



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Projects completed in 2024 with the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Every year, the Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre from all over the world contribute with immense generosity to support Christians in the Holy Land. They do so through the Grand Magisterium, which every month allocates a significant financial contribution to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem for institutional expenses, support for schools, the Beit Jala Seminary, pastoral activities and humanitarian aid. In addition, the Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations, through the Grand Magisterium, may choose to finance projects that considerably improve the lives of local populations. Here follows a summary of the projects implemented in 2024.

A special support for families in education and employment



Since October 7, 2023, Palestinian families have had to confront the harsh reality of the current conflict. They are facing significant reductions in income due to mass layoffs and travel restrictions. The withdrawal of work permits has aggravated the economic situation further, which in turn has led to the termination of many employment contracts. There are hundreds of Christian families who have been deprived of these permits, and have found themselves in a precarious condition, and unable to pay school fees. In addition, the cessation of tourist activities has had a profound knock-on effect, particularly on those who previously worked in the sector. Against this gloomy background, the aim has been to provide support for families, in the area of education and employment.

Education: support for disadvantaged pupils in Latin Patriarchate schools

Thanks to the additional contributions of many Knights and Dames, 75 Palestinian pupils from the West Bank received a scholarship in September 2023 and February 2024 that permitted them to enroll in schools in Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Birzeit and Zababdeh. This possibility has enabled them to continue their studies and complete the school year without interruption.



Turning instead to university education, medicine requires many years of study. At the request of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre supported two scholarships to help these students who need to complete their preparation:

The Dr. George Gahn Medical School Fund has awarded a scholarship to Marianne Saleem Shehadeh, a first-rate Christian student in the Faculty of Medicine at Al-Najah University, in Nablus.

Marianne's family of seven has faced considerable financial difficulties since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Her father worked in the restaurant business in Israel. Many restaurants closed due to the lockdown but even after the situation had returned to normal, his employers did not re-hire him. Marianne wrote in her letter of thanks to those who enabled her to complete her studies and made her dream of becoming a doctor to help her community possible, "Receiving your scholarship took a considerable weight off my shoulders and allowed me to focus more intensively on my studies and extracurricular activities. The fact that you believe in my potential motivates me to strive for excellence in all aspects of my life, both academic and personal."

The Dr. Schill Grant provided financial support to three families, which covered their children's school fees for the spring and fall terms of the year 2023-2024.

Rami is a 20-year-old student who lives in Bethlehem with his parents, sister and brother. His mother is a housewife and his father is the sole breadwinner for the family. However, due to health problems and the difficult situation in the country, his employment possibilities are limited. Rami is one of the recipients of the Dr. Schill scholarship from Al-Quds University. "Studying medicine is a challenge, but it is a rewarding path, especially thanks to the support of my parents. I am happy to have completed my second year of study and remain determined to achieve my goal of becoming a doctor. I thank you for your continued support. I promise to strive for excellence every year."

Damiana is a second-year medical student at Al-Quds University. Her father runs a small grocery shop and she has a brother and sister. Her brother is studying at Bethlehem University and her sister will finish high school this year and start university next fall. All this places a heavy financial burden on Damiana's family. "I am immensely grateful for your help in realising my dream of becoming a doctor. I have worked hard to get to this point, and rank among the top ten in Bethlehem for the secondary school exam results. To this day, I maintain my status as an honors student at the university."

Adam, 19, is a medical student at Al-Quds University and lives in Bethlehem. His twin sister, Maya, is accompanying him on this academic adventure, as she is enrolled in the Faculty of Dentistry at the same university. Having a partner on this journey makes everything easier. Adam's father, Ihab, owns a small workshop producing olive wood items; his mother, Nancy, works for the Ministry of Tourism and he has two younger sisters, Sama (16) and Lourdes (13), who are still at school. The twins' university fees are quite high and, given the current situation in Palestine, the family's financial condition has worsened, making it even more difficult for the parents to support their children's studies. Nevertheless, becoming a doctor has been Adam's dream, ever since he was a child. "I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity and for the help you have given my family and me. Your support is greater than words can express."

