



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

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## Update on projects in the Holy Land



Beginning at the end of 2023 and in the first part of 2024, Lieutenancies around the world, through the Grand Magisterium, sent a voluntary solidarity contribution of about \$1,5 million for the needs of the people affected by the ongoing conflict since the previous October 7.

During 2024, with the exception of ROACO-related projects and, of course, regular contribution to the Latin Patriarchate for its institutional activities (educational, pastoral, social), the Order's support will go mainly to humanitarian aid in the territories affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Order thus continues to contribute to the survival of refugees in Gaza Parish and to the many humanitarian situations in the West Bank, where aid consists of food vouchers, financial contributions for utilities or school fees, the purchase of medicine and coverage of medical expenses.

Given the cancellation of work permits for many in the West Bank and the resulting rise in unemployment, the goal is to work to put solutions in place through support for the development of small businesses or initiatives and, in general, to help local people find ways to generate income for their livelihoods.

In the meantime, in this annual edition of The Jerusalem Cross, we look back at the projects implemented in 2023, before the outbreak of war in the Holy Land and its devastating side effects.

## OFFICES OF THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

### A NEW TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

Over the years, telephones installed decades ago had become obsolete, and the devices needed to be replaced. The project, subsidized by the **Lieutenancy for Switzerland and Liechtenstein**, enabled the purchase of a new switchboard server and telephones from which employees and priests of the Latin Patriarchate in Palestine, Israel and Jordan can benefit, with a total of about 106 people thus having the opportunity to carry out their service in a more functional manner.

## **A DIGITAL ARCHIVING SOFTWARE**

A digital software was implemented so that it could streamline data archiving, retrieval and storage processes, reducing physical storage space and ensuring data integrity.

The project had been submitted in April 2021 and adopted by the **U.S. Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy**, but the pandemic and restrictions had slowed its implementation.

In 2023 the new software was purchased and installed, allowing the 120 employees of the Latin Patriarchate in Jordan, Palestine and Israel, as well as the 52 parishes (including 12 in Palestine, 6 in Israel, 33 in Jordan and 1 in Cyprus), to benefit from this new system.

## **RENOVATION OF THE RAINWATER COLLECTION SYSTEM**

As that of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem is a historic building, of times it needs restoration and adaptation works that will ensure its good long-term preservation.

Among these, a project to renovate the rainwater collection system on the roofs was proposed to the Lieutenancies through the intermediary of the Grand Magisterium and was supported by the Lieutenancy for Northern Italy. Diverting rainwater away from the foundations of buildings helps prevent erosion, contributing to the overall soundness of the structure and responsibility to the environment.

## **LATIN PATRIARCHATE SCHOOLS**



### SCHOOL SUPPORT IN GAZA

The grant from the **Lieutenancy for Austria**, ensured the continuity of education of 26 students of the Holy Family School in Gaza for the school year 2022- 2023.

The support was provided through scholarships that aimed to cover the tuition of needy pupils whose parents lost their source of income due to the Covid-19 pandemic and were not reinstated after restrictions were lifted; whose parents have a temporary contract that does not guarantee a steady income; who have at least one chronically disabled parent who is unable to work; or who are growing up with only one parent.

### SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STUDENTS IN PALESTINE

This project was proposed to support Christian students at Birzeit University whose parents lost their jobs due to the Covid-19 pandemic and could not get them back, but instead, had to declare bankruptcy or sell their assets to meet the rising cost of living.

Thus, through the donation from the **Lieutenancy for Germany**, students in need received a scholarship to cover their educational expenses during the Summer and Fall semesters of 2021 and the Spring and Fall semesters of 2022.



## VISUAL AIDS FOR CATECHISM

The Patriarchate's catechetical office aimed to build a good Christian education program for students in Christian schools in Palestine, Jordan and Israel.

Thus, new methods of explaining and telling the Bible were introduced, relying on the use of visual aids and enabling students to absorb the meanings of the stories through interaction and participation.

With these aids, funded by the **Lieutenancy for Belgium**, teachers have found that children stay focused and that the meanings of Bible stories are easier to understand and memorize.



## **INTERACTIVE PROJECTORS AND NEW DESKS**

Most of the Latin Patriarchate schools in Palestine were established in the 19th century as an extension of the Church's spiritual commitment to educate and provide proper Christian teaching to future generations.

A recent needs assessment of the various facilities had revealed that some of them lacked modern and essential equipment.

