

## **Our Twinning Link with Israel**

Nearly five years ago a new President for the Bedfordshire Baptist Association was elected, and he brought to the Association a vision for broadening our mission through twinning with churches overseas. The President didn't just serve one year as usual though – he stayed until the new Central Association was formed. That was Phil Hill, later joined on the Bedfordshire Executive by Peter Eyre who shared a passion for developing links with the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel (ABC).

From the initial vision we have seen God's blessing and tremendous growth in the now established twinning link with our brothers and sisters in Israel. We have been joined by the Sussex Association and a Twinning Strategy Group was formed so that we can work together. The BMS are also represented on the Strategy Group. The Twinning Relationship is included within the new Central Association, and an ABC pastor (Philip Saa'd from Haifa) spoke at the Baptist Assembly this year.

### **SO WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?**

The Purpose of Twinning is to "encourage International vision and to strengthen the Body of Christ through mutual support and encouragement in prayer, fellowship, mission, and practically as opportunity affords".

ABC Churches are located in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Nazareth, Cana, Touran, Jerusalem, Akko, Rama and Aylaboun. This is the largest single group of Evangelical Churches in Israel and the work includes an evangelical school of over 1000 students in the centre of Nazareth for 5-18 year-olds.

Started by the American Southern Baptists in 1920, there are now almost 20 churches in the Association, mostly Arabic-speaking, with over 2000 Arabic believers whose aim is revival and getting the good news to everyone in Israel. The relationship with our Associations came at time when the Southern Baptists were withdrawing support, and we are seeking to help the ABC become self-sufficient and to develop through Pastor training and Association resourcing.

As Evangelical Christian Arabs, living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society can be tough - it isn't easy being very much a minority group. In addition, Arab-Israeli citizens receive less state benefits than Jewish-Israelis. Financial pressures are considerably greater than in the UK.

### **WHAT ARE THE NEEDS?**

Commonly expressed needs in the ABC churches are:

- Prayer support
- The training of pastors and financial enabling to serve their churches.
- Training/discipleship material for pastors, new Christians, couples and groups.
- Church leadership training (Elders & Deacons).
- Help with building projects. Unity (where needed), and revival.

### **HOW CAN WE HELP?**

To help meet these needs we have established a:

Prayer network via email and with Prayer for Israel.

Support Fund to help with pastors' college training, Bible Study tools, and releasing into full-time service. The ABC has no equivalent of a Home Mission Fund. UK churches and individuals can sponsor or share sponsorship of an ABC pastor OR help cover the costs of speakers' visits to and from the UK, publications and administration. All donations should be sent to our Treasurer, payable to ABC Twinning Account.

Regular exchange of speakers. Two ABC pastors will be at the CBA pastors' conference at High Leigh in October.

Factfile containing Twinning Guidelines and other information about developing the relationship.

BMS Summer Team structure for 18+s serving in Youth Camps in Israel.

Church Tour groups in Israel can visit churches and invite ABC pastors to speak in the evening after dinner at the hotel.