Employment: The *Empowerment Programme* for young people and women

Young Palestinians represent approximately one third of the total population and have to deal with complex challenges and obstacles. The **Youth Empowerment Program** and **Women's Economic Empowerment**, have enabled many young people and women to be supported. The main objectives of both projects are: to improve the economic prospects of the youth and Christian women on low-income through the development of vocational skills; to create favorable environments for women's economic participation; and, to provide targeted subsidies for income-generating initiatives.

These two vocational assistance projects are intended for young people between the ages of 18 and 35 and women over the age of 20 from East Jerusalem and the West Bank who have been affected by the recent economic crisis. Thanks to contributions from the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, in 2024 the initiative has given 144 people the opportunity to benefit from training, which has facilitated employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and fostered psychological resilience and hope.

Here follow Awad, Hanna, Joyce and Samar's testimonies:

Awad, who is 28 years old, started to work in the tourism sector as a driver of a seven-seater van in 2013. His job was the main source of income for his family, which consists of his wife and their eight-year-old twin daughters. When the war broke out, everything changed. The conflict and the worsening economic crisis led to tourism in Israel and the surrounding areas coming to a halt, which left Awad and countless other young people in a precarious financial situation. Despite the difficult circumstances, Awad, with the support of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, has passed the driving test for a license to drive a larger bus. Although this license has not immediately brought any income due to the closure of the tourism industry, it represents a concrete investment in his future. Awad realized that the license can open new opportunities for him, especially because the demand for tourist transportation will increase once stability returns to the region. This qualification has given him hope, and made him one of the young people ready to actively contribute to the revival of tourism and the local economy.



With a heart condition that requires the use of a pacemaker, 26-year-old **Hanna** struggles daily with physical limitations and the fear that his condition could worsen. His dreams and ambitions seemed unattainable because his illness prevented him from living a fulfilling life. In response to Hanna's difficulties, the Latin Patriarchate, with the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, came forth to offer him a fully funded, three-month barber training course, allowing Hanna to work safely, and providing him with a profession that requires minimal physical effort but could still ensure him a stable income. Thanks to this training, Hanna not only gained new skills but also began to regain his self-confidence, and gradually overcome his fears. Today, he works as a barber for friends and family in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. As he works locally and in a way that caters to his health requirements, he is now able to support himself and has regained the feeling of being useful and proud.



Joyce, who is a 24-year-old woman from the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem, embodies resilience and determination. Born and raised in the Holy City, she faced physical challenges due to motor difficulties. However, her passion for aesthetics and her desire to create a better future has never wavered. Thanks to the Latin Patriarchate's *Empowerment Program*, Joyce received funding to purchase a professional fingernail machine. She has transformed a small room next to her home into a comfortable manicure salon, where Joyce has begun to offer her services to the community. Despite her physical challenges, she has created a welcoming and professional environment that has quickly become popular among her clients. Her dedication, talent, and friendliness has made her a trusted person in her field.



In the difficult situation in Jerusalem during the war, **Samar**, a 43-year-old mother of three, has faced enormous personal and professional challenges. She was previously employed in the hospitality sector, but Samar saw her working hours drastically reduced to 10 hours a week due to the conflict, which left her unable to support her three school-aged children. Samar could have easily given in to despair, but instead, she chose to see her passion for ceramics as a beacon of hope. Upon recognizing her innate artistic talent, she courageously pursued professional training in pottery art, aspiring to set up her own business. The Latin Patriarchate, who were impressed by her potential and commitment, financed her a training.

