



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

A Dame of the Order in society and in the Church

Agnès Durand testifies to her commitment to United Nations women's projects within an international humanitarian association.



“My name is Imelda Agnès Durand. I have been a Dame of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre since December 2018. I am French, and my country of origin is Burkina Faso. Coming from a Catholic family among the first Catholics in Burkina Faso, I was immersed from a young age in a regular and fervent practice of the Catholic faith.

The first baptism in my village took place in 1914 and my grandfather was baptized in 1915 during the celebration of Pentecost. Being among the first baptized meant this generation felt it was carrying the torch of religion before others and, for this reason, the duty to encourage the Catholic activities of all the children to set a good example. Therefore, my parents were all volunteer catechists: my mother was a member of the Passion Group, which organized prayers for bedridden patients, and my father animated the masses on Sundays.

I have been married for more than 25 years, and we have a son and daughter. We carry on a family life following the principles of Christian values. My husband is also a Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

I see my belonging to the Order as a viaticum of hope and testimony of fundamental Christian values that our age so badly needs. Therefore, for me being part of the Order represents not only a continuation of self-giving and involvement in projects for the most vulnerable in which we see the Lord, but also an opportunity to be an active protagonist in contributing to supporting the Christians in the Holy Land.

During the 50th anniversary of the *Populorum Progressio*, in which I participated on April 3 and 4, 2017, Pope Francis strongly recommended that Catholics be active protagonists in society so that

the true human values that allow hope are saved. This exciting mission seems to me to correspond to the one entrusted to the Order and I became a Dame precisely to respond to this call.

As a concrete action in the context of this commitment assigned to each of us, I ensured the catechism during the 2016-2017 school year to the students of the French high school Chateaubriand in Rome. Subsequently, since 2016 I have been a member of the group of volunteers from the San Marcellino and Pietro parish. In that context, and once a month, I assist the poor of the Caritas of Colle Oppio. This opportunity has been extremely enriching from every point of view: it made me aware of our good fortune and our duty to help those whose circumstances in life have put in precarious conditions.

In addition, my numerous stays in different countries of the world have given me the opportunity to learn a lot in contact with the people I have met in the school of life and to develop a particular interest in mutual help. I also had the opportunity to acquire skills in leadership, organization and management, matured and enriched in different fields, which opened up a wider horizon for me.

These are some of the tools that I strive to make available in my work as a Project Manager for the "United Nations Women's Guild" (UNWG). The UNWG is an international non-profit association that brings together people connected professionally or by family ties with United Nations agencies. It is an association that fosters intercultural tolerance and friendship by organizing social, cultural and educational programs for its members. The members of the association, in fact, come from all continents and actively engage as volunteers to raise funds to finance projects in all fields such as health, access to drinking water, education, infrastructure, and various micro projects designed to help women, children, and vulnerable communities in various countries around the world.

The funds used to finance the projects come from various sources: from donations, from the UNWG shop in the FAO building that sells various recycled materials donated by our members and from the United Nations, from the annual Bazaar which is the largest fundraising event, during which UNWG members sell international food, books, crafts, decoration items and works of art. As a member of the UNWG since 2014, I was Vice President for two years and for the past three years I have been responsible for project management. In this context, we had the opportunity with the UNWG to support two small projects in favor of the Saint James Vicariate of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which I encountered through the activities of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. The first project targets 25 children of migrant mothers in Israel to provide them with the necessary medical care (vaccines, dental and pediatric care) while the second contributes to the expenses of the nutrition program of the St. Rachel Center in Jerusalem where the children of migrants and asylum seekers from 3 months to 13 years of age are welcomed and fed during the day.

The UNWG is an association without political and religious affiliations that offers me the opportunity to commit myself to being an active protagonist in society and to help restore hope to those who need our small actions. Aware of all that the Lord has given me, I try to do good around me out of gratitude. The Lord also allowed me to be welcomed as a Dame of the Order to grow in faith with the help of fellow members.

In conclusion, I would like to remember that small actions done with love are great in the eyes of those who receive them."

Agnès Durand

(May 2020)