



## Easter Reflections 2018

It has been a mere six months for me at the Latin Patriarchate though it feels like I have been here for ages! I suppose my previous two employers, Bethlehem University and CNEWA – Pontifical Mission, being institutions of the Catholic Church prepared me very well for my current work. The warm welcome extended to me by both religious and lay staff of the LPJ as well as partners from around the world only gave me added strength to tackle the many challenges not only facing the Latin Patriarchate as an institution, but more importantly the communities it is serving in four countries in the Holy Land, each with its distinct reality, challenges, and opportunities.

Over the past six months, every time I felt the heavy burden of the administrative and financial restructuring we are undergoing, I went on field visits only to be reminded that behind the administrative work lies the living stones faithful who are tied to the institutions of the LPJ either spiritually through the Church or through the institutions of the Church providing services with distinction in education, health, and social services. I have visited Churches and prayed with various communities, some rich and some very poor, weak and marginalized including locals, migrants, and refugees. I also visited schools, refugee centers, elderly homes, special needs centers only to see the great witness these institutions are to the true meaning of Christian values, always providing quality services to anyone who comes calling without any consideration to their national origin, color, religion, age, or gender.

As we continue to focus our mission and vision for the future, it is clear that, in addition to our main task being the spiritual and faith formation, there are three main pillars to our work being education, humanitarian support, and pastoral work. What the last six months have reminded me is that looking at any institution from the inside is much different than looking at it from the outside. It truly has been an honor for me to look at the LPJ from the inside and to realize that all the great work done in education, humanitarian aid, and pastoral work has been overshadowed by the financial difficulties the LPJ faced in recent years, mostly as a result of the construction of the university in Jordan. While the administrative and financial challenges are being dealt with systematically and as a realist realize they will not disappear anytime soon, it is indeed time to focus on the great work done to support our mission in Israel, Jordan, and Palestine (not to forget Cyprus which I feel guilty for not visiting so far!). It is time for greater involvement with our youth, families, and the elderly, and it is time to support our various communities wherever they are so that we contribute to keeping a vibrant Christian presence in the Holy Land, without which, this troubled region of the world will not be the same. It is only through the prophetic message of the Church and its various institutions that you hear a message of love, peace, respect, appreciation, acceptance, and the true meaning of human dignity. It is a consistent message that is not only preached but actively practiced in all our institutions.

Over the past six months, our relations with our main partners around the world and in a very special way the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem are stronger than ever. The new Governor General of the Order and members of the Holy Land Commission have already visited the Holy Land twice, once in September 2017 and again in February 2018. Various Lieutenants and members visited as well, and I was privileged to visit Rome twice for



various meetings. There is a new spirit of cooperation and coordination aiming at providing better services and reaching out to more communities whether in Jordan, Israel, Palestine and eventually Cyprus. I was further privileged to have joint visits with many members to meet with priests, teachers, physiotherapists, social workers, students, refugees, migrants, and other service recipients. It was an eye-opening experience to not only share our challenges and realities with our guests but to also listen to their challenges and experiences elsewhere around the world so that we always challenge ourselves to improve our work. There is always a better way to do our work and improve and sharing some of these international experiences is truly priceless. Thus, again I feel privileged to be able to develop this historic partnership with the Order as well as other partners to new levels. It should be said in very clear terms that without the support provided by all of the members through various Lieutenancies, the Grand Magisterium and the Order as a whole, our work will truly be impossible. On behalf of the local church and its institutions, and more importantly the communities it serves, a huge thank you is in order.

Despite the political upheaval in our greater Middle East, the violence around us especially in Gaza these days, the messages of hate and revenge that is heard all around us, especially in the great city of Jerusalem that is supposed to symbolize the Christian message of love and peace, during this most holy week in our Christian tradition, we are reminded again of the simple message of our Savior. The various religious celebrations and processions, church bells, and the sound of chants in tens of languages of locals and pilgrims from around the world in the narrow alleyways of the Old City are a reminder to all of us that it all started here in Jerusalem. Starting with Palm Sunday's triumphal entry to Jerusalem when tens of thousands marched from Bethphage on the Mount of Olives to all the various religious ceremonies throughout holy week; to Maundy Thursday's celebrations including the last supper and the events at the garden of Gethsemane; walking the way of the cross on Good Friday, the trial, crucifixion, death and burial; to Saturday's events at the Tomb and finally resurrection Sunday when Christ has risen! There is no other place on earth where you are reborn as a Christian during holy week and you live again the events of this holy week that changed the world over two thousand years ago! We truly feel privileged and honored to call this great city of Jerusalem home with all the symbolism it presents and to walk on the same blessed paths of our Lord and recount his life, death, and resurrection.

Thank you so much for your unending generosity and support to the Church of Jerusalem and Happy Easter! Christ has risen; Christ has risen indeed.

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