Interventi sul territorio del Patriarcato Latino

PALESTINE

The projects in Palestine are an essential part of the Latin Patriarchate's emergency response, especially at this very difficult time in the West Bank. On the one hand, these actions provide safer and more welcoming facilities for those who live there and for the entire community that benefit from them. On the other, these projects offer support to many Christian families through the opportunity given to skilled workers - who face unemployment due to the ongoing conflict - to be hired for these renovations. Although the initial aim is to renovate physical infrastructures, these projects are important because they also rebuild lives and communities, strengthening resilience in the face of immense difficulties.



The purchase of new hospital beds for the Beit Afram Elderly Home in Taybeh

The Beit Afram Elderly Home accommodates 20 elderly men and women who otherwise would be living alone because they have no one to care for them, or who suffer from chronic illnesses requiring constant medical care. To help them, 10 electric inpatient beds were purchased, each with a steel frame and coated surface for durability and ease of cleaning. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Order, this modernization has improved the well-being of the residents, who now feel that they are treated with dignity and respect, which contributes to their overall quality of life.

The 21 staff members of Beit Afram are also benefiting from the project because the new beds are more manageable, reduce the caregivers' physical effort, which enables them to carry out their tasks more efficiently.

Maintenance work in the parish hall in Ramallah

Ramallah is one of the most active parishes in Palestine serving as a centre for various social and religious activities. The parish regularly hosts celebrations, workshops, training sessions, Scout meetings and youth gatherings in a dedicated hall that covers an area of approximately 400 square meters, and can accommodate up to 400 people with its five washroom facilities. The existing restrooms were in need of renovation, the ceiling of the hall needed to be renovated and the walls needed a new coat of paint to improve the overall appearance of the space.

Thanks to the contribution of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, this renovation project has had a significant impact on the parish, and created a more welcoming and functional environment for its **2,000 worshippers** and youth groups who use the hall to meet and organize various activities.

Renovation of the sanitary units in the presbytery of Zababdeh

The Zababdeh parish has approximately 2,000 Latin Christians in its congregation. The presbytery building had had serious insulation problems, which in turn had seriously damaged the interior. In addition, the sanitary facilities had deteriorated due to lack of maintenance and prolonged use over time. The renovation project, which was supported by the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, aimed not only to improve the sanitary facilities and ensure long-term compliance to health and safety requirements, but also to offer some hope to skilled Christian workers who were facing unemployment due to the conflict.



Various interventions in Beit Jala

Due to the dilapidated state of the structure and the lack of regular maintenance, the presbytery in Beit Jala had had numerous problems. The contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Order has made it possible to renovate the three rooms of the house and the bathrooms, enabling the priest to live in better conditions. It was also possible to renovate part of the building's infrastructure, in particular on refurbishing and replacing the heating, air conditioning, and photovoltaic system and water tanks so as to ensure the sustainability of the environment in which the mission and activities of the local priestly community take place.

A second project concerned the convent with a plan to replace the heating and cooling system. This was implemented with the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre to improve and guarantee the wellbeing of the ten priests and nuns who live there.

Upgrading the Aboud school and parish hall's power supply

The aim of this project was to help modernize and improve the reliability and stability of the buildings' power supply. As part of the work, there has been a necessary switch to a three-phase connection to optimize the electrical capacity and extend the life of the electrical equipment and machinery used in the school and parish hall.

These renovations, which were financed by the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, not only improved the functional capacity of the facilities, but also ensured a safer and more secure environment for all occupants and users, namely Aboud's **500 parishioners**, the **248 pupils** at the Aboud school and the **22 staff and teachers**.

ISRAEL



Repairs to the Deir Rafat Shrine

The Convent at the Deir Rafat Shrine is old and some of the infrastructure was antiquated, which made it prone to frequently requiring repairs and structural interventions. The brick roof was in poor condition, with numerous holes and broken tiles that caused all sorts of problems and exacerbated the deterioration and hygiene problems. In addition, the windows of the church were either broken or badly damaged.

Extensive renovation work was undertaken thanks to several Lieutenancies, which provided a sustainable and lasting response. The direct beneficiaries of this project are the **12 nuns** living in Deir Rafat, as well as the visitors and pilgrims who choose to stay in the convent's guesthouse and use its retreat centre.



