



Reflections from the Holy Land Journey through Jordan 8-14 September 2019

Departing from tradition, the Holy Land Commission of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem decided to dedicate this visit entirely to Jordan in an attempt to better understand that reality. Included were a number of visits and meetings to various parishes, schools and centers as well as meetings with various stakeholders. Coincided with the visit was the beginning of an open strike by all public-school teachers and staff, the largest union in Jordan. This has not affected our schools, but its ultimate resolution will affect us as our salaries are already lower than the public-school system in Jordan. What was also very evident is the deteriorating economic conditions in Jordan that in recent years have only two classes, the poor and the upper class. The disparity is more evident than ever as increasing prices are taking a toll on all, especially the poor and many are concerned about the stability of Jordan, especially as it continues to deal with the millions of refugees it hosts. Having said that, our visit was enlightening, and is cause for us to be very proud of the great work that is taking place there. Here are a few highlights:



Latin Patriarchate Schools

Our LPJ schools are parish schools and are the largest network of Christian schools in Jordan comprising of 23 schools and 18 kindergartens catering to about 10,000 students many are poor and operating in a number of rural areas. Some are relatively new, like Jubeiha built in 1991, while some are over 150 years old such as the Salt school established in 1866 and continue to provide a quality education and



play a major role in the life of the parish. One feeds on the other, and it is hard to separate the two. School students man the local scout troupes, are members of the church choir, serve as altar boys and girls, and are the beneficiaries of pastoral activities such as summer camps, Sunday school programs and various retreats. Three meetings were held with all principals clustered in three groups, one for the schools of the north, one for the south, and one for the Amman and center schools. Though the needs are great including infrastructure development, school desks, smart

boards, libraries, science and computer labs as well as capacity building programs, the belonging and dedication of these principals is contagious. They love what they do which for many of them is a calling and a mission rather than a job. Visits to various schools including the newly inaugurated Hashimi Kindergarten were impressive as you see the smile and happiness on the students faces as they are delivered a quality education with a Christian value set.

Pastoral Activities

A visit to the Jubeiha church construction site was most impressive as the shape and size of the church are becoming evident. We were assured that the project continues to be on target with plans to inaugurate the 900-seat church in Spring 2020 despite the delay as a result of the need to strengthen the foundations. Another visit to the last church completed with funding from the Order being Marj Al-Hammam was just as impressive. During various visits to Marka, Misdar, Zerqa South, Zerqa North, Madaba, Sweifieh, and Tla' Al-Ali among others, the highlight of our visit was the two religious celebrations attended,



the first at the Sweifieh parish through participating in a Rosary prayer along with 2,000 parishioners who all came voluntarily simply to pray. The second was attending the Exaltation of the Holy Cross celebration at Tla' Al-Ali parish where 1,200 faithful were in attendance. My international guests were envious of such large crowds as they only see dwindling church attendance in their own countries. Faith is well and alive in Jordan!

Care to Refugees

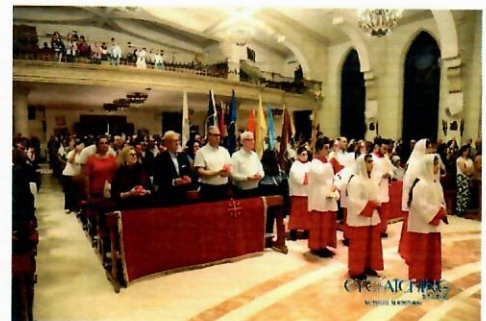
A meeting with Caritas Jordan highlighted the great work taking place by the church in support of Syrian and Iraqi refugees through education at the formal and informal level. Highlighted was the great partnership with the LPJ schools network where thousands of refugees are either incorporated in the



formal education, or through informal education where tens of schools are used afterhours as second shifts to educate refugees. However, the most touching moment of the visit was sharing a meal with Iraqi families who work at Our Lady of Peace Center and listening to their heartbreaking stories. The faces were different, while the story was the same. A brutal end to their normal life and turning them into refugees overnight forced out of their homes without any possibility to take anything with them. For most of them the tragedy started in 2014 and continues till now. Denied work in Jordan, they are forced to rely on the

support on the church as they continue to be in transit hoping to land a prized immigrant visa elsewhere so that they can start a new life again. Shattered dreams for many of them, but it was heartwarming to hear that none of them lost hope or faith. They believe that God will take care of them and ease their suffering even if it takes longer than expected. One cannot be prouder of the work of the church in supporting them during their time of most need.

We are indebted to the members of the Holy Land Commission for their dedicated service and for investing so much valuable time being a bridge between the LPJ and the Order. As the new Chair Professor Bart McGettrick was introducing his team, he kept insisting that the work should always be about "Justice, Love, and Hope". From his part, the departing Chair Mr. Tom McKiernan's message was "talk less, listen more, and always be kind". Many thanks for a wonderful journey.



Despite the great needs identified during various visits to schools, parish centers, priests and sisters' convents, as well as churches, and despite the grave economic conditions in Jordan, one can only be proud of the great accomplishments of the church in Jordan whether it is through education, pastoral activities or humanitarian aid. May the hard work of so many continue so that the faithful continue to find a warm heart in the various LPJ entities there and may we all find the strength to continue to provide the needed support.

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