



2024-2025

JERUSALEM CROSS

ANNALES ORDINIS EQUESTRIIS SANCTI SEPULCRI HIEROSOLYMITANI

**Close to
the Holy Land**



**A Jubilee for
each and
everyone**

**Voices
of hope in
the Holy Land**



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of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem*
Cardinal Fernando Filoni

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ANNALES ORDINIS EQUESTRIIS SANCTI SEPULCRI HIEROSOLYMITANI

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On the cover
In the center, a young student from one of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem schools that is supported by the Order. In the bottom left, this photo depicts the Jubilee 2025 logo embodied by four young people from the Holy Land. This image logo was created in collaboration with the Communication Department of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

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A Jubilee for each and everyone

*“Christ, yesterday and today,
The beginning and the end, Alpha, and Omega.
All time belongs to him, and all the ages;
to him be glory and power, through every age for ever. Amen”*

This is what we proclaim during the Easter Vigil when the priest engraves a cross, the Greek letters of the Alpha and Omega, and the current year into the Paschal candle.

Our God is one who always walks by our side and continually makes His presence known in our lives. He does not reveal Himself only at specific moments, as – if we look closely – the lives of the saints and even our own history teach us. Nevertheless, the Church’s wisdom invites us to become more aware of His presence in certain special moments.

From the time of Leviticus (*Lev 25:11-12*) to today, the Jubilee is a special moment that signifies a time of conversion; a pause along the journey so that we may resume our path with renewed strength. Whether we have the opportunity to travel to Rome during this Holy Year or not, it is an invitation to us all. The Knights and Dames of the Order are invited to gather in Rome for the Order of the Holy Sepulchre’s general pilgrimage in October 2025. It is going to be a joy to welcome all those who are able to join us for the occasion. For those who are unable to attend in October, similar events can be organized individually or in groups at the Jubilee Churches in their own Dioceses and Regions.

Let us become more attuned to God’s action in our lives; let us open our eyes, our ears, and our hands to receive the gifts that He wishes to bestow upon us.

In his Letter for the 2025 Jubilee, Pope Francis wrote: “We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision.” Thus, the Holy Father introduced the theme of *Hope*, which is the theological virtue that will accompany us throughout this year. Hope is something we – and the world around us – deeply need. If in past years we may have been under the illusion that the time of wars, mass killings, violence, and verbal, physical, and polarizing aggression had come to an end, the present shows us otherwise. Wherever we may be this year, let us make the decision to lift our gaze upward, to believe that even when no path seems to exist, God is able to open one. Let us not allow this virtue to fade, even *spes contra spem* (hoping against all hope), as the Apostle Paul wrote (*Rom 4:18*). Moreover, let us, as the Holy Father invites us, become “pilgrims of hope”, a sign for the world today.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni



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A word from the Chancellor

In this issue of the *Jerusalem Cross*, we present details of the assistance the Order provides to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which corresponds to 25% of the annual budget of this diocese.

During this time of war, many people have lost their jobs due to the absence of pilgrims, so our humanitarian support is especially important. Notwithstanding the tragic events, we have also chosen to share words of hope from the Holy Land, as well as testimonies of love and faith that strengthen our desire to experience in full our vocation as Knights and Dames.

Now more than ever, the 30,000 members of the Order need to raise awareness about both the needs of the Christian community in the Holy Land and the spiritual treasure it offers to the universal Church.

Alfredo Bastianelli
Chancellor

How to experience the liberating joy of a Jubilee Indulgence?

The Order's international Jubilee pilgrimage will bring together 3,000 Knights and Dames, pre-registered, in Rome from October 21 to 23, 2025, with a scheduled crossing of the Holy Door at the four Papal Basilicas and an audience with the Holy Father. As part of the preparation for this spiritual event, Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, Member of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and Major Penitentiary of the Catholic Church, explains what the 'indulgence' associated with this 2025 Jubilee centred on the theme of hope represents.*

Your Eminence, what is the Apostolic Penitentiary's mission, of which you are responsible on behalf of the Pope?

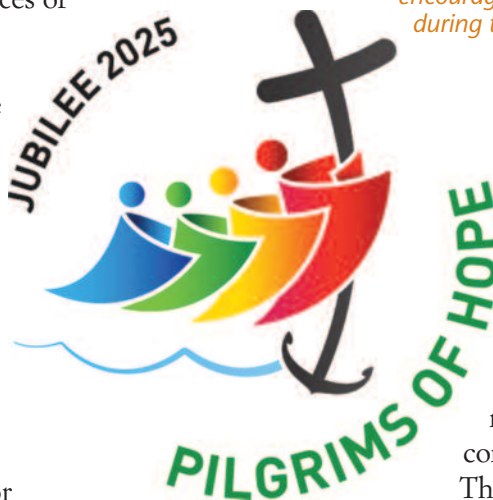
The Apostolic Penitentiary is the body of the Roman Curia that is responsible for administering God's mercy on behalf of and in the name of the Holy Father.

Legally, it is configured like a tribunal; however, it is a very special one. Here, no one is convicted, for the only sentence that can be issued is forgiveness, dispensation, or grace. Furthermore, it has another unique characteristic: its jurisdiction extends exclusively to the internal forum, which pertains to the intimate sphere of the relationship between the faithful and God. In this realm, the Church's mediation does not aim to regulate the social consequences of such relationships but rather to ensure the good of the faithful and the restoration of their state of grace. For this reason, those who turn to the Penitentiary usually do so through their confessor, and everything is protected by absolute and inviolable confidentiality.

Specifically, the Penitentiary is responsible for: the granting of absolution from reserved censures; dispensation from irregularities in receiving or



The Major Penitentiary of the Catholic Church encourages us to rediscover the virtue of hope during the Holy Year 2025, notwithstanding the current global circumstances.



exercising Holy Orders; the grace of the root cure of an invalidly contracted marriage; and, the reduction of obligations for unfulfilled Mass intentions. More generally, the Penitentiary examines and resolves all moral doubts and cases of conscience submitted to it. The Apostolic Penitentiary is also

tasked with overseeing the clergy who serve as confessors in the Papal Basilicas of Rome, known as Minor Penitentiaries.

Finally, the Penitentiary is entrusted with all matters concerning the granting and use of indulgences.

What does the “indulgence” offered by the Church to the faithful represent?

We could define indulgence as the total and fullest gift of God’s mercy, which, in a sense, crowns the forgiveness of sins that we receive through absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. While confession grants us the remission of sin, indulgence removes all the “residue” we carry with us as consequences of the sins we have committed.

These are what the Church calls the “temporal punishments” for sins. In practice, when a person of faith receives an indulgence, it is at that precise moment they are emerging anew from the baptismal font, and returning to the original state of grace of Baptism. It is a true miracle of grace!

Thus, we can understand that we should approach this opportunity, offered to us through the Church, with sincere enthusiasm and deep gratitude. The practice of indulgences, far from being a mere relic of the Middle Ages, represents a true treasure rooted in the very mystery of Christ’s Redemption. Moreover, the works required to obtain indulgence – whether that be prayers and devotional practices, acts of penance, or deeds of charity – are themselves signs and instruments that inspire and realize the call to personal and communal conversion and enable progress on the path toward holiness.

In short, I like to think of indulgences as the instrument that fully and perfectly manifests and accomplishes the tenderness of God’s love for each of us.



“The Holy Year represents an extraordinary opportunity for conversion and renewal to achieve full reconciliation with God and with others. Through the Jubilee, the Church, for its part, seeks to fully express its desire to intercede and to do everything within what is granted by the ‘power of the keys’ to help her children in need of purification and forgiveness.”

On May 13, 2024, the Norms for the Granting of Indulgences during the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025 were published. What do they entail?

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and to do everything within what is granted by the “power of the keys” to help its children in need of purification and forgiveness.

The Norms published by the Penitentiary for obtaining the Jubilee Indulgence outline the methods, practices, and places where this gift of God’s mercy can be received.

To sum everything up briefly, with further details available in the full text, during the upcoming Holy Year, the faithful can obtain a plenary indulgence by fulfilling the conditions required for all plenary indulgences (detachment from all sin, sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayers for the Pope’s intentions) and by performing specific acts aligned with the spirit and theme of the upcoming Jubilee, *Peregrinantes in spe* (Pilgrims of Hope):

- By making a pilgrimage to Rome, to at least one of the four Papal Basilicas; to the Holy Land; or to one of the Jubilee sacred places designated by bishops in their dioceses.
- By performing works of mercy, that reveal the Church’s maternal care for those in need.
- By engaging in penitential practices.

Hope is the theme of the 2025 Jubilee. How can Members of the Order who participate in this spiritual event rediscover this virtue?

If the granting of indulgences, and more broadly, conversion, spiritual renewal, and the advancement of society in justice and charity, are the goals that move popes to proclaim Holy Years, each Jubilee takes on a specific character through its bull of indiction. This document links these general objectives to the particular needs of the Church and society at the time.

During the Holy Year, Pope Francis seeks to invite the faithful to rediscover, in particular, the virtue of hope and to ‘become pilgrims of hope.’ This is because the political and social events we are experiencing on a global level – such as the many wars, both near and far, which seem to expand their reach daily, the violence inflicted on innocent victims, and the economic difficulties caused by exploitation and social injustice – seem to contradict and stifle, in every way, the yearning for hope that resides in every human heart. On a personal level as well, many of us are weighed down by various worries, unemployment,

emotional and family difficulties, to the point where, in some cases, we have lost the hope of rising again.

The Holy Year can be a year of grace and profound renewal, both personal and communal, for everyone. However, this renewal is only achievable when we experience in our lives the encounter with “Christ Jesus, our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). A different world is possible if Christ is in our hearts, if He becomes the compass guiding our lives, and the cornerstone on which we build our hope.

**Registration for this Pilgrimage is closed*

**Interview by
François Vayne**

“*Spes non confundit*”

“**H**ope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5). This is the conviction that we are invited to fully embrace throughout this Ordinary Jubilee. In the Jubilee’s Bull of Indiction, Pope Francis continues, “Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. [...] For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God’s word helps us find reasons for that hope.”

After the opening of the Holy Doors, the ample schedule of major events that are accompanying this year started to unfold from the *Jubilee of the World of Communications* (celebrated January 24-26, 2025) to the *Jubilee of Prisoners* (December 14, 2025). Throughout the year, as a family, a community, or even individually, we have the opportunity to experience the grace of this Holy Year.

Everyone is invited. From artists to the youth, from those with disabilities to world leaders, from the Holy See to migrants, and many other groups and communities too.

To find out more about the origin of the Jubilee and recent Jubilees, visit the Jubilee Special section on our website www.oessh.va

The Holy Land in Rome

The Jubilee in Rome has been an alternative to Jerusalem as a destination since 1300. We asked Antonio Olivié, Director of the Rome Reports television agency and author of a breathtaking documentary on the Holy Land in the Eternal City, to describe a pilgrimage route following in Christ's footsteps in the heart of the universal Church.

Since December 24, the Catholic Church has been celebrating a special year to commemorate the 2025th anniversary of the birth of Christ. The Jubilee is part of a tradition within the Church that can trace its origins to Jewish culture, with Jerusalem as the centre, since it was there that Jesus Christ was crucified. The pilgrimage to Rome is more recent, commencing 725 years ago.

In history, Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the first Jubilee in Rome in 1300. His decision was no accident, nor the result of any particular insight; instead, it was driven by circumstances. In 1291, nine years prior, the last stronghold of the Christian presence in the Holy Land, Acre, had fallen into the hands of Muslims. Therefore, the road to Jerusalem became unsafe for pilgrims, as they would have risked being enslaved in a territory where they were considered infidels.

The current situation in the Holy Land, which has been marked by violence since 2023, makes Israel once again a country not easy for travellers. For 725 years, Rome has hosted and been enriched by the relics and objects related to Christ's life and Passion. Therefore, a pilgrimage to the Eternal City can be considered a pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem, where the Order of the Holy Sepulchre has played a decisive role in preserving the traces of our faith.

The loss of Jerusalem as a Christian territory was preceded by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which added another chapter to

The martyrs of the 20th century are venerated in Rome at the Basilica of St. Bartholomew on the Island.

the historical context. The Ottoman conquest of this territory led to many of the relics stored in the city's temples to be taken to various Italian cities, particularly Rome.

Therefore, the capital of Christianity today preserves the relics of the nails used in Christ's crucifixion, the cross, the lance that pierced His side, the column where He was scourged, and Jesus' manger in Bethlehem. There are also the steps of the staircase from Pilate's palace that Jesus probably ascended before being condemned to death, as well as soil from Jerusalem brought to Rome by Saint Helena.

FIVE APOSTLES IN ROME

These relics linked to the Passion and life of Christ are in addition to the remains of the apostles who lived with Him. Alongside the tombs of Peter and Paul in the Vatican and Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls, the Eternal City also holds the remains of three other apostles, which many forget.



The Church of St Bartholomew on the Island in Rome dates back to 998, when the German Emperor Otto decided to build a church to house the relics of the apostle St Bartholomew, whose remains are also preserved in the city of Benevento, in Southern Italy. Today, all 20th century martyrs are venerated in this church on the Tiber Island too.

The Basilica of the Holy Apostles, near *Piazza Venezia*, is another of the Roman temples where the remains of those who accompanied Jesus during His life are preserved. Inside the basilica, the bodies of the apostles Philip and James the Less are kept. Tradition holds that their relics have been venerated on this site from the 4th century. However, the church in the heart of Rome where they were originally placed was destroyed by an earthquake in the 14th century. The current church on the site, and home to the relics, was built by the Colonna family in the 15th century on the site, and is considered a Baroque masterpiece.

HOLY CROSS IN JERUSALEM

If there is a church in Rome that is particularly connected to the Holy Land, it is the Basilica of *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*. The Basilica is part of the traditional seven-church route recommended for pilgrims visiting the capital of Christianity. Its history is closely tied to Saint Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, as the

original church was built within her palace.

Historians place Saint Helena's journey to Jerusalem at around 325. While there, the emperor's mother discovered the relics of Christ's cross and the thieves condemned alongside Him, which she decided to bring to Rome. The relics include that of the cross, some of the nails used to crucify Christ, the remains of the crown of thorns, and some Calvary soil, which she wished to lay as the foundation of the Roman church.

Alongside these relics, which have been venerated since the 4th century, a box was discovered in 1492 containing the remains of the *Titulus Crucis*, the inscription of Jesus' condemnation. The inscription, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, has since attracted the attention of pilgrims.

THE LANCE OF PEACE AT ST PETER'S

The four pillars supporting the dome of St Peter's Basilica contain relics and four large sculptures related to the Passion. Next to St Peter's tomb, the great temple of Christianity houses a piece of wood from the Holy Cross brought back by Saint Helena, a cloth attributed to Veronica, who wiped Christ's face on the *Via Crucis*, and the lance with which the centurion Longinus pierced Christ's side on the Cross. In addition to these three objects, it also housed until a few years ago the relic of the head of the apostle Saint Andrew, which Pope Francis decided to return to Constantinople. However, a large statue of the apostle remains in its place.

