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

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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 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 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 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 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

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