

GUIDELINES FOR GROUPS OF PILGRIMS VISITING ISRAEL-PALESTINE

The enclosed Guidelines, requested of me by the Commission for Unity and Dialogue, point to ways in which members of the Church of Ireland visiting The Holy Land, either on organized tours or in an individual capacity, may enrich their own experience and also show support for fellow-Christians living there. They are based on leading two Groups in quick succession and having two further Diocesan Pilgrimages planned.

NOTE: Over the last fifty years the Christian percentage of the population has dropped from c.25% to c.2%. Christians find the Holy Land a very 'cold climate' today.

- (1) Inform the Diocese of Jerusalem well in advance of your intention to visit. According to your itinerary, you may find yourselves, when in the region of Galilee for example, in an Anglican parochial area. Invite the incumbent and family to dinner with your Group in your hotel. The Diocesan Office in St George's Cathedral will help you to make contact. There is a good website, www.j-dioocese.org.
- (2) Seek out and meet local Christians of any denomination and be open more to listening to their story as 'Living Stones' than to telling them about yourself, what to them will seem to be your 'pilgrimage-holiday.' Most of them will never leave the country. This conversation may have to be done through an interpreter.
- (3) Recognize that responsible religious leaders locally seek to uphold the aspirations of Christianity within an Inter Faith reality. There is a Three Faiths' Forum of the Holy Land to which Christians, Jews and Muslims belong. It seeks to enable peaceful coexistence and collaboration in the Holy Land among adherents of these three Faiths. In Jerusalem you will meet people such people naturally.
- (4) Visit a mosque and a synagogue, and seek appropriate explanations of its layout, contents and religious purposes. Do not be afraid to ask questions.
- (5) Do not assume the best in yourself as a Christian while assuming the worst in those of Faiths other than your own or indeed in fellow-Christians who are different and may look 'primitive' to you. To do so closes down possible experiences of personal enrichment and group transformation.
- (6) Bring some simple gifts. I always travel with mounted illustrations from the Book of Kells which are readily available in the TCD Library Bookshop and are from our own Christian heritage. They are a way of showing Christian solidarity.
- (7) If possible, 'adopt' a Charity which builds up the missional life of your diocese. For example, there are many schools and hospitals, including a school for children with disabilities, under the diocesan auspices. Their facilities are not confined to Anglicans or to Christians. Again, use the diocesan website or other materials.
- (8) Shop in the Christian and Armenian Quarters in Jerusalem and in the Christian shops in Bethlehem, for example. They are in the hands of craftspeople who do intricate work, are welcoming to Christians and need the business.
- (9) Do not offer advocacy support in the wider world if you cannot see it through.
- (10) Pray.