Of these four relics, the most revered by pilgrims is Longinus' lance. This piece of metal



was venerated in Constantinople until a diplomatic agreement between Pope Innocent VIII and Sultan Bayezid allowed its transference to Rome at the end of the 15th century. The agreement was contingent upon the detention in Rome of one of Bayezid's brothers, his rival for the throne. In this manner, the Pope secured the friendship and peace with the Turkish Sultan. This marked the beginning of a period of stability in the Mediterranean.

THE HOLY STAIRS

A few steps from the main entrance of Rome's St John Lateran Cathedral, lies the Holy Stairs, which is one of the traditional pilgrimage sites in the Eternal City. This area was created to house the 28 steps that once provided access to Pontius



Pilate's palace in Jerusalem, which Jesus had to ascend before His Passion.

Pilgrims ascend these steps on their knees, in contemplation of the Passion of Christ, within a construction that permits them to descend other stairs, so as not to walk on the same ground that Christ walked upon. Tradition holds that the steps were brought from Jerusalem during the time of Saint Helena, in the 4th century. The current building, designed by Domenico Fontana, was constructed in the 16th century.

SAINT MARY MAJOR AND SAINT PRAXEDES

Saint Mary Major, which is one of the four Papal Basilicas, houses the remains of Jesus' manger found in Bethlehem. The wood of its construction from Palestine is preserved beneath the central altar of the church, which dates back to the 4th century, then rebuilt in the 5th century. The basilica's connection to the birth of Christ led to the Pope celebrating the Christmas Mass in this church for many years.



The Basilica of Saint Praxedes is located near Saint Mary Major. This small church houses an element that is closely tied to the Passion. In a side chapel of the church, a column associated with Christ's scourging is preserved. It was brought from Jerusalem to Rome by a member of the noble Colonna family, who wished to preserve it in one of the churches under their protection. The Basilica is dedicated to Praxedes, a young Roman woman who was martyred in the 2nd century.

These elements combined serve to strengthen the bond between Jerusalem and Rome. These two cities are united by the blood of Christ and His successors, as well as by a Church founded in Jerusalem and consolidated in Rome. ■

“It is important that we help the Members of the Order to grow in their faith”

Cardinal Francis Leo, Archbishop of Toronto and Grand Prior of the Lieutenancy of the Order for Canada-Toronto shared a few thoughts before his creation as a Cardinal by Pope Francis during the Consistory in Rome on December 7, 2024.



“It will be a call within a call to continue to serve but in a different way, taking upon a more international perspective, supporting the Holy Father more closely. But I also see it as a call to a greater unity and universality of the Church, its apostolicity, and I embrace it as a call to serve,” Cardinal Leo said the day before his creation as a Cardinal, thinking about this important moment coming up.

With regards to his engagement with the Order, Cardinal Leo commented: “A major highlight was the Consulta one year ago, it was a wonderful moment of Church, togetherness, of the Order consolidating and getting to know one another so that we can better serve together.” He also added, “I am very proud of the program of spiritual formation that has been carried out by our local Lieutenant, it is a path of spiritual development. It is important that we emphasize the primacy of the spiritual dimension, and that we help the Members to grow in their faith and devotion.”

The Vice Governor General, Enric Mas, led the Order's delegation to the December 2024 Consistory, during which the Grand Prior of the Lieutenancy for Canada-Toronto was created a Cardinal.

With regards to the Holy Land, Cardinal Leo sees a mission that Knights and Dames of the Order accomplish in their own diocese. “They can be – he shares – that live presence of the Church of Jerusalem, the Mother Church in each parish and community in the diocese. When people see Knights and Dames it is an automatic reference to the Land of Jesus and maybe we could make it a bit more explicit encouraging pilgrimages, helping people understanding the difficult situation in the Holy Land, supporting prayers and donations. There are many priorities and praiseworthy goals but I think – he concluded – that as Members of the Order we can be a clear reminder: don't forget the Land of Jesus, don't forget where first we began as children of God and disciples of Christ and support the Church and its work there.” ■

A Lay Saint for the Order

“The Holy Father, whom we entrust to the loving care of Our Lady of the Rosary, has listened to the People of God: the Founder of the Sanctuary will be a saint!” (H.E. Msgr. Caputo, February 25, 2025).

The announcement came shortly after midday on February 25. The Vatican Press Office, in its daily bulletin, announced Pope Francis’ approval of the “votes in favour of the Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops, members of the Dicastery, for the canonization of Blessed Bartolo Longo.” The Founder of the Sanctuary of Pompeii is going to be declared a saint!

This news had been long-anticipated since Bartolo Longo, a lawyer, was beatified on October 26, 1980. In the years that followed, a multitude of the faithful expressed a deep desire to see their Founder canonised. There are many who have prayed intensely with this intention, and many have turned to the Blessed asking for his intercession at the most difficult moments of their lives. His Holiness has listened to the people of God from the “special pulpit” at the Gemelli Hospital. To Pope Francis, we owe our profound gratitude and from our Sanctuary go our unceasing prayers.

The joy that immediately spread throughout the world - on every continent Our Lady of Pompeii is venerated and, with her, her apostle, Bartolo Longo - is shared by the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

In 1925, exactly one hundred years ago, Pope Pius XI granted Longo the papal knighthood of the Order of the Holy

Bartolo Longo was honored with the title of Knight of the Holy Sepulchre in recognition of his dedication and accomplishments, which have enabled - and continue to enable - the light of hope to overcome the darkness of despair. This is an essential mission for all members of the Order, wherever they may live.



Sepulchre. On May 1 that year, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri handed the papal brief of appointment and the insignia to be presented to the Founder to Cardinal Augusto Silj, then Papal Delegate for the Sanctuary of Pompeii. He wrote, “I am certain that this elevated distinction, which recognises the great merits acquired by this distinguished man, will also encourage him to continue with the tireless and youthful zeal that distinguishes him in his religious and humanitarian apostolate.”

The insignia was presented to Bartolo Longo on May 30, 1925 during a solemn ceremony. At the event, the pupils of the Orphanages and the Institutes for the children of prisoners, ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and friends of the Lawyer were present. In addressing those gathered there, the Blessed said, “Today, in the presence of this distinguished group of people and my dearest adopted children, I wish to make my final Will and testimony, feeling the end is near.” On listing his bequests – he wished to die poor and without any possessions – he added, among other things, “To the daughters of prisoners, my last living vow and the dearest dream of my heart, I leave the Grand Cross of the Holy Sepulchre, which was given to me today by Pius XI.”

Bartolo Longo is the first lay Knight of the Holy Sepulchre to be elevated to the honours of

the altar. We all remember him with emotion, but our joy is not so much for Bartolo Longo. He is already in Heaven, contemplating the beatific vision of the Father. What more could he desire? The joy is for us, who have a new Saint, a figure to look to and imitate in order to one day, like him, reach Heaven.

In this sense, the canonisation of Blessed Bartolo Longo is, once again, a sign of care, a declaration of love that God has made to humanity.

Throughout his life, the future Saint promoted harmony among men to the point that he wanted the very façade of the Sanctuary to be dedicated to universal peace. May he now intercede so that the weapons may fall silent once and for all in the beloved Holy Land and in the many international contexts where fighting is taking place today. Let us contemplate and preserve the Holy Sepulchre, not only because it received the holy body of Christ, but even more so because it was the place of His Resurrection. May the Holy Land, like every nation, rise again through dialogue, fraternity, and peace. All of these values were what Bartolo Longo testified to in his life and with his life.

+ **Tommaso Caputo**

*Archbishop Prelate of Pompeii
Assessor of the Order*

The founding documents of the Order are now completed

Under the guidance of Grand Master Cardinal Fernando Filoni, we have been working in recent years to help our Pontifical Institution gain an ever-greater awareness of its mission. This effort has been carried out by articulating its purpose through a series of documents and initiatives that guide us in deepening our identity. These elements serve as essential building blocks in the life of the Order – much like the *five fingers* of a *hand*.

In 2020, the new **Constitution** was published and approved by the Holy Father. As a founding document, it clearly defines the mission of the

Order in its first article. Here, the purpose that unites and strengthens our Institution is outlined: “The specific mission assigned by the Holy Father to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is that of animating zeal in the ecclesial community towards the Land of Jesus and sustaining the Catholic Church and the Christian presence there. The Order, in its members, is resolved to practice the evangelical virtues.”

From that point onward, during the COVID lockdown, the Cardinal Grand Master dedicated himself to writing a **book on spirituality**, with the title *The House was Filled with the Fragrance of*



into effect on January 1, 2025. This is a fundamental tool for the daily life and management of the Order, not only of the Grand Magisterium but especially of the local contexts, where many Lieutenants and Members of the Order over the past few years have highlighted the need to update the previous Regulations. Thus, an *ad hoc* Commission was established at the Grand Magisterium which worked for several months to produce this document.

As stated in the letter signed by the Cardinal Grand Master and the Governor General on the occasion of the Feast of Our Lady of Palestine

(October 25, 2024), “The General Regulations are intended to support the life of the Order in its organic dimension and participation in order to sustain that ‘project of life, of convictions, of values, of choices proper to a Knight and a Dame’”. The Regulations include various sections, such as Organization and the Central Government, Territorial Organization and Management; Members of the Order; and, Disciplinary Measures and Procedures. In addition to these sections, there are appendices related to admissions, promotions, and the

spiritual benefits granted to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre by the Supreme Pontiffs.

Due to its significance, the signatories continue, “The Regulations, alongside the Constitution, must be known by both the Leaders and every Knight and Dame, together with the documents on Spirituality and Formation.” They are approved *ad biennium*. In this way, the effort of recent years to update the life of the Order has been brought to a conclusion. ■

the Perfume. For a Spirituality of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. This work has provided the Knights and Dames – as well as individuals and other institutions – with a valuable tool for reflection on their life mission, the values they uphold, and the choices that define the path of the Order.

The next step was the development of guidelines for the **Ritual**, which provide a deeper understanding of the Order’s celebrations. Through the symbols that shape these ceremonies, Members are given the opportunity of full immersion in the mission that defines us.

Subsequently, the 2023 Consulta focused on **formation**, and the Cardinal Grand Master worked on a final document that integrated the insights and experiences of the Lieutenants and Magistral Delegates on this topic. This document was subsequently distributed during the summer 2024.

The final *finger* of the five of this hand of ours is the **General Regulations**, which came

HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

Another important reflection currently underway concerns the historical dimension of our Pontifical Institution. The Order is not foreign to cultural engagement and historical research, which strengthen its Christian roots and deepen every aspect necessary for understanding its nature. A Historical Committee has been established in order to conduct a thorough review of historical sources related to the Order and produce a historical text that will serve as a reference for the formation of the Order’s Members, as well as for the knowledge of those—scholars and enthusiasts—who wish to explore the most relevant aspects of the Institution. This committee will begin its work in 2025.

Cardinal Pizzaballa, Grand Prior of the Order, is titular of the Church of Sant'Onofrio al Gianicolo in Rome

On May 1, 2024, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch and Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, took possession of the title of *Sant'Onofrio al Gianicolo*. This church is historically linked to the Order since it was granted by Pius XII by *Motu proprio* on August 15, 1948, as the spiritual seat of the Order.

Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master, and Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect Emeritus of the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches, concelebrated, joining in the Patriarch's gratitude



The Holy Land is now represented in the College of Cardinals by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

for this moment of ecclesial life.

In his homily, Cardinal Pizzaballa said: "We would all like peace treaties to lead to something important and great," but, he continued, "the Kingdom of God does not grow like this. It grows in the community, with the gestures of the community, peacefully, little by little." Then he concluded: "As the Church of the Holy Land and of Rome, we are called, in union, to

be this seed. The Church has its roots in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land, where revelation was manifested, incarnated and then spread throughout the world. But the Church is not complete without Peter. And this is something that we must always keep alive and present in our meditation and prayer," Cardinal Pizzaballa commented.

At the end of the ceremony, the Grand Master, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, took the floor to thank Cardinal Pizzaballa for the welcome he gives to thousands and thousands of Knights and Dames who come to the Holy Land because they feel a deep connection with this region of the world that is at the heart of their faith. The Grand Master then insisted on this "golden thread" between Jerusalem and Rome: "It is wonderful that the Holy Father thought that the Patriarch of Jerusalem should be a cardinal. Thus this golden thread, this spiritual bond, that today unites Jerusalem, the Holy Land, the Patriarchate, to the Church of Rome is consolidated."



An international Order driven by one spirit

To organize and lead fruitful dialogue is not always easy during large meetings for an international Order like ours. In recognition of the richness of diversity within our Pontifical Institution, which is currently present in 68 local realities across over 40 countries, in recent years, the practice of sectorial meetings among Lieutenancies from the same linguistic areas or those facing similar challenges has been strengthened.

Over the years, meetings have been held among Iberians, English speakers, German speakers, French speakers, Italian speakers, Nordic countries, Central and Eastern European countries, North American countries, Latin American countries, as well as countries from Asia and the Pacific.

The Order is one, and it is present all over the world. Brothers and sisters from Argentina to Russia, from Canada to Australia, from Finland to South Africa are united by a single love for the Land of Jesus. Jerusalem stands at the center of the ideal axes that connect these distant Lieutenancies, and it is at the heart of the love that unites them. It is a love sometimes expressed through slightly different forms of devotion, but undoubtedly a unifying love.

My invitation is to experience this fraternity by: maintaining constant contact with Rome; participating in the experiences of other Lieutenancies; organizing joint pilgrimages when possible; informing about each other's publications; deepening our connections; and sharing invitations, as is becoming common practice among many of you.

Only in this way will everyone reach a full understanding of the structure, the various components of our Order, the evolution it is undergoing, and the correct and profound interpretation of its mission.

