



William J. Murray

The Chairman's Action Report

Religious
Freedom
Coalition

August 10 , 2005

(This entire report was written on my laptop in Ariel, Samaria. It was my intention to mail this report to you from Israel; however, I gave the postage money to families in need in Bethlehem. Please forgive me for getting this information to you a little later than planned.)

THREE HOLY LAND MISSIONS

The Religious Freedom Coalition has three intertwined missions in the Holy Land and for some of our supporters here in the U. S. what we do and where we do it is confusing. We openly support Christian schools in Beit Jala and Bethlehem. yet we must secretly help Christian families in other parts of the West Bank. Why is this? Simply answered the difference is in the numbers. There are still 30,000 Christians remaining in Bethlehem and while they are harassed and there is some violence against them, the situation is not nearly as bad as in Muslim villages around Ariel, because there the only Christians are recent converts. Keep in mind that 99% of the Christians in Bethlehem were born into Christian families. They are treated far differently than Palestinians who were born into Muslim families and then accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. In the Koran, death is prescribed for anyone who renounces Islam.



Dr. Nour and William Murray review student files for grants.

What are the three missions in the Holy Land? First: the Religious Freedom Coalition assists those Christians who are recent converts and who have been forced to escape Islamic persecution. Second: we support a full time evangelistic ministry in Ariel which is located in the heart of Samaria. That ministry works to take Christ to all non-believers. Third: we support the traditional Christian schools in the last remaining bastion of Christian civilization in the Bethlehem area which includes Beit Jala. These ministries support each other in various ways. Ariel is just an hour drive from Bethlehem. Various visiting missionaries stay at the mission apartment there and work both with Christians in the Muslim villages and in Bethlehem.

I am writing this entire Chairman's Report sitting at the dining table in the mission apartment in Ariel. The three bedrooms have recently been updated and now have actual beds! No one on a real mission is charged for the use of this apartment. It is not available for vacations, only for workers. Our ministry and other ministries are heavily invested in Ariel which is centrally located and has a mayor who is sympathetic to us. The mayor, Ron Nachman, would rather have Christian Arab neighbors than Muslim Arab neighbors and probably wishes we could convert the whole lot of them! Many ministries also support Ariel because Samaria was and should always be a part of Israel.

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

My first meeting in August in Bethlehem was with Solomon Nour, the headmaster at Hope School. We discussed the fees due for the most needy students. I had requested that he furnish me charts on the twenty children most in need at the school, children whose parents could not even afford the minimal charge at this Christian charity school. Of those, we picked ten children to receive \$250 each. This \$250 represented the total due from the families of these students for the entire school year.

One of the children had a father who had renounced Christ and become a Muslim. He then abandoned his Christian wife and children for a Muslim wife. The mother could not afford the minimum \$250 for the next school year for fees, books and other costs. (In previous years the amount has been \$300.)

Two other children had fathers who were alcoholics who had abandoned their wives and children. Many of the others had fathers whose jobs were sporadic at best and had little or no income. Other students at this school need help and if you want to help a student on a one on one basis please call Scott Parker in our office.

PLEASE NOTE: While we do support families who have children at other Christian schools, because Hope School is a charity based school we give direct aid to the school for maintaining its facilities. We have assisted with construction of everything from security bars on the windows to classroom chairs, new light fixtures, electrical and even grounds works. The school raises chickens and sells eggs to the community to help finance itself.

TALITHA CUMI



Some of the children of Talitha Kumi with William Murray

The Talitha Kumi school operates K through 12 in Bethlehem and has over 700 students. The name comes from the words Christ spoke in Mark 5:41 to awaken a young woman from the dead. While the tuition is high, over \$5,000 per student, the poorest students pay no tuition at all. However, the school does not pay for books, uniforms or bus transportation. We were informed that the cost of these items to the families for the coming school year would be a little over \$150.00 per child. This is lower than in previous years and allowed us to help more families. A school administration furnished us with a list of those students whose parents were struggling to keep them in the school because of unemployment or other reasons. A total of twenty students

were picked for aid. In some cases more than one child per family was picked because of specific problems at the homes.

On Thursday, August 4th, all twenty children and at least one parent of guardian was assembled to receive the funds. We had converted the dollars to shekels which are more easily used by the parents. At the gathering the parents were given 700 NIS (shekels) or a little more than \$150.00 for each at risk student. By "at risk" I mean children who may very well have been removed from the schools because the parents could not take this much food off their tables at home to pay for uniforms, transportation and books.

Unemployment in the Bethlehem area is at an all time high, perhaps as much as 50%. What jobs do exist go to Muslims first because they are now 80% of the population. As a result the unemployment rate among Christians is much higher than among Muslims. Christian businesses try to support each other, but because of the dwindling Christian population this becomes harder and harder to do. The repair and construction work the Religious Freedom Coalition has paid for at Hope School was all done by Christian craftsmen. Our funding of projects at Hope School assists many families in the Bethlehem - Beit Jala area.

