



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Projects that provide a direct link between the Lieutenancies and the Holy Land



Aid from the Order creates, for example, jobs for young people in Gaza.

Maintaining a living link with the Holy Land is experienced in a variety of ways by our members, but is always something very intense.

The financial aid sent monthly to the Latin Patriarchate for institutional expenses, schools and the seminary ensures in many respects, the continuity of the central activities of the life of the diocese. In addition, the opportunity to maintain a direct and privileged link with a small entity allows the Lieutenancies and their members to get to know the local life, to establish friendly relationships and to create deep ties.

With this in mind, the Lieutenancies often favour ongoing relationships with certain groups or certain types of projects. The Lieutenancy for Luxembourg, which has around forty members, specifies that the project chosen to receive financing in 2021, from the list of small projects agreed between the Grand Magisterium and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem “is part of the continuity of the project financed by the Lieutenancy in 2020.” Over the past two years, the Knights and Dames of Luxembourg have helped to install or upgrade information systems. In 2021 in particular, the chaplaincy service of the Christian youth group of Jabal Amman in Jordan benefitted from this, thanks to a project to renovate the main meeting room and computer equipment, which was adapted for conferences, remote interviews and activities during this time of pandemic.

The members of the Order always plan during their pilgrimage to the Holy Land to visit the projects they support. Thus, the Knights and Dames of Luxembourg are joyfully awaiting their pilgrimage scheduled for June/July 2022 when they will be able to go to Jordan to see, on the ground, how their help has enabled the birth of this project and to meet the people who benefit from it.

The Lieutenancy for Ireland, which has the same bond of affection with a small specific group, told us of its experience with the Christian community of Bir Zeit, a town located seven kilometres north of Ramallah. The Lieutenancy first contributed to the renovation work in the parish hall, which is now used for different activities by the parishioners and the pupils of the adjoining school. It then decided to continue this established relationship and to commit to completing the work of soil sealing at the parish. For Irish Knights and Dames too, the pilgrimage is an opportunity to experience and strengthen ties with a community that has names and faces. "During the 2019 pilgrimage, 50 Irish members and their friends met the parish priest, visited the parish hall, met the students and prayed in the church. All were impressed by the enthusiasm of the local population."

Among the various Lieutenancies that rejoice in visiting not so much the projects they support as the people who benefit from them, the USA Western Lieutenancy had the good fortune, in August 2021, of being able to travel to Jordan to attend the ordination of new priests of the Patriarchate. Since 2005, this American Lieutenancy has supported the "Adopt a Seminarian" programme which, each year, sponsors seminarians from the Patriarchal Seminary of Beit Jala by offering them scholarships. "What joy we receive in being adopted as children of God by the grace of his Son Jesus Christ. Likewise, what a great blessing to be able, in our turn, to adopt and take care of seminarians in the Holy Land", say the members of the USA Western Lieutenancy who confide to us that they still pray for these boys and maintain a correspondence with them. In a letter addressed to Lieutenant Margaret Romano, the rector of the seminary, Father Bernard Poggi, writes, "I would like to thank you for your initiative... Your presence and your support for the seminary are a marvellous expression of your love for the Holy Land and its future priests." Gaza is another place that is particularly close to our members' hearts, and various projects are carried out for the benefit of the local population, in particular the very small Christian community of around a thousand believers out of a population of two million people. Since 2018, the German Lieutenancy of the Order sends funds to facilitate the entry of young Christians in Gaza into the world of work by paying them a salary in cooperation with local companies. Since the beginning of the "Job Creation Program", more than 40 young people have been able to use their knowledge and skills to help develop commercial and entrepreneurial activities in the area: young pharmacists, computer scientists, or health care assistants have worked and obtained a decent salary. "Thanks to this training programme", explains Father Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of Gaza, "the chances of finding a permanent job in the labour market are much higher. Several participants in the programme have found a job in a company, although the unemployment rate is extremely high, especially for young people. Some of our young people have been able to rent or buy an apartment and have even taken the plunge and got married now that they have a salary."

The USA North Central Lieutenancy also decided to invest in a project in Gaza linked to the school and to the parish of the Holy Family, in particular by financing the one-month Summer camp for some 200 children. "The Summer camp provides a positive environment for the Christian and Muslim children who attend. Most of these children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder... At school and at camp, they get to know each other and become friends," the Lieutenancy says of the project.

In Gaza, another small project was supported by the Lieutenancy for Northern Italy which contributed to the renovation works of the house of the Sisters of the Incarnate Word who are very committed to pastoral and humanitarian activities with the local community. The same Lieutenancy also decided to allocate part of its funds to restoring the rainwater collection system of the seat of the episcopate of the Latin Patriarchate. In addition to these small projects, the Lieutenancy for Northern Italy reports that, in 2021, it was able to accept and pass on to the Grand Magisterium, the five per thousand contributions. The contributions were received via the Religious Foundation "Opera per la Venerazione dei Luoghi Santi e del Santo Sepolcro" ("Work for the veneration of the Holy Places and the Holy Sepulchre?") created by the Lieutenancy in 2013. This amounted to around € 100,000 that the Lieutenancy wished to allocate to scholarships for Christian students attending the schools of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Still in the field of education, since 2017 the Lieutenancy for Belgium has been sending aid to the Spanish school in Jerusalem run by the Missionary Daughters of Calvary, sponsoring twelve students. “The cost per student is around 1,000 euros per year, but the sisters also welcome students who cannot afford to pay for their schooling,” write the members from Belgium. And it is to support these situations that the Knights and Dames intervene, in some cases even paying alimony for young people whose families find themselves in abject poverty.

The Lieutenancy for Austria also has a long history with several Holy Land places. Since 2001, their Commission for the Holy Land has wanted to search on the ground, for a way of providing financial support to Christian families and has decided to do so by purchasing products made in Palestine. Initially, the action focused on olive wood products, but for over ten years now, they have also distributed olive oil produced in Taybeh, a Christian village fifteen kilometres northeast of Jerusalem. Since 2009, the Lieutenancy has managed to sell more than 135,000 bottles of oil, which has sent € 637,000 to the Holy Land, most of which has been reinvested in local projects. This activity involves the Austrian Sections and Delegations of the Order, which actively promote sales through various channels. Finally, Taybeh extra virgin olive oil is the one used by all Austrian dioceses as the holy oil consecrated during the Chrism Mass. “Thanks to the olive oil initiative, we have been able to improve the economic situation of the Taybeh community and its inhabitants. The profits obtained have made it possible to support other projects in the Holy Land,” rejoice the Austrian members of the Order.

Other Lieutenancies engage in fundraising, which they carry out in specific ways during certain key events such as annual meetings and Investitures, or even special celebrations organised with other entities linked to diocesan life. The Magistral Delegation for Norway, for example, collaborated with Caritas to organise a fundraising mass to help the populations of the Holy Land affected by the crisis linked to the pandemic. For its part, the USA Northern Lieutenancy successfully held its August meeting in Sioux Falls with an attendance of more than 500 Knights and Dames. It was an opportunity to have news direct from the Holy Land, which gave an even greater impetus to solidarity. After the testimonies of Sami el-Yousef, administrative director of the Patriarchate, and George Bannoura, owner of a craft business in Bethlehem, several members wished to make an additional contribution to a special collection, which exceeded \$ 100,000 over this weekend alone. In addition to this spontaneous initiative, the Lieutenancy has also decided to fund in its entirety the Bethlehem University Nursing Scholarship Fund to the tune of \$ 100,000.

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