



## Reflections from the Holy Land A New School Year

As I concluded my first year in office at the Latin Patriarchate, I thought it was a good time to pause a little and reflect on three particular areas that were part of shaping the past twelve months. They can be characterized as exciting and challenging times for all of us at the General Administration. Here is a brief survey of the challenges and accomplishments.

### Administrative Update

A major administrative restructuring took place at the General Administration, the main purpose of which was to develop a new hierarchy based on introducing internal controls and the concept of segregation of duties. Thus, a new structure was devised with clear job descriptions that clearly defines the lines of responsibility, authority and accountability. A new bank authorization policy was introduced and implemented to ensure proper controls, and brand new Standard Operating Procedures were introduced in the main functional areas of treasury and financial reporting; endowments management; capital expenditures; fundraising; human resources and payroll; and procurement. We were assisted in the process by Deloitte International and my appreciation goes to their team for their professional work. However, and more importantly, the greatest appreciation goes to our own team who actively participated in the development of all this important work and have demonstrated their love to the Church and their willingness to adopt and adapt to the needed change for the better. Along this journey, the external audit function was reintroduced which will lead to a unified fiscal year-end resulting for the first time ever in Combined Financial Statements including all entities of the LPJ which will be complete and clear. This is the part of my reflections that is not exactly the most exciting, but certainly has to be done to safeguard the institution and its interests.



### General Political Situation

The past period has witnessed many developments on the ground that leaves little hope that a peaceful resolution in Israel / Palestine is coming anytime soon. The one-sided positions of the current US administration represented by moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem and taking it "off the negotiating table"; by allowing unrestricted settlement construction; and more recently trying to dismantle UNRWA and disrupt educational, healthcare and social services to millions of Palestinian refugees in the region will in no way contribute to making peace and ensure justice and equality to all, and preserve the universal human rights to all. Additionally, Israel introduced racist laws by enacting the unnecessary Nation State law creating a double system based on one's religion. The Palestinians continue to be in disarray as they are engaged in internal conflict with little regard to the suffering of the people,





especially in Gaza. And mentioning Gaza, it keeps going from bad to worse and the humanitarian situation there is simply appalling with no electricity or clean water supplies, coupled with an open sewage system, not to mention an unemployment rate of some 45% (over 70% amongst youth and women). This is the part of my reflection that is simply very depressing and in many ways requires a miracle to change.

### New Beginnings

As always, one has to look at the bright and more exciting side. Thus, between restructuring and audits and a challenging political environment, over 19,000 students at the LPJ school network of 45 schools and 36 kindergartens, employing over 1,580 staff, enthusiastically went back to school. A new school year begun last week, and with this new beginning, we tend to forget all the difficulties and challenges as we see the hope in the eyes of the next generation. We are certainly proud that with the new school year students across the LPJ educational enterprise have better facilities to return to after the summer break. The construction of a new kindergarten and nursery complex in Jaffa-Nazareth in the Galilee was completed, accompanied by a complete renovation of the existing school structure. A new state of the art kindergarten in Hashimi in Amman was built to replace the old decaying one and meet new government standards. A new campus for the Salt school was renovated away from the heavy hustle and bustle of the old city center. A new kindergarten at the Holy Family School in Gaza was constructed, as well as an additional floor for the school that offers more classrooms and other school facilities. New technological equipment was introduced in a number of schools including Beit Jala and Kerak among others.



Finally going green meant introducing new solar electrical systems in Aboud, Bir Zeit, Beit Jala, Gaza and Zababdeh schools as well as the Seminary in addition to some in Jordan including Our Lady of Peace Center, Irbid, and Misdar on top of the ones installed earlier. Not only do these systems cut the operating costs, but are also environmentally friendly. More importantly, behind the scenes, endless workshops and training sessions took place with new and returning teachers bringing so much positive energy along the way, with the main purpose being to improve the standards and the quality of education.



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