

News Letter

ORDO EQUESTRIS SANCTI SEPULCRI HIEROSOLYMITANI

MESSAGE FROM THE CARDINAL GRAND MASTER

For our Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, the past two years have been particularly blessed.

Not only has our membership worldwide exceeded 27,000 Knights and Ladies – the largest in our history – and not only have the contributions we have received for the Christians in the Holy Land reached \$10 million a year, but we have been invited to take part in two historic apostolic pilgrimages of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI: one to the Holy Land itself (Jordan, Israel and Palestine) in 2009, and the first visit of a Pope to Cyprus in 2010. The Holy Father specifically asked if our Knights and Ladies would be present and he commented on how pleased he was to see them.

Then, the Holy Father named to the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East (October 2010) our Governor General Agostino Borromeo and the chairperson of our Holy Land Commission, Mme. Christa von Siemens as Auditors/Observers and myself as Grand Master and Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Grand Prior of our Order, as bishop members of the Synod.



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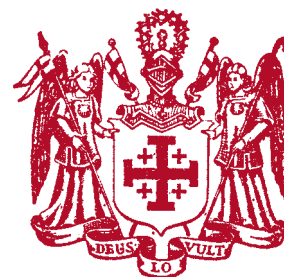
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00120 VATICAN CITY



MESSAGE FROM THE CARDINAL GRAND MASTER

Your work, our work, is recognized and appreciated by the Holy Father, by the prelates in the Roman Curia and, of course, by the bishops in the Middle East, especially those associated with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The greatest blessing for the Holy Land itself and for our work, of course, would be a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. As Christmas and the World Day of Peace on January 1 approach, I would urge all our members to pray daily for peace, to recite the Rosary for peace and possibly to schedule special ceremonies to pray for peace in the Holy Land and in the entire Middle East.

I would also encourage not only our members but as many people as possible to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land. As one who has been going to the Holy Land twice a year since I was named Grand Master of our Order, I can attest that Jews, Christians and Moslems want a peaceful environment for pilgrims and tourists, especially because it is essential to their livelihood. That peaceful environment, however, must be made permanent through a just and stable agreement between Israel and Palestine, which would also be a key to eventual peace throughout the Middle East.

During this holy season, may all of you experience peace and happiness, and may your prayers help to bring about peace and tranquility in the Land of the Lord, which all of us love so much!

Sincerely in Christ,



John Cardinal Foley

Grand Master

Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem



THE SPECIAL SYNOD OF BISHOPS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST:

*A Report to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.
By the Cardinal Grand Master John P. Foley,*



Why did the Holy Father call a Special Synod of Bishops for the Middle East?

As it turned out, the Synod was providential.

It occurred at a time when violence continued to afflict Iraq, especially its Christian community, after seven years of war.

It occurred when much needed peace negotiations were going on between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Most of all, it occurred at a time when the Christian community around the world – and indeed the world community – needed to know more about the two-millennia-old Christian community of the Middle East. The Christian community of the Middle East predates the Moslem community by at least six hundred years and has traditions and practices dating back almost to the time of Jesus Christ.

Participants in the Synod from the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem included the Grand Master, Cardinal John P. Foley; and the Grand Prior, Patriarch Fouad Twal, as members, and the Governor General, Count Agostino Borromeo; and the Chairperson of the Holy Land Commission, Mme. Christa von Siemens, as auditor/observers.

At the Synod, every day, the Divine Office was sung according to a different rite. The members, of course, took part in the deliberations vested in the traditional garments of their Eastern Churches. One of the official languages of the Synod was Arabic, for which simultaneous translation was thoughtfully provided.



A series of propositions was approved by the Synod delegates to submit to the Holy Father for the preparation of his possible post-Synodal Exhortation as a result of the historic gathering. Former Patriarch Michel Sabbah was chosen to be among those to assist the Holy Father in the preparation of that message.

In the meantime, a final message from the Synod itself – prepared under the chairmanship of the Coptic Catholic Patriarch, subsequently named a Cardinal -- was addressed to Christians in the Holy Land itself; to the faithful of the various Catholic churches in their diaspora around the world; to the migrants in Catholic Christian churches in the countries and churches of the Middle East; to Orthodox and Protestant churches; to Jews; to Moslems; to governments and political leaders; to the international community.

Very strong words, particularly pertinent as negotiations continued between Israelis and Palestinians, were addressed to the faithful of the Holy Land and to their own governments, noting that the conflict there has impacted the whole region but especially “the Palestinians who are suffering the consequences of the Israeli occupation: the lack of freedom of movement; the wall of separation and the military checkpoints; the political prisoners; the demolition of homes; the disturbance of socioeconomic life and the thousands of refugees.”

While the Synod of Bishops obviously touched on many problems and opportunities facing Catholic Christians in the Middle East, the most urgent and delicate seemed to be the achievement of a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians – and the subsequent pacification of the entire Middle East, rendering the area safe for people of every religion and ethnic origin.

