The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem by the sides of immigrant families

Father David Neuhaus, Jesuit, is in charge of the pastoral service for immigrants and refugees currently present in Israel. There are 227,000, among which are 150,000 Christians, of which 60,000 are Catholic. Of Jewish origin, baptised at 25 years old and ordained priest when he was 38 by the Patriarch Michel Sabbah, he succeeded Fr Pierbattista Pizzaballa in the pastoral work for Hebrew-speaking Catholics, as Patriarchal Vicar. With the help of his team he has just inaugurated, on September 5, **a new welcome centre for the infants and young children of foreign workers in Jerusalem**, in the court of a convent of Capuchin friars. Dedicated to Rachel, the great biblical figure of a suffering mother, the centre receives twenty-five babies during the day, thirty children on average come to do their homework after school, and sixty teenagers are able to meet together there at the weekend. Two playpark areas and a music room are part of the ensemble, situated in the neighbourhood of Talbieh.

Indians, Africans, Filipinos, Sri-Lankans, and Sudanese – who speak Hebrew due to their activity in the country – have the possibility of earning a daily living knowing that their children are kept in good conditions, their situation often being otherwise precarious. Seven infants recently died because they were kept elsewhere, in 'pirate' nurseries, without any care and in an inhumane manner, whilst many others are deeply traumatised from staying in these "baby warehouses". The Holy Land Commission of the Grand Magisterium is committed to helping Fr Neuhaus with respect to this humanitarian crisis; all the more so as the Hebrew-speaking Christians, originally from foreign countries, are increasingly more numerous and mount higher than the number of Christian Arabs in Israel, which is in itself a witness to the universality of the Church. Their children are integrated in the Israeli schooling system. Without a doubt they will contribute to shaping the future of the local Church, together with the 25,000 Arab-speaking Latin Catholics who are at home in this territory. **The second generation immigrants or refugees will be entirely Israeli from a cultural point of view, but no one can yet say if they will be able to legally stay in the Holy Land.**

In Tel Aviv, there are two houses close to each other which function in the context of pastoral service for the immigrants and where day-care for their children, in a familial environment, can also be found. Placed under the protection of *Our Lady, Woman of Valor*, the community of immigrants – principally Filipinos, Indians, Sri-Lankans and Africans – gather regularly to pray in the church of the pastoral centre which is capable of welcoming 250 faithful for every Mass even if many more faithful come to the eight Sunday Masses. Recently a summer camp gathered together a hundred Hebrew-speaking children, both Israeli citizens and immigrants, in the shrine of Our Lady of Palestine at Deir Rafat, and another for the immigrant children was held at the pastoral centre in Tel Aviv. **The representatives of the Hebrew-speaking community announced a pilgrimage with Mgr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa at Deir Rafat.**

Fr Neuhaus' team also pastorally accompanies **thousands of single immigrants who are in great suffering, rejected, Christians by the majority, stuck in a camp at Holot in the Negev desert, when they had come looking for work in Israel.** Furthermore, many men have to pay ransoms in order to free their wives and daughters who were kidnapped and raped by human traffickers in the Sinai desert during their long route. **An unimaginable hell, where the Patriarchal Vicar for the Hebrew-speaking Catholics looks with all his strength to bring the light of the love of God, with the help of the competent volunteers who surround him.** The Grand Magisterium of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which passes on with enthusiasm the missionary action of Fr Neuhaus, invites the Knights and Dames as well as all friends of the Holy Land to pray for the work he manages to do in the service of the most vulnerable.

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(Septembe 16, 2016)