Resolving moisture problems in the presbytery of Shefa Amr

Situated adjacent to the church, the Shefa Amr presbytery is a two-story building, which is about 25 years old. The building was prone to grave moisture problems, especially in the bathrooms, where the ceramic tiling on the shower walls was peeling away. Humidity was also affecting the building's exterior walls and the roof, which was flaking off in several places, and creating conditions for seepage and water stagnation. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames, it was possible to carry out the renovation work that made the building waterproof, and allowed the parish priest who lives in the building, as well as all the guests and visitors who use the premises, to live in a healthier environment.

JORDAN



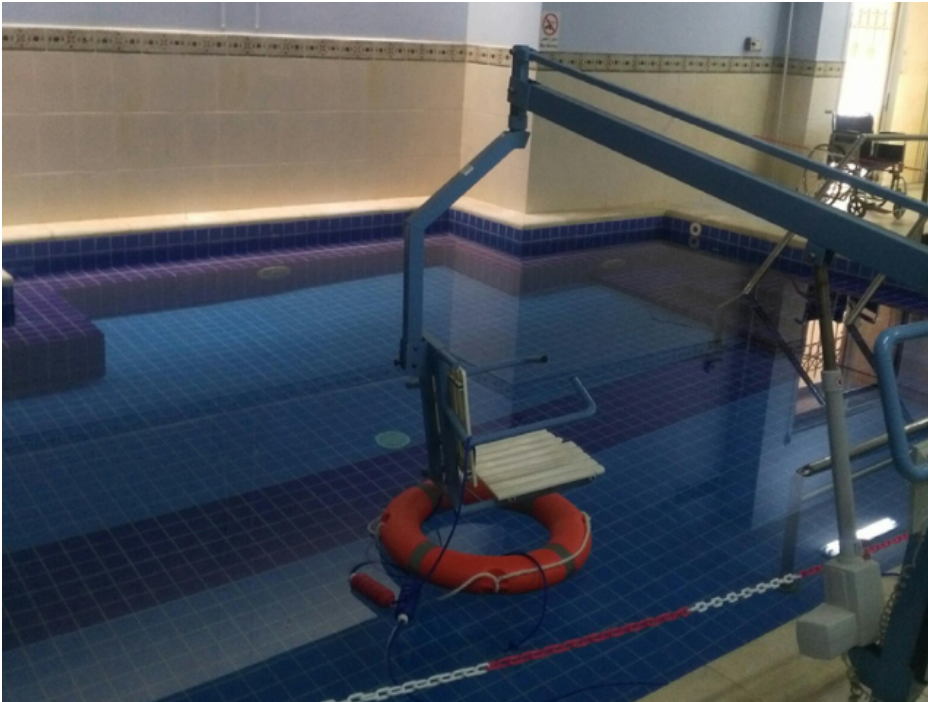
Renovation of Southern Zarqa school building

The school in Zarqa was located in a precarious infrastructure, with substandard equipment and furniture, a lack of classrooms, playgrounds, libraries, computer rooms and science laboratories. Thanks to the support of the Knights and Dames of the Order, work has been carried out. The main objective of the project was to renovate the building, improving its stability, safety and durability, thus ensuring a safe learning environment for pupils and staff. This work directly benefited the school's **200 pupils**, as well as its **22 teachers and school staff**, who now have safer and more stable learning spaces.



Providing computers and smart boards to five schools

In response to the growing dependence on digital learning and in order to combine it seamlessly with traditional teaching methods, the Latin Patriarchate launched a project to provide five schools in Jordan with computers, interactive whiteboards and projectors to improve teaching techniques, enrich education and develop pupils' technological skills. The project involved schools in: **Al Mafrq, Al Salt, Ader, Wahadne and Naour**. These five schools were chosen because they are located in remote areas of Jordan, where access to such resources is rather limited. The new equipment makes it easier for teachers to demonstrate the exercises and encourages pupil participation during lessons. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Order, some **1,870 pupils, 151 teachers and staff** in these schools have benefited from the introduction of these modern teaching tools.



