



# THE BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK'S LENT CALL 2024

*“Let justice roll down like  
waters and righteousness  
like an ever-flowing stream”*

*Amos 5:24*

## Week 2: St Martha's House, the Diocese of Jerusalem

St Martha's House is a Day Care Centre for Christian women in Bethlehem, in the West Bank. It was established in May 2010 to provide loving care to elderly women, mainly widows who live alone. Many of them can no longer manage to live alone independently and they are often isolated and lonely. In Palestine, an elderly Day Care Centre is not financially supported by the Palestinian Authority. No welfare systems such as state pensions, healthcare or social services exist in Bethlehem to provide a safety net of support.

St Martha's House aims to monitor and respond appropriately to the age-related personal and healthcare needs of those who they see week by week. They aim to provide a dignified life for those who have no means of support, to provide a place for social and recreational leisure activities that will support the psychological welfare of the elderly and will help them to overcome social isolation.

St Martha's House's mission is to help the elderly Christian women in their local area who lack financial and family support. They take their name and inspiration from Martha, Lazarus' sister. St Martha's House provides a safe and a caring environment where there are no worries about where the next meal is coming from or if they will see anyone that day. The women all say they enjoy coming to spend time with their friends and all the extra activities they are able to take part in.

The Christian population in Bethlehem has shrunk from 29% 100 years ago to



**Bishop Christopher with Laila Asfoura who runs Martha's House (both left) joined by supporters and the women who go there every week.**

less than 2% now. Many people have left the area and the whole of the Holy Land, especially young people, and those who remain are left alone with no one to care for them. The Martha's House project not only helps elderly women but also the younger population by easing their responsibilities looking after their parents and this helps them to stay in their homeland.

Currently there are 30 older women who go to St Martha's House, they come from different Christian denominations (Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran) and from different regions (Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour). St Martha's House is open four days a week and has seven



Raising funds for projects that focus on peace with justice and resilience and well-being.

**Lent Call 2024**

**The Bishop of Southwark's Lent Fund Registered Charity No 1075122**

[southwark.anglican.org/lentcall](https://southwark.anglican.org/lentcall)



**The women at Martha's House enjoying a fun activity involving balloons and sticks.**

staff. When it began it relied upon the help of volunteers in order to achieve its vision of serving and helping women who found themselves in need. Several of those who started as volunteers of them are still part of our staff team now.

### **A Day at St Martha's House**

Early in the morning the mini-bus driver and their assistant pick up the guests from their homes. When they arrive, they sit together in the dining room and have breakfast and a hot drink. They chat with each other and then they gather in the living room and pray. After this there are several activities on offer such as physical exercises or having a health education talk. Sometimes volunteers visit and offer the elderly women self-care such as cutting and dying their hair. Some like to do embroidery and craft work, other days they like to play bingo and cards. Some days it is enough to be able to sit around the TV or to share their stories and chat. After a busy and fun morning, they are served a choice of healthy lunches and snacks.

The House has an excellent garden, lovingly tended to by the gardener, Edward. There are lemon and olive trees and various herbs including basil, mint and thyme, which produce excellent harvests. Edward also grows other vegetables, such as courgettes, tomatoes, cucumber, and green beans. The guests are encouraged to help with picking and preparing the produce for cooking. This is then used to make delicious snacks and meals.

Whenever the budget allows, the staff try to arrange for outside activities such as picnics and journeys in the area or to other cities such

as Jericho. A medical crew from the Palestinian Medical Relief Society comes to St Martha's to do health checks, such as blood pressure and blood glucose tests and they also look after the women's dental health. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society also visits, and they teach the staff activities which they can use to keep the women physically and mentally healthy and happy, including using music for stress relief.

St Martha's House is still able to operate during the conflict in the Holy Land, providing an invaluable lifeline and a slice of normality for those who attend. At first many were scared to leave their homes, due to social unrest, demonstrations and armed roadblocks. Now all of the women are back and the staff and volunteers are trying to do activities with them to cheer them up and make them forget the horrors and worries about their families and friends. Now, more than ever, St Martha's House is crucial in keeping those who attends from sliding into depression and loneliness. St Martha's House gives them a place to be amongst friends and support each other. Those who manage the Centre cannot change the situation but they can make it a bit more bearable.

It costs £57,000 a year to provide this essential service for these elderly women, a lifeline for those who would otherwise be isolated at home. Might you be able to give £40 to cover the costs for a week for one guest? This would help St Martha's to ensure that more isolated elderly women could attend, there are six on the waiting list at present. Please pray for the work of St Martha's House at this difficult time for Israel and Gaza and the surrounding areas and this about whether you can help to keep this wonderful resource going.

**Lent Call 2024**

**The Bishop of Southwark's Lent Fund Registered Charity No 1075122**

[southwark.anglican.org/lentcall](https://southwark.anglican.org/lentcall)

