

EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY
SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

“FRIENDS OF
THE ORDER”



ORDO EQUESTRI
SANCTI SEPULCRI
HIEROSOLYMITANI

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PROT. N. 1334 / 2025

DECREE

The Holy See holds the Holy Land in the highest regard, and the Supreme Pontiffs have consistently shown concern for it. For this reason, Blessed Pius IX entrusted the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem with the task of supporting the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a decision that His Successors have upheld, up to the Roman Pontiff Pope Leo XIV, happily reigning.

In consideration of the spiritual commitments and the purposes of the Order, several Lieutenancies have asked the Grand Master whether men and women who are not Members of the Order may participate in initiatives in the Holy Land and share in the spiritual benefits of the Order itself.

The Holy Father Leo XIV, to whom the matter was submitted, on June 24, 2025, gave his assent to the establishment of an Area of the “Friends of the Order.” The Pope’s decision was confirmed by the Secretariat of State of the Holy See in Letter No. 20.319, December 6, 2025.

In consideration of the above

I HEREBY ESTABLISH

by this Act, the creation of the Area of the “Friends of the Order” according to the attached norms.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni
Grand Master

Vatican City, from the Order’s Headquarters,
December 25, 2025, the Nativity of the Lord

INTRODUCTION

My experience of more than eight years of service as Governor General of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem have taught me that the generosity of the faithful, though directed toward a single goal, expresses itself in a multitude of ways. That goal is perfectly clear and affirmed in the first article of the Order's Constitution: "[...] that of animating zeal in the ecclesial community towards the Land of Jesus and sustaining the Catholic Church and the Christian presence there."

The ways in which this generosity is expressed are varied, and it is often necessary to establish criteria to ensure balance and, above all, to direct resources toward the most pressing priorities. As the Cardinal Grand Master has often reminded us, for every Knight and Dame there exists an obligation - which is to respect an "Ideal Tripod" composed of three pillars. These are as follows: love for the Holy Land; the duty of contributing; and, support for one's own local Church.

However, in my fundraising work, I have often found that there is a significant additional

source of donations. This has occurred when Lieutenancies and Members of the Order approach family members and acquaintances, as well as institutions and foundations sympathetic to the Order's aims, with special appeals during emergencies or by organizing promotional charity events. For example, concerts, shows or gala dinners, raffles, fairs or markets, which are sometimes linked to special occasions, such as festivals or anniversaries.

As a result, the proceeds from these events – whether in the form of donations or the proceeds from event ticket sales – often exceed the total amount of regular contributions; and although they are not a regular source of income, they make a significant contribution to the Order's charitable work.

In light of this phenomenon, and in order to maintain a clear distinction regarding the nature of compulsory contributions, it has become necessary to regulate these contributions, by separating them (including administratively) from the donations that each Knight and Dame makes to their Lieutenancy upon joining the Order, upon each promotion in rank, and in any case once a year, in accordance with the quotas and rules set out by their Lieutenant.

Therefore, the aim was to formalize a practice

that exists currently, while distinguishing it between statutory contributions and voluntary contributions from the *"Friends of the Order"*.

The Grand Magisterium extends its gratitude for the generosity of so many 'Friends' who are distinguished by their sensitivity towards the Holy Land.

These contributions therefore represent a significant resource, accompanied in most cases by encouragement and prayer, which stand alongside the commitment of the Knights and Dames in their charitable work supporting the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

Leonardo Visconti d Modrone

Governor General

INSTITUTION AND REGULATIONS

Introduction

1. Through miraculous signs and parables, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God during his public ministry. His style was both effective and captivating, and he wished the Twelve to adopt it as well when he sent them ahead of him to the villages he intended to visit (cf. *Mk* 6:7-13; *Lk* 9:1-6).

2. After some time, the Twelve returned to the Master, recounting with great surprise and joy all that they had said and done (cf. also *Lk* 10:17-20). One of them, John, also told Jesus that he had seen a man who, though not belonging to the Twelve, was performing wondrous deeds in his name (cf. *Mk* 9:38-40; *Lk* 9:49-50), and they wanted to stop him because, they said, *"he was not one of us"* (*Mk* 9:38).

