Update on projects supported by the Order in the Holy Land

An increase in teachers' salaries: urgent action to safeguard the quality of teaching in Catholic schools. Copyright: Réseau Barnabé - schools of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Thomas McKiernan, President of the Commission for the Holy Land of the Grand Magisterium, gives an overview of ongoing and future projects of support in the Holy Land which add to the monthly support given by the Order to all institutions of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (parishes, schools , medical facilities, communications works ...).

A high school in Israel

Three-year project, started in 2015

In 2015 a project was started in Jaffa, Nazareth, in Israel, a town with about 14,000 inhabitants, all Arabs, of whom 10,200 Muslims and 3,800 Christians, or 70% Muslims and 30% Christians. It is a three-phase project to reconstruct the school to include a high school with a computer lab, a science lab and an indoor gym. To enable these additions, the community house of the religious sisters had to be moved as well as the priest's residence to the new kindergarten building. This will be the second high school that we have supported in Israel, the first was in Rameh about three years ago.

The first phase of construction took a long time because of the numerous and expensive permits required by the Israeli government. Most of these permits have been granted and so some work has begun. The cost of Phase 1 is estimated at $ 1,281,000. Progress in this phase is somewhat slow, but the work continues.

A Church in Jordan

A joint venture between the parishioners and the Order

Another project started in 2015 is the church and multipurpose parish hall at Marj Alhamam in Jordan, an area with about 30,000 residents. No doubt you will remember from last year's report on the parish, that it is home to about 300 families, 1500 parishioners with a total Christian population of about 4000 people. The church and the hall will be open to all. Currently we have only a small chapel. A lot of the initial work was paid for by a local Christian benefactor and the parishioners themselves, so it is therefore, a joint venture between the parishioners and the Order. The cost of the project amounts to $ 495,000. The church promises to be a very beautiful one.

Amman's Our Lady of Peace Center

A place of encounter and sharing for the Church in Jordan

Also in 2015, construction began on the Our Lady of Peace Center near Amman, Jordan. The Our Lady of Peace Center, established in 2004, specializes in assisting families with members who have limited physical and social abilities. Currently Jordan is the most stable of the Middle East countries, thus the Our Lady of Peace Center has become a regional nerve point for conferences and meetings, including retreats and meetings for priests, scouts, church and civic groups. An existing structure, partially complete, is about to be transformed into a conference center. The estimated cost is $ 141,000.

A kindergarten for the children of foreign workers in Israel

A joint initiative of the Order in collaboration with the Vicariate for Hebrew-speaking Catholics

The Vicariate for Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Tel Aviv has reported that migrants and refugees are in need of assistance for their children while they are at work, given the low wages they receive to support their family. Often, between 40 to 50 small children are kept in rooms without windows or with the light off (to keep them asleep), supervised by an unskilled worker. Two or three children die every month. Thanks to the intervention of our Order and private donors, as well as the energy of Father David Neuhaus, Patriarchal Vicar, and an important legacy received from the United States, we are responding to this dramatic reality. The Commission for the Holy Land has discovered a situation for which everyone should be ashamed and today we can be proud to see a significant improvement. This is just one example of the ways in which the Commission for the Holy Land has expanded its mandate.

An increase in teachers' salaries

Urgent action to safeguard the quality of teaching in Catholic schools

The Latin Patriarchate executives have insisted that we aid them in increasing the salaries of teachers in Palestine and Jordan. During our previous visit, Msgr. Maroun Lahham, Patriarchal Vicar in Jordan, had expressed his great sadness at the loss of good teachers due to low salaries in our schools. The Latin Patriarchate then proposed an apportioned increase in salaries over five years which, in practice, allow an average increase in Jordan of around $ 720 and in Palestine of around $ 1,060. The cost for this year will be $ 454,000.

Three new projects in 2016

Work on two schools and a nursing home

Besides the increase in wages, three other projects were presented in 2016 representing a total cost of $ 1.5 million.

The **Hashimi Kindergarten** no longer conforms to Jordanian law; nursery schools must be on the ground floor so that children do not run the risk of falling down stairs. If these rules are not followed, the school will be closed. The **school in Tla'el Ali** must have more space for games for children or also close. The estimated cost of these two projects is $ 911,000.

The last request is for the support of management expenses of the **retirement home in Taybeh**, in the West Bank. The Latin Patriarchate proposes to add funds for this service to current routine administrative expenditure provided by the Order.

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