



Ibillin, 17 January 2024

Dear friends all over the world,

We have been providing you with sad news about what is happening in the Gaza strip, which is a mass killing that we regret and our heart bleeds with the poor inhabitants in Gaza.

People ask me: Do I ache for what happens now in Gaza? I answer: Not only, but also, we ache and are sadden for what happened before the invasion to Gaza. There was a massive bloodshed.

Today I have the pleasure to convey to you one more sign of hope which is lighting a small candle amidst the ongoing fights and destruction.

Yesterday morning, at 9:00am, dignitaries from Christian community, from the Muslim community and from the Druze community responded to our invitation to participate in "A Day of Tolerance". This was done also in the contribution of the representative of the religious department IN THE Ministry of Interior affairs. I don't hide to you that I was wondering and scared from what might happen in the classrooms during the interaction of our students with the delegation of these dignitaries.

Indeed, we subdivided the group of dignitaries by three groups of one Christian, one Muslim and one Druze. They spent two hours with the tenth and eleventh grades. The topic was "How to promote tolerance and peace". after the two hours the group of dignitaries prepared an old olive tree of several hundred years of age, and planted it just in front of the high school. Those who might be coming in the future can see the tree and remember our students' and dignitaries' day of tolerance. This all was followed with a procession of the dignitaries and the representatives of the Ministry of Interior Affairs representing the department of religions.

The school have prepared posters mentioning the Beatitudes and some citations from the Quran. They went through the campus till they reach the Auditorium under the Church. There was a free time for questions by the students to the dignitaries, and then ended with the students going back home and the dignitaries stayed for a time of evaluation and feedback after the whole day experience with the students. Almost, everyone among the dignitaries expressed admiration for our students and for the quality of questions and of listening. The representatives of the religion department invited every one of the dignitaries was invited to a lunch in a nearby restaurant.

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What Abuna said during the evaluation was the gratitude for the organizers and his deep wish that any next time we should remember the representatives of our Jewish brothers and sisters, only then the promotion of tolerance would be replaced with the very important need of accepting each other and completing each other with the respect of the diversity and the need for unity. This was one among the major reference in the annals of the school. We were very encouraged by the outcome of such experience and we hope to organize such days of togetherness.

We hope thus we conclude the cruel time of the war which was started at the school with a donation of blood from our teachers and adult students for all wounded people in the atrocities of this war. It's a simple and humble sign of hope which we nurture in different ways and we can affirm to you that peace will overcome, and sharing will start, remaining in the Holy Land.

Please continue praying for us. We need your prayers to keep the hope alive.

Yours Sincerely,

Abuna Elias Chacour

Greek Catholic Archbishop em. of Galilee