3. We are particularly drawn to Jesus' response: *"Do not forbid him"*, Jesus said, *"for no one who works a miracle in my name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side"*. He then added: *"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My*

name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward". (Mk 9:39–41).

4. These words help us to better understand the mind and actions of the Lord. In addition, they may guide us in discerning the meaning and purpose behind the initiative to establish an *area* we wish to call the *"Friends of the Order"* alongside the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

5. The term *"Friends"* also finds its roots in the Gospel. We know that during Jesus' public ministry, there were men and women who supported the needs of his preaching with their resources, welcomed him into their homes, and remained close to him, receiving his Word. We think of those women, Mary called Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Susanna, and many others, who served the Master and the Twelve with their possessions (*Lk* 8:3), or of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary of Bethany, who were moved by sincere friendship for the Lord, which He returned (cf. *Jn* 11:5).

6. Friendship, in the gestures and words of Jesus, also carries a deeper, sacred dimension, and is by no means superficial, as we gather from these statements in the discourse at the

Last Supper: “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love... You are my friends if you do what I command you... I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide*” (Jn 15:9,14,16).

7. Jesus’ preaching was initially directed to the Jewish people, but it was soon opened without restriction to the multitude of peoples, so that Christ’s mission became universal. Indeed, Jesus’ mission and work possess a dimension of true fraternity in God, the Father of all. The Church of the apostolic age recognised this new reality, and entrusted to Barnabas and Paul the task of extending the faith therefore, to the “Gentiles” in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ -who reconciles us with the Father and grants true life, to the “peoples”, thereby widening the circle of *friendship*, fraternity, and community.

8. The Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, emphasises the communal nature perfected and fulfilled by the work of Jesus, who in his preaching expressly commanded the children of God to treat one another as brothers. This solidarity must always be deepened in the spirit of the family of God, loved by Christ (GS 32).

The Issue

9. For some time now, various Lieutenancies have raised with the Grand Magisterium the issue of whether men and women who are not members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, but who feel drawn to it, or even deeply moved by its spiritual goals and concrete initiatives in support of the Holy Land, may nonetheless be associated with the mission entrusted to the Order by the Supreme Pontiffs.

10. In order to assist the Lieutenants, the Magistral Delegates and local Leaders (lay and ecclesiastics) in navigating such a delicate matter, the question was submitted to Pope Leo XIV during the Audience granted to the Grand Master and His Most Reverend Excellency Monsignor Tommaso Caputo, Archbishop Prelate of Pompeii and Assessor of the Order, on June 24, 2025. Having considered the reasons presented, the Supreme Pontiff gave his **assent** to the establishment of an *Area* known as the "*Friends of the Order*"; this assent was confirmed by Letter of the Secretariat of State no. 20.319 of December 6, 2025. This *Area* includes those who, without formally entering the Order, wish to participate in aspects of its life. This initiative falls within the scope of Article 4, no. 7 of the

Constitution of the Order, which refers to collaboration with those who share “*similar goals and objectives*” concerning the Holy Land. It is further stated that “*The members of the Order seek to call to the attention of Catholics, other Christians, the members of other religions and men of good will of the whole world the good works in which the Order is involved in the Holy Land, as well as the promotion of the union of Christians and inter-religious understanding and cooperation.*”

Thus, a broad horizon opens up for the Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations.

11. Through this examination, therefore, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem embraces and puts into practice the assent of the Holy Father and intends to fully adhere to the Constitution, insofar as it encourages all to foster love for the Land of Jesus and to support, through appropriate initiatives, the aims of the Order, both at a spiritual level and through generous contributions (see in particular Article 4, paragraphs 5 and 7).¹

¹ Constitution, Art. 4, nos. 5 and 7. Commitments. The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, within the scope of its mission, aims to promote: [...]

5. Concern for the Christian presence in the Holy

Land. This commitment includes both the defense of the Church *in loco*, providing financial contributions for the Holy Places as well, and the survival and the continuity of the Christian communities. This commitment must also develop prayer and activity to promote mutual understanding between peoples, dialogue, forgiveness, reconciliation and other fundamental values that are pre-conditions for the peaceful co-existence of all the peoples of the Holy Land.

