West Bank, including over law enforcement, access and movement, and planning and construction. Thus, it makes it almost impossible for Palestinians to cultivate their lands.

Caritas Jerusalem in cooperation with Beit Jala Municipality and the Ministry of Agriculture conducted a meeting to discuss Caritas’ second phase project “Enhancement of Food Security and Livelihoods through the Agro-ecology land rehabilitation and water retention landscape in Al Makhrour area in Beit Jala”.

After 1967 many families in Al-Makhrour had to leave their lands and find other jobs so they can feed their families; over the years the lands became barren. In addition, since people no longer live there, water supplies diminished in the area which caused serious water crisis.

During the meeting with the Deputy Mayor, they discussed solutions for the challenges that the project is facing especially the lack of water and ways to encourage farmers to replant their lands.

Khalil was abroad and when he returned to Palestine he wanted to rehabilitate his lands but couldn’t. “I have witnessed tens of projects in this area, many organizations came and wanted to change the situation, but none of them succeeded, only Caritas did. That’s why I was motivated to rehabilitate my land again” he said.

When he first came back to the land, he says that there was very little water and no electricity. This problem caused a lot of other people to give up on the idea of replanting their lands, but Elias did not give up, he kept going each summer for 20 years to plant the land. Because of Caritas Jerusalem’s project, Elias now is happy to see tens of other farmers rehabilitating their lands, he says: “Not only they have encouraged tens of people to come back and replant their lands; they also helped with the rehabilitation process”.

Elias is an elderly man from Beit Jala. He started replanting his land again after his retirement 20 years ago.
Maurice is also one of the people that were encouraged to rehabilitate their lands. “I live in another village, and I had no idea about the lands that I inherited from my family. The land was neglected and barren when we started to clean it up. I was surprised to find 20 olive trees” He now visits his land daily, he takes his family to the land on weekends. “The special thing about Caritas is the continuity, they follow up with the project to its completion” Maurice said.

Issa who works in the marketing team of the project said: “Caritas project has encouraged not only the farmers but also other organizations to work in this important area”. He thinks that the project will prove to everyone how Agro-ecology is more beneficial for the land and more profitable for the farmers than the traditional agricultural methods.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the municipality of Zaragoza and Caritas Spain for funding this project.

**Mother’s day celebration**

Adel went back to replant his land because he wants his family to eat organic food. In addition, he knew that his land was in danger of being confiscated since it’s in Area C and had not been touched in years. So, he realized that he needed to rehabilitate his land and use it. When he heard about Caritas project, he joined immediately. “Thanks to the project and Caritas, now my kids eat organic food. I have planted a lot of different vegetables in my land, and my plan is to plant more and more so I can benefit all the people who are living in the town with organic products”.

On the 22nd of March, Caritas Jerusalem celebrated Mother’s Day with the senior citizens of the Elderly Day Care Center in Ramallah. We try our best to show love and gratitude towards our senior citizens, especially on these special occasions.
The event started with a Mass at the Holy Family Church in Ramallah, where 40 senior citizens attended and listened to Father Jamal Diabes preach about the importance of Mother’s Day since mothers are the symbol of love and sacrifice. After the mass, the seniors were escorted to the Orthodox Ramallah Club to celebrate the day.

Sister Bridget with one of the senior citizens wearing one of the handmade scarfs

Two parishes from Spain, Ferreries and Es Migjorn in Menorca, donated to the senior citizens handmade scarves. Coincidentally the scarves arrived on Mother’s Day and the elderly were extremely happy to receive such a beautiful gift on such a special day.

“Una Illa pel Mon” volunteers from the Ferreries parish

The celebration started with a speech from Sister Bridget, General Director of CJ, and a speech from The Very Reverend Archimandrite Abdallah Julio. Then the DJ played music and the senior citizens started dancing and singing with him. They were thrilled to receive roses, scarves, the love and all the attention from CJ staff.

