



11 December 2018

Dear Friends,

Greetings from this most holy city Jerusalem! It has been fifteen months since I assumed my new calling at the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and what a journey it has been. Every day during that period has been a steep learning curve characterized by new discoveries. Though the challenges are great, the satisfaction level has been greater. Never before in my professional career have I felt that my presence has been making a difference, though in many instances a small one like my work here. However, one must acknowledge that "the journey of a thousand miles starts with one step". We have certainly taken those first baby steps and laid the foundations for the future stability, growth, and sustainability of the LPJ. From the boring administration side, it is important to mention that the financial and administrative restructuring is nearing its completion leading to more efficient operations set in high professional standards. However, the more exciting part is certainly the major accomplishments in the areas of education, humanitarian, and pastoral activities.



The educational pillar of the LPJ thrived during the year through the dedicated work of the 1,580 teachers and staff serving over 19,000 students in Jordan, Palestine, and Israel through 41 schools and 33 kindergartens. The LPJ schools cannot be compared with any other network of Christian schools as they are truly parish schools bringing life to our 55 parishes serving in the most economically challenged areas and truly catering to the poor, weak and marginalized. Tens of projects were implemented during the year including infrastructure development, program support, extracurricular activities, and green energy projects. Major expansions took place with the addition of three new kindergartens, one in Jaffa- Nazareth, one in Gaza, and the third in Hashimi.

The humanitarian aid pillar has witnessed a dramatic shift during the year. The four basic programs (social assistance; medicines; medical emergencies; and scholarship support) continued during the year serving hundreds of the most needy in our various communities. The institutional support provided through our various centers (Taybeh Elderly Home; Our Lady of Peace Center in Amman; The Anjara Home) to various marginalized groups continued with excellence. Again, hundreds benefited from the services of these centers. The support to refugees continued, especially to Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The support included not only financial support, but more importantly through the implementation of capacity building projects teaching refugees skills in sewing, pizza making, and cheese making to give them the tools to be self-sufficient, let alone supporting their children through education. In Gaza, the launching of a job creation project targeting Christian youth provided employment to 20 unemployed youth in this tiny strip which is on the verge of humanitarian collapse. One can only be very proud of all the dedicated staff who quietly and discreetly run these various humanitarian works to preserve the dignity of the beneficiaries.





The pastoral work pillar has also witnessed great work during the year, whether through the pastoral office with focus on the family and adult formation as well as targeted activities during Christmas and Easter; the Scout movement and its various activities; the youth chaplaincy including youth movement activities through Christ the King Bookstore in Beit Sahour and Shabibe Store in Amman; expanded activities, training and curriculum development through the Catechism office; organizing various spiritual retreats for staff, clergy, and deacons; as well as bible summer camps, bible competitions, Sunday school activities and the organization of various local pilgrimages to local holy sites. As for the St. James Vicariate, work through the various centers in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem (Our Lady of Valor; St. Rachel's Center; the Guardian Angel Day Care Center; and the St. Martha and Mary House) served with distinction thousands who are the growing faithful from around the world, who along with the indigenous Christians make up the complete picture in the Holy Land! The breadth of the pastoral work that goes on quietly day in and day out is mind boggling, and it would not have been possible without a true partnership and dedicated teamwork of a network of local and international staff and volunteers.



As we approach the end of the year, one is reminded of the true meaning of the birth of our Savior. As one reflects on the challenging political situation (American Embassy move to Jerusalem; the ugly Nation State Law in Israel; defunding UNRWA and USAID; continued blockade on Gaza and other moves) which may explode in the near future either on the Gaza border or the Lebanon border, we at the Latin Patriarchate must continue to focus on expanding our humanitarian and pastoral support to our communities and continue to improve the infrastructure of our institutions as well as build the human capacities so that our institutions will continue to be centers of excellence with quality services delivered with a Christian value set that we will all continue to be proud of. Our region has always been marred with conflict, and we need to put this aside and concentrate on building our communities in many dimensions, especially the spiritual one. It is only through strong faith will there be hope for our people to continue to call this Holy Land home. In this regard, we must extend our gratitude and appreciation to our generous donors around the world, but in a very specific way to the Grand Magisterium and the Order of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher 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 2019 bring peace and justice to our troubled land. Keep us in your prayers.

Sincerely,

*Sami El-Yousef*

Sami El-Yousef  
Chief Executive Officer