7. Cooperation with other bodies and organisations, whether religious or secular, which share similar goals and objectives in the Holy Land. The members of the Order seek to call to the attention of Catholics, other Christians, the members of other religions and men of good will of the whole world the good works in which the Order is involved in the Holy Land, as well as the promotion of the union of Christians and inter-religious understanding and cooperation.

CERTAIN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Regarding the Members of the Order

12. Admission to the Order, for both Knights and Dames, requires not only the criteria set out in Article 34 §2 of the Constitution (being Catholic, of exemplary faith, and of irreproachable moral conduct), but also a written commitment declaring acceptance of the obligations established by the Statute and the General Regulations: formation, active participation in the life of the Order, financial contribution, and pilgrimage to the Holy Land (see Constitution: Articles 34 §§ 3, 4; 36 §§ 1–5; General Regulations: Article 70 §§ 1–5). Furthermore, the *Formation Document* addresses these aspects extensively in its Second Part and refers, among its key texts, to the *Letter on the ecclesiological significance of support for the Holy Land*, issued by the Grand Master in Autumn 2022 (text in Appendix).

13. The aforementioned *Letter* emphasises that, for a Knight and a Dame of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, contributing to the support of the Holy Places and the Communities living there is not merely

a task entrusted to them by the Supreme Pontiffs, but also a recognition of the profound duty carried out on behalf of the entire Church. Members must therefore be fully aware of the spiritual and ecclesial significance of their belonging to the Order, which calls for concrete acts of participation and generosity that are not occasional, but of enduring commitment - befitting children who care for the 'Father's House', where the roots of our faith are found.

14. The Constitution further provides that, in order to achieve this purpose, *"the Order avails itself of a patrimony made up of funds obtained by its central, national and local bodies, the economic contributions of its members, voluntary donations, as well as revenue derived from the economic and financial management of its personal and real property"* (Art. 2 §3).

15. In this context, 'generosity' is recognised as a noble virtue that characterises the Members of the Order. The Constitution addresses this in Article 4 §2, alongside another splendid virtue, 'solidarity', which enables us to care deeply for *"religious, charitable, educational, cultural and social institutions, as well as... the activities proper to the Catholic Church in the Holy Land"* (Art. 4 §4).²

² Constitution, Art. 4, no. 4. *Commitments*. The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem,

Regarding the “*Friends of the Order*” Area

16. While a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre is required to commit to regular contributions in support of our Institution, entry into the “*Friends of the Order*” area is voluntary, with the consent of the Lieutenant or the Magistral Delegate.

“*Friends of the Order*” are all those who freely wish to be part of it, regardless of faith, culture, or social status, provided that:

- they share a love and concern for the Land of Jesus,
- they feel drawn to the spirituality that inspires the Order, or at least uphold the principles of peace, justice, and solidarity among those who dwell in or visit the Holy Land,
- they wish to contribute, through their generosity, to educational, social, and religious institutions present there.

within the scope of its mission, aims to promote: [...] 4. **Solidarity** through the prayer and generous assistance of its members. This is expressed primarily in support of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and contributes to the maintenance of religious, charitable, educational, cultural, and social institutions, as well as to the activities proper to the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. The Order also cooperates with the particular Churches in which it is present.

Regarding the Participation of the *"Friends of the Order"* in Various Initiatives and Voluntary Contributions

17. For those who belong to the *Area of the "Friends of the Order"*, contribution is at everyone's discretion and may be occasional or ongoing. It falls within the category of charitable donations and may arise from initiatives undertaken with specific aims related to the Holy Land.

18. The Lieutenancies, Sections or Magistral Delegations may establish a "Register" of the *"Friends of the Order"* containing their names; however, if particular circumstances so require, they may also choose not to be included in it. The Lieutenant or the Magistral Delegate may award the badge of Merit of the *"Friends of the Order"* to those *"Friends of the Order"* who wish to receive it.

