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The Olive Branch

Bethlehem Holy Child Program Reaches Out to Friends and Benefactors

Welcome to ***The Olive Branch***, the first bulletin of the Bethlehem Holy Child Program (BHCP)! We are excited to share with our world-wide friends and benefactors the ongoing successes and new developments at the Holy Child Program in Beit Sahour, The West Bank. Our mission is to provide therapeutic treatment and an alternative education for children in the Bethlehem region in the Holy Land who suffer from untreated mental health issues and exposure to intergenerational trauma.

We invite you to read about our new Mothers' Group providing women with positive parenting skills. A 2004 study published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, found 42% of the children in the southern Bethlehem region suffered from emotional and behavioral disorders. (Can J Psychiatry, Vol. 49, #1, January 2004) Since Mothers' Group began, our mothers report *less stress* at home because children behave better and *greater self-esteem* in their parenting role as their children's school work and self-control improves. Additional funding will allow us to expand the Mothers' Group to help more women and children.

Our "Incredible Mothers" Mini-Retreat at Cremisan

The **Swiss Holy Land Association** awarded BHCP a grant to fund the parenting segment of the Incredible Years, a research-based program which trains parents and teachers to help children develop the social-emotional skills to be successful in life. (*The teachers are using it to great success with the children-more on that in a later edition!*)

Meeting weekly for two hours, the mothers progress through the curriculum, bonding and forming their own support group. The current mothers' group, actively petitioned that we take the last week of every month to meet for 3 ½ hours at a new place and share a potluck together.

This week we ventured to the Cremisan Winery which is owned by the Silesian Fathers. Outside of Beit Jala and about 10 miles from Jerusalem, Cremisan sits on a point of land looking out across a hillside terraced with olive trees and grape vines. It is a place of great solitude and quiet.



Despite the gorgeous surroundings, we accomplished a significant amount of work before beginning our feast. The mothers worked on developing an incentive program to help their children learn new behaviors reinforcing similar classroom training.

Then we feasted!

Mothers from SOS village provided a delicious spread of traditional Palestinian foods: hummus, foul, za'atar, pita, olive oil, Labenah, fresh and pickled vegetables, fresh fruits and a pineapple upside down cake!



After feasting, it was back to business with the mothers identifying incentives to reward themselves for completing difficult parenting goals, tasks, jobs or for being such hard-working mothers. Their responses were wonderful and varied:

- one mother said a one-hour nap alone would be heavenly;
- another would like to smoke a narguila with her women friends;
- a third mother will get together and have coffee with friends;
- while another said she would like to walk under the moonlight with her friends.

Although there was no moonlight at Cremisan, we did break so that the mothers could practice rewarding themselves for all their hard work by taking a walk around the grounds and enjoying the spectacular view.



Perhaps the most touching moment of the whole trip occurred when one mother turned to the

group saying "I never imagined that I would have so many friends!" Thank you to the Swiss Holy Land Association and to the creators of the Incredible Years Program for helping foster our incredible mothers' group!

**-free donations may be made to: Bethlehem Holy Child Program
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