



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Lieutenant for England and Wales shares his experience with the Holy Land Coordination

The Bishops' Holy Land Coordination pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 18-23 January 2025



Every year the Bishops' Holy Land Coordination Group organises its annual meeting to the Holy Land which this year took place from January 18 to 23.

At the end of the last century, the Holy See proposed that bishops from various countries coordinate their interests and involvement in the life of the Churches in the Holy Land. This would show pastoral care to the Christian Community, support the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, and show our brothers and sisters that the Church worldwide does not forget them. The Group spends its days visiting Catholic communities and institutions and holding meetings with Church, Religious, Political, and Diplomatic Leaders.

Bishop Nicholas Hudson KC*HS, auxiliary bishop of Westminster was the Bishop Moderator and the General Secretary to the Group was Canon Mark Madden KCHS, both ecclesiastical members of the Lieutenancy for England and Wales.

This year, the group, smaller than usual, consisted of about twenty five people, mainly bishops but with some lay people. It included two archbishops of Glasgow (Scotland) and Paderborn (Germany), the bishop of Urgell (Spain), two auxiliary bishops of Westminster, (England and Wales), and the bishop of the Maronite Eparchy in the USA, the retired bishop emeritus of Reykjavik and the Anglican bishop of Southwark, (England) also. I was the only Lieutenant privileged to be invited because by custom the English Lieutenant is invited to this annual pilgrimage and I was lucky to join for the fifth time.

Canon Madden organised this year's meeting, which was themed 'Christian Witness in the Holy Land: A Light Shining in the Darkness.' The theme was chosen to examine how the current situation is affecting the Christian community in Gaza and the West Bank and how the Church continues to shine as a light in the darkness for all people.

We were based in Jerusalem and travelled into the West Bank and met people at every level. We visited Bethlehem and a female day care centre, a hospice which provides palliative care for those with terminal illness, and also the Seminary at Beit Jala. We visited the Tent of Nations. We met His Beatitude the Patriarch, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the C.E.O. of the Latin Patriarchate, Mr. Sami El-Yousef, and also the Papal Nuncio to Israel, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, along with a very interesting meeting with diplomats which included the German ambassador and the consuls of France and Spain. We spent the day with Caritas Jerusalem and visited their Medical Centres, Daycare Centres for the Elderly and other projects in Taybeh and Ramallah. We visited the three parishes of Aboud, Taybeh and Ramallah where we heard mass and met the parishioners. We were made welcome everywhere and people were every glad to see us wherever we went. We also had a zoom meeting with Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, the parish priest of Holy Family parish in Gaza.

The commencement of the ceasefire took place while we were there and everybody was full of apprehension as to what the future holds, but despite the hardships endured people manage to carry on with their daily lives. It was a very rewarding experience and deepened our experience of the daily lives of the people there against the backdrop of warfare and a fragile ceasefire. At the end of the visit the bishops issued their Final Statement before returning home to share their experiences and to advocate on behalf of our Christian brothers and sisters.

Michael Byrne

Lieutenant for England and Wales

(January 2025)