The correct understanding of some recent

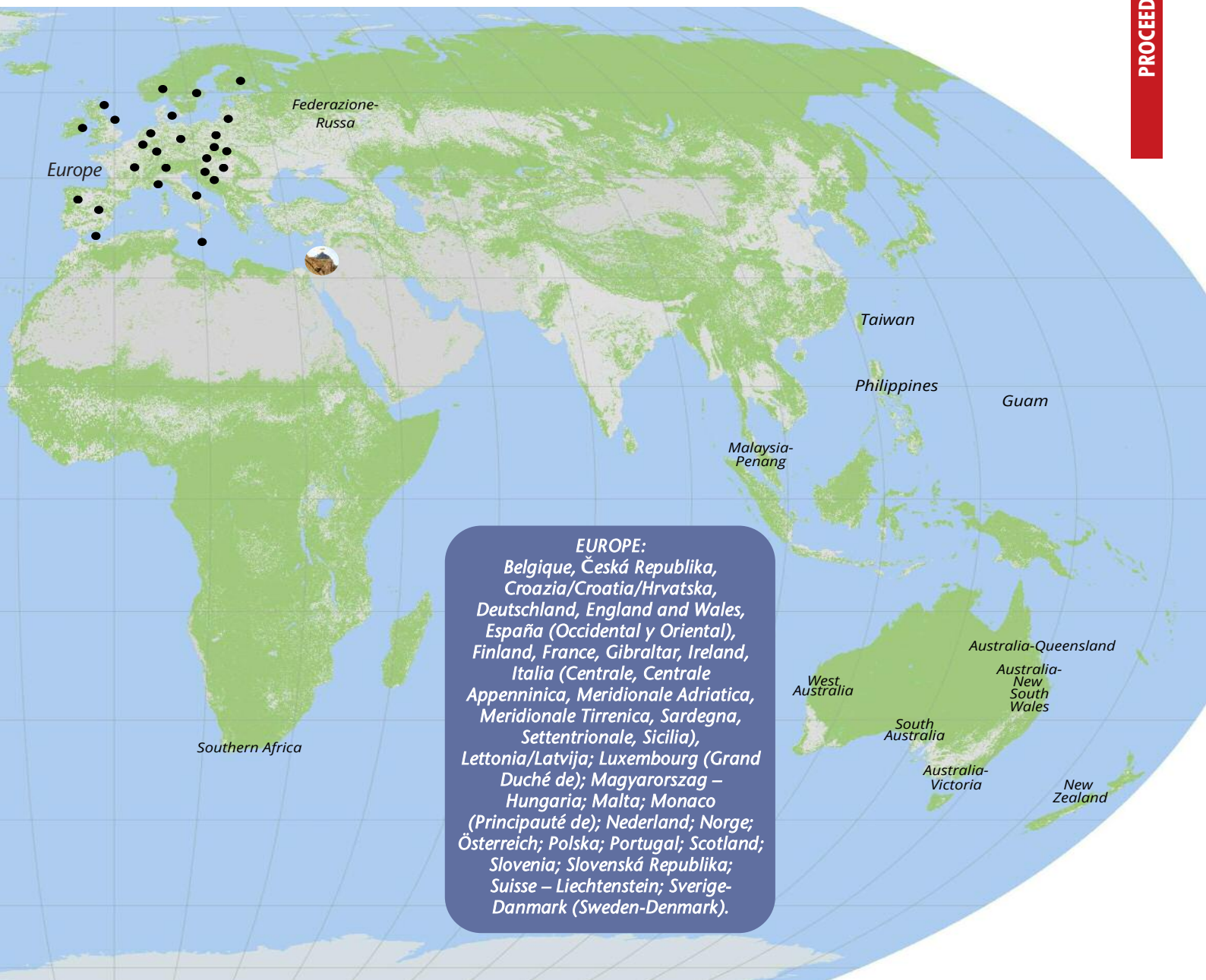


innovations in the Ritual, Regulations, and administrative rules, as well as the choice of coordinated and priority interventions in the Holy Land, are a result of this transparency in the exchange of experiences and an open dialogue with Rome.

From this dialogue, there has also emerged a shared understanding of how to make our love for the Holy Land concrete, through prayer and a constant contributory commitment. It is in our personal spiritual and contributory commitment

that the mission entrusted to us by the Pontiffs is truly realized. Whether large or small, our contribution must be constant, and sharing this aspect of charity among our 30,000 Members, alongside the spiritual aspect, makes the bond between Knights and Dames around the world even stronger and deeper, as we are supported and nourished by faith and our common commitment.

Leonardo Visconti di Modrone
Governor General



Preserving in the long term the Order's identity, statutorily founded on the personal contribution of its Members

THE 2024 SPRING MEETING OF THE GRAND MAGISTERIUM

The plenary meeting of the Grand Magisterium was held in person on April 16, 2024, in the Order's temporary Rome headquarters, near Piazza Cavour, chaired by the Grand Master, Cardinal Fernando Filoni.

The day began with Mass in the chapel of a religious community not far from the temporary offices of the Grand Magisterium, presided over by Archbishop Tommaso Caputo, Assessor of the Order, who had just celebrated his 50th anniversary of priestly ordination. In the morning, the Grand Master presented him with the insignia and diploma of Knight Grand Cross, in recognition of his commitment.

The meeting proceeded according to the agenda, after opening remarks by the Governor General, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, who explained the temporary move of the Grand Magisterium's premises by the work underway at Palazzo della Rovere, part of which will be rented out to a hotel company so that all the Order's resources can be used to support Christians in the Holy Land. He also highlighted the increase in the obligatory monthly transfer made by the Grand Magisterium to the Latin Patriarchate for its institutional expenses, which now stands at \$950,000 as of January 2024. The difficulty for the Grand Magisterium is that it has to make commitments to the Patriarchate in advance, without knowing exactly how much the Lieutenancies will be able to contribute, as donations from Members vary each year depending on various factors. The Treasurer, Saverio Petrillo, speaking after the Governor General, presented a positive balance sheet for the year 2023, indicating that the Order had been able to donate more than 15 million euros to the

Holy Land, one million more than the previous year.

The meeting continued with a speech by Sami El-Yousef, the Chief Executive Officer of the Latin Patriarchate, who described in all seriousness the crisis situation in the Holy Land: a destroyed economy and the despair of the inhabitants, many of whom are out of work due to the absence of pilgrims and tourists. What's more, Palestinian workers from the West Bank can no longer cross the border into Israel. The lack of communication between the Palestinian and Jewish communities is extreme, he explained, and it will take a long time to establish human links based on mutual respect. Sami El-Yousef pointed out that the main thing that can be done is to create jobs in the West Bank (a large number of people have been helped in this way since the start of the war, through the parishes, particularly in the field of construction, with jobs for bricklayers, electricians, tilers, etc.). The Patriarchate also covers the medical costs of a large number of uninsured patients and provides humanitarian aid to thousands of needy people. The school network (44 schools and almost 20,000 pupils), which encourages dialogue of life between young Christians and Muslims, continues to be active (the school budget corresponds to 76% of the Patriarchate's budget), except in Gaza.

According to the Patriarchate's CEO, the reconstruction of Gaza will take a long time, and the Church's priority will be to provide psychological and humanitarian aid to the local parish, which has suffered heavy bereavement.

During the meeting, Cardinal Filoni emphasized the urgent need to rebuild relationships based on trust, in order to move beyond the hatred that has taken root in people's



long term the identity of the Order, which is statutorily based on the personal contribution of members, like that of the widow's obolus in the Gospel (Mk 12:41-44). The Vice-Governors also spoke of the importance of the development of the Order, especially in Latin America and Asia.

For his part, Chancellor Alfredo Bastianelli showed that in 2023 the Order has welcomed more than 1,000 new Members, and hoped to return to its pre-pandemic level of nearly 30,000 members.

The Grand Magisterium's meetings, which take place twice per year, alternate between prayer and exchange to coordinate the service to the Mother Church of Jerusalem, which is carried out consistently and regularly by the Members of the Order on behalf of the universal Church.



hearts. The Church will have an increasingly essential role to play, he believes, in working towards coexistence based on respect for the inalienable rights of the different communities to live on the land of their ancestors.

The President of the Holy Land Commission, Bartholomew McGettrick, also agreed, recounting the visit made by the Commission in March 2024 and then stressing the importance of adapting the Order's efforts to the humanitarian and pastoral needs of the Patriarchate. Each of the four Vice-Governors spoke during the meeting, highlighting the search for extraordinary funds to support the Latin Patriarchate, while the Grand Master recalled the need to preserve in the

Finally, the day ended with a discussion on internal and external communication, before the Grand Master concluded by focusing on the priority of the spiritual formation of Members and knowledge of the Order – in particular through the creation of a permanent historical committee – as well as on welcoming young people, in a missionary perspective of growth and continuity in the service of the Mother Church of Jerusalem.

François Vayne

“Prayer and fasting are the weapons of love that change history” (Pope Francis)

THE 2024 FALL MEETING OF THE GRAND MAGISTERIUM

The Fall meeting of the Grand Magisterium was held in Rome on October 8, 2024, around the Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, and the Assessor, Msgr. Tommaso Caputo, Archbishop of Pompeii, the day after the day of fasting and prayer desired by Pope Francis for the intentions of peace in the Holy Land and the Middle East.

During the opening Mass, celebrated in honour of Our Lady of Palestine, Patroness of the Order, the Grand Master commented on the reading from the Book of Revelation which prophesies the “new Jerusalem”, indicating that this longterm vision requires the cooperation of the Knights and Dames, “little workers who are not afraid because Christ, the architect of Peace, is risen.”

The Governor General introduced the proceedings and led the meeting, stressing in particular in his speech that the contributions of the Members of the Order have doubled in favour of humanitarian aid in the Holy Land. Though it is necessary not to forget the monthly aid of almost a million dollars sent to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and which supports its vital structure (its expenses for schools and parishes particularly). He welcomed the success of the dissemination of the new documents of the Order in several languages. Regarding the expansion of the Order worldwide, the Governor

The Patriarch of Jerusalem and Grand Prior of the Order, who could not leave the Holy Land and his people facing terrible suffering, participated via videoconference in the Fall 2024 meeting of the Grand Magisterium.



General spoke of the creation of a new Lieutenancy in Malaysia and a Magistral Delegation in Slovakia, and of promising contacts in India, Africa (Congo, Tanzania, Ivory Coast) and Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, etc.). The Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was hindered from departing from the Holy Land, addressed the participants via video message, thanking the Order for all its moral and spiritual support – “we need your prayer” – also referring to the beautiful letter from the Pope to the Catholics of the Middle East, published on October 7, 2024, in which the Holy Father invokes the Queen of Peace and declares that “prayer and fasting are the weapons of love that change history.”

In line with the agenda, the floor was given to the Treasurer, Saverio Petrillo, who presented the 2025 budget. With the expected income (fifteen and a half million euros) the objective is to confirm the commitment of the Order to support the life and projects of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, whose faithful are facing a terrible financial situation, due to the war. The

Treasurer stated that the operating expenses of the Order will soon be covered by the rental of part of Palazzo della Rovere to a private hotel company.

The debate revealed a problem with donations from Members who have distanced themselves from the Order. The Grand Master intervened to ask for vigilance and transparency of management at all levels, so that Knights and Dames can be informed precisely, in particular about the institutional expenses of the Patriarchate which are less publicised than humanitarian projects, and therefore raise less generous donations.

In the absence of Sami El-Yousef, the Patriarchate’s CEO, who was not in attendance for health reasons, the president of the Holy Land Commission, Bartholomew McGettrick, commented on the report received from him. He emphasised the deficit of schools and described the expenses related to food coupons for the

population in financial difficulty, and for the psychological support centres set up to help traumatised people, following the bombings and deaths. Regarding the work of the Commission, the president recounted the four days of virtual meetings that were organised with about twenty local institutions (in the educational, pastoral and humanitarian fields), showing how these “conversations on the Holy Land” are important so that the actors of solidarity acting on the ground feel supported and accompanied at a global level.

Following these discussions, each of the Vice-Governors spoke. For North America, Tom Pogge spoke about the fundraising initiative for the Patriarchate’s schools, which, in addition to restructuring the establishments, helps families

who are unable to pay school fees and also helps reduce unemployment by allowing the hiring of staff in these establishments. For Europe, Jean-Pierre de Glutz proposed a meeting of the Lieutenants in Pompeii, the first to be held after the pandemic. For Latin

America, Enric Mas described his work in various countries to establish the Order and the need to build relationships of trust with local bishops. For the Asia-Pacific region, John Secker welcomed the development of the Order in Malaysia and the upcoming 40th anniversary of its presence in Australia.

At the end of the meeting, the Chancellor gave reassuring statistics, stating that the number of Knights and Dames (29,470 Members at that date) is rising after the difficult years of the pandemic, with admissions exceeding promotions that year. He also outlined the program of the Order’s Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome, which will take place from October 21 to 23, 2025, with nearly 3,000 people due to attend. A pilgrimage of young people from the Order was also considered.

François Vayne

“The New Jerusalem needs the Knights and Dames, those humble workers who are unafraid, because Christ, the architect of Peace, has risen”
(Cardinal Fernando Filoni)



GUCCIONE

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DECORATIONS OF KNIGHTLY ORDERS



Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Papal Equestrian Orders

Order of Malta

Italian Dynastic Orders and Orders of the Italian Republic

The Order's stable support in the Holy Land through regular contributions

At the end of 2024, Sami El-Yousef, CEO of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, provided us with data on the monthly aid received from the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. We publish below the full text of this important document.

The support that is received on a monthly basis from the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is directed to sustain the operations of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (LPJ) being the Catholic Diocese of the Holy Land covering the four countries of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus. This support ensures continuity to provide services to over 200,000 faithful Catholics within the Diocese; employ over 2,000 of mostly Christian staff deeming the LPJ as the largest employer of Christians; and serve 19,500 students studying at 44 schools. This annual support covers five main areas being institutional support, education support, the Seminary at Beit Jala, pastoral activities, and humanitarian support. A Memorandum of Understanding is signed annually through a process of joint planning between the Latin Patriarchate and the Order to align projected income from the



Sami El-Yousef, CEO of the Latin Patriarchate, coordinates in Jerusalem the support the Order through the Grand Magisterium in Rome sends to the Holy Land.

Lieutenancies and the needs of the Patriarchate. For the year 2024, such funds amounted to \$11.4 million, representing approximately 20% of the annual budget. It is important to mention that such funds are hardly highlighted though they amount to close to a million dollars per month given that they are the collective effort of all Members, unlike the support to projects which is usually more attractive as it is for a specific purpose and a Lieutenancy finds it easier to fundraise for and take ownership of. This becomes even more attractive when groups of pilgrims visit the respective location they supported and form bonds with the parish,

school, or center where the project is implemented.

Through the institutional fund support, \$3.85 million is received from the Order to subsidize the operating costs throughout the LPJ's five Vicariates: Jordan; Palestine and Jerusalem; Israel; Cyprus; and Migrants and Asylum Seekers in addition to service centers such as Our Lady of Peace in Amman, and the Beit Afram Elderly Home in Taybeh. This in reality is what keeps the LPJ functioning since it is through these Vicariates and centers that we continue to strive to offer the administrative support throughout the Diocese. Categories such as administrative salaries to cover religious stipends and employee expenses, legal and professional fees, utilities, communication and transportation are amongst the many expenses that are partially covered through this support through the general administration in Jerusalem. It is hard to see the LPJ function without this core funding. Additionally, no other donor is willing to contribute to core funding, and the LPJ does not have the means to generate such funds on its own, though a small contribution comes from endowments income.

The education support amounts to a little over five million dollars and is used to primarily cover around

Support for education is one of the Order's priorities.



24% of the Palestine and Jordan schools' budget. It is mostly dedicated to subsidize the salaries of over 1,500 teachers and support staff at the 38 schools in Jordan and Palestine serving over 15,000 students. It is worth mentioning that such support is not extended to our six schools in Israel that employ an additional 250 staff and serve an additional 5,000 students given that the support received from the Israeli Ministry of Education covers most of the salaries and operating costs there. Given that the LPJ schools are proudly considered parish schools in nature serving in socio-economic challenged locations, tuition is very low and does not exceed one thousand dollars in most locations. Compared to other Congregational Christian schools, this tuition rate does not exceed 25% of the rate charged by such schools making a Christian education only affordable at the LPJ schools. Even with these low rates, a large number of our Christian community members are not able to afford the tuition and thus the importance of this subsidy cannot be overestimated. In the event students cannot afford the tuition, their only alternative would be to transfer to the public school system and driven away from the Christian value set prevalent at our schools. This is to keep in mind that in the public school system, Sunday – the day of the Lord – is a school day denying Christian students from prayer and engaging in

Sunday school programs, other catechetical office activities, choir participation and many other faith formation programs. We cannot afford to lose a single Christian student, and thus every effort is made to cover the tuition one way or the other for these students. However, and with all the support received, both the Palestine and Jordan schools operate at a chronic deficit mode which can only be covered through the Order's subsidy to ensure smooth and sustained operations.

