



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Under the mantle of Our Lady Woman of Valor: welcoming migrants in Israel



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The pastoral center Our Lady Woman of Valor was opened in Tel Aviv by the St. James Vicariate for Hebrew-speaking Catholics of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in March 2014. It is a place of welcome for Catholic migrants of diverse origins who are in Israel for business purposes or as asylum seekers. They require pastoral care in Hebrew and consideration of the specific issues that these communities are facing. The Center is one of the projects that the Order of the Holy Sepulchre supports with particular attention and generosity.

Before the Our Lady Woman of Valor Centre

Tel Aviv-Jaffa is the largest city in Israel, the center of social and commercial life and therefore attracts many residents. These include tens of thousands of Catholics: Beyond those with Israeli citizenship, many are foreign workers, migrants and asylum seekers. In 2009, a group of Filipino Catholics rented a room in the south of Tel Aviv creating a center which they named "Divine Mercy". However, conditions were far from suitable and between 2009 and 2014, the center was forced to relocate three times, the last being to an air-raid shelter, as the community grew in numbers.

The history of the Centre

In March 2014, the Catholic Church, thanks to the support and generosity of many benefactors, including the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, was able to buy a building in the south of Tel

Aviv (33 Shivat Zion Street) to build the Our Lady Woman of Value Pastoral Center. The property was renovated and in 2014 a church, a chapel, a meeting room and two apartments were built, one for the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres who come from the Philippines and one for the Sisters of Perpetual Help who come from Sri Lanka.

The Centre is run by the St James Vicariate for Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel, whose patriarchal vicar and coordinator for the pastoral care of migrants is Father David Neuhaus. Currently, the parish priest and director of Our Lady Woman of Value Pastoral Center is Father Michael "Mako" Grospe from the Philippines.



Who are the foreign workers, migrants and asylum seekers?

According to statistics published by the Israeli Interior Ministry for 2015, there are 227,000 migrants in Israel. These include 91,000 who entered the country on a tourist visa and come mostly from the former Soviet Union, 77,000 who arrived with a work visa mostly from Thailand, the Philippines, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and China, and about 43,000 who are asylum seekers who entered Israel through the Egyptian border and come from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan. The vast majority are Christians.

Therefore, the ethnic composition of the people who attend the "Woman of Valor" center is varied: there are Filipinos, Indians, Sri Lankans, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Sudanese. The adults sometimes pray in their native language (Tagalog, Konkani, Sinhalese, Malayalam, Tigrinya) but their children are Hebrew-speaking, born and raised in a Hebrew-speaking society.

What happens at the "Woman of Valor" Pastoral Center?

Pastoral activities

Between Friday night and Sunday morning (we must remember that Saturday is a public holiday in Israel and not Sundays), the Center celebrates seven Masses, with a participation of about 400 people per Mass. The Eucharistic celebration is often followed by a convivial moment that allows people to meet and mingle with each other.

The Centre also pays particular attention to the religious education of children and young people. Over the years it has developed Hebrew text books for young people. This year 50 children will make their First Communion and 25 will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Activities for young people who have finished the catechism for the sacraments of Christian initiation are gradually growing and a place designed specifically for their meetings is being planned.

Daycare centers

In Israel there is an excellent support service for children above 3 years but unfortunately the only services available before the child reaches that age are private and extremely expensive. This forces the immigrant mothers to work hard to be able to pay these charges and does not allow them to spend time with their children. The Vicariate reflected upon the services most needed by the community and in September 2014 the first "daycare center" was opened for 6 children. To date, there are four facilities and they welcome 51 children cared for by twelve professional minders. The Order's Commission for the Holy Land - which travels twice a year to the Holy Land to monitor the status of projects to which the Knights and Dames contribute – also noted that other centers, not dependent on the Vicariate, where young women migrants were forced to leave their children, were operating in difficult and inadequate conditions. The Commission has since secured support for this important initiative. It is important to remember the generous bequest of Rose Bente Lee, a Dame commended by the US Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy, who died in 2014, that allowed to take the project forward. Today the main structure of the Vicariate's daycare center in Tel Aviv bears the name of its great benefactor, Rose.



Support for the sick

Should a migrant become ill and need hospital care there are no structures to welcome them for the necessary period of care and often they find themselves on the street, homeless, jobless and without health insurance. Thus the Pastoral Centre has set up a room to accommodate people who are in this type of need. At present a woman who has been diagnosed with cancer and his 4 year old daughter are being cared for.