19. Lieutenancies or the Magistral Delegations are to ensure that a bank account is maintained separately from that used for Members' contributions, as the latter represents the rightful fruit of the institutional bond.

20. Contributions from the *"Friends of the Order"* must always be recorded and

maintained as a separate, transparent, and clearly defined accounting management. No percentage may be deducted for the Order itself (except for costs of account maintenance and transferring the donations) all funds must be allocated in full to the Holy Land. The Auditor shall be responsible for monitoring income and expenditure and for drafting an official Report. Local laws regarding charitable donations should always be taken into consideration.

21. Donor "*Friends*" may express preferences regarding the intended use of their contributions or for specific projects of the Order.

22. "*Friends of the Order*" may, with the consent of the Lieutenant, of the Magistral Delegate or the local Leader, participate in spiritual or cultural gatherings.

23. They may also take part in ceremonies such as Investitures, the celebration of Holy Masses, and pilgrimages, including those to the Holy Land.

24. "*Friends of the Order*" are not authorised to wear the cape or insignia of Knights and Dames, nor to serve at the Altar during liturgical ceremonies; furthermore, they cannot hold institutional offices within the Order.

25. Clergy, and religious men and women may also be admitted as *"Friends of the Order"*.

26. All matters concerning the *"Friends of the Order"* (register, financial accounting, assignment of badges) must be reported to the Governor General, who will inform the Grand Master. For anything not expressly provided for herein, the general regulations of the Order shall apply.

APPENDIX

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SUPPORT FOR THE HOLY LAND

“The Order, with its structure and activities, participates directly in the Roman Pontiff’s solicitude for places and Catholic institutions in the Holy Land [...] In particular, the link with Jerusalem, which is specific to the Order, requires responsibility for its Holy Places (cf. *Gal* 4:26).”

(Constitution, Introduction)

Reflecting on these expressions, a Knight and Dame of the Holy Sepulchre understand that, in addition to the necessary practice of the evangelical virtues (spirituality of the Members), they undertake a task entrusted to them by the Holy Father in the name of the Church. It is a true ecclesial task, not a task left to the goodwill of a few; it is much more. It is an assignment that belongs to the Church because of the responsibility it has towards the Places of Jesus and in particular towards the Church in Jerusalem, so that those Places do not become sites of religious archaeology, and that Church does not remain devoid of vitality.

To offer one's support to the Temple of Jerusalem, as it appears in the passage from the Gospel of Mark on the offering of the poor widow (Mk 12:43-44), was a duty very much felt among the Jews of the Lord's time; the affluent and the poor, who upon entering the Temple used to make their offering for the worship and maintenance of the majestic building. Jesus, observing those who made their donation, points out that some emphasised their offering by throwing in many coins, while the poor widow, almost furtively, let slip "*two small coins worth a few cents*", that is, all that she had. The difference, Jesus notes, lies not so much in the quantity of the giving, but in the difference between those who give "*what is superfluous*" and those who give "*all she had, her whole livelihood*"; the humbleness of the gesture is elevated to a supreme ethical value. Even Jesus, on his part and that of the Disciples, contributed to the sustenance of the Temple (cf. Mt 17:24-25).

Contributing to and supporting the Church in Jerusalem therefore belongs among Christians's highest sentiments of responsibility toward the Holy Land. For a Knight and Dame, the undertaking of this specific commitment is part of a life choice. In fact, they do not join the Order out of an empty desire for social

elevation, nor to enhance their public profile, but out of a sense of high and noble responsibility as 'sons and daughters' towards what is considered the 'Mother' Church and towards those places where Jesus spent his life, preached, performed miracles, and offered life on the Cross as a ransom for us. St Jerome recalls that blessed is he who carries the holy places and events of salvation within himself: *"Happy is he who bears in his breast the cross, the resurrection, the place of Christ's Nativity and the place of the Ascension. Happy is he who has Bethlehem in his heart, the heart in which Christ is born daily"* (Hom. in Ps. 95).

Some may ask: Is it really an ecclesial duty to contribute to and support the Holy Places? How can we support the Church in those Places, when all around us, in our dioceses and parishes, there is so much poverty, perhaps even more, and we do not have sufficient financial resources? These questions have been raised both by lay people and clergy.

