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## IWU Students "Dig" Mav Term Archaeological Expedition to Israel Set for May

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March 26, 1997

**Contact:** Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181***IWU Students "Dig" May Term*****Archaeological Expedition to Israel Set for May***Locals, Cent. IL,  
Sci./Tech., Education*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--He wears an Indiana Jones'-style fedora and has a passion for antiquities akin to Hollywood's legendary archaeologist-adventurer.

Illinois Wesleyan University Chaplain Dennis E. Groh is a veteran of about 15 archaeological expeditions to Israel since 1972. But his next one will be different. When Groh arrives in Israel in May, he'll be accompanied by about 25 IWU students and perhaps some alumni.

"The goal for members of the expedition is to learn field archaeology from the ground *down*," said Groh, a 1961 IWU graduate and former member of the university's Board of Trustees.

Expedition members, Groh said, "will discover for themselves objects ancient people handled. Those objects will be handled for the first time in 1,600 years. They will get to do something most people don't do when they travel--leave a personal imprint on a country."

The May 5-27 archaeology expedition is among several trips overseas that IWU students will be making during May Term, a month-long program where students study a single course intensively on campus, take a travel course, or work on an internship.

**Sepphoris Site**

Members of the expedition will dig at Sepphoris in Lower Galilee, four **miles** north of Jerusalem. It is the ancient site of a city built by Herod the Great, a city destroyed by a revolt and rebuilt by his successor, Herod Antipas.

"Last season," Groh said, "we found skeletons of victims of the revolt."

The Mishnah, the oral tradition of Judaism, was codified at the excavation site.

"By the end of the second century A.D.," Groh explained, "a famous Jewish literary figure, Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi--Judah the Prince--came to Sepphoris. He was learned and gathered around himself a group of sages. Sometime around the third century, he and his disciples, codified the Mishnah, the second holiest document of Judaism--so Sepphoris was a leading center of Jewish learning, it was special."

Groh describes the city as huge with a large underground water system and an upper city or acropolis, where there were theatres, housing, and buildings with beautiful mosaics.

The IWU crew will dig in the lower city at what was a public building with mosaic floors. After the Roman period, it housed Byzantine and Arab bathing and glass-making facilities. The

(more)

## **IWU's Archaeological Expedition to Israel/2**

building's history spans 50 B.C. to 1000 A.D. Archaeologists divide the structure into 5 x 5 meter squares that various teams will explore.

"Members of the expedition will slowly remove layers of dirt," Groh explained, "because this is evidence. They will carefully remove and record all objects, taking surveyors' elevations" of where the artifacts were found.

Their tools will be back hoes and trowels like those used by masons.

Groh cautions expedition members to be ready for the unexpected and the unpredictable.

"You can't prepare for surprises," Groh explained. "But we bring years of experience to the problems we're likely to encounter. People have talents they don't know they have until they face them. I'm sure we'll see people take leadership roles as needed."

### **Daily Schedule**

The amateur archaeologists' daily routine will look something like this. They will get up at 4 a.m. and have a snack of bread and coffee. They will be on-the-job in the field by 4:30 a.m. to get a jump on a work day where temperatures could soar to 100 degrees F. By 8:30 a.m., they'll have a breakfast of eggs, bread, cheese, cucumbers, olives, tomatoes, and onions. The day's digging will wrap up around 12:30 p.m., when members of the expedition will return to Kibbutz Hasololim, their quarters, for a typical meal of soup, meats, and vegetables.

After lunch, expedition members will relax, study, and read. At 4 p.m. on a typical day the group will convene for an hour or 90 minutes to "read" pottery recovered from the site, dating it and looking at rims, handles, bases. They will perform similar analyses with coins found at the site. These late afternoon activities typically will involve washing, recording, dating, and identifying pottery and other artifacts.

Members of the expedition will be guided in their work by a staff of about 25 experts, most of whom have been trained by the University of South Florida's (USF) excavation project at Sephphoris, the group Groh is affiliated with as associate director.

The group will eat dinner at 6:15 p.m. and attend a 7 p.m. lecture most nights. Lectures and readings will cover history, cultural anthropology, geography, and other subjects. It will be lights out at 9 p.m.

Expedition members will spend their weekends touring other excavation sites, the coastal plain, Galilee, and they will spend a weekend in Jerusalem.

IWU students on the expedition will be enrolled in a course called, "Field Methods in Archaeology."

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## **IWU's Archaeological Expedition to Israel/3**

### **Excavation Site, Kibbutz Hasololim**

Speaking of the excavation site area, Groh said: "I've fallen in love with the place--its smells, the sun, the site's culture, and the people I've met there."

Kibbutz Hasololim, which has about 100 residents, features many recreational facilities, including a swimming pool, basketball courts, and a petting zoo.

"The kibbutz," Groh said, "was started years ago by English Jews. It was started as an agricultural kibbutz--growing grain, vegetables and some corn--and is located on a mountain. It has diversified over the years and they now make plastic rulers, gauges, and scales like those used by architects."

### **Links to University of South Florida**

The archaeological expedition is part of a long-term USF project, directed by James F. Strange, a professor of religion at the Tampa-based campus.

Strange, according to Groh, is the "best New Testament archaeologist in the world." Strange will be at the dig site during the IWU expedition. Groh and Thomas R.W. Longstaff, the Crawford family professor of Religion at Colby College in Maine, are associate directors of the USF excavation project at Sepphoris.

The expedition is licensed by the Israel Antiquities Authority and is accredited by the American Schools of Oriental Research.

### **Groh's Background**

Groh joined IWU's faculty last fall as university chaplain and professor of humanities and archaeology. He was a professor of the history of Christianity at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., from 1968-96.

He went on his first non-digging archaeological expedition in 1965. Over the years, Groh has participated in various types of expeditions in Cyprus, Italy, Tunisia, Turkey, and Israel. For example, he was co-director of the Tel Nessana Archaeological Expedition of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev from 1991-93, and senior staff member and fine wares specialist for the Meiron Excavation Project of Duke University from 1976-86.

Groh is a member of several professional societies, including the American Schools of Oriental Research, Archaeological Institute of America, and Israel Exploration Society. A widely published author, recent articles by Groh appear in the 1997 edition of The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East.

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