

Overcoming challenges at Bethany

In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory it is illegal to teach Christianity to Muslim pupils, but Christian establishments like Bethany Girls' School are nevertheless in high demand for the excellent quality of education they provide.

Many Muslim parents are happy to allow their children to be taught by Christians and are keen to build up a good working relationship with the staff. At Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, 98% of the school's 350 students are Muslim, mostly from poor families, and there is a waiting list for places.

While the town of Bethany does not experience the same levels of tension and violence as some of the other areas where BibleLands' partners work, it has its own problems, which have an effect on the school. There is a high rate of drug abuse locally and the school has had difficulties with addicts breaking into the grounds during the night, giving the staff the unpleasant and potentially dangerous task of cleaning up the mess they leave.

Unemployment is also a big problem in the area, and the global economic crisis has worsened the situation. This makes it difficult for many families to make any financial contribution to the school, so the school's resources have recently been concentrated on the care of its students rather than on maintenance or developing the facilities. In the future, however, they would like to be able to renovate the

computer lab, expand the library and improve the playground.

The school, which is led by Russian Orthodox nun Sister Martha, has thirty teachers, many of whom live in Bethlehem or the City of Jerusalem. For them, the journey to and from work each day is frustrating and time consuming as they wait at checkpoints without knowing whether they will be allowed through.

'Checkpoints create extreme hardships for teachers and workers,' Sister Martha told us. 'As we try to support the Christian community we depend on Christian workers either from Bethlehem or from Jerusalem. But checkpoints restrict workers coming from both directions to come to our school, and those restrictions only increase. Arriving on time remains an uneasy task. Also transportation of materials and equipment – even between Palestinian settlements – continues to be a challenge.'

In spite of these difficulties, the students have enjoyed a varied programme of activities this year, going on educational visits that included a trip to Hebron glass factory, where they enjoyed seeing the glass being taken from a 1400-degree heat chamber and crafted into different shapes.



Get Involved!

- Bethany Girls' School relies on BibleLands' ChildSponsorship scheme for a third of its funding. To find out about this, or about contributing to our general Education Fund, contact our Sponsorship Team on 01494 897955/56 or sponsors@biblelands.org.uk.
- Consider running an event for children in your own community – have a look at our Holiday Club resources at www.biblelands.org.uk/resources

Prayer Points

Please pray:

- for the teachers and students who face difficulties travelling to and from the school
- for the ongoing success of the school's cultural activities
- for the families in Bethany affected by unemployment
- for Sister Martha, whose energy and commitment motivate her staff team.

traditional Palestinian embroidery and prepared a dance to perform at the school's graduation ceremony.

With the stresses and difficulties of life in the Holy Land it is important for the school to maintain a positive and motivating atmosphere. By offering its students a varied programme of lessons, visits and fun, Bethany Girls' School aims to keep life as normal as possible in a challenging environment. ■

Thanks to the donations of BibleLands' ChildSponsors, Sister Martha realised her dream of being able to provide a music programme, which started with an introduction to the works of Beethoven and Chopin, and also looked at the principles of Arab folk music. The students had the chance to try out traditional musical instruments, and the most popular part of the whole course was dedicated to Arab folk dancing – the girls wore dresses decorated with