The name of the school, while chosen long ago, is very symbolic today as Christianity is rising from the ashes of oppressive Islam in the birthplace of Christ.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

The First Baptist Church in Bethlehem has been bombed by Muslims fourteen (14) times. The Pastor, Naim Khoury, was ambushed and shot three times about three years ago. About 85% of the 200 families at the church are unemployed and I learned that twenty-five children at the church were at risk of being withdrawn from Christian schools because their parents had little or no money for even food on the table.



Pastor Naim Khoury and William Murray address students and parents at First Baptist Church in Bethlehem.

Unfortunately I had not raised sufficient funds to significantly help that many families. I asked Dr. Khoury to pick the ten worst cases and we gave 500 NIS or about \$120 to each family. This does not sound like much, but it will pay for the children's books, supplies and uniforms for school. Since the average monthly wage in Bethlehem is just 1400 NIS (about \$325) a month, this was a sizable amount of money for them.

Because the school year has begun does not mean that we cannot help more of the unemployed families in Bethlehem and Beit Jala. The Christian population in Bethlehem is now down to 20% and more will be forced to leave if we do not help. We are not just giving money away. If you think about it, when we help with tuition, or books, or uniforms, we are creating jobs for Christian teachers and tradesman.

[YOU CAN STILL HELP THESE KIDS](#). Please help our work in the Holy Land with a gift to RFC Bethlehem Project, PO Box 77511, Washington, DC 20013. If your church or corporation would consider a grant please call Scott Parker at 202.543.0300.

Other assistance was given to families and children that cannot be reported on at this time. Because of the nature of our organization some who have been helped have requested that the assistance not be publicly reported for fear of reprisals.

BETHLEHEM BUSINESS VENTURES

I spent one full day in the Bethlehem area talking to business leaders who still remain about business opportunities for American investors. As part of those meetings I met with the mayor of Beit Jala, members of the City Council and business leaders. From these meetings we hope to be able to inform American entrepreneurs about available opportunities to do business in Bethlehem.

ARIEL MISSIONS

Our mission in Ariel is to all non-Believers regardless of their background. Virtually every month there are salvations and baptisms. Shabbat is traditionally the day of baptism for Believers in this area, and the new Believers were ready! On Saturday we drove up to the Jordan River location of [Yardenit](#) near Tiberias. A special baptismal area has been set aside at Yardenit for this very purpose.



William Murray and church elders prepare to baptize new Believer

I was fortunate enough to assist in the Baptism of the two men in the Jordan River. This was not the first time for me to baptize in the Jordan. When I led tours of pilgrims here back in the 1980's we visited this site frequently. It was a joy for me to return to it on a day when two new Believers took the plunge!

After the baptismal service we had lunch under the shade of palm trees before heading back to our home base of Ariel where the mission maintains an apartment. The four bedroom mission apartment in Ariel, which is currently rented, is now available for about \$90,000. This is a huge apartment and at that price it is a bargain. After the defensive wall is extended around Ariel the value of the apartment may double. The owner is willing to sell even though he has been under pressure by ultra-religious Jews to kick our ministries out of the apartment. The apartment is used for Bible studies and services; it is basically a house church.

The Christian community in Ariel is small and cannot afford to purchase the apartment. I would very much like to buy the apartment and place it in the name of the Religious Freedom Coalition so that it is owned by a non-profit organization. Please pray with me that the Lord would give understanding and wisdom to those who could help us buy this apartment, that they would see the need and the benefit to the cause of Christ.

THE SOAP

Our Christian Palestinian brothers who are in exile from their villages are still selling hand made soap to make ends meet. [The soap](#) is made by the families and then sent to the men in Israel who sell it and send the funds back. In a few months the Supreme Court of Israel will decide if these men may stay or if they will be forced to return to the West Bank. There are applications on file with Homeland Security to bring some of them to the United States as religious workers. One man has already made it to Norway and we pray his family can follow him soon. Canada is going to accept some as well. As soon as the last man under a death warrant in the West Bank is evacuated from Israel and reunited with their families we will no longer be selling the handmade olive oil soap in the USA for them. This is one of those situations in which you pray a program will stop, because that means it has been successful!

THE HILL

During my absence from Washington, DC our work there continued. Although Congress is in recess our Executive Director, Peggy Birchfield, attended numerous meetings in Washington, DC in preparation for the return of Congress in September and for the confirmation hearings for Judge John Roberts. The next chairman's report will contain details of all of our Capitol Hill activities.

Your help with both our Capitol Hill and International projects is appreciated. [Click here](#) to help with and online gift!

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William J. Murray, Chairman