



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Volunteers and pilgrims: a summer experience for young people in the Holy Land organised by Western Spain



From 15 to 31 July, a group of some fifteen young people, organised by the Lieutenancy for Western Spain, had an intense volunteer experience in the Holy Land coordinated by the Dame Commander with Star María José Fernández y Martín (who had already taken a group of young people from the Lieutenancy in 2019, before Covid) and the Order's chaplain Father Francisco Javier Boada y González.

Participants concurred on the great blessing of being able to once again propose what had already been a positive experience in the past, now that health restrictions have been relaxed.

The young people divided into groups had the opportunity to experience diverse forms of service: some helped the Sisters of the Incarnate Word who work at the Hogar Niño Dios and prepared spaces in another house in Beit Sahour to welcome older children with disabilities for whom the best solution is to have their own environment and not in close contact with the younger children welcomed in Bethlehem.

"I was particularly struck by the way in which, with their loving hands, the Sisters of the Incarnate Word care for children with special needs, many of them orphans," said Mamen García Cid.

Another group served at the Crèche run by the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Bethlehem, which takes in 57 children between the ages of 0 and 5.

Two other experiences in the second week were in service to the friars at the Basilica of Gethsemane (cleaning, welcoming pilgrims, cooking, etc.) and a day's work at the Shrine of Bethphage to help the friars clean the archaeological area behind the friary. Being of help to the friars who administer these

sacred places for the benefit of pilgrims was another important element of volunteering. Marta Inés García Cid shared how it was "a privilege to assist the Franciscan friars in their care for the pilgrims".

"I received much more than I could give": with these words, Gadea González del Valle summed up her experience of service.

During their time in the Holy Land, the young people were also able to visit the holy places and also meet the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Bishop Pizzaballa, Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Custos of the Holy Land, Father Francesco Patton. These were important moments in which to listen and better understand the situation of the communities of the Holy Land, but also to be comforted in their journey by volunteers and pilgrims.

These days in the Holy Land were not only an opportunity to be at the service of the needs of the communities the young people encountered, but also to grow in faith and dedicate space and time to spirituality. Each day was marked by morning prayer and the Eucharist lived together, as well as by sharing and various moments of recollection.

One significant moment was the night spent in the Holy Sepulchre: the young people organised themselves into three groups as they could not all go together. One of the young people, Elena Cebrián Guinovart, recounts: "I find it difficult to pray at the Holy Sepulchre because it is always full of people and it is not possible for all the pilgrims to be able to pray, so it is almost impossible to stay for long in these important places, whereas I need a certain calm to enter into prayer. That night, which was the last before returning to Spain, in silence and tranquillity at the empty tomb, I was able to reflect on my fifteen days in the Holy Land and make sense of them. Along with the rosaries I had, I placed some of my personal concerns and uncertainties on the empty tomb, asking "which way to go". The answer was not explicit but I received the certainty that God has a plan for me, that everything makes sense and that I just have to listen".

The chaplain of the Lieutenancy for Western Spain who accompanied the group, Father Francisco Javier Boada y González, shared some concluding thoughts: "I thought we would contribute a lot of work and effort, but now I think it was an enrichment in which we received more than we were able to give". And again: "I can only thank the Lord for taking me where He wanted me to go, through the angels who were each one of the volunteers to whom I am particularly grateful".

Dame Maria José Fernandez y Martin, who had already accompanied the group of volunteers in 2019, expressed her joy at their return to the Lieutenancy: "It is difficult to express how proud and happy I am to have been able to be the group's guiding thread. A group with a great personality and strength in the service of the good and dedication to the Mother Church of the Holy Land. With people like these, the Order can be sure that its solidity is assured, always responding to the mission that the Popes have entrusted to it".

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