

.....Overseas Partner Fact Sheet.....

Bethany Girls' School

How it all started

Bethany Girls' School was founded by two British ladies, Barbara Robinson and Alix Sprott, in 1936, to ensure that local girls received a Christian education. Barbara and Alix had recently converted to Russian Orthodoxy and given the names of Mother Mary and Mother Martha and begun a community of nuns in Bethany called "Bethany Community of Resurrection of Christ". The school was founded by this community to help serve the needs of the local people.

The school is in Bethany, on the Mount of Olives and just a couple of miles outside Jerusalem. The tomb of Lazarus and the spot reputed to be the site of Mary and Martha's house are about half a mile from the school, and in the school grounds themselves there is a small cave-chapel with a large stone, dating from the fourth century, which is inscribed in Greek with the words: *'On this site the Messiah spoke with Martha and Mary about the resurrection.'* There are murals in the school showing Mary and Martha with Jesus, and the raising of Lazarus.



Key facts

Founded: 1937

Location: Bethany, West Bank

First Grant from BibleLands: 1956

BibleLands' Grant: £50,628 per annum



Current Activities

The school has nearly 350 pupils from kindergarten up to ninth grade (4–15 years old). Whilst most of the pupils are girls, there are a few boys in the kindergarten. Most of the children are day students, coming from Bethany village itself or from villages nearby like Abu Dis and Sawahreh. In previous years, a lot of girls have come from Jerusalem, but the construction of the Israeli Security Barrier around Bethany has made travel to and from the village very difficult. About 10–15 Christian girls, whose journey is too difficult to travel each day, board at the school.

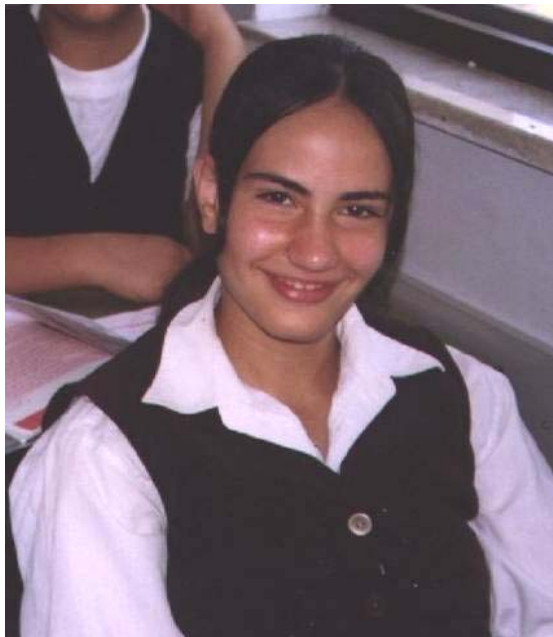
All of the children are from poor Arab families, most are Muslim. The students' parents are asked to make a contribution towards their school fees, but many of them cannot afford to pay the whole amount.

It is strictly against the law to teach the Christian faith to non-Christians, and teachers could be imprisoned or schools closed down if these laws were disobeyed. Therefore, the Christian girls at this school have Bible teaching without their Muslim classmates. The witness to the Muslim children has to be informal, through the lifestyle of the teachers and by their responses to questions.



Above: Sister Martha, the school's Principal, is a member of the Order that founded and still administers the school

Below, left: One of the older students in class



The school has been affected badly by the current Intifada, which began in 2000. Many school days have been missed due to imposed curfews, which then have to be made up at the end of the academic year. The girls now play 'check point', where students acting as Israeli soldiers make a Palestinian stand for an hour in the playground while they 'check' her papers; and there is a new nursery rhyme that students sing, which mimics the siren of the Israeli jeeps.

In spite of such difficulties, over the years, through wars and civil strife, the school has managed to provide an education, and often a home, for over 2,500 children. Without this school, the probability is that many local girls would go without a formal education altogether.

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