Sister Bridget presenting her speech

Cutting the cake with Dr. Hani Husary

Caritas Jerusalem would like to thank Dr. Hani Husary, president of the Orthodox Ramallah Club, and all the other local donors that made this event happen with their kind donations. In addition, we would like to thank Caritas Spain and all the parishes in Spain who are committed to the wellbeing of the elderly and are accompanying us for many years.
This is one of the reasons why Caritas Jerusalem designed the project to benefit elderly people in Gaza as much as possible. Through this project, Caritas is trying to promote a healthier lifestyle for the elderly by raising their awareness about healthy behaviour regarding nutrition, exercise and medication control. Moreover, through this project we are trying to inform them about their rights as senior citizens and train those carers who do not have the needed skills to cater for their needs. In addition, fresh medical graduates are trained by professionals on how to treat and deal with elderly people.

Mr. Ahmad is a 76 year old man from Jabalia (In northern Gaza) who suffers from diabetes. He attended our nutrition session and talked about his eating habits. ‘I eat fruits all the time, everyone says they are healthy and don’t affect diabetics negatively’. The tests showed high blood sugar levels and the nutritionist explained to him the right kinds of fruit to eat and the amount recommended. The next day, Mr. Ahmad talked about his wrong eating habits in the nutrition session and shared his new knowledge.

In the first 6 months of its implantation, from September 2018 until February 2019, we were able to screen a total of 1,729. Despite the bad weather that made mobility and movement difficult 1,321 elderly were committed and attended the training and awareness sessions.

With the constant crisis in Gaza the youth, women and children are prioritized when it comes to different services including medical treatments. Consequently, the senior citizens are the most neglected and marginalized segment of the society in Gaza.
Mr. Abu Jalalah is a 62 year old man from Bait Hanoun (in northern Gaza). He was suffering from a diabetic foot which was very bad to the point that he couldn’t walk on it. He had no idea on how to take care of his foot nor did he have enough money to treat it. “My foot hurts all the time, I don’t go outside as much now to avoid the pain.” He said when he visited us. During the visit, the medical team provided him with the needed medical intervention. Moreover, they gave him some recommendations on how to take care of his diabetic foot to avoid any serious complications. After one week, he started walking again and now he knows how to take care of his condition.

We would like to thank Misean Cara and Caritas Switzerland for funding this project that has already benefited hundreds of people and will continue to benefit more.

Caritas Jerusalem believes deeply in the importance of youth being leaders and active members in their societies, especially since they make up 30% of the total population.

On the 22nd of March, Caritas Jerusalem hosted the final session of “Catholic Social Teaching” course and graduated 25 youth; 6 young men and 19 young women. This project is funded by Caritas Spain which aims at empowering the youth in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by training the new generation about Catholic Social Teaching and involving them directly with the parishes in doing voluntary and community work.
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Swift Code: ARABPS 22110
Account number: 457793/0/510 USD
Credit Account: Caritas Jerusalem
Branch No: 9110
At Arab Bank in Al-Ram
P.O.Box: 2445-Al-Ram

Rasha Odeh is a 20-year-old woman from Ramallah. She was very excited to enroll in her first course ever. She knew about Caritas from their charity work; “I saw a post on Facebook with youth playing with children, and I thought to myself that I really love to be part of this community one day”.

She loved the course very much because it was versatile but what stuck in her mind the most was the lecture they had about the history of Christians in Palestine. “Most of us did not know about the history of our ancestors, it was very interesting and important to know”. Rasha wants to keep taking courses like this: “I am now excited even more to take other courses like this, I hope Caritas continues this good work in the future, we are in need for their work with the youth”. She said at the end.

Lectures on the Catholic Social Teaching in addition to Palestinian identity and leadership skills were given to the youth in order for them to have the knowledge and skills needed to be able to play a key role in the development of their communities.

From left to right: Issa Massaad, Rasha Odeh, Adlerine Mubayed