New trends in teaching and learning and technological advances were taken into account in the assessment. In light of these changes, and through the support of the Grand Magisterium, the Latin Patriarchate purchased 28 interactive projectors for 8 schools in Palestine (Taybeh, Bir Zeit, Aboud, Ain Arik, Jifna, Ramallah, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour).

In addition, again thanks to a donation from the lieutenancies that came through the Grand Magisterium, older desks were replaced with new ones to provide students with the comfort they needed to attend classes.

The schools in greatest need and thus given priority were those in Birzeit, Zababdeg, Beit Sahour, Ramallah and Nablus.

## **IMPROVED LEVELS OF SAFETY AND SANITATION**

The school in al-Fuheis, Jordan, suffered from a degraded sanitation infrastructure due to irregular maintenance and overuse.

Therefore, it was critical to intervene to ensure that the sanitation facilities were adequate to the needs of the children, including spaces to fit, clean environments, privacy, and safe access to clean water.

Thanks largely to the contribution of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, renovations were carried out that provided the units with adequate ventilation, new flooring, completely private access and use for each bathroom, new sinks, safe and clean drinking water taps, and adequate lighting.





## **UPGRADING COMPUTER LABS**

Upgrading school computer labs is critical to evolving educational needs. They are designed to facilitate learning activities and collaborative group work. Some schools in Palestine had outdated systems that slowed down the process of both teaching and learning.

With the support of the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, the main goal of this initiative was therefore to create technologically advanced spaces and tools that could accommodate a larger number of students by providing them with more modern tools with extended functionality.

The schools targeted were specifically those in Zababdeh, Nablus, Birzeit, Ain Arik, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Taybeh and the two Latin Patriarchate schools in Gaza.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing conflict, it has not been possible to complete the project in Gaza, however, improvements in schools in the West Bank, namely Zababdeh, where 1,034 young people study, Nablus (607 students), Birzeit (470 students), Ain Arik (256 students), Beit Jala (840 students), Beit Sahour (393 students) and Taybeh (373 students) have been made and completed.

These institutes now have computer labs that conform to contemporary technological trends.

## **THE BUILDINGS OF THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE**

### **PALESTINE**

## **RENOVATION FOR THE HOLY FAMILY PARISH AND SCHOOL IN GAZA**

The parish hall of the Holy Family in Gaza was in an unsafe condition, mainly due to the moisture that had built up and natural deterioration, not to mention the years of bombing in the neighborhood.

Therefore, it was necessary to take remedial measures to repair and restore its stability and safety, and it was possible to do so thanks to a grant from the **U.S. Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy**.

The rehabilitation project included work to insulate, reinforce the basement floor and the entire balcony and allowed the 120 members of the Gaza Latin parish, as well as the entire local Christian community of about 900 people, to have a safe and renovated place to gather.

Unfortunately, this work was damaged by the war that began on Oct. 7, 2023.

One of the schools of the Latin Patriarchate of Gaza is located in Al-Zaytoon. This school was in need of renovations and these and it was possible to carry them out through the contribution of the **Lieutenancy for Austria**.

The renovation has had a significant impact in that it has created a more conducive environment for teaching and learning, resulting in improved academic performance of students, increased enrollment, with additional benefits to the community through access to quality education and a safer environment. Again, efforts have been hampered by the war.

## **OPERATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THOMAS AQUINAS CENTER**

The Thomas Aquinas Center is the only Christian Catholic youth center in Gaza among the more than 130 non-Christian centers operating in this troubled part of the world.

The project, which started in 2021 thanks to the support of the **Lieutenancy for Germany**, covered a number of activities, including: a salary for teachers who taught English language courses, project management, computer skills, and salary coverage for the center's managers, with a total of 17 people.

It is worth mentioning that 72 young Christians found jobs in Gaza thanks to the training programs offered by the center, which ceased activities following the outbreak of the 2023 war, which completely destroyed Gaza.



## WORK ON BEIT JALA SEMINARY

Several renovations and safety improvements have been completed at Beit Jala Seminary, established in Jerusalem in 1852 by Patriarch Joseph Valerga for the purpose of training diocesan priests to serve all the parishes of the Diocese of the Holy Land and transferred to Beit Jala in 1936.

Through the grant from the **Lieutenancy for England and Wales**, which adopted this project in 2021, it was possible to start the tender and begin the work, providing a benefit to the approximately 100 people living and working in the Major and Minor Seminary, and to all visitors and guests.

In addition, besides the annual financial savings, this change decreases electricity and gas consumption, and thus protects the environment.

Another intervention was then carried out and completed in the rooms housing the seminarians, which had parts of cracked plaster, as well as moisture stains on the ceilings and walls due to rainwater leaks from the roof, and to the bathrooms, which were in poor condition and needed renovation.

