



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

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## Returning to school after the summer

An interview with Father Yacoub Rafidi, the new diocesan director of schools in Palestine



Over the summer, Patriarch Pizzaballa shared new appointments in his diocese. Among them was that of Father Yacoub Rafidi, called to serve as director of the Latin Patriarchate's schools in Palestine, after serving these past four years as rector of Beit Jala Seminary.

A month into his tenure, we asked Father Yacoub Rafidi a few questions in his new capacity.

**How are you approaching your new position as director of schools in Palestine and what are the main challenges you will face in the years to come?**

I have been in charge of our schools for a month now and I am very busy at this beginning of the school year, facing many challenges. I would like to share with you the initial vision of the work, since the education of young people in the Holy Land is particularly close to the heart of the commitment undertaken by the Order.

I envisioned a well-organized administrative and financial management of the schools, where we work in a team spirit. First, I visited all the institutes with the administrative team, except Gaza (we are waiting for Israeli authorization). We visited with the curate, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of his school. We listened to him, so that he could share the responsibility with us. Afterwards, we met with the directors - to whom I outlined ideas and goals on which we will work in the coming year - the administrators, teachers, and students.

Together with the administrative team, I try to focus on three main points:

- Paying attention to school infrastructure, through periodic interventions throughout the year and the definition of development projects;
- Strengthen capacity building, through various courses for principals and teachers in all disciplines;
- Considering aspects that can help reduce the deficit, without compromising the quality of the education system.

**You served for several years as rector of Beit Jala Seminary. What are your thoughts after such service and what are your fondest memories?**

It was not an easy assignment, but it was a wonderful experience from all points of view, particularly on a personal, spiritual, and ecclesiastical level. What distinguishes the seminary is the family spirit that reigns among the priests, the women religious, the teachers, and the seminarians. Together with my brothers, I experienced a magnificent joy: at the end of the term I celebrated my priestly silver jubilee, 25 years in the service of the Lord, and I thank God for what He has given me during this long period.

One of the most beautiful moments experienced at the seminary was the ordination, considered as an encouragement and a spiritual consolation for the priests in formation.

**What does the new year look like for students?**

The students have welcomed the new school year with excitement after the long period at home due to Covid-19. In addition, they are very excited to meet up again with friends they missed during the past year. The local directorates were perfectly prepared, welcoming students on the first day of class with special events and activities. On the first week, all schools celebrated Mass to open the year.

However, the health situation remains difficult - this is a big challenge for us and our schools.

What are the successes and strengths of youth education through Patriarchate facilities that you have already experienced? Could you share a story or brief narrative about them?

Over the summer, maintenance work was done so that all schools were ready for the new year with modern furniture and electronic devices for distance learning. In addition, we appointed several teachers.

Our institutes help to form a good believer and a good citizen, in a healthy human, educational, and pedagogical environment that helps to build bridges and develop society. Another strength is the willingness to welcome students when schools reopen in a professional manner, especially with the efforts to adapt to the current health situation. In the summer, a variety of courses were organized for teachers, with the aim of expanding skills and abilities, as well as improving their performance.

This year, we will focus particularly on the kindergartens in all our schools, taking care of the teaching staff, furniture, and buildings.

Such a mission and such important work in the schools of the Latin Patriarchate would be impossible to accomplish without the support and partnership of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, whom we

thank and to whom we extend our gratitude for all the material, moral and spiritual support they offer to our institutions.

**Interview by Elena Dini**

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