As for the Seminary's annual subsidy, during 2024 it amounted to \$708,000 and this generous subsidy covers 78% of the

The priests of the Latin Patriarchate are formed at the Beit Jala Seminary.

operating costs there. The Seminary was established in Jerusalem in 1852 and relocated more than once until eventually settling in Beit Jala. Since its establishment, it has been the main institute for the formation of priests serving the Diocese and elsewhere. To

date 3 Patriarchs, 15 Bishops, and close to 300 diocesan priests were formed at the Seminary, all of whom served with great distinction enriching the pastoral, educational, and humanitarian activities of the Diocese. In many circles around the Patriarchate, the Seminary is dubbed the “beating heart of the Diocese”. As for the Minor Seminary, it was closed during the pandemic given that the laws in Israel changed at that time and prohibited the entry of unaccompanied minors to the country. Given that the majority of such students came from Jordan, external factors forced such a painful decision. However, that did not mean that the efforts stopped to recruit at an early age and various programs were developed to engage parish priests in early formation. Additionally, new initiatives were started at the Seminary that engages in the faith formation of the laity through the establishment of the Spiritual Formation Center attracting hundreds of lay people to attend courses at the Seminary. The work of the Seminary continues to develop to meet the needs of not only the priests, but also of lay people.

As for the humanitarian support, thanks to the Order the LPJ is able to continue to engage in the largest humanitarian intervention targeting the Christian community in the Holy Land. We do so unashamedly knowing that many of the Christian charities that engage in humanitarian aid do so by



their mandates to help the most vulnerable and the poorest within our societies. The criteria they use by default exclude most Christians who are in critical need, while our support targets marginalized Christian communities. This sets us apart from all other such aid schemes. We truly make a significant difference in the lives of marginalized Christian communities. For 2024 one million dollars was committed by the Order to cover seven main critical categories being tuition support to students who study at non-LPJ schools (this is to avoid double dipping from the education fund); medical support for emergencies for people who do not have medical insurance; medicines targeting elderly with chronic diseases and who do not have medical insurance; social assistance to families who at times cannot put food on the table; support to Iraqi refugees who continue to be stuck in Jordan; support to the East Jerusalem residents caught in the politics of the city and who are forced to live a sub-standard life given they are not entitled for the social benefits while forced to live in Jerusalem at excessively high cost of living standards; and finally a job creation program to support our brothers and sisters in Gaza. Through these various schemes thousands are supported on an annual basis, and this truly helps their resilience and allows them to live a dignified life away from extreme poverty.



The pastoral fund is supported in the amount of \$800,000 and covers a whole range of activities aiming at strengthening the faith which is critical to help people not lose hope, especially while living in a chronic conflict area. Tens of thousands are engaged in the various activities including Sunday schools; summer camps; youth activities; spiritual retreats for religious and laity; liturgical and catechetical offices activities; prison ministries, and many others. The focus since the beginning of the war shifted to create offices and centers that will help our faithful deal with the stressful conditions of living in this land. Over the past year, the Spiritual Formation Center was established at the Seminary of Beit Jala to offer courses to the laity. Demand surpassed expectations and the offerings are extended to other areas on the West Bank including Ramallah and Jerusalem. Family Centers have been established in Amman, Beit Jala, Ramallah, and Haifa to help families cope with their daily issues, and a Counseling Center was established in Bethlehem to help individuals and groups cope

Many Holy Land inhabitants, who are victims of the consequences of the war, have turned to the social aid provided by the Latin Patriarchate thanks to the donations of the Knights and Dames.

with issues that require special attention and counseling. It is truly heartening to see the Church expand and diversify its pastoral activities at a time of extreme crisis and war.

Having given an overview of the core funding provided to the Latin Patriarchate on an annual basis, it is important to also mention that the Order also has been very supportive in providing additional funding to projects that are small and large, ranging from renovations to

equipment and furniture, to new constructions of schools and churches. Additionally, during crises, the Order is at the forefront of providing additional support that reaches some millions of dollars. That was the case during the pandemic when the economic crisis threatened the financial foundations of the Patriarchate, and again during the current emergency in both Gaza and the West Bank. One thing we know for sure is that our brothers and sisters in the Order are not only there for us on an annual basis with core funding, but also with special projects and emergencies.

On behalf of all the hundreds of thousands of faithful calling this Holy Land home, and who are direct beneficiaries of the various categories, I extend our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for this most generous and continuous support without which it will be extremely difficult for the LPJ to sustain its operations. We never felt abandoned or alone due to this support and we never will. This beautiful partnership which started over 175 years ago will undoubtedly continue indefinitely and help preserve the local Church and the Christian faithful in the Holy Land. Thank you!

Sami El-Yousef
Chief Executive Officer

The challenge of education in Gaza

During the 2023/2024 school year, more than five million dollars were transferred from the Grand Magisterium to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. These funds are a stable and regular contribution to support the educational activities offered by the Patriarchate to the youth of the Holy Land, through the network of schools managed by the Diocese.

In a letter sent by Cardinal Pizzaballa – who also holds the role of Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre – to the Grand Master of the Order, Cardinal Filoni, on September 3, 2024, at the start of the school year, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem briefly shares the challenging educational landscape in the Holy Land, where students and teachers face countless daily struggles. “The recently concluded school year saw the destruction of several schools in Gaza and, in fact, the absence of classes for the 2023/2024 year. In Palestine and Jordan, rising unemployment has caused difficulties for families and an inevitable increase in the Latin Patriarchate’s contribution toward scholarships and aid for students. In Israel, the laws governing public funding for private schools result in some programs being funded in public schools but not in Catholic schools, which translates into an insufficient budget for our schools in Galilee.”

The situation in Gaza is truly tragic, as we well know, and the educational situation is one of the factors that adds to the ongoing disaster. Sami El-Yousef, CEO of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, shares: “Our two schools in Gaza were immediately closed, as both were converted into shelters at the start of the war. The Latin Patriarchate school in Zeitoun – continues Sami El-Yousef –

continued to be used as a shelter for about 650 Christian brothers and sisters, while the Sacred Family school was initially used as a shelter for our neighbors in the Remal neighborhood, but it progressively suffered severe structural damage due to the multiple attacks it endured throughout the year.” The CEO of the Patriarchate emotionally shares what the parents present during the pastoral visit of Cardinal Pizzaballa to Gaza in May 2024 asked, namely, “that their priority is for the Patriarchate to provide an education for their children. They asked for this even before food, water, and medicine! We have the responsibility to listen and respond despite the challenges.”

Thus, while during the 2023/2024 academic year all students from the two Catholic schools in

The Latin Patriarchate has organized remedial courses for the students of Gaza, who were left without education after the closure of schools due to the war.

Gaza were left without school, starting in June 2024, the Patriarchate organized recovery courses for 180 students located in the parish through some teachers who sought refuge there and are already



employees of the Patriarchate. In addition, Sami El-Yousef concludes, “Until the end of August 2024, we continued to pay the salaries of all 80 school employees. Starting from September 1, we stopped paying the salaries of the staff who had already left Gaza, about 40 people, and we continue to pay the salaries of those who

remained in Gaza, as well as the additional staff we contacted for the recovery education, since we did not have all the specializations in the parish.” In this way, the children can continue to study, and the adults working for them are able to receive a salary.

Elena Dini

Working for educational excellence

Beyond the confines of Gaza, the schools of the Latin Patriarchate (a total of 43; 13 in Palestine, 24 in Jordan, and 6 in Israel) welcomed nearly 20,000 students this year and who have achieved noteworthy results. Many professional development activities were held for teachers, ranging from workshops for preschool teachers in Palestine – where learning techniques for young children were shared – to training for Palestinian teachers on methods for assessing learning or developing critical thinking. There were also specific sessions for French language teachers and meetings to help teachers take care of their

well-being by recognizing signs of stress or burnout and being able to respond appropriately.

In addition to the activities offered to teachers, there are also various initiatives for the benefit of students, made possible through the funds sent by the Knights and Dames as part of their regular contribution. These include student conferences,

drawing competitions, the opening of clubs in six of the Jordanian schools for students who wish to engage in environmental protection activities, field trips, the organization of events in Palestine for days dedicated to Palestinian heritage, and activities related to the most important holidays, such as Christmas.

Our students proudly demonstrate their ability to achieve significant success both academically and beyond the classroom, which makes us

extremely proud. In Jordan, for example, Wael Hijazeen from the Karak school ranked third in the national secondary school exam results, known as *Tawjihi*. George Louis Barakat, from the Shefa-Amr school (Israel), came first in the Israeli Mountain Bike Championship, while Lauren Aram from the Reineh school (Israel) secured second place in the national Karate championship for her category.



The schools of the Latin Patriarchate educate their students to achieve excellence also in sports and the arts.



Projects completed in 2024 with the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Every year, the Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre from all over the world contribute with immense generosity to support Christians in the Holy Land. They do so through the Grand Magisterium, which every month allocates a significant financial contribution to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem for institutional expenses, support for schools, the Beit Jala Seminary, pastoral activities and humanitarian aid. In addition, the Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations, through the Grand Magisterium, may choose to finance projects that considerably improve the lives of local populations. Here follows a summary of the projects implemented in 2024.

A special support for families in education and employment

Since October 7, 2023, Palestinian families have had to confront the harsh reality of the current conflict. They are facing significant reductions in income due to mass layoffs and travel restrictions. The withdrawal of work permits has aggravated the economic situation further, which in turn has led to the termination of many employment contracts. There are hundreds of Christian families who have been deprived of these permits, and have found themselves in a precarious condition, and unable to pay school fees. In addition, the cessation of tourist activities has had a profound ripple effect, particularly on those who previously worked in the sector. Against this gloomy background, the aim has been to provide support for families, in the area of education and employment.

EDUCATION: SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED PUPILS IN LATIN PATRIARCHATE SCHOOLS

Thanks to the additional contributions of many Knights and Dames, 75 Palestinian pupils from the West Bank received a scholarship in September 2023 and February 2024 that permitted them to enroll in schools in Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Birzeit and Zababdeh. This possibility has enabled them to continue their studies and complete the school year without interruption.

Turning to university education, medicine



requires many years of study. At the request of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre supported two scholarships to help these students who need to complete their preparation:

The Dr. George Gahn Medical School Fund has awarded a scholarship to Marianne Saleem Shehadeh, a first-rate Christian student in the Faculty of Medicine at Al-Najah University, in Nablus.

Marianne's family of seven has faced considerable financial difficulties since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Her father worked in the restaurant business in Israel. Many restaurants closed due to the lockdown but even after the situation had returned to normal, his employers did not re-hire him. Marianne wrote in her letter of thanks to those who enabled her to complete her studies and made her dream of becoming a doctor to help her community possible, "Receiving your scholarship took a considerable weight off my shoulders and allowed me to focus more intensively on my studies and extracurricular activities. The fact that you believe in my potential motivates me to strive for

sole breadwinner for the family. However, due to health problems and the difficult situation in the country, his employment possibilities are limited. Rami is one of the recipients of the Dr. Schill scholarship from Al-Quds University. "Studying medicine is a challenge, but it is a rewarding path, especially thanks to the support of my parents. I am happy to have completed my second year of study and remain determined to achieve my goal of becoming a doctor. I thank you for your continued support. I promise to strive for excellence every year."

Damiana is a second-year medical student at Al-Quds University. Her father runs a small grocery shop and she has a brother and sister. Her brother is studying at Bethlehem University and her sister will finish high school this year and start university next fall. All this places a heavy financial burden on Damiana's family. "I am immensely grateful for your help in realising my dream of becoming a doctor. I have worked hard to get to this point, and rank among the top ten in Bethlehem for the secondary school exam results. To this day, I maintain my status as an honors student at the university."

Adam, 19, is a medical student at Al-Quds University and lives in Bethlehem. His twin sister, Maya, is accompanying him on this academic adventure, as she is enrolled in the Faculty of Dentistry at the same university. Having a partner on this journey makes everything easier. Adam's father, Ihab, owns a small workshop producing olive wood items; his mother, Nancy, works for the Ministry of Tourism and he has two younger sisters, Sama (16) and Lourdes (13), who are still at school. The twins' university fees are quite high and, given



excellence in all aspects of my life, both academic and personal."

The Dr. Schill Grant provided financial support to three families, which covered their children's school fees for the spring and fall terms of the year 2023-2024.

Rami is a 20-year-old student who lives in Bethlehem with his parents, sister and brother. His mother is a housewife and his father is the

the current situation in Palestine, the family's financial condition has worsened, making it even more difficult for the parents to support their children's studies. Nevertheless, becoming a doctor has been Adam's dream, ever since he was a child. "I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity and for the help you have given my family and me. Your support is greater than words can express."

EMPLOYMENT: THE *EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM* FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND WOMEN

Young Palestinians represent approximately one third of the total population and have to deal with complex challenges and obstacles. The *Youth Empowerment Program* and *Women's Economic Empowerment*, have enabled many young people and women to be supported. The main objectives of both projects are: to improve the economic prospects of the youth and Christian women on low-income through the development of vocational skills; to create favorable environments for women's economic participation; and, to provide targeted subsidies for income-generating initiatives.

These two vocational assistance projects are intended for young people between the ages of 18 and 35 and women over the age of 20 from East Jerusalem and the West Bank who have been affected by the recent economic crisis. Thanks to contributions from the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, in 2024 the initiative has given 144 people the opportunity to benefit from training, which has facilitated employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and fostered psychological resilience and hope.

Here follow Awad, Hanna, Joyce and Samar's testimonies:

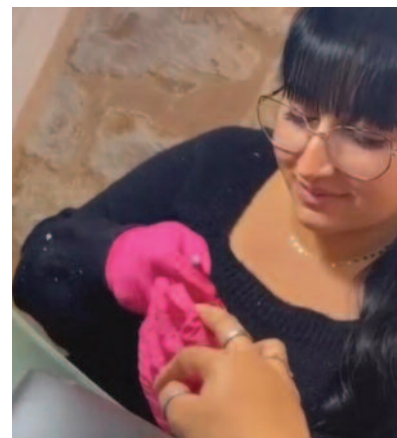
Awad, who is 28 years old, started to work in the tourism sector as a driver of a seven-seater van in 2013. His job was the main source of income for his family, which consists of his wife and their eight-year-old twin daughters. When the war broke out, everything changed. The conflict and the worsening economic crisis led to tourism in Israel and the surrounding areas coming to a halt, which left Awad and countless other young people in a precarious financial situation. Despite the difficult circumstances, Awad, with the support of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, has passed the driving test for a license to drive a larger bus. Although this license has not immediately brought any income due to the closure of the tourism industry, it represents a concrete investment in his future. Awad realized that the license can open new opportunities for him, especially because the demand for tourist transportation will increase once stability returns



to the region. This qualification has given him hope, and made him one of the young people ready to actively contribute to the revival of tourism and the local economy.

With a heart condition that requires the use of a pacemaker, 26-year-old **Hanna** struggles daily with physical limitations and the fear that his condition could worsen. His dreams and ambitions seemed unattainable because his illness prevented him from living a fulfilling life. In response to Hanna's difficulties, the Latin Patriarchate, with the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, came forth to offer him a fully funded, three-month barber training course, allowing Hanna to work safely, and providing him with a profession that requires minimal physical effort but could still ensure him a stable income. Thanks to this training, Hanna not only gained new skills but also began to regain his self-confidence, and gradually overcome his fears. Today, he works as a barber for friends and family in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. As he works locally and in a way that caters to his health requirements, he is now able to support himself and has regained the feeling of being useful and proud.

