



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

How Can We Relieve Despair in the Holy Land?

Autumn Meeting of the Grand Magisterium (11 November 2025)



“We decided to hold this meeting in hybrid form (partly by videoconference, partly in person) so as not to oblige members who do not live in Italy to return to Rome so soon after the October Jubilee pilgrimage, and also in order to limit travel expenses,” explained Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, Governor General, at the start of the autumn meeting of the Grand Magisterium, held on 11 November at the Order’s temporary headquarters near Piazza Cavour in Rome.

In his opening remarks, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master, referred back to **the address delivered by Pope Leo XIV to the Order’s pilgrims** who had come to Rome for the Jubilee, stressing that this important text will serve as a point of reference for the years to come.

The Governor General then welcomed a new member of the Grand Magisterium, Michael Byrne, Lieutenant of Honour for England and Wales, who—after two distinguished terms at the helm of his Lieutenancy—has been called to join this supreme body which, as stated in Article 8 of the Constitution, “assists the Cardinal Grand Master in the governance of the Order.”

The Governor General went on to emphasize that the tragedy that has struck the Holy Land has had extraordinary repercussions on the **generosity of the Order’s members**, whose donations have increased—both in the form of the regular contributions provided for by the Constitution and in extraordinary contributions responding to humanitarian appeals, along with special donations and fundraising campaigns.

“Over the course of this year, we have surpassed a total of more than 20 million euros sent to the Holy Land. Pilgrimages, however, have not resumed to the hoped-for extent because of persistent fears and risks, with harmful consequences for economic activities tied to religious tourism. The Cardinal

Grand Master visited the Holy Land this past August, and others have followed his example, but we remain far from the numbers of pilgrims seen in the years before the war and COVID,” he noted.

Among the new initiatives launched by the Order, the Governor General highlighted in particular the establishment of a **Foundation of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem**, under Italian law, created by notarial act on 27 October. “Inspired by the principles of the Third Sector, it will support the Order’s projects of an economic and commercial nature—activities that, for tax and management reasons, were suitably removed from the Order’s direct competence. It will be able, with full legal autonomy and without profit, to carry out commercial-type activities such as managing the museum, overseeing publications, promoting cultural, social and outreach activities, and organizing charitable and representative events,” added Ambassador Visconti di Modrone.

He also informed the assembly that “work on the restructuring and restoration of the **Palazzo della Rovere** has begun, after the laborious process of securing all necessary permits, and is progressing in parallel both for the Museum area—which will be completed first—and for the hotel and office areas, expected to be finished in 2027.” He clarified that “the cost of this work is borne entirely by the tenant, the company Fort Partners, which has also covered the rental costs of the temporary offices on Via Belli 86 and has contributed a donation of 800,000 euros to the creation of the Museum, in addition to the 500,000-euro contribution offered by the Italian Government.”

As scheduled, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa addressed the meeting via live connection from Jerusalem, first thanking the Order, whose regular and constant financial support—along with the visits and messages of its members—brings confidence and serenity to the Latin Catholic Church in the Holy Land, on behalf of the Holy See and the universal Church. Regarding the situation in Gaza, he reported the creation of an **intervention office** (the *Jerusalem Response Hub*) dedicated specifically and long-term to the deeply afflicted population of this devastated territory.

“The first task is to organize and coordinate aid,” he stated realistically.

In Gaza, priorities include rebuilding schools, distributing medicines, and creating a canteen for meal distribution while awaiting the reconstruction of the city and homes—a process that will take years. The Patriarchate intends to address these emergencies through logistical and legal support (the *Response Hub*) in view of reconstruction and the resumption of activity.

As for the West Bank, where Christians and Muslims share the same suffering, suffocated by lack of work and resources and confronted with continual aggression by Israeli settlers, the Patriarch expressed alarm at the absence of pilgrims—the only ones capable of reviving the economic activity of Palestinian Christian families, especially in Bethlehem.

