



### Christmas Reflections 2019

The past year at the Latin Patriarchate has been an exciting year as we inch forward towards administrative and financial stability. Many problems have been solved while many others remain. The important challenge is to keep moving forward to ensure that the three main sectors of our work, being humanitarian support, pastoral activities and the educational sector stay focused on target and as new programs are designed, the needs of our various communities are taken care of. Thus, the focus continues to be less emphasis on infrastructure projects and greater emphasis on programs that support the living stones.

In the humanitarian area, the four core programs of social assistance; medical emergencies; medicines; and educational support have been complimented with additional programs of assistance targeting three specific groups being Iraqi refugees in Jordan; unemployed youth in Gaza; and marginalized families in East Jerusalem. Through these funds, hundreds of families were supported, though temporarily in some cases to enable them to live a dignified life. New programs are being designed to target the chronic social cases to enroll them in empowerment programs to assist them stand on their own feet in the future. Only during meetings and field visits to assess the impact of our humanitarian programs and talking to the beneficiaries, does one truly appreciate what such support means to these families. Words truly cannot express the true life changing experiences some witness as a result of this support.



The other area that has been given additional emphasis during the year has been expanding the pastoral activities in order to strengthen the faith within various age groups. This included expanding the summer camp activities to include field visits to the holy sites; expanding the Sunday school activities; greater support to the scout troupes; participation in the major feasts in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Rafat; providing educational games and resources in various languages including



Hebrew; encouraging greater use of social media to reach the younger generations; expanding the activities with the migrant communities whether in Israel or Jordan; supporting the work of the youth chaplaincy and putting plans to expand the mandate to include Israel as well; and catering to the prison ministries. I must admit that these major expansions of the works were done with very limited resources and through encouraging the spirit of volunteerism. However, fundraising for this work continues to be a priority despite

the major obstacles faced, especially with donor restrictions that are many in this particular area. Despite the obstacles, the plans are to keep putting more resources to expand the work further in 2020.

As for the educational sector, the normal activities through the 45 schools and 34 kindergartens continued at full force as over 1,550 staff see each day as a new beginning serving over 18,500



students day in and day out. Additional kindergartens were inaugurated during the year including



Jaffa of Nazareth; the Holy Family in Gaza; and the Hashimi new kindergarten in Jordan. The network of schools also expanded by incorporating two new schools in Israel, specifically the two Sisters of Nazareth schools in Haifa and Shefamr as they were turned over to the LPJ network given the lack of new vocations within the Sisters congregation. In addition, the transformation of 12 LPJ schools in Jordan everyday as second shift schools catering to Syrian and Iraqi refugees is truly a heartwarming

development, as between 3,000 to 4,000 excluded and marginalized refugee students are receiving a first-class education despite their miserable living conditions.

During the year, over 88 ongoing and new projects were advanced. The largest is certainly the continued construction of the church in Jubeiha, Jordan with the planned inauguration in spring 2020. Many small projects were completed while others are advancing to ensure better infrastructure and better services to the thousands of beneficiaries entrusted to us. As we move forward, the focus will continue to be on education, humanitarian support, and pastoral activities with focus on the living stones.



As we approach the Christmas season, we the indigenous Christians who call the Holy Land home, are reminded again of the heavy burden of responsibility to have been born here. Not only is it a great privilege and honor, but certainly a great witness to the life of our savior who did not lead an easy life himself. If there are lessons to be learned, it is that life in the Holy Land has rarely witnessed true political peace, but those of us who live here, understanding the true meaning of the inner peace one experiences knowing that the most holy places on earth in the Christian faith are a mere few minutes from home. Thus, despite all the political instability in Israel, the lack of freedom and justice in Palestine, and the lack of economic stability in Jordan, the Church continues to move forward through its various works to be that icon of stability in the lives of the Christian communities regardless of the realities.

In closing allow me to extend our gratitude and appreciation to our generous donors around the world, but in a very specific way to all members of the Order of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem for their generous moral and financial support without which our work would not be possible. May I take this opportunity extend to you and your families and friends a Merry Christmas with our best wishes for the New Year. May 2020 bring peace and justice to our troubled land. Keep us in your prayers.

Sincerely,

*Sami El-Yousef*

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