Joyce, who is a 24-year-old woman from the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem, embodies



resilience and determination. Born and raised in the Holy City, she faced physical challenges due to motor difficulties. However, her passion for aesthetics and her desire to create a better future has never wavered. Thanks to the Latin Patriarchate's *Empowerment Program*, Joyce received funding to purchase a professional fingernail machine. She has transformed a small room next to her home into a comfortable manicure salon, where Joyce has begun to offer her services to the community. Despite her physical challenges, she has created a welcoming and professional environment that has quickly become popular among her clients. Her dedication, talent, and friendliness has made her a trusted person in her field.

In the difficult situation in Jerusalem during the war, **Samar**, a 43-year-old mother of three, has

faced enormous personal and professional challenges. She was previously employed in the hospitality sector, but Samar saw her working hours drastically reduced

to 10 hours a week due to the conflict, which left her unable to support her three school-aged children. Samar could have easily given in to despair, but instead, she chose to see her passion for ceramics as a beacon of hope. Upon recognizing her innate artistic talent, she courageously pursued professional training in pottery art, aspiring to set up her own business. The Latin Patriarchate, who were impressed by her potential and commitment, financed her a training.



Interventions in buildings on the pastoral territory of the Latin Patriarchate

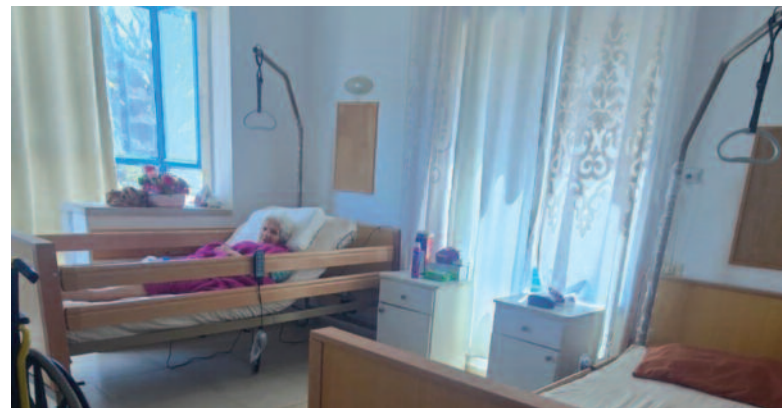
PALESTINE

The projects in Palestine are an essential part of the Latin Patriarchate's emergency response, especially at this very difficult time in the West Bank. On the one hand, these actions provide safer and more welcoming facilities for those who live there and for the entire community that benefit from them. On the other, these projects offer support to many Christian families through the opportunity given to skilled workers – who face unemployment due to the ongoing conflict – to be hired for these renovations. Although the initial aim is to renovate physical infrastructures, these projects are important because they also rebuild lives and communities, strengthening resilience in the face of immense difficulties.

THE PURCHASE OF NEW HOSPITAL BEDS FOR THE BEIT AFRAM ELDERLY HOME IN TAYBEH

The Beit Afram Elderly Home accommodates 20 elderly men and women who otherwise would be

living alone because they have no one to care for them, or who suffer from chronic illnesses requiring constant medical care. To help them, 10 electric inpatient beds were purchased, each with a steel frame and coated surface for durability and ease of cleaning. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Order, this modernization has improved the well-being of the residents, who now feel that they are treated with dignity and respect, which contributes to their overall quality of life. The 21 staff members of Beit Afram are also benefiting from the project



because the new beds are more manageable, reduce the caregivers' physical effort, which enables them to carry out their tasks more efficiently.

MAINTENANCE WORK IN THE PARISH HALL IN RAMALLAH

Ramallah is one of the most active parishes in Palestine serving as a centre for various social and religious activities. The parish regularly hosts celebrations, workshops, training sessions, Scout meetings and youth gatherings in a dedicated hall that covers an area of approximately 400 square meters, and can accommodate up to 400 people with its five washroom facilities. The existing restrooms were in need of renovation, the ceiling of the hall needed to be renovated and the walls needed a new coat of paint to improve the overall appearance of the space.

Thanks to the contribution of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, this renovation project has had a significant impact on the parish, and created a more welcoming and functional environment for its **2,000 worshippers** and youth groups who use the hall to meet and organize various activities.

RENOVATION OF THE SANITARY UNITS IN THE PRESBYTERY OF ZABABDEH

The Zababdeh parish has approximately 2,000 Latin Christians in its congregation. The presbytery building had had serious insulation problems, which in turn had seriously damaged the interior. In addition, the sanitary facilities had deteriorated due to lack of maintenance and prolonged use over time. The renovation project, which was supported by the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, aimed not only to improve the sanitary facilities and ensure long-term compliance to health and safety requirements, but also to offer some hope to skilled Christian workers who were facing unemployment due to the conflict.

VARIOUS INTERVENTIONS IN BEIT JALA

Due to the dilapidated state of the structure and the lack of regular maintenance, the



presbytery in Beit Jala had had numerous problems. The contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Order has made it possible to renovate the three rooms of the house and the bathrooms, enabling the priest to live in better conditions. It was also possible to renovate part of the building's infrastructure, in particular on refurbishing and replacing the heating, air conditioning, and photovoltaic system and water tanks so as to ensure the sustainability of the environment in which the mission and activities of the local priestly community take place.

A second project concerned the convent with a plan to replace the heating and cooling system. This was implemented with the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre to improve and guarantee the wellbeing of the ten priests and nuns who live there.

UPGRADING THE ABOUD SCHOOL AND PARISH HALL'S POWER SUPPLY

The aim of this project was to help modernize and improve the reliability and stability of the buildings' power supply. As part of the work, there has been a necessary switch to a three-phase connection to optimize the electrical capacity and extend the life of the electrical equipment and machinery used in the school and parish hall.

These renovations, which were financed by the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, not only improved the functional capacity of the facilities, but also ensured a safer and more secure environment for all occupants and users, namely Aboud's **500 parishioners**, the **248 pupils** at the Aboud school and the **22 staff and teachers**.

ISRAEL

REPAIRS TO THE DEIR RAFAT SHRINE

The Convent at the Deir Rafat Shrine is old and some of the infrastructure was antiquated, which made it prone to frequently requiring repairs and structural interventions. The brick roof was in poor condition, with numerous holes



and broken tiles that caused all sorts of problems and exacerbated the deterioration and hygiene problems. In addition, the windows of the church were either broken or badly damaged.

Extensive renovation work was undertaken thanks to several Lieutenancies, which provided a sustainable and lasting response. The direct beneficiaries of this project are the **12 nuns** living in Deir Rafat, as well as the visitors and pilgrims who choose to stay in the convent's guesthouse and use its retreat centre.

RESOLVING MOISTURE PROBLEMS IN THE PRESBYTERY OF SHEFA AMR

Situated adjacent to the church, the Shefa Amr presbytery is a two-story building, which is about 25 years old. The building was prone to grave moisture problems, especially in the bathrooms, where the ceramic tiling on the shower walls was peeling away. Humidity was also affecting the



building's exterior walls and the roof, which was flaking off in several places, and creating conditions for seepage and water stagnation. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames, it was possible to carry out the renovation work that made the building waterproof, and allowed the parish priest who lives in the building, as well as all the guests and visitors who use the premises, to live in a healthier environment.

JORDAN

RENOVATION OF SOUTHERN ZARQA SCHOOL BUILDING

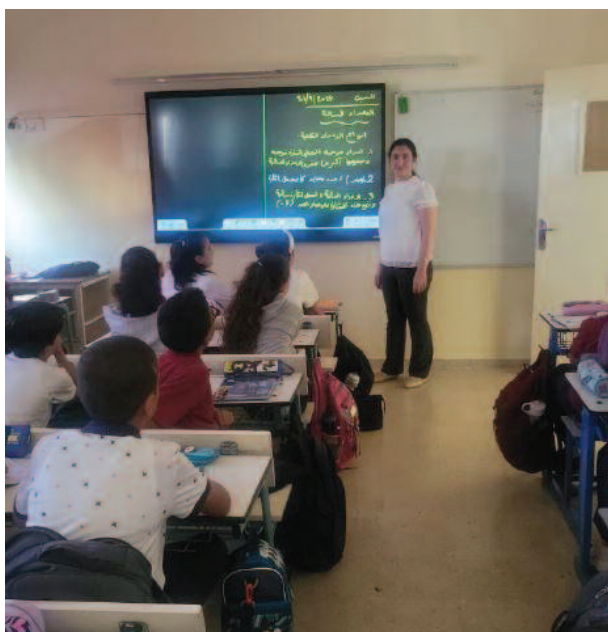
The school in Zarqa was located in a precarious infrastructure, with substandard equipment and furniture, a lack of classrooms, playgrounds, libraries, computer rooms and science laboratories. Thanks to the support of the Knights and Dames of the Order, work has been carried out. The main objective of the project was



to renovate the building, improving its stability, safety and durability, thus ensuring a safe learning environment for pupils and staff. This work directly benefited the school's **200 pupils**, as well as its **22 teachers and school staff**, who now have safer and more stable learning spaces.

PROVIDING COMPUTERS AND SMART BOARDS TO FIVE SCHOOLS

In response to the growing dependence on digital learning and in order to combine it seamlessly with traditional teaching methods, the Latin Patriarchate launched a project to provide five schools in Jordan with computers, interactive whiteboards and projectors to improve teaching techniques, enrich education and develop pupils' technological skills. The project involved schools in: **Al Mafraq, Al Salt, Ader, Wahadneh and**



Naour. These five schools were chosen because they are located in remote areas of Jordan, where access to such resources is rather limited. The new equipment makes it easier for teachers to demonstrate the exercises and encourages pupil participation during lessons. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Order, some **1,870 pupils, 151 teachers and staff** in these schools have benefited from the introduction of these modern teaching tools.

MAINTENANCE OF THE HYDROTHERAPY POOL AT THE OUR LADY OF PEACE CENTRE

The Our Lady of Peace Centre in Jordan, which opened in 2004, offers free rehabilitation and special education sessions to people with disabilities, regardless of their religious and social background, financial situation or nationality. Over time, the renovation of the hydrotherapy pool had become indispensable because of the essential role it plays in the treatment of patients. In particular, it helps relieve the symptoms of various ailments, particularly arthritis and joint, muscle and nerve problems. It is particularly effective in reducing acute and chronic pain, especially in children suffering from cerebral palsy or autism.

This renovation project, which was made possible thanks to the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, included a series of technical interventions, such as a water dehumidification and sterilization system, and some electrical interventions, which have enabled the centre to continue to provide its approximately 30 free treatment sessions per month, to assist almost 1,500 children and adults suffering from various ailments and thus have a positive impact on their lives.



CONSTRUCTION OF NEW SANITARY FACILITIES AND A NEW ENTRANCE FOR THE CHURCH IN NAOUR

There were certain facilities at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Naour that were inadequate to meet current pastoral needs. There was an urgent need to provide a separate and more easily accessible entrance to the church and toilets outside for worshippers attending celebrations and activities organized in the courtyard.

The generous financial support of the Knights and Dames made it possible to make significant improvements to the main entrance of the church and to carry out much of the work on the outdoor toilets.



INTERVENTIONS REQUIRED FOR THE JUBEIHA CHURCH

The church in Jubeiha, which celebrated its first mass at Christmas 2020, can accommodate around 1,000 worshippers. The church also includes a large parish hall and other infrastructure. After the inauguration, the plan was to connect the sewage system of the parish complex to the local public sewage system. Since the project was delayed for reasons on the ground, other options had to be explored to temporarily solve the sewage problem and use the remaining budget to address critical issues requiring an immediate response.

RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH IN IRBID, INCLUDING THE DEFECTIVE ELECTRICAL NETWORK

The parish of St. George the Martyr is located in Northern Jordan, about 70 kilometers north of Amman and 25 kilometers from the Syrian border, in the Governorate of Irbid. The church, which is a very old building, had dilapidated electrical and plumbing systems that risked



overloading the network and endangering the safety of the building and the people living there. Thanks to the contribution of several Lieutenancies of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, it was possible to start work in March 2023 to renovate and replace the electrical system to improve its functionality and ensure its safety. The project also included the removal of the old water tanks followed by the installation of a new hot and cold water system. The works, completed in May 2024, created a modern and safe meeting place for the approximately 600 worshippers of the Irbid parish.

TWO ROOMS ADDED TO THE PRIEST'S HOUSE IN SMAKIEH

The village of Smakieh is located 120 km South of Amman, in a semi-desert area. It has about 2,000 worshippers, including 230 Latin families, and the primary school alone has 330 pupils. Smakieh is one of the most active parishes in Jordan, which holds regular youth meetings (through the JEC - *Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne* – for three age groups), workshops and courses, a football tournament and theological training evenings dedicated to important topics such as marriage, the Eucharist, etc. The parish priest



with the help of the sisters and other community leaders manages these activities. The presbytery was relatively small and did not offer adequate space to receive the parishioners, nor comfortable accommodation for the priest himself.

In order to support these activities and develop parish life, it was proposed to build two additional rooms by adding a floor to the existing house. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre, the Grand Magisterium was able to support the creation of a larger and more welcoming space, and transform the priest's house to accommodate a meeting room, an office and a waiting room to serve the

parishioners. The two additional rooms will serve as the priest's residence with a bedroom, bathroom and living area.

RENOVATION OF THE PRESBYTERY IN SALT

The presbytery in Salt is one of the oldest buildings in the region and had had a number of structural and safety problems. When it was declared unfit for use, it needed to be renovated quickly and effectively to restore suitable living conditions. Thanks to the contribution of the Lieutenancies, the parish priest now has a decent space and better living conditions.

The contribution of the Order through the ROACO

Through the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, make monthly contributions and support projects through the Grand Magisterium. In addition, for years, we have been committed to contributing to the implementation of certain initiatives indicated by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches within the framework of ROACO (Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches).

In 2024, the Order adopted nine projects. Four of these directly benefit educational structures linked to religious institutions or congregations: the installation of classrooms and sanitary facilities at the school of the Discalced Carmelites in Haifa (Israel); the reconstruction of the fence for the kindergarten of the Comboni Sisters in Bethany (Palestine); the renewal of the electrical network for the Greek Catholic Melkite boys' school in Zarqa (Jordan); and finally, the maintenance of the classrooms and stairs at the Dar Al-Lutf school in Aqaba (Jordan).

Other projects supported churches that required significant renovation work in order to better accommodate their local communities: the replacement of pews at the Greek Catholic Melkite Church of Our Lady of the Dormition in Arrabeh (Israel); insulation work and roof maintenance at the Greek Catholic Melkite Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Virgin in the Old City of Jerusalem; at the complex of the Church of Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant in Kiryat Ye'arim (Israel), a contribution was made towards the

Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant Church in Kiryat Ye'arim (Israel).



redesigning of the irrigation system. The last two projects are more directly concerned with renovation work on other buildings belonging to religious congregations, such as the Monastery of the Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady of Calvary in Jerusalem and the guesthouse for the priests of the Word Incarnate located at the monastery at the Sanctuary of the Baptism of the Lord in Bethany, Jordan.

