



### Reflections from the Holy Land Visit to Jordan

During a recent visit to Jordan which was primarily to advance the administrative and financial restructuring of the Latin Patriarchate schools there, a number of field visits and side meetings took place. I also happened to be there a few days before the U.S. sponsored meetings in Bahrain took place which were intended to kick start some peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis! Thus, traveling some streets in Amman was a challenge as a number of demonstrations were taking place in protest of the one sided "deal of the century". Additionally, one could not help but see the many "For Sale" signs on buildings and land lots as the real estate market is in a deep recession which is an indication of the serious economic distress Jordan is feeling now.

With this brief backdrop, my visit was a sign of hope and a clear acknowledgement of all the positive developments taking place in Jordan despite everything. Here is a brief summary from my four day visit:

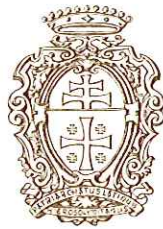


During a meeting with Fr. Wissam Mansour, the Director General of the Jordan schools, and during field visits to five LPJ schools, I became aware of the magnitude of our intervention of support to Iraqi and Syrian school children who have been excluded from the formal education in Jordan. Some 15 LPJ schools are used after hours as a second shift to provide a quality education to thousands of these marginalized and forgotten children. The joy on the faces of some of them as they were lining up to get on the bus that will take them home while the teachers were handing out a simple meal to them made me speechless. Our schools are not only there for the local communities but are turned to great use in the afterhours.

Sharing a cold local beer with Fr. Mario Cornioli on a hot summer afternoon at the Jabal Amman parish, he proudly gave us a summary of the various programs he is involved in benefiting 126 Iraqi refugees as he has been instrumental in using LPJ facilities in Jabal Amman and Anjara among others to provide for them training opportunities in Italian cheese making, pizza making, wine making, and tailoring. Not only are these young refugees gaining a trade but making some money in a dignified way. The church is well and alive in supporting refugee communities in Jordan!

A visit to the construction site of the new Jubeiha church was most gratifying as work is progressing according to schedule and workers were preparing the site for the pouring of concrete. Potentially, this will be the largest church in Jordan with seating that will exceed 800 faithful. Where else do you find new churches being built to strengthen the faith and meet the needs of shifting and growing communities in our troubled middle east other than





in Jordan. The construction should be completed by February 2020 and the church inaugurated during the Easter celebrations shortly thereafter.



The administrative and financial restructuring workshop, was attended by over 80 accountants and school principals from our 25 schools and 18 kindergartens in Jordan to map out a new era for the schools with the introduction of new operating procedures and educational software that will move our schools to a new level of communication between administrators, teachers, parents and students so that the learning process is dramatically enhanced and meets the educational technological advances.

Though change is not easy, but the determination amongst all promises that we are at the verge of a new stage of development for our LPJ schools.

During a field visit to some of the schools and in a particular way to Fuheis, one of the summer camps serving the parish and the school was well underway. There the children entrusted to us were under the care of the Sisters of Saint Anne who were diligently trying in the most creative way possible to strengthen the faith of these young souls. The positive energy one feels just watching these kids and their leaders was simply contagious. This is one of over 40 summer camps in progress in not only Jordan, but also in Palestine and Israel.



My visit was not all good news, as a visit to five schools highlighted the great needs each one of them has whether in infrastructure development, furniture, equipment and providing a clean and safe environment for the thousands of children entrusted to us. Thus, at this stage, we are in the process of quantifying the needs so that a plan can be put in place to prioritize and in a systematic way meet those needs in the coming period. As the general direction of the LPJ is not to build new institutions, every effort will be made to improve what we have so that we excel in serving those entrusted to our care.

Wishing you all a restful summer, with my deep appreciation to all supporters who make our work possible, and in a very particular way the members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher.

*Sami El-Yousef*  
29 June 2019