ADDRESS OF CARDINAL JOHN P. FOLEY, ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM, SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, VATICAN CITY, OCTOBER 10-24, 2010

Most Holy Father, Venerable Brothers, my brothers and sisters in Christ:

As messengers of Christ's peace, I am convinced that all of us must pray and work for peace in the Middle East – especially for a just and lasting peace between Palestine and Israel and among their neighbors.

I am convinced that the continued tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians has contributed greatly to the turmoil in all of the Middle East and also to the growth of Islamic fundamentalism.



While many, including the Holy See, have suggested a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, the more time passes, the more difficult such a solution becomes, as the building of Israeli settlements and Israeli-controlled infrastructure in East Jerusalem and in other parts of the West Bank make increasingly difficult the development of a viable and integral Palestinian state.

During the Holy Father's historic pilgrimage to the Holy Land last year, I had the opportunity for brief conversations with political leaders at the highest level in Jordan, Israel and Palestine. All of them spoke of the great contribution to mutual understanding made by Catholic schools in those three areas. Since Catholic schools are open to all and not just to Catholics and to other Christians, many Moslem and even some Jewish children are enrolled. The effects are apparent and inspiring. Mutual respect is engendered, which we hope will lead to reconciliation and even mutual love.

As the one honored by our Holy Father with the task of serving as Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, I am inspired by the interest and generosity of the almost 27,000 Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre in 56 jurisdictions all over the world.

Many have made pilgrimages to the Holy Land where they have visited not only the places made sacred by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but also the parishes, schools and hospitals which serve those we call the "living stones" – the Christian descendants of the original followers of Jesus Christ in that land we call "holy".

Since the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre has sent more than \$50 million to assist especially the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem but also other Christian communities and institutions to survive and indeed excel in service to the entire community in the Holy Land.

Such generosity, while important, is secondary to the development of an ever deeper spiritual life on the part of our members and of those whom we serve.

Years ago, I noted that the so-called five pillars of Islam really had their origins in Judaeo-Christian sources.

Jews, Christians and Moslems all believe in one God; we all practice frequent and, I hope, fervent prayer; we all, in different ways, practice fasting; we believe in and practice almsgiving; and we all seek to take part in pilgrimage – also to Jerusalem, a city sacred to Jews, Christians and Moslems.

May these common beliefs and practices be acknowledged and followed in the hope of greater mutual understanding and of reconciliation, peace and indeed love in that land which all of us, Jew, Christian and Moslem, are moved to call "holy".



✠ *From the Grand Magisterium* ✠

REPORT GIVEN BY DR. CHRISTA VON SIEMENS AT THE FALL MEETING OF THE GRAND MAGISTERIUM

From the end of August to the beginning of September Members of the Holy Land Commission made visits to the chosen Projects in order to see how these were progressing overall. As well as the two major Projects – the school at Rameh and construction of the church in Aqaba – they looked at the renovation of the Rosary Sisters' convent in Reneh and the schools at Naour, Al Wahadneh and Kerak.

Neither the school at Rameh nor construction of the church in Aqaba had yet been started, so the only information available to Dr. Christa von Siemens, Mr. McKiernan and Dr. Whelan were the plans and architectural drawings for the Projects. Both Projects had been altered from the original plans.

The new school at Rameh was supposed to consist of two storeys but the Latin Patriarchate has decided to create a space on the ground floor for a much needed parish hall, as well as reserving the option to build additional storeys. According to the new plans, the original floors will each be one storey higher. The administrative offices and laboratories will be on the first of these floors and the classrooms on the second. If further floors are built it is intended that they will also be for classrooms.

Not long ago, the renovation of the Sisters' convent in Reneh and the schools in Naour, Al Wahadneh and Kerak had almost been com-

pleted. However, because of the special regulations governing school renovations, construction work can only be undertaken during the summer vacation. This year, Ramadan fell during the vacation and this has delayed the work considerably. The same will happen again next year. Nonetheless, we have been assured that the works will be completed in time for the start of the school year (in Israel and Palestine this is at the beginning of September, in Jordan it is on 15 September, after the end of Ramadan).

The Members of the Commission also inspected the priest's houses in Misdar and Al Wahadneh, the sanitary installations on the ground floor of the Seminary and the Sisters' convent in Aboud; at the latter they discovered that the electrical installations were particularly disastrous. The Latin Patriarchate may suggest these four as future renovation projects. No decision will be taken until the Grand Magisterium meets next Spring – after discussions with the Patriarchate.

Dr. von Siemens then reported her own very personal impressions and findings: "On this trip – more so than on previous visits – we had the opportunity to be part of the Christian community, by simply being present or by talking to people.

We attended in the Feast of St. John the Baptist in Madaba and the inauguration of the new parish council in Amman Tla al Ali.



The evening in Madaba could not have been better. I'm sure all the faithful from the whole area had come to enjoy the program of dances and songs. The high point of the evening was a singing contest which, to everyone's delight, was won by a young girl.

We also found the inauguration of the clearly enthusiastic members of the parish council in Tla al Ali not just inspiring but also interesting. We were thus able to see for ourselves how people who are part of a minority become actively and enthusiastically involved in supporting their faith.