The local communities are involved and contribute part of the funds to these interventions. This makes these projects very meaningful since the Order is called upon just to 'makeup' the missing part of the financial commitment that comes from and starts at the grassroots, which demonstrates the interest, engagement, and love of the local communities for their own facilities and activities.

Voices of hope in the Holy Land

Life on the streets of Jerusalem goes on as usual, although the tension of the past year and a half is still felt. Since the start of the war, 17 months ago, and during the ceasefire, pilgrims are slowly returning to the Holy City and beyond.

In 2025, Ramadan began March 1 and Lent, for Latins, began March 5, so they cover a similar period. In addition, the Catholic and Orthodox Easters coincide on April 20, as well as the end of *Pesach* (Passover) for Jews. The strongly felt hope is that the future of the Holy Land may open up to a dimension of lasting peace – for which the people of this war-torn land are in dire need after a period of suffering, with tens of thousands of victims, and a crisis in mutual trust.

We wish to give space in the following pages to those who, from the Holy Land or in the name of their deep connection to it, like our Grand Master, strive to be voices of hope in dark times, small flames and leaven in the dough as we are called to be, and continue to hope even in the face of the many challenges that daily seem to slow and hinder peace efforts and close the doors to a shared future. *“Spes non confundit”*, “Hope does not disappoint” is a message that speaks directly to the heart of the Christians of the Holy Land and to us, Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre. In this Jubilee year, we pray with them.



Cardinal PIERBATTISTA PIZZABALLA, OFM
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Being the head of a diocese as vast as that of Jerusalem – which, as a reminder, includes Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus – is not a simple mission in these times; instead, it takes on an important prophetic dimension. “To hope here in the Holy Land also means keeping the path open for the future, being conscious of the others as they are and not as you would like them to be,” said His Beatitude, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, in an interview given in early February, a few weeks after the start of the truce, to SIR

[Religious Information Service]. “As a Church, we have ‘experienced’ the war both from the outside and from within; there are different ways of seeing the conflict. In this war, we have had Christians both in the army and among the population of Gaza. It was not easy to manage this diversity of opinion. We used clear, honest, and sincere language, but one that did not close the door to dialogue and relationships,” he continued.

Hope, the virtue for which we ask the gift, is not always easy to identify in the context of war. On this subject, the Patriarch insisted clearly in that interview, “In the Holy Land, we must not confuse hope with a political solution to the conflict that we will not see. Hope is not a slogan to shout, but a way of seeing and being in life [...] Hope cannot be separated from faith, which is its foundation.” To conclude, looking ahead within his diocese and the Israeli-Palestinian context, Cardinal Pizzaballa stated the need for a vision and new leadership. “Politics is also based on a religious vision and narrative. The settlers have a very clear religious narrative. We need a religious leadership capable of developing a firm, serious religious narrative of the Holy Land, based on the

Scriptures, which is not that of the settlers. This is necessary to provide, on a cultural and interreligious level, something different and important to say.”

The situation in Gaza remains clearly and unfortunately tragic. With great clarity, the Patriarch shared, “In the coming months, we will have a better understanding of what needs to be done. It does not depend solely on us. Even if we had the means to rebuild, we need to understand what can be rebuilt and where. Rebuilding a house when there is nothing around it is not very useful. We are waiting to understand whether or not there is a plan, whether the borders will be opened, to whom, and under what conditions”. Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa concluded by stating, “This is the most difficult phase, understanding how to begin again.”

Father FRANCESCO PATTON, OFM

Custos of the Holy Land

Father Francesco Patton is the Custos of the Holy Land. We interviewed him at the height of the war in October 2024. He shared some thoughts on what possible solutions might be

In January 2025, when the ceasefire began, Patriarch Pizzaballa and Custos Patton sent a joint message to all Catholics to invite them to return to the Holy Land on pilgrimage. “Now is the time to continue helping and supporting this Church by resuming the holy journey. Return to Jerusalem, return to the Holy Land, visit the places, and bring back to life the other lung of this Church; the pilgrimage and the presence

of pilgrims”, said Cardinal Pizzaballa. Father Patton echoed these sentiments, stating, “It is a special year, a Jubilee year, and we are standing before the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, which is one of the three Jubilee sanctuaries designated for the Holy Land by the Holy Father, along with Nazareth and Bethlehem. The invitation is to be pilgrims of hope and come to the Holy Land as pilgrims to return to the roots of our faith but also to show concrete support for the small Christian community of the Holy Land.”

“There is also a very concrete dimension of solidarity. When you come to the Holy Land as pilgrims, you give our people the opportunity to live with dignity from their work,” stated Father Francesco Patton.



implemented to allow the local populations to live in the necessary tranquility. “At the moment, these two options [two states or a single state, ed.] are unfeasible. Regarding the two-state solution, we must remember that this year [2024, ed.], Israel voted in Parliament and passed a law that denies the possibility of a Palestinian state. But the single-state formula (in the sense of a unitary state) is also impossible because Israeli Jews would not accept having a state in which Palestinians have the same rights, and on the other hand, Palestinians would not accept living in a state where they are legally discriminated against. So, we live in a situation of deadlock, a limbo, and in order to break out of it, the local and international political class must start thinking outside the box, which for me means going beyond the classic concept of two states or a single state.”

“This Land – he continued – has a long history filled with many moments of conflict and difficulty. It is an interesting place even from a geographical point of view because it is where Europe, Asia, and Africa meet – and therefore also clash. I believe that when the Eternal Father chose to send His Son to incarnate in a specific place in the world, He chose this one because it was the most complicated, and He did so to bring reconciliation. I do not know how long it will take, but if Our Lord has promised certain things, over the course of history He will also be able to fulfill them. You see, we have a problem that God does not have, i.e. we measure everything by the duration of our lifetimes, which is extremely short. [...] The Eternal Father does not have this problem and therefore He is not in a hurry. He can afford the luxury of guiding history without violating human freedom, and this is certainly a great effort for Him, but it is also His wager and an act of trust towards humanity. We all wish that God would solve things with a magic wand, but this would mean that He would bypass what makes us similar to Him, that is, the freedom He has given us.”

We spoke to Father Patton again in February 2025, when he stated, “Regarding the current ceasefire and the necessary steps to be taken, the most important thing is that the truce holds, and that the duration of the truce is not just time

enough for the release of hostages and prisoners. Instead, that this is the time for real political and diplomatic negotiations to eventually reach a solution that allows for the establishment of a lasting peace, because the truce is not yet peace. Obviously, public opinion needs to support this type of process, rather than supporting the opposite path. As for the Christians, I believe that, as always, what we can do is pray, and pray with great faith. Christians who also have political roles and responsibilities, however, have the task of exercising persuasion on the parties to ensure that the truce is not just an interlude between fighting but a first step towards genuine peace.”

Cardinal FERNANDO FILONI

Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

“If we speak from the perspective of human reality, we cannot be indifferent to the human dimension of suffering, both for the Israeli population that is still waiting for the release of all hostages, and for the Palestinian population that lives in a devastating situation, with tens of thousands of lives lost and total uncertainty about the future.





This photo of a flowering shrub growing within the walls of Jerusalem is a parable of the hope in action that characterizes the persistent and generous work of the Church in the Holy Land.

From this perspective, the Order, through the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, takes on the responsibility of supporting a human situation in severe difficulty.

The political dynamics are the responsibility of those with political duties, and we follow with concern the impact these dynamics and choices have on peoples, families, and individuals on the ground who have the right to be heard, protected, and supported with justice and respect.

What Jesus teaches us in the Gospel is not to be indifferent towards those who suffer the most and to whom we owe our full attention. In such an extremely complicated and difficult political framework, the Church certainly does not fail to voice its opinion and contribute, and we, as the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, strive to be close to them in prayer and with humanitarian support.”

Contributions gathered by Elena Dini

Abbot NIKODEMUS C. SCHNABEL, OSB

Abbot of the Abbey of the Dormition and the Priory of Tabgha, Religious-Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Abbot Nikodemus Schnabel has been a Religious-Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre since 2015. After having served the Church of Jerusalem as Patriarchal Vicar for Migrants and Asylum Seekers, he was elected by his confreres as Abbot of the renowned and picturesque Abbey of the Dormition in Jerusalem in 2023. Looking back on the past year and a half, Abbot Schnabel confesses, “One of our challenges has been related to our 24 employees, the majority of whom are Christians. In Jerusalem, they are Christians from the West Bank who come from Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour; and in Tabgha, they are Arab Christians from Israel. In their families, there are a total of 29 school-age children, and the social responsibility is clear, not only for our employees but for their children. I am grateful to my confreres because together we reached a common decision, which is we cannot save the entire Middle East, but we can choose to take care of these people and families and continue to uphold the contracts of our employees.”

All this, of course, occurred in a context where,



The Abbot of the Benedictine Monastery of the Dormition in Jerusalem, Father Schnabel is an emblematic voice of the Church in the Holy Land. Alongside the three high ecclesiastical authorities who preceded him in these pages, his testimony, as a Religious Knight of the Order, illustrates what the local religious communities are concretely doing to serve a population who are experiencing unimaginable suffering.

with the war, their work, which was primarily dedicated to pilgrims, was no longer necessary, and for the Abbey, it was not easy (due to the lack of income from pilgrimages) to find funds to pay them, and the monks did it asking for donations or drawing from emergency reserves. “However,” the Abbot continued, “thanks to them, we have been able to give a visible sign to the outside world because during these months we have kept our two monasteries and churches, our café, and our shops open every day. We talk a lot about solidarity, and for us, it has become very concrete.”

Meetings of the Order's Lieutenants around the world

“The constant commitment, both spiritual and material, of each Member marks the specificity of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre”

Governor General Leonardo Visconti di Modrone is particularly concerned about maintaining relationships between the Lieutenancies, both between regions and from one continent to another. This is why, in 2024, he took part in the **North American Lieutenants’** annual meeting held in Quebec City, Canada, from June 6 to 8.

That was a critical encounter for the internal coordination of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, as 15,000 of the 30,000 Knights and Dames worldwide reside in North America.

After a meeting with Cardinal Cyprien Lacroix, Archbishop of Quebec and Grand Prior of the local Lieutenancy, the Governor General addressed the Lieutenants in a major speech. He emphasised, for example, the importance of the

Members’ personal contributions that are the basic foundation for the Order’s solidarity activity towards the Latin Catholic diocese of the Holy Land. Indeed, unlike other organisations, “the constant commitment, both spiritual and material, of each Member marks the specificity of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre as a Pontifical Institution,” he recalled.

The meeting, chaired by the Vice Governor General for North America, Thomas Pogge, in

the presence of the Vice Governor General for Latin America, Enric Mas, continued with numerous exchanges between the Lieutenants and the Governor General,

The meeting of the North American Lieutenants took place in Québec, coinciding with the 350th anniversary of the founding of this Diocese.



especially on current issues related to the situation in the Holy Land and the aid provided regularly and discreetly by the Order.

After that meeting, the participants prayed during a mass celebrated in Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix (Our Lady of Peace) Cathedral, on the occasion of the jubilee of the 350th anniversary of the foundation of the diocese of Quebec, the second diocese created in America after that of Santo Domingo. The Lieutenant for Canada-Québec, Mireille Éthier, who organised the event, was warmly thanked by the Governor General – on behalf of everyone – for her work at the head of the Order in that part of the world.

The Governor General then accompanied the Cardinal Grand Master to Brazil. On October 27, 2024, they held a meeting with the **Lieutenants of the Latin American area** at Rocas do Vouga, the country residence of the Lieutenant for Brazil-São Paulo, Manuel Tavares. The encounter brought about renewed enthusiasm among those present, who had until this meeting and for various reasons, remained somewhat on the margins of contact with the Grand Magisterium since 2018.

Six years had indeed passed since the last in-person meeting, which was held in Buenos Aires. COVID and other unfavourable circumstances had delayed this face-to-face meeting, which could only take place twice previously through video conferencing. What are the new elements that have emerged? First among them, since 2018, there has been the creation of a role for a Vice Governor General responsible for Latin America. This position has been entrusted to the skills and dedication of Enric Mas, who, in close collaboration with the Grand Magisterium and through ongoing communication and frequent visits, has enabled coordination between all the activities in Rome and those of the region.

This work has yielded numerous results. In Argentina, there has been a reassuring revival of dialogue between the Members of the Order and the local episcopate, which had previously faced some difficulties. In Brazil, prominent figures from various regions have stepped into the scene, allowing for a confident outlook on the prospects for expanding the Order in a country with immense potential and deep devotion. Mexico has been playing a leading role in training efforts,



In Brazil, the Lieutenants of Latin America gathered around the Grand Master at the residence of the Lieutenant of São Paulo, where a grotto at the end of the garden welcomed participants for the daily Mass celebrated for the intentions in the Holy Land.



which has benefited neighboring countries too. A new Magistral Delegation was established in May 2024 in Santo Domingo, which marks the beginning of the Order's Central America expansion. In this context, Honduras, Panama, and Guatemala have been visited, and direct contacts have been initiated with local ecclesiastical authorities. The leadership transition within the Lieutenancy in Bogotá has brought new energy and fresh perspectives to Colombia. Chile, Paraguay, and Ecuador are other countries where potential openings are being explored.

The atmosphere of warm cordiality and constructive intentions that characterized the meeting of the Latin American Lieutenants at the picturesque “*coudelaria*” near São Paulo is certain

to yield positive results. The initiative received encouragement from Cardinal Odilo Pedro Scherer, Grand Prior of the Lieutenancy and Archbishop of São Paulo, who attended as a welcome guest and observer during the first phase of the meeting. His presence embodied the spirit of “accompaniment” by the ecclesiastical component, initiated during the last Consulta 2023.

The overview would not be complete without mentioning the two Investiture ceremonies held in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In attendance at these events were the two Archbishop Grand Priors, Their Eminences Cardinal Orani João Tempesta and Cardinal Odilo Pedro Scherer. The two Cardinals strongly support and have fully cooperated with the Order’s initiatives, both in their interactions with the Grand Master and in meetings with the new Knights and Dames. Their insights will also be of great assistance in raising awareness of the Order within the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference (CNBB).

This way, on every continent, dialogue between Lieutenancies has continued intensely throughout the year 2024. This was evident in Bari as well, during the Investiture on November 23, where the **Italian-speaking Lieutenants** gathered for their annual meeting to address topics of shared interest. The meeting was enriched by the unexpected but greatly appreciated participation

In the presence of the Grand Master and led by the Governor General, the Italian-speaking Lieutenants gathered in Bari.



of the Cardinal Grand Master, who, through this gesture of attention, emphasized the importance of dialogue and coordination among Lieutenants with similar challenges. In his remarks, the Governor General reminded those present that the Holy Land needs us and, in this tragic moment, seeks to feel our closeness through prayer and our tangible charitable solidarity. He further noted that Rome will soon become a destination for millions of pilgrims during the Jubilee.

