

## IN COMMUNION AND SOLIDARITY WITH HOLY LAND CHRISTIANS

On the weekend of the third Sunday of Advent, parishioners attending Masses at the Cathedral Parish in Ballarat took the opportunity to support Christians in the Holy Land by purchasing Olive Wood handcrafted carvings made by the Christian people of Bethlehem. Atallah Ghanim held a “Pop up Piety Stall” in the Cathedral grounds where parishioners could browse the many Bethlehem olive wood products available including nativities, rosaries, crosses and statues.

Cathedral parishioners took this opportunity to stand in communion and solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land and the Christian families in Bethlehem in particular. There continues to be a decline in the number of Christians in the Holy Land that is part of a Christian exodus all across the Middle East. Back in 2011, John Allen of the National Catholic Reporter, quoted the then Catholic patriarch of Jerusalem, Fouad Twal who warned that “the Holy Land risks becoming a “spiritual Disneyland” -- full of glittering rides and attractions, but empty of its indigenous Christian population.”

In July 2018 at Bari, at the beginning of the prayer meeting with the Heads of the Eastern Churches of the Middle East, these words of the Pope Francis resounded:

“This region so full of light, especially in recent years, has been covered by dark clouds of war, violence and destruction, instances of occupation and varieties of fundamentalism, forced migration and neglect. All this has taken place amid the complicit silence of many. The Middle East has become a land of people who leave their own lands behind. There is also the danger that the presence of our brothers and sisters in the faith will disappear, disfiguring the very face of the region. For a Middle East without Christians would not be the Middle East”.

*Fr Justin Driscoll - Administrator*

