



## VISIT OF FR MAMDOUH ABU SA'DA FROM THE SCHOOL OF JOY ("AL-FARAH") IN BETHLEHEM

The School of Joy was founded by Fr AbuSada in 1993 in Beit Sahour, the town of the shepherds, just few miles from the birth place of Jesus (Nativity Church - Bethlehem). The school was founded to improve the overall quality of life for students who have low academic achievement in the greater Bethlehem area.

The prevailing harsh political and economical situation the area is going through has affected almost every member of our community and the children and young people. An increasing number of children are dropping out of schools and heading for the streets, especially those who suffer from low academic achievements and are coming from poor families. Noticing the alarming numbers of dropout children roaming the streets and in response to the requests from the distraught parents, The school was started for the children with Special Needs and for the poor/orphan children. He has recruited 6 teachers, who are receiving less than half of the normal salary, and furnished the school with the needed desks, chairs, and basic equipment. The school relies mainly on the generous donations from the local and international communities, in addition to the small amount of fees collected from some of the students who can pay.

The School of Joy now serves 51 children between 6-14 years old, and seven young people between 16-23 years old. The School is considered their home, offering its services to poor orphan children, and also children with learning difficulties without regard to race, religion or colour. There are continual requests to take more students. There is a waiting list of at least 50 further "at risk" children.

Also many of the children served at this school suffer from a low academic achievement that is due to brain damage, bad home environment or bad schooling, Children with minimal brain damage include those who have Dyslexia, Right Hemisphere, Learning Disorder, and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Our Mission is to rehabilitate mentally disabled and emotionally distorted children by preparing them for greater self-sufficiency and independent living, and to make them productive members of the society.

### **The Aims of the School:**

- To prevent deterioration of the problem of street children.



- To provide the children with schooling appropriate to their needs and to enable them to catch up so that they can return to the normal school routine as soon as possible.
- To improve quality of life for pupils who have Low academic achievement in greater Bethlehem region.
- To prevent the growth of a population of Palestinian street children.
- To provide a safe environment for children who have dropped out from normal schooling and to enable them to continue their education in anticipation of returning to normal school in the near future.
- Accepting difference as ordinary, and not an excuse to dismiss, reject or ridicule. To give opportunity to disabled people getting the full and effective education they need.

The school present programs try to rehabilitate older children through a vocational program, and serve younger children through an academic program. The vocational programme emphasizes life skills development by making carved Olive Wood articles and Christmas hangers, while the academic programme puts emphasis on the educational needs of the child in his/her daily life.



FR ABU SA'DA came to talk to a group of Parishioners on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013 on his way back to Bethlehem from a family wedding in America. He explained the difficulties of daily life in The Holy Land for Christians and said that some years ago almost 25% of the population was Christian. Ten years ago that was down to 10% and today, it is only 1% of the population. The great fear is that, without support, the Christian presence will disappear leaving many of the Holy places to become museums or fall into secular use.