



The Church in Wales Gaza Dental Project

Summer 2007 Newsletter

Help from Wales—for the people of Gaza



A humanitarian project in Gaza, supported by people in Wales, is in danger of collapse following increased violence in the area and a lack of funds.

Philip Morris, Archdeacon of Margam, reports

IN A strip of land not much larger than the Vale of Glamorgan, with a population of 1.5 million, there are constant street battles between rival security forces, frequent kidnappings and regular bombings of internet cafes, restaurants and bookshops. And amid all the chaos, a large Mercedes van, adorned with the Welsh flag, quietly goes about its work.

This is Gaza, a land in turmoil, controlled by gun-wielding militants. A land into and out of which people cannot move. A land where there is no economic activity, and where the cycle of violence that its residents

have had to endure, not only in the last few days but for decades, has been horrific.

In this most densely populated area in the world, local and international non-governmental organisations work desperately to provide basic health, education and occupational services to its inhabitants. The second largest NGO working in Gaza, a Muslim territory, is the Christian Near East Council of Churches (NECC). It runs family health clinics, vocational training centres, self-help co-operatives – and a mobile dental clinic, solely funded by the Church in Wales.

Archbishop makes dental charity appeal



The Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, is appealing for more money to keep the mobile dental clinic on the roads of the troubled area where BBC journalist Alan Johnston is still being held captive, to help people in desperate need.

The mobile clinic, which has been funded by donations to the Church in Wales since 2000, travels around Gaza embossed with Welsh flags, treating more than 3,500 people a year who have little access to any health care facilities.

It costs £15,000 a year to run but that sum looks set to rise as tension in the area grows and fuel costs soar.

More donations from the people of Wales are desperately needed to ensure the Gaza Dental Clinic can continue to be funded.

Archbishop Barry says, "I have had two opportunities to see the Gaza Mobile Dental Clinic in operation, and been able to witness the way in which cash generously donated by members of the Church in Wales has made a real practical difference to the lives of the people of Gaza.

"With conditions in the area becoming more fraught by the day, it is more important than ever that we continue to support the Dental Clinic Fund, despite the fantastic sum raised so far. Apart from providing practical healthcare to people in great need, it gives them some sense of stability and hope in an otherwise chaotic landscape.

"I therefore appeal to the people of Wales to continue to support the fund, and to show that we care for ordinary people and families caught up in such awful terror and violence."

The dental clinic van, with its Welsh red-dragon stickers, is a familiar sight in Gaza City, and wherever it parks, men, women and children queue up outside it for treatment. In 2006, 3,508 people were examined by the dentist, and only 12 did not need any treatment. Babies and pregnant women were checked at the family health centres. All examinations, treatments and medicines are provided free of charge, thanks to the generosity of churches and individuals in Wales.



It was on the initiative of Rowan Williams, now Archbishop of Canterbury, that I led a small group from the Church in Wales to visit the Holy Land in 1999 to identify projects which could be funded by the churches in Wales as part of its Millennium pledge to help those living in hopeless poverty or under the threat of constant violence and oppression. The aim was to assist people in all parts of the world, but to start in the land of Jesus's birth to mark his 2000th birthday. The Jubilee Fund was set up, and has funded projects in Latin America, many parts of Africa and in China.

On visiting Gaza, the Welsh group discovered the Mercedes van, fully equipped as a dental clinic, but mothballed, as the NECC did not have the funds to operate it. The Church in Wales made a commitment to completely fund the running of the dental clinic, to pay the salary of the dentist and nurse-driver, and to enable patients to be treated free of charge. Over the last seven years the Church in Wales has raised £150,000 for the dental clinic.

Constantine Dabbagh, the executive secretary of the NECC in Gaza, says the escalating conflict in the region has made the role of the clinic and health centres more important than ever.

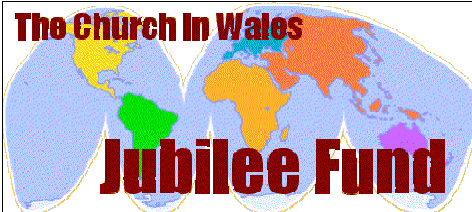
He says, "There is no governmental dental programme in Gaza, and very little attention has been paid by people to the proper care of their teeth. We feel that as part of our health care, we should continue to provide dental facilities. The people of Gaza are very appreciative and thankful to the people of Wales for making the mobile dental clinic's services available to the poorest in our communities.

"But it is getting harder. The situation here has been really awful and horrible lately. We, the Palestinians, are encountering difficulties as a result of the conflict between the two main rival factions. We all are safe and our staff continued rendering services during the period, particularly at the clinics including the mobile dental. We have some reserve diesel but we do not know how long the sanctions will be imposed which definitely will affect all spheres of everybody's life in the Gaza Strip.

"People are living under extreme hardship and poverty. They feel isolated, as if they are living in a big prison. Under these conditions, we expect more people to turn to extremism which will result in the end in encountering more violence and instability, not only in Gaza Strip but also in the region at large.

"The work of the NECC brings Christian witness and hope to Gaza, and therefore has credibility. Muslims have great faith in the NECC.

It is an injection of hope – touching people, healing them and giving them hope."



The Jubilee Fund was established by the Governing Body of the Church in Wales in April 2000, with the two-fold aim of:

- marking the Millennium by creating a Church in Wales Fund attracting new money for funding overseas projects supported by their local churches and recognised by their dioceses;
- responding to the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolutions concerning economic justice and the funding of international development programmes.

After raising £205,000 and supporting 11 projects world-wide, the Fund has now been wound up, to be replaced by the Gaza Dental Project.

Bishop **David Thomas** explains the reason why the Bench of Bishops decided to continue to support the Dental Clinic:

"When it was announced that the Jubilee Fund would be closing at the end of 2006, a lot of people expressed the hope that our commitment to supporting the mobile dental clinic in Gaza would nevertheless continue. This project had clearly caught the imagination of people here in Wales, and with good reason. The mobile dental clinic is one little ray of hope in the situation in that area, a sign that there are other human beings – you and I – who really do care, who really do want to help. Though its purpose is to make healthcare available to as many people as possible, that Mercedes van driving round the camps and other refugee settlements speaks silently, and therefore with eloquence and integrity, of care and compassion being shown in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Gaza Dental Project

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Cheques should be made payable to **Gaza Dental Project** and sent to the Treasurer.

Donations from individuals should if possible be gift-aided—gift aid envelopes are available from the Treasurer.