With the support of the **Lieutenancy for Austria**, a renovation project for these spaces had been initiated in 2022, which involved dismantling and installation operations, electrical work, sanitary and ventilation work, and much more, and resulted in a significant transformation of the facilities. Instead, thanks to the support of the Grand Magisterium and other organizations, it was also possible to restore the roof.

Further intervention at the Beit Jala Seminary completed in 2023 was the replacement of one of the elevators, thanks to the contribution of the **Lieutenancy for Switzerland and Liechtenstein**.

All of this benefits the 15 priests and seminarians who currently reside in the Seminary, as well as all future priests and seminarians who will succeed the current residents in the years to come.



## **RESTORATION OF THE MULTI-PURPOSE HALL IN ABOUD PARISH**

Moving into the West Bank territories, we arrive in the village of Aboud, which is home to several historical sites and which, like many areas in the region, has experienced tensions and conflicts related to the broader geopolitical situation in the Middle East.

Indeed, the village, with its archaeological and religious heritage, reflects the history of the region and the mixed Christian and Muslim population that inhabits it, which contributes to its cultural richness. Aboud is home to 2,000 residents, including 1,000 Christians (500 Latin Christians).

The renovation of the parish's multi-purpose hall, which is used for spiritual and recreational activities: exhibitions, conferences, school activities, retreats, events, festivals, etc., was made possible thanks to contributions that also came through the Grand Magisterium.

248 students, priests and the 500 members of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Parish can now benefit from this space and participate in the initiatives that are carried out.

## **REPLACING THE SOUND SYSTEM OF THE**

### **CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF THE VISITATION, ZABABDEH**

Staying in the West Bank, we move to the northern part, to Zababdeh, a relatively small village that nevertheless plays a significant role in preserving the Christian presence there.

Here, for decades, Our Lady of the Visitation Church has been serving its parish and its youth, and over time, some of the equipment used, particularly the sound system, had become malfunctioning.

Thanks to support that came through the Grand Magisterium, a state-of-the-art sound system was purchased and installed, with microphones, amplifiers, speakers and modern sound processing equipment. The project also included training for church staff and volunteers who would operate it.

## **JORDAN**

### **INSULATION WORK IN THE PARISH OF ST. ELIJAH IN WAHADNEH**

Al Wahadneh, is a village in Ajloun Governorate, located on a small hill and affords a view of the Jordan Valley. The parish was founded in 1926, and in 1963 the church was built, then consecrated in 1964.

Wahadneh is home to 8,000 residents, 500 of whom are Christians for whom the parish is a very important hub. St. Elias Church, which has served the community for decades, had begun to show signs of thermal insulation problems, which caused plaster damage inside the building.

Thanks to the grant sent through the Grand Magisterium, the work done has solved the building's roof drainage problem and the parish and community of Wahadneh can benefit from a safe and welcoming place.



## **RENOVATION OF THE RESIDENCE OF THE SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY IN SALT**

Salt is the first parish established by the Latin Patriarchate in East Jordan (1866) and is home to 2,000 Christians, 450 of whom are Latin Christians.

The Sisters of Our Lady's Assumption Parish have served this Christian community for decades. They have lived in the same residence since its founding (1910-1912), and despite numerous renovations to repair and preserve the building, it still had unsafe and poorly functioning sanitary units, as well as a lack of adequate access.

Support for the Sisters stemmed from a desire to support their mission to serve the local Christian community. Hence, the renovation of parts of the house, mainly by building new bathrooms and repairing adjacent spaces.

The project included demolition work, reconstruction, waterproofing and thermal insulation, and then putting in new toilets and sanitary facilities.

The work, which began in 2022 thanks to a grant sent through the Grand Magisterium, was completed in early 2023, allowing the 6 nuns living in the Residence of the Sisters of the Assumption of Our Lady to live in a welcoming and functional space.

## **RENOVATION OF FIVE ROOMS FOR SCOUTS IN AL-MISDAR**

Christ the King Parish in AlMisdar has earmarked five rooms for the scouts to provide them with a space to meet, practice, and store their equipment.

Through contributions received in spring 2022 from the Knights and Dames, renovations and securing of the rooms enabled the approximately 100 scouts of Christ the King parish to have a welcoming space.

## **RENOVATION OF THE PRIESTS' HOUSE IN MARKA**

The house was suffering from waterproofing problems due to high humidity levels and water leaks.

Therefore, several electrical, demolition and painting works were needed to improve the place and create a more decent environment.