Maintenance of the hydrotherapy pool at the Our Lady of Peace Centre

The Our Lady of Peace Centre in Jordan, which opened in 2004, offers free rehabilitation and special education sessions to people with disabilities, regardless of their religious and social background, financial situation or nationality. Over time, the renovation of the hydrotherapy pool had become indispensable because of the essential role it plays in the treatment of patients. In particular, it helps relieve the symptoms of various ailments, particularly arthritis and joint, muscle and nerve problems. It is particularly effective in reducing acute and chronic pain, especially in children suffering from cerebral palsy or autism.

This renovation project, which was made possible thanks to the support of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, included a series of technical interventions, such as a water dehumidification and sterilization system, and some electrical interventions, which have enabled the centre to continue to provide its approximately 30 free treatment sessions per month, to assist almost 1,500 children and adults suffering from various ailments and thus have a positive impact on their lives.



Construction of new sanitary facilities and a new entrance for the church in Naour

There were certain facilities at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Naour that were inadequate to meet current pastoral needs. There was an urgent need to provide a separate and more easily accessible entrance to the church and toilets outside for worshippers attending celebrations and activities organized in the courtyard.

The generous financial support of the Knights and Dames made it possible to make significant improvements to the main entrance of the church and to carry out much of the work on the outdoor toilets.



Interventions required for the Jubeiha church

The church in Jubeiha, which celebrated its first mass at Christmas 2020, can accommodate around 1,000 worshippers. The church also includes a large parish hall and other infrastructure. After the inauguration, the plan was to connect the sewage system of the parish complex to the local public sewage system. Since the project was delayed for reasons on the ground, other options had to be explored to temporarily solve the sewage problem and use the remaining budget to address critical issues requiring an immediate response.

Restoration of the church in Irbid, including the defective electrical network

The parish of St. George the Martyr is located in Northern Jordan, about 70 kilometers north of Amman and 25 kilometers from the Syrian border, in the Governorate of Irbid. The church, which is a very old building, had dilapidated electrical and plumbing systems that risked overloading the network and endangering the safety of the building and the people living there. Thanks to the contribution of several Lieutenancies of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, it was possible to start work in March 2023 to renovate and replace the electrical system to improve its functionality and ensure its safety. The project also included the removal of the old water tanks followed by the installation of a new hot and cold water system. The works, completed in May 2024, created a modern and safe meeting place for the approximately 600 worshippers of the Irbid parish.



Two rooms added to the priest's house in Smakieh

The village of Smakieh is located 120 km South of Amman, in a semi-desert area. It has about 2,000 worshippers, including 230 Latin families, and the primary school alone has 330 pupils. Smakieh is one of the most active parishes in Jordan, which holds regular youth meetings (through the JEC - *Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne* – for three age groups), workshops and courses, a football tournament and theological training evenings dedicated to important topics such as marriage, the

Eucharist, etc. The parish priest with the help of the sisters and other community leaders manages these activities. The presbytery was relatively small and did not offer adequate space to receive the parishioners, nor comfortable accommodation for the priest himself.

In order to support these activities and develop parish life, it was proposed to build two additional rooms by adding a floor to the existing house. Thanks to the contribution of the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre, the Grand Magisterium was able to support the creation of a larger and more welcoming space, and transform the priest's house to accommodate a meeting room, an office and a waiting room to serve the parishioners. The two additional rooms will serve as the priest's residence with a bedroom, bathroom and living area.

Renovation of the presbytery in Salt

The presbytery in Salt is one of the oldest buildings in the region and had had a number of structural and safety problems. When it was declared unfit for use, it needed to be renovated quickly and effectively to restore suitable living conditions. Thanks to the contribution of the Lieutenancies, the parish priest now has a decent space and better living conditions.

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