



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

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

## Enabling young students to fall in love with the Holy Land

The beautiful initiative of the Lieutenancy for England and Wales could become a model for others



The Lieutenant for England and Wales, Michael David Byrne (center back row), accompanied by the Director of Pilgrimages, the Master of Ceremonies, and young students Nicholas and Peter, invited to discover the Holy Land and the Order.

As part of the outreach programme of the Lieutenancy for England and Wales a small team of members have embarked upon a programme of going into the Catholic Chaplaincies of universities and giving presentations to students about the Order and its work in the Holy Land and talking to students afterwards. This work has produced a genuine interest in the Order among catholic students, so we decided to establish a Bursary Scheme to fund two post graduate students to come out with us to the Holy Land to experience for themselves at first hand the work we do.

This was a completely new venture for us, and so two post graduate students having been selected, in October 2023, five of us, myself the Lieutenant, our Pilgrimage Director, our Ecclesiastical Master of Ceremonies and Nicholas and Peter spent eight days in Galilee, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. We wanted them not just to see for themselves the work the Order does, but also to experience at firsthand what life is like for Christians there. This was a completely new experience for them and a great joy for us who have been to the Holy Land many times, to witness the reaction of them both as they travelled around. Our programme was built around daily Mass, and consisted of visiting the holy sites and meeting people in the local Christian communities. They met students at Bethlehem University and the Seminary where they experienced the warm hospitality always extended to us when we visit there. We were all invited to spend one evening in the home of a Palestinian family in Bethlehem and join them in a family meal. This gave the students the opportunity to talk to members of three generations of the same family about the difficulties of their daily life as Christians. For those of us in the West who don't have to fight for our faith, this was a profound experience for both Peter and Nicholas who saw first-hand the bond between the Christians there and the members of our Lieutenancy, who over the years of many pilgrimages have struck up a personal relationship with so many Christian friends there.

Both Peter and Nicholas returned home deeply impressed by all they had experienced for the first time. Although in a general sense they knew what to expect because they had previously attended many talks and meetings with members of our Lieutenancy, no amount of previous information could make up for actually experiencing life there for themselves; the sights and smells, the noise and bustle of the Christian Quarter in Jerusalem and the views, and just being there thinking and praying; experiences such as their first Mass on Calvary in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, and standing at the water's edge in Tabka on Lake Galilee, staring across at the Golan Heights picturing Our Lord on the Lake and in the boats with his Disciples.

For many of us repeated pilgrimages to the Holy Land make the experience more profound and reflective, but nothing can ever replicate the total impact of the first pilgrimage there. That experience lives forever, and it was a privilege for the three of us who had been there many times before, to witness the joy of this new experience of our young students for whom this pilgrimage will motivate their commitment to the land of Christ forever.

Peter and Nicholas returned home having had a profound experience in two ways; firstly, the experience of daily life in the Holy Land seen at first hand; and secondly, the experience at seeing the work of the Order not just in terms of material support and almsgiving but the deeper element of standing alongside the Christians there in their daily struggles to live out their faith. They both experienced for themselves the difference between being just a religious tourist and a real pilgrim.

They returned home with much to think about and their own faith renewed. They both demonstrated the success of this new initiative of our Bursary Scheme, and it is hoped to repeat this programme regularly in the future when it is possible to do so.

**Michael David Byrne**

Lieutenant for England and Wales

*(March 2024)*