Thanks to the contributions sent by the Knights and Dames, the priests can live in a proper space for the coming years of service in the parish, and receive parishioners and guests.



## **PURCHASE OF A BUS TO ACCOMPANY DISABLED CHILDREN**

The Our Lady of Peace Center (OLOPC), located in the mountainous area of Khirbet Al Souq, south of Amman, officially opened in 2004 by Jordan's Queen HRH Rania Al-Abdullah, provides therapeutic and learning services for children with mental and physical disabilities and their parents, regardless of race, color or religion.

Services carried out free of charge by qualified therapists, ranging from family counseling to social skills development and rehabilitation.

In addition to serving the population of Amman governorate, OLOPC has similar programs in five other districts in Jordan. These subdivisions mainly provide physical therapy services for children and adults, while the Aqaba branch offers comprehensive services for physical and mental disabilities.

In order to give disabled children in Aqaba the opportunity to participate in all extracurricular services and activities, without being excluded and discriminated against, it was important for the Center to have a means of transportation suitable for the needs of these recipients.

Thus, the purchase of a bus designed specifically to be able to transport children with disabilities was proposed. Through contributions also received from the Knights and Dames, the approximately 45 children with disabilities who receive care and counseling at the OLOPC office in Aqaba can be transported from their homes to the center and back.

### **PURCHASE OF A MINIVAN FOR THE PASTORAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES OF THE JEC IN SMAKIEH**

In Jordan, the Jeunesses Etudiantes Catholiques (JEC) has 30 youth groups comprising a total of 3,068 registered members spread across nine different towns and villages.

Each youth group in each locality is divided into five age groups: workers (22-35 years old), undergraduates (19-22 years old), high school students (16-18 years old), preparatory school students (13-15 years old), and elementary school students (6-12 years old).

Smakieh is one of the areas where JEC has about 200 members who participate in activities and prepare trainings and workshops, retreats and spiritual gatherings, summer camps, religious festivals, sports events, educational trips and meetings. All these initiatives are held in Amman, 130 kilometers away from Smakieh, and other often distant locations.

A means of transportation was needed to enable JEC members in Smakieh to attend and arrive on time for the various activities. With the help of the **Lieutenancy for Western Spain**, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem provided the JEC members in Smakieh with a minivan that allows them to travel easily and serves as a platform for interaction, enhancing the overall experience of the participants who, by traveling together, can share moments and create stronger bonds.

### **RENOVATION OF THE MARTYRS' CHURCH AND PARISH HALL IN MARJ EL HAMAM**

Established in 1986, the parish of Marj alHamam consists of 350 families.

The interior of the small church needed repair work as the walls, ceilings and floors showed signs of cracks, erosion and damage caused by moisture and water infiltration. The project aimed to renovate the old small church and parish hall to preserve their historical value, improve their structural integrity and create a welcoming space for the community.

Through grants from the lieutenancies, which came to the Latin Patriarchate through the Grand Magisterium, the renovation involved the complete restoration of the architectural, electrical, plumbing and interior systems.



## **MAINTENANCE OF THE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM OF THE CONVENT OF ST. JOSEPH IN ADER**

In Ader, a small village in southern Jordan with a population of about 2,000 Latin, Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians, there is St. Joseph Parish.

With contributions that came in from the Grand Magisterium, work was done to renovate and secure the electrical system, allowing the approximately 500 members of St. Joseph Parish, the priests and all who use and visit the facility, to live in a safe environment.

### **ISRAEL**





## RESTORATION OF THE MAIN COURTYARD AND GUESTHOUSE AT DEIR RAFAT

Moving instead to Israel, to Deir Rafat, the Shrine of Our Lady Queen of Palestine and the Holy Land is part of a complex that includes two wings: one dedicated to hospitality and professional development centers, and the other to the monastic community.

In 2022, a renovation project was initiated with a grant from the **Lieutenancy for Australia New South Wales** for this place that attracts pilgrims from all over the world.

The main courtyard and guest wing of the convent were remodeled, providing a welcoming and comfortable environment for residents and visitors. Sanitary units were brought up to code, and improved insulation and roof maintenance contributed to energy efficiency and reduced utility costs.

Aesthetic improvements, including tree trimming, painting and whitewashing, revitalized a more pleasant and relaxing look to the complex.

Replacement of the old water tanks and solar panels with a more efficient system confirmed the commitment to sustainability and responsible resource management.

Overall, this renovation project not only preserved the historic charm of Deir Rafat, but also ensured its functionality and sustainability for years to come.

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