He expressed hope that pilgrims might also return to the Holy Places, where our faith was born, and bring renewed hope to our brothers and sisters devastated by the violence of war in their daily lives, their work, the education of their children, and the care of their sick. The discussion then focused on the role of the Christian community in the Holy Land: though a minority, it is vibrant, anchored in hope, and supported by our solidarity. In turn, this community has much to offer in rebuilding relationships where hatred and violence currently prevail. This will be one of the great missions of the future, once the war ends: rebuilding dialogue inspired by the spirit of the Gospel. In the reconstruction of human relationships – more so than in rebuilding destroyed infrastructure – we Christians will play a vital role, as we stand outside the constraints of politics and ideology.

“Therefore, it was agreed that we must support those who choose not to abandon their homeland, whether in Gaza or Palestine, encourage the resumption of work, the reopening of schools, and the reactivation of an economy that relies on pilgrimages,” stressed Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone. “This is our commitment – he concluded – which materializes in an ever-increasing contribution to the Latin Patriarchate and other institutions in the Holy Land. It also drives us to expand the Order’s presence in new countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa; to strengthen dialogue among Members and improve communication; to rationalize and modernize our administration; and to rejuvenate our ranks, which will provide fresh energy to our mission. Being proud of our roots, we remain focused on today’s challenges while keeping our eyes fixed on the future.” ■

The international growth of the Order

Throughout 2024 and the early months of 2025, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre has been pleased to expand its number of Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations. The Order has achieved this by adding the Magistral Delegation for Santo Domingo, the Lieutenancy for Malaysia-Penang, and the Magistral Delegation for Slovakia. In addition, the Magistral Delegations for the Czech Republic, Norway, and Croatia have been elevated to the status of Lieutenancies.

According to our Constitution, “The placing of the Order in a geographical area in which it was not present or the autonomy granted to a Section in relation to the original Lieutenancy to which it belonged takes place initially with the creation of a Magistral Delegation. The Magistral Delegation can be raised to the level of a Lieutenancy when it reaches a minimal duration of existence and a specific number of members, as envisaged by the General Regulations.” (Art. 25)

This is what took place with the Czech Republic, Norway, and Croatia. Instead, for the newly established Lieutenancy for Malaysia-Penang, it was immediately elevated to the rank of Lieutenancy due to its singular situation of having long been a Section of the Lieutenancy for Western Australia. In addition, the now Lieutenancy for Malaysia-Penang has a large number of Members already invested in this local group.



The Grand Master and the delegation accompanying him were received by the President of the Dominican Republic, on the occasion of the official establishment of the Order in the Caribbean.

As for Santo Domingo and Slovakia, these represent entirely new presences in the Order.

During a profound and meaningful pastoral visit on May 25, 2024, the Grand Master invested the Metropolitan

Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Msgr. Francisco Ozoria Acosta, who assumed the role of Grand Prior of the newly established Magistral Delegation. In addition, the new Magistral Delegate, Juana Josefina Domínguez de Jesús, was invested, along with eight other members (four Knights, three Dames, and one priest). Among the various authorities present at the ceremonies was Guillermo Macías Graue, who is the Lieutenant of the neighboring Lieutenancy for



Mexico, who assisted and accompanied the process of formation for the new Knights and Dames in the country.

“Santo Domingo represents the first concrete step in the growth of this Pontifical Institution in Caribbean America, - commented Governor General Visconti di Modrone - and strengthens the ties in this region of the world thanks to the closeness and fraternal support received from the Lieutenancy for Mexico, which accompanied the process of founding the Magistral Delegation in Santo Domingo and is already broadening its horizons with the presence of the first Guatemalan Knight who was invested.”

In early April 2025, the Grand Master traveled to Slovakia for the celebrations marking the official establishment of the Order in this country with the new Magistral Delegate, Miroslav Gieci, and the new Grand Prior of the Magistral

The Governor General together with the first Guatemalan Knight who received his Investiture in Santo Domingo. Here he is pictured with his family.

Delegation, Msgr. Ján Orosch, Archbishop of Trnava.

The new Magistral Delegate shared how his desire to become part of the Order grew stronger over time, stating, “Thanks to the figure of Saint Charbel, for whom I have great respect, I became much more familiar with the history of the Eastern Churches, their activities, and their current circumstances. I wanted to support our fellow Christians living in the Middle East. I sought a way to help them and discovered the presence of the Order in the Czech Republic, which I drew closer to.”

From there, various steps were taken to establish the presence of the Order in Slovakia as well.

As has now become customary, the support of a neighboring Lieutenancy has been essential in guiding the early steps of establishing this new Magistral Delegation. For Slovakia, this “sponsoring Lieutenancy” was the Czech Republic.

“The help of a more experienced friend is indispensable for understanding, for example, the best ways to interact with the Grand

Magisterium, how to prepare ceremonies, and where to obtain capes and insignia,” explained Czech Lieutenant Tomáš Parma. He recalled how his predecessor had also received assistance in those initial stages from the then-Lieutenancy for Sweden. Furthermore, the Czech leader added that, given the geographical and linguistic proximity, “even before discussions about a Magistral Delegation for Slovakia began, there were already people who expressed a desire to join the Order through us in the Czech Republic. In communicating with the Grand Magisterium, the idea emerged to welcome these Knights and Dames through us and then allow them to move to Slovakia once – as is happening now – a presence of the Order was established there.”

In the process of forming the Slovak Knights and Dames, Tomáš Parma gave a presentation on the Order, while for the more spiritual aspect, both Czech and Slovak Members have already shared the experience of spiritual exercises preached by the Czech Grand Prior, Archbishop Jan Graubner, earlier this year. ■

Some Investitures attended by the highest authorities of the Order



NAPLES
March 15-16
2024



MONACO
April 5-6, 2024

EDINBURGH
April 12-13, 2024



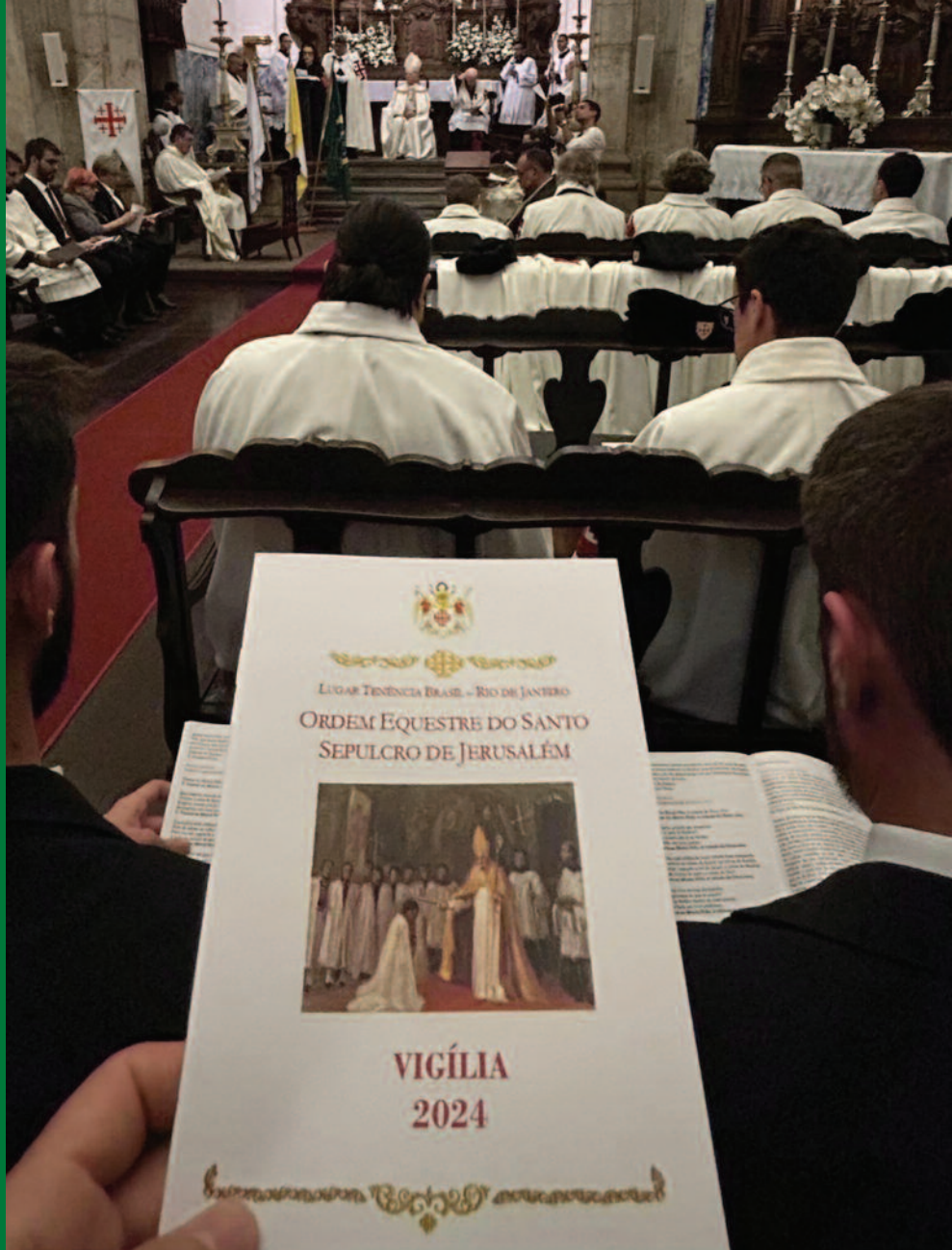
SANTO
DOMINGO
May 22-26
2024

GENEVA
June 14-15, 2024



OSLO
June 21-22, 2024





RIO DE JANEIRO
and SÃO PAULO
October 23-26
2024





ALCOBAÇA
(Portugal)
November 15-16
2024



MALTA
November 15-16
2024





BARI
November 22-23
2024

ASSISI
November 29-30
2024





LONDON
November 29-30
2024



ROME
December 13-14
2024

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A Regular Canoness of the Holy Sepulchre becomes a Religious-Dame of the Order

From the origins of the Order to the present day

In the introduction of our Constitution, it states, “The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, of ancient origins, has its historical roots in the

creation of the Canons Regular of the Holy Sepulchre and in the firmly established custom of valiant men being invested with the title of knight at the tomb of Christ in past centuries.”

Centuries later, we still see the richness of the tradition linking the Canons Regular and the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Sister Monica Raassen, a Regular Canoness of the Holy Sepulchre, who was recently invested as a Religious-Dame in the Netherlands, here shares her testimony about her calling to join the Order.

Sister Monica, could you tell us more about your Congregation and how you decided to become a sister?

My religious Order is named ‘Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre’. Our Order was founded during the First Crusade in 1099. At first, it was intended for men only, but soon after for women too. We served the pilgrims around the Holy Sepulchre and in time, the Order settled in Europe. Our oldest Monastery, which was founded in 1276, still exists and is located in



Canoness Monica Raassen received the Investiture as a Religious-Dame of the Order in the Netherlands.

Zaragoza.

I entered this religious Order at the age of 45 after I became a widow. It was not my intention to become a nun but the

Lord led me to the Monastery in Maarssen, in the Netherlands. In the Monastery – Priorij Emmaus – lived the Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre and I entered the community in 2006. In January 2012, I took my final vows. I lived for a few years with a small number of sisters very happily in our community.

Today, my Monastery does not exist any longer because most of the sisters have died, and there was a lack of new vocations. Although I am no longer living in a community, I am still a member of the Association of Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre and the general Prioress is my Superior.

At the moment I live in a presbytery in Breukelen in the Netherlands. I am based here

because I am involved as a pastoral worker with a mission that the Archbishop of Utrecht, Cardinal Eijk, chose for me.

How did you get to know about the Order of the Holy Sepulchre?

The Dutch Lieutenancy of the Order used to come twice a year to our Monastery to celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and then again on the first Sunday of Advent. During these meetings, since 2006, I have personally made contacts with several Members of the Order. We shared our spirituality and that created a bond.

Since 2017, the national meetings have no longer been held in our Monastery but I have been invited to continue to attend.

During the last three years, I was invited to join the regional meetings and to give some lectures.

Then two Members of the Order asked me to become a full Member and because the possibility to become a Dame is open for religious women now, the procedure started.

Your connection to the Holy Land was already part of your spiritual life. How do you think that being a Member in the Order has added something to that dimension?

The Order takes special care of the Christians in the Holy Land, and I like to join this care with my prayer, and financial support as far as is possible for me. During the meetings, and through the newsletters, we are informed about the situation in the Holy Land and in this way I am even more involved. My bond with the Holy Land has therefore been strengthened.

How is your religious family supporting your commitment in the Order?

My Superior supported and approved my membership in the Order. My religious Order community in Odiliënberg in the Netherlands was very supportive during the Investiture. I

stayed with them during the two days of the celebrations and they followed the ceremony by livestream.

Your closeness to the Land of our Lord is definitely a source of wealth for the other Members of your Lieutenancy. How do you think that this gift of yours can be shared with your fellow Knights and Dames in terms of service?

Being present during our meetings is an enrichment for all of us. Since I am a theologian I will contribute with my knowledge, and to this end, I have already given some lectures and have led some conversations. Together with a priest in our region, I contribute to Church celebrations with a testimony or a sermon. In the future, I intend to help as much as I can.

You were recently invested. Can you describe the experience of the ceremony? Was there something that particularly moved you?

As a religious sister, I like simplicity, so I was a little afraid of too much ceremonial display.

Nevertheless, I was touched by the intensity of the ceremonies. Everything was very well prepared and we were surrounded by overwhelming warmth and sense of brotherhood.

The local musicians who played during the procession and during the celebrations provided a very special moment for us.

Do you have a favorite place in the Holy Land and a Biblical passage that is especially dear to you?

Because I lived for so many years in the Priorij Emmaus, my favorite place in the Holy Land would be Emmaus. My favorite Biblical passage is therefore the story of the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24:13–36)

Interview by Elena Dini

“The Order takes special care of the Christians in the Holy Land, and I like to join this care with my prayer, and financial support as far as is possible for me”

To be a Religious and a Knight: “A Vocation within a Vocation”

“My journey within the Order began in reverse,” says Father Raffaele Di Muro, O.F.M Conv., president of the Pontifical Theological Faculty ‘San Bonaventura’ Seraphicum, managed by the Order of Conventual Franciscan Friars. In this interview, the Religious-Knight shares how he became part of the Order and how he experiences this “vocation within a vocation.”



Father Raffaele, how did you become involved with the Order of the Holy Sepulchre?

My journey within the Order began in reverse. I had previously read an article by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Order, about the possibility for religious men and women to become Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. I experienced a calling and decided to discuss it with the Cardinal, who encouraged me further. As a Franciscan, I clearly have a profound love for Holy Places. However, as Conventual Franciscans, we do not have a direct presence in the Holy Land, so for me, it was a matter of understanding how I could help and offer support – how I could be a “guardian” of the Holy Sepulchre even from here. From the Cardinal’s encouraging words, I then moved on to contact the Lieutenancy, followed by the local Delegation (St. Luke), which guided me toward the Investiture.

You are a Conventual Franciscan friar. How did this calling come to you?

I am originally from Lucera (province of Foggia) and share my hometown with Francesco Antonio Fasani, a Franciscan saint. I have always been fascinated by his life, and when I felt called to consecrated life, the Franciscan order naturally presented itself as the path to follow. The getting to know more about St. Maximilian Kolbe’s life further strengthened my resolve in this choice.