Yes! Supporting the Holy Places and the communities living there is a true ecclesial responsibility. It does not belong to the solitary generosity of a few benefactors, but to the duty of all the children who cherish the memory of and affection for that 'paternal/maternal home' where the first apostolic community was born

and raised, where the places of the Lord's life and death are preserved, and where it is possible to return to the roots of our faith. Caring for the Church of Jerusalem is therefore much more than preserving its historical and archaeological memory; the Apostles had already urged the charity of the early Christian communities of Antioch, Greece, Galatia and Macedonia to remember the 'saints' in Jerusalem and to hold collections, which they later described as generous, indeed '*beyond their means*' (2 Cor 8, 3-4). We therefore perceive, in this common endeavour, that we have one of 'our characteristic traits', which allows each member of the Order to exercise their spirituality through "*a marked generosity*" drawn from their "*own material resources*" (cf. *The House was Filled with the Fragrance of the Perfume*, EWTN Publishing 2020, pp. 73, 74). St Paul himself also teaches us how to perform this gesture of dutiful generosity: "*so that in this way it might be ready as a bountiful gift and not as an exaction. [...]. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Cor 9, 5b. 7).

The Apostle Paul saw helping the Mother Church of Jerusalem in times of calamity, persecution and famine as a true ecclesiological gesture that went beyond human solidarity. The

Holy Land belongs to everyone (Jews, Christians and Muslims) because it is the place where the monotheistic religions have their roots in the one, clement and merciful God. It is the place that speaks to us of God's presence among us, almost a 'touching' of Christ again, according to the felicitous expression of Francis of Assisi.

This task, in itself, belongs to the entire history of relations between the Holy Land and Christians scattered throughout the world; the continuous pilgrimages, the initiatives to ensure a presence in the most significant places, the preservation of environments, the construction of basilicas and churches to preserve the sacred memory, even unfortunately the struggles to defend, conquer and hoard the Holy Land are the testimony of this perceived ecclesial responsibility since time immemorial. It should never be forgotten that those Places are alive because of the presence of communities of believers and that we all, even more so as Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre, direct our primary attention to them.

Precisely because of the importance that the Holy Land has in the life of the Church, the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre do not show an occasional interest in it, but do so in a stable and generous way, convinced of their

noble and splendid responsibility.

It is not infrequent that even some ecclesiastics either do not understand this ecclesial 'duty', or are disinterested in it; there is even a certain prejudice against the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, seen as an anachronistic institution; there are even those who consider this ecclesial duty extraneous to the local Churches, either because of limited economic resources, or because of the presence of many poor people, reducing it to a private and extemporary gesture. There is a fundamental error in this way of thinking: there is a tendency to marginalise or downgrade that ecclesial duty that the Popes have always considered to be of high sensitivity and common responsibility in the Church. Some Supreme Pontiffs even kept the office of Grand Master of the Order for themselves, before delegating it to a Cardinal.

I am heartened by the gestures of some Bishops who, and many do, include among their duties, the pastoral care of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, whose Members do not only belong to an Entity recognised by the Apostolic See, but are first and foremost their faithful, understanding that they can be a concrete expression of a work that belongs to the local Churches. Through the presence of the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre, in

fact, it is the same diocesan ecclesial reality that in some way participates in the duty to permanently (and not only occasionally) support the Mother Church of Jerusalem and those Places where, not infrequently, Bishops lead pilgrimages, preserve indelible memories and send lay people and priests for in-depth biblical-theological studies and intense inter-religious experiences.

Supporting the Mother Church of Jerusalem is an act of high nobility of spirit and genuine charity. When Judas Iscariot commented negatively on the gesture of Mary of Bethany who, in his view, wasted money by anointing the Master's feet, Jesus replied concisely: *'Leave her alone! Her gesture takes nothing away from the poor for "you always have the poor with you" (John 12:8), but concerns the mystery of faith, of his Person and of his resurrection.*

Fernando Card. Filoni

*Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy
Sepulchre of Jerusalem*

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