The Patriarch emphasized the importance of strengthening pastoral activities. He also spoke of the need for the **formation of adult faithful** who require spiritual assistance—a decisive issue for future generations, especially in Israel, for example in Nazareth, where religious vocations are dramatically scarce. To this end, the Patriarch stressed the importance of **Catholic education** and highlighted the need to train religion teachers and formally recognize their mandate in the form of a *missio canonica*.

Finally, he expressed the desire that this year’s celebration of the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord be prepared with particular splendor, to offer a sign of vitality to the faithful who have been deeply wounded morally by the conflict and by the colonization of Palestinian lands.

Treasurer Saverio Petrillo presented the projected budget for 2026, with more than 15 million euros in revenue, and—taking into account the monthly transfers to the Latin Patriarchate and the Order’s expenses—a projected surplus of 800,000 euros that will allow continued support for the Holy Land.

Sami El-Yousef, Chief Executive Officer of the Latin Patriarchate, speaking from his office in Jerusalem, described in detail the local situation and the needs of the Christian community. After outlining the sad effects of the war on the region, he explained how **in 2025 requests for humanitarian aid have quadrupled**, including medical care for elderly people with chronic illnesses, medical emergencies for those without health insurance, school tuition aid, and the growing demand from youth and women to enter the Empowerment Program to find a place in the labor market.

In Gaza, where emergency assistance has mobilized the Patriarchate's services, the number of beneficiaries may have exceeded 250,000 people. Since the ceasefire was declared, attention has shifted to education, housing, job creation, and health.

Jobs are being created in the West Bank, but in Jerusalem priority is given to social assistance (food vouchers, financial aid, help paying rent, water, electricity, and overdue municipal taxes) and to job creation in the form of daily work for projects, 3- to 6-month internships, and measures to support small business development.

The Patriarchate pays school fees for numerous families, thanks in particular to the **North American Lieutenancies' school campaign**, with around 19,000 students enrolled, about 58% of them Christians. "Relieving despair," in his words, is the work to which the Patriarchate is committed both in Gaza and the West Bank, while in Jordan and Israel it seeks to strengthen pastoral support for Christians who are often tempted to emigrate. **Pastoral activities have significantly increased:** summer camps, youth chaplaincy activities, and scout troop programs.

The President of the Holy Land Commission, Bart McGettrick, recounted the Commission's visit to Jordan (see our article in Newsletter 78, last October, pp. 11–12), stressing the **importance of physical and human reconstruction** for people once hostilities end.

The Vice-Governors—Tom Pogge from the United States, John Secker through a written report, and Jean-Pierre de Glutz and Enric Mas in person—then addressed topics still under internal study before presenting their views on the **development of the Order in their respective geographic areas**, where significant progress is evident everywhere, especially in Latin America, where Ecuador and Chile may soon see the formation of groups of Knights and Dames.

Chancellor Bastianelli, responsible for the Nominations and Promotions Commission, noted that new admissions to the Order continue to offset losses, with 1,051 admissions recorded to date, bringing the number of members worldwide to nearly 30,000.

In closing the meeting, the Grand Master returned to the **importance of spiritual accompaniment in the Order**, to which his new book—*I miei giorni sono nelle tue mani* ("My Days Are in Your Hands")—is dedicated. Published for now in Italian, its proceeds are donated to the Order for its works in the Holy Land. In the same vein, he announced the forthcoming publication of a book on Saint Bartolo Longo, written by Archbishop Tommaso Caputo, Prelate of Pompeii and Assessor of the Order, and confirmed the **creation of an Area of Friends of the Order**, intended for people who do not wish or are unable to become members but who desire to support the Holy Land through free offerings, to be managed transparently in separate accounts within each Lieutenancy.

The next meeting of the Grand Magisterium is scheduled for 21 April 2026.

By François Vayne, with Andreina Merheb and Livia Passalacqua

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