After my novitiate, I was sent to the Seraphicum in Rome for my academic and religious formation, as well as for priestly training. After my ordination as a priest, I was assigned to Benevento for nine years before returning here, where I have held various roles (formator, professor, and, since 2020, president). For six years, I also served as president of the *Militia of the Immaculata*, an international public association of the faithful of pontifical right inspired by Father Kolbe’s work and his missionary and Marian charism.

How would you describe your experience of membership in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre as a religious?

At first, I did not think it was possible to belong to two orders. However, I then realized how this enriches my life as a Franciscan. When I felt drawn to the reality of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, I asked for permission from my General Superior, who did not hesitate in granting it. In my community, everyone is aware of my membership, which I experience as a “vocation within a vocation.” One must feel called to be a Knight or Dame, and have a special love for the Holy Land. One must be, as I would put it, “kneaded with the Holy Land.”

Regarding life within the Order, we now hold most of the meetings of the St. Luke Delegation – to which I belong – here at the Seraphicum. The meetings take place bimonthly on a Saturday

afternoon, and we offer a conference on spiritual or ecclesial themes, followed by the Eucharistic celebration and a time of fellowship. I have the pleasure and honor of giving some of these conferences, thus offering a service to the Knights and Dames with whom we grow in fellowship and closeness.

You received the Investiture in December 2023 from Cardinal Filoni. Was there anything in that experience that particularly moved you?

What struck me the most was the intensity of that celebration. To be honest, I did not think I could experience such emotion again after my priestly ordination. I can't point to a single moment; it was everything all together. The

celebration is very long but rich, and every moment has a particular meaning that I fully savored.

How do you hope to see the Order evolve in the coming years?

The Cardinal Grand Master has given a strong push in the field of spirituality, which is becoming more and more defined and outlined. I expect that in the coming years there will be an increasing awareness of the beauty of this aspect for the Knights and Dames. I wish for each of us to experience the spirituality of the Order because that is where the future of this Pontifical Institution lies.

Interview by Elena Dini

The Holy Land in the heart

The testimony of Sebastian Wetter, Prior of the St. Gallen Delegation in Switzerland

In one of the parishes I oversee as chaplain, there is a pilgrimage site dedicated to Maria Bildstein (Benken SG). In addition to the pilgrimage church, a multitude of grace images, grottos, and Stations of the Cross invite the visitor for devout contemplation. The sacred landscape, which was created at the end of the 19th century, was initiated by the pilgrim priest Johann Anton Hafner (1837-1929), and modeled after the Baroque Sacred Mountains. With the knowledge that not all believers would be able to visit the Holy Land, a Milanese Franciscan friar had the idea of bringing the Holy Land to Europe – after all, faith moves mountains (*Mt 17:20*). Thus, during the Baroque period and beyond, places in Palestine or symbolic locations were



recreated so that even the simple carpenter and the elderly peasant could dwell where the Lord spent His earthly life.

To bring the Holy Land to us has always been a fascinating thought for me. It is quite mysterious that the Almighty takes on human form, is baptized in the waters of the Jordan, and visits cities and villages. It is a wonderful task of the Equestrian Order to take care of the places that are the origin of our faith, without forgetting that with Christ in our hearts, even our Switzerland, my city, my village can become the Holy Land.

The Order's solidarity for the prisoners of Ventotene: a historic Jubilee experience

“**O**ne of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (*Luke 23:39-43*)

We are men and women capable of immense good, yet also capable of sin. Nevertheless, Jesus clearly teaches us that we are not defined by what we do, but by who we are: beloved children of God, who always comes back to seek us and, until the very last moment, offers the possibility to choose Him and be with Him. Just like the “thieves” crucified beside Jesus, today many prisoners are serving their sentences, and offering them a chance for comfort is an important calling that, as Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre over the years, we have made our own and, particularly during this Jubilee, wish to remember.

On June 18, 1953, during the Conference of Regional Delegates of the Chaplains of the Prevention and Penal Institutions, His Holiness Pope Pius XII received a group of prisoners in an audience. At the encounter, he blessed a Statue of the Madonna that the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem had wished to donate to the Ventotene prison, on the small island of Santo Stefano. The statue of the “Madonna of Consolation” arrived in Gaeta on August 7, and from there, as reported by *L’Osservatore*

Romano, it was placed on a throne that the prisoners had wanted to prepare for her. The statue then passed through the city of Gaeta before being embarked on August 8 aboard the ship *Pellicano* (*in English: pelican*), a name that evokes the symbol of the Eucharist, a gift of consolation and grace.

For the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which wished to make this gift to the prisoners of the Santo Stefano penitentiary, Dr. Mario Mochi, a dignitary of the Order, and two Knights from Naples were present. In addition to the prisoners who welcomed the Madonna onto the island, there were also the boats of Ventotene’s inhabitants, and on the cliff adjacent to the prison, three large signs with clearly visible writings: “This is a place of pain...”, “...a place of atonement...”, “...but above all, a place of redemption...”.

An old photo showing the statue of Our Lady of Consolation that the Order gave as a gift to the prisoners of the prison on the Italian island of Ventotene.

In the Vatican newspaper, it was recounted thus in an article dated August 10-11, 1953, “Along the arcades, at the windows, at the doors, everywhere,



small flags and garlands, and banners exclaiming ‘Long live Mary.’” The article also spoke of how many prisoners had wept with emotion. Taking turns, some of the prisoners had the joy of carrying the statue of Mary on their shoulders from the cliff to the top of the rock on the small island of Santo Stefano. From there, Mary – despite the state of neglect of the place after the prison’s closure in 1965 – still protects that corner of the world that has witnessed so much suffering, but also repentance and the beginning of new lives.

In the following days, letters from some prisoners were shared, recounting the event. “With the statue of the Madonna of Consolation,” one of them wrote, “Holy symbol of all mothers and of our suffering ones in particular, you have wished to bring us the most tangible sign of human solidarity, so that, in addition to being a source of comfort, it may also be an encouragement and a guide in the harsh journey of life.”

In this Jubilee Year, which will conclude the calendar of major events with the Jubilee of

Prisoners, we wish to remember the importance of being close to those who are suffering the most. Among the norms for granting indulgences during the Holy Year, there are also works of mercy. As we read in the document published by the Apostolic Penitentiary, “During the Holy Year, we are called to be tangible signs of hope for those of our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind.” (*Spes non confundit*, 10). Therefore, the Indulgence is also associated with works of mercy and penance, through which the conversion undertaken is witnessed. The faithful, following Christ’s example and mandate, are encouraged to perform works of charity or mercy more frequently, primarily in service of those brothers and sisters burdened by various needs, including prisoners.

Elena Dini

We thank Dr. Rosa Immacolata Cirone, former head of the office of the Pistoia Detention Center, for sharing this story with us and sending historical material on the subject.

“I lived inside the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre for three years”

Interview with Professor Francesca Romana Stasolla

Francesca Romana Stasolla is a full professor of Christian and Medieval Archaeology at the “La Sapienza” University of Rome and a member of the Pontifical Roman Academy of Archaeology. She leads several archaeological excavation projects, including the one carried out during the interventions on the floor of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

Professor, during the archaeological excavations that preceded the interventions on the flooring of the building, you spent many months inside the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. How did you feel during this privileged experience?

Together with the team of archaeologists, and colleagues from other disciplines (botanists, geologists, archaeozoologists, historians, philologists, etc.) from the “La Sapienza” University, we spent about three years inside the basilica, with a brief interruption only after the events of October 7, 2023. It is an extraordinary opportunity both from a professional and human point of view. We never imagined we would be able to conduct excavations in such a sacred place, where the entire history of Jerusalem is encapsulated, from the Iron Age – i.e. from the 8th century BC onwards – up to the present day.

From a human point of view, what impressed



us was the ability of the various communities to live together in Jerusalem, a city that is the epitome of multiculturalism and multi-religiosity. We were profoundly changed during the months spent observing this “permanent miracle” of coexistence amidst the local social and religious complexities. It was an exercise of trying to assimilate ourselves discreetly into this harmonious complexity, which greatly opened our minds. We tried to understand without judging, and sometimes we also accepted that we could not understand certain situations, while still remaining humanly close to the people we met.

It was about building bridges between all the worlds that intersect at the Holy Sepulchre. We got to know everyone, and gradually found the keys to relationships, which allowed us to integrate more and more into the reality of the Resurrection sanctuary. Now, we have many friends in Jerusalem.

How would you define the Holy Sepulchre?

It is not simply a “church,” for it is a “sanctuary,” open freely to everyone, without any entrance checks, located in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem. As I mentioned, I lived within the Holy Sepulchre for three years, and this extraordinary place inspires peace. You cannot break down an open door! This permanent spiritual hospitality embodied by the basilica disarms hearts and encourages contemplation, mutual respect, understanding beyond differences, and openness to others. This coexistence is remarkable, especially in such a historically difficult moment, which is so full of conflicts.



A panoramic view of the archaeological work at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre directed by Professor Stasolla.

What did you find particularly moving in the Holy Sepulchre, for example?

The team, consisting of about ten people, has been working in the Holy Sepulchre since May 2022. Every day, we send the documentation of what we find to the team in Rome, at the “La Sapienza” University, and here a larger group of archaeologists work on analysing, processing and systematising the data. Archaeology gives

materiality to history. For example, we found evidence that this site, which was a quarry during the Iron Age, was a garden at the time of Christ. The paleobotanical analysis shows that the area of land beneath the Northern part of the basilica was cultivated with vines and olive trees, according to pollen samples collected on-site, near a typical low wall that surrounded the plantation there. This confirms what the Gospel of John tells us, which speaks of a garden where a new tomb was located, in which the body of Christ was placed after His descent from the cross. We have also gained a better understanding of the work conducted around the rock of the tomb venerated in the 4th century, from the time of Constantine. The complex has grown continuously since the early 5th century. The archaeological data collected is being studied in relation to the liturgical paths described, in particular, by Egeria, the woman from Roman Hispania who, in 380, left an account of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In your opinion, when did the pilgrimage to the Tomb of Christ begin?

The material traces of the first Christian community are very difficult to find, although it is

clear that the early Christians venerated the tomb, as indicated by some ancient documentary sources. The location was topographically determined and passed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, the antechamber of the Sepulchre, where there could have been graffiti, was destroyed when Constantine built a new entrance to the venerated tomb, after destroying a cultic installation ordered by Emperor Hadrian. Therefore, we have no historical or archaeological evidence, because everything surrounding the tomb chamber was removed under Constantine to create a larger space for the veneration of the tomb.

What was your personal experience of the Risen One in Jerusalem?

First of all, I find it providential that the Christian communities responsible for the Holy

Sepulchre have chosen to allow us to organise these excavations before restoring the floor of the basilica. In fact, they could have devoted themselves directly to the technical work without dealing with the archaeological aspect. Thanks to their decision, I had a wonderful spiritual experience. My faith, of course, is not based on my research, it is independent from my work. I do not need material evidence to believe, and the archaeological data is there to help tell the long story of Jerusalem. On an inner and personal level, I am always very impressed by the large number of faithful who have regarded Jesus' burial place as a Holy Place for twenty centuries. The faith of these millions of faithful gave material form to history, handed down memory, built what I now have the privilege of investigating.

Interview by François Vayne

“We must take on the challenge of listening to each other”

To open new pathways for the Holy Land's future

An interview with Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt

Your book *The Challenge of Jerusalem* [our translation] (Albin Michel publisher), is the result of an important pilgrimage you made to the Holy Land. What were the encounters that marked your spiritual journey?

First and foremost, I must speak about my encounter with the land itself, with the Middle Eastern aspect of Christianity, which contrasts with what we experience in Europe. I encountered the bucolic and pastoral dimensions of the Gospels, which give full force to the metaphors used in the Bible. Then, at the Holy Sepulchre, there was the encounter, the most important of course, the moment when I inexplicably felt the presence of Jesus. That encounter transformed my Christianity from intellectual to carnal, from choice to necessity. The Gospels had touched me deeply, and I could not stop thinking about how

Christianity was different from other religions. Suddenly, this experience brought me face to face with a form of necessity, and my faith became a will to accept reality. For me, there is nothing optional about Christianity anymore. Christianity is not an option but a necessity! I must also mention two people with whom I had much contact; the first, my Jewish guide called Gila, who was extremely welcoming, and a priest, Father André, a man of faith who was both a pastor and an intellectual. Father André, who comes from the Réunion Island with other pilgrims like himself, had lived in Bethlehem serving children. From plain and simple concern for others, and with love, the emotion of his reunion with the local people showed me the importance of maintaining connections with the people of the Holy Land, as the Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre do.

Writer Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt in
the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

You also met the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. What did your conversation focus on?

I was struck by his non-judgmental understanding of the complex and tragic situations taking place in the Holy Land. His ability to remain deeply Christian in the midst of this complexity opens up pathways for the future. In my opinion, his stance is characterized by an acceptance of coexistence and a desire to create a shared path.

Can the Holy Land belong to one people alone, or is it God's land and therefore for everyone?

The challenge of Jerusalem is that this city calls us to be our brothers' keepers and not our brothers' killers. Upon this land, where Judaism and Christianity – two monotheistic religions – were founded and which is also very important for Muslims, God, after saying repeatedly, “listen to me”, “listen to me”, has withdrawn and tells us: “listen to each other”. We must take on the challenge of listening to each other.

Could the dramatic situation in the Holy Land that began on October 7, 2023, finally be a wake-up call in favour of the long-awaited peace?

I am a tragic optimist. Progress in history does not come from a desire to do good, but from a will to avoid evil. I believe that the true driving force of history is catastrophe. Catastrophe makes men react, and leads them to seek ways to prevent it from happening again. Men are not driven by a desire to do good, but by a desire to cause the least harm. In this sense, it seems to me that the absolute deadlock, the inability to live together that we are witnessing in the Holy Land, will provoke a healthy awakening – but at what cost of number of lives already? This is Immanuel Kant's philosophy of history, who imagines ways to regulate radical evil. In his essay *Perpetual Peace*, published in 1795, he demonstrated that evil is at the root of progress, of what is for the better and good.



Mary of Nazareth experienced the love of the Heavenly Father for her, a love that gave her great freedom and inner peace, and allowed her to escape the world of appearances and live humbly in the light of God's will. Did you also experience God's love for you in the Holy Land as a source of deep peace that makes one truly free?

I must admit that this love of God for me, for us, does not give me peace but rather impresses me; I feel completely unworthy, and I am still a bit stunned by the spiritual experience I had in Jerusalem. I am still at the beginning of the journey, but I am certainly in motion, aware of my shortcomings, aware of how much further I still have to go. At its core, the heart of the pilgrim's experience is this inner upheaval caused by the presence of the greatest love, which sets us in motion toward something different from what had been important to us until then, which directs us toward what is essential!

What message would you like to send to the Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, whose inner gaze is constantly directed towards Jerusalem?

I encourage the Knights and Dames of the Order to embrace their identity. If they are fully themselves in the light – both humble and proud – then they will be transparent witnesses to the beautiful mission they have received. I truly wish for them to be proud to be humble! In this spiritual dynamic, may they become ever more mediators of peace through the moral and material support they give to the populations in need in the Holy Land.

Interview by François Vayne

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Pope Francis' prayer for Jubilee 2025

*Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.*

*May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both
humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.*

*May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.*

*May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.*

*To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.*

Amen

Franciscus