But it was not just festivities that impressed us. For me, the afternoon Mass in Aqaba was once more an enriching experience: a Mass in the Holy Land, in a room of the former presbytery, with the temperature still at 40° Celsius. During his sermon, Abuna Emil presented us to the congregation and, as is always the way with our Christian communities, we were welcomed most heartily as we joined in drinking the coffee that inevitably followed. Everyone wanted to talk to us and get to know us better. And of course the upcoming generation of Christians was shown off with pride.

Personally, I was impressed by people's readiness to help build the church. Here they are still building churches whereas at home they are being sold or closed. The offertory boxes hold nothing but notes, although this is not a wealthy area. I noticed the hands during Mass. They were all the hands of hard-working people whose average monthly earnings amount to no more than 300-500 Euros, despite the fact that Aqaba is considered to be a town with a growing economy.

As a wife and mother, meeting children is always a special experience for me. I made three new little friends, all girls. First the butterfly princess from Aboud, who was naturally happy to let me photograph the butterfly on

her leg. Then a little girl in Ader with an enormous baseball hat – left over from the recent summer camp and far too big for her – that said I love Jesus. She showed me her family's new baby and led me by the hand across the playground which, unfortunately, was completely empty. In Aqaba a small creature suddenly clambered onto my lap and flung her arms around my neck. From her appearance, she could hardly be from southern Jordan; she looked more likely to have climbed straight down from the ceiling fresco of a Baroque church in Bavaria.

During this trip I was again made aware how important stones can be. The Christians in the Holy Land need a permanent place to live, somewhere where their children can obtain a good education. They need meeting places where they and the younger generations can get together and they need churches to give them the strength and support they need as a minority and to consolidate their presence. How often have we leant, tired, against a wall or sought refuge beneath a roof from the rain or the snow?

Let me once more mention the gratitude of the people in the Holy Land. They show and speak of their gratitude. I know of nowhere else where thanks are expressed so often. It almost feels as if "yislamu" and "shukran" were the most important words in the Arabic language.

But by talking to people we also learnt about their needs and concerns.

For example, at the very beginning of our journey, we had a conversation with a colleague in the Patriarchate who spoke of harassment and discrimination against Christians in Israel and who said he was thinking of emigrating. The idea was prompted not only by financial circumstances but from the desire simply to have only ordinary, everyday concerns to deal



with, rather than having to live constantly under political pressure.

We cannot do anything to relieve the political pressure, but we can certainly ease the day-to-day worries a little.

At this point, I would like to conclude by quoting Patriarch Twal, who once told me, 'It's not how much people give but the fact that they give at all because every gift is a sign of love for the Holy Land and the Mother Church' ”.

ISRAEL: CHRISTIANS ON THE INCREASE

Rise in non-Arab Christian immigration

Jerusalem, 08.10.10 (KAP) Government figures show a rising number of Christians in Israel. According to the latest survey by Israel's Central Office of Statistics, around 152,000 Christians were living in the Jewish State in 2007. That is the figure which emerged from a communication from the Israeli Embassy to the Holy See published in Rome on Friday and it means that the Christian community has increased by a good 36,000 people since 1990. After the State of Israel was created (1948) there were around 34,000 Christian residents.

In concrete terms, the official statistics show that the Christian community in Jerusalem has grown slightly in the past two decades: from 14,400 in 1988 to 15,400 in 2008, whilst the city's total number of inhabitants has increased from 494,000 to 764,000.

The Israeli Embassy gave the reason for the growing number of Christians as the increase in non-Arab Christian immigrants from Russia and the surge in foreign labor in the country's industrial regions.

According to the communication, the overall increase in the Christian population is greater than or at least on the same scale as that of the Jewish population of Israel. Claims that the number of Christians in Israel is decreasing, it says, do not correspond to the facts.



FRANCISCAN HOUSING PROJECT:

*The Franciscans want to stop Christian emigration.
New housing complex for Christians in Jerusalem.*

Jerusalem, 30.09.10 (KAP) The Franciscans want to provide affordable accommodation in the Holy Land in order to prevent Christian emigration. On Wednesday afternoon, in a symbolic key ceremony, the Franciscan Superior for the Holy Land, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, opened a new housing complex in Bethphage on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. Since 1967 Bethphage has been inside Jerusalem's city limits.

Those present at the ceremony – who included the Vatican Ambassador to Jerusalem, Archbishop Antonio Franco – saw 68 apartments handed over to local Catholics.

Fr. Pizzaballa spoke of the numerous problems the project had met with. Planning had started 20 years ago, but the Intifada and other obstacles had delayed the work. Even after completion, another three years had passed because of legal complications. However, he also announced plans for further housing projects. This kind of support for local Christians is in line with the Franciscan mission and the long tradition of their presence in the Holy Land.

Some of the families – who were chosen from over 600 applicants – only learnt of the decision on the previous evening. Many were clearly very moved. Several of the new tenants had been waiting almost 30 years for an apartment. The new apartments are to be rented on very favorable terms and new employment opportunities are also to be created.

