

# ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH FRATERNITY IN ISRAEL

## איחוד אקומני למחקר תיאולוגי בישראל

pob 249 \* 91002 JERUSALEM \* TEL 02-625-4941 \* FAX 02-672-4237 \* EMAIL: ECU\_FRAT@NETVISION.NET.IL

President: Prof. Fr. Marcel Dubois, OP Executive Secretary: Rev. Petra Heldt

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**Dear Friends!**

We are pleased to announce that a new season of fruitfulness has come to *The Ecumenical Fraternity!* In addition to more staff at the office we are seeing an influx of new faces in the form of study groups, interns as well as regular visitors!

This year's lecture series has also been unveiled. On October 28, 1999 we delved into *Hebrew University Prof. David Heyd's* lecture entitled "New Challenges in Medical Ethics" as an introduction to the 1999/2000 theme "Christian and Jewish responses to Ethical Challenges of Today". It seems that we will all be equally challenged this year to seriously ponder the various approaches to ambiguous situations in today's world.

### *Special Projects*

*The Ecumenical Fraternity* has of late become further involved in Christian Orthodox communities. The Syrians, Copts and Ethiopians, as important 'stones' in the early foundation of Orthodox Christianity in Israel, are at this time deserving of our sincere attention.

### *The Syrians*

The Syrian Orthodox Community is one of the oldest of its kind in the land of Israel. She possesses a rich heritage of

religious tradition and as such, it is of special importance that the young ones of the Community be given the opportunity to learn of these traditional 'gems'.

With this perspective the *Bethlehem Syrian Community Scouts' Group* organizes each summer a week-long youth camp. This past year's event was a great success, with over 45 attendees and a warm spirit all round. The site for the camp is by the Sea of Galilee, at the beautiful *Benedictine Monastery of Tabgha*. This coming year we expect a total of approximately 75 participants, part from Israel and part from England! Along with fun and games it is an excellent occasion to impart and/or acquire a genuine sense of identity in the Faith.

## *Ethiopians*

The Amharic-speaking Christians have a long-standing presence in Jerusalem. Here since Apostolic times, the Community continues to grow in both size and faith! Today there are a great number of Ethiopian Christians within our city.

Although she continues her practical assistance of the Ethiopian Orthodox, the Western Church is gradually realizing their rich spiritual heritage. We consider this a welcome development which counters the traditional attitude of the 'West helping the East.'

At *The Fraternity* we are faced daily with the reality of tangible needs within the Christian communities. However, we also have the sincere pleasure of witnessing the results gained by simple expressions of brotherly love.

## *Student Christian Forum*

Christian identity -the many different faces of the Christian community in Israel and Christians' rich culture- is presented to Israel by *The Ecumenical Fraternity*, not less by the *International Student Christian Forum*.

This year's excursions have included locations such as the Monastery *St. Jean du Desert* in the Judean hills; the Oriental Churches in Jerusalem; Bethlehem...with many more like opportunities in the making. Dr. Kirsten Stoffregen-Pedersen's wonderful presentation of the sites seems to be a determining factor in the success of the trips, quite apart from the beauty of the country!

In the spirit of Godly ecumenism,

**Fraternally yours,  
Rev. Petra Heldt**

## *Syrian School*

The Syrian youth will soon have the opportunity to study in a school of their own! *Coventry Cathedral* of the UK has undertaken the responsibility for the building of a Grade School (K-12) on a property owned by *The Anglican Church* on the outskirts of Bethlehem. This has long been a need in the Community and now, thanks to the generosity of Anglican Christians, the dream is becoming a reality. The school will provide Christian education for a maximum of 800 students. Building is expected to begin in the spring of 2000.

The future is indeed in our youth...Syrian Orthodox included!

## *Copts*

Are there Egyptian Christians in Jerusalem? The answer is positive although the title "Egyptian" may not automatically cause us to think "Coptic". This community speaks to us of a deep commitment to Christian Orthodoxy. They are to be commended for their faithfulness to the preservation of valuable traditions as well as for an exemplary attitude towards those of a different disposition.

A good example of the above is that of *The Coptic Primary School* in the Old City of Jerusalem. In spite of the many hardships they face, the school remains open to children of all backgrounds. During a recent visit to the school we were reminded of the atrociously low quality of furnishings in the classrooms; they belong rather in the *Israel Museum* than in a currently-operating school! On this same occasion we had the joy of delivering a donation from overseas, intended for the payment of school fees for the neediest students.