

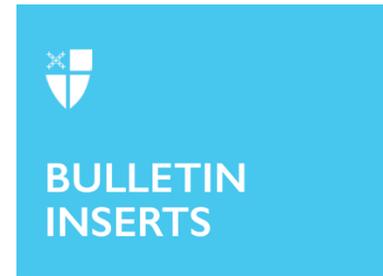


**March 18, 2018 – Lent 5 (B)
The Good Friday Offering**

“Christian Presence”

Most of us are not concerned about Christians being present where we live. Most of us take it for granted that Christians have been and will continue to be a part of the fabric of our neighborhoods. This is not the case in what we often call the “Holy Land”. We have seen the results of enormous pressure brought upon Christians in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere to leave their homes under the onslaught of fundamentalism. Tens of thousands have become refugees. Political realities in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza have limited access to education, health care and opportunities which have prompted some families to re-locate. Numbers are very politically charged, but it is safe to say that something far less than 10% of the population in the region are made up of indigenous Christians.

The importance of Christians living and working in the region is essential to a civil society. Christians provide a vital bridge between Muslims and Jews through organizations like the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, meeting in Jerusalem, which brings together leaders of all three Abrahamic faiths for discussion on topics of common concern.



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Education, health programs and pastoral care are the essential tools which are used throughout the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East which bring people together and provide examples of day to day cooperation and efforts to build a shared future to benefit all. Teachers and students; doctors, nurses and patients; clergy immersed in an inter-faith context all bear witness to the love of Christ in their relationships throughout the region.

The Good Friday Offering is a response from throughout the Episcopal Church in support of Christians in the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. Our church-wide effort to provide meaningful support for these “living stones” of the faith we share in Jesus Christ gives them hope for a future where perhaps, by God’s grace, we will no longer have to be concerned about the ongoing presence of Christians throughout the region where our Lord lived, died and rose again.



From Iraqi Anglicans in Baghdad: “On Saturday 14 October [2017] Fr. Faiḏ Jerjes and the people of St. George, Baghdad, celebrated a Festival of Faith. In the midst of hardship and at a time of disturbing political developments, the many Christians who attended joyously reaffirmed their faith in God the Holy Trinity, who is Lord of all.”

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