



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

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## Voices from the Holy Land

Economic inclusion of women and young people in Palestine and the presence of the Saint James Vicariate in Israel



The Saint James Vicariate – which brings together Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel – serves extremely active parish communities with highly involved youth groups.

The realities of the Holy Land that the Order supports have not only faces but voices too.

During the summer period, we decided to share two short podcasts to report on various initiatives for the benefit of the local population so the Knights and Dames of the Order can discover more about them through the voices of those directly involved.

Father Piotr Zelazko, Patriarchal Vicar for the Saint James Vicariate, which unites Catholics Hebrew-speaking in Israel, tells of the five communities who, unlike the historic Catholic community in the Holy Land, speak Hebrew rather than Arabic. These are extremely active parish communities with dynamic youth groups, groups for young adults and activities such as summer camps for children, and weekend retreats which, as of this year, are not only for families, but also for the elderly. Another special ministry carried out by this Vicariate is to support prisoners who speak Hebrew. All of this alongside the spiritual life nourished by the sacraments that is central to each parish.

The Saint James Vicariate is comprised of small communities which, in addition to the normal needs of a parish, also experience the challenge of having to translate their texts into another language and thus cover the expenses this incurs. Through the words of its vicar, the Vicariate is deeply grateful to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre thanks to which it is able to carry out its mission. This particular reality of the Catholic Church also has the privileged vocation of acting as a bridge of dialogue and encounter with the Jewish and Israeli world, given that it speaks the same language. “We try to build bridges between Israeli society and the Catholic Church. We try to teach our Jewish friends something about the Church and also our Catholics something about Judaism. We are pursuing various projects for dialogue,” Father Piotr concluded.



The AFAQ project – a word meaning “horizon” in Arabic – promotes entrepreneurship and employment for Christian women and youth in Palestine.

Another initiative that you can discover through our podcasts is the AFAQ project for the empowerment, business capacity building and employment of Christian women and youth in Palestine. The Order has so far contributed more than \$200,000 to this project, which started in September 2021 under the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in partnership with Bethlehem University and in close cooperation with a number of parishes, Catholic schools and Church organisations.

Nisreen Mansour, coordinator of the AFAQ project – a word that means “horizon” in Arabic – tells how, after an initial phase of meetings with the communities to present the initiative and raise awareness among the local population, the project is now continuing with “training for young people over 18 and those who are unemployed to develop their skills and be ready for the job market.”

The aim of the project is precisely to create opportunities to encourage the economic inclusion of these people, while also supporting them in the development of small entrepreneurial projects by helping them to access financing or interest-free loans. This will “increase the level of self-esteem of the beneficiaries while contributing to a paradigm shift: from the feeling of being a minority to being active citizens and agents of change within Palestinian society,” comments the Director of the Institute for Community Partnerships at Bethlehem University, Musa Rabadi.

Finally, the vibrant voice of Lara Matar, a young student at Bethlehem University, sharing with us what she has received so far from this project, helps to understand the importance of supporting these young people in their professional development and emancipation: “I participated in this training course through the AFAQ project to learn how to write a CV and prepare myself for job interviews. I learnt what my weaknesses and strengths are and this boosted my self-confidence. Arriving on the job market as a new graduate, I was guided in how best to look for work.”

These testimonies are available in English on the Grand Magisterium website [www.oessh.va](http://www.oessh.va) in the podcast section: <http://www.oessh.va/content/ordineequiestresantosepolcro/en/podcast.html>

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